

## Cultural Scripts and Pragmatic Norms in Algerian EFL Students' Writing: A Document-Based Analysis

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**Abstract:** This paper critically examines the culturally situated discourse practices of Algerian EFL students as they navigate academic writing in English, a language ideologically positioned as both a global medium and a colonial residue. Drawing on a multidisciplinary framework such as contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, and linguistic anthropology; the paper explores how rhetorical behaviors such as hedging, deference, and authorial modesty emerge not as errors but as epistemologically coherent strategies rooted in Arabic and Islamic educational traditions. Through a pragmatic writing test administered to thirty Master 1 EFL students at Setif 2 University, the analysis uncovers patterns of indirectness, avoidance of self-citation, and mitigation in argumentative stance, demonstrating how these reflect culturally grounded values of respect, humility, and collective ethos. Rather than treating such discourse as deficient, the paper argues for a pedagogical reorientation that embraces rhetorical pluralism and critical awareness. It contends that dominant Anglo-American writing norms often conflict with learners' rhetorical instincts and calls for writing instruction that empowers students to negotiate, rather than assimilate to, global academic discourses. By situating Algerian EFL writing within a broader anthropology of meaning-making, the paper contributes to efforts to decolonize applied linguistics and reimagine academic literacy as an intercultural and ideological practice.

**key words:** contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, linguistic anthropology, rhetorical culture, Academic writing, EFL learners.

### INTRODUCTION

In the context of globalized higher education, English has solidified its status as the default academic lingua franca. For countries in the Global South, including Algeria, the acquisition of English is not only an educational requirement but also a symbolic investment in modernity, employability, and global belonging. As Kachru (1992) observed, English has transcended its native contexts to become a language of global interaction, carrying with it particular cultural, rhetorical, and epistemological norms. In Algerian universities, English is taught predominantly as a Foreign Language (EFL), with significant emphasis placed on academic writing competence. However, writing in a second or foreign language does not occur in a vacuum; it is shaped by the communicative traditions, interactional expectations, and educational histories of learners. These socio-cultural influences remain under-explored in mainstream EFL pedagogy, particularly in the context of Algerian academic writing.

A significant body of research in applied linguistics has drawn attention to the culturally variable nature of rhetorical and pragmatic norms. As Kaplan (1966) famously proposed in his model of contrastive rhetoric, writers from different cultural backgrounds follow divergent paths of argumentation and textual organization. While his model has since been refined and critiqued, its core insight, that rhetorical preferences are culturally situated, remains central to understanding how EFL learners write. In Algerian university contexts, students bring with them

deeply internalized communicative scripts shaped by Arabic and Francophone academic traditions, Islamic epistemologies, and oral-dominant discursive practices. These influence how they structure their essays, position themselves in relation to the reader, and engage with sources. However, much of the EFL writing instruction in Algerian institutions is implicitly modeled on Anglo-American academic norms, often without accounting for these culturally rooted discourse frameworks.

Linguistic anthropologist Dell Hymes (1972) emphasized that communicative competence extends beyond grammatical accuracy to include sociocultural appropriateness. This principle is particularly relevant in academic writing, where students are expected not only to master a foreign grammar but also to adopt unfamiliar rhetorical identities and persuasive strategies. In the Algerian context, where English is not commonly used outside the classroom, students often face the dual challenge of expressing complex academic ideas in a foreign language and doing so in ways that align with culturally alien rhetorical expectations. As Byram (1997) has argued, intercultural competence in language education involves the ability to navigate between one's own cultural scripts and those of the target language. This intercultural navigation is especially demanding in writing, which is often treated as a neutral, technical skill rather than a culturally mediated act.

The dominant paradigm in Algerian EFL writing instruction tends to valorize coherence, directness, and linear argumentation, features which are often associated with Anglo-Western rhetorical tradition (Connor, 1996). However, research in intercultural pragmatics has shown that these preferences are neither universal nor superior; rather, they reflect culturally specific values such as individualism, assertiveness, and writer-responsibility (Thomas, 1983). In contrast, many Algerian students may exhibit what is sometimes perceived as circularity, digression, or excessive politeness in their writing, not due to linguistic incompetence, but because these features align with their culturally shaped expectations for academic discourse. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) have emphasized the importance of understanding such pragmatic norms as part of a broader communicative competence that includes sociopragmatic and pragmalinguistic dimensions.

This paper investigates the presence and role of cultural scripts in shaping Algerian EFL students' writing norms, with a particular focus on academic essays produced at the university level. By analyzing university-issued writing guides, sample student texts, and institutional discourse around writing instruction, it aims to demonstrate how pragmatic features such as hedging, repetition, citation style, and paragraph development are informed by local cultural traditions and communicative values. The objective is not to pathologize these differences but to illuminate them as evidence of meaningful, culturally situated rhetorical behavior.

Drawing on theories from linguistic anthropology, intercultural pragmatics, and contrastive rhetoric, this paper seeks to reframe EFL writing not merely as a technical exercise but as an intercultural communicative act. By doing so, it argues for pedagogical approaches that validate learners' linguistic and cultural identities while guiding them to navigate global academic conventions. As Kramsch (1993) has pointed out, effective language education should foster symbolic competence—the ability to make meaning across cultural boundaries. In writing instruction, this means creating space for students to understand not only how to write “correctly” in English, but also how to write persuasively, authentically, and interculturally.

## ALGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION AND EFL WRITING CONTEXT

Algerian higher education occupies a unique position within the broader landscape of North African universities. The Algerian educational system reflects a complex negotiation between Algerian Arabic and Tamazight dialects, the legacy of French colonialism, and the global influence of English. This linguistic and cultural tension is particularly evident in the realm of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), where students must navigate both the expectations of a global academic community and the demands of their own multilingual, multi-dialectal context.

Within the context of EFL instruction, one of the central challenges faced by Algerian university students is the gap between the local and global norms for academic writing. Algerian students often struggle to meet the expectations set by Western-style academic writing, which emphasizes clear, linear argumentation, formal tone, and directness (Connor, 1996). These expectations are at odds with many of the local communicative conventions that Algerian students bring to their writing. For example, in Arabic academic traditions, indirectness and politeness are frequently used as markers of respect and humility. As a result, students may inadvertently produce essays that are perceived as overly verbose, circular, or lacking in directness by instructors who are unfamiliar with their cultural scripts.

The issue is further complicated by the multilingual nature of the Algerian student body. While many students are fluent in Arabic and French, they often possess varying degrees of proficiency in English. Their English skills, therefore, may be shaped not only by formal education but also by exposure to English-language media and peer interactions. This multilingualism influences the ways in which students approach writing in English. Students often rely on their proficiency in French and Arabic to structure and organize their English writing, a practice that results in hybrid forms of discourse that do not fully conform to Anglo-Saxons academic expectations. For instance, students might introduce ideas in a manner more consistent with French rhetorical structures, for example beginning with broad generalizations and gradually narrowing the scope of the argument, rather than adhering to the more direct Anglo-American preference for a clear, focused thesis from the outset (Kaplan, 1966).

Moreover, Algerian universities do not always offer comprehensive writing instruction that bridges the gap between local writing traditions and the global expectations of academic English. While there are courses that address grammar, vocabulary, and basic writing skills, the focus on cultural and rhetorical norms in academic writing is often insufficient. This lack of cultural grounding in writing pedagogy leaves many students to struggle with the application of Western academic standards to their own writing contexts, without guidance on how to adapt or transform their own cultural scripts to fit the norms of academic English. The pedagogical implications of these issues are significant. First, they suggest that EFL instruction in Algeria must be more attuned to the cultural underpinnings of students' writing practices. Second, they highlight the need for more inclusive pedagogies that respect local traditions of communication while promoting intercultural competence. By incorporating local cultural scripts into EFL writing instruction, educators can help students not only master the technicalities of academic English but also learn to express their ideas in a way that feels authentic to them, while still meeting the expectations of a global academic community.

The remainder of this paper builds on this understanding of the Algerian EFL context by analyzing how cultural scripts influence students' writing practices in more detail. The following

section will introduce the theoretical framework that informs this analysis, specifically focusing on the concepts of contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, and linguistic anthropology.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To understand how Algerian EFL learners navigate academic writing through culturally embedded discourse practices, this paper draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates three complementary lenses: contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, and linguistic anthropology. These perspectives offer the necessary tools to interpret how language, culture, and identity intersect in students' writing, particularly in postcolonial and multilingual contexts like Algeria.

### **1- Contrastive Rhetoric**

The foundation of contrastive rhetoric was laid by Kaplan (1966), who proposed that students from different cultural backgrounds structure their written texts according to distinct rhetorical patterns. His model illustrated how the rhetorical organization of paragraphs and arguments in English differs from that of other languages, such as Arabic, Chinese, or Spanish. While Kaplan's original work was criticized for being overly prescriptive and ethnocentric, it initiated a broader inquiry into how writing is shaped by cultural norms and educational traditions.

Later developments in contrastive rhetoric, especially those led by Connor (1996, 2002), reframed the concept within a more dynamic, intercultural context. Rather than viewing rhetorical structures as fixed, researchers began exploring how bilingual and multilingual writers negotiate and blend rhetorical strategies across languages. In the Algerian context, students often shift between Arabic, French, and English rhetorical models. This rhetorical hybridity challenges traditional classroom instruction that prioritizes Anglo-American writing models. Thus, contrastive rhetoric provides a useful foundation for analyzing these patterns and recognizing students' rhetorical choices not as errors, but as manifestations of cultural logic.

Connor, Nagelhout, and Rozycki (2008) emphasized the importance of approaching rhetorical variation as a source of insight into learner identity and discourse competence. This perspective aligns well with the goals of this paper, which aims to reframe Algerian EFL students' writing practices as rooted in culturally coherent strategies rather than deviations from a universal standard.

### **2- Intercultural Pragmatics**

While contrastive rhetoric focuses on the macro-structure of writing, intercultural pragmatics offers insight into the micro-level choices learners make in their language use, particularly concerning politeness, directness, stance-taking, and argumentation. Thomas (1983) introduced the concept of "pragmatic failure" to describe miscommunication that arises not from grammatical mistakes but from a mismatch between culturally expected norms of appropriateness. Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) further elaborated on this through the lens of interlanguage pragmatics, a field concerned with how second-language learners acquire and use pragmatic norms in their target language.

In academic writing, intercultural pragmatics can help explain why Algerian students might avoid strong thesis statements, hedge their claims excessively, or adopt indirect argumentative styles. These are not simply linguistic weaknesses but reflections of deeper cultural orientations toward humility, group harmony, and deference to authority, values which are deeply embedded in Algerian discourse communities. For instance, repetition in writing may serve a cultural function of emphasis and respect, while Anglo-American readers might interpret it as redundancy.

By applying intercultural pragmatics to the analysis of Algerian EFL writing, this paper seeks to illuminate how such pragmatic patterns are influenced by the students' native discourse traditions. It also challenges the assumption that the pragmatic norms of English academic writing are value-neutral, suggesting instead that they are culturally situated preferences that must be taught with sensitivity.

### **3- Linguistic Anthropology**

To frame these phenomena within a broader socio-cultural context, this paper incorporates concepts from linguistic anthropology. As Hymes (1972) argued, language use must be studied not only in terms of form but also in terms of function and context. Linguistic anthropology views language as a social practice embedded in patterns of power, identity, and cultural values.

Central to this perspective is the idea of cultural scripts; recurrent, socially constructed ways of using language that are deeply embedded in a given culture. These scripts govern expectations about how one should speak, write, and interact in various communicative situations. In Algerian academic settings, such scripts are shaped by Islamic traditions of knowledge transmission, French colonial education legacies, and Arabic oral rhetorical norms.

For example, in many traditional Arabic and Islamic educational contexts, knowledge is transmitted through memorization, citation of authoritative texts, and displays of humility. These values may manifest in EFL writing as heavy reliance on quotations, reluctance to assert original opinions, or indirect expression of critique. While these practices may clash with Western academic norms, they reflect valid, context-specific ways of constructing academic authority and ethos. Linguistic anthropology enables us to interpret these rhetorical behaviors not as cultural deficits but as culturally situated discourse practices.

Moreover, linguistic anthropology encourages us to treat writing itself as a form of communicative action shaped by social expectations and institutional ideologies. In this sense, writing is not merely a product to be assessed, but a process of negotiating identity, authority, and membership in academic discourse communities.

Together, these three frameworks: contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, and linguistic anthropology, offer a rich analytical lens for examining how Algerian EFL students write, why they write the way they do, and how educators can respond to these realities more thoughtfully. This interdisciplinary approach allows for a holistic understanding of the intersection between language, culture, and writing instruction.

In the following section, this theoretical grounding will inform a review of existing literature on pragmatic variation, EFL writing practices, and cultural discourse norms in academic settings. The goal is to situate Algerian learners' experiences within a wider scholarly conversation and to identify gaps that the current paper seeks to address.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Understanding the intercultural dynamics of EFL writing requires a synthesis of scholarship spanning multiple domains within applied linguistics and linguistic anthropology. This section critically engages with established and emerging perspectives in contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, cultural discourse studies, and academic socialization. Rather than offering a chronological or segmented overview, this literature review emphasizes thematic continuities and interpretive intersections that inform how culturally embedded communicative norms influence Algerian university students' writing practices in English. The purpose is not merely to outline what has been studied, but to identify conceptual limitations and propose more culturally responsive pathways for future pedagogical practice and research.

### 1- Contrastive Rhetoric and the Evolution of Cultural Rhetorical Theory

The study of cross-cultural writing differences was formally introduced through the work of Kaplan (1966), whose early model of contrastive rhetoric posited that rhetorical organization in writing reflects the thought patterns of a student's first language. According to Kaplan, learners from Semitic, Oriental, and Romance language traditions, among others, tend to exhibit different paragraph structures, argumentation flows, and coherence devices than native English speakers, often resulting in what instructors perceive as digression or circularity. While pioneering in its effort to bring cultural differences into writing pedagogy, Kaplan's work has been justly critiqued for essentializing national or ethnic writing styles and lacking attention to context, power, and learner agency (Kubota & Lehner, 2004). Nevertheless, the central idea that cultural experiences shape rhetorical preferences remains foundational, especially when reframed through more dynamic, poststructural, and interactionist theories.

Building on Kaplan's work, subsequent research led by Connor (1996; 2008) has transformed contrastive rhetoric into a more reflexive and socioculturally sensitive field. Connor introduced the term "intercultural rhetoric" to capture the increasingly complex rhetorical negotiations multilingual writers engage in. Rather than treating rhetorical forms as static or culturally deterministic, contemporary contrastive rhetoric emphasizes the situated, negotiated, and often hybrid nature of second-language academic writing. Connor, Nagelhout, and Rozycki (2008) further argued that rhetorical variation should be viewed as a site of identity construction and cultural negotiation, not merely as interference. Their work resonates with Canagarajah's (2013) translingual perspective, which advocates for a model of academic writing that allows students to shuttle between rhetorical traditions in flexible, purposeful ways. This is particularly relevant in Algeria, where students operate within Arabic, French, and English linguistic ecosystems, each with its own literacy traditions, genres, and authority structures.

Recent scholarship has taken this reframing further by exploring the intersection of rhetorical practice and institutional ideology. Xinghua Liu (2020), for example, calls for a move beyond comparative patterns and towards an examination of power, ideology, and writing instruction across contexts. His study of EFL learners in China, although geographically distant from Algeria, underscores the universality of this challenge: students are expected to internalize Anglo-American academic rhetoric while negotiating locally rooted expectations about deference, community orientation, and textual aesthetics. In Algerian higher education, this negotiation is further complicated by the enduring influence of French academic traditions, which valorize elaborate introductions, formal tone, and intellectual modesty, features that often conflict with the thesis-centered, explicit, and assertive argumentation favored in Anglo-American English writing.

Empirical studies in Algeria have begun to document this rhetorical hybridity. Ziani and El Mouedden (2022) observed that Algerian students frequently deploy discursive strategies that blend Arabic oral traditions: such as repetition, storytelling, and circular elaboration, with formal structures derived from French schooling. These hybrid rhetorical practices are often judged negatively in English writing assessments, where clarity, economy, and linearity are prized. The absence of instructional frameworks that account for this hybridity reinforces a deficit model, where students are evaluated against an imported standard rather than supported in developing rhetorical flexibility across languages and genres.

## 2- Intercultural Pragmatics and Pragmatic Competence in Academic Writing

Beyond rhetorical structure, the pragmatics of academic writing, how writers position themselves, address readers, express certainty or doubt, and signal politeness, plays a central role in shaping perceptions of textual appropriateness. Thomas (1983) introduced the notion of “pragmatic failure” to describe communication breakdowns that occur not due to linguistic inaccuracy but because of misaligned expectations around appropriateness and politeness. While originally applied to spoken interaction, the concept has been extended to writing, where L2 learners must navigate the nuanced expectations of hedging, authorial stance, and argumentative tone. In Algerian academic contexts, these pragmatic norms are rarely made explicit, yet they significantly affect students' ability to conform to institutional standards of academic writing.

Kasper and Blum-Kulka (1993) further developed the field of interlanguage pragmatics, emphasizing that second-language learners must acquire not just vocabulary and grammar, but also the sociopragmatic norms of the target language. More recent work by Ishihara and Cohen (2014) underscores the teachability of pragmatic competence, advocating for instructional interventions that foreground metapragmatic awareness. This is especially pertinent in writing instruction, where students often struggle with appropriately expressing disagreement, attributing sources, or managing the formality of tone.

The relevance of pragmatics to EFL writing has been increasingly recognized in applied linguistics. Researchers such as Bonyadi and Samuel (2013) and Huh (2023) have examined the pragmatic markers used by L2 writers in English academic essays, highlighting differences in how politeness, certainty, and critique are expressed. These differences are not merely stylistic; they reflect deep-seated cultural orientations. In Algerian academic culture, as in many collectivist societies, humility, deference to authority, and indirectness are considered appropriate, particularly in formal discourse. As such, students may hedge excessively, avoid self-mention, or refrain from critiquing sources, practices that are often misread by Western-trained evaluators as a lack of critical thinking or personal voice.

In the Algerian context, empirical insights remain limited but are beginning to emerge. Dendenne (2016) conducted a review of EFL textbook materials in Algeria and found that pragmatic content, such as speech acts, discourse markers, and politeness strategies is either oversimplified or entirely omitted. Similarly, Arzim (2024) analyzed Algerian student essays and reported consistent use of repetition, high deference to sources, and avoidance of first-person pronouns, all of which align with broader cultural norms of rhetorical modesty. These findings reinforce the need for a pedagogical model that situates pragmatic competence within culturally grounded understandings of appropriateness, rather than assuming universal standards.

## 3- Cultural Scripts and the Anthropology of Academic Discourse

The role of cultural scripts in shaping academic discourse has gained increasing attention in linguistic anthropology and applied linguistics. As Wierzbicka (2003) explains, cultural scripts are the tacit, shared norms that guide behavior and language use in a given community. These scripts shape what is considered polite, logical, authoritative, or persuasive, and they often operate below the level of conscious awareness. In academic writing, they influence everything from how writers introduce their arguments, cite evidence, and engage with readers, to the broader ethos they project through their textual stance.

In Algerian academic settings, cultural scripts are deeply influenced by Arabic rhetorical traditions, Islamic modes of knowledge transmission, and the lingering legacy of French educational models. These traditions privilege collective values, textual deference, and the citation of respected authorities, all of which manifest in students' writing. While these practices

may conflict with the expectations of Anglo-American academic discourse, they are internally coherent and culturally meaningful. For example, repetition in writing may be a way of emphasizing a key point or displaying humility, rather than an indication of redundancy. Similarly, the reluctance to assert a bold, singular thesis may reflect an epistemological preference for shared authority and consensus.

Kramsch (1993) was among the first to highlight the symbolic dimensions of language learning, arguing that language learners must navigate not only grammar and vocabulary but also the cultural meanings embedded in discourse practices. More recently, Sharifian (2015) has elaborated on the idea of cultural conceptualizations, suggesting that second-language users bring with them cognitive and rhetorical frameworks that shape how they interpret and produce discourse. In the context of Algerian EFL writing, these conceptualizations influence how students structure essays, express evaluation, and adopt stance; areas that are frequently assessed using rubrics that do not account for cultural variation.

Despite this, mainstream EFL instruction in Algeria has yet to integrate these insights into curriculum design or classroom practice. Belmihoub (2018) argues that the continued reliance on decontextualized textbooks and imported rubrics contributes to a disconnect between students' lived linguistic realities and the academic genres they are expected to master. Without pedagogical frameworks that address the cultural embeddedness of writing, students are left to navigate unfamiliar expectations with limited guidance.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper adopts a qualitative, document-based approach to investigate how culturally shaped pragmatic norms and rhetorical strategies emerge in Algerian EFL learners' academic writing. The analysis is grounded in interpretive traditions within applied linguistics and linguistic anthropology, focusing on textual performance rather than attitudinal or behavioral data. As Silverman (2013) and Bowen (2009) argue, document and text analysis in qualitative inquiry allows for deep engagement with meaning-making practices embedded in institutional and pedagogical discourse.

### 1- Setting and Sample

The study focuses on writing produced by 30 Master 1 students enrolled in an English Language Sciences program at a public Algerian university. All students were Arabic or Tamazight speakers with a reported Upper intermediate French language level, and had completed undergraduate degrees in English studies. At the time of the writing task, participants were also enrolled in academic writing and research methodology courses, giving them familiarity with English academic genres. Their English proficiency ranged from Upper intermediate to advanced (B2–C1 CEFR levels), with varying degrees of comfort in written expression.

### 2-Writing Task Design

To explore the pragmatic dimensions of their writing, students completed a pragmatic writing test composed of three short-answer prompts. Each prompt targeted a core area of academic discourse pragmatics: stance-taking, politeness, hedging, and self-positioning. Students were asked to write short academic paragraphs in response to each item, producing approximately 100–150 words per response under in-class conditions. Prompts were reviewed by two faculty members to ensure their appropriateness and alignment with the curriculum.

The three prompts were as follows:

1. Expressing Opinion Politely: Students were asked to agree or disagree with a claim about traditional vs. modern teaching methods in Algeria, with attention to polite tone.

2. Evaluating a Claim: Students responded to a statement about minimizing grammar instruction in EFL classes, requiring stance expression and justification.
3. Academic Voice and Self-Citation: Students addressed whether referencing their own previous academic work is acceptable in formal writing, focusing on voice and self-positioning.

These writing tasks were integrated into regular coursework as reflective writing activities, not as graded exams, to reduce performance pressure and allow for authentic language use.

A total of 90 short academic texts (30 students  $\times$  3 prompts) were collected. All names were anonymized. The data corpus reflects a range of pragmatic and rhetorical behaviors typical of Algerian EFL learners, shaped by linguistic background, educational history, and sociocultural discourse norms. No additional interviews or observations were conducted, as the focus remained strictly on textual analysis.

### 3-Analytical Framework

The analysis draws on an interdisciplinary framework integrating:

- ✓ Contrastive Rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 2008): to explore organizational structures and argument patterns in learner texts;
- ✓ Intercultural Pragmatics (Thomas, 1983; Ishihara & Cohen, 2014): to analyze expressions of politeness, hedging, authorial stance, and pragmatic appropriateness;
- ✓ Linguistic Anthropology (Hymes, 1972; Kramsch, 1993): to interpret cultural scripts, epistemologies, and symbolic values underlying writing behaviors.

Each response was read iteratively, and themes were coded according to these three lenses. Coding categories included:

- ✓ Use of modality and hedging devices
- ✓ Degree of directness or indirectness
- ✓ Structure and coherence of argument
- ✓ Presence or absence of self-mention
- ✓ Indicators of epistemic humility or deference to authority

Through this interpretive process, the analysis aimed to uncover how pragmatic and rhetorical strategies in students' writing reflect broader cultural and educational orientations.

The researcher conducting this analysis is an experienced EFL Teacher in the same setting. This insider position enhances contextual understanding of institutional norms, classroom practices, and cultural expectations that shape student writing. However, this also necessitates reflexivity: the interpretation of texts is grounded not only in theoretical knowledge but in lived experience within the same educational ecosystem. To mitigate potential bias, analysis focused on identifying patterns across multiple responses rather than privileging isolated examples. Findings are framed as indicative of culturally coherent practices rather than as shortcomings or deviations from standard English writing models.

### ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATIONS

Through this interpretive process, the analysis aimed to uncover how pragmatic and rhetorical strategies in students' writing reflect broader cultural and educational orientations.

#### 1-Politeness and Epistemic Modesty: Disagreeing without Confrontation

The first writing prompt, which required students to express an opinion on traditional versus modern teaching methods, consistently elicited politeness strategies and mitigation devices, even if the students clearly disagreed with the claim. Phrases such as "I respectfully suggest," "It may be argued," and "In my humble opinion" occurred frequently, even in responses that ultimately supported modern pedagogies.

From a surface-level perspective, this may appear as simple overuse of hedging. However, through the lens of intercultural pragmatics, such choices reflect deeply embedded norms of deference and modesty in Algerian academic discourse. In traditional Arabic-Islamic educational contexts, assertive self-expression particularly when directed at authority is discouraged in favor of indirectness and collective consensus (El-Aswad, 2012). These values persist in university classrooms, where students are socialized to show respect toward teachers and knowledge authorities, even when offering critique. Thus, the rhetorical choices here are not linguistic weaknesses, but pragmatic performances of humility and academic ethics as locally understood.

Critically, these politeness strategies often conflict with dominant academic conventions in English, which value clarity, assertiveness, and direct positioning. As Hyland (2005) notes, stance-taking is a key element of authorial identity in Anglo-American writing, and lack of explicit commitment may be penalized as vagueness or lack of critical thinking. What is judged as underdeveloped argumentation in these students' responses may, in fact, be culturally congruent practices of non-confrontation and intellectual modesty.

This disconnect raises important questions about the cultural validity of writing rubrics imported into Algerian universities. Rubrics that reward explicit thesis statements, firm stances, and direct disagreement implicitly favor certain epistemologies of knowledge and self-representation while devaluing others. The risk here is not merely of "misassessment", but of ideological assimilation: learners are subtly pressured to conform to Western discursive norms, often at the expense of their rhetorical instincts and cultural identities.

## **2- Hedging and Epistemological Positioning: Negotiating Certainty and Authority**

Responses to the second prompt, evaluating a controversial academic claim, showed consistent use of hedging devices such as "perhaps," "it may be true," and "to some extent." Students rarely adopted categorical positions, even when disagreeing with the claim. Moreover, many included conditional framing (e.g., "if applied correctly") or qualified support (e.g., "only for beginners").

While such language might initially seem cautious or non-committal, it reflects a particular epistemological stance prevalent in postcolonial academic cultures, what Santos (2007) calls "ecology of knowledges." In this view, truth is not singular and assertive but negotiated, contingent, and often plural. The use of hedging, then, can be interpreted as an attempt to honor multiple perspectives rather than impose one's own.

Through the lens of contrastive rhetoric, this also reflects the interference or blending of rhetorical traditions. Algerian students have historically been exposed to French academic models, which emphasize elaborate reasoning and deferential tone, as well as Arabic rhetorical forms that value repetition and reverence for authoritative sources. These rhetorical logics contrast sharply with the English academic genre's preference for writer visibility and clear argumentative structure (Hyland, 2005; Swales, 1990).

Critically, however, this hybridity is not a transitional deficiency to be overcome. Following Canagarajah's (2013) translingual approach, it should be seen as an adaptive rhetorical resource—a sign of students' ability to shuttle between discursive systems. Yet, without institutional recognition of this complexity, such hybridity is often read as lack of sophistication, perpetuating a deficit narrative that silences non-Western ways of arguing and knowing.

## **3-Authorial Presence and Self-Citation: Negotiating Academic Identity**

The third prompt, which asked students to discuss the acceptability of self-citation, revealed nuanced tensions around academic voice, self-positioning, and authority. While a few

students affirmed the legitimacy of self-citation as an academic practice, the majority expressed discomfort or hesitation, using expressions like “it may seem arrogant,” “I personally avoid this,” or “I don’t think it is appropriate to refer to oneself.”

This reluctance highlights a core tension in EFL writing pedagogy: the demand for personal authorial identity versus the culturally grounded expectation of humility and collective voice. In many Islamic intellectual traditions, authority is not self-generated but derived through alignment with canonical sources and community-sanctioned knowledge (Ahmed, 2007). To cite oneself, then, may seem egotistical or premature which is a violation of the moral economy of learning.

Through the lens of linguistic anthropology, this becomes a matter of ideological positioning. Students are not merely choosing whether or not to self-cite; they are negotiating what kind of academic subject they are allowed to become within their institutional and cultural context. Their discursive choices reveal that academic writing is not only a skill but a moral practice, which is a way of performing responsibility, modesty, and scholarly character.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, this points to the need for more nuanced instruction around voice and citation. Rather than simply teaching students to “insert their opinion,” educators must recognize the cultural unease this may provoke and find ways to frame authorial presence as compatible with local values of respect and epistemic caution. Otherwise, writing instruction risks becoming a form of ideological coercion, requiring students to adopt unfamiliar identities in order to succeed academically.

#### **4-Cross-Cutting Patterns and Institutional Implications**

The analysis of all three writing tasks reveals a set of cross-cutting rhetorical behaviors that are best understood not as isolated strategies, but as the surface expressions of deeper, culturally informed communicative ideologies. A notable pattern throughout the corpus is a marked preference for indirectness and hedging over direct assertiveness. This manifests in students’ use of modal verbs, conditional clauses, and softening devices, even when responding to prompts that clearly invite a firm position. The inclination to defer, to consider multiple sides, and to couch opinions in cautious phrasing reflects a communicative orientation that values respectfulness over confrontation.

Alongside this, students consistently demonstrate high respect for epistemic authority. Across all prompts, responses suggest an avoidance of overt critique, especially of institutional practices or theoretical claims perceived as authoritative. Rather than challenge dominant ideas, students often situate their arguments within broader consensual frameworks or reference general collective beliefs, revealing a reluctance to directly oppose dominant positions. This rhetorical caution is further evidenced by the general absence of explicit thesis statements or personalized argumentative claims. Instead, students tend to present ideas as emerging from communal wisdom or conditional reasoning, rarely anchoring them in personal intellectual stance or experience.

Another recurring feature is the strategic use of repetition or parallel constructions, often employed as a method of emphasis rather than redundancy. This is consistent with oral rhetorical traditions in Arabic, where reiteration serves both persuasive and respectful communicative functions. In contrast, Western writing pedagogy often penalizes repetition as a stylistic flaw, failing to recognize its rhetorical function in other discourse cultures.

Perhaps most significantly, there is a persistent reluctance to position oneself as a knowledge source. Whether in terms of authorial self-citation or the insertion of personal voice, students repeatedly show discomfort with presenting themselves as epistemic agents. This

hesitance is not attributable merely to inexperience or insecurity; rather, it reflects the continued influence of cultural scripts in which knowledge is validated through alignment with authority rather than through individual assertion. Within such a worldview, claiming authorship or staking a personal intellectual position may feel ethically precarious or institutionally discouraged.

Collectively, these discourse practices are culturally coherent. They are the result of rhetorical socialization in a postcolonial, multilingual educational system shaped by Arabic, French, and Anglophone influences. Yet, Algerian writing pedagogy remains largely inattentive to these rhetorical complexities. The widespread use of imported textbooks, Anglo-American genre expectations, and rubrics grounded in native-speaker norms results in a persistent misalignment between students' rhetorical instincts and institutional expectations.

This misalignment is not merely pedagogical; it is ideological. By treating culturally rooted rhetorical strategies as deficits rather than differences, current instructional approaches risk enacting what Spivak (1988) might call "epistemic violence", silencing alternative ways of knowing and arguing. Students are not simply learning to write; they are being asked to perform identities that conform to dominant discursive models, often at the expense of their own rhetorical and ethical frameworks.

The implications are clear: academic writing instruction in Algeria must move beyond the surface correction of form toward a deeper engagement with the cultural and ideological assumptions that underlie both students' writing and the norms used to evaluate it. Writing pedagogy must shift from remediation to rhetorical negotiation. Rather than attempting to replace students' discourse habits with "correct" ones, instructors should help learners critically examine, adapt, and expand their rhetorical repertoires, equipping them not only to write well in English but to do so in ways that are critically aware, contextually sensitive, and culturally responsive.

### **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this paper call for a significant pedagogical reorientation in how academic writing is taught to Algerian EFL learners. Rather than approaching student writing through a deficit lens that emphasizes error correction and native-like proficiency, instructors must recognize that learners' rhetorical choices are not arbitrary deviations from a universal norm but culturally situated strategies deeply embedded in local communicative practices. What is frequently dismissed as "poor writing", vague thesis statements, hedged arguments, avoidance of self-citation, or excessive politeness, may in fact be coherent rhetorical acts shaped by epistemologies that value modesty, intertextuality, and deference to authority.

#### **1-Pedagogical Implications**

First and foremost, writing pedagogy in Algerian higher education must adopt a rhetorically pluralist stance one that acknowledges the legitimacy of diverse rhetorical traditions and prepares students to critically navigate, rather than simply conform to, dominant Anglo-American academic conventions. This means moving beyond the uncritical adoption of Western textbooks and genre models, and instead fostering a classroom discourse that explicitly addresses the cultural and ideological assumptions underlying English academic writing. Students should be encouraged to interrogate why certain rhetorical forms such as linear argumentation, explicit self-positioning, or critique of authoritative sources are privileged in English discourse communities, and how these forms may contrast with the rhetorical habits they have acquired in the Algerian educational setting.

In practical terms, this entails designing writing instruction that makes contrastive rhetoric an explicit part of the curriculum. Rather than framing English rhetorical conventions as the only acceptable academic model, instructors should use comparative tasks that highlight both the similarities and differences between English and other rhetorical systems. For example, students could be invited to analyze how introductions, conclusions, or citations are structured in Arabic-language academic texts versus English-language ones, not as a means of evaluating which is “better,” but to better understand the communicative values and ideologies each reflects.

Moreover, students must be given discursive space to experiment with rhetorical hybridity. They should not be required to erase their rhetorical identities in order to meet institutional expectations. Instead, they should be taught strategies for strategic rhetorical code-switching; adapting their discourse in ways that allow them to preserve elements of their cultural voice while still meeting the demands of international academic audiences. Pedagogy, in this sense, must be both dialogic and translational. It must provide students with the metalanguage and critical tools to decide when to accommodate dominant norms and when to resist or adapt them.

This approach also has implications for how voice and authorial stance are taught. Students should not simply be told to “be more assertive” or “take a position”; rather, they should be guided through the ethical and cultural dilemmas that such practices involve. Writing instruction must create a safe space in which students can explore the tensions between their academic training and their cultural values, where asserting one’s opinion is not imposed as a moral good but negotiated as a rhetorical possibility.

Importantly, teacher training must also be reconfigured to support this shift. Many instructors in Algerian universities have themselves been socialized into a system that treats Western norms as universal. As a result, they may unintentionally reproduce the very ideologies that marginalize students’ rhetorical instincts. Professional development programs should include training in intercultural rhetoric, linguistic anthropology, and critical pedagogy, equipping teachers to recognize the cultural and ideological dimensions of academic writing and to respond to them with sensitivity and reflexivity.

Lastly, assessment practices must be aligned with this pedagogical philosophy. Rubrics should not penalize students for failing to reproduce native-speaker conventions. Instead, assessment criteria should focus on clarity of purpose, coherence of ideas, and rhetorical appropriateness within the communicative situation. Where possible, assignments should be designed to allow for multiple rhetorical approaches to be valid, thereby affirming students’ cultural resources rather than marginalizing them.

In sum, the pedagogical implications of this paper are far-reaching. Algerian EFL writing instruction must shift from assimilation to negotiation, from correction to critical engagement, and from monolingual norms to multilingual awareness. Only through such a transformation can students be empowered not merely to write in English, but to write as full, culturally grounded participants in global academic discourse.

## **2-Future Research Orientation and Recommendations**

The findings of this paper present a compelling argument for a reimagined approach to academic writing pedagogy in Algerian universities. Moving beyond the simple correction of language errors, this paper advocates for an approach that honors students’ cultural and linguistic identities while guiding them to effectively navigate the expectations of global academic writing. However, the implementation of such a pedagogical shift will require sustained effort across various levels of educational practice. Below, several key recommendations are outlined for

improving EFL writing instruction in Algeria, followed by suggestions for future research directions.

One of the central recommendations of this paper is the integration of contrastive rhetoric into EFL writing instruction. By comparing and contrasting English academic writing norms with those of Arabic and French, instructors can foster an awareness of cultural differences in writing and argumentation. For instance, assignments that encourage students to compare introduction structures or citation practices across languages would allow them to better understand how these conventions are culturally embedded. Students should be taught that different rhetorical styles can be legitimate and effective, depending on the context.

Students in Algeria, as in many postcolonial contexts, bring a wealth of multilingual and multicultural resources to their writing. Pedagogical practices should encourage students to draw upon these resources, allowing for rhetorical hybridity. This could involve providing opportunities for students to incorporate ideas, phrases, or modes of argumentation that reflect their cultural background while also meeting the requirements of English academic writing. Teachers should provide explicit instruction on how to strategically code-switch between different rhetorical systems and allow students to experiment with merging local discursive practices with global academic norms.

As the analysis of self-citation revealed, students in Algerian universities are often uncertain about how to position themselves as knowledge producers within academic writing. To address this, writing instruction should engage students critically in discussions about authorial voice, citation practices, and academic identity. Rather than simply teaching students to “state their opinion” or “argue clearly,” instructors should help students reflect on the moral dimensions of academic writing. Activities that allow students to explore different academic genres and authorship models would help them navigate these tensions with greater agency and awareness.

Current assessment rubrics in Algerian universities often prioritize Anglo-American writing conventions, particularly those related to linear argumentation and assertive stance-taking. To support students in expressing themselves in culturally appropriate ways, assessment rubrics must evolve to reward a broader range of rhetorical strategies. This could involve assessing clarity of thought, coherence of argument, and relevance of cultural or historical context, rather than rigid adherence to Western conventions of directness or individualism. Moreover, rubrics should recognize that different academic communities may value indirectness or shared authority as forms of intellectual rigor.

One of the key factors in the success of these pedagogical changes is the professional development of EFL instructors. Teachers must be made aware of the cultural assumptions that underpin their teaching practices and assessment criteria. Workshops and training programs focused on intercultural communication, contrastive rhetoric, and critical pedagogy can equip teachers with the tools to recognize and address cultural differences in academic writing. These programs should also emphasize reflexivity, encouraging teachers to examine how their own educational experiences influence their expectations of students.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has sought to reframe the academic writing practices of Algerian EFL learners not as a set of deficits to be corrected, but as culturally and rhetorically meaningful acts situated within specific sociohistorical, ideological, and pedagogical contexts. Drawing on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates contrastive rhetoric, intercultural pragmatics, and linguistic anthropology, it has demonstrated how student writing is shaped by

and in turn reflects deeply rooted cultural scripts concerning knowledge, authority, humility, and academic voice. The analysis of student responses to three pragmatic writing prompts revealed patterns of politeness, hedging, epistemic modesty, and authorial reticence that challenge the dominant norms of Anglo-American academic writing. Rather than viewing these patterns as evidence of communicative failure, the paper has interpreted them as performances of rhetorical ethics grounded in Algerian educational traditions. These performances, while often misread through Western rubrics, reveal learners' strategic negotiation of competing discursive systems: Arabic, French, and English, as well as their desire to maintain coherence with locally valued modes of expression.

Crucially, the paper has argued that such rhetorical choices are not merely stylistic, but ideological. They are embedded in broader histories of colonialism, linguistic marginalization, and globalized educational models that have often positioned English as a language of power and epistemic legitimacy. In this context, teaching writing becomes a political act: one that can either enforce conformity to dominant norms or enable students to write back with rhetorical agency and cultural integrity. To respond ethically and effectively to this reality, Algerian writing pedagogy must shift from models of remediation to models of negotiation. Educators must foster a classroom environment that validates students' cultural and rhetorical resources while equipping them with the tools to critically engage with international academic conventions. This requires more than minor curricular adjustments; it demands a rethinking of what it means to write academically, who gets to decide the standards of good writing, and how those standards reflect and reproduce particular ideologies of knowledge.

The paper's pedagogical recommendations aim to contribute to a more inclusive, dialogic model of writing instruction. At the same time, it acknowledges the structural and ideological challenges that such a transformation entails. It is not enough to critique from the margins; sustained institutional change will require collective effort, empirical inquiry, and critical engagement at multiple levels of the educational system. In advancing this conversation, the paper aligns itself with the broader goals of linguistic anthropology and critical applied linguistics: to uncover how discourse operates within systems of power, to question the naturalization of dominant norms, and to imagine more equitable ways of participating in academic knowledge production. In doing so, it invites scholars, educators, and students alike to rethink not only how writing is taught, but why, for whom, and to what ends.

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