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Faculty of Humanities

Theses of dissertation

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RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION

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Budapest, 2015

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1. Introduction and objectives

Mihály Babits wrote to his pupils in his famous essay about the L1 education: “We are teaching you, how to think and speak” (Babits 1909/1978: 87). In this dissertation I examined the bibliography of classical and modern rhetoric with the aim to find tools to diagnose and develop the competences shaping the mother language, the composition and thinking skills.

The two scientific fields, rhetoric and composition (essay writing) are inevitably linked. The closeness of these two fields is well represented by Connors’ term *Composition–Rhetoric*. As a subject, the curriculum of the primary school gives place to composition studies in Hungary. The new general curriculum allows a few classes to study writing every two years. Rhetoric as a subject finds its place in the curriculum only in the 11th form of the high school. But in a wider sense, rhetoric permeates the L1 educational studies.

“The need for [...] effective discourse is plain for all to see” – thinks Weaver, that’s why he finds: “To write well, one must be alive at every point of one’s being, with the result, that composition, more than any other subject, is a training of the whole man” (1961: XIII). His ideal of freshman composition is very similar to “the good man speaking well” (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*), the classical ideal of Quintilian and of the whole rhetorical tradition as well.

By Composition we mean not only the process but also the result of the process, the text. That’s why my research question was not only: Is it important to teach rhetoric in high school? but the following: Can I use the results of the classical and modern rhetorical bibliography to diagnose and develop the writing skills of the children?

The main question of my research was: How can I as a teacher give a positive and constructive feedback to the children’s essays? Can I use the criteria of the rhetorical analysis to give substantive feedback that helps them to improve their writing? The topic of my research is the rhetorical analysis of children’s papers. This analysis is based on the terminology of classical rhetoric: “the rhetorical critic asks, why an author did this, in this order, and in these words” (Corbett 1969: XI–XXVII).

The objective of my research was to use the rhetorical analysis to diagnose the state of the thinking skills of the children. My hypothesis was that these criteria can be used for the analysis of children’s papers as well as for literary works, because the demands of rhetorical analysis comply with the requirements of the curriculum. To obtain a relevant picture of their writing skills I elaborated an evaluation form for the children. This form consists of 40 statements and describes the “ideal” essay.

Composing an essay is a great challenge for the students as well as the teachers coaching them. There were a lot of surveys regarding the writing skills of teenagers (Baranyai–Lénárt 1959, Orosz 1972, Kernya 1988, Kádár–Fülöp 1990) or adults (Horváth 1998) in Hungary. Writing an argumentative essay is considered to be the most difficult task for the participants. It is instructive to study the role that education plays in this problem. It is a must in high school L1 education to develop the academic thinking skills of the children. Zwiers (2004: 31) collected 12 thinking skills: analyzing; comparing and contrasting; categorizing and classifying; identifying cause and effect; solving problems and hypothesizing; persuading; empathizing; synthesizing; interpreting; evaluating; communicating and applying. Most of these skills are similar to the common topics of the rhetorical education (Connors–Corbett 1998: 87–130). Writing as an art of communication is on the 11th level of this scale, therefore it can show the thought process and the existing thinking skills of the children.

Research No.	Date	Assignment	Participants	Time
1.	15. 01. 2014	Writing Chreia using worksheet	30	45 min.
2.	19. 02. 2014	Thesis 1. Is there a need for schools?	30	45 min.
3.	03. 30. 2014	Thesis 2. Is there a need for required readings?	30	45 min.
4.	05. 28.2014	Chreia, without worksheet, every day life situation	29	45 min.

Table 1. The tasks of the high school beginners

Most of the former researches focused generally on writing, but the writing assessment of the senior year, the argumentative papers of the 9th grade or the comparative analysis of the results of the two groups have not been studied yet. The rhetorical analysis was used for literary works (Corbett 1969, Schirren–Ueding 2000) or for mass communication (Schirren–Ueding 2000). As a teacher of the two groups I was able to reflect on the children’s essays and support them one by one using the results of my measuring. This study-coaching scaffolds the development of the thinking skills and the academic language, and has always been a foundation-stone of the rhetorical education.

2. Material, method, participants in the experiment

There were three corpora of children's essays that I examined. The first corpus was the argumentative papers of the children of the 9th grade (German language preparatory class). Of their four papers I examined the chreia ("Is there a need for schools?") and their deliberative essays in my dissertation in detail. The second corpus is composed of the detailed rhetorical analysis of two papers of the senior class (one analysis of a literary work/novel and one argumentative essay.) The third corpus was chosen from the collection of the best graduation exam papers of the year 1995 (Pásztor 1996).

Res. No.	Date	Assignment	Participants	Time
1.	10. 10. 2013	Literary Analysis: Epic	22	90 min.
Reflection				
2.	11. 07. 2013	Comparative Analysis: Poems	22	90 min.
How to write an argumentative essay? (drafting)				
3.	02. 20. 2014	Argumentative essay	22	90 min.
Reflection				
4.	03. 13. 2014	Comparative Analysis: Poems	22	90 min.
Reflection				
5.	03. 27. 2014	Former Exam Assignment (Analysis)	22	90 min.
Reflection				
6.	04. 10. 2014	Test Exam	22	135 min.
Reflection				
7.	05. 05. 2014	Graduation Writing Exam	21	180 min.

Table 2. The tasks of the high school leavers

The participants were school boys and girls between 14 and 19 years, healthy, of middling ability (only a girl from the senior class was partially sighted.) Their mother language was Hungarian. By the examination I ignored the social background, the gender and the domicile of the children. The pupils of the 9th grade had 45, the senior class 90 minutes to complete their papers. The graduation exam in the year 1995 took 240 minutes.

Date	Assignment	Participants	Time
Pásztor 1996	Graduation Writing Exam	20	240 min.

Table 3. Graduation exam in the year 1995

The evaluation form that I elaborated consists of 40 statements organized by eight criteria of the rhetorical analysis (Adamikné 2006): the rhetorical situation; the genre; the relation of logos, ethos and pathos; the source of arguments; the train of thought; the disposition of arguments; the style and the appearance of the papers.

By the analysis of the results I reflected upon Zwiers' skills as well as the criteria of the rhetorical analysis. Zwiers' minilessons (2004: 30) show, how to scaffold the development of thinking skills of the children. Scaffolding (Roberts–Street 2000) is a well-tried method which “motivates the child to work on a task, defines the number of task steps related to the child's abilities, diagnoses discrepancies between the child's production and the ideal solution and serves as control for frustration and risk in finding task solutions.” (2000: 395) My evaluation form served similarly as a scaffolding tool to reflect upon the children's essays as well as a diagnose tool for the teacher to determine the level of skills, the source of the common mistakes and to point out the direction of further development.

3. The structure of the dissertation

The introduction described the definition of composition and the most important composition models on the basis of the bibliography. The problem brought up here was that in spite of the well-known significance and questions related to the writing skills, developing (the possibility to develop) writing skills is of secondary importance. The aim of this study was to find out the connection between rhetoric and composition.

For the exposition of the subject it was necessary to clear the interpretations of rhetoric and its connection with the modern sciences in **Chapter 1**. According to Aristotle the rhetoric is a *tekhné*, a craft or art, which [is] „concerned with such things as come, more or less, within the general ken of all men and belong to no definite science” (1354a, W1). The guideline of my analysis was the ancestor of text linguistics, the classical rhetoric, because it was followed later on in the course of history, and so we can understand the situation of today better. The rhetorical analysis is based on this system, which I have used for the diagnosis of the chosen corpus.

The aim of **Chapter 2** was to show that the composition development in the school based on the system of the rhetoric is as relevant today as it was in the ancient times to improve L1 and L2 key competences in writing skills, to build up a rhetorical „toolkit” – not only because of the tradition of rhetorical education, but because this system is born to

develop the academical thinking skills. The analysis of the curricula and the exam requirements has proved that this system was conserved in the education.

Chapter 3 details the participants of the experiment, the number and genres of the assignments and the evaluation form, by which I assessed the papers and its foundations in the NCC and the new curriculum framework. The end of the chapter contains the research question and the two hypotheses: 1. the skill system of children's papers can be diagnosed with rhetorical analysis; 2. the developmental evaluation can be built up on this feedback.

Bitzer's rhetorical situation (as) presented in **Chapter 4** is related to the approach of competence development, both put the problem solving in the centre of interest. The new type of written and oral assignments at graduation exams (not only L1 assignments) not only describes the problem, but gives a title to the school-leavers, and the rhetorical situation itself. That's why it is a must for them to know the elements of the situation. The indicators of the rhetorical situation are represented in the requirements of the graduation exams.

Chapters 5–9. consider the results of the diagnosis one by one on the basis of the five tasks of the public speaker („five canons of rhetoric”). **Chapter 5** discusses the invention: the (rhetorical) can help it by showing prototypical texts as well as the arguments based on logos, ethos or pathos. The analysis of the argument fallacies can throw light upon the problems of the thinking skills; the Toulmin-method can serve as a tool to disclose the fallacies and can offer a model to the correct form.

Chapter 6 analyses the second task of the „speaker”, the arranging arguments, including a. inductive or deductive train of thought, b. the improvement of relevancy, directness, fluency, cohesion and convergence of the essays and c. the parts of the discourse. The absence of the synthesis is shown by the small number of a. deductive arguments, b. paragraphs based on topic sentences, c. cohesion or convergence.

The third task of the speaker is the style, **Chapter 7** examines the style of the student papers based on the four classical virtues: correctness, clarity, propriety and ornateness. These categories despite the partial overlaps (for example between correctness and clarity) have proven suitable to diagnose the level of writing skills. The demands of the teachers as well as the analysis of the papers found to be outstanding by them have shown that ornateness and the use of the figures of speech are the most convincing at the graduation exam.

The fourth task of the speaker the presentation (the written form of the text) is a field often neglected but significant in persuasive communication. It is the main theme of **Chapter 8**. The conscious control of the characteristics of handwriting, the letter type, the making-up, the quoting and orthography are skills, which cannot be developed without consistent

feedback in every area of the written form. In two subchapters have I examined the expectations of the audience based on a. the judgement of the teachers who marked the writing exam papers in 1996 and b. the demands of the oral graduation exams of the other subjects. The criteria of the rhetorical analysis presented in both groups of demands were examined.

Chapter 9 defines the fifth task of the speaker not as memorizing the completed speech (memoria), but searches the marks of the metacognitive strategies with the rhetorical analysis of the papers. In the corpus of the beginners rather the complexity of the several tasks (genres) can be revealed. In the group of school-leavers a regular development tendency can be found in all criteria of the rhetorical analysis until the graduation exam. The printed collection of exam papers was not examined in the last two chapters.

The end of conclusion contains the model of composition developed as a result of the measuring process. The inserts are placed after the conclusion and the theses. One part of them resulted in getting here because of their extent (the analysis of curricula), but includes important pieces of background information for my theses. The other part of the inserts contains the required diagrams, figures, documents and data to the theoretical and practical sections of the dissertation.

4. Scientific achievements, theses

The question whether the rhetorical tradition lingers on in today's (L1 and composition) education or not I examined with the analysis of the curricula supplemented with the research of the evaluation criteria of teachers and critics (Pásztor 1996). The influence of the rhetorical education on the development of the children's personality and composition studies lingers on in (high) school education. The aim of composition studies, the „rhetorical toolkit” is equal to the criteria of rhetorical analysis.

1. The duty of the composition studies is to supply the children with the rhetorical toolkit as required to the writing and text production by the curricula, the teachers and the examination demands.

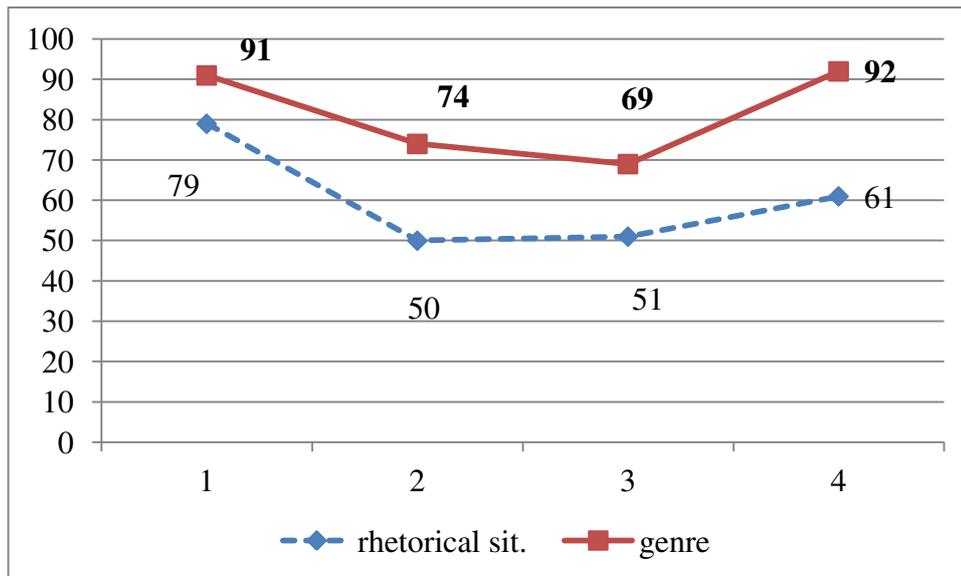


Figure 1. Rhetorical situation and genre. Research data of the high school beginners (%)

- The composition is the final result of the composition process; the problems regarding the process can be marked out thanks to the criteria of rhetorical analysis (fault diagnostics). These criteria can help to diagnose the level of writing skills and to point out the direction of future development.

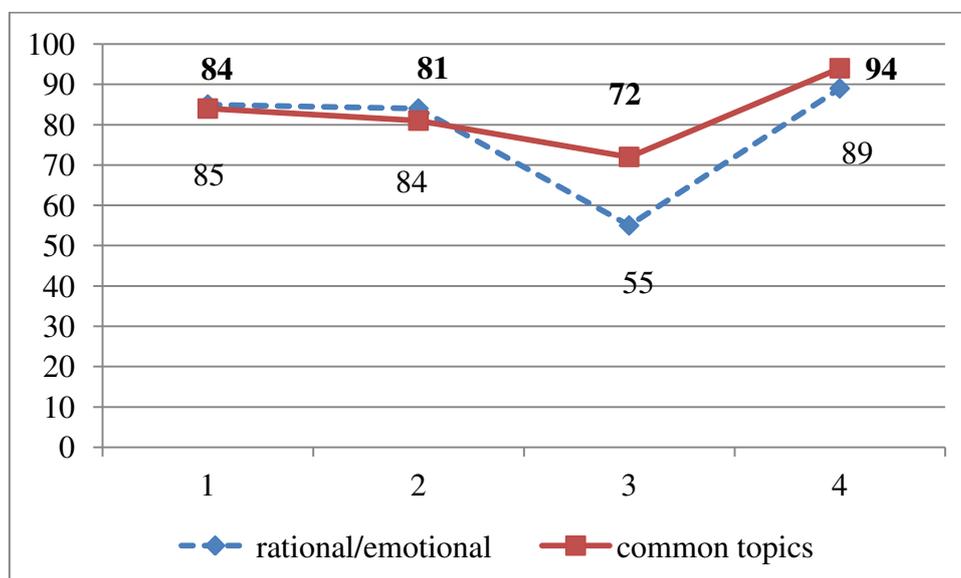


Figure 2. Rational/emotional arguments and common topics. Research data of the high school beginners (%)

- Composition is not only a communicative but a rhetorical situation as well. The rhetorical instruments: the main question, the status (stasis), the main argument and the judgement help with the problem solving fitting for the constraints and adequate to

the demands of the audience. The graduation exam based on competences looks on the writing assessment as problem solving, that's why the children have to be fully aware of the steps of problem solving. Converting, analyzing problems, examination of the circumstances present difficulty to the children particularly in case of an abstract assignment or an analysis of a literary work.

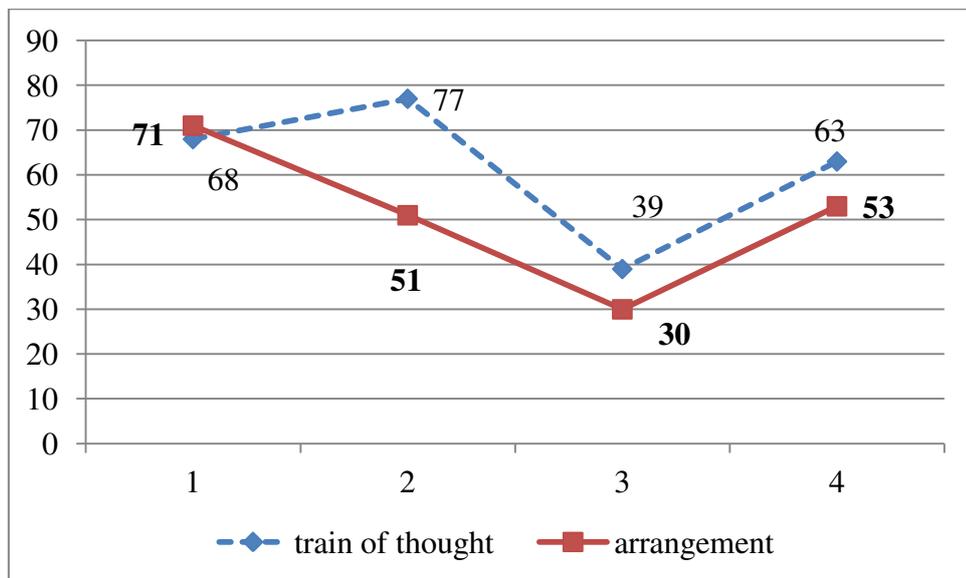


Figure 3. Train of thought and arrangement. Research data of the high school beginners (%)

4. The relevance fallacies and the missing parts of the assignment are the most frequent problems caused by the problem of the analysis skills. The Bitzer-theory of the rhetorical situation, the Burke-pentad as well as the seven questions of the rhetorical education of the middle ages can help children to reveal the circumstances in their assignments.

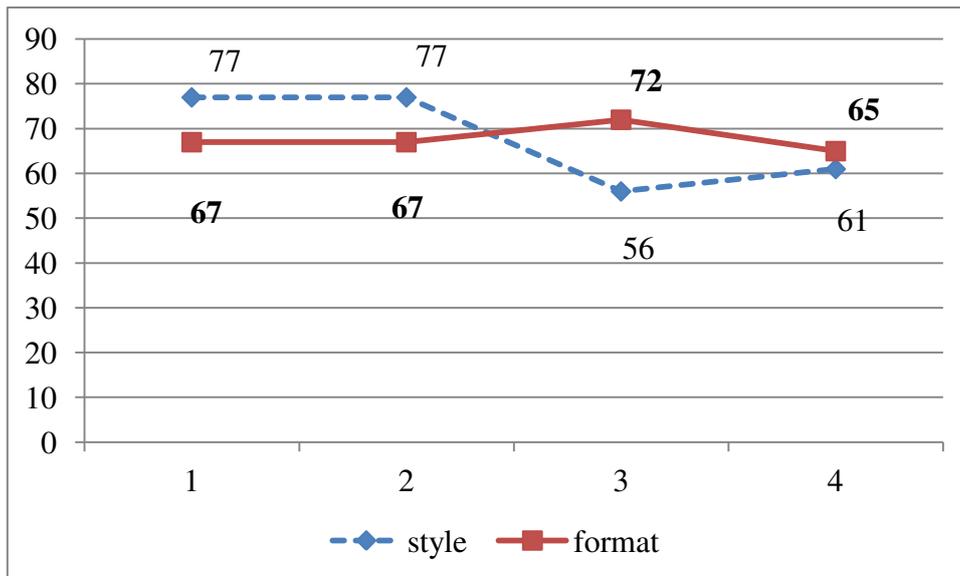


Figure 4. Style and format. Research data of the high school beginners (%)

- The acquaintance with the genres can serve as a problem losing strategy to answer writing assignments. After the identification of the problem the children have to use their structural knowledge as well to solve the problem of writing a proper essay utilizing the tools of analysis, identifying causes and effects, emphasizing and interpreting. The most frequent fallacies are (according to the thinking skills in Zwiers' system) a. the copying the assignment without real problem solving; b. the incapability to see cause and effect structures and because of this the inability to expound every guideline of the essay; c. the lack of emphasis or d. metaphorical thinking.

The greatest challenge was to find the right proportion of subjectivity and objectivity in the essay, which is related to the acquaintance of the three modes of persuasion or the common topics. The rhetorical assignments (progymnasmata) can help to develop the skills mentioned above. The treatment of outstanding essays with rhetorical analysis can be an important possibility for the children to study the characteristics of tone, arguments, arrangement and style. This practice can be of assistance for them to find their own essay style.

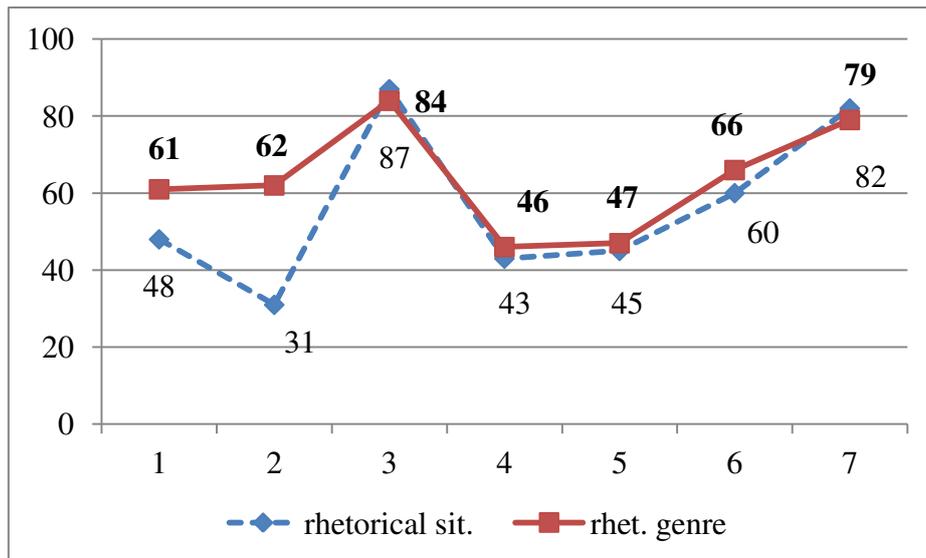


Figure 5. Rhetorical situation and genre. Research data of the high school leavers (%)

6. Knowing how to use the logical or emotional appeal is expected on the part of the curriculum and the teachers, therefore by using them the children's papers could be more convincing. The assignment can be enriched by sensitive recognition of the emotional appeal, the child can avoid manipulation, by using them he or she can develop his or her own essay style and learn how to form an authentic introduction and conclusion. The teachers and critics of Pásztor 1996 (in subchapter 8.2.) take sides unanimously with the sincere, trustworthy expression of feelings and were against the bathos, the memorized, required clichés and patterns. The examination of papers proved the classical theory, the ethical and emotional appeals occurred most frequently in the introductions and conclusions.

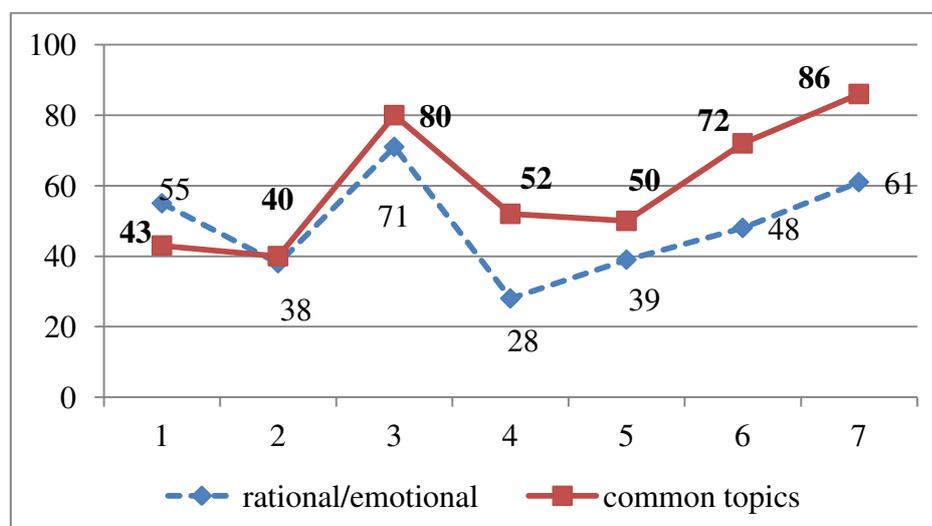


Figure 6. Rational/emotional arguments and common topics. Research data of the high school leavers (%)

7. The commonplaces (topoi) are equal to the thinking strategies, they can assist in the induction of the material, tinge the argumentation; the practice of using them can help to find the proper linguistic form of the thought. The fallacies of the argumentation point out the problems of the thinking process. The most emphasized virtues of the assignments mentioned by the teachers and critics of exam papers were the logical appeal, the own opinion, the excellent judgement (iudicium). The choice of diction and the composition of sentences are calling for a distinct development based on continuous and consistent feedback.

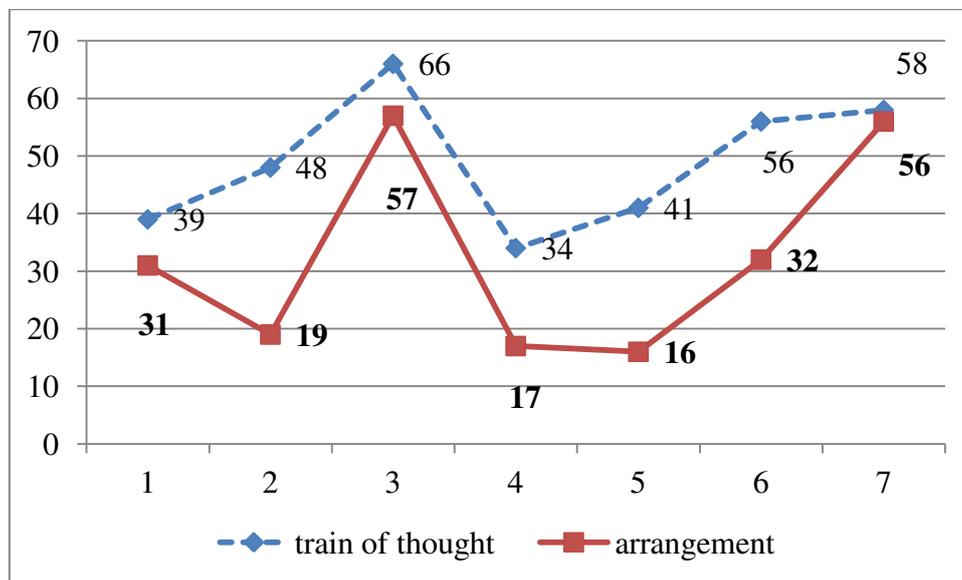


Figure 7. Train of thought and arrangement. Research data of the high school leavers (%)

8. The observation of the structure of the argument helps to follow the train of thought, to find the fallacies or manipulation, to create a synthesis and to find the fitting linguistic form of the thought. The ability to draw conclusions can be measured with the Toulmin-method, the skills of analyzing or synthesizing can be examined with the criteria of relevancy, directness, fluency, cohesion and convergence. The analysis of the papers using the Toulmin-method has proved that the fluency of the train of thought is an effect of the connection between claim and data. Therefore, the lack of fluency is an effect of the missing qualifiers, rebuttals, backings and warrants.

9. Knowing the parts of the discourse is an important element of synthesizing. The convergence of the extreme parts and the paragraph building based on the topic

sentence serve as a problem solving strategy in the persuasive arrangement of the arguments. It is hard to find paragraphs built around a central idea or topic sentence analyzing the thesis. These units can hardly be called paragraphs, because they serve only the formal purpose, but they do not meet the criteria of the content of the paragraph.

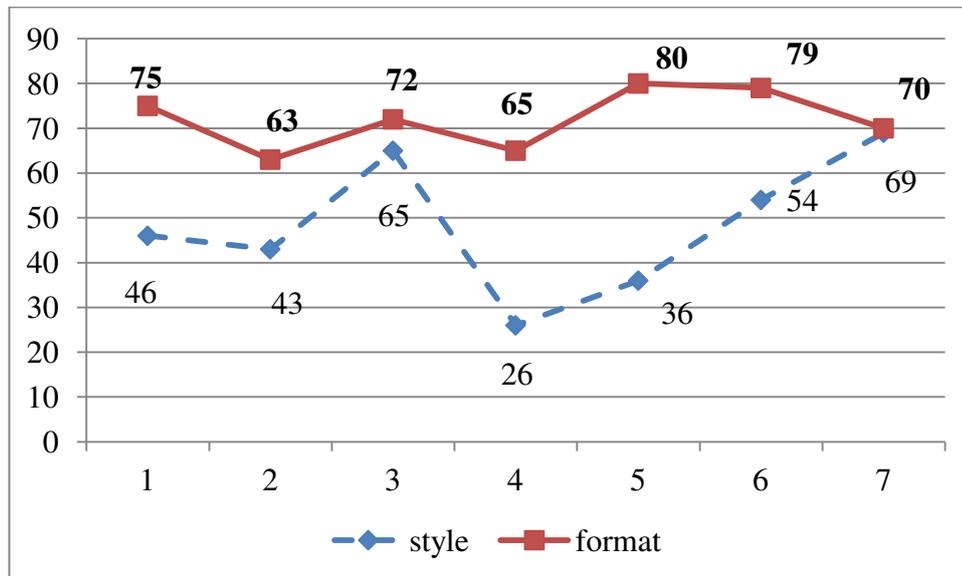


Figure 8. Style and format. Research data of the high school leavers (%)

10. The expectations of teachers and the requirements of the graduation exams are based on the application of the virtues of the style (correctness, clarity, propriety and ornateness). These evaluation criteria can be used successfully for fault diagnosis and scaffolding. The analysis of the fallacies regarding the style has to be connected with the practice of the grammar, similar to the traditional practice of essay writing in the USA (pl. Weaver 1961, Willis 1973). The ornateness, namely the identification, interpretation and conscious application of stylistic devices can serve as a problem solving strategy in the essay because of its persuasive effects.

11. The written form, the presentation of the paper exerts influence on the opinion of the teacher similar to the appearance of the speaker. It is a must to understand the persuading effects of the written form in classes 1–12 as a part of educating children to have high standards and consider the role it plays in the overall impression of the teacher. To support this process the criteria of the writing form deserves detailed description of evaluation criteria similar to the evaluational categories of orthography.

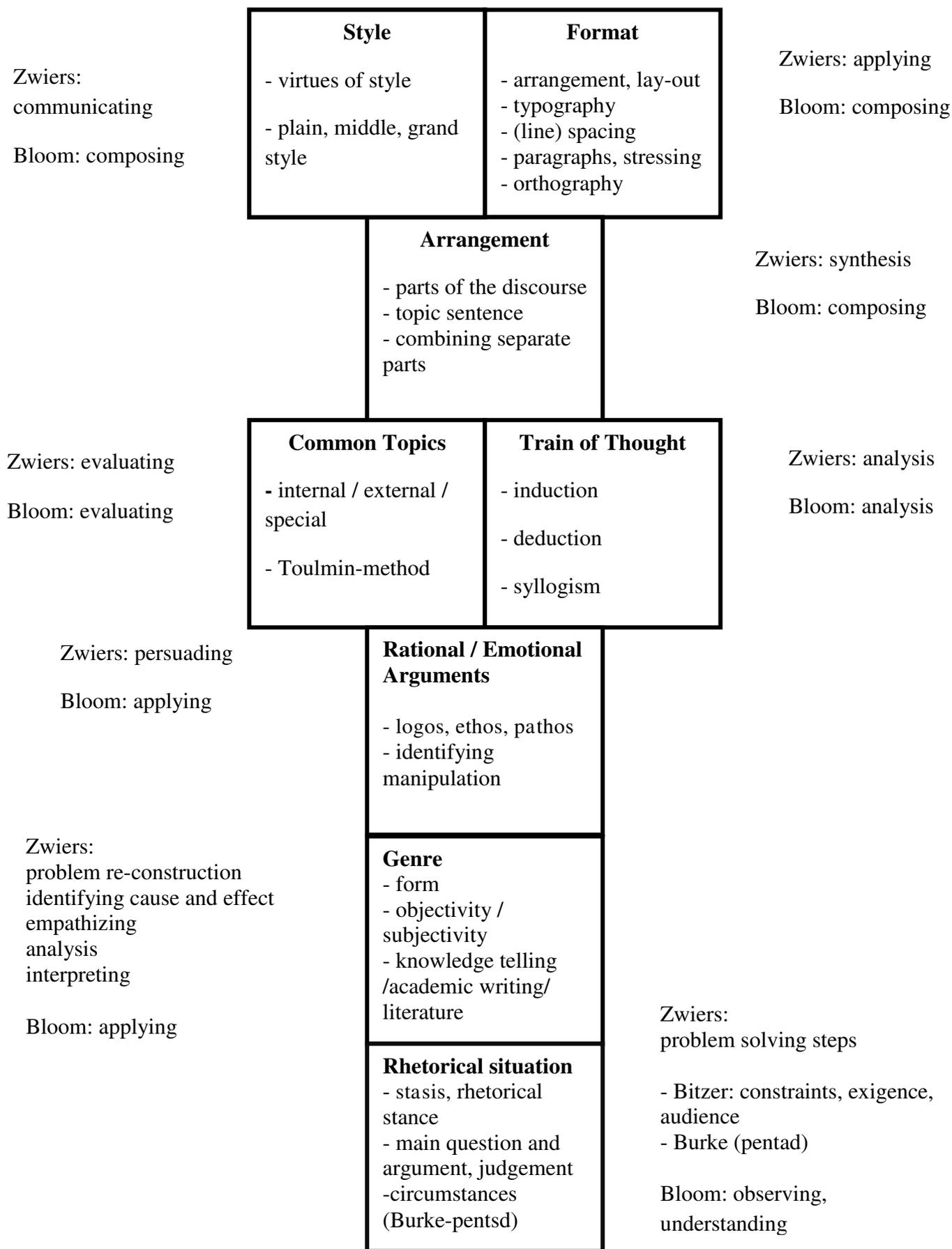


Figure 9. The model of Composition–Rhetoric

12. The problem solving strategies of the rhetorical analysis are suitable for the preparation for the oral and written graduation exam. Not only at L1 exam, but based on my examinations it is interdisciplinarily necessary for children leaving high school to have the rhetorical toolkit.

The continuous feedback has been proven to be useful, but the teacher has to make strenuous efforts to evaluate every paper in eight criteria. It can be worth dividing the evaluation criteria between the essays in the syllabus, and only 2–4 criteria should be examined in one paper. In the case of consistent feedback in every year the results can be measured, since the development has been proven in one year in the papers of the school-leaving group. The prestige of composition studies and rhetoric could be improved with a national competence based assessment similar to the existing reading comprehension assessment in Hungary. After all – as the results of this study established the truth of the fact – composition is nothing else but applied rhetoric.

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6. List of publications as regards the dissertation

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Major Hajnalka 2011. *Reflektálás egy jelenségre - retorikai szempontból: Az emelt szintű magyar nyelvi és irodalmi érettségi érvelési feladatának vizsgálata*. Anyanyelv-pedagógia, 4. évfolyam, 4. szám.

Major Hajnalka 2011. *Retorika és fogalmazástanítás*. In: Raátz Judit – Tóthfalussy Zsófia szerk. *A filozófia és a szónoki beszéd*. Trezor Kiadó, Budapest.

7. Presentations at conferences as regards the dissertation

Hogyan érvelnek a tizenévesek? Félúton konferencia, Budapest: ELTE BTK Mai Magyar Nyelvi Tanszék, 2010.10.07–2010.10.08.

(Conference paper in Félúton 6. conference proceedings)

Rend a lelke az esszének? Félúton konferencia, Budapest, ELTE BTK Mai Magyar Nyelvi Tanszék, 2011.10.06–2011.10.07

(Conference paper in Félúton 7. conference proceedings)

Retorika és szövegalkotás. Generációk nyelve konferencia, Budapest, ELTE BTK Mai Magyar Nyelvi Tanszék, 2014.11.27–2014.11.28.

(Paper in press)