

Physical and Topical Structures of Manpower Discourse: A Contrastive Rhetoric Analysis in Southeast Asia

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the physical and topical structures of thirty paragraphs culled from websites of Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian manpower agencies. Drawing on the frameworks of Simpson (2000) and Lautamatti (1987), the study describes potential regional (Southeast Asian) and national preferences of writers on a subgenre of L2 professional writing, called manpower discourse (MD). The physical structure analysis points to slight but statistically insignificant differences between the data sets. Such analysis aids in the description of a possible regional preference in the physical structure of MD in Southeast Asia, which appeals to directness and simplicity. The topical structure analysis (TSA) shows that there is a stronger demand for internal coherence in Philippine MD, compared with Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD. Specifically, the analysis reveals that topical development is more sophisticated in Philippine MD attributed to the use of some form of topical reoccurrence and some kind of topical progressions in all paragraphs, which was not observed in the internal structure of paragraphs from Indonesian and Malaysian MD. Moreover, Philippine MD seems to keep up with one valued characteristic of composition in English: to develop ideas using sequential and extended parallel progressions. Also, topical depth is found to be most elaborate in Philippine MD than in the Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts. The paper closes with a discussion of implications for professional writing, specific to manpower discourse and teaching writing coherence based on socially and culturally relevant inputs.

Keywords: contrastive rhetoric; topical structure analysis; internal coherence; Southeast Asia; manpower discourse

INTRODUCTION

Much of the work in almost 60 years of contrastive rhetoric (henceforth, CR) research focused on cultural influences on academic writing, initially conceived as a pedagogical solution to the problem of L2 organizational pattern (Matsuda, 1997). CR studies with implications for the ESL writing classroom began with Kaplan's (1966) seminal work entitled "Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education," which involved some 600 L2 student essays. Albeit exploratory and, to a certain extent, more intuitive than scientific, Kaplan's (1966) work established CR as a new field of linguistic inquiry (Leki, 1991).

Because of the spate of CR studies involving students' essays, modern contrastive rhetoric researchers found themselves challenged by the need to situate their work in a field that copiously explored- L2 student writing. Hence, from its initial conception as an appeal to writing pedagogy, CR has since become more complex and has taken different directions to examine written discourse across cultures. Leki (1991, p. 126) advanced one of two main approaches to CR which respond to the need to identify research gap and create research space and which has particular relation to the present study: "to examine L1 texts from different cultures, often professional, and published work, written for native speakers, and the rhetorical contexts in which these texts are inscribed..."

Interestingly, Leki's (1991) observation has had some confirmation by way of looking at how recent CR studies have departed from L2 student writing and dealt with other genres and subgenres of writing not only in L1 but also in L2, altogether extending the notion of cultural influences to written discourse. At present, the literature on CR includes investigations that focus on academic research writing (Suryani et al., 2014), research articles (Morales, 2012), conference abstracts (Fartousi & Dumanig, 2012), news leads, stories and editorials (Scollon, 2000; Dumanig et al., 2009; Mercado, 2009), L2 professional writing (Thatcher, 2000; Pariña, 2010), rhetorics and communication media (Thatcher, 2004), business and technical writing (Woolever, 2001), and workplace discourse (Dautermann, 1993; Kleimann, 1993) among others.

Another concern arises considering the cultural or rhetorical tradition under which a CR study is focused. For example, Leki's (1991) claim that there have been surprisingly few studies of European languages other than Spanish seems to still hold true at the present state of CR research. The same concern can be said of Asian or Oriental rhetoric, originally described in Kaplan's (1966) 'doodles' article as following a spiral organization pattern. Severino (1993) posits:

"To speak of 'Oriental rhetoric' when Asia is comprised of over fifty languages, countries, and cultures is most certainly a gross generalization. Even though in one section of the article he says that 'Oriental' means Chinese and Korean, but not Japanese, it seems unlikely that successive generations of over a billion Chinese in Taiwan, the People's Republic, and Hong Kong, not to mention Chinese speakers in other Asian countries (Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, the Philippines) and Korean speakers in Korea and elsewhere, would use the same indirect spiral form in their written communication". (p. 47)

It is therefore the concern of the CR researcher to specifically describe the cultural and rhetorical tradition under focus to overcome what Severino (1993) and other CR researchers have accused the original 'doodles' article of: gross generalization of rhetorical styles.

Another challenge that researchers from within the field of CR constantly face is qualifying claims, which Severino (1993) states can be facilitated by either or both approaches: specifying the genre and subgenre and specifying the background of the writer in terms of the demographic factors. Severino (1993, p. 46) disputes Kaplan's (1966) work, at least the original one, saying that it did not take into account 'the particular language backgrounds of the writer, genre factors, developmental factors, and previous writing instruction' (p. 46), when, in fact, findings become more grounded and sound if researchers have a way to integrate both approaches to qualifying claims. However, this may not always be possible. For one, not all written texts subjected into CR inquiry lend themselves certain in terms of writer background. Therefore, the least that researchers should do is to ascertain the comparability of genre or subgenre in question across cultures involved in CR inquiry, which for Kachru (1999) is the primary consideration to have a meaningful contrastive research.

Kachru (1999) explains that establishing the comparability of genre is important because (1) there may be genres in one or more languages and cultures that have no counterparts in other languages and cultures; (2) there may be different rhetorical patterns associated with different genres; and (3) similar, or even identical, speech situations may call for different genres across cultures. It is therefore the task of the CR researcher to ensure that the data being analyzed are comparable and establish the method through which such comparability is verified. Also, the rhetorical tradition under focus, that of Southeast Asian rhetoric, responds to Severino's (1993) and Kachru's (1999) challenges of first specifying the rhetorical tradition in question and second making sure that data from these traditions are comparable.

The present study analyses the physical and topical structures of manpower discourse (henceforth MD) found in websites of manpower agencies from three Southeast Asian nations: the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia, with the aim of identifying regional and possibly national writing preferences in this subgenre of L2 professional writing.

The type of text to be analysed is in consonance with Leki's (1991) challenge for modern CR studies to examine professional writing. In the researcher's opinion, professional writing is itself broad, hence, analyses of subgenres of professional writing are possible. Therefore, MD as a subgenre of L2 professional writing is examined in this paper.

Further explication of text type and rhetorical traditions in question and selection of corpus is presented under the methods and procedure section of this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies from within the tradition of CR have been conducted so that much is now known and understood on the cultural influences to L2 writing. Previous CR studies vary in the text types or genres of writing and the methods of analysis, but all are geared towards better understanding Oriental rhetoric in general and Southeast Asian rhetoric in particular.

In a study of academic research writing by non-native writers in Malaysia, Suryani et al. (2014) explored the rhetorical moves used by Malaysian writers in the introduction section of Computer Science research articles (henceforth RA) for journal publication. Using the Create-A-Research-Space (CARS) model by Swales (2004), they found that, in battling against the difficulty of meeting academic writing expectations of native speakers of English, a majority of Malaysian writers adopted most of the rhetorical strategies in Swales (2004), which model native English speakers' rhetorical presentation of research ideas. The authors hence close the paper by arguing for the suitability of CARS model in identifying rhetorical moves in RA by Malaysian writers.

From an analysis of introductions of RA in Suryani et al. (2014), Morales (2012) geared her analysis toward the conclusion section of RA written by Filipino and Japanese writers. Her study identified organizational and compulsory moves from the two writing cultures and detected intercultural variation in the rhetorical preferences of Filipino and Japanese RA authors. Specifically, Filipino RA authors seem to indicate in their RAs' conclusion sections the probable contributions that their studies might have added to the growing body of knowledge; whereas Japanese RA authors appear to employ in their conclusions a brief account of the main points from the perspective of the overall study, which characterizes their cultural rhetorical pattern called "ketsu."

Sandoval (2010) also made use of RA conclusions to find existing stance-taking strategies of research papers. The results of his quantitative analysis reveal that the frequency distributions of stance would vary from one type to another, which are used for the purpose of (1) protecting one's image as a form of face-saving act with the use of hedging devices; (2) conveying probabilities; and (3) establishing credibility of claims or notions. He suggests that the more a writer uses stance-taking strategies in his or her claims the more the papers appear to be credible.

Fartousi and Dumanig's (2012) study focused on conference abstracts in a contrastive rhetorical analysis which aimed to shed light on rhetorical patterns followed in writing abstracts of papers presented in a conference at the University Putra Malaysia (UPM). They found four rhetorically potential elements which include three obligatory elements of Articulating an Objective (AO), Articulating a Method (AM) and Articulating a Result (AR) and one optional rhetorical element namely Addressing a Problem (AP) and advanced a rhetorical pattern derived from the analysis of conference abstracts.

Meanwhile, Mercado (2009) analyzed lead stories written in three varieties of English: Philippine, Spanish and Indonesian to determine the organizational pattern of school paper lead stories found in three school papers. She found that the stories follow a three-move structure: providing a summary, elaborating the report, and making a claim or stating a fact. The most notable pattern in the introduction is the use of the Who-What and When-What elements, whereas the conclusion is characterized by adding more information, giving instructions, and making announcements. She posited that the minor contrasts that the stories exhibited may be attributed to the writers' style rather than some cultural influences.

The journalistic writing genre was also under focus in Dumanig et al. (2009) as it examined the topical structures of Philippine and American editorials in *The Philippine Daily Inquirer* and *The New York Times*, respectively. Using Topical Structure Analysis (TSA), the paper analyzed the differences in internal coherence between the editorials of the two newspapers. The study found very minimal difference in internal coherence between the two newspapers' editorials. American and Filipino editorial writers follow more or less the same rhetorical organization in terms of topical progressions although Filipino writers tend to write longer and wordier clauses and sentences.

Rajo-Laurilla (2002) subjected Philippine advice columns written in English and Filipino in a contrastive rhetorical analysis, which aimed to describe the genre of advice columns, particularly in the area of self-disclosure and the concept of presentation of self or face work strategies of letter writers (presumably with problems that need counseling) who seek advice and the ones who offer advice, i.e. the columnist. The study provides insights into this particular genre of writing, but also has implications for the Filipino psychology of self-help, and regard for authority.

In her study of emails sent to a company's email bank by Filipino and Filipino-American personnel, Pariña (2010), using interactionist and ethnomethodological designs advanced by Thatcher (2000), found differences in terms of hypercodification and context of text structures. She reports that the Filipino personnel's emails contain more vivacity, dynamism, life, and contextual features and were evaluated by other Filipino personnel as more distinct, more understandable and more direct to the point as compared to the emails and the mission/vision of the Filipino-American personnel, although those may be taken as wordy or circular by native speakers of English.

Contrastive analyses of texts in specialized forms of writing have also been done in order to investigate potential differences in the way writers from different cultural backgrounds organize rhetorical structures. One such study is that of Jaganathan, Mayr and Nagarathnam (2014). In their study, they analyzed three cars' print advertisements from German and Malaysian English dailies using Toulmin's model to identify arguments and rhetorical devices used in the advertisements. The study revealed two main similarities in the arguments put forth and stylistic approach espoused in the advertisements. Further, it found that German advertisements were more persuasive and directed the buyers for action, whereas their Malaysian English counterparts provided more data and warrants. Also, the use of figurative language was more evident in English than in German advertisements, which was attributed to the former's need to highlight the internationalization of the car brands.

The foregoing review of research done in the tradition of CR suggests that the variety of text types and methods of analysis still have left a considerable amount of contrastive rhetorical research work that needs to be done in order to account for as many more rhetorical and cultural traditions and genres and subgenres as possible. A quick review of literature suggests that the gap which the current investigation attempts to fill exists in the genre and rhetorical tradition on which the present study focused.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study examines the physical and topical structures of MD found in websites of manpower agencies from three Southeast Asian nations: the Philippines, Indonesia and Malaysia. In this paper, MD is treated as a subgenre of professional writing and potential regional and possibly national writing preferences in this subgenre of L2 professional writing warrants contrastive rhetorical investigation.

The paper compares and contrasts physical structures of MD from three different cultural orientations. Also, an analysis of the topical structures aids in the examination of differences in the internal topical structure of MD from the three cultural orientations in question. Further, this paper looks into topical development, topical progressions and topical depth typical of the paragraphs culled from manpower agency websites.

Specifically, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the physical structures of MD from the three Southeast Asian countries?
2. How can Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian MD be described in terms of topical development, topical progression and topical depth?
3. Based on the physical and topical structure analyses, how can MD text in Southeast Asia and in each of the three writing traditions be described?

METHODS AND PROCEDURE

RESEARCH METHOD

In order to discover more about the differences of MD texts from the three writing traditions, the present study is informed by contrastive text linguistics as described by Connor (1996) and is a quantitative descriptive research (as described by Lauer & Asher, 1988 in Connor, 1996) study of paragraphs written by professional writers in the subgenre of MD.

Connor (1996, p. 160) explains that “text analyses have always been at the core of contrastive rhetorical research, whether of large or small data sets.” She posits that such analyses of texts have helped researchers of CR identify patterns favored by writers in a certain culture.

Conversely, the present study can be classified as quantitative descriptive research based on Lauer and Asher’s (1988 in Connor, 1996) taxonomy of descriptive studies in educational research. They explain that quantitative descriptive research “goes beyond case studies and ethnographies to isolate systematically the most important variables developed by these studies, to define them further, and to quantify them at least roughly, if not with some accuracy, and to interrelate them.”

The genre of choice is professional writing because as mentioned earlier, despite the variety of CR research, not many of these studies examined professional writing in the Oriental writing tradition. Specifically, the subgenre under focus is manpower written discourse.

In contrast with Bhatia’s (1993 in Connor, 1996) claim that job application letters and promotion letters are similar in communicative purpose, MD does not seem to possess the key characteristics of the two types of professional writing. For one, unlike promotion letters which are unsolicited, MD found in agency websites is, in fact, solicited since jobseekers voluntarily check this form of writing when evaluating potential manpower agencies. Another, unlike application letters which respond to an announcement, MD may, in fact, be considered an announcement itself and not a response to one. Further, looking at Bhatia’s (1993 in Connor, 1996) analysis of moves in job application letters and promotion letters, MD seems to match only the first move ‘establishing credentials’ and may perhaps take a different direction from there.

Consequently, there has to be a framework on which analyses of the physical and topical structures of manpower discourse are anchored. For this purpose, the study utilized Simpson's (2000) method of analyzing the physical structures of English and Spanish academic paragraphs. As for the topical structures, the study utilized Lautamatti's (1987) framework for topical structure analysis (TSA), which since its inception has had substantial impact on the way coherence was studied from a contrastive rhetorical lens. Both frameworks for physical and topical structures are further explicated under the methods of analysis section of this paper.

BUILDING THE CR CORPUS

Ten paragraphs from each variety of English from the three writing traditions in focus compose the present study's corpus of thirty paragraphs. Lackstrom, Selinker, and Trimble (1973, p. 130) define a paragraph as a "group of sentences forming a complete unit of thought and marked on a page of text by spacing or indentation." Although they also argue for the possibility of a "conceptual paragraph," which may include more than just the "physical paragraph," for the purpose of the present study, the physical paragraph represents an easily identifiable and adequate unit for analysis. Simpson (2000) also explains that when an author divides physical paragraphs, he or she has intentions regarding the organization of the text.

Staying within the area of professional writing in general and manpower recruitment and pooling in particular in order to select the correct paragraphs for analysis, manpower agency websites were initially selected through a simple engine search in the internet. The first ten websites from each country that readily appear after the internet search were immediately considered for selection.

As soon as the websites were identified, verification is done in order to ensure that the agencies selected are accredited in their respective countries, which is necessary if the right MD is to be analyzed in this paper. Verification is carried out by counterchecking names of manpower agencies in each of the country's manpower administrative body, respectively: Philippines' Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA), Indonesia's Ministry of Manpower and Transmigration (MMT), and Malaysia's Ministry of Human Resources (MHR).

Non-verification of the manpower agencies could have an impact in the consistency of the texts culled from the websites, since unlike accredited agencies, bogus manpower agencies do not have to consider government rules and regulations in presenting their supposed credentials. This in turn might affect the comparability of the texts. Therefore, should the name of a website initially selected through internet search not appear in the list of accredited agencies, it is taken out and another agency is considered and goes through the same verification process until ten accredited agencies from each country are determined.

From each selected manpower agency website, the home page article was chosen for analysis for it is deemed the most appropriate website content considering the characteristics of MD discussed in the research method section of this paper. From this home page article, the second paragraph was lifted. Thirty paragraphs were selected for analysis. The paragraphs were analyzed in terms of their physical structure and topical structure from a contrastive text linguistics framework.

DATA ANALYSIS

The overall framework for the analysis of data in the present data is dichotomized according to the physical structure and the topical structure.

ANALYSIS OF PHYSICAL STRUCTURES

In terms of the physical structure of the texts, the analysis follows that of Simpson (2000). In her study of academic paragraphs in English and Spanish, the physical structure analysis consisted of simple counts of the (1) number of words, (2) number of sentences, (3) number of words per sentence, (4) number of clauses, and (5) number of clauses per sentence. The same aspects of the physical structure were used to examine MD in Southeast Asian rhetorical tradition. Just as Simpson (2000) did in her paper, the genre analyzed in this paper was controlled (all paragraphs were published in manpower agency websites), as was the general thematic content (all paragraphs were written by experts in their field of professional writing).

ANALYSIS OF TOPICAL STRUCTURES

Following her seminal work on “Observations on the Development of the Topic of Simplified Discourse,” Lautamatti’s (1987) framework for topical structure analysis (henceforth TSA) has since been extensively used in examining both global and local coherence of texts (Connor & Farmer, 1990, p.127-128). Further, Connor and Farmer (1990) explain that TSA is “concerned with the semantic meanings of sentences and their sequencing to develop the overall discourse topic.”

Another strong point of TSA is that it matches what Kaplan (1966) describes as the ‘internal structure of a paragraph,’ which is said to possess culturally distinct characteristics. Lautamatti’s (1987) TSA was designed to identify the internal structure of paragraphs by plotting the repetition of key words and phrases. Moreover, Schneider and Connor (1990, p. 423) consider the applicability of TSA in the analysis of textual coherence, and after a rigorous statistical analysis, they argue that “TSA offers a productive approach to text analysis in composition research.” Hence, this study utilizes Lautamatti’s (1987) framework for TSA.

In her study, Lautamatti (1987) describes three basic sentence elements that play a role in the sentence: initial sentence element (ISE), mood subject and topical subject. The ISE is what comes first in the sentence, which may be the subject of the sentence, an introductory phrase or clause, etc. Second, the mood subject is the grammatical subject of the sentence. Third, the topical subject is the final element, which may or may not be the mood subject. After the three elements are identified in each sentence, the topical subject is plotted onto a graph, and a physical representation of the thematic development can be deduced.

TABLE 1. Possible Combinations of the Three Basic Sentence Elements¹

Type	Description	Sample Sentence
1	ISE, mood subject and topical subject coincide.	<i>This helplessness of human infants</i> is in marked contrast.
2	ISE is separated from mood subject and topical subject, which coincide.	Without care from some other human being or beings... <i>a child</i> is very unlikely to survive.
3	ISE and mood subject coincide while topical subject is separate	It is during this very long period in which the <i>human infant</i> is totally dependent on others that it reveals...
4	ISE and topical subject coincide, while mood subject is separate.	When the <i>human infant</i> is born... it has two things...
5	ISE, mood subject and topical subject are all separate.	For this reason, biologists now suggest that <i>language</i> is...

Lautamatti (1987) further explains that the three basic sentence elements can occur in various combinations. She identifies five types of combinations of these elements. Table 1

¹ Descriptions and sample sentences are adopted from Lautamatti (1987, pp. 93-94).

summarizes the five types of combinations with an example for each type. The topical subject is italicized in each sample sentence.

After identifying the three basic sentence elements and the possible combinations with which they occur in authentic discourse, Lautamatti (1987) also describes three types of thematic progression: parallel progression, sequential progression and extended parallel progression.

The following paragraph that first appeared in Holden (1995) is provided to aid in better understanding these three types of thematic progression. *Italics* are used for ISE, underlining is used to signal mood subject (grammatical subject of the verb), and **bold face** is for the topical subject.

(1) *For example*, **one project** I set involved the class devising a board game based on a nursery rhyme or folk tale for younger children. (2) *The class* were reasonably enthusiastic about this until they realised that they younger children were fictional; (3) i.e., *they* would not be playing these games with real children apart from each other. (4) *I* felt a certain amount of shame here, for I realised that the reason there would be no audience was because I had already decided that **those games** would not be 'good enough' for public consumption. (5) *I* have frequently arranged **real audiences** for other classes, but only when I have been confident that the finished product would show the class, the school, and, most shamefully of all, myself, in a good light. (6) *My other error* was not to impose a structure to the work or a deadline by which to finish. (7) *Because these were low-ability students*, my reasoning ran, *they* would need more time to complete the activity, (8) *and in the way of these things*, *the children* simply filled the available time with low-level busy work-colouring in the board, and making the dice and counters, rather than the more challenging activities such as negotiating group responsibilities, discussing the game or devising the rules.

In the excerpt provided, Simpson (2000) identified the occurrences of progressions based on Lautamatti's (1987) proposed TSA as follows:

Parallel progression: In Clause 2, the noun phrase "the class" serves as the ISE, the mood subject, and the topical subject. In the following Clause 3, the pronoun "they" similarly functions as the three sentence elements. "They" refers to the noun phrase "the class" in the preceding clause; thus, it is an example of parallel progression.

Extended parallel progression: In Clauses 7 and 8, the topical subjects "low-ability students" and "the children" both pertain back to the topical subject "the class" in Clause 2. This is an example of extended parallel progression because there are intervening clauses with different topical subjects between Clauses 2 and 7. And, in Clauses 7 and 8, the relationship is parallel progression since these are consecutive clauses with the same topical subjects.

Sequential progression: This progression is displayed from Clause 3 to Clause 4 and from Clause 4 to Clause 5. The noun "games" is mentioned in Clause 3, but it is not the topical subject. "Games" is part of the rheme element of Clause 3 and is taken as the theme or topical subject of Clause 4 as noun phrase "those games". And in Clause 4, the author mentions "audience", which is then used in Clause 5 using "real audiences" as the topical subject.

Although Lautamatti (1987) at the onset of TSA proposed only three types of thematic progression, Simpson (2000), in her study, found the need of adding a fourth category, which she called extended sequential progression and described still using the excerpt from Holden (1995) as follows:

Extended sequential progression occurs when the rheme element of a clause is taken up as the theme of a non-consecutive clause. In the previous example given by Simpson (2000), he claims that “the topic of the “game” is brought up for the first time in the first clause, but not as the topical subject. This is then repeated as the topical subject of clause (4) and a number of clauses intervene between the first mention of the game and the second use as a topical subject, making this an extended sequential progression” (p. 302).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of the study are presented and consequently discussed in this section. Following the research questions, the results are presented in two sections, one each for the first two questions. Embedded on each of these two sections of results are discussions pertaining to the third research question.

WHAT ARE THE PHYSICAL STRUCTURES OF MD FROM THE THREE SOUTHEAST ASIAN COUNTRIES?

The physical analysis of paragraphs shows some differences between the three rhetorical traditions, particularly in terms of the total number of words and total number of sentences. Tables 2 and 3 summarize the data on the physical structure of MD in each rhetorical tradition.

TABLE 2. General Data

	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia
Total number of words	796	574	599
Average words per paragraph	79.6	57.4	59.9
Total number of sentences	33	25	28
Average sentences per paragraph	3.3	2.5	2.8
Average words per sentence	24.12	22.96	21.39

TABLE 3. Clause Data

	Philippines	Indonesia	Malaysia
Total number of clauses	69	55	41
Average clauses per paragraph	6.9	5.5	4.1
Average clauses per sentence	2.09	2.20	1.46
Average words per clause	11.54	10.44	14.61

As can be seen in Table 2, the total number of words in Philippine MD is much greater than in both Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD (796 vs. 574 and 599, respectively). As a result, the average words per paragraph also differ: The paragraphs from the Philippine data average 79.6 words, whereas the paragraphs from Indonesian and Malaysian data average 57.4 and 59.9 words, respectively. Similarly, the number of sentences in the Philippine data is greater than in both Indonesian and Malaysian data. On surface level, it can be gleaned that the Philippine English paragraphs are more elaborate and wordier than the two other counterparts, in consonance with what Dumanig (2009) found in his analysis of Philippine and American editorials. However, a simple *t*-test shows that the differences on the number of words and the number of sentences between Philippine and Indonesian data and Philippine

and Malaysian data are not statistically significant. This also holds true for the average number of sentences per paragraph and average words per sentence. Therefore, to say that manpower written discourse in Southeast Asia is elaborate overall is not grounded on the data.

In relation to the previous point, one striking finding for L2 writing in the subgenre of MD is that, by way of looking at the average number of sentences per paragraph, adult writers who are professionals in the field of manpower tend to write short paragraphs averaging only two to three sentences, perhaps in an attempt to be simple and direct. Such simplicity and directness of MD is realized not only quantitatively in terms of the number of sentences per paragraph, but also qualitatively in that an analysis of the paragraphs suggest that each sentence in the paragraphs contribute to the overall goal of the sub-genre and that there is no evidence of figurative language in the paragraphs for such may be counterproductive to the purpose of manpower discourse as earlier discussed. These qualities of simplicity in structure and directness in language are exemplified in excerpts (1) to (3), which were lifted from Philippine, Malaysian and Indonesian data, respectively. The name of the manpower agencies in the excerpts are replaced with [Manpower Agency] for ethical considerations.

- (1) [Manpower Agency] is firm in its commitment to convert such Filipino attributes to help their families to alleviate their present situation. Our commitment is to serve Filipinos by providing jobs and income opportunities for qualified professionals. With continuous improvements in our services, we are determined to be a stronger partner for your career and future
- (2) Despite its relatively young corporate history, [Manpower Agency] has grown very aggressively over the years to be a leading supplier of foreign workers across industries. [Manpower Agency] has built a wide network of many leading and reputable foreign manpower agencies in various source countries. It also offers the full range of manpower supply, ranging from general foreign workers, semi-skilled and skilled workers to professionals. [Manpower Agency] has over the years successfully recruited and deployed thousands of foreign workers from various source countries to employers in different industries.
- (3) [Manpower Agency] understands that leadership capital plays a key role in any organization's performance. An organization's ability to earn profit, thrive and grow depends on the talents and performance of its people. In an age of extreme executive mobility, employing the top performers can make the real difference between success and failure.

In sum, the data reveal that professional writers of MD from the Philippines tend to write longer sentences and longer paragraphs compared with their Indonesian and Malaysian counterparts. This author suspects that the Philippine writers' tendency to write slightly longer sentences and paragraphs could be attributed to the linguistic atmosphere in the Philippines where English had been in use for far longer than in Malaysia and Indonesia, given that among the three countries only the Philippines had been colonized by the United States. Also, Philippine English is a much more advanced variety of English in the World Englishes paradigm compared with Indonesian and Malaysian Englishes. Borlongan (2011) posits that Philippine English had already reached phase 4 Schneider's (2003, 2007) dynamic model. The author also suspects that the development of Philippine English could have contributed to the writers' tendencies in the sub-genre in question. Although the same data reveal that differences on physical structure discussed so far are not statistically significant,

an investigation of probable reasons as to tendency of Philippine MD to be wordier than their counterparts warrant further contrastive rhetorical examination.

Table 3 shows the data for the analysis of clauses in MD. For the purpose of the present study, a clause is considered to be a group of words that include a subject and a verb, including dependent and independent clauses. The clausal analysis points to the same trend as with the sentential analysis, with only very slight differences observed.

Still, on the clause level, the data from Philippine MD show that there are more clauses ($n = 69$) in a paragraph compared with data from both Indonesian and Malaysian MD. However, the data reveal that Indonesian MD ($n= 55$) tends to have more clauses in a paragraph compared with Malaysian MD ($n= 41$), although earlier data show that the latter is slightly wordier. This suggest that when compared, Malaysian MD is wordier, but Indonesian MD is more elaborate in sentence construction as can be gleaned from the use of more clauses but less sentences compared with Malaysian MD. It is important to mention, however, that again a simple *t*-test on the data shows no statistically significant differences between the clause data from the three groups.

Indonesian MD also leads the two other MD traditions when it comes to the average number of clauses per sentence, although only very slightly versus the Philippines (2.20 vs. 2.09, respectively). In terms of the average number of words per clause, Malaysian MD ($n= 14.61$) is greater than both Philippine ($n= 11.54$) and Indonesian MD ($n= 10.44$). A closer look at the clause data reveals that among the three groups, Malaysian writers tend use the most number of words per clause although they too write the least number of clauses per sentence.

Based on the analysis of the physical structure of Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian MDs, a number of tendencies were observed. First, the Philippine writers tend to use the most number of words in the sentence level and in the paragraph level. However, Malaysian writers tend to use the most number of words in the clause level. Philippine writers tend to use more clauses on the paragraph level but Indonesian writers seem to be more productive in using clauses in the sentence level. Overall, writers from the three rhetorical traditions examined all tend to go for few sentences per paragraph and also few clauses per sentence. Consequently, it could be the tendency of MD writers from these countries to use the most number of words per sentence in the fewest number of clauses per sentence and sentences per paragraph, as an appeal to simplicity and directness, which are highly valued in the field of manpower recruitment and pooling.

HOW CAN PHILIPPINE, INDONESIAN AND MALAYSIAN MD BE DESCRIBED IN TERMS OF TOPICAL DEVELOPMENT, TOPICAL PROGRESSION AND TOPICAL DEPTH?

CO-OCCURRENCE OF SENTENCE ELEMENTS IN PHILIPPINE, MALAYSIAN AND INDONESIAN MD

Table 4 summarizes the data on the co-occurrence of the three basic sentence elements (refer to Table 1), which are necessary in understanding the topical development employed by Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian writers in MD.

TABLE 4. Co-occurrence of sentence elements

	Philippines		Indonesia		Malaysia	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Type 1	15	45	11	44	13	46
Type 2	8	24	6	24	7	25

Type 3	7	21	6	24	6	21
Type 4	0	0	0	0	0	0
Type 5	3	9	2	8	2	7
Totals	33	100	25	100	28	100

On the surface level, the raw data look sufficiently different. However, there really is no meaningful difference looking at the percentages. Starting with Type 1 which is most productively used in the three data sets, Philippine writers use this type 45 percent, Indonesian writers 44 percent and Malaysian writers 46 percent of the time. Type 2 appears in all the three data sets 24 percent for the Philippine data, 24 percent as well for the Indonesian data and 25 percent for the Malaysian data. Philippine writers use Type 3 in 21 percent of the cases, while Indonesian and Malaysian writers use it 24 and 21 percent, respectively. Type 4 is equally absent in all data sets. Finally, Type 5 appears in Philippine data 9 percent, in Indonesian 8 percent and in Malaysian it appears in 7 percent of the cases.

These observations on the co-occurrence of sentence elements in the three writing traditions have important implications for ensuring comparability of data as posited by Kachru (1999). Specifically, Simpson (2000) explains that the analysis of sentence structure as revealed in the co-occurrence of sentence elements suggests that the three sets of data are sufficiently similar and hence justifies the use of Lautamatti's (1987) TSA for the purposes of comparing thematic development in the three writing traditions in the subgenre of MD. An analysis of the co-occurrence of sentence elements for TSA is of utmost importance because this contrastive rhetorical investigation would be empirically problematic if data prove to be not sufficiently similar.

PHILIPPINE DATA

After analyzing the co-occurrence of sentence elements in Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian MD and establishing the similarity and consequently comparability of data, the analysis proceeds with the topical development in the paragraphs beginning with the ten paragraphs written by Philippine MD writers. Table 5 presents the data for this. It particularly shows the number of paragraphs analyzed, the number of independent clauses per paragraph, the number of new topics that occur in each paragraph, and the kinds and number of topical progression employed in each paragraph.

TABLE 5. Summary of Topical Development in Philippine MD

Paragraph No.	Independent Clauses	New Topics	PP	EPP	SP	ESP
1	6	4	3	0	2	0
2	5	4	2	1	2	0
3	4	3	0	0	1	1
4	8	6	3	1	1	0
5	6	5	1	1	3	0
6	5	3	2	1	1	0
7	4	4	0	0	2	0
8	6	4	0	0	1	0
9	4	3	3	0	1	0
10	6	5	4	1	0	1
Total	54	41	18	5	14	2

Note: PP = parallel progression, EPP = extended parallel progression, SP = sequential progression, and ESP=extended sequential progression

As can be gleaned in Table 5, all ten paragraphs analyzed for Philippine MD exhibit some form of topical re-occurrence and at least one of the four main types of topical progression. The data further suggest that for Philippine MD, parallel and sequential progressions are the favored types of topical progression. Specifically, the topical development for Philippine MD consists of 54 independent clauses, 41 new topics, 18 parallel progressions, 5 extended parallel progressions, 14 sequential progressions and 2 extended sequential progressions.

One example of a paragraph from Philippine MD is given in excerpt (4).

- (4) The greatest driver of [Manpower Agency]’s continued success is human capital. The company’s multicultural team of top-flight technicians, engineers and managers is recognized for its efficiency, reliability and enterprise. Certified by the American Bureau of Shipping for being ISO 9001:2008 compliant, [Manpower Agency] puts forward quality and professionalism on bringing ship management and crew management services to our customers. This is further confirmed by the consistent honor of receiving the Top Performer and Excellence Awards in the past years.

After identifying and underlining the topical subject in each of the clauses in the excerpt from Philippine MD, these sentence elements were plotted onto a graph for a visual representation of the topical development employed in the paragraph. Figure 1 is an illustration of the progression of ideas in the paragraph. The clause number appears to the left and the topic number appears to the right. The topical depth refers to the different topics introduced in every sentence. The arrow indicates sequential progression.

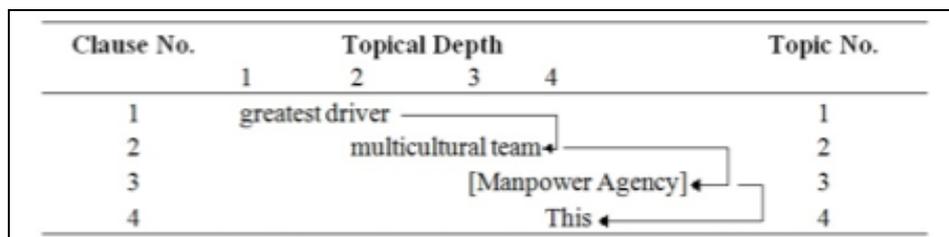


FIGURE 1. Plot of Progression of Sample Paragraph form Philippine Data

Figure 1 shows that Clause 1 has the word “greatest driver” as the topic of the clause. “Greatest driver” is then labeled as Topical Depth 1 and also Topic 1. Throughout the sample paragraph, there is no other instance in which “greatest driver” or its equivalent idea is mentioned, so there is no other word that falls under Topical Depth 1. Clause 2 has “multicultural team” as its topic, so it is labeled as Topical Depth 2 and indented to the right of Topical Depth 1. It also serves as Topic 2 since it is a different topic from “greatest driver”, originating from the rheme of Clause 1. When the rheme of a preceding clause is taken as the theme of the next clause, then sequential progression occurs and is indicated with an arrow drawn from the previous topical depth to the next. Therefore, from Clause 1 and Clause 2, the writer employed sequential progression as seen in the plot of progression. The same sequential progression is realized moving to Clause 3 from Clause 2. The topic of Clause 3 “[Manpower Agency]” originates from the rheme of Clause 2 and is signaled by another arrow in the plot. Finally, from Clause 3 to Clause 4, “This” is used as a topic. It is not an equivalent of any topic used in the previous clauses and is therefore considered a new topic as signaled by an arrow.

Based on the numbers and visual representation of data from Philippine MD, it can be said that there is considerable demand for internal coherence in Philippine MD. With 14

sequential progressions, data from Philippine MD suggest that there is an attempt from Philippine writers to develop the topic in sequential manner, which is akin to how native writers would also develop the topic in paragraphs.

INDONESIA AND MALAYSIA DATA

The analysis of topical development in Philippine MD is enriched when data coming from ten paragraphs of Indonesian MD and ten paragraphs of Malaysian MD are examined. Tables 6 and 7 show these data.

TABLE 6. Summary of Topical Development in Indonesian MD

Paragraph No.	Independent Clauses	New Topics	PP	EPP	SP	ESP
1	5	4	1	0	0	0
2	3	3	0	0	0	0
3	4	4	0	0	0	0
4	3	3	0	0	1	0
5	4	3	1	0	1	0
6	5	4	2	0	0	0
7	4	4	0	0	0	0
8	6	3	0	0	1	0
9	4	4	3	0	0	0
10	3	3	2	1	0	1
Total	41	35	9	1	3	1

TABLE 7. Summary of Topical Development in Malaysian MD

Paragraph No.	Independent Clauses	New Topics	PP	EPP	SP	ESP
1	4	3	1	0	0	0
2	4	2	1	0	1	0
3	3	3	0	0	0	0
4	2	2	0	0	0	0
5	3	3	0	0	1	0
6	2	1	1	0	0	0
7	4	2	1	1	0	0
8	3	3	0	0	1	0
9	3	3	0	0	0	0
10	4	2	1	0	0	0
Total	32	24	5	1	3	0

Topical development in Indonesian MD consists of 41 independent clauses, 35 new topics, 9 parallel progressions, 1 extended parallel progression, 3 sequential progressions and 1 extended sequential progression. For Malaysian MD, topical development comprises of 32 independent clauses, 24 new topics presented, 5 parallel progressions, 1 extended parallel progression and 3 sequential progressions.

Tables 6 and 7, more importantly, show that, in contrast with the Philippine MD data, some paragraphs in Indonesian and Malaysian MD do not employ any topical progression at all, three and four paragraphs, respectively. These data suggest that the demand for internal coherence by repetition of key words and phrases is not as strong in Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD as it is in Philippine MD, as seen in the latter's use of a variety of topical progressions in all paragraphs. This is also suggestive of the possibility that, among the three writing traditions in MD, Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD show signs of digression. Excerpts (5) and (6) are given as examples of data from Indonesian and Malaysian MD, respectively; whereas Figures 2 and 3 show the topical progression of these paragraphs.

- (5) [Manpower Agency] is dedicated to being one of Indonesia’s leading Manpower Agencies. [Manpower Agency] provides a variety of services to its clients including contract and permanent resources.
- (6) [Manpower Agency] was established in 2009. [Manpower Agency] supply (sic) contract local workers to factory in Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Kuching and Malaysia. [Manpower Agency] will undertake total outsource contract for the local workers to Manufacturing Company in Malaysia.

Clause No.	Topical Depth	Topic No.
	1	
1	[Manpower Agency]	1
2	[Manpower Agency]	1

FIGURE 2. Plot of Progression of Sample Paragraph from Indonesia Data

Clause No.	Topical Depth	Topic No.
	1	
1	[Manpower Agency]	1
2	[Manpower Agency]	1
3	[Manpower Agency]	1

FIGURE 3. Plot of Progression of Sample Paragraph from Malaysia Data

The sample paragraphs lifted from Indonesian and Malaysian data show that writers from both writing traditions employed parallel progression of topic. Excerpt (5) reveals that the Indonesian paragraph had two clauses and that both clauses used the same topic, “[Manpower Agency].” Therefore, as seen in Figure 2, the paragraph does not go deeper than the first topic. The same can be said of the paragraph from Malaysian data. Although the paragraph had more clauses, the depth is the same as that of its Indonesian counterpart since the topics for Clause 2 and Clause 3 are the same as the topic of Clause 1, “[Manpower Agency],” ultimately pointing to the parallel progression of the topic.

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF THE THREE SETS OF DATA

Table 8 presents the comparative totals of the thematic progression in all of the three sets of data. The differences in the lengths of the paragraphs necessitate an analysis of percentages to grasp similarities and differences between the data.

TABLE 8. Comparative Summary of Totals for TSA

	Philippines		Indonesia		Malaysia	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Clauses	54		41		32	
Topics	41	75.9	35	85.4	24	75.0
PP	18	33.3	9	22.0	5	15.6
EPP	5	9.3	1	2.4	1	3.1
SP	14	25.9	3	7.3	3	9.4
ESP	2	3.7	1	2.4	0	0.0
Total Progressions	39	72.2	14	34.1	9	28.1

On the surface level, Indonesian MD with 85.4 percent leads Philippine MD with 75.9 percent and Indonesian MD with 75 percent of all independent clauses introducing new topics. However, a simple *t*-test suggests that this difference is not statistically significant. There is a difference in the occurrence of all four types of topical progressions, but the most marked difference occurs in the use of parallel progressions and sequential progressions.

It is necessary to consider that the texts analyzed in the present study are MD texts written in English by L2 adult writers who are professionals in the field of manpower

discourse. As such, there are some expectations as regards valued characteristics of composition in English, such as to develop ideas by introducing them as the rheme of a sentence and later using them as the theme of succeeding sentences. This aspect, Simpson (2000), contends, “is considered to lend coherence (and even sophistication) to a paragraph” (p. 305). Table 8 underscores this aspect of composition in English.

Philippine writers made most productive use of parallel progressions, which make up 33.3 percent of the clauses, while Indonesian and Malaysian writers use parallel progressions in 22 percent and 15.6 of the total clauses, respectively. Philippine MD overshadows both Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD in the use of sequential progressions. The kind of topical progression in which the rhematic part of a sentence is taken as the thematic part of a succeeding sentence is most abundant in the Philippine data, with 25.9 percent of the total clauses compared with Indonesian MD’s 7.3 and Malaysian MD’s 9.4 percent use of the same.

Further, topical depth is most elaborate in Philippine MD as can be seen in the number of new topics that progress in each paragraph. This may suggest that elaboration of topics through the presentation of new topics in the paragraphs is most evident in Philippine MD ($n = 41$), compared with Indonesian MD ($n = 35$) and Malaysian MD ($n = 24$). Whether elaboration through topical depth in this subgenre of L2 professional writing is necessary and culturally informed is another contrastive rhetorical investigation that warrants future research.

The same trend in the three data sets can be observed in the use of extended progressions. Still, Philippine MD makes use of most extended parallel and extended sequential progressions compared with Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD. In Philippine MD, extended parallel progression occurs in 9.3 percent of the clauses; in Indonesian MD, it occurs in 2.4 percent of the clauses; and in Malaysian MD, it occurs in 3.1 percent of the clauses. This shows greater use of extended parallel progression in Philippine MD than in Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD. In terms of extended sequential progression, which was first suggested by Simpson (2000), Philippine MD still exhibits greater use with 3.7 percent of the clauses compared with Indonesian MD’s 2.4 percent. The extended sequential progression does not appear in the paragraphs analyzed for Malaysian MD.

The analysis of the internal topical structure of paragraphs in the present study points to some tendencies of Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian writers in the subgenre of L2 professional writing, here called MD. First, writers of Philippine MD seem to most effectively keep up with the demand of composition in English to develop ideas in parallel and sequential progressions. Because of this, the Philippine texts have been seen to exhibit more internal coherence despite the number of new topics presented in each paragraph. The Indonesian and Malaysian paragraphs, on the other hand, show introduction of new topics per paragraph but less use of topical progressions, which may be seen to hamper internal coherence in composition in English. The introduction of new topics and less use of topical progressions may be seen to break the continuity of idea development since the continued introduction of new topics without the use of topical progressions might make ideas appear that they have not progressed from or to some previous or succeeding ideas. Therefore, the Indonesian and Malaysian paragraphs seem to exhibit more digression that contrasts with one expectation in English composition.

In global terms, 39 or 72.2 percent of the 54 independent clauses from Philippine MD raises some kind of repeated topic. Philippine MD outnumbers Indonesian MD and Malaysian MD, with only 14 or 34.1 percent of 41 clauses and 9 or 28.1 of 32 clauses, respectively, using a progressive topic. This suggests very important differences in the internal topical structure of paragraphs in the three writing traditions of MD examined in this paper.

IMPLICATIONS

Given the nature of the present study, the most important implication is the understanding of how paragraphs in Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian manpower discourse are similar and different, which hopefully informs professional development and CR research.

Understanding the structures of paragraphs found in manpower agency websites should inform professional writers and professional development officers toward an evaluation of two things: first, if the descriptions of physical and topical structures of paragraphs from the countries in question in the present study meet their needs and expectations in terms of online presentation of the company, which could potentially enrich or harm the practice of manpower recruitment and pooling; and, second, if improvements in the composition of paragraphs found in their website, which present their company to possible human resource capital, need to be carried out based on the evaluation of the first. The descriptions discussed in this paper are not meant to tell whether one rhetorical tradition is better than another, but are meant to provide the necessary data for people working toward professional development to make informed choices as to what writing practice needs to be sustained and what needs to be improved in relation to the practice of manpower recruitment and pooling.

Where implications for pedagogy is concerned, acquiring knowledge on the topical structures should not only be on academic paragraphs, but also of paragraphs from professional discourse to provide teachers with an understanding of how coherence is realized, achieved and valued in different writing traditions. This, in turn, could hopefully inform the teaching practice with real-life applications of what is taught in the classroom so that socially and culturally relevant inputs on and strategies to teaching writing could be utilized. Ultimately, teachers who teach writing from a contrastive rhetoric lens should exercise caution in doing so. This is especially relevant in nonnative contexts, such as the text type analyzed in this paper. Teachers should be cautious in contrasting writing conventions so as not to emphasize that one convention is better than the other, but rather inculcate in the students an appreciation of the cultural differences in writing.

CONCLUSION

Using a corpus of thirty paragraphs culled from websites of Philippine, Indonesian and Malaysian manpower agencies, the present study explored the physical and topical structures of manpower discourse.

The analysis of physical structure of the texts, which is informed by that of Simpson (2000), points to some regional (Southeast Asian) tendencies and preferences in MD. First, Philippine MD writers are wordiest in the sentence and paragraph levels, but Malaysian MD writers are wordiest in the clause level. Philippine writers tend to write more clauses in a paragraph, but on the sentence level, Indonesian writers seem to prefer having more clauses. Simple *t*-tests, however, reveal that these differences on the physical structures of MD in the three writing traditions are not statistically significant, a result which lends itself useful in arguing for a possible regional preference in terms of the physical structure of MD. Overall, the observations on the physical structures of MD in Southeast Asia have been argued to be simple and direct, which are highly valued in the field of manpower recruitment and pooling.

The analysis of topical structure using Lautamatti's (1987) framework for TSA also reveals differences in the internal topical structure of MD paragraphs. The analysis suggests that Philippine MD meet the valued characteristic of composition in English, which is to develop ideas through topical progressions. All ten paragraphs from the Philippine data set reveal that the writers made use of at least one of the four types of topical progressions,

whereas the Indonesian and Malaysian data sets show that there are paragraphs that did not follow any type of topical progressions. Also, Philippine MD exhibits a degree of elaboration in topical depth as can be gleaned from the writers' use of topical progressions to present new topics in paragraphs. The comparative summary of totals of the thematic progressions suggests that, in both local and global terms, MD texts from the Philippines exhibit internal coherence through the use of topical progressions. The data for Indonesian and Malaysian MD, on the other hand, point to some concerns as regards the internal tightness of the paragraphs, brought by the introduction of new topics and less use of topical progressions, which break the continuity of thematic development. Hence, the Indonesian and Malaysian paragraphs of this text type were observed to show some signs of digression although the amount of data warrants further examination of this observation. Following Connor (1996), it can therefore be said that Philippine MD exhibited most similar characteristics of a "good prose" in that a good combination of sequential and extended parallel progressions was utilized to achieve internal coherence.

The findings extend present understanding of the complex interplay of culture and writing as opposed to the simplistic contrastive rhetoric notion in Kaplan (1966), where Asian rhetoric was described as circular in nature. This study corroborates some findings in the extent literature particularly those which dealt with Asian writing traditions (Morales, 2013; Mercado, 2009). In this paper, it was found that the Asian writing traditions of the particular text type were themselves contrastive and that labeling them as belonging to the same writing tradition and sharing the same characteristics is not only a dated manner of thinking but also a not empirically sound understanding of the linguistic phenomenon. As Morales (2013) in Filipino and Japanese and Mercado (2009) in Filipino and Indonesian writing traditions found, this paper found intricate differences between Filipino, Malaysian and Indonesian writing traditions in the text type in question.

Because the present study analyzed only 30 paragraphs of MD, it cannot be said that the findings in the present study speak of MD as a legitimate subgenre of L2 professional writing. However, given that this is an initial attempt to explore MD as a type of writing analyzed from a contrastive rhetorical vantage point, the findings lay the initial information necessary to fully understanding cultural influences to MD. More extensive work to document MD in other rhetorical traditions using other CR methods necessary to verify and extend the findings of the present study warrants further research.

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