

2016

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## Teaching Anglo-American Academic Writing and Intercultural Rhetoric: A Grounded Theory Study of Practice in Ontario Secondary Schools

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### Abstract

This qualitative research project is a grounded theory study of the experiences of five EAL (English as an additional language) academic writing instructors with intercultural rhetoric. Following the academic conversation about contrastive/intercultural rhetoric, this investigation explores narratives of classroom practice in Ontario secondary schools in order to underline L2 writing activities that are sensitive to intercultural rhetoric. This paper includes explanations of the phenomenon of intercultural rhetoric as identified by the interviewed instructors and lists practical strategies employed by the participants. These strategies are organized in three categories: (1) strategies that use the potential of students' first languages and mother rhetorics, (2) strategies that take advantage of non-academic written forms and non-written modes of expression, and (3) genre-oriented strategies. This report, finally, discusses pedagogies underutilized by Ontario English writing teachers by comparing this project's findings with available literature on intercultural literature.

Keywords: contrastive rhetoric, intercultural rhetoric, multiliteracies, genre theory

### Introduction

This article is a report on a qualitative research project that attempted to generate theories describing pedagogical practices that enable secondary EAL students to learn English academic writing as a construct of a certain cultural and rhetorical background as opposed to traditional drilling exercises, which largely ignore students' rhetorical backgrounds and start with lessons on Anglo-American "paragraph writing," the "topic sentence," and "supporting details." These theories are grounded in in-depth open-ended interviews with some Canadian writing instructors who have tried to develop methods for interacting with the rhetorical traditions that secondary EAL students bring with them into the classroom.

Over the past fifty years, there has been a conversation in scholarly literature about the relationship between non-Anglo-American rhetorical patterns and the struggles of EAL students with English academic writing. The discussion started in the 1960's with the idea of "contrastive rhetoric" (Kaplan, 1966), which, after modification and critique, has been remodeled and renamed "intercultural rhetoric" (Connor, 2002). "Contrastive rhetoric is an area of research in second language

acquisition that identifies problems in composition encountered by second language writers and, by referring to the rhetorical strategies of the first language, attempts to explain them” (Connor, 1996, p. 5). Intercultural rhetoric is a more recent interpretation of contrastive rhetoric in the wake of (a) the criticisms of earlier contrastive rhetoricians, whose speculations seemed to indicate that Western rhetoric was superior to Eastern rhetoric and (b) new directions in contrastive rhetoric which favour interaction between rhetorics rather than opposition, friction, and conflict.

Regardless of the positions that different researchers have taken on this issue, very little theory concerning the rhetorical challenges that EAL students face has translated into actual classroom practice. Theoretical speculations about intercultural rhetoric have sometimes been described as “lacking in development and application to classroom study” (Walker, 2011, p. 72). Formulating possible practices of this nature becomes even more problematic when viewed through a critical lens. Kubota and Lehner (2004) wrote, “A pedagogy of critical contrastive rhetoric is not a neatly planned, comfortable enterprise in which static rhetorics are simply taught/learned and utilized at will” (p. 22).

With the dominance of English as an academic *lingua franca* and unprecedented waves of global migration—turning most urban schools into multilingual communities—it is imperative to think about strategies that are sensitive to students’ native manners of writing, which are rooted in their first languages and cultures. Such an attempt is particularly important since a lack of awareness about the variety of writing rhetorics that students are culturally accustomed to often leads to disregarding students’ voices when not shared in Anglo-American writing genres and rhetorical patterns. The findings of this study hopefully will help teachers not only to teach EAL writing as a linguistic skill but to introduce EAL writing to students as a cultural paradigm change.

Qualitative research into classroom practice sensitive to secondary school students’ mother rhetorics, similar to the nature of this project, is crucial because there has been little qualitative inquiry conducted to give EAL writing teachers and students a voice in order to hear about their experiences regarding this issue. “Most studies of contrastive rhetoric can be classified as quantitative, descriptive research” (Connor, 1996, p. 157). Although some qualitative research projects on intercultural rhetoric have been conducted (Benda, 1999), (a) they have not attracted a lot of attention as key works and (b) they usually rely on textual analysis rather than interviews. This study attempts to fill this gap in literature on intercultural rhetoric by interviewing five teachers practicing in Canada’s Ontario. Student populations of Ontario schools are among the most multilingual in the world; and the teachers practicing in these schools thus have pedagogical experiences that appeal to an international audience interested in multilingual education and writing.

The research questions that guided this study were: (1) What are Ontario secondary school ESL writing instructors’ experiences of the phenomenon of intercultural rhetoric? (2) What strategies have they employed or developed to deal with this phenomenon? These questions were formed to be in harmony with the methodology adopted for this project, which is discussed in the next section.

## Methods

*Grounded theory* as a qualitative research approach was adopted for this research. Inspired by Pragmatism as the philosophical foundation of grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) (broadly defined as a set of doctrines keen on “draw[ing] an intimate connection between theory and practice” (Waal, 2005)), this study attempted to generate theories based on the practice of five EAL academic writing instructors in Ontario secondary schools. In this project, the methods of participant selection, data collection, data analysis, and verification were informed by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and also Charmaz’s (2000) writings about grounded theory.

Searching for participants occurred through a network of university instructors, researchers, EAL teachers, Ontario English teachers, and students. Purposive (or judgemental) sampling was adopted to invite the participants. There were two criteria to satisfy. First, the participants were carefully handpicked to represent a variety of educational centres in Ontario for a more realistic presentation of practice in the province. Second, the participants who were chosen were EAL teachers who had somehow tried to move beyond drills and controlled exercises. All the participants also agreed that students’ first languages and native rhetorics were part and parcel of students’ identities and deserved due attention.

The following paragraphs include accounts of the participants’ backgrounds and experiences with EAL writing. All the names referring to participants in this article are pseudonyms. The names used in this report have been borrowed from the main characters of the internationally renowned Canadian film *Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner* (2001). *Atanarjuat* is the first feature length moving picture ever written, directed, and acted in Inuktitut (Eastern Canadian Inuit language). This choice has been made as appreciation of linguistic diversity in Canada, not always respected by European colonizers and their governments.

My first participant was Uluriaq. She is an ESL writing instructor and an ESL consultant in a major school board in Ontario. She also supervises a TESOL program in Waterloo, Ontario. What made Uluriaq a particularly valuable candidate for this project was the dual language book club that she had run for years. My second participant was Puja. Puja is a seasoned ESL teacher with 15 years of teaching experience both in Canada and abroad. She is at the moment teaching in an esteemed all-girls independent Toronto high school, with a strong academic orientation and a large ELL population. Oki, my third participant, has been seriously involved in literacy projects with different youth circles in addition to his experiences with Ontario high school ESL students and ELL’s. Moreover, what distinguishes him from the first two participants is his engagement with research. Oki is a doctoral student at a major Canadian University in Ontario, working on a research project about a multi-literacies related theme.

The fourth participant, Panikpak is not an ESL teacher. She is an English teacher. Her classes, however, usually host a great number of ELL’s (up to 40% of the students). Besides, her main form of assessment has traditionally been typical North American persuasive and argumentative essays. Niriuniq, the fifth participant has been tutoring ESL students in academic writing. She is also a teacher assistant at a prominent university in Ontario. Niriuniq is an essay grader and deals with year-one

undergraduate students' papers. Niriuniq's views, thus, have been included in this project for a better understanding of second rhetoric problems that ESL secondary students take with them into higher education.

The theories generated in the course of the study were shaped in a spiral rather than a linear fashion (Creswell, 1998, p.143). In other words, the data collection process was not determined beforehand. Instead, it was informed by the theories that formed along the way. Data collection and analysis thus mutually influenced each other. For strict checking of this process, detailed analytic and reflective memos were written to direct the rest of the study.

Within the dynamics of this spiral model, three steps of data coding were taken in order to yield theories, "open coding," "axial coding," and "selective coding" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In open coding, significant words, expressions, and sentences in participants' comments were coded and identified by *vivo codes*, short descriptors, for survival and coping purposes. Moreover, analytic and reflective memos about the coding strategies were written and archived. Open coding was followed by axial coding, which puts data "back together in new ways by making connections between a category and its subcategories" (p. 97). Axial coding helped the categories emerge. All the categories identified were labelled while detailed memos were written about the identification and labelling of each category. Finally, through selective coding, the central category, the participants' experiences of the phenomenon (intercultural rhetoric in this study) was selected. The rest of the categories also were also placed in logical connections with the central category.

Strauss & Corbin (1998) suggest the following "coding paradigm or logic diagram" as a model for arranging categories (See Figure 1), which guided the organization of the findings of this study.

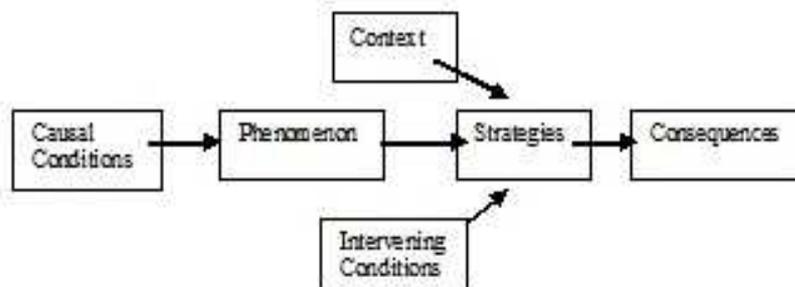


Figure 1: Coding Paradigm or Logic Diagram

## Findings

Based on the coding paradigm illustrated in Figure 1, the themes emerging during coding and analysis were categorized as (1) causal conditions, (2) phenomenon, (3) strategies, and (4) intervening conditions. The "context" of the participants' experiences was broadly considered as "EAL academic writing in Ontario secondary education." Similarly, the "consequences" of the participants' practices were gener-

ally summarized as “improvement in student EAL academic writing.” The grounded theory model for teaching EAL academic writing beyond drills and controlled exercises evolving from Strauss and Corbin's framework and the data collected for this research project is presented in Figure 3 at the end of the Findings section.

***Causal Conditions of the Phenomenon of Intercultural Rhetoric  
Rhetorical paradigm change in written language.***

All the participants agreed that the challenges that EAL students face while learning academic writing in English go beyond their problems with vocabulary, grammar, or punctuation. All the participants were aware that EAL students experience a rhetorical paradigm change that profoundly impacts the process of learning and teaching EAL academic writing. Also, all the interviewees emphasized that although their students might not be able to express their ideas in accordance with the requirements of Anglo-American rhetoric, it did not mean that they were not intelligent, creative, or opinionated or that they did not understand the task at hand. Panikpak, for example, said,

I have a student whose mother tongue is Bangali. And it was the exact same problem that the writing did not communicate clearly in English. Not because the student didn't understand the material, but because the [rhetorical] paradigm was different.

***Different cultural perceptions of writing as a medium of expression.***

While talking about the paradigm shift EAL students experience in structuring an English academic paper, Uluriaq and Oki underlined that the question of intercultural rhetoric went well beyond the actual written text. They believed part of the problem that caused students to struggle with English essay writing was in fact the way they regarded the very act of writing in their own cultures. In Anglo-American culture, the teachers thought, academic writing has a functional existence and is used to report opinions and findings straightforwardly. Uluriaq and Oki doubted if it was true of all other cultures. In Uluriaq's words,

Cultures are so different in the way that they view things. You've got low context cultures like in North American society, where it's more focused on the individual, and then you've got higher context cultures where community and sort of the group way of thinking plays in everything. So if you think of that as being your background knowledge that you're bringing to writing, you're going to write according to those influences.

***Students' unfamiliarity with Anglo-American writing pedagogies.***

Panikpak, pointed out that what sometimes in the process of EAL academic writing appeared as contrastive rhetoric might be actually caused by the assumption that Canadian writing pedagogies were understood and accepted by students from other cultures. Canadian EAL students, however, might not be following lessons and instructions simply because they are used to other methods of teaching. She commented,

As we have more students, especially in our school, who come from different countries, we all have to be aware that the method of teaching and the method of learning might be very different in the student's home country and that it's a huge paradigm shift for the student. The material isn't just different, but the whole approach is totally, totally different.

***Canadian-born ELL's and hidden struggles.***

The fourth theme of this category is very specific to second language education in the Canadian context. Puja warned that it was a mistake to consider Canadian-born ELL's as native speakers of English with no particular problems with English academic writing. Puja, in particular, spoke about the linguistic advantage that the students whose home language was English had over Canadian-born ELL's. For instance, she said, Canadian students with English speaking parents have a better grasp of academic English vocabulary simply because of the conversations their families might have about different scientific, social, or literary issues at home. Canadian-born ELL's cannot learn from this type of "home English conversations." At the same time, their first language also is not developed enough to tap into the same concepts in their first language so that they might try to find the English equivalents of those concepts.

***Descriptions of the Phenomenon of Intercultural Rhetoric as Identified in Student Writing***

During all the interviews questions were asked to help the participants recall instances of rhetorical challenges in student writing in order to specify the manifestations of the phenomenon of intercultural rhetoric in actual written products or writing processes. Four particular themes emerged from the data, (1) the appearance of non-Anglo-American rhetorical styles in students' English writings, (2) problems with thesis and introduction, (3) problems with the schematic structure of English academic papers, and (4) the importance of the link between first rhetoric and student identity.

***Appearance of non-Anglo-American rhetorical styles in student writing.***

All the teachers recalled instances of having to deal with writing styles that were different from Anglo-American writing norms and that stemmed from students' mother rhetorics. Referring to some examples of non-Anglo-American rhetorical patterns in the writing of her Mandarin speaking students, Panikpak spoke about "students whose writing was overly flowery, elaborate, extremely long syntax, had trouble focusing." Puja, also, talked about "Chinese students, who'd like to ask a lot of questions at the beginning, rhetorical questions." Moreover, Puja shared her experiences with essays written by students from the Middle East. She said students from the Middle East "prefer to write in a spiral rather than in logical chunks, which is the English essay."

***Problems with introduction and forming thesis statements.***

All the participants unanimously talked about students' challenges of forming thesis statements that were considered well written by Anglo-American rhetorical

standards. Panikpak, for example, talked about how an attachment to mother rhetoric could influence students' English introductory paragraphs. "I find often students who have this difficulty [writing very long sentences as required by first rhetoric] might have the most difficulty in their introduction and thesis and conclusion, which tend to be more abstract." The other participants also, more or less, echoed the same concern with thesis and introduction. Nevertheless, an analysis of what a thesis statement in English academic writing is or why writers from other cultures do not explicitly write a thesis statement did not emerge in a more detailed manner than described above anywhere in the data.

***Problems with the schematic structure of English academic papers.***

The teachers occasionally indicated that EAL students can have trouble producing English essays that meet the standards of order, unity, and fluidity in academic writing in English. Nevertheless, apart from scattered comments, there were no descriptions particularly concentrating on the problems with Anglo-American structures of argument presentation in the body of a scientific paper. Also, despite the fact that relevant questions were asked, the participants did not particularly talk about supporting details or cohesion either.

***The link between first rhetoric and student identity.***

According to the participants, not only does dealing with writing in a new rhetoric threaten the student's understanding of the process and functions of writing, it also challenges the student's identity inasmuch as the way we express ourselves is profoundly connected to our identity. Consequently, one of the challenges imposed by intercultural rhetoric is the way our definition of our identity is stretched when we are learning a strange rhetoric. Uluriaq, for example, emphasized the question of identity and written expression in the following comment.

I think first language is your way of expressing your heart. If we take that away from students, being able to express themselves in a full rich way that they are accustomed to in a culture, I think we're depriving those students from a lot more than written language.

Intercultural rhetoric, thus, can lead to different forms of identity crisis or confusion that might seriously influence the process of learning to write in a second language. This final theme, of course, is slightly different to the first three in view of that fact that the first three themes specifically focused on the impact of intercultural rhetoric on student written work.

***Practical Strategies for Approaching Intercultural Rhetoric***

Three subcategories of themes, focusing on practical strategies beyond drills and exercises, emerged from the data: (1) strategies that use the potential of students' first languages and mother rhetorics, (2) strategies that take advantage of non-academic written forms and non-written modes of expression, and (3) genre-oriented strategies.

***Tapping into students' first languages and mother rhetorics.***

The majority of the themes regarding practical strategies evolved around the idea of tapping into students' first languages and rhetorics. These strategies are informed by the underlying belief that EAL students already possess literacies that are communicated more effectively in their mother tongues. As a result, making room for their first languages, in an attempt to help those literacies surface, is a wise pedagogical investment. The following three themes include recommendations for using the potential of students' first languages in the process of teaching EAL academic writing.

*Continuing to study first language up to advanced and academic levels.*

All the participants agreed that even the mere act of consolidating students' knowledge of their first languages, particularly enabling them to master advanced levels, could boost their understanding of academic writing in English. Puja, for instance, said,

I would say keep writing in your first language. Do what you do in your first language. If you can take a first language course, please do that. If you maintain and develop your mother tongue to the highest level possible, it is easier to add other languages. So you want to have that structure developed as much as possible. And the way to do that is, of course, to read and to write in your first language in the most sophisticated way that you can.

In addition to the advantages of constant interaction with the first language, the participants, also, believed that students' first languages and rhetorics could be tapped into while they were handling particular writing tasks in English.

*Using the first language in the process of writing in English as a second language.*

The participants had experienced three distinct forms of employing first language and mother rhetoric to help with students EAL writing tasks. First, they invited students to write and recite in their first language, and then had them translate what they had written into English. Second, they encouraged their students to plan their essays in their first language before they actually started with writing them. Third, they asked them to write in both languages simultaneously and do dual language projects.

Uluriaq, for instance, spoke about the possibility of writing bilingual passages. She believed writing in both languages at the same time would create a natural and organic space for the students to let their first rhetoric negotiate with the second rhetoric. She gave the following short account of how her students made dual language passages in her club.

Students are partnered, and I think that's really key. They're partnered with another student that speaks the same first language. The students may have different levels of English fluency both orally and in writing, and [different levels of fluency in their] first language. That doesn't really matter. What matters is that they are able to communicate with each other in their first language and English to create the book. I feel that allows for ongoing discussion, moving

back and forth from their first language to English. This allows them to fuse the two languages. So that's, sort of, the loose structure. As we come to using some academic language as opposed to everyday language, students would talk it out and negotiate between the two of the languages. You know, "what word we exactly want to use? This is what it is in Chinese. What do you think we might say in English?" So that's happening through their discussion. Also, the teachers are there to assist with the process. We are, of course, more helpful with English.

The participants, thus, created environments in which students could constantly negotiate with their first languages while, or before, writing in English.

*Considering first language in assessment.*

Uluriah and Panikpak emphasized that they used students' first languages and mother rhetorics for assessment as well, particularly for diagnostic and formative assessment. Uluriah thought it natural to start academic writing lessons with short pieces of writing in the student's first language. This, she maintained, would give teachers a great opportunity to see where their students are coming from rhetorically and what perceptions they have of good quality writing.

***Taking advantage of non-Academic written forms and non-written modes of expression.***

All the participants thought that students, especially prior to the actual academic writing task, should be able to employ modes of expression that they are accustomed to in order to express themselves comfortably and make their ideas transparent without any concern about, or fear of, making formalistic or rhetorical mistakes. The teachers specifically spoke of their experiences with two modes of expression, free-form writing and conversation.

*Free-form writing.*

All the teachers agreed that free-form writing functioned as a painless transition from everyday English to academic English, particularly for language learners. Puja briefly described what she usually did in the following example, "They're writing a paper about their dream job, and we start with just a free writing activity. Then, they go and read it to two peers. They find out about each other. Then, I'll help them re-structure those ideas into a form. I don't show them the form first."

Among all forms of non-academic writing, Oki was particularly interested in poetry since, he thought, poetry provided students with the smoothest linguistic transition.

The one thing about poetry is that, although it might be rooted in a kind of aesthetic, it provides more leeway for students to play with language, whereas academic writing is targeted. Once you had this chance to demonstrate skills, your confidence develops very quickly. I think poetry can be a bridge.

Hence, the participants maintained, free-form writing, poetry in particular, can provide a sizable arena for students to experiment linguistically without worrying about the mistakes that they might make when writing academic papers. Additionally, poetry is very personal. This characteristic will let students express their deepest

emotions and usually unsaid opinions. The personal quality of such messages, when expressed in public and in the beauty of poetry, can facilitate community building and create respect, and consequently confidence, for students.

*Conversation.*

Next to free-form writing, pre-writing conversations were commonly experienced by the participants. Puja described one way of employing conversation before academic writing as follows:

Through conversation with their peers, they may come up with more ideas, and they might wish to note them down. So I say, "Take your paper. Take your pen. Go read it to someone. And if you come up with anything while they're talking, write it down." I don't tell them the purpose of the activity; otherwise, they will freeze up because "we're going to write a paper." We always start with a way in.

Similar to free-form writing, casual conversations with peers or the teacher will let students express their ideas without struggling with technicalities of academic writing. Having a casual conversation, students voice their opinions without any anxiety, for instance, about spelling or punctuation. If students are admired for their opinions before they are required to write passages free of grammatical errors, they will feel more confident in the process of writing.

*Creating genre transparency.*

The dominant theme in the participants' discussions about genre was an emphasis on creating transparency. All the participants unanimously agreed that teachers need to make students conscious of the fact that English essay writing is a unique written genre which has been formed by certain historical and social circumstances. Students, they underlined, should be aware that if they face challenges, while trying to adopt Anglo-American rhetoric, they should not feel guilty or inadequate. Neither should they doubt their ability as good writers. All the teachers in this investigation told stories of their attempts to make this fact transparent that English academic writing was one genre among many. Moreover, they made it clear to their students that no genre was superior to another. We choose to write in a particular genre merely based on the dictates of context and circumstance. Thus, students can learn that they can value both their native rhetoric and their second rhetoric.

Puja suggested constant discussions about genre, "I speak to it whenever it comes up. They should know the difference between where they are from and what it's like here, or might be expected here." Uluriaq, in the same fashion, recommended student awareness of the genre. She compared the necessity of clarifying the rationale that had shaped the form of English academic writing with the importance of thinking about a philosophical framework for a research paper in higher education. "Philosophy is the overall influence here. It's like being a researcher. Your philosophical framework. It also affects any learners." Figure 2 represents the strategies discussed above.

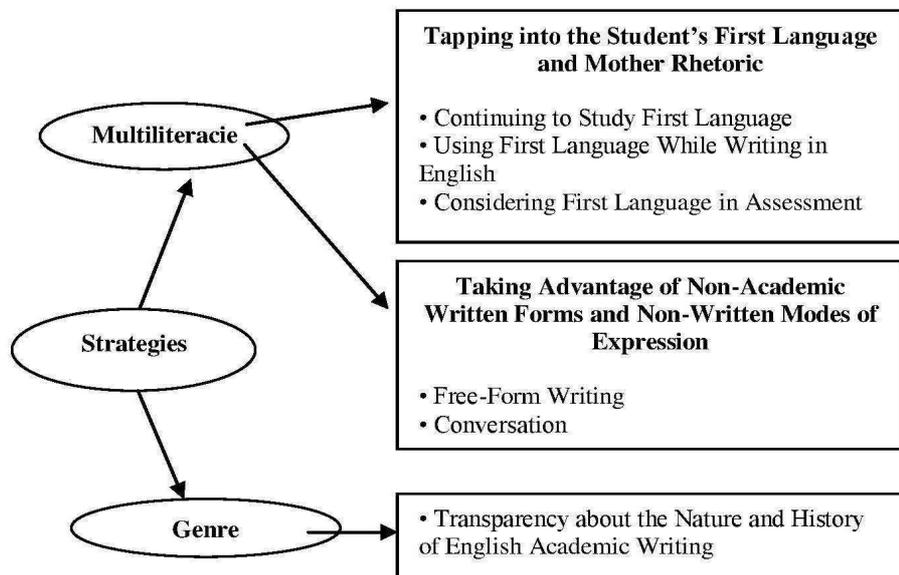


Figure 2: Practical Strategies for Approaching Intercultural Rhetoric

***Intervening Conditions Influencing Teaching EAL Academic Writing Strategies Sensitive to Intercultural Rhetoric***

As detailed in the Methodology section, I had initially intended to focus on three categories, (1) causal conditions, (2) phenomenon, and (3) strategies. Nevertheless, the data hosted a significant number of themes that addressed issues that interfered with the process of teaching of EAL academic writing with cultural and rhetorical considerations. The frequency of these comments made the creation of an Intervening Conditions category inevitable. All participants shared this view that for successful transition from mother rhetoric to second rhetoric, creative classroom practice, although a very important factor, was not necessarily enough. The teachers interviewed frequently listed conditions that would hinder the process of teaching EAL academic writing with an eye on intercultural rhetoric. The most important themes emerging from the data are as follows.

***Teacher familiarity with non-Anglo-American rhetorical traditions.***

The participants believed that teachers should make every attempt possible to learn about their students' native rhetorics, and possibly even their languages. This theme is also closely tied to the second theme in this category, the student's country of origin and the way different rhetorical and pedagogical traditions can determine a teacher's practice of teaching EAL academic writing.

***The student's country of origin and the specific rhetorical tradition.***

The more specific the participants became about their practical strategies, the more detailed they had to be about the particular rhetorical traditions that they were

trying to deal with. They also, as discussed in the Causal Conditions, talked about the impact of writing pedagogies that students were used to and that were commonly practiced in their countries of origin. Thus, the idea that we can easily list a set of strategies that can successfully deal with all Non-Anglo-American rhetorics is probably too simplistic. In actual practice, different non-Anglo-American rhetorical traditions might lead to different sets of strategies.

***The student's command of the first language.***

Some of the participants believed that, similar to the impact of specific cultural traditions on choice of strategies, the student's command of the first language would influence a teacher's practice immensely. They also were worried that it was more difficult than it seemed to define an ESL student or ELL in Canada.

A careful diagnosis of students' knowledge of their first languages can impact the teacher's arrangement of strategies. For instance, a large number of the themes formulated in the Practical Strategies for Approaching Intercultural Rhetoric category tapped into students' knowledge of their first language. These strategies won't breed much educationally if the student can hardly speak the first language, or her level of fluency in academic areas is much less than her ability in academic English.

***Marks and institutional requirements.***

Almost all the teachers reminded me of the fact that the usual drills and controlled exercises in EAL academic writing classes were not invented only by the teachers. They emphasized that a lot of practice that is blind to students' cultural backgrounds and identities have been built through a utilitarian view of language by numerous educational and social institutions over centuries. Unfortunately, this attitude, the teachers held, has been adopted by parents and students themselves as well. They complained that a lot of students, along with their parents, are so mark driven that they might regard attempts to connect writing to culture and identity as futile, and sometimes as a waste of time.

***Willingness of the student.***

A few of the teachers believed that students should be willing to adopt Anglo-American rhetoric and be eager to add it to the repertoire of their literacies. Students, also, these teachers thought, had to believe in alternative teaching strategies that were sensitive to their cultural background and identity.

***Time.***

Two of the teachers thought that culturally sensitive EAL writing teaching strategies required more time than teachers and students typically had. They did not mention why that was the case. Nor did they explain if continuing with strategies that took less time but were less effective were worthwhile.

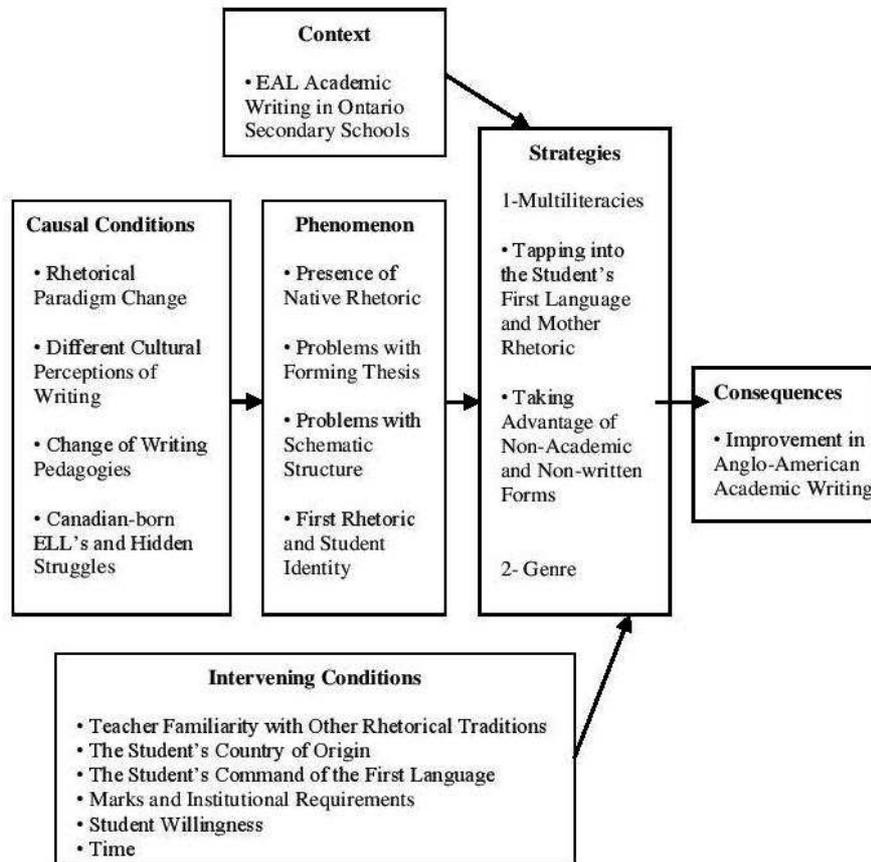


Figure 3: Grounded Theory Model of the Findings

## Discussion

This section presents reflections upon the perceptions of the participants of their practice as related to intercultural rhetoric. While highlighting the achievements and innovations of these practitioners, I, also, insert the stories that they shared about their practice within the scholarly conversation about intercultural rhetoric in order to create more room for comparison and contrast.

### *Teacher Awareness of Rhetorical Paradigm Shift*

All the participants were extremely conscious of the fact that although EAL students and ELL's might struggle with academic and essay writing in English, they were not necessarily weak writers. Instead, they might only have difficulty adopting a strange rhetoric. Moreover, the data clearly displayed that the participants did not have a reductionist view of culture, language, and rhetoric (Leki, 1997; Spack, 1997; Zamel, 1997). On the contrary, all the teachers appeared to be cognizant of plurality

of rhetorics within one language and the complexities of making comparisons between rhetorical traditions of different languages. Accordingly, all the interviewees emphatically described their strategies as *additive*, being conscious of the process of *othering* that would otherwise occur in the process of teaching (Pennycook, 2001). They showed great respect for their students' first languages and regarded students' native cultures as a great resource to tap into. They were particularly aware of the connection between writing and identity (Cumming, 2013; Ivanic, 1998; Norton, 2000). Thus, generally speaking, the teachers' knowledge of intercultural rhetoric, and the complexities of the issues surrounding it, seemed to have created a solid theoretical foundation for the participants' practices.

Nevertheless, through the lens of critical contrastive rhetoric (Kubota & Lehner, 2004; May, 1999; Pennycook, 2001), some phrases used by the interviewees might be considered a quiet manifestation of the discourse that deems Anglo-American rhetoric superior to non-English rhetorics. Critical pedagogists might feel uncomfortable with the generous use of the words "linear" (Anglo-American rhetoric) and "spiral" (other rhetorics). Puja, for example, commented that students from the Middle East "prefer to write in a spiral rather than in logical chunks." Based on this statement, it could be interpreted that Middle Eastern rhetoric does not follow a "logical" order, with "logical" having a positive connotation. In another example, Panikpak remembered "students whose writing was overly flowery, elaborate, extremely long syntax, had trouble focusing." Similarly, from a critical point of view, the following questions can be posed. Can an emphasis on "overly" in the above comment indicate "poor writing"? Do writers in languages other than English essentially "have trouble focusing"?

Whether or not these examples are indicative of a systematic problem will only be answered by more probing in other research projects. The data collected for the present project, however, suggests that the general tone of the teachers, their emphasis on the importance of students' home cultures, and the strategies that they typically employed did not signal the presence of Eurocentric mentality among the population studied. The teachers vividly took a stance of care and empathy.

#### ***Identification of the Phenomenon***

The participants identified four general characteristics of rhetorically challenged EAL essays. They, also, frequently referred to specific countries/cultures in order to be precise about the experiences they had had with English learners from different geographical places. However, the list of the problems formulated based on the data was not exhaustive. The list presented here is relatively short compared to the number of the issues covered by typical academic writing textbooks such as *IELTS Masterclass* published by Oxford or *LONGMAN Preparation Course for the TOEFL Test*. Although some of the activities suggested in these books are examples of drills and controlled exercises, they usually cover a comprehensive list of EAL students' struggles with academic writing in English. The participants, in particular, did not spend much time on "supporting details in a paragraph", a major challenge for students who usually use non-Anglo-American rhetorics (Kalan, 2012).

Moreover, although the participants commented on specific non-English rhetorics, their descriptions were rather general (one exception, of course, was Oki's experience with Korean). The participants did not usually give detailed descriptions of

rhetorical differences between writing in English and writing in languages that they were speaking about. This particularly is significant since a sizable body of research on contrastive/intercultural rhetoric contains comprehensive comparisons between Anglo-American and other rhetorics. Ventola and Mauranen (1991), for instance, have compared Finnish academic writing and English scientific articles. Hatim (1997) has analyzed Arabic-English discourse contrasts and differences in argumentation. Kong (1998), Kubota, (1998), and Zhu (1997) have written about Asian-English contrasts. These are only a few examples to illustrate the depth of work in this area. The participants, however, as mentioned in the Intervening Conditions chapter, did urge teachers to familiarize themselves with other rhetorics, which indicated their understanding of the importance of this issue.

### *Strategies.*

In comparison with recorded experiences, recommendations, and theoretical speculations in literature regarding intercultural rhetoric and L2 academic writing, the number of strategies employed by the participants was impressive. The findings of this investigation indicate that employing students' first languages in Ontario classrooms is not a rare practice. All the participants said that they encouraged their students to continue studying their first languages. They also used their students' first languages in the process of writing in English and for different forms of assessment. Moreover, the participants referred to the official documents that required or recommended such practices and they frequently mentioned the names of Canadian researchers who worked on a variety of dual language projects and bilingualism—a sign of effective university-school communication in Ontario.

From another perspective, this consciousness among Ontario EAL teachers about students' mother tongues must have also been strengthened by dominant Canadian social and political discourses that have favoured multiculturalism and multilingualism over the past five decades. Drawing upon the findings of this project, elsewhere I have written about the impact of social discourses in Canada on L2 writing pedagogies, and in particular the tendency towards employing students' first languages and dual language writing (Kalan, 2013).

Next to first language use, which was the focus of the largest number of strategies, the teachers also used non-academic forms of writing and non-written modes of expression to assist the students with their academic writing. They, in particular, used free-form writing and conversation as a bridge between student literacies and academic writing. Besides, although to different degrees, all the participants agreed upon such activities both as a method to combat the language barrier and as one form of differentiated instruction.

Despite the enthusiasm among the teachers about multimodal activities, no particular story was told about using visual, pictorial, or digital media in the preparatory steps that lead to actual writing of an academic piece. The philosophies of L2 writing pedagogies shared by the participants make it difficult to believe that any of them would support such a move in the classroom less than passionately; however, specific examples were not recorded in the data. I thought this should be mentioned since a review of literature can reveal many successful examples of using visual and pictorial media in connection with L2 academic writing. Brisk and Harrington's (2000)

experiments with drawing and Kasper's (2000) attempts to use film in academic writing classes are a few examples.

The second sub-category of strategies was designed to host genre activities. The concern about "transparency," as the result of the critical stance that the participants assumed, was the most significant theme in their references to genre. Their views echoed the views of critical rhetoricians that "[e]xplicit teaching from this point of view seeks to uncover the structural forms of dominant language so that minority learners can access social and cultural power. The aim is not assimilation but rather empowerment of the disadvantaged" (Kubota & Lehner, 2004, p.13).

Although the interviewees spoke about genre, based on the data collected for this study and its findings, one can see that in Ontario schools activities with a multi-literacies bent comfortably outnumber genre-oriented activities. Different genre movements, in different periods, have become popular in the United States, Australia, and Europe (Hyon, 1996). The Canadians, in contrast, have never speculated about and experimented with genre theory as seriously. A comparison between the data collected for this project and literature about the importance of genre-centred writing instruction shows Canadian EAL teachers can learn more from genre theorists. For example, they can more often focus on the social and situational contexts in which genres occur (Bazerman, 1988), variety of styles and audiences (Swales, 1990), and the social context and power networks surrounding every genre (Hyland, 2007).

Additionally, more emphasis on genre in the classroom might pave the way for new pedagogical experiments with the ideas of the advocates of post-process writing (Atkinson, 2003; Kent, 1999). Hyland (2003), for instance, argues that post-process genre-based pedagogies empower students by "explicit and systematic explanations of the ways language functions in social contexts" (p. 18). Journet (1999), also, holds that post-process writing is basically a question of genre, or rather challenging dominant genres. More attention to post-process pedagogy can indeed guide L2 writing instructors who might have the same pedagogical inclinations of the participants of this project inasmuch as strategies such as pre-writing activities listed in the Findings sections are rooted in the doctrines of process writing. These process-based activities can indeed be enriched if revisited under the light of post-process theorists' critiques of the process movement.

## **Conclusion**

This article reported the perceptions of five purposively selected Ontario EAL teachers of intercultural rhetoric and listed their practical measures to deal with this phenomenon. This attempt, hopefully, helps us have a better idea of Canadian classroom practice sensitive to intercultural rhetoric. Also, as discussed above, it can also open new horizons to explore further spaces in this regard. Talking about intercultural rhetoric is crucially important because this cultural challenge in writing is unfortunately sometimes interpreted as lack of literacy, or even worse, lack of intelligence.

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