

**BEYOND GRAMMATICALLY CORRECT:
CLASSICAL RHETORIC FOR EFL STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports a two-month study that investigated the extent to which classical rhetoric may foster writing development among a group of 24 tertiary-level students majoring in English. Seven rhetorical devices were targeted as operational abilities for student practice in essay writing. Data are drawn from students' first drafts prior to the treatment and revision drafts after the study was completed. Post-study questionnaires are also collected to examine student perceptions involved in the production. The data analysis includes a comparison of texts produced by each individual learner and an investigation into the learners' reflections on the experience of exercising rhetoric in that composition process. Results indicate that students produced longer and stronger texts in terms of expressiveness, creativity, and complexity with treatment. Rhetoric training affords students with abundant opportunities to see more clearly the inter-relatedness of form and meaning, and the psychology of diction both in their own writing and that of others. This study concludes with implications for composition pedagogy when taken in an EFL context.

Key Words: writing pedagogy, pedagogical stylistics, rhetoric used in composition teaching

INTRODUCTION

Grammar correction is a particular issue figuring commonly in the field of instructional second language (ESL) and foreign language (EFL) writing. Developments in this area of research testify to the writing teachers' perennial concern for discovering the most effective ways of providing corrective feedback (Bitchener & Knoch, 2008; Bitchener, Young, & Cameron, 2005; Ferris & Hedgcock, 2005; Lalande, 1982). Of

particular concern to many teachers is the “fossilization” of errors and the need to provide meaningful reader reaction to students’ efforts (Lee, 2004). For these reasons, most writing teachers feel obligated in some way to make obvious corrections for the students to benefit from, and this convention has met wide acceptance among most ESL/EFL writing teachers (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Ferris & Roberts, 2001; Leki, 1991). The preponderance of this expected feedback practice is noted in Truscott’s (1996) observation, “In second language writing courses, grammar correction is something of an institution” (p. 327). In effect, virtually all writing teachers perform correction in one form or another in the belief that grammar instruction and corrective feedback are necessary to enhance students’ writing (Ferris, 2004; Lyster, Lightbown, & Spada, 1999).

About two decades ago, Connors (1985) painted a rather bleak picture of contemporary writing pedagogy when he noted that “English composition has meant one thing to most people: the single-minded enforcement of standards of mechanical and grammatical correctness in writing” (p. 61). In fact the exigency to which Connors referred to still resides with composition teachers because the obsession with mechanical correctness seems to be a common stereotype in most writing courses. For example, You (2004) made the observation that English writing in a typical Chinese university is most often taught under the direct guidance of an examination system. Teachers in such a system of instruction are predominantly concerned with the teaching of correct form, but have less far less regard for student-originated thoughts and content. Anecdotal evidence would also suggest that much of what ESL/EFL writing teachers do—correcting grammatical errors—continues to represent the primary concern (Lee, 2005).

Is corrective feedback, which has received so much research and pedagogical attention in the past, worth the time and effort expended? Does error correction have any long-term benefits on students’ overall writing abilities? As a matter of fact, the efficacy of teacher error correction has been the subject of much controversy. While some studies have claimed that error feedback leads to writing improvement (Chandler, 2003; Ferris, 2006; Master, 1995; Polio, Fleck, & Leder, 1998), other studies have questioned the effectiveness of teachers’ corrective feedback as a way of improving the practical nature of students’ writing. Surprisingly, there is substantial research showing that there is little if any benefit in devoting inordinate amounts of time in providing feedback

to students' errors (Fazio, 2001; Kepner, 1991; Krashen, 1999; Semke, 1984; Sheppard, 1992; Truscott, 2004). In a well-known review of this literature, Truscott (1996) debunks the assumption often held by many writing teachers; he makes a strong claim that "grammar correction has no place in writing courses and should be abandoned" (p. 328). Similarly, in a research into L2 writing teachers' perspectives and problems regarding error feedback in Hong Kong, Lee (2003) reports that the majority of teachers correct student errors/grammar comprehensively, yet too often, in a vain attempt to avoid poor results. In a real classroom setting, teachers tend to treat error feedback with a task-orientation having little long-term significance. Although spending a massive amount of time marking student essays is an expected part of the job, teachers themselves are not entirely convinced that such effort pays off in terms of demonstrable student improvement.

Where Do We Go from the "Grammar Correction" Debate?

While the volume of research into corrective feedback has increased dramatically over the last decade, there are still uncertainties regarding its possible effects. While the issue is still very much open to debate, I do not wish to weigh in either for or against requisite error correction of student writing practice. Rather, my point is to question the place of priority given to the monopoly concern of "correctness" in college-level writing classes. Despite the traditional importance placed on grammatical accuracy, teachers still remain acutely aware that good writing depends on more than producing a veritable collection of acceptable lines on the paper. It seems rather simplistic and even downright uninteresting to stick to the most basic levels of writing. As McRae (1991) reminds instructors working within the confines of ESL/EFL teaching, "The learner often loses his communicative impetus simply because he has to devote so much concentration to the mechanical aspects of grammatical manipulation. The content becomes subordinate to the mechanics of the language" (p. 6). Expounding on the same idea, Bartholomae (2000) contends, student writing should be treated as "more than a submission to standard forms and expectations" (p. 1951). In "Good enough writing: What is good enough writing anyway?", Bloom (2006) highlights components that are necessary in the development of successful college-level composition. Bloom argues, "It is the difficult-to-measure, the difficult-to-teach proficiencies, such as critical thinking, questioning authority, and experimentation with language, form, style, and voice that

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equate to great writing” (p. 83). Accordingly, it is important to emphasize that only by moving away from a narrow obsession with the practice of corrective feedback can ESL/EFL writing pedagogy embrace a new range of practices that will lead to “good-enough” writing.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

From the vantage point of Bloom’s approach, I will designate a larger purpose which is different from the remedial, error-avoidance or error-correction-centered purposes of writing instruction. In other words, students can and should be encouraged to move beyond the purely referential level of basic language use and instead begin to experiment with language, rhetorical forms, style, and voice thus increasing the potential representational capacity of their writing. Since there are relatively few discussions currently available in the related literature, the aim of this study will be to fill the information gap by offering empirical aspects related to the teaching of rhetoric and to explore how EFL students incorporate a variety of stylistic features into their own writing.

ENACTING A RHETORICAL APPROACH

While ccontemporary studies of rhetoric evidence a more diverse range of practices and meanings than was the case in ancient times (Fleming, 1998), the term *rhetoric* has always referred to a process of argumentation and persuasion, either in a macro-rhetoric sense (the study of the larger units of the composition) or in a micro-rhetoric sense (the study of the smaller units of words or sentences). With his famous treatise on rhetoric, Aristotle defined the term as “the faculty of discovering in any particular case all of the available means of persuasion.” For another example, Cole (1991, p. ix) defines rhetoric as “a writer’s self-conscious manipulation of his medium with a view to ensuring his message as favorable a reception as possible on the part of the particular audience being addressed.” The word *medium*, which is in accord with Aristotle’s notion of “the available means of persuasion,” can be conceptualized reductively as any rhetorical devices one can use to scale the relative effectiveness of personal expression. From this perspective, the term rhetoric denotes various stylistic devices such as *metaphor* or *repetition* that can be used to add a certain grace and charm

to one's writing. Nonetheless, this classical art is often given short shrift or ignored in the modern writing class. And it is this practical art of writing from a rhetorical perspective that needs to be returned to the composition pedagogy if student writing practices are ever to progress (Bulter, 2008; Corbett & Connors, 1999).

One point of entry into rhetorical art is through the practice of stylistic analysis. In making this argument, I borrow from the framework of pedagogical stylistics, with which Watson and Zyngier (2006), Clark and Zyngier (2003) are closely associated. Pedagogical stylistics is characterized by language-based activities which are interactive between the text and the (student) reader. Whether reading belletristic texts or newspaper articles, students can be guided under the rubric of stylistics in order to focus on well written sentences and obtain insights into compositional skill. This teaching approach entails the management of learner-centered activities rather than striving for a routine explication of texts. Another important aspect of initiating students into the art of rhetoric concerns the choice of teaching materials. Previous scholarship offers ample evidence that literature provides a rich mine of materials for composition teachers (Belecher & Hirvela, 2000; Corbett, 1983; Simpson, 1997; Steinberg, 1995; Tate, 1993). As literary texts abound with rhetorical structuring, they may serve to offer students an inkling of what a really good writing is all about. As Salvatori (1996) points out, students "can learn to exercise this sophisticated practice of writing in the process of learning to understand and to appreciate the effects of writing on themselves as readers" (p. 441). The premise is akin to Kusel's (1992) argument that "aware readers will develop into aware writers" (p. 467). Following this line of reasoning, this study proposes that it is high time for composition studies to be backed up with the teaching of formal rhetoric techniques. By doing this, we may reclaim an area of traditional practice that can provide a valuable resource to language users.

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

Research Questions

This study attempts to answer two basic research questions: (1) What are the empowering potentialities of rhetoric if students are educated on how to read model texts carefully? and (2) What are students' views

related to the application of stylistic features to their practice texts?

Defining and Operationalizing Rhetoric

While the domain of rhetoric is broad, to say the very least, for purposes of this particular study and the instructional design, I do not attempt to take into account the macro/global factor of coherence as it exists in student writing. To delimit the scope of rhetoric, this study is concerned exclusively with scheme and tropes that can be described locally under the aspect of style. From a purely methodological perspective, rhetoric is operationalized as a definite set of seven stylistic devices. In this study, the definitions of the terms in use, along with some examples of their given usage, were taken from Corbett and Connors (1999, pp. 382-411). Table 1 presents a checklist of these rhetorical devices.

These rhetorical devices are chosen because there is ample evidence in the extant literature that these moves—"metaphor here", "repetition there", "alliteration at one moment", "assonance another"—are the most frequently deployed methods employed by professional writers (and poets as well) to give language texture and power (Lodge, 1992; McRae, 1998; Montgomery, Durant, Fabb, Furniss, & Mills, 2007; Short, 1996; Simpson, 2004; Thornborrow & Wareing, 1998; Traugott & Pratt, 1980; Wormser & Cappella, 2000). Hence, given the multitudes of expressive figures and tropes that students must learn from, we may fully justify the investment of learning these specific devices prior to compositional practices. This direction has the potential to expand students' insights into the nuanced aspects of *how* language works and improve their critical thought expression. It should be pointed out that the sequence of teaching is organized through several distinct levels of language (cf. Carter & Nash, 1990; Simpson, 2004). The program of instruction, which is organized in a bottom-up fashion, starts with the sound of language (phonology) and ends with the sentential level of language (syntax).

Table 1. A Catalogue of Rhetorical Devices

Rhetorical Devices	Definition	Illustrative Example
sound patterning	(e.g. alliteration)—Repetition of initial or medial consonants in two or more adjacent words.	I should hear him fly with the high fields And wake to the farm forever fled from the childless land. —Dylan Thomas, “French Hill,” II. 50-51
repetition	(e.g. anaphora)—Repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginnings of successive clauses.	We are going to the land of freedom. Let us march to the realization of the American dream. Let us march on segregated housing. Let us march on segregated school. Let us march on poverty.... —Martin Luther King, Jr., on a civil-rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, 1965
simile	An explicit comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common.	Your face, my thane, is as a book where men May read strange matters. To beguile the time Look like the time; bear welcome in your eye, Your hand, your tongue: look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under’t. —Lady Macbeth in <i>Macbeth</i> (1.6.71-75)

Table 1. (Continued)

Rhetorical Devices	Definition	Illustrative Example
metaphor	An implied comparison between two things of unlike nature that yet have something in common.	But soft, what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun! Arise fair sun and kill the envious moon Who is already sick and pale with grief That thou her maid art far more fair than she. —Romeo in <i>Romeo and Juliet</i> (2.2.3-6)
hyperbole	The use of exaggerated terms for the purpose of emphasis	It's really ironical... I have gray hair. I really do. The one side of my head—the right side—is full of millions of gray hair. —Holden Caulfield in <i>Catcher in the Rye</i>
personification	Investing abstractions or inanimate objects with human qualities or abilities.	And indeed there will be time For the yellow smoke that slides along the street, Rubbing its back upon the window panes. —T.S. Eliot, “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”
antithesis	The juxtaposition of contrasting ideas, often in parallel structure.	That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind. —Neil Armstrong

Data Collection and Analysis

Answers to research questions were sought from production and perception perspectives. It was sought that such a combination of perspectives might reveal a more accurate picture than a single method of inquiry. Product data was collected from student essays composed respectively in the first and final weeks of this study, with an 8-week gap between the two periods of production. Following a pre-test and a delayed post-test design format, each student was expected to produce two pieces of narrative writing related to the topic of “An Unusual Dream” (suggested to be approximately 200 words in length). To ensure that students would be the sole authors of their own work, all writing took place in the classroom, and all student work was neither privileged nor disadvantaged by direct instructor feedback. Perception data was collected from a questionnaire survey, designed by the researcher with 16 subsequent questions to be filled out by all participants upon completion of the study. The research adopts a general approach to data analysis: (1) examining the rhetorical choices students have made for accommodating the essay assignments; (2) judging holistically on how well a rhetorical device is suitable for the desired representational effects; and, (3) categorizing students’ perceptions of how to apply rhetorical figures to the content of their own texts.

Participants

Twenty-four sophomores who are English majors enrolled in a required composition course taken at an intermediate level. Students ranged from 18 to 22 years of age, with a mean of 20 years of age. There were 4 males and 20 females in the subject group. None of the participants had previously received instruction related to the use of rhetorical devices in their past writing classes.

Instructional Design

The instruction, which lasted about 2 hours per class meeting, totaled 14 hours. In order to make the process as systematic as possible, a unified instructional procedure was adopted. The following is the general teaching rubric, derived from a two-fold pedagogies—close readings of literary works and careful imitation of style.

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Observation

To begin, students are given exemplary text(s) to read in the classroom. My selection of materials includes excerpts from William Shakespeare's plays (e.g. *Romeo and Juliet*; *Macbeth*), famous speeches (e.g. Martin Luther King, Junior's "I Have a Dream" speech), poems (e.g. William Carlos Williams' *This is Just to Say*, *Sonnet 14*, *Sonnet 130*), popular songs (e.g. *Puff the Magic Dragon*), proverbs, advertisements, essays, etc. Each stint of reading begins with something simple, like reading a few sentences from a well-known essayist, in order to put students in the mood. As I read the text aloud, I then ask students to mark the sentence(s) that they really like from the text they are following along with. When the passage is finished, students are allowed ample time to re-read and to discuss the texts in either classroom pairs or groups, with an emphasis placed on noticing what and how writers do linguistically. Then students are asked to share their favorite examples and finally to explain why those sentence(s) appeal to them. After reading and discussing the given texts, students are directed to focus on the targeted device, which some might have already noticed. I then define some of the terms in use and prepare the students for an active involvement in subsequent tasks and discussions.

Illustration

The use of the representative rhetorical device is further illustrated by a close examination of exemplary text(s) prepared by the teacher (or, sometimes by the students themselves). Close reading of these texts aims to raise students' awareness of the possible semantic potentials created by a careful choice of rhetorical action in phrasing. Here, textual analysis is presented as a productive means for the development of writing skills. In other words, I guide students to read the texts not so much as to define their content but as a way of initiating, arranging, stylistically editing, and finally composing their consequential text. The transition, from the careful analysis of sophisticated texts of a professional writer to the fruitful production of the students' own works, underscores the well known synergy that is known to exist between reading well and writing well (Corden, 2007; Lee, 2002; Miller, 2001).

Exploration

Having observed some effective examples, students begin to write a few sentences that are closely patterned after the models provided.

Activities may include: parsing sentences, changing the scale (i.e. to compress a text into a more concise piece, or amplify a text by inventing or adding new details), and switching the point-of-view. Most importantly, students may choose to experiment with the rhetorical device or assimilate the models by incorporating them into their own writing in some fashion. These activities are purported to deepen students' overall appreciation both for literature and for their own composing techniques. While students share their texts with class peers and communicate feedback at various points during the writing process, the teacher plays the role of facilitator (Carter & Long, 1991), working with students and creatively intervening to ensure a relevant and meaningful experience.

Extension

As a follow-up assignment, I ask students to find more interesting examples of how the given rhetorical device may be observed in the works of other well-known writers. The required task enlarges the pool of first-hand and secondary materials students may encounter and then helps them to further consolidate and internalize what they have just learned during the class. Otherwise stated, students are empowered to embark on their own journey of discovery as to the rhetorical subtleties and ways of achieving style that are available to all writers, not only professionals. On a regular basis students are asked to bring the texts they have found to the class for a short presentation in front of the class.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Product Data: Pre- and Post-drafts

During the course of study, each student generated two essays: a 200-300-word draft at the beginning and a revision at the end. Integral to the second essay assignment is the use of the rhetoric devices—metaphors, similes, repetitions—students had learned in the program. Since it was not made compulsory, the use of these devices is considered to be optional. To verify students' development, the measure of writing performance was operationalized as tally counts of rhetoric devices to be found in the realized student texts, as it is considered that the use of rhetorical devices exemplifies the fruits of both the students' cognitive and creative efforts. Because of the complexity involved in

composition assessment, I must fully acknowledge the limitations inherent in the assessment of students' texts based only on this simple criterion. That being the case, this simple measurement, which is closely tied to the stated purpose of the instructional program, has the advantage of aligning assessment to instruction in a real way (White, 1985).

Among the first drafts, not a single student had elected to use any rhetorical devices as part of their writer's repertoire. The absence of these stylistic features reflects what Elbow (2002) sees as often missing in the typical composition course. The fact also points out the imaginative elements of writing that does not come naturally to most students without intervention. In the reformulation of the revised drafts, nonetheless, the majority of students were found to have a greater use of rhetoric devices as aid to writing. The results showed that in 22 out of 24 texts (i.e. 92%), the revised draft contains more stylistic devices than were observable in the first draft. While the original drafts contain no rhetorical device at all, the revised drafts contained an average of 3 devices per submission, suggesting that in post-revision drafts, students are much more conscious of rhetorical issues. By implication, students display an ordered attention to invention and style in their composition.

As an illustration of how this dramatic change takes place, samples of students' writing are presented (see Table 2). The following example shows how one student, called Jane, elaborates the portrayal of a scene through a combination of devices. Herein, Jane is a pseudonym, as are the names of all of the students whose works are quoted.

Table 2. Excerpts Taken from Student Work

Original Draft	Self-revised Draft
"Suddenly, a bear with a big mouth and sharp claws rushed out from the woods, and Frank didn't know what to do".	"Suddenly, a bear with a big mouth <i>which was able to swallow a whale</i> and sharp claws <i>which could cut a diamond</i> rushed out from the woods, and Frank didn't know what to do but shudder".

The phrase "a bear with a big mouth which was able to swallow a whale and sharp claws which could cut a diamond" introduces a form of *hyperbole* under the aegis of a *personification*. By the use of these vivid rhetorical devices, Jane created a vivid image of 'the bear', one that is all the more ferocious and more devastating to the reader's sensibilities, as

compared with that of the much plainer first draft. For another example, that of applying *simile* to writing (see Table 3), a student called Whitney described how she felt when she had broken up with her boyfriend. The lines added in the revised-draft (italicized to provide emphasis in this case) represent her use of emotional appeals (*pathos*) in further emphasizing her grief.

Table 3. Excerpts Taken from Student Work

Original Draft	Self-revised Draft
<p>“I still remembered the feeling at that time. I was at a loss when and how to begin and where to end. What I could do was to blame others and was full of remorse”.</p>	<p>“I still remembered the feeling at that time. I was at a loss when and how to begin and where to end. What I could do was to blame others and was full of remorse. <i>I rolled up and bent in my bed, listening to sad songs and read sad poems. I was just like an empty shell, sad and pessimistic in it</i>”.</p>

Here the ‘*hollow, motionless shell*’—an image created by the device of *simile*—has rendered the heartbreak feeling of the author more expressive and more immediate to the potential reader. As Aristotle pointed out in his *Rhetoric*, good similes give an effect of “brilliance”. With the dynamism enabled by this rhetorical trope of the revised text, the earlier flat description is greatly flavored; new “flesh” was put on the “bare bone” of the paragraph. I feel delighted to see students when they transfer these rhetorical skills into their own prose, to explore the risks they can take in writing, and to let these devices color their stories.

As the above two excerpts may illustrate, students draw from a variety of stylistic resources in order to express their own ideas and to create a sense of depth and breadth in their individual personal experience. In theorizing the notion of “representational composition” Kaufer and Butler (2000) make the cogent point that representational composing, which seeks to ally both the representational and rhetorical language approaches, helps students to become skilled writers who are “effective with audience because they can compress into words worlds of experience that they want their audiences to conjure” (Kaufer, Ishizaki, Collins, & Vlachos, 2004, p. 369). This is because representational language, as McRae (1991) similarly claims, “opens up, calls upon,

stimulates and uses areas of the mind, from imagination to emotion, from pleasure to pain, which referential language does not reach” (p. 3). In actual practice, the students’ exercising of rhetorical figures seems capable of stimulating thought, of inducing imagination, and of stretching dormant or underdeveloped writing skills.

By enhancing powers of rhetorical perception, as Fredrick (2006) attests, students can “think shrewdly about the uses and effects of language” (p. 131). More importantly, students can begin to “see a reason to look not only at what they say, but also at how they say it (Dean, 2001, p. 89). Coupled with this new angle of vision was the augmentation of content or of substance. With the supportive scaffold of rhetorical devices, students readily solve one of the most crippling problems they commonly encounter in writing—a lack of words and of original thoughts. As might be expected, a rhetorical device serves as a spur or trigger for students to use in attaining an abundance of unforeseen words and ideas. Clearly, this reflects the integral relationship between style and content pointed by many composition scholars (Butler, 2008; Connor, 2000; Corbett, 1963; Crowley & Hawhee, 1999; Johnson, 2003).

Apart from the examples given above, quite a few students made progress in terms of their stylistic flexibilities during composition. It is evident from the student texts received that certain devices are quite commonly employed, while others are rarely so. Among the devices being introduced, *simile* is the most widely employed feature, with 18 students who participated in the study using it to engage the readers’ attention. This is followed by *repetition* (used by 7 students) and *hyperbole* (used by 5 students). Surprisingly, the device of *metaphor* is almost none existent in the writing samples. Oftentimes, a student uses the same device more than once in the course of the writing. The following excerpts show how students use rhetoric devices to make their texts more expressive and conceptually rich in tone. Table 4 presents both pre- and revised-drafts written by five different students. Where a rhetoric device appears, it is italicized and then identified in parentheses.

Table 4. A Comparison of Students' First and Revised Drafts

Students	Pre-draft	Post-draft
<i>Beth</i>	“Betty and I become good friend and she is going to marry my elder brother who is handsome, humor and works in a great company”.	“Betty and I become good friend and she is going to marry my elder brother who is <i>handsome, humorous with high income</i> ”. (sound patterning: alliteration)
<i>Richard</i>	“So, Neil tears and burns the map. He wants to hide the secret forever”.	“So, Neil tears and burns the map. <i>Because he does not hope to control the world,</i> <i>Because he does not hope to,</i> <i>Because he does hope to have peace</i> He wants to hide the secret forever”. (repetition)
<i>Amanda</i>	“I didn't learn about anything in my last year (last writing teacher), but I am sure I have learned something in this term. My new teacher teaches us so much knowledge; I tried to learn all of them”.	“My former writing professor is <i>an angel who came from the hell,</i> and this year, <i>my writing professor is a devil who came from heaven</i> ”. (antithesis)
<i>Christine</i>	“Although I keep shooting them, the number of monsters increases quickly”.	“Although I keep shooting them, the number of monsters increases quickly. <i>The scene is like a group of bees swarming out of the nest suddenly</i> ”. (simile)
<i>Rita</i>	“... it was an only way to go to a magic school called Walter. However there were elves which owned powerful magic and ghost living in the dark so every witch must be careful enough until they passed the street safely”.	“... it was an only way to go to a magic school called Walter. The street is <i>dangerous like a hungry tiger</i> because there was an evil and old witch living in a small cabin on the street”. (simile/personification)

Note. Students' sentences are recorded in their original form, allowing for some idiosyncratic language.

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Overall, students seem to develop practical writing skills with a varying degree of success by practicing a closer reading of the text. That being said, I would not want to claim that such treatment could hope to develop students' immediate mastery of figures and tropes. What it strived for was the heightening of students' awareness that might serve to facilitate further analysis of the target structures during subsequent input. This awareness will lay the groundwork for the (academic) writing to follow. Best of all, students may draw on this rhetorical knowledge in order to make their own written compositions more aesthetically interesting. This kind of writers' training concurs with what Elbow (2002) aptly calls for: "even in academic writing, even in prose, we can have playfulness, style, pleasure—even adornment and artifice" (p. 542).

Perception Data: Questionnaire

In this study a student's writing ability is fostered by an exposure to seven traditional rhetorical features. The potential usefulness of each device to each of the participants, as far as its instructional value is concerned, is considered to be of pedagogical significance. In order to obtain a sense of the actual learners' experience, a questionnaire was constructed by the author to determine the central phenomenon of interest. The questionnaire (see Appendix) was administered to each student during the final week of course attendance. To obtain as much reliable data as possible, the questionnaire was filled out anonymously by the respondents.

Most of the items in the questionnaire focused on students' feelings related to the study of rhetoric, including their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of a rhetoric-based approach to writing well. Respondents were asked to indicate their degree of agreement on a scale of 1-6 (1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Somewhat Disagree, 4=Somewhat Agree, 5=Agree, 6=Strongly Agree). For the analysis of this Likert-type data, the mean scores of the responses were computed relative to the six-point scale employed. To enhance the presentation of the data, responses were coded into two broad categories—"Agree" and "Disagree"—by placing all positive answers into the "Agree" category and all negative answers into the "Disagree" category. Table 5 shows the student relative assessment of the rhetoric-based approach for learning writing as it addresses the second research question: "What are students' views related to the application of stylistic features to their practice texts?"

Table 5. Student Responses to Rhetoric Instruction in Writing Class (n=24)

Item	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	M	SD
I understand the purpose of learning rhetorical devices in the course.	96	4	4.67	0.73
Rhetoric devices are easy to understand.	84	16	4.25	1.35
Rhetorical devices are easy to apply in my writing.	65	35	4.21	0.79
Rhetorical devices help my writing skills.	92	8	5.67	0.91
Practicing these devices is interesting.	100	0	4.58	0.94
I like the rhetoric devices introduced in the class.	92	8	4.17	0.88
I will try to use rhetorical devices in future pieces of writing.	92	8	4.92	0.79
I'd like to learn more rhetorical devices.	96	4	4.88	1.05
I recommend learning these devices to future students.	96	4	4.67	0.89

Note. 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4=Somewhat Agree, 5=Agree, 6= Strongly Agree.

As seen from the data, what emerges from students' responses is a widespread approval of a writing pedagogy grounded in respect to both style and rhetoric. Particularly, there seems to be a strong belief expressed in the idea that learning rhetoric improves their writing skills ($M=5.67$). There was a slight drop-off in terms of students' interest in practicing these devices ($M=4.17$), but the responses were still favorable in nature. Also worth noting is the fact that 35% of the students considered it not easy to apply these rhetorical devices within their own writings. Predictably, the difficulty could be attributed to a lack of practice on the part of the learner. Another possible explanation is that students usually search for a simple formula to obtain writing success. Since rhetoric cannot tell students—in fact, even art cannot accomplish such a task—how best to marshal forces in any given situation, students tend to find it hard to relate the value of any rhetorical devices to their

writing. In this respect, the teaching of rhetoric seems to belong to an imprecise science, since teachers can only lay down the general principles useful in guiding students in strategically adapting a means to an end. Therefore, more solid scholarship of teaching (of writing) is required to unpack the instructional strategies of classical rhetoric for the learner. Further research on developing more explicit guiding principles and related pedagogies is clearly in order.

With respect to those rhetorical devices of greatest interest to the participants of this study, it was found that the device of *simile* (38%) and the device of *personification* (25%) generated the highest percentage of choices. Otherwise stated, for this particular group of students *simile* and *personification* seem to be the given artistic elements that make for significant communication. And, the percentage observed is consistent with a wide range of *simile* usage by students in transmitting their conception of newly-developed ideas. The most favored rhetorical devices used in the students' writing samples, and then reported by the students, are charted in Figure 1.

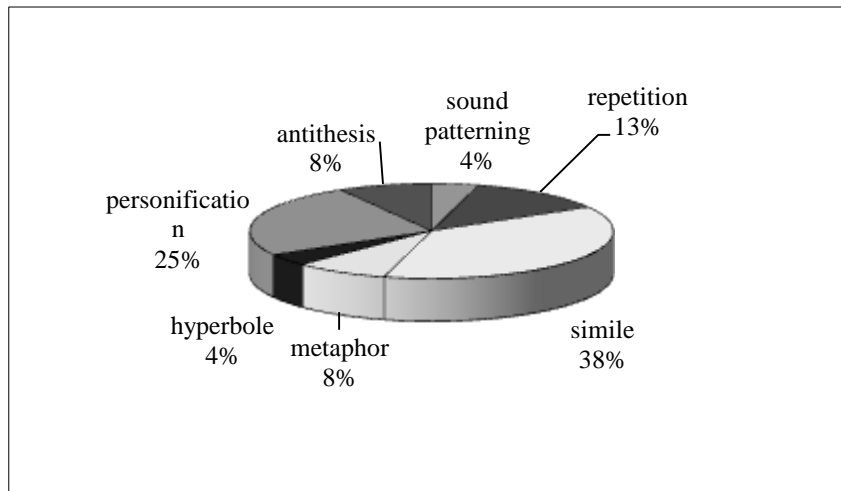


Figure 1. Favored Rhetorical Devices (n=24)

Conversely, when asked to indicate which rhetorical device is the most difficult for them to apply in the composing process, over one third of the students (37%) pointed to the device of *sound patterning*. This may be attributable to the students' overall assumption that *sound*

patterning, such as *alliteration* or *rhyme*, belongs to the language of poetry and therefore gives lip-service to the aspects of their prose. While this assumption may not be entirely true, any issues of sound tend to be overshadowed by meaning, content, and structure when it comes to the writing process. As for the rhetorical device of *antithesis*, almost 25% of students considered it as most difficult to apply in their own writing. It is believed that placing opposing words or ideas in a well-balanced or parallel construction pattern requires more cognitive effort on the part of the writer. For this reason, it is ranked on the difficulty chart as well.

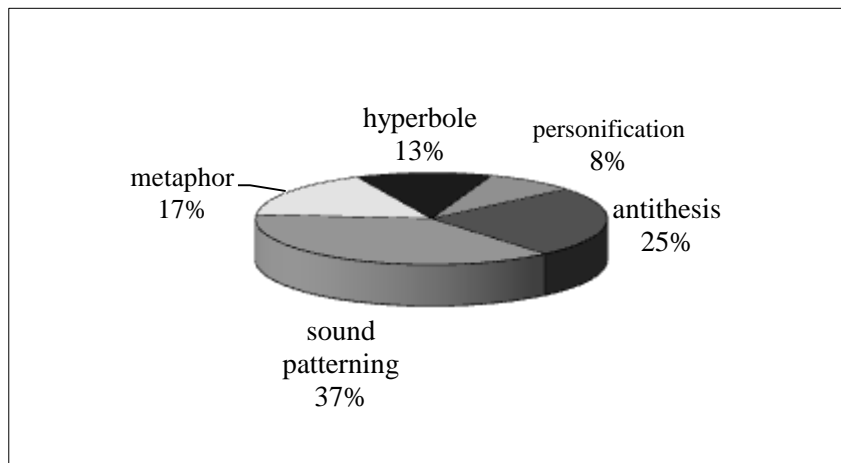


Figure 2. Most Difficult Devices to Apply in the Process of Writing (n=24)

PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of pedagogical implications follow from enacting such a rhetoric approach during classroom instruction. In this small scale action research, it is found that classical rhetoric can be useful as a catalyst for some changes, in the mindset of both the teacher and the student, to take place in composition studies.

From the Teacher's Perspective

Teachers working in a transmission-based, product-focused teaching

culture tend to lavish too much attention on the necessity of giving corrective feedback to the student writers (Cohen & Cavalcanti, 1990; Lee, 2004; 2005). Operating within this paradigm, teachers may actually mislead students into believing that obtainment of correct forms takes precedence over having original ideas and content; they also run the risk of being evaluated negatively, as shown in a study by Pennington, Brock and Yue (1996). Another potential problem, signaled by Hyland (2000) and Lee (2004), is the likelihood that a students' uncritical reliance on teachers in error correction and mechanical problems will take place. This is the very paradigm that teachers should resist; it is also one of the major challenges facing teachers conducting composition studies today. My central claim is that, once students grasp the basics of grammar and punctuation, it should be the goal of writing teachers to move students beyond such mechanics, to nudge learners to care about aesthetic communication and recognize that good writing, like art, is not just the rote following of mandated formats (Bartholomae, 2000; Richardson, 2008).

As a writing teacher, I have read too many uninspired writing prescribed by writing textbooks that standardize the steps of the writing process into a veritable formula. Standards, according to Rosenwasser and Stephen (2003), inhibit ways of thinking and seldom push students' thinking beyond the most obvious and accessible ideas related to their writing. As such, Irwin and Knodle (2008) suggest that teachers need to "loosen the reins and change the focus" of the current view of writing pedagogy (p. 41). Lovas' (2002) article, "All good writing develops at the edge of risk", provides a similar indication and a needed invitation for writing instructors to extend their efforts beyond the immediate improvement of the technical quality found in student writing. Based on this premise, this study attempts to offer a fresh approach to an old problem: how to get students to write something that is not dull or boring for them to write or, in turn, for us to read. The goal of this type of writing invokes Bruner's (1986) notion of a "narrative mode" of language that strives to be evocative, to be expressive, and to achieve verisimilitude. As opposed to the language of logico-scientific report, which is the dominant type of writing in the current climate of academic writing, the narrative mode of writing—language that is expressive and representational—merits far more attention in the composition classroom (Mlynarczyk, 2006). Within this newly formed paradigm, allowance should be given to the immediate and generalized manifestation of

imagination and creativity in student writing.

Of course, learning what the tools are and then using them well are two different things altogether. This is why it is so important for teachers to design appropriate exercises and assignments that will assist students in “acquiring the habits of reading and re-reading, and of writing, revisiting, and revising, which are essential to well-written prose” (Moser, 2008, p. 57). Under the rubric of pedagogical stylistics, teachers may find practical knowledge about how writers deploy stylistic resources and maximize the potential value of that knowledge in the teaching of rhetoric. I have touched upon only a fraction of the teaching methods open to suggestion, indicating a potentially fruitful future research direction. There are clear possibilities for further research in this area with different readings, different rhetorical figures (e.g. ellipsis, puns), and different types of writing modes (e.g. argumentation) in the offing. Furthermore, the case presented here illustrates a need for localizing writing pedagogies that are useful and do-able in the varied language contexts facing different composition teachers (Liu, 2008). Hyland’s (2002) sensitive comments in *Teaching and Researching Writing* reminded thus: “Effective writing teaching cannot be based solely on the implementation of abstract theoretical principles but needs to be grounded in local knowledge of what works with particular students” (p. 190). Of equal importance is the teacher’s need to be more resourceful in pedagogical diversity and teaching materials so that s/he may help students apply rhetorical devices with taste and good judgment. How to implement well-structured tasks to elevate the instructional value of classical rhetoric in compositional situations merits further in-depth research beyond this current study.

From the Student’s Perspective

In this study, students started their writing efforts from an identification of stylistic features, making inferences about the functions of stylistic features/patterns, and then moved towards the use of stylistic devices as a means of gaining a vigor and variety of expression in composition. Product data throws light on the potentials of rhetoric to facilitate students’ writing development, with students’ sentences appearing to be more varied, more mature, and more sophisticated as a result. Summarily, there are two contributory inclinations regarding students’ learning outcomes that were determined as a result of this study. The first, and probably the most obvious, is that rhetorical awareness

contributes to the production of stylistically improved sentences among student writers. This result lends support to Swale's (1990) contention that developing "rhetorical consciousness" in students should help promote the quality of writing (p. 213). Second, this newly developed rhetorical awareness may create some wonderfully creative ideas that would never have crossed the students' minds otherwise. In this regard, when students are struggling to get their chosen words and ideas on paper, rhetorical devices may serve well as writing prompts and prod less confident students into finding a more unexpected means of self-expression.

Turning attention toward the more global aspects related to methodological issues, I must acknowledge that the number of participants in the present study is relatively small, which precludes me from making any gross generalizations of the overall value of teaching rhetoric to students of composition. Though the treatment benefits the group at large, some applications of rhetorical devices occur at an almost superficial level. For a few disengaged students participating in the study, a part of their written assignments seemed forced and unreflective in nature, just a poor response to "homework". Therefore, it cannot be claimed that all students had a transformative experience that was initiated by such a small-scale rhetoric craft. For this reason, I do not wish to contend that the study of rhetoric is a panacea for all that is wrong with writing instructional methods; or, for that matter, that it will transform basic writers into better writers. As any experienced teacher would know, there is no single best method or best approach to be equally effective for every student (Hutchings, 2000).

Further research may also consider multiple drafting as an alternative to a pre- and post- design, as this will sensibly integrate a *process* orientation within the teaching routine. This integration means that there should be sufficient time for learners to draft and then redraft in order to both discover and express their meanings accurately, appropriately, and stylistically (Stewart & Cheung, 1989). This integration also means that peer-feedback activities can become a part of the writing process (Hedgcock & Lefkowitz, 1992), allowing for the explicit negotiation of meaning in a non-threatening atmosphere (Flower, 1994). Apart from this, teachers can document the maturation process of the student writer through the use of a portfolio kept by the student and thereby underscore the real value placed on the *process* of revision as part of the learning process itself. With students working on the self-revised essay over the

course of the semester, fresh ideas and perspectives are continually available to inform each revision. In this way, students can truly experience revision as a process of “trying out new ideas” and “demonstrating creativity” rather than, as is often the case, simply seeing it as some kind of rewriting (O’Brien, 2004, p. 13).

CONCLUSION

Writing teachers should never be content with accepting a piece of student writing that is simply free from mechanical errors. Instead, we could instruct students of composition as to the stylistic techniques available. Stylistics, then, becomes a particularly apt tool for students to integrate into their writing process because, despite our commitment to error feedback, most of us do want our students to embrace a more productive sense of rhetorical deployment. Certainly, composition students cannot expect to get the benefits of literary texts unless they make an active and well-reasoned effort to analyze, pull apart, and root out the hidden meanings or implications of what they read. The act of merely reading in a usual passive frame of mind is simply not enough. In all pertinent ways, engaging students with a rhetorical component in the composition class can help generate original ideas, activate creative writing processes, and help students to see writing from a perspective of taste and less as a thing of rule.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire about Practicing Rhetorical Devices in Writing

The following questions are asked regarding your opinions on using rhetorical devices. Please use a scale of 1~6 provided in order to *circle* the response that most closely resembles your own perspective:

<i>1= Strongly Disagree</i>	<i>2= Disagree</i>	<i>3= Somewhat Disagree</i>
<i>4= Somewhat Agree</i>	<i>5= Agree</i>	<i>6= Strongly Agree</i>

1. I understand the purpose of learning these devices in the course.
1 2 3 4 5 6
2. These rhetorical devices are easy to understand.
1 2 3 4 5 6
3. These rhetorical devices are easy to use in writing.
1 2 3 4 5 6
4. These rhetorical devices help my writing skills.
1 2 3 4 5 6
7. Overall, I like the rhetorical devices introduced in the class.
1 2 3 4 5 6
8. I am interested in practicing these rhetorical devices.
1 2 3 4 5 6
9. I will try to use these rhetorical devices in future pieces of writing.
1 2 3 4 5 6
10. I'd like to learn more rhetorical devices than those we have learned in class.
1 2 3 4 5 6
11. I recommend learning these rhetorical devices in the same course in the future quarters?
1 2 3 4 5 6

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12. What device do you like most? (*Tick one box*)

- sound patterning repetition simile personification
 metaphor antithesis hyperbole

13. What device is the most difficult to apply in your own writing?

(*Tick one box*)

- sound patterning repetition simile personification
 metaphor antithesis hyperbole

14. How many devices did you use in the second draft of you paper?

Example:

sound patterning 2 times

- sound patterning _____
 repetition _____
 simile _____
 personification _____
 metaphor _____
 antithesis _____
 hyperbole _____

15. What are these rhetorical devices you used?

(*Tick any box(es) that may apply*)

- sound patterning repetition simile personification
 metaphor antithesis hyperbole

16. Do you have any suggestions to make to improve this course?

(*open-ended question*) (e.g. In what ways do you think rhetoric is helpful/unhelpful for your writing?)