A Contrastive Analysis of Chinese and American Rhetoric

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Abstract

It is obviously true that discourses may share similar organizational structures. Psychologists have even testified in recent years that different cultures may share similar schema for comprehension and memory. We must, however, admit that differences in terms of discourse organizational structure as well as in many other aspects of behavior are just as obvious. It is generally acknowledged and, to more or lesser extent, verified by scholars that, even though different cultures may both use linear and configural structures in their organizing discourses, Eastern rhetoric seems to favor configural logic while Western rhetoric seems to favor linear logic.

This paper is based upon a case analysis of 46 expository essays by non-English majors, 16 model essays by English majors of Peking University, and a considerable number of academic paper abstracts delivered at The Third International symposium on ELT in China.. It argues that in Chinese writing in English, the traditional Chinese configural logic mode finds their best expressions. To make a contrastive study between the patterns in the Chinese English writing and Anglo-American English patterns in English writing, this paper also includes an analysis of 31 essays of American college students and reaches a conclusion that all of the 31 essays have adopted linear logic mode. This paper makes a contrastive analysis of linear and configural logic modes on the basis of Aristotelian reasoning and the Toulmin model, which are represented in almost everyday American spoken and written discourses and the traditional pattern of Chinese discourses called "起、承、转、合" ("qi—cheng—zhuan—he") four-part structure.

Introduction

It is true that rhetoric and discourses may share similar logic structures. Chinese and English rhetoric and discourses, for example, may both enjoy linear and configural logic structures. Psychologists have even testified in recent years that different cultures may share similar schema for comprehension and memory (Carroll, 1999, p. 180). We must, however, admit that differences in terms of logic structure as well as in many other aspects of behavior are just as obvious. It is generally acknowledged and, to a large extent, verified by scholars that, even though different cultures may both use linear logic and configural logic in organizing discourses, Eastern rhetoric seems to favor configural logic while Western rhetoric seems to favor linear logic.

At the beginning of this paper, I would like to quote what Kearney and Plax have to say in regard to the differences between linear logic and configural logic as I believe their observations in this aspect are insightful and in general applicable to comparative analysis.

Whereas linear logic is direct and straightforward, configural logic is more indirect. Speakers using configual logic are not likely to provide a preview of the main points or spell out a specific conclusion. They explore issues from a variety of tangential view or examples. Links between main points are not made explicitly; direction is only implied.   (Kearney & Plax, 1996, p.238)

With considerable work done on the comparison of Western linear logic rhetoric and Eastern configural logic rhetoric as well as of Western mind and Eastern mind underlying the differences between these two rhetorics, the differences in terms of logic structure still need detailed and accurate explorations. This paper aims to explain the differences of logic structures by analyzing them on the basis of Aristotelian reasoning and the Toulmin model, which are represented in almost everyday American spoken and written discourses and the traditional pattern of Chinese discourses called 'four-part structure'.

The interpretation of Chinese traditional discourse structure, "起、承、转、合" ("qi—cheng—zhuan—he"), is a controversial issue. In Benhua Wang's *Practical Modern Chinese Rhetoric* (王本华，(2002, pp. 106-107), he points out that the question is raised in the setting up ("qi"), analyzed in the development ("cheng") and transition ("zhuan"), and solved in the resolution ("he"). He holds the view that in the setting up ("qi"), narrative and descriptive writings begin with the introduction of time and place while expository and argumentative writings raise a question. In the development ("cheng"), the occurrence and development of events are stated in narrative and descriptive writings, while the question is analyzed and expounded in expository and argumentative writings. In the transition ("zhuan"), flashbacks and indirect descriptions are used in narrative and descriptive writings, while the question is expounded from the reverse side in expository and argumentative writings. In the resolution, the end of the events is laid out in narrative and descriptive writings, while the solution to the question is proposed in expository and argumentative writings.

This kind of interpretation or point of view reflects the idea that a certain number of Chinese writings share a somewhat similar discourse structure with the Western writings. This idea does not contradict what this paper is trying to prove, which is analyzing the logic mode of the majority of Eastern and Western discourses.

To verify the claim of this paper, Professor Yuxin Jia and I examined 46 expository essays from the Prize Essays of College Student Writing Contest (2000) These 46 prize essays were chosen from 1600 candidate essays written by English learners and thus may represent the tendency of the organizational pattern of Chinese expository discourse in English. Our findings are that 31 essays of the total of 46 essays adopt the configural logic mode, including 2 essays with the main point placed in the middle; 13 adopt the linear logic mode; and 2 adopt what Hinds calls the quasi-inductive style. In the quasi-inductive style (quasi-configural logic mode) the main point is not explicitly stated but only suggested or implied.

We find that both configural and linear logic modes are used in these essays. However the configural logic mode seems to be the general preference. The indirectness in the expository essay writing does not only lie in the fact that there is no place for a preview of the thesis in the opening remarks or that the main point is delayed until the end, but also in the fact that the main point or claim is arrived at on the basis of the explanations of specific or particular instances. Besides, personal feelings, involvement, and opinions, which might be considered to be not directly relevant by the Westerners, appear in almost every paragraph

and serve as important supports for the authors' claim. It is also found that, in at least three or four essays that cling to the configural logic mode, the main point is either implied (left to the reader to guess) or stated in too general or vague terms at the end. It is also found that in one essay both configural and linear logic modes are used, the configural logic mode for the essay as a whole and the linear logic mode for one paragraph. Interestingly, we found that whether the configural or linear logic mode is preferred may likely have something to do with topics selected. Those essays (four in all) with the topic of 'Has Art Passed Its Prime?' all adopt the configural logic mode while all the six essays with the topic 'Knowledge Is Power' keep to the linear logic mode.

       The analysis above is made of essays of non-English majors. To make the analysis of essays of English majors, I have chosen a book of model essays of English majors from Peking University. The essays in this book are classified into 3 groups: narration, exposition, and book review. There are in total 16 expository essays. Among them 7 essays have adopted the configural logic mode, 5 essays the quasi-configural logic mode, and the other 4 essays the linear logic mode.

       Professor Yuxin Jia and I have recently examined abstracts of over 500 papers presented at the third International Symposium on ELT in China held on May 19-21, 2001 in Beijing. Although the data collection and analysis are still underway, we have already found that of all the abstracts, a considerable number follow the traditional Chinese configural logic mode and all these abstracts are written by Chinese scholars. In contrast, all of the Anglo-American participants follow the direct or deductive approach, which can be explained by the Toulmin model.

       In order to compare Chinese writings in English with Anglo-American English writings, I have examined a book of selected essays of college students from several American universities. There are 49 essays in the book. 31 of them are expository essays and all of the 31 essays have adopted the linear logic mode.

       Below is a table of the number and percentage of English essays adopting configural logic mode, quasi-configural logic mode, and linear logic mode analyzed in this paper.

English Essays	Total Number	Configural Logic Mode		Quasi-Configural Logic Mode		Linear Logic Mode	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Chinese Non-English Majors' Prize Essays	46	31	67%	2	4%	13	28%
Chinese English Majors' Model Essays	16	7	44%	5	31%	4	25%
American College Students' English Essays	31	0	0	0	0	31	100%

From these case studies and analyses we can see that Chinese writing in English is indeed greatly influenced not only by Anglo-American patterns but also by traditional Chinese patterns in writing, which can be regarded as the result of transfer. From such transfer we can tell how influential the configural logic mode in the writings of Chinese.

In this paper, the differences between logic and configural logic structures in terms of directness and indirectness will be revisited through a detailed analysis of these two logic structures.

1.   Linear Logic Structure
1.1   Linear Logic Mode

The linear orientation in terms of patterns of thinking in the West naturally leads to the linear orientation in terms of rhetoric and discourse organization. Linearity characterizes the Western cultural tradition in older rhetoric and discourse and it basically represents the characteristics of contemporary rhetoric and discourse organization. Almost all the spoken and written discourses are linear-oriented in the West and almost all of them are made up of three parts: introduction, body, and conclusion (See Fig. 1). The introduction, the beginning of a speech, is designed to secure the audience's attention, to state the thesis, and to preview the development of the speech. The body, the largest portion of a speech, includes the bulk of the arguments, and evidence and proof of the thesis and other claims. The conclusion, the end of a speech, provides a brief summary of the argument or restatement of the main points or claims and gives a strong note of finality to the speech. The linear logic structure is often characterized by presenting the claim or proposition at the beginning paragraph so that the listener or reader can quickly see how the solution is relevant to them and attention can be easily maintained. This order of arrangement, that is, the order with main arguments being presented first, is called the anti-climax order. In this linear organization, the claims or main points are organized in cause-and-effect, problem-and-solution, space, chronological, and topical order.

Introduction   Thesis/Preview
                          Claim/Main point   **Sequence of Arranging main ideas**
                             Evidence   Chronological
                             Main point   Categorical/topical
                             Evidence   Cause-Effect
Body   Main point   Problem-Solution
                             Evidence   Spatial
                             Main point   Comparison and contrast
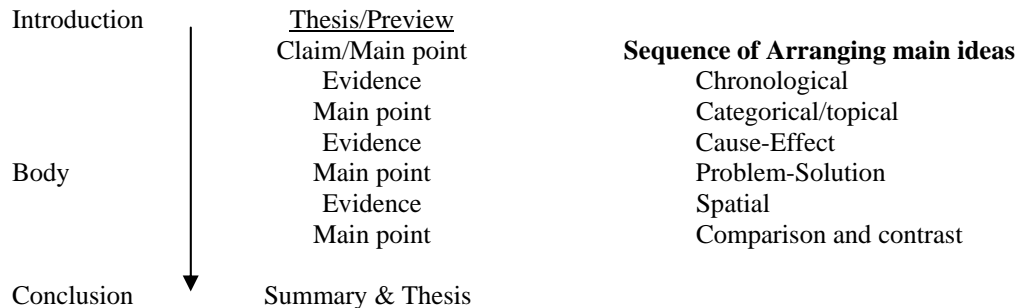
Conclusion   Summary & Thesis

Fig. 1. Linear logic/Anti-climax Ordered Structure

An important feature of Western rhetoric is people's attitude towards the rationality behind all the claims or propositions that are made, whether claims of fact, value or need. They must be supported with evidence and factual evidence that forms the basis for decision-making for almost every speaker or writer.

Supporting materials include all forms of factual evidence lending weight to the truth of the claim. They include facts, data, statistics, examples, opinions, experience, quotations, and so on. It is the factual evidence and the proof based upon the evidence and the claim to which the proof leads which constitute the core of Western rhetoric. And the answer to the question of what constitutes proof and how it is related to claim can be found in what Douglas Ehninger and Wayne Brockriede have to say in regard to definition of proof: *"Proof is the process of securing belief in one statement by relating it to another statement already believed"* (Ehninger & Brockriede, 1963). In organizing discourses in linear order, all we have to decide is how much and what supporting material we will use to support each claim and in what order to arrange them. In short, the addition of factual evidence is what linear logic is all about. In general, claims or main points are laid out in a linear order and connected with signposts such as "in the first place", "secondly", and "finally."

1.2   Linear Logic/ Toulmin Model

Aristotelian reasoning and the Toulmin model, the two major representative structures of reasoning in American rhetoric, can analyze the linear logic characterizing Western rhetoric.

The model devised by Stephen Toulmin gets one proof from evidence to inference and avoids symbolic relationships. A unit of proof has six elements, which is what Toulmin Model all about.
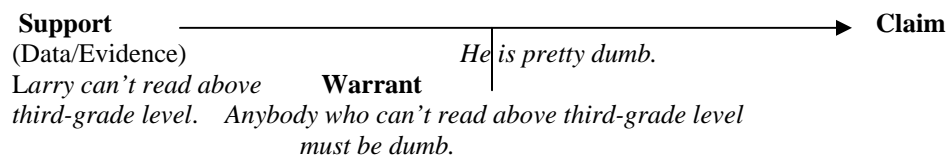
According to this model, speakers and writers reason from a presumed, or piece of **evidence** or data, to a **claim** or **proposition**, which often appears as the thesis statement of an inferential nature. The two are connected or made reasonable by bridges called **warrants**. A warrant is defined in some dictionaries as a guarantee or justification for the claim. Another element of this linear structure is a **qualifier**, which allows for exceptions, qualifications, or reservations. The following dialogue offers an example of the relationship between the claim and the other elements of the Western discourse.

"*I don't think that Larry can do the job. **He's pretty dumb**.*"
"*Really? I thought he was smart. What makes you say he's dumb?*"
"*Did you know that he's illiterate-**can't read above a third-level**? In my book that makes him dumb.*"

Using the Toulmin model, we can symbolize the relationships among the support (evidence), the claim, and warrant by the following diagram:

Support ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯▶ **Claim**
(Data/Evidence)   *He is pretty dumb.*
L*arry can't read above*   **Warrant**
third-grade level.   *Anybody who can't read above third-grade level*
                    must be dumb.

Of course, we cannot tell if the warrant is valid. That decision has to be delayed until the backing is considered.

To allow for exceptions, special conditions, or qualifications, Toulmin uses the symbol "Q" for qualifiers. "R" stands for rebuttal.

These indispensable elements of a unit of proof are almost identical with "evidence", "main point", and "thesis" in the structure of linear logic.

The following example may offer a complete picture of the Toulmin model:
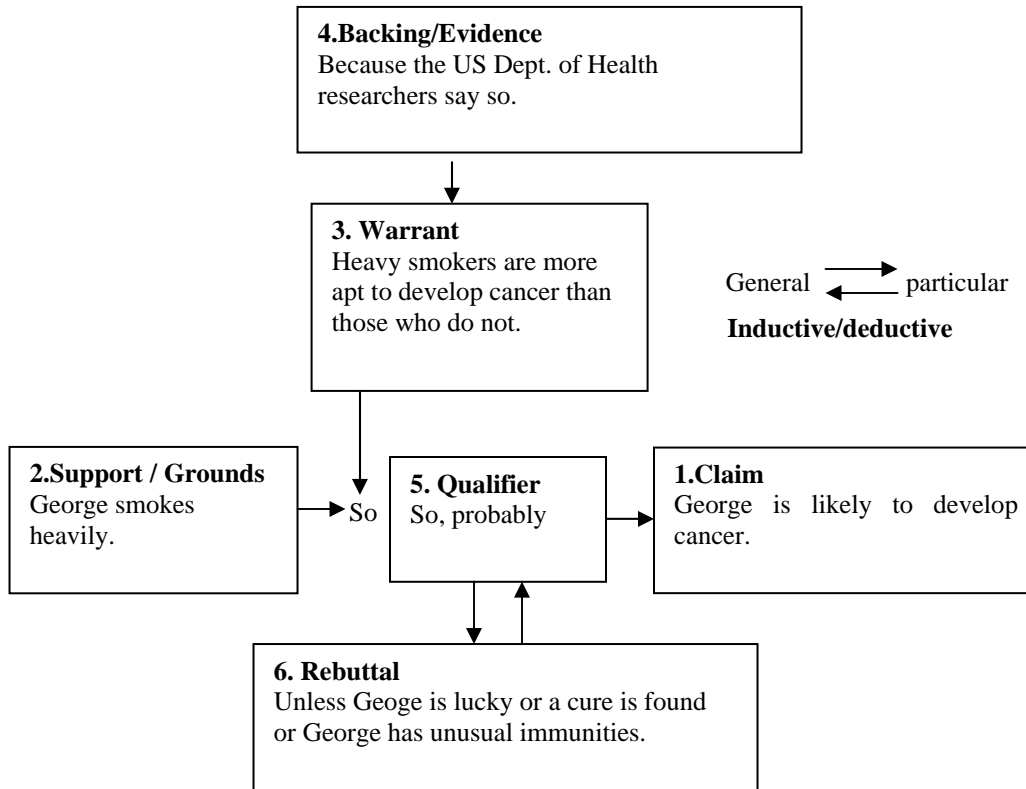
4.Backing/Evidence
Because the US Dept. of Health researchers say so.

3. Warrant
Heavy smokers are more apt to develop cancer than those who do not.

General ⇄ particular

Inductive/deductive

2.Support / Grounds
George smokes heavily.

So

5. Qualifier
So, probably

1.Claim
George is likely to develop cancer.

6. Rebuttal
Unless Geoge is lucky or a cure is found or George has unusual immunities.

Fig. 2.Toulmin Model / Linear Logic (Ross, 1990, p.119)

The diagram demonstrates that "(I claim that) George is likely to develop cancer" is the **Claim**, the speaker's stand, or the position he or she is taking. **Support/Grounds** is the evidence, facts, data, etc. that tend to prove the truth of the claim in the first place–a reasoned beginning. In this case "George smokes heavily" functions as support or ground. The **Warrant**, "Heavy smokers are more apt to develop cancer than those who do not," is like a bridge between the grounds and claim. It certifies the truth of the claim, which is the product of the grounds and warrant. **Backing**, "Because the U.S. Dept. of Health researchers say so ", serves as a piece of evidence and supports and clarifies the warrant, which in this case is also

a main point. The **Qualifier**, "So, probably" expresses the degree of force the claim is judged to possess. The last statement, "Unless George is lucky or a cure is found or George has unusual immunities", serves as what is called **Rebuttal**, which is where the speaker specifically assesses how or under what circumstances the claim might prove false or untenable.

These elements presented in the Toulmin Model appear not only in argumentation of a debate, but also in almost all the spoken and written discourses in the West as almost all of them are linearly logically patterned.

Another indispensable mode of linear logic in contemporary American rhetoric is reasoning, which includes inductive and deductive reasoning. The mode of reasoning is derived from Aristotle's enthymeme and involves a mental leap from the supporting material (evidence) to the claim (see the Diagram above). It is reasoning that links the supporting material with the claim, enabling the speaker or the writer to influence the listeners' attitude or behavior.

Induction is a form of reasoning in which we come to conclusions about the whole on the basis of observations of particular instances; while deductive reasoning moves from general cases to conclusions about particular cases. The reasoning process of the above example may well represent the method of deductive reasoning. That is, it starts from general cases and arrives at conclusions about the particular case.

Linear logic underlies almost all Western spoken and written discourse. In the following business negotiation, linear logic finds expression just as well. Mr. Horn, an American negotiator, makes the talk.

Mr. Horn: "So, Karino-san, (1) **Claim** I think I would suggest is at this time, and tell me if you agree or not, that the first thing is to really find out how serious their timing is. And, as I said, (2) **Support** we would like to accommodate you for many reasons, you being a good tenant and prestigious tenant. But again (3) **Warrant** we, on the other hand, cannot lose a major tenant for a whole quarter, especially (4) **Backing** considering the way the market is now. If we lose this one, I have no idea if we can get another. So (5) **Qualifier** maybe (6) **Conclusion** the first step is, rather than to try to figure out alternatives at this time, just to see if whether or not their timing is so critical.

And if they can move that date a little bit, we just might be able to accommodate you" (Kim, 1996, Fall 1996/7, 6:1, pp.115-150).

This American negotiator's statement can be illustrated again using the Toulmin model. [See the next page.]

2.   Configural Logic Structure
2.1   Configural Logic Mode

The Chinese discourses, of both spoken and written structure, no matter what genre they are of and what they are about, are generally characterized by what is called "起、承、转、合" in Chinese. What is in contemporary China is called three-part structure (introduction, body, and conclusion) today is in fact just an extension of this four-part-structure. Being climax ordered, it is essentially different from Western linear logic structure.

This four-part ("qi", "cheng", "zhuan", and "he") discourse structure includes setting-up, development, transition, and conclusion stages. (See Fig. 3) The essence of this four-part

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            ┌─────────────────────────┐
            │ (4) Backing             │
            │ considering the market  │
            │ now                     │
            └───────────┬─────────────┘
                        │
                        ▼
            ┌─────────────────────────┐
            │ (3) Warrant             │
            │ We cannot lose major    │
            │ tenant                  │
            └───────────┬─────────────┘
                        │
                        ▼
┌──────────────┐  ┌──────────────┐   ┌──────────────┐
│ (2) Support  │  │ (5) Qualifier│   │ (1)  Claim   │
│ to accommodate│─▶│ So          │──▶│ timing       │
│ you          │  │              │   │              │
└──────────────┘  └──────────────┘   └──────┬───────┘
                                            │
                                      ┌──────────────┐
                                      │ (6) Conclusion│
                                      │    timing     │
                                      └──────────────┘
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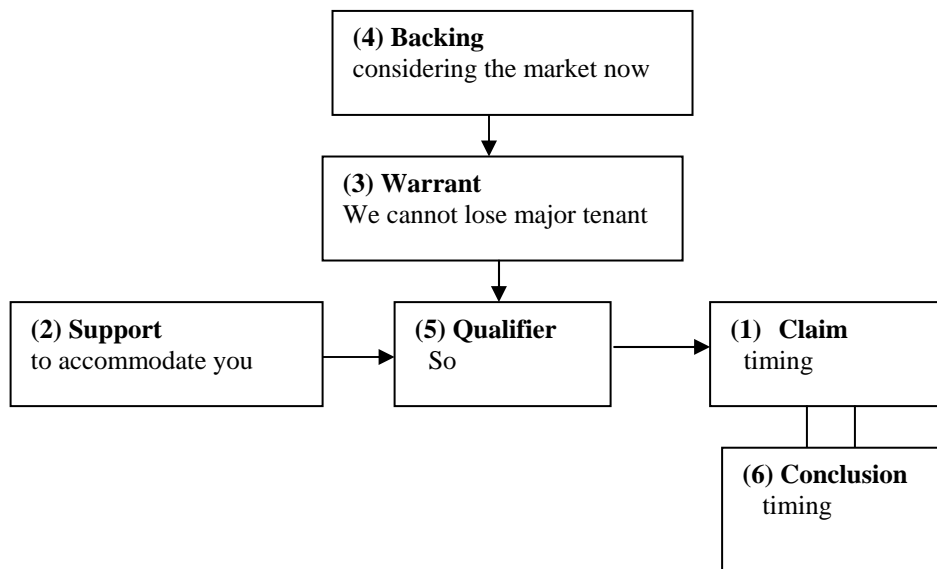
Fig.3. Linear Logic

structure is that the speaker or writer comes to his or her point or claim indirectly. In concrete terms, the four-part structure is characterized by: 1) initially, the speaker or writer should first of all arrest the listener's attention by expounding the importance of his or her topic or by building up a shared context or situational framework with and through which to judge or justify his or her claim (unlike the American rhetoric, Chinese rhetoric seldom offers a thesis or preview at the outset that would orient the listener or reader to the overall direction of the discourse); 2) through the efforts at the second and third stages, the speaker or the writer must achieve the effect that the listener is not supposed to get the speaker's or the writer's intention until he or she reaches the last stage. Stated differently, the claim or one's request, for example, is delayed till the end. In this way, in most cases the Chinese discourse structure seems to be the inverse of English discourse structure; 3) the indirection in presenting one's claim embedded in the development of the discourse seems to be like gyres or circles "turning and turning around the subject" so that the main point may seem (to Westerners) to be buried in a mass of item-by-item of listing of justifications; and, as a result, 4) subordinate clauses in complex sentences connected by markers such as "because A, because B, and because C, so/therefore...", "since..., so...", "although..., but/yet...", etc. precede main clauses to set the evaluative framework. The order of this structure with the major points presented at the last stage is called 'climax order'. Fig. 4 on the next page demonstrates this climax ordered structure.
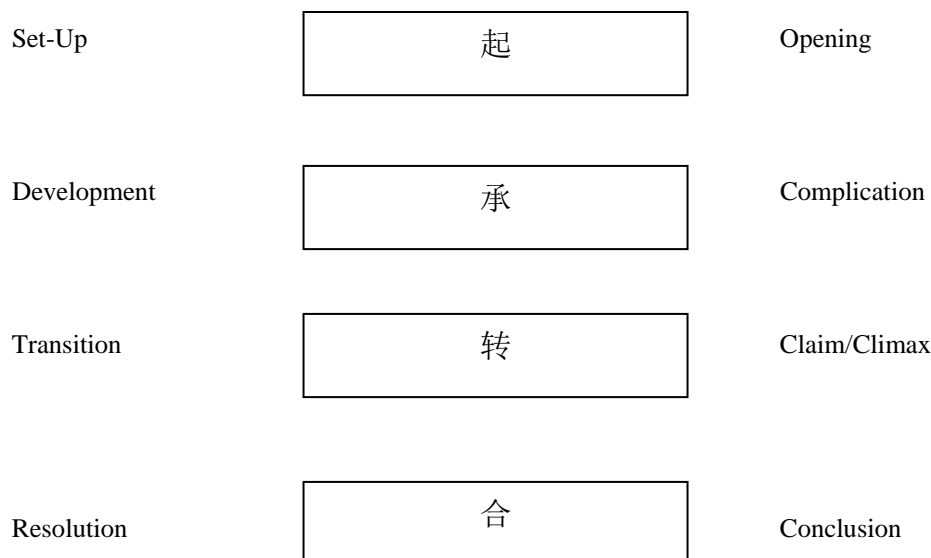
Set-Up	起	Opening
Development	承	Complication
Transition	转	Claim/Climax
Resolution	合	Conclusion

Fig. 4. Configural Logic Structure/ Climax Ordered Structure

2.2 Configural Logic

The configural nature in organizing discourses finds best expression in the fact that the main points or claims are seldom seen directly in most Chinese discourses. Stated differently, the main argument, which in fact is like a topic sentence in an English discourse, is logically derived from previously listed reasons, examples, observations, and opinions and appeared in the conclusion. This indirection finds best expression in the following talk (a part of a recorded discussion by a group of Chinese businessmen who manage the various divisions of a large Hong Kong business corporation). This talk concerns the qualities desired in a good salesman. The claim or summary statements are italicized (Young, 1992. p.76).

Irving:
    Oscar, anything else to add? Your line of business is, again, quite different from what PK and Tony have. And, in your line of business, I presume market information will be quite important.
Oscar (a Chinese):
    Yes. (1) What have been mentioned previously by the three gentlemen, I think they are quite sufficient to cover all the basic requirement of a salesman. (2) My business is textile. The salesman is....The quality of the salesman, need something different. (3) **Because** the volume of making a sales in textiles is about, at least, to over ten thousand U.S. dollars, sometimes. **So** (4) that is the problem. That is, (5) whenever anybody who makes a decision to buy such.. .willing to pay such amount, we'll make sure their financial aid is strong. And, then, (6) such... sometimes the market may suddenly drop in textile. (7) Maybe we're willing to buy one month ago, but may not

be buying.. .want to buy now. Things like that. (8) **So** the **so**, (9*) for a salesman, also have to understand about the financial situation and things like that.*

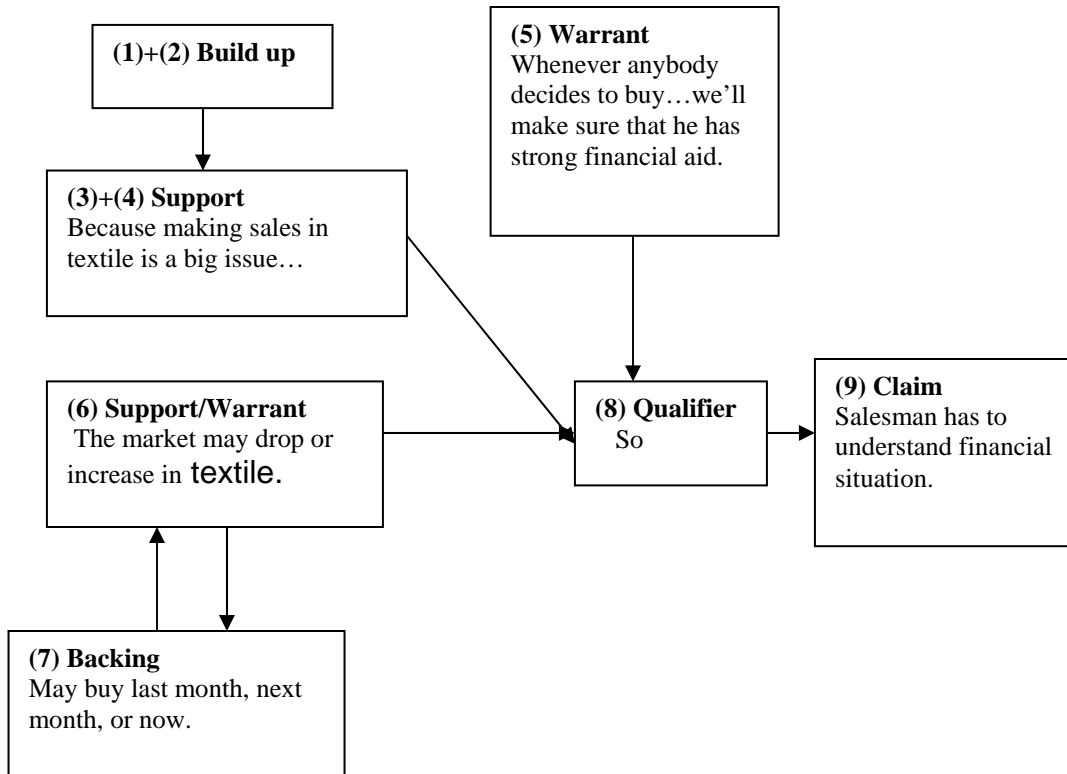The Toulmin Model in Fig. 5 can illustrate this talk underpinned by configural logic.

Fig. 5. Configural Logic

If we compare configural logic (Fig. 5) with Linear logic (Fig. 3) and (Fig. 2) the difference is obvious.

      In the first place, the speaker at the very beginning makes efforts to build up a shared context or emotionally attached framework.

      Secondly, this discourse structure, which is true almost in most spoken and written discourses in Chinese culture, is just the inverse of English discourse structure explained earlier, as the claim or the climax (Sentence 9) is delayed till the end of this discourse. In fact the concluding paragraph (Sentence 9), which is derived from previously posited ideas, may well serve as a topic sentence or claim in English discourses. Stated differently, this speech arrives at where it should have started in English discourses. Naturally, this kind of discourse structure is generally regarded as indirection oriented as the proposition or claim is not dealt with straightforwardly. What is more, the use of special order of subordinate clauses, namely the subordinate clauses precede the main clauses using lexical markers such as "because A, because B, and because C, so/therefore...", "since..., so...", "although..., but/yet...", (in which

"because", "since", and "although" etc. initiate the (listing of) reasons and justifications while "so/therefore", "so", and "but/yet" act as transition from the reasons to the claim or main point), further reinforces indirection in addressing the topic or claim. According to Chao (1963), these subordinate clauses set the evaluative framework for the main clause or for the topic of the topic-comment utterances, therefore they must precede the main clause.

Thirdly, the opening sentences (Sentences 1&2) in this discourse, instead of acting as a preview or a thesis statement or even as a claim in English discourses, sound like sort of an emotionally attached build-up that aims to achieve an harmonious relationship. The second and third sentences are uttered by the speaker to justify the speaker's position, which is different from the positions of some other attendants, and to make reasonable what he is going to say. The meaning of these opening sentences in fact have little to do with the claim, which appears at the very end of discourse (see Fig. 5).

Fourthly, in Fig. 5, we can see that the evidence (3), (4), (6), and (7) are in support of the claim (9). They are, however, not as linearly organized as a cause-and-effect relationship in an English discourse. To our understanding, the claim or proposition *that salesman has to understand market situation* (9) is supported by two main points*: Because .. making sales is a big issue* (3) (4) and *market may drop* (6). These two parallel points are connected by grammatical cohesive links "and, then". This flexible way of using "Because..." and "and, then" to connect the parallel points may strike Westerners as odd as these two connectives may in no way serve as signposts in Western discourses.

Lastly, in the reasoning process, the speaker also seems to be flexible. He employs both inductive and deductive methods within the same paragraph of just a few lines. In sentence (3) and (5), the speakers uses the inductive method. That is, he comes to the conclusion about the whole (5) on the basis of particular instances. The speaker, however, also adopts the deductive method. He comes to the conclusion about the specific cases (7) on the basis of general cases (6).

Conclusion

In summary, contrastive studies and discourse analysis have discovered noticeable differences between Chinese writing in English and Anglo-American English writing. Chinese writing in English is indeed greatly influenced not only by Anglo-American patterns but also by traditional Chinese patterns in writing. The most noticeable difference is that configural logic in Chinese English writing is the generally preferred mode while in Anglo-American English writing linear logic is the general preference, even though both writings share both linear and configural logic modes. Presumably, the configural logic mode in Chinese writing in English is not an accidental phenomenon but a systematic one. It is systematic in the sense that it is consistently underpinned by culture-specific patterns, which can be explained by a complex synthesis of factors: historical, cultural, philosophical, social, political, ethical, and educational. I believe that we must go beyond the first language transfer theory to account for this complicated Chinese configural logic mode in English writing.

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