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Rearticulating Rhetorical Modes of Apologies in Academic Texts: EFL University Students' Voices

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Rearticulating Rhetorical Modes of Apologies in Academic Texts: EFL University Students' Voices

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Abstract

The objectives of this research are 1) to describe the frequencies of rhetorical modes of apologies in academic texts written by EFL university students, and 2) to find out problems that they face when constructing rhetorical modes of apologies through exposition, narration, description and argumentation genres of writing. Using documents and interviews, this qualitative research mainly deals with the purposive sampling technique, data reduction, and display concerning rhetorical modes of apologies and problems on constructing them. The research results show that the interpretation of students' rhetorical expressions is meta-pragmatic based on interactions, linguistic nuances, and rhetorical meanings. Rhetorical modes of apologies influence the language production, contextual expressions, and dissemination of messages to audiences or readers. The language used in the rhetorical modes of apologies is integrally connected to one's identity, personality, and situation. Therefore, several efforts are made to see how linguistic differences in a series of interactions lead to denials, avoidance of responsibility, reduction of offensiveness, corrective action, and mortification. The interview results outline that rhetorical modes of apologies function as an integral part of interests, utilities, and moral values instead of some problems the students faced while writing the academic texts.

Keywords: Rhetoric, Rhetoric modes of apologies, Academic texts, Rhetorical values

Introduction

Rhetorical modes of apologies shed light on the art of using a language in different texts namely exposition, narration, description, and argumentation (Bloom, 2007). In terms of the exposition, both rhetoric and ethnicity are two sides of a second language writing coin. On one side of the coin is the impact of Chinese rhetoric on the expository writing in English by the majority of Chinese Han group, and two ethnic minorities, Tibetan and Mongolian, but on the other side of the coin is a generic structure of rhetoric of the three groups' features of writing. The research's result indicates that the students' first language transfer, in this case, Chinese influences the way students produce rhetorical modes in the expository genre of writing though other determining factors are worth considering as well (Liu, 2008).

Another type of a rhetorical mode of apologies is narration, an excellent domain of cognitive tradition through which narrators seek to develop audiences' imagination or reflection concerning stories, dramas, or legends. For the sake of pedagogy, the narrators attempt to display traditional omniscience of stories so that the audiences are confined to see and know Horacio Oliviera (Valentine, 1981). The focal point is that the audiences not only see Horacio as the narrator but also the fictional facts in every rhetorical mode behind the storytelling world. Most of all, narrators stand behind the art of using rhetorical modes to attract the audiences' attention and encourage them to get involved in the narrative world.

In what follows, the narrators incorporate creativity, imagination, and moral concerns into the language ideologies of narratives. Christoffersen (2019) notes that critical narratives encourage audiences to have different responses to language ideologies in different stories, including language varieties, national identities, sociolinguistic ideologies, and standard language ideologies. The more narrators keep prioritizing an in-depth understanding of the storytelling, the better they put forward a dialogical context in which audiences get involved in rearticulating a detailed message of the narration based on their language use and personal experiences. Thus, language

ideologies in narratives contribute to language pedagogy, language awareness, sustainability, inclusiveness, values, and ideals of citizenship (Chávez, 2015).

As another rhetorical dimension, the description provides orientation, labeling, organization, and selection of historical objects. A detailed collection of descriptive reports may hold archival files in different volumes that depict transformative representations of leadership and gender justice. Taken together, these files show an archival description that functions not only for bureaucratic and access purposes but also for epistemological ones. In this sense, the power to describe is the power to make and remake records and to determine how they will be used and remade in the future (Rawson, 2018).

The last rhetorical mode within academic texts is argumentation that expands logical arguments and facts. Argumentation is at the heart of researchers who ask scientific questions of why they conduct research (epistemology), how they conduct research (method), and the way they communicate their research results (the style and mode of address). This fundamental principle represents the most prominent new area of research (Kjeldsen, 2018) in the digital era. A logical mode is an imperative norm of argumentation that fosters academicians to advance both dialectical and rhetorical dimensions (Novak, 2020). A wide range of academic texts, therefore, seeks to reveal diverse discourses and rhetorical modes that transform the clarity of messages, textual productivity, and resistance to specific meanings (Polezzi, 2014).

Rhetorical modes of apologies cover basic elements that promote the persuasive use of language expressions and language styles in compositions as they are of interest in responding to certain statements or utterances. A greater number of persuasive arguments may produce more favorable cognitive responses than those exposed to fewer persuasive ones (Benoit & Smythe, 2003). The language expressions in academic texts or conversations confer the rhetorical modes of apologies to indicate the rhetorical implications of vernacular discourses or utterances. Within such emerging linguistic frameworks, this research attempts to answer two questions such as the most frequently used rhetorical mode of apologies in academic texts written by EFL university students, and the problems they face when constructing the rhetorical modes of apologies through exposition, narration, description and argumentation genres of writing.

Rhetoric and Rhetorical Modes of Apologies

Crystal (1995) examines that rhetoric is a study of effective or persuasive speaking and writing, especially as practiced in the public oratory. Rhetoric is often restricted to argumentative or persuasive purposes (Kachru & Nelson, 2006). Bloom (2007) defines rhetoric as the art of using a language in different texts namely exposition, narration, description, and argumentation genres of writing. Genre is a recognizably structured and conventionalized text type, e.g., a scientific report of an experiment, or an abstract at the beginning of an academic paper or the blurb (a short description) on a book cover (Kachru & Nelson, 2006).

DiSanza & Legge (2016) coin a term called a rhetorical genre that contributes to human communications and motivations bound up with specific tactics for accomplishing goals. The aim of rhetoric in academic texts is to help EFL university students to write simple, direct, clear, unambiguous facts and procedures, along with readable, logical arguments and interpretations. Stein & Ostrowsky (2016) coin another term called a plethora of excuses or commonly known as apologia rhetoric – a typology of rhetoric that puts more emphasis on a general strategy or tactic that highlights failures of events resulting from a lack of information, volition, or ability. Another type of apology rhetoric is called defeasibility, a claim that indicates a lack of knowledge to understand necessary complete requirements. For example, when shifting blame, a person blames other people rather than an external and often intangible circumstance. Bolstering is a strategy to counter the harm done to a person's image by emphasizing other positive qualities. For example, misbehavior in an utterance the interlocutor implies.

Bloom (2007) examines that rhetoric is the art of using language effectively to serve the writer's purpose, originally for speaking and speech-making. The rhetoric now encompasses a composition and its expanded definition including a host of a dynamic relationship between the writers (speakers), texts (messages), and readers (or hearers). For this reason, rhetoric is mainly related to different modes of texts such as exposition, narration, description, and argumentation. The dominant rhetoric of a person's linguistic selections and rhetoric of reasons has become the instrument for an expressive affirmation of faith in the value of rationality (Rieder, 1990).

Benoit & Smythe (2003) argue that the audience or reader is a potential active part of the process of persuasion in rhetorical discourse. The audience is important to generate the invention or message production over the message reception and interpretation. A basis for developing a rhetorical theory has vast practical implications.

Therefore, rhetoric is composed of two quite distinct processes, namely a message production by rhetoricians and a message reception by audiences, each of which requires and deserves explicit scholarly attention.

Three Dimensions of Academic Texts in Rhetoric

Rhetoric mainly connects with national identity construction (Bruner, 2011) through texts to generate arguments (Ramage & Bean, 2016). What to consider in the 21st century is the identity of a nation that can fully be portrayed in academic texts. More specifically, each academic text containing rhetorical modes across cultures maintains the professional development of writers' cultural competence involving cultural values, identities, reflections, and diversities. The production of texts in society contributes to the content area of topics, standards of evidence, and the social structure of writer-audience relations (Shaw & Vassileva, 2009). In classic rhetoric, for example, empirical phenomena manifest themselves in either public speeches, conversations, or argumentative academic texts (Nemesi, 2013). As rhetoric has become the oldest tradition in linguistic pragmatics (Liu & Zhu, 2011), it is imperative for writers to re-configuring their interdisciplinary perceptions on the cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions of academic texts.

In line with rhetorical expressions in a language, (Werry, 2005) points out that linguistic theories outline two cognitive theories of language in different academic texts, namely Chomskyan linguistics, and cognitive linguistics. The former highlights the exclusion of linguistic inquiry through a set of rhetorical moves that constructs a linguistic discourse as a transparent window, and the latter seeks to treat a linguistic discourse as a transparent window or neutral meta-language. Mircicã (2014) emphasizes that the rhetorical evolution of sciences in societies promotes social-human interactions through expressions, thoughts, attitudes, emotional states, and intentions. The social focus of academic texts holds a principle that cognitive inquiry, as a direct impact of the textual production, is a matter of academic disciplines, original thinking, and textual patterns in a discourse community (Beck, 2009). This altruism has emerged in "a set of new methods for intercultural rhetoric" (Connor, 2004) that is context-sensitive in socio-cultural relations (Abasi, 2012), and social interactions. In short, intercultural rhetoric continues to exist in specific contexts of cultural practices (Waller, 1987) beyond textual analysis traditions.

In a political arena, prospective leaders deliver messages in public speeches, and campaigns to generate "an expert systems-based exploration of the rhetoric dynamics" (Ficcadenti, Cerqueti, & Ausloos, 2019) that reaches out general public's interests, and decision-making policies. The transformative power of rhetorical modes determines the socio-political accessibility of their speeches and campaigns toward personal, relational, institutional, and global impacts of democratic contestation. From a pedagogical perspective, the dynamics of rhetorical modes also share public major concerns involving engagement, sustainability education, and collective commitment of negotiating challenges (Papadopoulos & Hegarty, 2017).

Rhetorical modes deal with significant texts in certain cultures in which literary texts are included in the education system. In a discipline of literature, different academic texts are literary monuments that should be preserved for the sake of cognitively-based rhetoric, and reader-centered criticism emerging in all the sciences (Waller, 1987), most dominantly in what Abasi (2012); Belcher (2014); Ene, McIntosh, & Connor (2019) call the "intercultural rhetoric (IR)" as a pathway for both productive, dynamic and problematic ways of constructing or de-constructing, negotiating and accommodating theories in the context of multiculturalism, and multi-literacies to achieve language learning goals across global cultures.

Method

This qualitative research seeks to answer two questions on the most frequently used rhetorical modes of apologies in academic texts written by EFL students at the English Education Department of Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia, and the problems that they encountered when constructing rhetorical modes of apologies through exposition, narration, description and argumentation genres of writing.

Research Instrument

The research instruments include documentation and interview. To get the documents, researchers took academic texts such as exposition, narration, description, and argumentation from some classes followed by interviewing ten students (as the data sample) to elicit information on problems of constructing academic texts on rhetorical modes of apologies.

Data Collection Technique

The researchers collected the data of written or printed documents on rhetorical modes of apologies from the classes and conducted interviews after students wrote different academic texts on rhetorical modes of apologies in the form of exposition, narration, description, and argumentation.

Data Analysis Technique

The researchers used analytical components to analyze the data, namely the data reduction and display. Data reduction is a process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting and transforming the 'raw' data into a systematic analysis or a coding system, aiming to map out how the research questions can be answered, or how the research problems are solved. Data display is the second major flow of an analysis activity. A 'display' is an organized assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action-taking (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña 2014).

Results and Discussion

Rhetorical modes of apologies offer a basic understanding of how apologies are addressed, aiming to get insights into the value of rhetorical strategies and theories in which the power of rhetoric is integral to persuasive acts (Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon, & Usher, 2004). This rhetorical discourse illustrates contemporary sources of information on the craft of apologies, and the participants are informative to distinguish them in 36 data within 12 academic texts (as the data samples).

The research results show that the first text contains two kinds of rhetorical modes of apologies, namely corrective action in the narrative genre (*Sorry, I'm not accusing you*) and reducing offensiveness in the form of compensation (*Because I have damaged your motorcycle lock, I will lend my bike to you until your bike has been repaired*) to indicate the description genre, as stated in the following sample.

Sample 1: Corrective action and reducing offensiveness (compensation)

*The next day he sent a message to me via WhatsApp to ask again his binder book. I think he's a bit suspicious of me because he's asked twice and finally says, "**Sorry I'm not accusing you.**" "But I tried to answer it clearly that I did not see the book and I found it, I would immediately return the book to her. Two weeks ago my friend damaged my motorcycle lock, so I could not use my motorcycle. After that he said, "**Because I have damaged your motorcycle lock, I will lend my bike to you until your bike has been repaired.**"*

The second academic text has two rhetorical modes of apologies (argumentation genre) that explore the category of evading responsibility in the form good intentions (*It is fully my fault that I am less disciplinary in managing time*) and a correction action (*Sorry for my mistake, and I admit that's my selfish behavior*). The third academic text has three rhetorical modes (a descriptive genre) such as a simple denial (*No one can blame me; Don't say I am sorry if I don't mean it*), and corrective action (*I was wrong at that time*), and reducing offensiveness in the form of differentiation (*Sometimes, sorry isn't enough*).

Sample 2: Evading responsibility (good intentions), corrective action, and reducing offensiveness (differentiation)

*If I am accused of stealing something that I literally didn't do, I will be disappointed and angry. Because it is not fair to judge someone without knowing that fact. I will prove and explain that I am right, so **no one can blame me** and they can find a problem solver wisely. I will try to discuss it calmly and make sure that everything is understood.*
*My responses to reduce someone's anger because of my bad action are that firstly I will ask for an apology that I will admit that **I was wrong at that time.** Secondly I will try to identify the problem that triggered his/her anger.*
*When I was doing something embarrassing, I would apologize politely, "**Don't say I am sorry if I don't mean it**". It has to be from the heart and the person being apologized says, "**Sometimes, sorry isn't enough.**"*

Reactions and responses to rhetorical modes of apologies can be viewed and analyzed in their own right as primary texts, and they may lead to instances of the reception of rhetoric that offer natural responses to rhetoric and allow

the researchers to establish connections between the rhetorical situation, the rhetorical utterance and the responses to evoke. The academic texts on rhetorical modes of apologies provide the researchers with access to the more immediate real-life reactions dealing with apologies in different contexts. The research leading to these texts, on the other hand, makes it possible to understand the reception whereas other texts are not available. The university student-generated texts also make it possible to choose the primary texts, to select the material that is most suited for the research questions, and to control the types to study.

Table 1. The Frequency of Rhetorical Modes of Apologies in Academic Texts

No	Rhetorical Aspects	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Rhetorical modes of apologies
1	Denial			
	Simple denial	3	8.3%	Description
	Shift blame	3	8.3%	Exposition
2	Evading responsibility			
	Provocation	0	0%	
	Defeasibility	0	0%	
	Accident	4	11.1%	Narration
	Good intentions	5	13.8%	Argumentation
3	Reducing offensiveness			
	Bolstering	1	2.7%	Exposition
	Minimization	0	0%	
	Differentiation	0	0%	
	Transcendence	0	0%	
	Attack accuser	0	0%	
	Compensation	5	13.8%	Description
4	Corrective action	6	16.6%	Narration
5	Mortification	8	22.2%	Description
	Total	36	100%	

Table 1 shows that mortification (as one of the rhetorical aspects of apologies) appears 8 times (22.2%) so that it is categorized as the most frequently used rhetorical mode of apologies within descriptive texts. The least frequently used rhetorical aspect is bolstering because it only appears once, but 6 rhetorical aspects of apologies have not appeared in the academic texts. This result indicates that such rhetorical aspects seek to describe rhetorical behaviors and responses in actual communication situations.

Promoting Rhetorical Modes of Apologies

Interview results indicate that EFL university students find it hard to determine the topic to write, and they argue that rhetorical modes of apologies have complicated structures. Besides, the aim of expressing rhetorical modes of apologies is to show weaknesses so that they fear of losing face when acknowledging their faults and mistakes.

Sample 1:

For me it's difficult to choose the topic. How can I write my ideas if I get blank? Even I don't have experiences about making fatal mistakes. I've got the idea from the prompts, but it's not easy to express them. Perhaps apologies should be part of my life. Every time, everywhere I can learn to apologize.

Regardless of the difficulty in choosing the essay topic, rhetorical modes of apologies epitomize the existence of an ingrained tradition to apologize at the right time beyond rhetorical structures (Abasi, 2012) in a classroom context. According to Ellwanger (2012), public apologies are an integral part of rhetorical modes that undergoes much dysfunction nowadays because apologetic statements aim to reach a reconciliatory state of forgiveness. On the contrary, public apologies are likely to inflict either a ritualistic public punishment or a humiliation through public statements or speeches to set ethical standards of communication. Rhetorical modes of apologies function as a means of punishing or humiliating others through an apologetic discourse, and its further implications.

Sample 2:

I'm not good at writing an essay about apologizing others. You know the structure [of the essay] is complicated. I must have more knowledge to understand it. I only know about apologies from some expressions. For example, I'm sorry, I do apologize. What if I don't have no more ideas to express apologies?

Several factors are worth considering when dealing with the EFL student in Sample 2. The sheer lack of knowledge on constructing rhetorical modes of apologies offers the lecturer to supply more resources and rethink how a student understands a series of structures in the essay. From this point of view, the design of learning activities should lead students to the development of new knowledge, skills and practical experiences while producing more familiar forms of rhetorical apologies from different countries in the world.

An apologetic discourse in Rwanda, for example, plays a pivotal role to reconcile communities torn apart by both violence and genocide. As a community-based model of reconciliation, public apologies result from the deep-rooted hatred because of disputes, genocide-related violence, property losses and destructions involving the course of justice, and the court system to re-establish trials. The criminals committing such crime or violence will receive two punishments namely community services and apologies as part of repentance with an honest confession (Towner, 2010).

Sample 3:

I can perform well today ... after writing and revising parts of my essay. I learn to express my apologies in a real situation. I must not use difficult words. I just create dialogues or interactions based on the knowledge I know about rhetorical apologies. I like to use them every day. If not, I just feel like a loser.

Through such lines of thoughts in Sample 3, the nature of rhetorical modes of apologies in academic texts leads to "rhetorical performances" (Rieder, 1990; Benoit & Smythe, 2003; Stein, & Ostrowsky, 2016) for three reasons. First, the language used in each rhetorical mode is more likely elastic because certain genres of writing expand concepts that determine the power of rationality. Second, the specific and practical use of language rests on authentic utterances, speeches, or conversations. Third, the interpretation of words is meta-pragmatic in that participants are allowed to construe what is going on in an interaction, and it focuses on linguistic nuances and their meanings. Rhetorical modes affect language production, its contextual use, and message dissemination to the audience or readers considerably.

The typology of such rhetorical modes of apologies can take a specific form namely a plethora of excuses commonly known as "apologia rhetoric" (Stein, & Ostrowsky, 2016) within a variety of dialects, accents, slang, or even a different academic language use. Since language is integrally tied to a person's identity and personality, it requires efforts to see how linguistic differences in a series of interactions can cause a denial (a simple denial and shift blame), the evasion of responsibility (provocative, defeasibility, accident, and good intention), and offensiveness reduction (bolstering, minimization, differentiation, transcendence, attack accuser, compensation, corrective action and mortification) (Stein, & Ostrowsky, 2016).

Rhetorical modes of apologies help EFL students delineate simple, direct, clear, unambiguous, logical, and readable arguments or interpretations. Rhetoric is necessarily new to rhetorical studies – the idea that epistemic language configures the reality, and rearticulates the "authentic moral sentiment" (Rieder, 1990) and objectivity. The use of rhetorical language in academic texts not only serves as a covering motive for the interest and utility but moral values (Rieder, 1990) as well. In one way or another, academic texts have particular values of rhetoric, in general, and rhetorical modes of apologies, in particular.

Conclusion and Suggestions

This research leads to both academic contributions in terms of rhetorical modes of apologies, and introductions to different forms of the rhetorical audience and reception research, functioning as examples of selected qualitative and reception-oriented approaches. The remaining part of this research provides brief accounts of the frequency concerning rhetorical modes of apologies by suggesting how they are carried out, and how they relate to rhetoric in daily academic life. Thus, these rhetorical modes of apologies take into consideration the ideas, moral values as well as the constraints of communication forms in the academic texts.

The most frequently used rhetorical aspect is mortification that appears 8 times (22.2%) within descriptive texts. In contrast, the least frequently used rhetorical aspect is bolstering that merely appears once within an expository text, indicating a minimum use of the rhetorical mode of apologies. The other 6 rhetorical aspects have not been

used at all in the academic texts resulting from the absence of rhetorical behaviors, attitudes, or responses in the verbal communication situations.

As an under-researched topic, rhetorical modes of apologies cover more areas of concerns, but future researchers can focus on expressions used in a wide variety of texts, e.g., utterances used by the main characters in a novel or a collection of short stories, academic texts produced by students of different background knowledge because the text enrichment is part of rhetorical modes of apologies, and utterances used by the main characters in a movie in which rhetorical modes of apologies are based on original expressions.

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J.C. Setyo Karjono is an assistant professor of English Education at the English Education Department, Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He graduated from the English Education Department of Graduate Education Program, Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa, Yogyakarta, Indonesia. He is interested in discourse analysis, linguistics, and academic writing.
