A Preliminary Contrastive Study of English and Supyire: Expository Texts Using RST Analysis

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ABSTRACT
In this study, an RST analysis was performed on two texts: “The Cause of Discord Between Parents and Children” (Carlson 1994) and “Rebellious teenagers – whose fault is it?” (Schreifels 2009). These texts are written in Supyire (a Niger-Congo language) and English, respectively. This preliminary analysis is used to compare rhetorical strategies in the two texts at both the higher (superstructure) level and lower (microstructure) level. Similar, more thorough studies could be applied to language learning and translation.

I. Introduction
In this study, an RST analysis was performed on two texts: “The Cause of Discord Between Parents and Children” (Carlson 1994) and “Rebellious teenagers – whose fault is it?” (Schreifels 2009). These texts are written in Supyire and English, respectively (see Appendixes A and B). This analysis is used to compare rhetorical strategies in the two texts at both the higher (superstructure) level and lower (microstructure) level. I found that the Supyire text uses Concession and Elaboration relations at the higher level and Restatement and Cause at the lower level, resulting in a text that presents multiple viewpoints using mostly inductive reasoning. Meanwhile, the English text uses Background and Evidence relations at the higher level and Evidence relations at the lower level resulting in a text that advances a single viewpoint supported with evidentiary information in a deductive style.

While this is a preliminary study, its results will serve as a starting point for further research into Supyire expository texts. It will generate hypotheses that can be used to design a fuller study on the same topic using more texts. Furthermore, the information produced about rhetorical strategies in Supyire expository texts could aid Supyire writers both in their L1 and in any L2 they may use. Finally, this information, in conjunction with discourse analyses of Biblical expository texts, may help Supyire speakers to better understand the different rhetorical strategies used in the Supyire Bible translation.

II. Background

Supyire
The major work on the Supyire language is Carlson’s 1994 grammar. Interspersed throughout this grammar is information about how various syntactic constructions are used on the discourse level. Carlson has written several other articles on various aspects of the language, the main article on any type of discourse analysis being “Narrative connectives in Supyire” (1988). From my research, it seems that no higher-level analysis of discourse, such as RST or a Longacre paragraph analysis, has been done in Supyire.

Contrastive Rhetoric
The study of contrastive rhetoric began in the 1960’s with initial work by Kaplan (1966). Since then, many researchers have studied cultural differences in writing styles often with the goal of helping ESL

1 Abbreviations:
D  Discord text
EFL English as a foreign language
ESL English as a second language
L1  first language
L2  second language
MN Multinuclear
NVC Nonvolitional cause
RST Rhetorical Structure Theory
RT Rebellious Teenagers text
VC Volitional cause
students with composition. Recently, Rhetorical Structure Theory has been used to highlight differences between rhetorical styles in argumentative essays (Godó 2008). This kind of analysis has never been done in Supyire, so this study will contribute to the field of contrastive rhetoric and perhaps help Supyire writers develop their own writing styles.

There are a few works within the field of contrastive analysis that have applied this kind of research to fields outside of ESL instruction. Connor (1996) gives a good overview of the field and devotes a chapter to similarities with translation studies (117-23) and another chapter to different genres of texts (126-50). Hatim (1997) applies it to the field of translation using Arabic and English as examples throughout the text. A quick overview of this work reveals that contrastive linguistics is most helpful at lower linguistic levels of translation. So it may help reveal where discourse level structure necessitates a shift in verb tense or use of particles in a translation. However, Hatim does not apply higher level differences in translation. So while he discusses the differences in organization of Arabic and English expository texts (Hatim 1997:35-46), he does not discuss how this might be used to improve a translation.

Godó 2008

My study is based largely on a study by Godó in 2008; thus, it will be helpful to give a short overview of his work. He performed a contrastive rhetoric study of (American) English and Hungarian argumentative essays. In the study, Godó had 30 first year college students of each nationality write an essay in their native language in response to the question, “Do you think genetic engineering will benefit people in the future?” Then Godó did an RST analysis of each essay using modified relation definitions. The questions this study answered are:

Does Rhetorical Structure Analysis indicate any differences between the two essay groups in terms of:

1. superstructure\(^2\) organization?

2. the function and positioning of superstructure nuclear claims (thesis statements)?

3. reasoning demonstrated in macrostructure and microstructure organization?

Based on this study, Godó concludes that American students tend to use deductive reasoning (place thesis statements at the beginning of the essay) and produce proof-oriented texts with Justification relations at the superstructure level (see Figure 1). Hungarian students, on the other hand, show a wider variety in their text organization, but tend to use inductive reasoning (place thesis at the end of the essay) and incorporate alternative views in Concession relations at both the superstructure and macro/microstructure level (see Figure 2).

The two groups show several differences in superstructure organization. First, Hungarians students tend to use more vague thesis statements (superstructure nucleus), as seen below:

\([(22) \text{Unfortunately, I cannot take a clear position in connection with this topic as my heart and head prompt different things. (23) but I do trust that experts will serve the interests of the human kind with these scientific experiments.}]\)

Second, Hungarian introductions tend to use Situation relations while American introductions tend to use Background relations. Finally, Hungarians often include a Concession relation with an alternate viewpoint at the superstructure level in their main argumentation/discussion section, while Americans tend to use Justification relations in this section.

The two groups also show several differences in organization at the macro/microstructure level. Americans tend to use macrostructure segments that advance a single argument, as seen below:

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\(^2\) Superstructure refers to the central relational proposition in the essays arising between the thesis and the rest of the text, as well as among the main argumentative components realized by paragraph or paragraph blocks; macrostructure or paragraph structure refers to relational propositions evolving within the components of superstructure units, that is, between paragraph-level discourse blocks developing a single theme unified by a recognizable central idea or signaled by a topic sentence; microstructure relations refers to relational propositions arising between units within the macrostructure components, practically meaning sentence and t-unit level relations
In addition to medicine, genetic engineering could also be used in plant biology. Imagine growing huge foods, big enough to feed entire families. There is no telling how much good that could do to help stop world hunger for good. The possibilities are endless.

Hungarians tend to use several different strategies. They may use a lower-level Joint relation to advance several arguments as Justification for a single topic sentence, as seen below:

The discovery of DNA chains and genes has indeed revolutionized medicine. The origin of several illnesses can be explored with the help of genes, which brings us one step closer to finding the cures as well. The transmission of a given disease from generation to generation can also be prevented by genetic manipulation. Besides, it is also a positive point that it is possible to check who is predisposed to a given illness and so the problem can be cured in time, perhaps even before birth. Another great advantage of genetic testing is that parents get to know even before the birth of the child if their offspring will be healthy and they can decide whether or not they want to take the risk.

Hungarians also frequently incorporate alternate views at this lower level with Concession relations, as seen in the following and in Figure 3:

Personally, I'm not sure if I would want to alter the appearance of my child but the idea of ridding a terminal disease sounds inviting. Also, if finding a disease or the gene for a disease that can be stalled or prevented on some sort of way may help. Whether or not I choose to do this or not, the possibility is still out there.
Godó concludes that these differences in rhetorical styles are a result of different intellectual traditions in Hungary and America. Hungary follows Classical Humanism, “where the focus is on preserving and passing on the intellectual heritage of the community without re-interpreting or re-evaluating it.” (Godó, 98). Students are expected to demonstrate a broad knowledge of relevant viewpoints. Americans follow a Progressivist tradition which values individual experience and interpretation and embraces change. Therefore, American students are expected to re-evaluate and re-interpret knowledge systems while developing a clear personal viewpoint.

III. Data and Methodology

**The texts**

The Supyire text is “The Cause of Discord Between Children and Parents” (Carlson 1994). It is an oral text, but no further information is given about the speaker or the context in which the text was elicited. From the content, it seems likely that the speaker is an older Supyire man.

The English text is “Rebellious teenagers – whose fault is it?” by Jessica Schreifels. This is an editorial that appears in The Signpost, Weber State University’s student newspaper.

Since an RST analysis had already been done on the Discord text, it was necessary to find an English text that was similar enough for comparison. The Rebellious Teenagers text was on approximately the same topic and roughly the same length as the Discord text, so it was chosen for the English text.

**Methodology**

This paper will use a similar procedure to Godó’s 2008 study to examine the differences between one English expository text and one Supyire expository text. In this analysis, I use the definitions of relations found on the RST webpage (Mann and Taboada 2009). After analyzing each text using RST, I will answer the following questions:

1. Does Rhetorical Structure Analysis indicate any differences between the two texts in terms of:
   1. superstructure organization?
   2. the function and positioning of superstructure nuclear claims (thesis statements)?
   3. reasoning demonstrated in microstructure organization?

Similar to Godó’s definitions of these terms, I consider **superstructure** organization to include paragraph-level organization, the “big chunks” of the text. For example, American students are taught the five paragraph essay, whose superstructure would consist of an introduction paragraph, three body paragraphs, and a conclusion paragraph. **Microstructure** is the organization of clauses and sentences within a paragraph. For example, American students are typically taught to begin a paragraph with a topic sentence, include 3-5 sentences that support it, and one sentence that concludes the paragraph and points to the next one.

On both the superstructure and the microstructure levels, I examine the types of relations used and the order in which they are used. One of the major goals is to identify if inductive or deductive reasoning is used. In **inductive** reasoning a claim follows the argumentation, while in **deductive** reasoning the claim comes first with the argumentation placed afterwards. So in an Evidence relation, if the nucleus precedes the satellite, deductive reasoning is being used.

On the microstructure level, I calculated the number of times each relation was used in each text and what percentage of the total number of relations this represented. So in the Rebellious Teenagers text, there were 32 total relations at the microstructure level, and three of these were Antithesis relations, which represents 7.7% of the total relations. While statistics alone cannot give a complete picture, they do help to see the most common strategies used in each text.

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3 Subsequently referred to as the Discord text
4 Subsequently referred to as the Rebellious Teenagers text
Limitations
The sample size is very small. It would be preferable to analyze a higher number of texts (at least twenty in each language) to see which aspects of the text are culture/language specific and which are merely specific to a single text or author. It would be better two compare two written texts instead of comparing a written text to an oral text.

It would be better to elicit texts from people of similar backgrounds in a similar setting, for example college freshman given the same writing prompt in their L1. While this was easy for Godó to accomplish with Hungarian speakers, it may be difficult to find a sufficient number of these types of Supyire speakers which is a smaller minority language (350,000 speakers) with a literacy rate of less than 1% in L1 and only 20% in an L2 (Lewis 2009), likely French.

IV. Results
The RST analyses of the Discord and Rebellious Teenagers texts did show significant differences. The superstructure of the two texts was quite different, as was microstructure organization (see Figure 4).

Superstructure
For both texts, the highest relation was Solutionhood. In the English text, this is the relation between the title and the article itself. In the Supyire text, it is the relation between the first two sentences and the rest of the text. In both, the problem is first presented as a question. Neither text uses a Solutionhood relation anywhere else in the text. It seems that this relation would be characteristic of the superstructure of many expository texts since Problem and Solution are two of the schema elements Longacre (1992) identifies for this text type.

Interestingly, both of these texts place the initial thesis in the second third of the text. According to Godó (2008:75-6), this is the rarest type of thesis-placement for both Hungarians and Americans. When this type of thesis-placement is used, the thesis usually follows a lengthy Background or Situation section that "serves to justify the thesis, which is further supported or evaluated in the second half".

Godó also notes that American students favored Background relations for the "scene-setting" component of the superstructure in order to highlight "the different aspects or viewpoints related to the problem, and which often contains the writer's evaluative judgement." (2008:82). This is in fact what Schreifels does in the Rebellious Teenagers text: in using the example of Lynn Spears and her two "rebellious" daughters, Britney and Jamie Lynn, she gives the popular view that the mother is to blame while implying her evaluation that this is not the correct solution. Following this, the thesis is given, that children should be blamed for their own rebellious behavior. This is supported by three segments in an evidence relation with the thesis. The last segment, clauses 37-40, serves as the conclusion evaluating the argument. Below is an RST diagram of the Rebellious Teenagers superstructure:

Figure 4: Superstructure of English Rebellious Teenagers Text.

The organization of the Supyire text is slightly more complex (see Figure 5). The thesis is stated both in sentences 11b-12 and 30b-30a. Both times, it is presented in a concession relation with a partial solution to the problem. The other main segment of the superstructure is sentences 13-22, which elaborates on the thesis statement by explaining how counseling used to be done and why it worked. Below is an RST diagram showing the superstructure of the Discord text.
From these two superstructures, we see that the American text mainly presents evidence for the author’s own viewpoint, while devoting a small amount of space to the opposing viewpoint in the introduction. Meanwhile, the Supyire text devotes a large amount of space to alternate viewpoints in concession relations to the speaker’s viewpoint while devoting only a small amount of space to an elaboration on his own solution as his main argumentation. It may be then, that Supyire speakers, like Hungarian speakers, value demonstrating a broad knowledge of relevant viewpoints while Americans value presenting a clear personal viewpoint that re-interprets or re-evaluates knowledge systems (Godó 2008).

From the superstructure organization alone, we see that the American author uses deductive reasoning, but it is difficult to determine the type of reasoning used by the Supyire speaker. The initial thesis statement is followed by an elaboration section that seems to be the main argumentation for the thesis which could indicate deductive reasoning. However, the two partial solutions are each placed before the thesis statement, and if these are taken as argumentation, it would indicate inductive reasoning.

**Microstructure**

The two texts are very different on the microstructure level. Table 1 shows the number and percentage of each relation used at the microstructure in each text. For these calculations, I consider only the relations that were not in the superstructure discussed above. I further grouped the relations according to similar functions. These groupings may not be perfect, but they do provide some further insight.

From this table, it is clear that restatement (both the actual restatement relation itself and the restatement group of relations) is an important feature of the Supyire text. It seems to be one of the main ways that important ideas are emphasized. On the other hand, the English text uses a lot of evidence relations. In addition to the evidence relations shown in the table above, clauses 4-6 and 32-35 are sets of Joint relations that each form an Evidence relation, and Evidence was used for the argumentation in the superstructure. The English text also uses a lot more “Setting” type relations in the microstructure.
Table 1: Statistics for Microstructure Relations.

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<th>Relation Groups</th>
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<th>Percent D</th>
<th>Percent RT</th>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
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By looking at the relations each text uses in the “Logical Argumentation” section, we also notice differences in rhetorical styles. The English text favors Evidence, as discussed above, while the Supyire text favors Cause relations (see Figure 6). The English text makes a statement and then provides examples that serve as evidence proving their point. This can be seen below:

![Figure 6: Example of English Evidence Relation.](image)

The Supyire text uses true-to-life\(^5\) examples that hearers will recognize as the cause of discord or obedience, therefore proving the speaker’s point. An example of this is shown in Figure 7.

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\[^5\] By true-to-life, I mean that they may not be an example of a specific event that actually happened, but they are common situations any one would recognize as realistic.
These differences in argumentation styles seemed to be based on a preference for deductive reasoning by the English writer and inductive reasoning by the Supyire speaker. All of the English uses of Evidence and Cause relations place the nucleus (thesis to be proved or result) before the satellite (evidence or cause), while the Supyire usually places the nucleus after the satellite for these relations.

V. Summary and Conclusions
The English and Supyire expository texts appear to have different goals and different rhetorical styles of argumentation. The English text aims to prove a single thesis using evidentiary information in a deductive style. Meanwhile, the Supyire texts aims to incorporate several viewpoints while giving one prominence. For its argumentation it uses Concession and Elaboration on the superstructure level and Cause and Restatement on the microstructure level.

This kind of contrastive study is very enlightening in learning to understand and appreciate argumentation from other cultural contexts. While contrastive rhetoric has mainly been used in ESL/EFL contexts, it has the potential for wider use. For example, it could be used alongside literacy programs and Bible translation in minority languages (and other languages like English) to help people understand the expository and hortatory portions of the Bible. This would be especially helpful when one culture’s rhetorical style differs significantly from the Greek and Hebrew styles of the Bible.

VI. References


Appendix A: English Text of Rebellious Teenagers

(1) Rebellious teenagers - whose fault is it? [Title]

(2) Lynn Spears, mother of Britney and Jamie Lynn Spears, has been bashed in magazines and television shows as being "no mother of the year." (3) Not only has her older daughter, Britney, fallen off the deep end (4) and is photographed stealing lighters, (5) shaving her head, (6) and opting to not wear underwear with her mini skirts, (7) her youngest daughter, Jamie Lynn, is now 16 and pregnant. (8) Who else can be blamed but Mom?

(9) Besides the public humiliation of being labeled "a bad mom," (11) Lynn Spears also wrote a book (about parenting) that has been put on indefinite hold by the publisher (12) after the news of her daughter's pregnancy. (13) Some would call her naive (14) for even attempting to pass herself off as a good parent, (15) yet her book is about raising children in the limelight. (16) Never does she claim to give life-altering advice to be a good parent; (17) she shares her experience of raising two child stars.

(18) Rather than blaming bad parenting on this "rebellious" behavior, (19) the blame should be placed on the person responsible: the child. (20) Parents may try and claim that they control their teenage children, (21) but, in actuality, they do not.

(22) When out of their parent's vision, (23) some children become completely different people than who their guardians think they are. (24) No amount of "the talk" about safe sex or scolding about underage drinking will stop a teenager who has made the decision to engage in these activities.

(25) According the National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy, (26) one in three American girls become pregnant (27) before they are 20 years old. (28) This equals to about 750,000 teen pregnancies per year. (29) It is impractical to blame 1,500,000 parents for their children's actions.

(30) If we take the magnifying glass off of Lynn Spears, (31) it is easier to see that most of Hollywood's young stars are no model children. (32) They drink underage (33) and do illegal drugs. (34) They get in drunken car accidents (35) and make sex tapes. (36) Shall we start criticizing the Hiltons' mom, or mother Lohan? [i.e. We can't criticize all celebrity parents.]

(37) Rather [than criticizing parents], (38) it is imperative to realize that teenagers have the free will and knowledge to make educated decisions. (39) If we put more emphasis on the children being responsible for their own actions, (40) perhaps they would think twice before engaging in activities that are currently being blamed on "bad parenting."
Appendix B: English Translation of the Supyire Text

1. Discord (between) people, what is it with discord (between) people today?
2a. (If) you notice, ayiwa-well,
2b. relatives ya-NEG' don't agree m-NEG',
2c. brothers and sisters ya-NEG' don't agree m-NEG'.
3. ṭkaa—but the thing which will be found at the bottom of it ke-REL', [I think]⁶, (is) the desire for wealth.
4. Wealth is sweet to us all.
5. Everyone will get some.
6a. This comes with discord,
6b. parske-because (if) you are seeking it
6c. you yourself keep seeking it.
7. You can't be satiated with it mɛ-NEG'.
8a. (If) you and someone unite on it,
8b. na—if you ya-NEG' don't put love between you,
8c. ma-and keep checking each other mɛ-NEG',
8d. it's a necessity you will let go on(separate from) each other because of wealth.
9a. ṭkaa-But I have grasped it's importance, [I think], (that) a person and a person y-NEG'ought not let go on each other because of wealth mɛ-NEG',
9b. parske-because love is better than wealth (lit. covers power on wealth).
10. I think agreement is better than the search for wealth.
11a. The thing which separates the children and the fathers from each other ge-REL', [(if) you grab its importance], wealth is on its side a bit,
11b. ṭkaa—but the biggest thing is: children y-NEG' are no longer counseled like the first time (i.e. the old days) mɛ-NEG'.
12. Bad deeds y-NEG' are no longer said on the children's eye (in their presence) mɛ-NEG'.
13. folo-first (i.e.before), the old man used to be able to sit ma-and say on the children's eye,
14. "This y-NEG' is not done mɛ-NEG'.
15. This y-NEG' is not done mɛ-NEG'.
16. This is a bad deed.
17. This is a bad deed.
18. This is a good deed."
19a. kabyii-since ma-and you left childhood⁷ (i.e. since you were young),
19b. the old man says these things in your presence.
20a. ayiwa-Well, (if) you can grow up with this,
20b. it's ba-like (when) a person sows seed,
20c. it sprouts
20d. ma-and grows old m-like:
21. it stays in your head.
22. I think it's this that has come with it.
23a. ayiwa-Well, there are lots of children,
23b. they y-NEG' don't listen to the words of their fathers mɛ-NEG'.
24. Those (things) that are sweet to your father-ke-REL, you y-NEG' don't do them mɛ-NEG'.
25. You and your father y-NEG' won't be able to agree mɛ-NEG'.
26a. parske-Because (if) you notice it,
26b. there are lots of fathers,
26c. tajaa-yesterday (i.e. in the past) ayiwa-well, they were counseled.
27. Tajaa-yesterday also they themselves feared (=respected) their fathers.
28. They themselves used to force themselves to do their fathers' will.
29a. (If) you do this,
29b. ka-and then it comes about

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⁶ Clauses in square brackets really express modality, and so they don't show relations with other spans of text. Therefore, they have not been included in the RST analysis.
⁷ not sure of this translation: it's a compound word that Carlson glosses as person-?-G1S; for the free translation of this clause he has 'From the time you were a child'
29c. that those children you have gotten ge-REL, they y-'NEG' will not do your will mɛ-'NEG',
29d. it's a necessity you y-'NEG' won't agree mɛ-'NEG'.
30a. nkaa-But the biggest fault, [(if) you note], you will find it on the fathers' side,
30b. parske-because counseling y-'NEG' is no longer done on its manner mɛ-'NEG'.
31. Children y-'NEG' are no longer raised on their manner mɛ-'NEG'.
32. Children y-'NEG' are no longer raised on yesterday's raising-manner mɛ-'NEG'.
33. I think this is it with discord.