

Culture, Logic, and Rhetoric

Logic, which is the basis of rhetoric, comes from culture; it is not universal. Rhetoric, therefore, is not universal either but varies from culture to culture. The rhetorical system of one language is neither better nor worse than the rhetorical system of another language, but it is different.

English logic and English rhetoric, which are based on Anglo-European cultural patterns, are linear — that is, a good English paragraph begins with a general statement of its content and then carefully develops that statement with a series of specific illustrations. A good English paragraph may also use just the reverse sequence; It may state a whole series of examples and then summarize those examples in a single statement at the end of the paragraph. In either case, however, the flow of ideas occurs in a straight line from the opening sentence to the last sentence. Furthermore, a well-structured English paragraph is never digressive. There is nothing that does not belong to the paragraph and nothing that does not support the topic sentence.

A type of construction found in Arabic and Persian writing is very different. Whereas English writers use a linear sequence, Arabic and Persian writers tend to construct a paragraph in a parallel sequence using many coordinators such as *and* and *but*. In English, maturity of style is often judged by the degree of subordination rather than by the degree of coordination. Therefore, the Arabic and Persian styles of writing, with their emphasis on coordination, seem awkward and immature to an English reader.

Some Asian writers, on the other hand, use an indirect approach. In this kind of writing, the topic is viewed from a variety of angles. The topic is never analyzed directly; it is referred to only indirectly. Again, such a development in an English paragraph is awkward and unnecessarily vague to an English reader.

Spanish rhetoric differs from English rhetoric in still another way. While the rules of English rhetoric require that every sentence in a paragraph relate directly to the central idea, a Spanish-speaking writer loves to fill a paragraph with interesting digressions. Although a Spanish paragraph may begin and end on the same topic, the writer often digresses into areas that are not directly related to the topic. Spanish rhetoric, therefore, does not follow the English rule of paragraph unity.

In summary, a student who has master the grammar of English may still write poor papers unless he/she also mastered the rhetoric of English. Also, the student may have difficulty reading an essay written by the rules of English rhetoric unless he/she understands the "logical" differences from those of his/her own native tongue.

(Oshima, Alice and Ann Hogue. 1983. *Writing Academic English*. Essex: Pearson Education.)