

Developing Critical Reading Skill for Academic Writing

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アカデミック・ライティング力を向上させるための批判的読み

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Abstract

Development of academic writing skill requires students to monitor their composition. This monitoring skill includes (1) to check whether there is a difference between what is implied in a statement and what a reader may carelessly infer from it and (2) to check whether the information stated in their composition is accurate. According to Paul and Elder, this is defined as critical reading. Monitoring a composition can be done by validating an assumption and by checking whether a counterevidence can be shown. The former is referred to as deductive inference while the latter as inductive inference. The tools to check these inferences are (1) materials with key questions enabling students to monitor and (2) debate format. Affirmative and negative points and refutation need to be studied for debate format.

Key words: critical reading, assumption, inference, debate format, refutation

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抄 録

アカデミック・ライティング力を向上させるためには、モニター能力が必要である。その能力は、(1) ある言明の含意 (imply) する内容と、その書き手がその言明を通して読み手に推論 (infer) してほしい内容が必ずしも一致しないことと (2) 提示された情報が的確 (accurate) であるかどうかを見抜くことを含む。Paul & Elder によれば、これは、批判的読みとされ、想定が妥当かどうかを検証する演繹推論と反例がありうるかどうかを検証する帰納推論によって可能となる。その為には、これらの推論を導ける英文記事やディベート・フォーマットが有用である。このフォーマットには、立論と反駁の理解が必要である。

キーワード: 批判的読み、想定、推論、ディベート・フォーマット、反駁

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1. Introduction

Ozawa (2000) mentions that 'reading' plays the role of a monitor in the writing process and that such a monitor is the mechanism by which the writer 'rereads' what has been written. 'Rereading' is different from reading in that its main role is to 'read' critically (i.e. monitor) what the writer has composed. Monitoring in the writing process involves inference. According to Paul and Elder (2001), inference can be referred to as an intellectual act by which one comes to a conclusion based on a set of facts perceived by the mind. They illustrate such an act with the statement, "if you come at me with a knife in your hand, I probably would infer that you mean to cause me harm." The basis for this inference is the assumption that someone holding a knife may cause you harm. Hence, inferences are based on assumption. Paul and Elder state that an assumption can be defined as a statement accepted as true without proof. The following story that related by Inose (2001) in his book is a good example of assumption:

A man on the street was reading a newspaper in the Soviet Union a while before it was dissolved. Another man asked him why he was reading the newspaper so eagerly, even though everyone knew that the communist regime scrutinized the media and that the newspaper articles were censored. He replied that he was reading to conjecture what was not printed.

What the man did was based on the assumption that in a communist country, the truth can only be found in what was not expressed in print. This assumption was totally different from others'. This story indicates that all the people do not necessarily have the identical assumption.

2. Critical Reading

The above-mentioned scholars define critical reading as the act of looking for assumptions, key concepts and ideas, reasons and justifications, supporting examples, parallel experiences, implications and consequences. They also point out that one important skill involved in critical thinking is monitoring the inferences, namely the ability to distinguish what a statement actually implies from what a reader may carelessly infer from it. Therefore, this skill can be referred to as critical reading. In other words, critical reading can be done with deductive inference by reviewing whether the given warrant is credible or not. A warrant can be considered as identical with an assumption. Critical reading also can be done with inductive inference by reviewing whether any counterevidence can be provided. I will give some samples of writing that caused the message receiver to misunderstand what he read, because the message sender was unable to differentiate what his statement actually implied from what he wanted the message

receivers to infer from it.

3. Syllogism

Critical reading requires message senders to monitor deductive and inductive inferences. In order to understand monitoring deductive inference, I would like to clarify first what inference means. In one of my classes, I showed my students a picture of Ms. Shirin Ebadi, the first Iranian and the first Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize in 2003. The picture appeared in the *Mainichi Weekly* and I asked my students if they had noticed something unusual in it. Very few students noticed it. The answer I expected was that she was not wearing her headscarf, which in Iran is considered a social and religious obligation that all Muslim women were expected to observe. Most of my students did not notice it, because the Japanese women do not wear their headscarf as an established custom. The students unconsciously applied the Japanese social norm to Iranian women. In other words, they did not doubt the assumption that a custom taken for granted in Japan is also applicable to Iranian culture. Ms. Ebadi was protesting against the Iranian government and an Islamic principle, in favor of human rights that Iranian or Muslim women should be allowed to enjoy just as other women do. What is taken for granted in a certain culture can't always be applied in other cultures. Japanese students need to realize that what is taken for granted differs, depending on different cultures. The credibility of a warrant ought to be checked. This is where syllogism is needed. According to Nouchi (2003), a typical example of syllogism is as follows:

The subject of the claim is represented by S (Subject), the predicative part is represented by P (Predicative) and the term appearing in both the data and warrant is represented by M (Middle term).

(Formula)	[Warrant]	M is P.
	[Data]	S is M.
	[Claim]	∴ S is P.
(Example)	[Warrant]	Every man dies.
	[Data]	Socrates is a man.
	[Claim]	∴ Socrates dies

3.1. Monitoring Deductive Inference

Hinds (1990) mentions that Japanese is a reader-responsible language whereas English is a writer-responsible language. The former means that readers are expected to work to fill in missing information and transitions while the latter places the burden on the writer to make main messages as transparent as possible. The sample 1 and 2 are the compositions written by my students.

[Sample 1] We jog naked about ten minutes every day.

(A1) We jog naked about ten minutes every day with no clothes on.

(B1) We jog stripped to the waist, about ten minutes every day.

The sample 1 was used in the Hirayanagi's article (2000). This deals with the difference in terms of how a total affirmative sentence is interpreted in the two languages. Although this sample sentence is a total affirmative sentence, the Japanese message receivers are expected to supplement the deleted part, using their common sense to understand the correct message. In other words, they are to bridge the gap between what is implied in a statement and what should be inferred in it. What is implied in the sample 1 is the message stated in the sentence of (A1). However, that is unacceptable. What the message receivers are expected to infer from the above-mentioned sample is the one stated in the sentence of (B1). The Japanese readers are expected to infer something from what is not explicitly stated, using the common sense, because Japanese is characterized as a reader-responsible language. This characterization of Japanese dependence on message receivers makes them lack in checking the validity of an assumption that people, Japanese or Westerners, interpret the message with their common sense in their mind. Deductive inference is a process whereby a conclusion can be drawn from a general statement. The warrant, data and claim of the message sender are as follows.

[Warrant] Message receivers should interpret the message with the context or the common sense in their mind.

[Data] Students wrote "We jog naked."

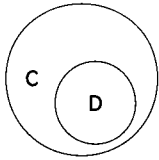
[Claim] Message receivers should interpret the aforementioned statement as "We jog naked to the waist." by keeping the common sense in their mind.

3.2. Monitoring Inductive Inference

[Sample 2] Attendance is not taken in a required class, because there are about 200 students in the class.

This is a sample of giving inaccurate information. This inaccuracy can be reviewed with inductive inference. Inductive inference is a process of drawing conclusions from particular statements. The sample 2 is grammatically correct but it does not give accurate information. In the college, attendance is taken in some small required classes with lower enrollment. Therefore, this sentence does not always convey the message accurately. In the following diagram, the group (C) represents required classes whereas the group (D) stands for the large classes. It could be inferred that any class belonging to group (D) belongs to group (C), but not vice versa, because some required classes are small ones. By presenting

an item of counterevidence that in some required classes attendance is taken when they are small, it can be inferred that the above-mentioned statement is not always accurate.



(C) A group of required classes

(D) A group of large classes

4 . How can Critical Reading Skill be Developed?

Critical reading skill can be developed by monitoring deductive and inductive inferences which can facilitate syllogistical analysis. It can be developed (1) with materials written in English such as English newspapers, and (2) with debate format.

4.1. Reading English Materials with Key Questions Enabling Students to Analyze

The first two materials are the newspaper articles that I summarized for this section, and the third is an excerpt of an English newspaper article (Hirayanagi, 2004).

Newspaper Article Summary #1

My daughter was told by one of her classmates to change her natural brown skin into "skin color." They made the racist comments, "kitanai," and "makkuro." She was sad. I asked the principal, her parents and the City School Board to discuss the matter. The offer was refused. Many parents pointed at us "gaijin." Those people are wrong because my children are not "foreigners" in Japan; they are born here and are Japanese citizens just like the other Japanese children. (by Joel Assogba—Canadian of African Descent.)

[Key Question1—Is Ms. Assogba Japanese?]

Monitoring deductive inference can be demonstrated through this newspaper article. In order to have students monitor deductive inference, I gave the following question, "Is the writer's wife Japanese?" In order to answer the question correctly, deductive inference is needed. The Japanese Nationality Law stipulates that anyone born of a Japanese parent, father or mother alike, has the right to obtain the Japanese citizenship, regardless of the country of the person's birth. What is stipulated in this law can function as a warrant of the claim that she is Japanese. On the other hand, the data shows that the father is Canadian of African descent and that his children are Japanese. Therefore, it can be claimed or inferred that his wife must be Japanese. In other words, the claim that the mother is Japanese is accurate. The following is the deductive inference for the claim that Ms. Assogba is Japanese.

- [Data] The father is Canadian of African descent. His children are Japanese by nationality.
- [Warrant] The Japanese Nationality Law stipulates that a baby born of a Japanese parent is Japanese.
- [Claim] Ms. Assogba is Japanese.

Newspaper Article Summary #2

A man who killed eight children during a brutal rampage at an Osaka elementary school was sentenced to death on August 28, shortly after being evicted from the courtroom for disorderly behavior. — In handing down the ruling, the presiding judge at Osaka District Court described the killings as “self-centered.” He rejected claims by the lawyers that the defendant was mentally unstable at the time of the killings.

[Key Question 2—Can you argue that the defendant should be judged guilty because he committed an atrocious crime?]

It can be inferred from the above-mentioned passage that what is needed in order to make the defendant not-guilty is to doubt the credibility of the warrant given by the prosecutors. The claim that the defendant was guilty cannot be made without validating the warrant that the defendant was mentally stable. Deductive inference can be used for the defendant to be sentenced guilty. Therefore, the following is the deductive inference for the prosecutors' team.

- [Date] The defendant committed an atrocious crime.
- [Warrant] The defendant was mentally stable.
- [Claim] The defendant should be judged guilty.

Newspaper Article Summary #3

“When I saw people helping out I felt the urge to join them,” Miss O said, “It really touched my heart. I’m not a Christian but I actually went to church the next week to sing ‘God Bless America.’ That does not mean I applaud everything the U.S. government has done since the attacks.”

[Key Question 3—Can you argue that Miss. O went to church after the 9/11 incident because she was a supporter of the U.S. foreign policy?]

This is a good sample of how an inductive inference can be monitored. The writer of this passage thought that some readers might interpret her remark of going to church to sing the American song as a sign of an advocate for the U.S. foreign policy. The writer of

this passage understands that a group of people who went to church after the 9/11 incident can be divided into two groups: the first one is a group supporting the U.S. foreign policy, and the other is the group of people who did so without consideration of any political implications. In order to avoid misunderstanding, she monitored inductive inference and made it clear that she belongs to the latter.” The following is the inductive inference made by Miss.O.

- [Data] After the 9/11 incident, Miss. O actually went to church to sing, ‘God Bless America.’
- [Warrant] The remark may be inferred differently from her intention by some message receivers.
- [Claim] Miss.O added the following: it did not mean she applauded everything the U.S. government had done since the attack.”

4.2. Through Debate Format

A convincing refutation is what you need to make your opinion as persuasive as possible. The purpose is to prove that your opponents’ view is wrong, in order to prove that you are right. Refutation is important, because you can analyze your views objectively through the opponents’ views. The expressed desire to change a current system or policy is referred to as the affirmative side while the desire to preserve it intact is the negative side. A claim to support the affirmative side is called an affirmative point and the one to support the negative side is a negative point. A statement advocating change of the present system is referred to as a proposition. In this section, each table with an affirmative side on the left and a negative side on the right is shown as follows (Hirayanagi, 2004).

Proposition 1 = High school students don’t need to wear uniform at school

AP: Affirmative Point NP: Negative Point

Affirmative Side	Negative Side
[AP1] Students’ individuality will be hampered if they wear uniforms.	
	[Refutation for AP1=Refutation 1] You can promote individuality by doing other things, for example, by increasing the number of elective classes.
	[NP 1] Wearing uniform can function as a deterrent.
[Refutation for NP1=Refutation2] Some high school students wearing uniforms	

were seen smoking the other day. Therefore, it can't function as a deterrent.	
	[Refutation for Refutation2=Refutation3] You should not jump to the conclusion with a small number of examples.
	[NP2] Students take pride in their schools by wearing their uniform.
[Refutation for NP2=Refutation4] Students can take pride in their schools by doing other things, such as winning a game where they can represent their school.	

The following is the explanation of the inferences monitored for each refutation.

[Refutation1: Inductive Inference]

A group of the students who could develop individuality can be divided into some groups: one is for those who wear uniforms and another is, for example, for those who study a lot of elective classes. The latter group can function as an item of counterevidence.

[Refutation2: Inductive Inference]

The high school students wearing uniforms can be divided into two groups: smokers and non-smokers. The former group can function as an item of counterevidence.

[Refutation3: Deductive Inference]

The refutation 2 presupposes a warrant that there are no rules with exceptions. However, such a warrant is not always true.

[Refutation4: Inductive inference]

The students taking pride in their schools can be divided into some groups: one group takes pride in their school by wearing their uniform and another group does through activities, such as winning games where they can represent their school. The latter group can function as an item of counterevidence.

Proposition2= Capital punishment should be abolished.

AP: Affirmative Point NP: Negative Point

Affirmative Side	Negative Side
[AP1] Executing someone means that society commits another legal murder: Even the convicted have their own rights.	

	[Refutation for AP1=Refutation 1] The convicted should not be allowed to have their human rights, and the bereaved family's feeling should be taken into consideration.
[Refutation for Refutation1=Refutation2] All of the convicted are not guilty, because some convictions are made by a testimony of an accomplice or a witness.	
	[NP1] Capital punishment functions as a deterrent. The number of murders have decreased, because capital punishment has been maintained.
[Refutation for NP1=Refutation3] With life imprisonment, in other words, by confining the convicted to prison, another murder can be prevented.	
	[Refutation for Refutation3=Refutation4] Without capital punishment, the expenses to feed prisoners will be greater than before. The financial burden will be imposed on taxpayers. They can't accept it.
[Refutation for Refutation4=Refutation5] By making prisoners work and using their profits to feed them, the financial burden will be reduced.	

The following is the explanation of inferences monitored for each refutation.

[Refutation1: Deductive Inference]

The affirmative point 1 presupposes a warrant that everyone, including even an inhuman person, should have his human rights.

[Refutation2: Inductive Inference]

A group of the convicted can be divided into two groups: one is for those who were proved to be guilty and the other is for those who weren't. The latter group can function as an item of counterevidence.

[Refutation3: Deductive Inference]

The negative point 1 presupposes that maintaining capital punishment is the only way to reduce the number of the murders. Another way is that death sentence should be commuted into life imprisonment in order to prevent more murders.

[Refutation4: Deductive Inference]

The refutation 3 presupposes that financial burden will be imposed on taxpayers. This is not calculated by the affirmative side.

[Refutation5: Deductive Inference]

The refutation 4 presupposes that prisoners can not make profits. However, by making prisoners work and using their profits to feed them, the financial burden of the taxpayers will be reduced.

4.3. Organizing Refutation

Lubetsky et al. (2000) mentions that refutation is composed of ① signpost, ② rephrase, ③ negation and ④ rationale. Signpost means a name to make it easy for debaters to refer to, rephrase is to repeat the same idea with different words, negation is to say that something is NOT, and rationale is where you explain your reasoning for why something was NOT. The above-mentioned four parts are underlined, in the two model compositions listed below. According to Arnaudet & Barrett (1981), ascending order is the one in which the minor points should be listed first, saving the most important for last in order to build up to a climax. The following compositions are made in the ascending order, using the above-mentioned propositions and the four components of refutation.

(1) A Sample Composition concerning Proposition 1

Whereas there may be some reasons why ① wearing uniforms is necessary for high school students, I would like to oppose wearing their uniforms by refuting the reasons and expressing my own for it. ② One reason for supporting it is that you can foster individuality by doing so. ③ It is not always true. ④ You can foster it by using other ways such as having more electives. ③ I would like to express my own reason why it is not necessary. ④ Not wearing one helps students develop a spirit of independence, because they are to blame if their clothes badly affect the atmosphere in which they study. Therefore, I am against high school students wearing school uniforms.

(2) A Sample Composition concerning Proposition 2

I am against maintaining ① capital punishment. Some people are for maintaining it. There may be some reasons why it should be maintained. ② The first one is that the convicted should not be given their rights as humans and the second is that capital punishment functions as a deterrent. ③ I would like to refute these rationales from the viewpoint that it should be abolished. ④ First of all, all the convicted are not guilty, because some are accused by an accomplice or a witness. ④ The second refutation is that not releasing prisoners can be achieved by confining them in the prisons. This means that with life imprisonment, the number of murders can be decreased. Therefore, I am opposed to capital punishment.

5 . Conclusion

What is needed to revise an essay is 'rereading' the writing process. 'Rereading' is to read critically. 'Rereading' requires students to monitor deductive and inductive inferences. Inference is referred to as an intellectual act by which one comes to a conclusion based on a set of facts perceived by the mind. Deductive inference means a process in which a claim can be inferred from a general statement, while inductive one is a process in which a claim can be concluded from a particular statement. Monitoring deductive inference can be done by doubting the credibility of a warrant or an assumption while doing inductive inference can be done by providing a counterevidence. Since critical reading is defined as differentiating what a statement implies from what its readers may carelessly infer from it, critical reading can be done by monitoring the two inferences with English newspaper articles which enable students to analyze and with debate format. Debate format is essential in terms of having students understand their opponents' views and refute them. Refutation is a tool to prove that your opponents' view is wrong, in order to prove that you are right. Thus, students' academic writing can be facilitated by developing their critical reading skill.

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