



A Contrastive Genre Analysis of Iranian and American English News Reports

Mohammad Jafar Jabbari¹

¹Department of English, Yasouj University, Iran.

Sajjad Farokhipour²

²Department of English, Yasouj University, Iran.

Abstract

Considering the importance of cross-cultural rhetorical conventions, the present study is an attempt to conduct a contrastive genre analysis between the English newspapers written in Iran and that in the United States in order to find the major rhetorical similarities and differences between them. The analysis is based on a corpus of 120 news reports from two sets of newspapers (Iran Daily and Tehran times from Iran and Washington Post and New York Times from United States of America). Utilizing an analytical framework, the researcher analyzes the variability of rhetorical and structural patterns within Iranian and American news reports. It is concluded that the news reports of Iranian and American English newspapers are different in their rhetorical and structural organizations because in the Iranian news reports, unlike their American counterparts, certain moves are absent due to their different position, purpose and institutional practice. This study has pedagogical implications for teaching journalistic English, EFL students and teachers and news translators.

Key words: Contrastive Rhetoric, Genre Analysis, Move Analysis, News Report.

1. Introduction

The study of cross cultural rhetorical patterns in written texts has been an area of growing interest in the last decades. Contrastive rhetoric (CR), the hypothesis that different cultures may have different ways of organizing ideas, has become a very important research area. Casting a brief look at the history of CR studies, one can see that the growing interest in these studies was for its concern with practical pedagogical purposes and pedagogical implication.

One area for which teaching English as a foreign language has received criticism is that, students, when placed in professional settings (e.g. working in a news agency or a newspaper), are not only disable to handle textual features of the professional genres, but also unaware of the discursive realities of the them (Bhatia, 2008) [3]. So, findings from CR research can indeed offer valuable information to material writers and language teachers for foreign language classrooms (Badger 2007) [2]. CR studies are, for example, capable to provide teachers and students with knowledge about the preferred patterns of writing (Connor, 2003) [7] because they uncover specific rhetorical patterns, which might be culturally and contextually specific. Thus, such knowledge can provide the basis for explicit strategies which Iranian students of journalism, news writers and even news translators might use to comprehend and produce effective English news stories and last, but not the least, the ESP teacher to know more about the sophisticated practice of writing news in a foreign language.

Furthermore, in newspaper genre, the Knowledge obtained from identifying rhetorical differences and similarities of various types of texts can also allow both the language teachers and students to cope with the important cultural elements that affect the nature, usage and production of these texts.

Since the number of CR studies that investigate discourse cultural patterns in which languages such as English are taught as a foreign language is small in comparison with countries with ESL situations, the main objective of this research is to present a comparative genre analysis of newspaper reports across two cultures as represented by 4 quality newspapers (two newspapers released in Iran as a non-native culture and two newspapers released in United States as a source and native culture in regard to English language) to describe some of the cross-cultural differences. In particular the study aims to investigate a number of discourse and linguistic features in the newspapers mentioned above.

Finally, taking into account the fact that the primary goal of CR has principally been pedagogical interests in EFL contexts (to assist non-English speaker students with the acquisition of English rhetorical strategies), the primary goal of this research is to investigate the pedagogical implications to enhance practical genre knowledge of Iranian students, teachers, journalists and news translators.

1.1 News report definition

A news report is defined as a text in a newspaper that gives the opinion of the news writer or a journalist on a topic or item of news. According to (M.C. Kane, 2002) [11], News report in the journalistic terms is referred to as soft news (a news in which the editorial comment is incorporated) rather than hard news (a news that avoid editorial comment) because it represents the partial, national and private opinion of journalist and news editors as well as their cultures, institutional practice and foreign policy rather than just the events itself.

For the purpose of this study, newspaper reports were selected for a number of reasons, related to the use of CR research and pedagogical interests. First, news report as an important professional text type with a big size of readership in different cultures, constitute a useful set of data for conducting cross-cultural genre analysis. For the sake of this research, therefore, we can say that they are written by professional journalists and therefore, reflect discourse patterns of experienced writers representing the types of writing in the aforesaid newspapers. Second, the news reports typically represents the metropolitan values of a society, evaluating government decisions and practices and even it can influence policy making on various issues (Mc Kane, 2002) [11]. And third, unlike hard news, news reports do not represent straightforward information but they are written in a way that their analysis requires greater effort and knowledge from students for decoding the message of them (Mc Kane, 2002) [11]. This indicates that although news reports are not easy to analyze, despite their subjectivity they are considered useful for foreign language classrooms, however. It seems that news reports can be useful resources for assessing and enhancing the linguistic and cultural knowledge of the foreign language learner. In this respect, a contrastive analysis of news reports across different cultures can be a useful step toward making the pedagogical connections to enhance the students' awareness of certain subtle differences in written discourse structure.

1.2 Review of literature

As it is also touched above, the development of CR first began in ESL writing classrooms as an attempt to explain and understand the different rhetorical strategies or rhetorical errors found in the compositions written by non-native speakers of English. Influenced by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which proposed a close connection between language and one's view of the world, Kaplan (1996) [10] studied a large corpus of English compositions written by Roman (non-native) speakers. He found out that the patterns used by English writers and speakers tend to be linear and hierarchical. He suggested that in comparison to English, Romance languages exhibit much more freedom to introduce extraneous material in complex digressions from the central idea. Although this (by Kaplan) was among early cross-cultural genre analysis researches on rhetorical differences, his views of text and rhetorical patterns were narrow. After that, a number of studies attempted to identify general rhetorical patterns of various languages based on the investigation of traditional texts such as literary works on novels, and short stories, and classic manuals for writing in different cultures. Some of these include studies conducted by Hinds (1982) as cited in Hinds (1986) [8] on Japanese, Kachru (1982) as cited in Kachru (1988) [8] on Hindi, and Niles (1981) [12] on Oriental and Arabic languages.

A while later, however, a growing number of recent CR research studies investigated genres other than student compositions. These include business letters, newspaper editorials, and research articles in various academic fields. Many of these studies have moved beyond the narrow view of text as a final product and have considered other elements that influence text production such as awareness of the audience, the constraints of the particular genre, and the communicative function(s) of the text type perceived by different cultures

While many earlier CR studies focused on the narrow view of text analysis by looking at texts as finished products (final products), Swales (1997) [14], attempted to adopt a more comprehensive view of text analysis (text not only as product but as process) by analyzing article. He then proposed a four move model to analyze article. Move 1: Establishing the field by showing centrality, Move 2: summarizing previous research, Move 3: Preparing

for present research (by indicating a gap, raising a question or extending a finding and Move 4: Introduction of the present research (by stating the purpose, or briefly describing present research).

The present study, too, has adopted a "broader" scope of text analysis as discussed above by exploring the nature of the genre of news reports from the perspective of Iranian and American cultures.

1.3 Research questions

Based on what was mentioned above, news reports are key texts for students of journalism and so should be key materials for teachers of journalism in English language in EFL contexts. The value of newspapers as resources for language learning is well-recognized and for many language learners, being able to read and write a newspaper in a foreign language without too much difficulty is seen as 'the holy grail' of language acquisition. Yet being able to write a newspaper in a foreign language provides the learner with a formidable task because the generic conventions and structure of texts in first language and second language is different (David Allen, 2009) [1]. Besides, according to teaching theories, the importance of the first language in performance of the learners in the target language is inevitable. Brown (2001) [6] also believes that, the native language could exert an interfering effect on the target language; however the facilitating effects of the native language are surely as powerful in the process even though they are less observable. Therefore, being unaware of similarities and differences in generic conventions and structures of the text could pose serious problems for second language writers. Thus, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the generic conventions and structures of Iranian English newspapers and newspapers published in United States, in terms of moves, steps and strategies, to light upon the pedagogical implications that emerge from the findings. Therefore, this research aims to address the following questions:

- What are some of the major rhetorical differences among the news reports of the two sets of newspapers?
- Are the discourse and linguistic features of the news reports of Iranian English newspapers and American newspapers similar enough to regard them as a single rhetorical universal genre?

2. Methodology

This paper has analyzed a corpus of 120 news reports, of which 60 were from New York Times and Washington Post and another 50 from Tehran Times and Iran Daily. As the objective of the study was to conduct a detailed analysis of the texts, this was deemed an adequate number to work with. The analytical framework that is adopted for linguistic analysis is that of Pak (1998) as cited in Richardson (2007) [13], which has removed the problems and inefficiencies of previous models. This model that is based on Swalesian move-based analysis (Swales, 2004) [15] is represented in the following table.

2.1 Analytical Framework

- **MOVE 1: Title**

Definition: is one that established a theme around which the report is centered. All reports have titles. However, there may be stylistic differences among the headlines of the newspapers.

- **MOVE 2: (Preparatory Comment)**

Definition: As the name suggests, it is a kind of writing which prepares the mind of the readers for the things to be followed. The sign () shows that move is optional.

- **MOVE 3: Main Topic**

Definition: The main topic category is defined as the central topic or issue discussed in the news reports.

- **MOVE 4: Main Thesis**

Definition: The main function of a news report is to present the newspaper's view on a particular issue. Main thesis summarizes the position of the newspaper on the main topic.

- **MOVE 5: Analysis**

Definition: As the name suggests this part provides the reader with more explanations on main topics and main thesis. There may be steps for this move, called argumentation, argumentation 1, argumentation 2 and so forth.

- **MOVE 6: Directive**

Definition: The "directive" may present a recommendation, restatement of the main thesis, or a summary of the

elaboration on the main topic. Directive may also be prediction or recommendation

2.2 Pilot Study

In order to investigate the efficiency of the adopted and modified analytical framework, taking into account the review of literature, the researcher applied the framework on a corpus of adequate numbers of news reports gathered from several issues of New York Times as a source of native writing, because in genre analysis studies the native language is referred to as source language. Therefore, the samples of Iranian news reports are not probed because the efficiency of the framework has to be investigated against a native sample rather than a sample in an EFL context. This section was done with the assistance of Mr. Ehsan Bakhshandeh, the editor of PRESS TV in its Tehran headquarter. Application of the model described above demonstrated that some identified elements appeared regularly in the texts and that their order of appearance did not vary very much. So, the following order was identified.

- Move 1: Title (f = 30, 100 %)

Title: Example 1

Getting Iran to agree to talk about its nuclear program proves difficult

(NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

- Move 2: Preparatory comment (f = 11, 36%)

Preparatory Comment: Example (first paragraph of the news report)

In the ongoing political skirmishes among Iran's leadership, it was the equivalent of bringing out the heavy ammunition: The country's most powerful figure warning that the post of elected president could someday be scrapped. (NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

- Move 3: Main topic (f = 30, 100 %)

Main Topic: Example

For four months now, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili have traded a series of letters trying to pin down a time and place for Iran to meet with a group of powerful countries concerned about its nuclear program. Finally, late last week, the two sides appeared to have settled on a start date. (NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

- Move 4: Main Thesis (f = 23, 76%)

Main Topic: Example

For four months now, European Union foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton and Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili have traded a series of letters trying to pin down a time and place for Iran to meet with a group of powerful countries concerned about its nuclear program. Finally, late last week, the two sides appeared to have settled on a start date, but they have yet to agree on venue, a length for the talks or even the subject. Iran says it is willing to talk about everything but its uranium enrichment program; the other countries - the United States, Britain, France, Russia, China and Germany - want to talk mostly about the entire nuclear program.

(NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

- Move 5: Analysis (f = 30, 100 %)

Analysis: Example

(Initiation of Argumentation) *The difficult path to restarting the talks, which have been on hold for more than a year, doesn't bode well, analysts and diplomats say.*

Argument number 1: Iran Moves Against UN, Paragraph 1, and Body

The latest round of U.N. Security Council sanctions, which by all accounts have been more crippling than anticipated, was intended to force Tehran to begin negotiating seriously about its nuclear program. But Iranian officials, insisting that the program is for peaceful energy purposes, have given little indication they are interested in such a negotiation.

Argument number 2: US Stance on Iran Nuclear Program, Paragraph 2 Body

U.S. officials say that Iran's well-documented problems with its uranium enrichment program this year have greatly reduced concerns that Iran is on the brink of producing a nuclear weapon, giving additional time to strike a deal. Iran is enriching uranium with a Pakistani version of a half-century-old Dutch design, and "the Iranians now have discovered that

it's a very poor machine," said a senior administration official who spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. "It's prone to breaking down. They've had hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of these things break down." The enrichment program appears to have plateaued at just under 4,000 active centrifuges, he added. "They could install a lot more if they wanted to but they've decided that this machine is a loser so that's why they stopped," he said, adding that the Iranians appear to have had little success with a more advanced design. Yet, paradoxically, the rise of a Republican majority in the House of Representatives could bring new political pressure to bear on the administration, forcing it to harden its stance on Iran and making it more difficult to strike a deal.

Argument number 2: Negotiations will fail, Paragraph 3 and 4 Body

In the past week, senior GOP figures have pushed the administration to take tougher steps. Ilona Ros-Lehtinen, the incoming chairwoman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told Reuters that "if the country with whom we are negotiating with and playing diplomatic niceties with gets the feeling that they can string us along and have no actions take place, I think that's to the detriment of the United States." She warned against conveying a "sense of weakness and a lack of resolve." At the same time, some analysts think the tough talk increasingly reduces the chances of a successful negotiation. "The stick side has been emphasized so much that it is hard for Iran to hear anything positive," said Paul R. Pillar, national intelligence officer for the Near East and South Asia from 2000 to 2005 who teaches at Georgetown University. He warned that military action would be "an enormous blunder with huge consequences for the United States."

(NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

- Move 6: directive (f = 30, 100 %)

Directive, Example:

The upcoming talks will also be complicated by a failed agreement concerning a medical research reactor in Tehran, the centerpiece of the talks in 2009.

(NY Times, Saturday, November 13, 2010; 9:42 PM)

2.3 Analysis

As it is observed, the adopted framework proved an efficient one that is capable to single out rhetorical organization in typical news reports. In other words, the frequencies obtained vouch for the efficiency of the framework. By structural analysis in the present study, the researcher has examined whether the news reports in the corpus reflect a faithful adherence to, or some deviations from the above report discourse structure.

3. Results

Move 1: Titles

First, the titles (headlines) in the four newspapers are investigated. The analysis shows that the frequency of titles in all four newspapers is 30. Besides, it is observed that the titles in New York Times and Washington Post tend to be more informative than their Iranian counterparts; since they often summarize the content of the reports which reflect the main topic and the position of the newspaper if the main thesis is present in the text. Using Microsoft Word software (version 10) 120 different titles from 4 newspapers were analyzed quantitatively (30 titles for each Newspaper). The counter of Word Software has produced proofs for larger American headlines (titles).

Move 2: Preparatory Comment

Although this move is an optional move, almost all Iranian news reports have missed this move. In American newspapers, the reverse is the case. Table 2 represents these findings.

Table 1: Analysis of Preparatory Comments

Newspaper	Frequency of the Preparatory Comment
Iran daily	2
Tehran Times	1
W. Post	18
NY. Times	11

Move 3: Main Topic

The frequency of main topic in both sets of newspapers is equal 30, however, some stylistic differences are observed in the placement of this move. The figures from the table above show that Iranian newspapers tend to introduce the main topic slightly earlier than the Americans.

Table 2: Analysis of Main Topic

Newspaper	N	1 st Sentence	1 st Paragraph	after 1 st Paragraph
Iran Daily	30	21	8	1
Tehran Times	30	25	4	1
W. Post	30	19	9	2
NY. Times	30	21	9	0

Table 3 – The Placement of Main Topic in the Newspapers

Move 4: Main Thesis

In the case of the fourth move however, the following results are obtained. As it is reported in the following tables, 86.6 percent of the American reports in the corpus have an explicit thesis statement at the beginning of their new report. The American examples of reports include an explicit thesis statement. A significant number (95 percent) of reports in Tehran Times and Iran Daily, however, do not appear to present a single unifying thesis statement that summarizes the position argued in the report. Some reports present several theses throughout the news. Others do not seem to argue for a position but evaluate the current situation. That is, although we recognized that there were several key statements that highlighted the point of view of the newspaper, we could not confidently identify the main thesis statement in a single place.

Table 3: Analysis of Main Thesis

Newspaper	Early presentation of Move	Delayed Presentation of Move
Iran Daily (N = 30)	0	1
Tehran Times (N=30)	1	1
W. Post (N=30)	18	9
NY. Times (N=30)	18	7

Move 5: Analysis

The results of structural analysis showed that the frequency of this Move in all four newspapers was 30. In other words, all 120 news reports included this move.

Move 6: Directive

The analysis of the final moved also brought to light the fact that this move seems to be obligatory in American Newspapers; the reverse is the case in Iranian Newspapers however. These will be represented in the concluding Table (Table 5) too.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The nature of the above examples of reports in two sets of newspapers suggest that the titles in Iranian reports may 1) presume greater background knowledge on the part of the readers (i.e., the titles may provide hints to only the insiders) or 2) have functions other than to inform, for example, to grab the reader's interest. In other words, it seems that they try to present a catchy title for their reports. That is why they are shorter than their American counterparts.

To explain the root of differences between two sets of newspapers it is observed that most of the reports in *The New York Times* offer an easily identifiable main thesis statement because *The New York Times* and *the Washington Post* tend to write argumentative/positional reports. For example in one of its news reports, *The New York Times*, after presenting the topic (the possibility of Iran – EU negotiation) faces the readers with the possibility of disagreement and the U.S stance. However, a different story is seen in Iranian news reports. They have included neither their institutional practice nor the country's stance on the issues. The Iranian newspapers, however, have sufficed it to provide the

information needed. In other word, unlike their American counterparts which chose an Argumentative Style of writing, Iranian newspapers have performed their informative function and nothing more. So, the principal function of texts written by these two Iranian newspapers is to inform rather than to argue for a position. For example, the news report that is investigated as an example for Tehran Times newspaper, namely “Age issue takes center stage for Saudi monarchy” did not have a main thesis statement and used a simple topic-discussion-directive pattern (table 5). The lack of positions in the statements of Tehran Times newspaper may be attributed to the fact that, the newspaper only writes for insiders with political stance in line with that of the newspaper. Thus, the daily catapults reader with expert analysis and information. One more possible reason, as it is suggested by the corpus of Iran Daily news reports, is that the writer follows a more straight structure for their reports perhaps because they are mainly affected by universal methodologies of merely news writing (hard news) rather than soft news in which the idea of news writer as an expert is also incorporated. For example, Iran daily in the above example by the title of “Salehi, Ashton Review Cooperation Prospects” after presenting main topic (that is equal to lead in “inverted pyramid” methodology of hard news writing), provide the readers with lots of news, interviews, quotation and experts idea all in all ordered based on their degree of importance (obvious adherence to” Inverted Pyramid”). So, difference of function has resulted in different linguistic structures in Iranian and American Newspapers. The findings are summarized in the following table.

Table 4: Findings (Schematic Structure of Newspapers)

Function	<i>Argumentative</i>		<i>Informative</i>
Option	<i>1</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>3</i>
Presentation of Position	<i>Early Presentation of Position</i>	<i>Delayed Presentation of Position</i>	<i>No Clear Stance on the Issues</i>
Newspapers	<i>Washington Post / New York Times</i>	<i>Washington Post / New York Times</i>	<i>Iran Daily Tehran Times</i>
Typical Structure of Genre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Title</i> • <i>Main Topic</i> • <i>Main Thesis</i> • <i>Analysis</i> • <i>Directive</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Title</i> • <i>Main Topic</i> • <i>Analysis</i> • <i>Main Thesis</i> • <i>(More Analysis)</i> • <i>Directive</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Title</i> • <i>Main Topic</i> • <i>Discussion</i> <p><i>(Almost Background Information)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>(Directive)</i>

4.1 Conclusion

In order to answer the research questions, the results of the study showed that: 1) almost all American news reports in the corpus of study possess all Moves in our analytical framework. In the Iranian newspapers, on the other hand, in almost all cases, certain moves are absent. These differences lead to structural and rhetorical differences between two sets of newspapers therefore. 2) The results obtained clearly indicate that discourse structure of a news report is not only dependent on the communicative purpose and the role of participants of this genre but also on different cultural rhetorical traditions. One can expect different structures for argumentative and informative reports like option 1 and 2 in the table 5 that both are for argumentative news report writing. Therefore we cannot regard them as a single rhetorical universal genre.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications

The results of contrasting American and Iranian genre analysis have pedagogical implications for teaching journalistic English and writing. Teachers can benefit from the findings of the analysis. They may make the teacher aware of the structural conflicts (differences) among the news reports of the two sets of newspapers and, as a result, teachers may be able to help their students get a better understanding of the language of news. With relevant contrastive rhetoric information such as those provided in this study an EFL teacher of reading

journalistic English can be a better teacher than a person without such information.

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