

## Introduction

When Kaplan (1966) published his seminal “Cultural Thought Patterns in Intercultural Communication”, his main concern was to come to grips with discourse problems produced by foreign students, particularly by Asian students, as he wrote, “Foreign students who have mastered syntactic structures have still demonstrated inability to compose adequate themes. ‘The material is all here, but it seems somehow out of focus,’ or ‘Lacks organization,’ or ‘Lacks cohesion’” (p. 3).

At that time, it was common to assume that EFL students could write well in English if they had memorized the basic grammar rules and the vocabulary needed. Kaplan pointed out, however, that the students would also need to master the English thought patterns which, constrained by the Aristotelian syllogism, are linear in contrast to the non-linear foreign patterns — the “doodles” (Severino 1993) — constrained by their own logics. Kaplan (1967, 1968, 1976, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1990) consistently reiterated these conceptions of patterns, helping thus set off the train of studies that is known as contrastive rhetoric.

Ever since then, Kaplan’s conception of the linear thought patterns against which the other dichotomous ones are delineated, has been and is still being taken for granted as a valid construct by scholars and teachers alike, particularly those whose research focuses on the Asian ESL/EFL students (Bloom 1981; Cai 1993; Coe and Hu 1989; Cole and Scribner 1974; Eggington 1987; Fagan and Cheong 1987; Hinds 1976, 1980, 1987, 1990; Malcom and Pan 1989; Matalene 1985; Ramsay 2000; Scollon 1991; Scollon and Scollon 1997; Shen 1989; Tsao 1983; Yong 1994). Even those who have doubts about Kaplan’s general hypothetic thinking have not seriously questioned the validity of the concept of the *linear thought pattern* as defined by Kaplan (Cahill 2003; Connor 1996; Kirkpatrick 1995, 1997; Liu, J. J. 2007; Liu, L. 2005; Mohan and Lo 1985; Taylor and Chen 1991; Wang 1992; Wong 1988; Yang and Cahill 2008). On the other hand, a textbook series published as recently as 2008 (Boardman and Frydenberg 2008) still presents those “doodles” to EFL students and teachers about composing “linear” paragraphs (p. xvi).

In retrospect, Kaplan treated thought patterns as isomorphic of rhetorical patterns, which reflects his understanding of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis (Ying 2000), a highly controversial proposition to begin with. As an EFL writing teacher, I have been struggling to help my students compose proper English discourse, hoping to give them more enlightening directions than practical corrections. But I have never been convinced that their inadequate performance can be explained away in these sweeping diagrams delineated by Kaplan; on the contrary, I think the conception of the

so-called *linear paragraph* as a thought pattern is logically absurd, referentially unsubstantial, and conceptually confusing and misleading, which keeps researchers from discerning and delineating the complex and subtle rhetorical features of English or any language, particularly when applied to analysis of full-compositions. And it always strikes me as odd that this seriously flawed notion of *linearity* should have been taken for granted for so long as a well-formed theoretical construct. In the following sections, I will present a critique of the construct of the so-called *linear* thought pattern as is invoked in publications on contrastive rhetoric, and my thoughts have evolved around three major questions:

1. Is the Aristotelian syllogism uniquely intrinsic to English and the other Indo-European languages?
2. Does the Aristotelian syllogism constrain English to the extent of necessarily entailing the linear rhetorical patterns as defined by Kaplan?
3. Is Kaplan's notion of linear rhetorical pattern well-formed in its own terms, irrespective of the Aristotelian syllogism?

And my thoughts have naturally led to a fourth question of concern:

4. What may possibly be put in place of Kaplan's conception of thought patterns to address the unacceptable foreign-sounding discourse patterns produced by ESL/EFL learners?

I perceive the fourth question as a new challenge to all of those who share my concern and, while I will suggest a few potentially useful lexical-semantic constructs to begin with, I hope that we together will eventually build up a research paradigm constituted in more solidly defined and empirically operational constructs for research in contrastive rhetoric.

## The Aristotelian Syllogism and Languages

Kaplan (1966, 1967, 1968, 1976, 1987, 1988, 1990) entertained the proposition that rhetorical patterns reflect the thought patterns which are constrained by the logic of the language involved. That reflects his heuristic interpretation of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Matsuda 2001; Ying 2000). Although he never defined what the other logics are, Kaplan consistently contended that the Aristotelian syllogism is the internal logic of the English language and, from that major premise, he proceeded to develop his conceptions of the linear versus the non-linear rhetorical patterns. Naturally the first question to be raised should be whether the Aristotelian syllogism is uniquely intrinsic to English and the other Indo-European languages.

In his 1966 article, Kaplan distinguished between “*logic per se...* the logician's sense of the