



Collectivism and Individualism as Cultural Aspects in Arabic/English Argumentative Writing by Moroccan Students

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Abstract— *The present study analysed cultural dimensions in the argumentative writing of Moroccan students at Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. It aimed at tracing features of collectivism and individualism such as personal disclosure (employment of first person singular pronouns and personal anecdotes) and collective self (employment of first personal plural pronouns and statements of collective virtues) in Arabic and English argumentative essays by Moroccan master students at the Department of English. Also, the study sought to trace any potential transfer of cultural features across the students' essays. To achieve such a purpose, the study opted for textual analysis, using within-subject analysis and between-subject analysis to compare and contrast the argumentative essays of the same individuals. The collected data was described and analysed using frequency counts of individualist and collectivist features in the students' writing. The results revealed the prevalence of collective self elements manifested in the high proportion of first personal plural pronouns and statements of collective virtues employed, especially in Arabic essays. In addition, collective virtues was the most prevalent cultural feature in Arabic essays, and combination of collective virtues and first person singular were the most dominant cultural features in English essays.*

Keywords— *Culture, argumentation, transfer, individualism, collectivism.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The issue of interaction between culture and argumentation has taken centre stage in intercultural rhetoric studies (Connor, 1996, 2002, 2004, 2011, Chibi, 2018, 2019; Ismail, 2010; Uysal, 2008; Ouauicha, 1986). A myriad of studies have revealed that argumentation is culture-oriented (Drid, 2015; Hirose, 2003; Kamimura & Oi, 1998; Kobayashi, 1984; Uysal, 2008, 2012). In other words, it was found that the structure, logical development, relevance, and cogency of arguments vary across cultures (Kaplan, 1966; Connor 1996; Hyland, 2003; Uysal, 2012) due to the impact of deep culture and cultural practices on the thought patterns/systems of people/writers (Kaplan, 1966; McCool, 2009; Nisbett, et al., 2001). Such differences become apparent when non-

native writers write in another language (Grabe & Kaplan, 1989; Ostler, 1987). In addition, it is assumed that discourse conformity forces L2 writers to tailor their writing to meet the needs their audience (Farr, 1986; Nystrand et al., 1986). In this context, it was found that culture-specific rhetorical patterns are likely to affect EFL students' argumentative writing (Kubota, 1996; Uysal, 2012). For example, employment of rhetorical patterns strange to Anglo-American conventions of argumentative writing was found to create a mismatch between the writer's intention and the audience's expectation (Drid, 2015).

As mentioned above, Kaplan (1966) argues that cultural thought patterns affect writing across cultures. Also, Connor (1996) maintains that writing is a deep-

rooted cultural by-product. Arguments that corroborate such a claim find reflection in the research findings in intercultural communication. According to Thomas and Inkson (2004), writers from collectivist cultures abide by the social norms and traditions. They are seldom autonomous; their actions and behaviour take place in the public sphere, within their social circle. For instance, China, labeled as a collectivist culture (Zhu, 2011), is a country where students' argumentative writing was found to exhibit traces of collectivism such as collective values, interdependent relationship through the use of plural pronouns, etc. (Liu, 2009; Wu & Rubin, 2000). In this respect, Triandis (1994) maintains that first person singular pronouns and personal anecdotes are features of individualistic culture; the amount of pronouns utilised in argumentative writing is suggested to vary across cultures (Wu and Robin, 2000).

Motivated by the findings of previous research studies on argumentation and cultural dimensions, the researcher aims at exploring collectivism and individualism as cultural aspects in the Arabic/English argumentative essays by Moroccan master students. Another push factor is lack of studies on such a topic in Morocco. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to shed light on such an issue and to contribute to enriching the literature in the field.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Contrastive rhetoric, referred to now as intercultural rhetoric (Connor, 2008), is an area of research that focuses on studying, comparing, and contrasting writing across cultures (Connor, 1996, 2002, 2008, 2011; Kaplan, 1966). Initiated by the Robert Kaplan in 1966, contrastive rhetoric examines similarities and differences in the writing of native and nonnative speakers of English. To explain how the rhetorical properties of a language impact the writing of EFL students and how they differ from the ones of native speakers of English, Kaplan (1966), inspired by the findings of the Whorfian hypothesis (Matsuda 2001), examined the structure of paragraphs of EFL learners. As result, the writing of non-native speakers of English exhibited traces of the mother tongue rhetorical thought patterns. Claims such as these, without backup with solid empirical data, exposed Kaplan to ceaseless waves of criticism. Severino (1993) refuted Kaplan's claims that the paragraphs students write reflect their cultural thought patterns. However, this was not the only pitfall of Kaplan's hypothesis. What fueled the situation was Kaplan's method of analysis, comparing EFL students' writing to the writing of native proficient writers. Hence, contrastive rhetoric was again criticized for favouring the

Anglo-American rhetoric and for being reductionist, deterministic, prescriptive (Kachru, 1995; Kubota and Lehner, 2004; Spack, 1997), and ethnocentric (Hinds, 1983). Given such facts, a need for a paradigm shift emanated out of the womb of such harsh criticism.

To render contrastive rhetoric a dynamic field of research, Connor (2008) changed the name into intercultural rhetoric. The paradigm shift intercultural rhetoric underwent dismissed the static explanations for culture, explained culture in terms of small and big cultures, provided a new interpretation of rhetoric, encouraged studying texts within their cultural contexts, and recommended researching writing in relation to intercultural communication (Connor, 2011).

Literature on intercultural communication revealed that cultural values and dimensions affect the way people speak and write. In this perspective, individualism and collectivism as cultural dimensions were found to affect communication and writing across cultures (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). By individualistic cultures researchers mean societies in which the ties between individuals are larger, and looking after one's self and family is the most prominent characteristic (Hofstede, 2001; McCool, 2009). Such cultures emphasize interdependence over dependence, prize individual success, and revere the quality of uniqueness (Martin & Nakayama, 2010). As a result, people from these cultures display a great deal of self-disclosure during interactions and when expressing their opinions (Gudykunst et al., 1987). On the contrary, collectivist cultures promote strong social ties, group affiliation, loyalty (Hofstede, 2001), solidarity, harmony (McCool, 2009), shared beliefs and social norms, in-group needs, objectives, and cooperation (Triandis, 1990). They avoid expressing their opinion in public, for they "reserve self-disclosure for in-group rather than unknown audiences" (Wu & Rubin, 2000, p. 155).

However, notwithstanding the academic value of intercultural rhetoric and intercultural communication as field of research, they have received very little attention in Morocco. In this perspective, literature revealed the scarcity of studies on argumentation in relation to Moroccan cultural dimensions (Chibi, 2018, 2019). Also, the reviewed literature (Amrous & Nejmaoui, 2017; Amzaourou & Oubaha, 2018; Khartite & Zerhouni, 2016, 2018; Khartite et al., 2021; Ouaouicha, 1986) revealed that the issue of argumentation in relation to individualism and collectivism as cultural dimensions has not yet been addressed from an intercultural rhetoric perspective with regard to Moroccan cultural context.

III. METHODOLOGY

The research paper at hand examined traces of individualism and collectivism as cultural dimensions in the students' Arabic and English argumentative essays at Ibn Tofail University in Kenitra, Morocco. Similarly, the study sought to trace any similarities and differences in the students' essays that might be due to L1 cultural dimensions or vice versa. To do so, the study at hand set out to answer the following question:

Do the argumentative essays by Moroccan students display traces of collectivism or individualism?

To answer this research question, the study focused on describing the frequency of first person singular pronouns (I, my, mine) and personal anecdotes as element of personal disclosure that characterise the writing of individualistic cultures in the students' Arabic and English essays. Also, the study analysed the use of first person plural pronouns (we, our, ours) and reference to collective virtues as features of the collective self that characterize the writing of collectivist cultures in both essays.

Data collection instrument and procedures

As a data instrument, the study used students' essays to collect the features targeted by the study. The use of essays as a data tool was reported to be efficacious in that it helps highlight the features of effective writing in a given context as well as the circumstances that controlled the production of that text (Hyland, 2003). Moreover, Walker (1985, as cited in Hyland, 2003, p. 261) maintains that "a sample student essay or exam writing may provide awareness about student uses of particular forms or the assumptions underlying different choices. Similarly, Hyland (2009) maintains that essays help know about the students' writing preferences strategies they use to persuade an audience.

In order to avoid plagiarism and to ensure good quality data, students wrote English and Arabic essays in-class in two separate days. To avoid putting students under pressure, which might wreck havoc on the students' performance (Raimes, 1983, Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008), no amount of time was set for the task to be completed. In fact, time flexibility was reported to have a positive psychological effect on writers' performance. Besides, it help students avoid resorting to their mother tongue to generate ideas (Widdowson, 1990). To test their audience awareness, students were asked to address an Arab reader for the Arabic essay, and an English reader for the English essay.

Data analysis method

With regards to data analysis method, the study adopted a within-subject design to compare and contrast

the same individuals' Arabic and English argumentative essays on two different topics. The objective was to trace any potential signs of cultural transfer in the students' English essays.

The within-subject analysis has been recommended by several intercultural rhetoricians (Doushaq, 1986; Hirose, 2003; Kobuta, 1998a; Uysal, 2008), for it enable researchers to study texts in their social contexts (Connor, 2008, 2011), to compare and contrast the same individual's essay in both languages, and to understand the examined phenomenon within its cultural context. Put another way, the within-subject comparison enables researchers to back up any possible connection between L1/L2 language/culture and writing with empirical data (Kobuta, 1998 b).

Owing to the non-availability of participants willing to take part in the study, a non-probability sampling design was adopted since the study targeted a particular group [master students at the department of English, Ibn Tofail University] that solely represents itself but not a wider population (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). The choice of master students as the population of the present study was driven by the need to recruit proficient students who are believed to have good command of English in order to avoid the influence of other developmental factors, such as language problems and poor writing skills that may affect the research findings. To collect bona fide data, students wrote Arabic and English argumentative essays on two different topics on two separate days. To avoid the effect of translation on the writing of student from Arabic into English and vice versa, students had written the first argumentative essay in Arabic a week before they wrote the second one in English, but this time on a different argumentative topic.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This research paper sought to answer the following question: Do the argumentative essays by Moroccan students display traces of collectivism or individualism?

To answer the research question of the study at hand, first, employment of the element of personal disclosure (first person singular pronouns and personal anecdotes) were highlighted, counted, and analysed. After that, the use of first person plural pronouns and the reference to collective virtues were also highlighted, counted, and analysed. Frequency counts of the employment of each of these features were provided during the analysis process.

Personal disclosure

As stated earlier, the amount of pronouns utilised in argumentative writing has been reported to vary across cultures (Wu and Robin, 2000). Therefore, examination of personal disclosure aimed at highlighting the frequency of using first person singular pronouns and personal anecdotes in the participants’ Arabic and English essays. As mentioned before, Triandis (1994) maintain that first person singular pronouns and personal anecdotes are features of individualistic culture.

Between-subject analysis of personal disclosure across Arabic and English essays

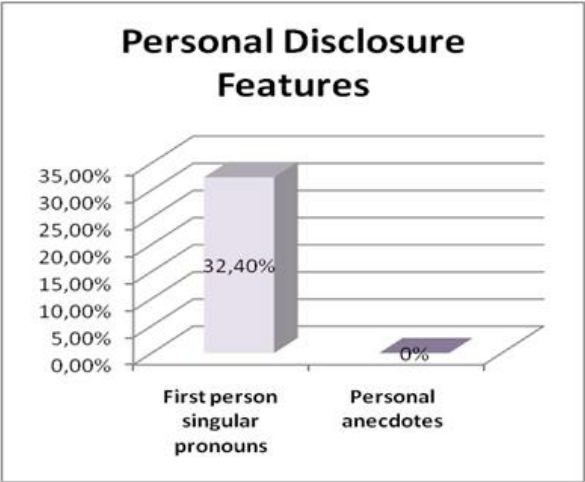


Fig.1: Features of personal disclosure in the participants’ in the Participants’ Arabic Essay

The between-subject analysis of personal disclosure in Arabic essays showed a moderate use of first person singular pronouns in the participants’ essays (figure1 above). Among the thirty-four Arabic essays (100%), eleven (32,40%) contained first person singular pronouns. No traces of first singular pronouns were found in the remaining twenty-three essays (67,60%). As for personal anecdotes, no such a feature was found in any of the essays.

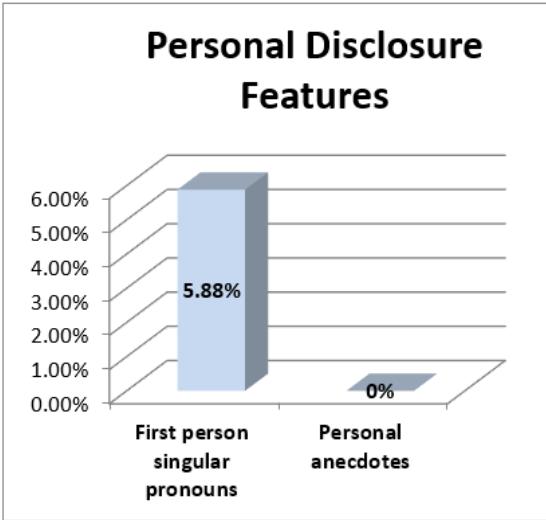


Fig.2: Features of personal disclosure in the participants’ English essay

On the contrary, the between-subject analysis of English essays revealed unexpected findings (figure 2 above). Of the thirty-four essays (100%), only two essays (5,88%) contained features of personal disclosure. In this context, participant 3 included personal anecdotes and used first person singular pronouns “I” four times and “my” once in her essay. Participant 29 used the first person singular pronoun “I” once in his essay.

Table.1: Within-subject analysis of personal disclosure across Arabic and English essays.

(a)Similarities

Participants by Number	Personal Disclosure	
	Arabic	English
1	None	None
5	None	None
6	None	None
7	None	None
9	None	None
10	None	None
11	None	None
12	None	None
13	None	None
15	None	None
16	None	None
18	None	None
20	None	None
21	None	None
22	None	None
23	None	None
24	None	None
25	None	None
26	None	None
27	None	None
28	None	None
29	I	I
30	None	None
33	None	None
Total 24	24	24

Analysis of similarities (table 1 above) showed very few affinities due to the large number of participants

who did not use any personal disclosure elements in their Arabic and English essays. To further elucidate, twenty-three participant (67,6%) out thirty-four (100%) did not use first person singular pronouns or personal anecdote in both essays. Only participant 29 employed the first person singular “I” once in Arabic and English essays.

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Table.2: Within-subject analysis of personal disclosure across Arabic and English essays.

(b)Differences

Participants by Number	Personal Disclosure	
	Arabic	English
1	First person singular pronouns	None
2	First person singular pronouns	None
3	First person singular pronouns	First person singular pronouns + personal anecdote
4	First person singular pronouns	None
8	First person singular pronouns	None
14	First person singular pronouns	None
17	First person singular pronouns	None
19	First person singular pronouns	None
31	First person singular pronouns	None
32	First person singular pronouns	None
34	First person singular pronouns	None
Total 11	11	11

Within-subject analysis of personal disclosure in Arabic essays showed noticeable differences. As shown in table 2 above, one third of the participants did not use any personal disclosure features in Arabic essays; however, noticed was the fact that Arabic essay contained more personal disclosure than English essays. In other words, of the thirty-four Arabic essays, eleven (32,35%) had personal disclosure elements. In this context, ten participants (29,41%) used the first person singular pronouns “I” once, but only one participant number2 used it twice. Besides, participant number 8 was the only

student who employed the first object pronoun “me”. Nevertheless, the same participants had none of the pronouns or personal anecdotes in English essays, except participant 3, who used I four times, “my” once, and one personal anecdote in her English essay.

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Collective self

Analysis of collective self elements sought to examine the use of first person plural pronouns and reference to collective virtues in the participants’ essays. According to Triandis (1994) first person plural pronouns and collective virtues are features of collectivist cultures. As stated above, the amount of pronouns employed and their frequency in argumentative writing is reported to be culture-specific (Wu and Robin, 2000)

2.1 Between-subject analysis of collective self across Arabic and English essays

2.1.1Arabic essays

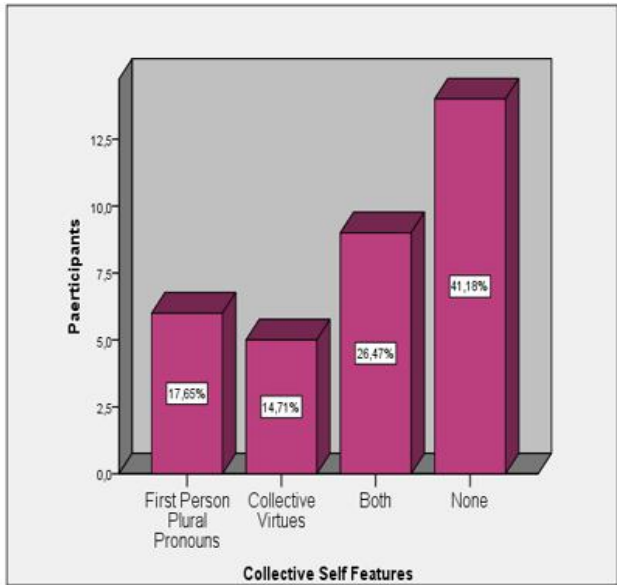


Fig.3: Features of Collective Self in the Participants' Arabic Essay

Unlike the between subject findings about personal disclosure, the findings of the between-subject analysis of collective self in Arabic essays revealed that the majority of participants exhibited traces of collective self features. As illustrated in figure 3 above, twenty-five Arabic essays (73,5%) out of thirty-four (100%) contained elements of collective self. In this connection, fourteen participant (41,18%) employed collective virtues, while nine participants(26,47%) utilized first person pronouns and collective virtues. On the cotrary, nine participants (26,47%) did not use any of the features of collective self.

2.1.2 English Essays

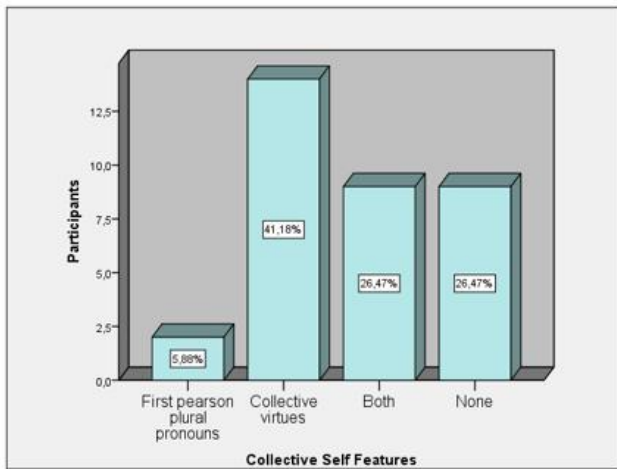


Fig.4: Features of Collective Self in the Participants' English Essay

The between-subject analysis of collective self showed significant findings. Analysis of the collective self features revealed a decrease in the use of these elements in the students' English essays. As shown in figure 4 above, twenty participants (58, 8%) out of thirty-four (100%) had features of collective self. Combination of first person plural pronouns and collective virtues was noticeable in 26% of the essays, and single use of one of collective self features appeared in 32% of the essays (11 participants). However, fourteen participants (41,2%) did not use any of the collective self elements.

Within-subject analysis of Arabic and English essays

Table.3: Within-subject analysis of Collective Self Features across Arabic and English essays.

(a) Similarity

Participants by Number	Collective Self features	
	Arabic	English
1	Collective virtues	Collective virtues
2	Both	Both
4	Both	Both
10	Both	Both
11	Both	Both
13	None	None
15	None	None
18	Both	Both
25	None	None
26	None	None
31	Collective virtues	Collective virtues
Total 11	11	11

Note: Both refers to the use of first plural pronouns and collective virtues

The within-subject analysis of similarities showed that about one third of participants had similar features in Arabic and English essays by the same individuals. As illustrated in table 3 above, of the thirty-four participants (100%), eleven (32,35%) had similarities as regards the use of collective self features in Arabic and English essays. Of the eleven participants, five (14,7%) combined first person plural and collective virtues in the both essays. Similar use of virtues was detected in two essays, whereas four (11,8%) participants had none of the features in Arabic and English essays.

Table.4: Within-subject analysis of Collective Self Features across Arabic and English essays.

Differences		
Participants by Number	Collective Self features	
	Arabic	English
3	First plural pronouns	None
5	Collective virtues	None
6	Collective virtues	None
7	Collective virtues	Both
8	First plural pronouns	None
9	First plural pronouns	None
12	None	First plural pronouns
14	Collective virtues	None
16	First plural pronouns	None
17	None	Collective virtues
19	Collective virtues	Both
20	Collective virtues	First plural pronouns
21	Collective virtues	First plural pronouns
22	Both	Collective virtues
23	Both	Collective virtues
24	First plural pronouns	Both
27	Collective virtues	Both
28	Both	None
29	Collective virtues	First plural pronouns
30	Collective virtues	Both
32	None	Both
33	Collective virtues	None
34	Collective virtues	First plural pronouns
Total 23	23	23

Note: Both refers to the use of first plural pronouns and collective virtues

Within-subject analysis of differences across Arabic and English essays showed also important findings. As shown in table 4 above, twenty-three (67,6%) of the thirty-four participants (100%) exhibit divergent uses of collective self features in Arabic and English essays. In this context, four participants (11,76%) have collective self features in Arabic essays, but they used none in English essays. In addition, the findings showed that participants favoured some constructions over others. Sixteen essays (47,05%) adopted the same construction, four each. For instance, participants 5, 6, 14, and 33 employed collective virtues in Arabic essays, while they used none of the features in English essays. In a similar vein, participants 3, 8, 16, and 27 employed first plural pronouns in their Arabic essay, yet they did not use any in their English essay. Another worth noticing point was the single use of one of the collective self features in one of the essays and the use of both features of the collective self in the other one (participants 7, 19, 24, and 30). Last but not least, differences were observed in the way of using the collective self features in each essay. Participants (20, 21, 29, and 34) exhibited preference for collective virtues in Arabic essays, whereas the same participants favoured first person plural pronouns in English essays.

All things considered, analysis of the features of individualism and collectivism yielded interesting findings. In this context, the between-subject analysis and

the within-subject analysis of personal disclosure features showed more similarities than differences. As regards similarities, a large proportion of participants did not use personal disclosure elements either in Arabic or English essays. As for differences, findings revealed students' preference for employing personal disclosure features to express opinion in Arabic, but not in English. However, so misleading these facts be that they should be dealt with cautiously. They should not mean that first person singular pronouns are the most frequently used features in the students' argumentative essays. In this context, the between-subject analysis and the within subject-analysis of the collective self features provided illuminating results: significant use of the collective self features were detected in both essays, yet they were more predominant in the students' Arabic essays (73,53%) than in their English ones (58,8%). Succinctly put, dominance of collective self elements manifested itself in the higher proportion of pronouns and collective virtues employed in the students' writing, especially Arabic essays. Remarkable also was the prevalence of collective virtues in Arabic essays and combination of collective virtues and first person singular in English essays. One more interesting fact is that participants had approximately equal employment of collective self features in both essays Arabic (26,47%) and English (26,5%). Worth mentioning here also is the fact that within-subject analysis showed more differences than similarities, even in using collective self features. Participants exhibited preference for divergent collective self elements in each essay.

V. DISCUSSION

The study at hand aimed at analyzing cultural dimensions in the argumentative writing of Moroccan students at Ibn Tofail University, Kenitra. It sought to trace features of collectivism and individualism, two cultural features reported to affect the argumentative writing of nonnative speakers of English. Also, the study sought to detect any traces of transfer of these elements in the students' Arabic and English essays.

To begin with, the findings of the present study with regard to the employment of personal disclosure and collective self elements as features of individualism and collectivism respectively concur with previous findings of some previous studies (Triandis, 1994; Wu & Rubin, 2000, Zhu, 2011). Features of collectivism such as collective virtues and use of first person plural pronouns appear to predominate. Deduced from such findings is the students' tendency towards employing the collective self features when constructing an argument or expressing an opinion. Findings such as these dovetail with those obtained by

Triandis' (1994). In a similar vein, Wu and Robin (2000) found that Taiwanese students leaned towards employing a high frequency of collective self elements and collective virtues in their English argumentative essays.

Another worth noting point is the high frequency of collective self features in the students' essays. Such a result may insinuate some sort of impact of the students' culture on their thought and therefore writing, especially that many a researcher view writing as a social, personal, interactional practice embedded in a culture (Connor, 1996; Hyland, 2009; Kaplan 1966). Hence, it is likely that the Moroccan cultural context might have exerted an indirect impact on their argumentative writing. With the strong social ties, group affiliation, loyalty, shared beliefs and social norms so characteristic of people from collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2001; McCool, 2009; Triandis, 1990), they tend to reserve self-disclosure and rely on collective self when voicing one's self/ opinion or constructing an argument(Wu & Rubin, 2000). In addition, the findings of the within-subject analysis revealed that some students employed the same features, particularly collective self elements, in both essays. Hints such as these corroborate the claim that such a similarity might be due to transfer from L1 to L2 (Kobuta, 1998 b, Uysal, 2008) since only one student employed self disclosure features in both essays. Equally important here is the fact that such findings might indicate that students have failed to consider the audience, using discourse nonconformities that does not meet the reader's expectations (Drid, 2015).

VI. CONCLUSION

The study at hand attempted to explore individualism and collectivism as cultural aspects in the augmentative essay of Moroccan students. It sought to discover whether the argumentative writing of master students at Ibn Tofail University display any cultural specific dimensions of individualistic or collectivist cultures. Driven by the need to dismiss or corroborate the claims that the mother tongue culture impact the writing of its people, the study at hand set out to know the extent to which cultural dimension such as collectivism and individualism may affect the students'Arabic and English argumentative writing in Morocco. Also, the study capitalized on the new directions in the field of intercultural rhetoric (Connor, 2004, 2008, 2011) that recommend studying texts within their cultural context. Hence, the current study, maintains that if writing is a socio-cultural cognitive process, a close relationship between culture and writing does exist (Connor,1996; Kaplan, 1966; Ostler). Furthermore, it was reported in the review of literature that argumentation varies across cultures and

may therefore be influenced by the dimensions of the cultural context in which it is practiced. (Connor, 1996; Uysal, 2012). With regard to the findings of the present study, it was found that the argumentative writing of the participants contain a great deal of collective self and collective virtues, features that characterize writing and communication in collectivist cultures (Hofstede, 2001; Gudykunst et al., 1987; McCool, 2009, Triandis 1994; Wu& Rubin, 2000).

Pedagogical implications

The findings of the present study have shown that students, consciously or unconsciously, lean towards employing the collective self features and the collective virtues in argumentative writing. Notwithstanding the fact that the participants are master students supposed to have already developed a mature style, they failed to meet the expectations of their audiences. Therefore, writing classes at university should stress the fact that a well-crafted argument is audience-based. Also writing classes should be geared towards raising students' awareness to rhetorical similarities and difference, to the audience's cultural background, and to the styles of communication across cultures to avoid communication breakdown (Connor 1996; Reid 1984). In addition to this, adopting the process approach and genre approach to teaching writing at the tertiary level can help enhance students' writing.

Limitations

The current study has its limitations. First and foremost, the sample size is not representative enough. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized. Second, Standard Arabic is not the mother tongue of Moroccans. A limitation such as this needs to be taken into consideration as it raises the question of which mother tongue to consider: "Darija", "Tarifit", "Tashelhit", "Tamazight", or "Hassaniyya" (Ennaji, 2005). Moreover, the educational context in the present study is limited to Ibn Tofail University; therefore, it cannot be representative of all Moroccan universities. Last but not least, the study could have yielded better results had it used statistical tools, recruited large sample size of teachers and students, and adopted mixed-methods research design.

Recommendations

The present study recommends employing different data collection methods, such as stimulated recall interviews, background questionnaires, and essays. Also, highly recommended is the use of statistical tools to get reliable result, for relying solely on texts as a source of data is not enough to yield better results.

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