Examining the Impact of Subtle Cultural Differences on Rhetorical Variation in EFL Essays

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Abstract

Past research of rhetoric has relied on simple binary comparisons between groups that either do, or do not, possess a cultural trait. While countries like Korea and the UAE may share cultural values such as an acceptance of unequal power relationships (power distance) and a preference for group action (collectivism), these traits vary in degrees of intensity. To understand how these similar cultural traits may manifest differently within rhetoric, three separate corpora of persuasive essays written in English were compiled from female learners with Arabic, Korean, and English L1s. Next, frequencies of rhetorical devices from three categories (pronoun deixis, modals, and epistemic stances) were tallied and statistically compared using Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance. Results did not reveal statistically significant differences for average frequencies, yet analysis of specific rhetorical devices within each category exposed some notable disparities between corpora. Emirati (Arabic) learners, who have a strong cultural preference for power distance, tend to lessen authority of propositions and avoid a direct connection with the reader, making an argument less personal (increasing power distance). Korean learners tend to use more direct and authoritative rhetorical strategies (decreasing power distance), while simultaneously hedging with epistemic stances to maintain some degree of power distance. Hedging also appears to support Korean collectivist values that promote conflict reduction and group cohesion. Ultimately, more research of cultural influences on rhetoric is needed to develop culturally responsive pedagogy that promotes better intercultural communication.

Keywords: *Deixis, Modals, Epistemic Stances, Arabic, Emirati, Korean, Rhetoric, Power Distance, Collectivism*

INTRODUCTION

In Kaplan's early work (1966), rhetorical differences between students from different cultural backgrounds were described, along with a simplistic model of culturally related patterns for rhetoric. Via this research, standard American discourse was labeled as a linear construct, whereas Asian cultures were hypothesized to have more circular rhetorical patterns. Although insightful, subsequent research has pointed out that such notions are overly simplistic (Cahill, 2003; Huh & Lee, 2019; Severino, 1993). Critics also highlight the fact that standardization of "normal" English discourse indirectly labels non-native rhetoric as invalid, thereby injecting bias into analysis. To address this concern, Kaplan (1966) argued that his theory was not designed "to offer any criticism" of other rhetoric types; instead, he suggested that "developments other than those normally regarded as desirable in English do exist" (p. 20).

Even Kaplan recognized that English rhetorical patterns are far from standardized. They may diverge in a number of ways, which is revealed by the circular structure of Ezra Pound, as well as the "wildly digressive" paragraphs of William Faulkner (Kaplan, 1996, p. 20). Despite recognition of rhetorical variability, Kaplan also suggested that this divergence was primarily due to the artistic

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nature of literature. Other forms of writing were considered to be more stable in each cultural context, primarily because "requirements of communication can often be best solved by relatively close adhesion to established patterns" (Kaplan, 1996, p. 20). Essentially, non-literary discourse was posited to be more standardized, which led to the widespread understanding that rhetoric in essays varied consistently on a cross-cultural basis.

Contrary to Kaplan's assertions, culturally driven diversity in rhetoric has been anything but stable in non-literary genres. In a study of 27 Korean college students, analysis of expository essays suggested that learners mixed a more linear deductive approach with circular forms of inductive logic (Ryu, 2006). Rather than being mutually exclusive cultural patterns, essays in this study often used rhetorical characteristics designated to a different cultural group. This finding may be attributed to differences in learner experience, which compelled students to attempt a deductive pattern that mimicked standard American discourse, albeit not accurately (Ryu, 2006). Later studies of Korean discourse confirm that varied experiences cause a rhetorical style to vary significantly (Huh & Lee, 2019). In this study, learners had various experiences in both Korea and the United States, which led each learner to develop their own novel approach to persuasive discourse. Like Korean discourse, Arabic rhetorical patterns often do not resemble either the target L2 or L1. Concerning this variability in discourse, researchers suggest that "the source of rhetorical differences is the Arab speakers' lack of awareness of the rhetorical patterns of either Arabic or English" (Hammad, 2002, p. 3).

Clearly, textual variation is more diverse and complex than overly simplistic theoretical models, which were proposed in early stages of contrastive rhetoric. Rather than being static, development of rhetorical style is a dynamic individual process, which is based upon personal experience and exposure to rhetoric. At the same time, each learner must utilize major rhetorical traditions to construct their own unique style of discourse. Because learners must use broader ethnic, national, or international conceptions of discourse to construct a new sense of "rhetorical identity," study of larger cultural influences is still needed. In response to this need, recent research has been developed to reaffirm the importance of contrastive rhetoric, while simultaneously considering the dynamic nature of both culture and communication (McIntosh, Connor, & Gokpinar-Shelton, 2017). Ultimately, through heightened understanding of cultural beliefs and values, a more holistic understanding of rhetorical variability and diversity may result, thereby leading to more culturally responsive forms of pedagogy.

Cultural Complexity and Influence on Rhetoric
Some research has disparaged the use of contrastive rhetoric, calling for new pedagogical approaches that criticize the cultural and political foundations upon which rhetoric is constructed (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). Although Kaplan's oversimplification of concepts is indeed problematic, the influence of cultural differences remains both valid and important to the study of rhetoric. This importance is reaffirmed in later research, which also addresses problems with past oversimplification of theory. More modern conceptions of contrastive rhetoric suggest that cultural influences are not "frozen in space" but dynamic (Connor, Nagelhout, & Rozycki, 2008, p. 3). To accommodate this new view of discourse, the term Intercultural Rhetoric (IR) has been adopted. IR utilizes a dynamic and more holistic approach, which also includes social context and genre in the interpretation of discourse (Connor, 2004). Instead of using a "large culture" approach, which regards national or ethnic groups as "contained, static, and homogeneous" (Huh & Lee, 2019, p. 56), IR uses a small culture approach, asserting that different cultural "subgroups" are not subordinate, but simply different and coexisting (Holliday, 1999). Via the small culture approach, rhetorical differences are not labeled as undesirable or incorrect. They are conceptualized as different adaptations to the unique cultural, linguistic, and social context of an individual.

While a small culture approach to rhetoric correctly takes into account social context and genre when interpreting differences, it serves to deemphasize larger cultural processes that may affect individual writing styles. Research suggests that that there are indeed broad cultural forces that impact rhetoric in Confucian and Arabic countries (Hamadouche, 2013; Hamam, 2020; Hammad, 2002; Jiang, 2006). These forces are illustrated by challenges posed to American learners who study Chinese as a Foreign Language. In a recent study, university students from five American universities struggled to adopt a new rhetorical style in their writing. Results revealed that learners relied on their L1 rhetorical preference, disregarding "what the instructor had taught in class about evidence use" for yìlùnwén writing (Liu & Du, 2018, p. 1). Clearly, there are larger cultural influences on rhetoric that require further scrutiny. Although more study of "macro" influences is needed, predilection for individualistic interpretations of rhetoric has caused such research to fall out of favor. As a result, understanding of broader cultural influences and their impact on rhetoric remains limited in Confucian contexts such as South Korea (Kim, 2017) and Arabic countries such as the UAE (Hamam, 2020).

Rather than overly simplistic studies of the past, more modern research is needed to examine the complexities of largescale cultural influences on rhetoric. Past studies which attempted to analyze cultural values on a larger scale were constructed with the mistaken view that culture is simplistic, a set of binary traits that a group either does, or does not, possess. This perspective is illustrated by the theory of high vs. low context cultures. The concept separates cultures into two discreet groups. High context cultures (Western European groups such as Germans, Swiss, Austrians, New Zealanders, the British, and Americans) are thought to focus on the written word and content of a message, seeking out the research and evidence to validate conclusions. In contrast, low-context cultures (Asian groups such as Koreans, Chinese, Japanese, Southeast Asians, and Arabic nations) are thought to interpret texts through contextual cues, assuming the reader will be well-informed and interpret the context of the writing carefully before validating conclusions (Van Everdingen & Waarts, 2003).

To avoid the pitfalls "binary" cultural conceptions, studies by Hofstede (1980, 2001) examined both similarities and differences in beliefs in a more holistic way. A study of 50 countries revealed the existence of several different cultural characteristics such as power distance, collectivism, gender egalitarianism, uncertainty avoidance, and long-term (future) orientation (Hofstede, 1980, 2001). Later, a follow-up study of 62 countries added two additional categories: assertiveness and performance orientation (House et al., 1999; House et al., 2002; House et al., 2004). Through analysis of more cultural traits, the research added to our understanding of group characteristics, particularly in Confucian and Arabic countries. It has revealed that both Confucian and Arabic countries share qualities of high power distance (the degree to which members of a group accept unequal power relationships) and collectivism (the degree to which members of a society or organization support joint action and express loyalty for an organization or family group) (Buja, 2019; Zhao & Khan, 2013).

In addition to the discovery of diverse cultural beliefs and behaviors, research by Hofstede (1980, 2001) also revealed the degree to which a cultural trait is supported in each country. His research placed cultural preferences on a scale that ranged from 0 to 100, with 50 representing a mid-level for the trait being analyzed. Through this information, cultural groups with similar traits could be differentiated. In Confucian and Arabic countries, which exhibit similar beliefs about power distance and collectivism, there is a distinct difference in the degree to which these cultural values are supported. Refer to Table 1:

Table 1. Power Distance and Individualism ("Hofstede Insights," 2021a, 2021b)

Power	Power Distance	Individualism
United Arab Emirates	90	25
South Korea	60	18
United States	40	91

While both the UAE and South Korea have high power distance, the value is significantly higher in the UAE. As for collectivism, South Korea's value is higher, as revealed by the lower value for individualism. Just as cultural values vary in intensity and expression in different countries, so may rhetoric that is manifest from these cultural foundations. Unfortunately, past research of intercultural rhetoric has relied on simple binary comparisons between cultures that either do, or do not, possess a particular trait. Furthermore, research has tended to use the United States as the sole benchmark for comparison. Such research has limited our understanding of how intercultural rhetoric differs between non-Western countries who have similar cultural characteristics. Differences in the degree to which a cultural trait is supported may influence how rhetoric is used. Thus, further study is needed to examine rhetoric from countries such as Korea and the UAE, which have similar cultural traits that vary by degree. Such study has the potential to heighten our understanding intercultural differences in discourse.

Cultural and Rhetorical Attributes Imbued in Language
To investigate cultural differences like power distance or collectivism, a number of rhetorical devices can be analyzed. The term power distance consists of two terms, "power" and "distance," both of which may be imbued within formulaic aspects of language. Distance may be exemplified in formulaic language that denotes the relationship between the writer and reader. This relationship is exemplified through deixis, where the pronouns *I* and *you* signify a direct connection between the writer and reader. An even closer relationship may be exemplified by inclusive *we* (e.g., *We need to fight against pollution*), which suggests a membership in the same group or speech community (Yule, 1996, p. 11). By using inclusive *we*, the writer participates "in the discursive construction of national identities," thereby establishing a clear cultural connection with the reader (Petersoo, 2007, p. 419). In contrast to more direct relationships signified by the use of *I*, *you*, and *we*, more distant relationships denoting "other" may be established with pronouns such as *he*, *she*, *it*, and *they* (Yule, 1996, p. 10). Through explaining evidence by using these pronouns, a direct link to the reader is avoided. Distance between the writer and reader may reduce conflict when opinions are expressed, thereby promoting cooperation, which is characteristic of collectivism.

Power may be reflected in modals used to give advice or express obligation, as in the following examples:

1. You (might/could) see a doctor.
2. You (should/ought to) see a doctor.
3. You must see a doctor. (Celce-Murcia & Freeman, 1999, p. 146)

As examples move from one to three, the authority or power of advice increases. Each modal serves a deontic purpose, indicating that a proposition is "obligatory, advisable or permissible according to some normative background such as law, morality, convention" (Suhadi, 2011, p. 156). Modals may also be used for an epistemic purpose, which is defined as "the possibility, probability or impossibility of a certain proposition" (Winiharti, 2012, p. 532). The following are some examples of epistemic modal use:

Someone's knocking.
1.   That could/might be Sydney.
2.   That may be Sydney.
3.   That should be Sydney.
4.   That must be Sydney. (Celce-Murcia & Freeman, 1999, p. 142)

As the examples move from one to four, certainty of the proposition increases. Like deontic expressions, an increase in certainty can suggest authority. In persuasive essays, a higher degree of epistemic certainty may suggest the authority of the writer, who is confident to assert their opinion. At the same time, epistemic statements are less "confrontational" than their deontic counterparts. Epistemic expressions do not directly advise or obligate the reader but provide evidence for an opinion through interpretation of a situation (e.g., *Smoking could have a negative effect on your health*). Being more indirect in how it addresses the reader, such strategies may reflect collectivist beliefs, which discourage conflict to promote cooperation and group action.

A final means of assessing power distance is by examining epistemic stances. These rhetorical devices can be used to construct "a word or phrase that makes a statement less forceful or assertive" (Fatihi, 2019, p. 29). By making a statement less assertive, a writer may lessen the degree to which the reader disagrees, promoting cooperation and collective behaviors characteristic of cultures in Confucian and Arabic countries. Like modals, the degree of assertiveness varies by type of stance. Adjectives, adverbs, and verbs, for example, may be separated into epistemic certainty (e.g., *certain, obvious, actually, certainly, definitely, conclude*) and epistemic likelihood (e.g., *likely, probable, possible, apparently, perhaps, probably, assume, guess, seem*) (Min, Paek, & Kang, 2019). Using stances of epistemic certainty (not epistemic likelihood) may be an indication of authority (additional power distance) in argumentation. At the same time, excessive use of epistemic expressions over deontic ones (e.g., deontic modals) may reflect a desire to avoid direct criticism of the reader, thereby promoting collectivist values that reduce conflict and promote cooperation.

Through careful examination of formulaic language, culturally driven aspects of rhetoric may be revealed, thereby providing insights needed to improve education and intercultural communication. The relationship between the writer and reader (deixis), use of modals (both deontic and epistemic), and epistemic stances (adjectives, adverbs, and verbs) may all reflect a learner's conception of power distance and collectivism. Although this rhetorical language can reveal cultural influence, little research has been conducted thus far. Moreover, past study has not adequately examined rhetorical differences between learners in countries like South Korea and the United Arab Emirates, who share cultural similarities like power distance and collectivism, yet favor these cultural traits with different degrees intensity. More research is needed to better understand cultural differences in rhetoric, as well as useful methods for cultivating the understanding and use of diverse rhetorical styles.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS
Due to the need for further investigation of cultural influences on rhetoric, the following questions were posed:
1. To what degree is pronoun use from learners with Arabic, Korean, and English L1s different? Are there any differences that may reflect characteristics of power distance or collectivism associated with each cultural and linguistic group?

2. To what degree is modal use from learners with Arabic, Korean, and English L1s different? Are there any differences that may reflect characteristics of power distance or collectivism associated with each cultural and linguistic group?
3. To what degree is use of epistemic stances from learners with Arabic, Korean, and English L1s different? Are there any differences in correlation that may reflect characteristics of power distance or collectivism associated with each cultural and linguistic group?

METHODS

To examine essays produced by EFL learners, the International Corpus Network of Asian Learners of English (ICNALE) was used. This 2-million-word corpus contains persuasive essays written in English by college students from ten different EFL countries. Included in the corpus are essays from Korean learners, Arabic learners from the UAE, and college students with English as their L1 (Ishikawa, 2018). From this corpus, essays from each learner group were separated into distinct corpora for comparison. Characteristics of each sub-corpus are featured in Table 2.

Table 2. Portions of ICNALE Corpus Used for Study

	Korean Corpus	United Arab Emirates Corpus (Arabic)	English Native Speaking Corpus
Word Types	4265	2626	1967
Word Tokens	88301	47903	19245

Essays in the ICNALE corpus were strictly controlled to ensure that all participants wrote about the same topics. Learners were each given the same two prompts (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 97)

Topic A: It is important for college students to have a part-time job.
Topic B: Smoking should be completely banned at all the restaurants in the country.

Following the prompt, all participants were given from 20 to 40 minutes to write essays for each topic (length from 200 to 300 words). No dictionaries or other reference tools were allowed (Ishikawa, 2013). Control of topics in this way helped to increase the validity of contrastive analysis between groups in the present study. All essays came from university learners who ranged in age from 17 to 29 and majored in a variety of subjects from the sciences, social sciences, and humanities. The English corpus was primarily comprised of learners from the United States, yet there were also a few learners from Australia (3), Great Britain (3), New Zealand (3), and Canada (9). While there were 100 students from the UAE (200 essays), all participants were female. Since gender differences may influence the findings, only female participants were selected from the other two corpora for comparison. After males were eliminated from consideration, the Korean corpus included 195 learners (390 essays) and the English L1 corpus included 44 learners (88 essays).

To investigate research questions, corpora were analyzed using the free software program called Antconc. Files were separated into three different corpora for analysis (Arabic, Korean, and English). Following this, rhetorical devices for each research question (pronoun deixis, modals, and epistemic stances) were tallied from each corpus for comparison. Because each corpus was of a different size, frequency values needed to be adjusted. To make frequency values equivalent for each corpus, frequency values from the Arabic corpus were multiplied by a ratio value (# of tokens in Korean corpus / # of tokens in Arabic corpus) and frequency values from the English corpus were multiplied by another ratio value (# of tokens in Korean corpus / # of tokens in English

corpus). This adjusted frequency values of Arabic and English corpora according to the size of the Korean corpus, resulting in values that could be used for comparison.

To answer research question one, which sought to examine the degree of power distance between the writer and reader, deixis was analyzed. The pronouns *I, you, we, he, she*, and *they* were examined along with associated demonstrative pronouns *my, your, our, his, her*, and *they*. While pronouns like *I, you*, and *we* represent an inclusion of both the reader and writer in the process of argumentation, *he, she*, and *they* have greater distance from the writer, representing something "other" (Yule, 1996). Words like *person* or *people* also serve to represent something other than the writer or reader. Therefore, these words were included in the examination. Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks was used to compare instances of pronouns in each sub-corpus (Korean, Arabic, and English L1 learners). This non-parametric alternative to the ANOVA was used since normal distribution of scores could not be assumed. The degree to which words did, or did not, correlate was analyzed and graphically charted.

To investigate the second research question, which sought to understand the power or force embedded within modals, the following modals were analyzed: *must, have to, has to, got to, need to, should, had better, ought to, could*, and *might*. These modals were chosen because they can be ordered according to a "speaker's degree of authority" (Celce-Murcia & Freeman, 1999, p. 146). They were separated into the following categories based on the research of Celce-Murcia and Freeman (1999, p. 146): highest authority (*must, have to, has to, got to, need to*), intermediate authority (*should, had better, ought to*) and lowest authority (*could* and *might*). Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks was used to compare instances of pronouns in each sub-corpus (Korean, Arabic, and English L1 learners). This non-parametric alternative to the ANOVA was used since normal distribution of scores could not be assumed. The degree to which words did, or did not, correlate was analyzed and graphically charted.

For both deontic and epistemic modals, authority of the writer may increase with the use of more forceful modals like *must* or *have to*. In the case of deontic modals (e.g., *you must see a doctor*), they serve as a kind of advice or obligation; for epistemic expressions (e.g., *you must be a doctor*), the writer expresses greater certainty or authority as they interpret a particular truth. Despite similarities in their representation of authority or power, deontic expressions directly engage the reader, giving some form of advice. In contrast, epistemic modals more indirectly make a proposition about the truth of an event or situation. Thus, epistemic expressions appear to be more distant and less direct. Usage of each modal type was examined in the study. Modals were deemed deontic if the context appeared "obligatory, advisable or permissible," suggesting some kind of advice (Suhadi, 2011, p. 156). If the context suggested "the possibility, probability or impossibility of a certain proposition," the modal was coded as epistemic (Winiharti, 2012, p. 532). Modals were also examined with Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks to ensure that no significant differences ($p = .178$) existed between deontic and epistemic usage between the corpora, which could have influenced the findings.

As a further reflection of power distance and collectivism, stances were evaluated. To examine the use of stances, the following adjectives, adverbs and verbs in Table 3 were chosen based upon a study by Min, Paek, & Kang (2019):

Table 3. Epistemic Words Chosen for Examination

Epistemic Certainty	Epistemic Likelihood

certain, obvious, actually, certainly, definitely, conclude	likely, probable, possible, apparently, perhaps, probably, assume, guess, seem

If learners utilized more stances with epistemic certainty, it may represent an attempt to reduce power distance. Epistemic certainty represents more authority, which may signify the writer's heightened perception of equality with the reader. Conversely, heightened use of epistemic uncertainty may reveal a collectivist culture, in which argumentation is less desirable and power distance is more substantial (individuals have well-defined roles in a status hierarchy). Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance by Ranks was used to compare instances of pronouns in each sub-corpus (Korean, Arabic, and English L1 learners). This non-parametric alternative to the ANOVA was used since normal distribution of scores could not be assumed. The degree to which words did, or did not, correlate was analyzed and graphically charted.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparison of Pronoun Deixis
Concerning pronoun use, differences were not significant according to Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of Variance ($p = .751$). Unlike statistical analysis, which appears to support the null hypothesis, scrutiny of individual pronoun use appears to reveal a difference due to power difference (See Figure 1 and the Appendix for more information). Korean and native English speakers utilized the words *I* and *you* to a larger degree, which appear to reflect a closer connection between the writer and reader (less power distance). By using these pronouns, issues related to both the author and reader were directly addressed. Whereas the personal pronoun *I* was used to express personal feelings and experiences of the author, the pronoun *you* was often used to present the reader with options or alternatives. Concerning both English and Korean students, phrases like *I (absolutely) agree, I agree with, I (do not) think,* and *I feel that* were used by the writers to express their own opinion, seemingly opening a personal dialogue with the reader. Other use of the pronoun *I* reflected an attempt to express personal experience (e.g., *I had a part-time job; I had experienced…*). Regarding the pronoun *you*, it was primarily used to show the reader a direct benefit of having a part-time job or quitting smoking (e.g., *It can give you an idea; it can give you a lot of exercise; developing you and experiencing various things; You can learn*).

As in English and Korean essays, Arabic EFL writings included pronouns to give an opinion, describe experiences, and suggest the potential benefits of having a part-time job or quitting smoking. However, Arabic learners tended to utilize generic pronouns such as *they*, *their*, *people*, and *person* to perform these functions (see Figure 1). By using pronouns assigned to the category "other," students from the UAE appeared to distance themselves from evidence and opinion by avoiding pronouns that directly addressed the reader. Concerning the pronoun *they*, for example, the following collocates were frequently used in the Arabic corpus: *they are applying, they are aware, they are face with, they could work,* and *they do not need*. While the functions of phrasing (to express an opinion, talk about an experience, or reveal potential benefits) appear similar in all corpora, use of pronouns seems to suggest that power distance is greater between the author and reader for Arabic writers. Through avoiding a direct connection to the reader, Arabic writers appear to express greater preference for power distance. These writers also used pronouns such as *he* and *she* much more often, which may reflect highly segregated gender roles. This view parallels the linguistic structure of Arabic, which is highly differentiated with regard to gender.
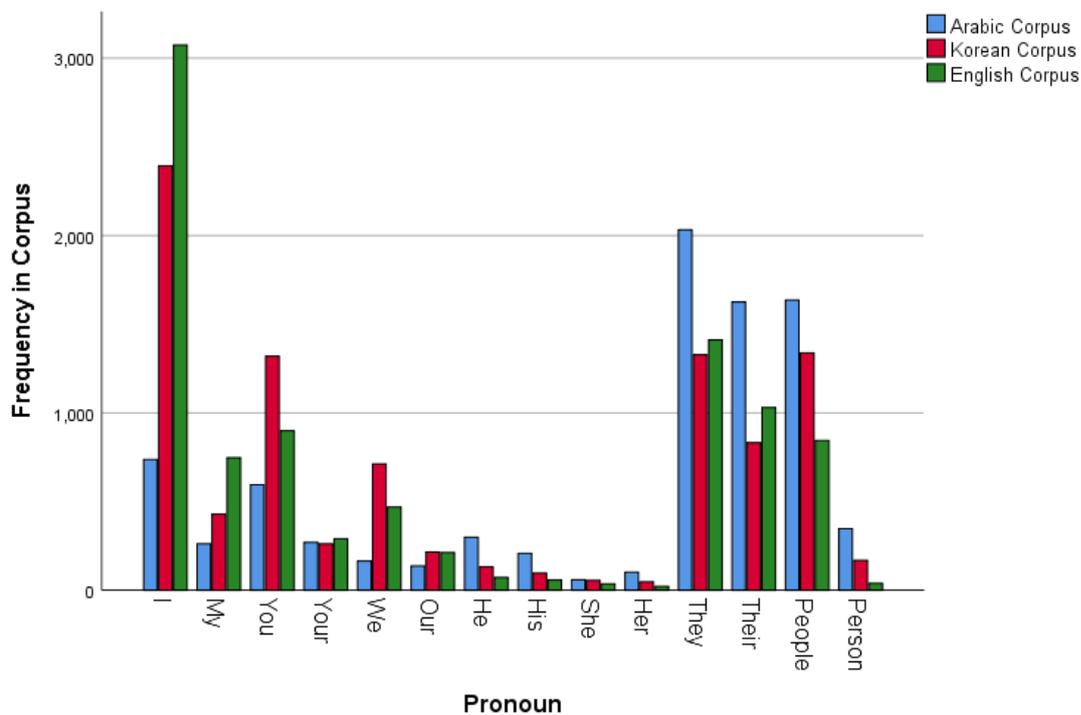
Figure 1: Pronouns Used in the Korean, Arabic, and English Corpora

Overall, results seem to suggest that Korean and Native English students tend to maintain a closer relationship with the reader, opening a dialogue between *I* and *you*. Arabic learners, in contrast, appear to maintain distance with the reader through generic pronouns and gender differentiated pronouns.

Comparison of Modals
Like pronoun deixis, analysis of modal verbs revealed no significant differences ($p = .388$), yet evaluation of individual modal use did reveal some notable differences in style of argumentation (See Figure 2 and the Appendix for more information). Qualitative analysis reveals that highest authority modals (*must, have to, has to, (have) got to*, and *need to*) are used more often by Korean learners, which reveals an authority of the author to speak directly with the reader. Therefore, Korean learners appear to have a lower power distance than their UAE counterparts. In contrast to modals with the highest degree of force, intermediate and lower authority modals like should, could, and might are all used more often by Arabic learners. Emirati authors appear to be less assertive in the use of modals, which may reflect a recognition of the reader's authority or status. Ideas of the author are not being "forced" on the reader, reflecting an increased acceptance of power distance.

Native English students favor the use of the modal *have to*, which may reflect a rhetorical style that is more direct than the collectivist cultures of Korea and the UAE. Despite having many expressions that express a degree of force (e.g., *have to*) in English discourse, these expressions appear to be lessened through hedging or careful use of pronouns as in the following expression: *we know in work life, workers need to be in touch*. By using the pronoun, *we*, the writer appears to suggest that the problem is "ours" rather than "yours," lessening negativity associated with an

additional responsibility. The use of *have to* by Arabic and Korean learners seemed to be more direct. Expressions like *have to deal with, have to be prepared, have to communicate, have to be independent*, and *have to be ready* are commonly used without hedging. The larger degree of force in these writings may reflect a cultural characteristic of argumentation or limitations in English ability.
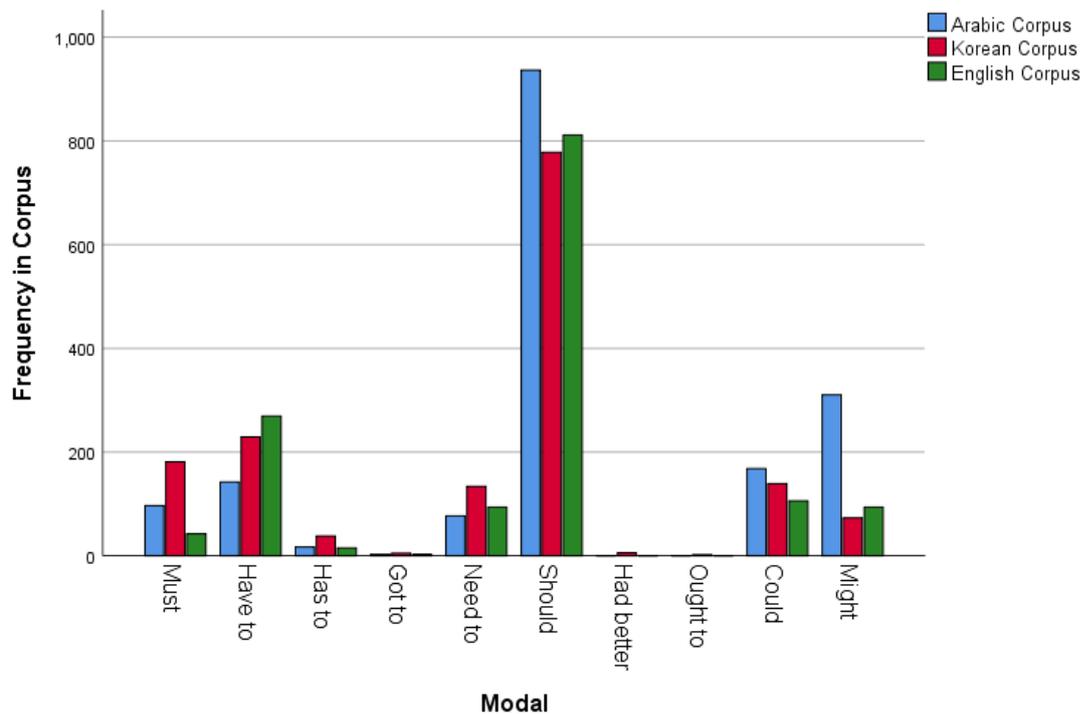

Figure 2: Persuasive Verbs Used in the Korean, Arabic, and English Corpora

In Arabic discourse, the word *could* is often used as a more honorific form of discourse than the word *can*, thereby increasing power distance between the writer and the reader. The word *could* appears to parallel the use of *can* in the other two corpora, as in the following expressions: *could eventually result, could help*, and *could hire*. The terms are used to express possibility, yet more politely and less directly. This parallels patterns of deixis, which suggest a larger distance between the Emirati author and their reader (higher power distance). The reader is placed at a higher level of authority in the Arabic corpus.

Concerning deontic vs. epistemic use of modals, each learner corpus used these devices in similar proportions for each modal. However, Korean learners used more higher authority modals (e.g., *have to* and *must*), which tended to be used in a deontic context. Students from the UAE used lower authority modals more often (e.g., *could* or *should*), which tended to be used in epistemic contexts. Deontic modals are more "confrontational" in that that they forcefully and directly advise readers on the correct course of action. Epistemic expressions do not directly advise or obligate the reader but provide evidence for an opinion through interpretation of a situation (e.g., *Smoking could have a negative effect on your health*). Differences in using either deontic or epistemic modals provides further evidence that an underlying value such as power distance may have an influence on the use of rhetorical devices. When using more obligatory modals, the author appears to directly advise the reader as an equal. In contrast, when using epistemic expressions, the author indirectly

expresses an opinion, thereby showing more respect for the authority of the reader; the author appears to lack authority, reflecting an acceptance of the idea that the power or status of the reader may be higher.

Comparison of Stances

Differences between use of stances were not significant according to Friedman's Two-Way Analysis of variance ($p = .057$). Individual use of stances did reveal one notable difference between Korean and Arabic learners (See Figure 3 and the Appendix for more information). Arabic learners tended to use more authoritative expressions for epistemic certainty such as *certain, actually, definitely*, and *conclude*. Rather than using deontic modals like *have to* or *must*, epistemic assertions with the highest authority were utilized. This finding may reveal a means for Arabic learners with high power distance to express opinions with more strength. They may utilize a different means from their Korean peers to make an argument stronger, choosing a more authoritative, yet indirect (epistemic) rhetorical device to provide criticism or support for a proposition. Korean learners tended to use stances of epistemic likelihood more often. Words expressing epistemic likelihood such as *apparently, likely, possible, probable, possible, perhaps, assume, guess* and *seem* were used more often by Korean learners in relation to their Emirati peers.
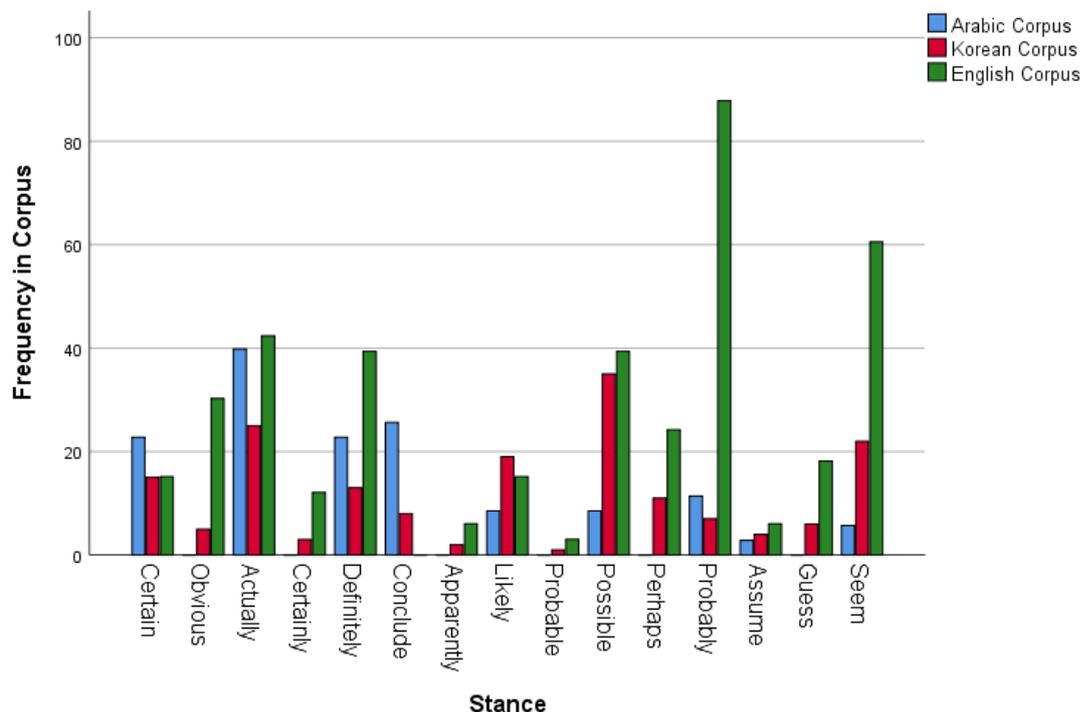

Figure 3: Stances Used in the Korean, Arabic, and English Corpora

Overall, Korean learners seemed to have a larger repertoire of adverbs, adjectives, and verbs that hedged their statements. Use of words like *apparently, possible, seem, probably*, and *likely* may signify a greater emphasis on lessening the degree of force in argumentation. They tended to be used in greater variety and to a greater extent (with the exception of *probably*) than their Arabic counterparts. Utilization of stances that lessen the force of a proposition may help soften

argumentation, thereby preventing the chance that a reader may take offense. This rhetorical style may reduce conflict between the author and reader, supporting collectivist or Confucian values that discourage argument and promote harmony.

CONCLUSION

Analysis of rhetorical devices used in persuasive essays from three different cultural groups has yielded some interesting insights. Differences in discourse appear to be more complex than past research would suggest. As collectivist cultures, both Korean and Arabic learners may use rhetorical strategies that reduce argument and decrease disagreement. For learners with an Arabic L1, pronouns such as *they* are used to distance the writer from a reader. In addition, lower authority modals are used to lessen the power of an argument. By increasing distance in this way, the writer may reduce potential conflict caused by direct confrontation, thereby respecting the position or authority of the reader to make decisions. This appears to reflect a respect for the potential power distance of the reader. Emirati learners also appeared to use stronger epistemic stances (an indirect way to frame an argument for the reader) more often, which may provide a moderate means to strengthen assertions in a context where power distance must be respected.

For Korean learners, distance between the author and reader is reduced through pronouns like *I* and *you*. More authoritative modals are also used, in contrast to their Arabic peers. While power distance is reduced by asserting a more direct and equitable connection to the reader, more stances of epistemic likelihood are used as a hedge, which decreases the power of an argument and promotes values of a collectivist culture. Overall, the strategies of Korean learners appear to reflect their intermediate standing in regard to power distance. They appear to show some adherence to rhetoric that supports power distance, yet not to the extent of the Emirati learners. Review of English writers appears to suggest that they involve the reader closely through the use of pronouns and modals of higher authority. While they use argumentation that has force (e.g., *have to*), careful utilization of rhetorical devices also ensures that the reader can be actively engaged without taking offense, which would cause the reader to disengage from the argument.

Overall, study suggests that cultural influences on rhetoric may be more substantial and diverse than originally thought. Groups with similar cultural characteristics may express these similarities differently in rhetoric, as revealed by analysis of Korean and Emirati EFL writing. Because rhetoric forms a lens through which EFL learners interpret what they read and write (Baker, 2021), understanding culturally driven conceptions of discourse is essential for language education. The present study provided some insights to help educators assess the impact of cultural differences on persuasive text, yet further study is still needed. Because corpus data was used for investigation, a writer's individual experiences could not be examined in detail, limiting understanding of how personal and cultural variables interact to influence rhetoric. More research is needed to examine how potentially codependent factors such as prior experience, cultural background, and gender influence rhetorical strategies. This research may ultimately lead to new forms of pedagogy that help learners better comprehend and compose rhetoric, thereby promoting more effective cross-cultural communication.

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APPENDIX

Frequency Values

Word	Korean Corpus	English Corpus*	Arabic Corpus*
certain	9.00	9.18	14.75
obvious	3.00	9.18	.00
likely	9.00	.00	5.53
possible	22.00	13.76	5.53
probable	1.00	4.59	.00
actually	18.00	27.53	25.81
certainly	3.00	4.59	.00
definitely	10.00	18.35	14.75
apparently	1.00	4.59	.00
perhaps	5.00	13.76	.00
probably	3.00	73.41	7.37
conclude	4.00	.00	16.59
assume	3.00	.00	1.84
guess	1.00	13.76	.00
seem	15.00	55.06	3.69
could	81.00	36.71	108.76
got to	2.00	4.59	1.84
had better	4.00	.00	.00
has to	26.00	9.18	11.06
have to	150.00	201.88	92.17
might	46.00	73.41	200.92
must	117.00	18.35	62.67
need to	81.00	45.88	49.77
ought to	1.00	.00	.00
should	527.00	546.00	606.46
I	1529.00	2124.36	477.42
You	690.00	734.12	385.26
He	79.00	36.71	193.55
She	39.00	32.12	38.71
They	904.00	880.95	1316.14
We	498.00	307.41	106.91
My	268.00	513.88	169.59
Your	125.00	284.47	175.12
His	69.00	22.94	134.56
Her	29.00	18.35	66.36
Their	598.00	651.53	1052.54
Our	128.00	197.30	88.48
people	917.00	591.89	1059.91
person	122.00	27.53	224.89

*Frequencies for English and Arabic corpora were adjusted for comparison to the Korean corpus.