

RESPONSE TO TAKANO

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This study is a valiant attempt to separate questions of the structure and rhetorical organization of written discourse from other issues which influence readers' evaluations of writing, such as content, grammatical accuracy, and vocabulary choice. It is impossible to succeed completely in such an effort, of course. Organization is inextricably linked to the ideas expressed. In addition, a nonnative speaker's use of certain words may influence a reader's perception of the organization. For example, my understanding of Paragraph B was hampered by the author's use of the word "evidently." For me, this adds to the final sentence an air of disbelief which is incompatible with the content of the paragraph up to that point and leaves me unsure of the author's own opinions about sexual harassment. Nevertheless, I think the methodology of this study did insure that the readers' judgements were primarily made on the basis of rhetorical organization.

The preceding caveat aside, the paper documents nicely some of the problems which can result from the transfer of Japanese L-1 rhetorical strategies into English writing, and Mr. Takano's points about the pedagogical implications of his findings are well-taken and extremely important. As he points out, skill in a foreign language does not necessarily entail the ability to manipulate the rhetorical strategies usually associated with the language, and it is thus important to teach the latter along with other aspects of a language. Fortunately, an awareness of cultural differences in rhetorical structure is a relatively easy thing to teach, once teachers become aware of the differences and of the importance of teaching about them. Mastering the new rhetorical strategies is somewhat more difficult, but is certainly possible, and one can think of various exercises which would help students to do so.

Like most interesting and worthwhile papers, this one immediately suggests a number of related questions which might be explored. As a nonnative speaker and writer of Japanese, I would enjoy seeing an examination of the reverse case: how do native speakers/writers of Japanese evaluate Japanese texts written by Americans? The particular mismatch of rhetorical styles described in this paper will probably lead to quite different sorts of problems in this case. Having recently written my first article in Japanese--an article with no hint of *ki-shoo-ten-ketsu* organization about it--I was relieved to find that the Japanese readers in Shoji Takano's study did not necessarily rate more "English-like" writing lower in terms of organization. The question of how they evaluate it overall remains, however. Does such writing seem tediously overexplicated? Condescending? Unaesthetically bald?

Future research could also grapple with the issue of how genre fits into the picture. A drawback of most work on Japanese oral discourse is that observations based primarily on studies of conversation have been stated as general claims about the Japanese language or Japanese speech, rather than as claims about Japanese conversation. For written discourse as well, genre is sure to make a difference. The rhetorical strategies deemed appropriate for Japanese academic writing are not the same as those typical of the sort of expository prose described here. Business letters, personal letters, short stories... all are likely to be associated with different strategies albeit with some overarching cultural preferences which we may discover.