

Shift from Local Errors to Global Errors for Better Organization in Writing

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作文指導における局所的誤りから全体的誤りへの転換

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Abstract

Why do English compositions by Japanese fail to convey accurate message to readers? It is because Western reasoning, such as deductive and inductive reasoning has not adequately been learned through global errors, by using pedagogical techniques like sharing, revision and outlining. I listed up some example compositions written by Japanese college freshmen and pointed out what kind of global errors were made. Global errors affect overall sentence organization and cause misunderstanding of the whole context. This occurs because the Japanese value interpersonal reality, unlike Western culture which respects objectivity. The lack of learning of Western reasoning results in a lack of accountability which can be found not only among Japanese students but among Japanese politicians and diplomats. From global errors of the example compositions, it could be found that the Western reasoning can be learned by applying two-valued logic, by confirming the validity of evidence and warrant .

Key words: global error, deductive reasoning, two-valued logic, validity of evidence and warrants, sharing

(Received September 7, 1998)

抄 録

日本人の書いた英文は何故、的を得たメッセージとして読者に伝わらないのであろうか。それは、西洋人の推理、すなわち、演繹的推理・帰納的推理が、全体的誤りを通して、シェアリング・書き直し・アウトライニングという授業展開上のテクニックを用いて学ばれていないからである。筆者は、日本の大学1回生の書いた作文の全体的誤りを指摘した。全体的誤りは、推理に影響を及ぼし、誤解を与えるもととなる。客観性を重んじる西洋文化と違って、日本文化は対人関係を重視するからである。西洋人の推理を学ぶことの欠如が、日本人の説明責任の欠如をもたらし、そのために、西洋人に誤解を与えている。作文の授業で、全体的誤りを使い、背反論理を挿入することや、小前提・大前提の有効性を確認することによって、演繹的推理や帰納的推理を学ぶことが出来、誤解を防ぎ、的を得たメッセージを伝えることが出来る。

キーワード: 全体的誤り、演繹的推理、背反論理、小前提と大前提の有効性、シェアリング
(1998年9月7日 受理)

One reason why English compositions by Japanese often fail to convey accurate messages to readers is that they lack analytical and organizational skills. The following skills are important: ① Each paragraph should be cohesive (i.e.: the topic sentence should be supported). ② Discourse markers or transitions such as conjunctions and listing signals should be used. ③ Abstract statements should be followed by concrete examples. This paper will examine one of the reasons why they lack such analytical and organizational skills. The reason is that error analysis among Japanese teachers has not shifted from local errors to global errors in writing classes for college freshmen. According to Burt and Kiparsky, a local error affects single constituents in a sentence whereas a global error affects overall sentence organization (1974). As Kaplan says, students write English with different organizational patterns depending on their first language background (1966). Japanese students lack deductive reasoning and this affects their writing. Western writing is deductive: the main idea is presented at the beginning of a paragraph and then followed by reasons or illustrations, whereas Japanese writing is inductive: illustrations and examples are presented before the main idea, which is often implied rather than directly stated. Most writing in English by Japanese college students is inductive, because it reflects the way they think and write in Japanese (Hirayanagi, 1998).

According to Condon, reasoning means a process of an argument which is composed of three basic parts: ① evidence or particular statement, ② warrant or universal statement and ③ conclusion. In other words, reasoning is a process which shows how these three basic parts are chosen and arranged in order to persuade the audience (1980). For example, imagine someone made a statement that Orix Bluewaves would win the pennant in 1999, based on a famous baseball commentator's analysis. In this example, the evidence is the fact that a famous commentator analyzed which team would win the pennant. The warrant is the prerequisite that his analysis is true all the time. Therefore, the accuracy of the conclusion that Orix will clinch the pennant depends on the reliability of the commentator's analysis. Understanding of deductive reasoning should include

- (1) whether a topic sentence is in a paragraph and a thesis statement is in a text which is composed of two or more paragraphs
- (2) whether the evidence and the warrant are valid and
- (3) whether a paragraph is deductively developed. A thesis statement is a single sentence that formulates both a topic and a point of view. Therefore, it is the most important sentence in the whole essay, just as a topic sentence is the most important in a paragraph. In most essays, it is the last sentence of the first paragraph.

Furthermore, inadequate understanding of inductive reasoning causes overgeneralization. An example of overgeneralization is as follows: A college student gave a comment on murders in Kobe in 1997, in which a fourteen-year-old boy killed two elementary school children. She wrote that she was ashamed that our society produced such a killer. However, her idea that the boy represented every boy in Japan was a mistake. She made an overgeneralization (Hirayanagi, 1998).

In most junior and senior high schools in writing class, grammar rules are too much emphasized when translating from Japanese to English. In other words, most of the errors focused on are local ones. Therefore, in college, paragraph writing should be introduced and explored in order to focus on global errors. In my class, explanation was given to college freshmen that a paragraph needs a topic sentence, cohesiveness and transitions such as “in conclusion,” or “first.” Then deductive development of a paragraph was taught because Western writing is deductive. In controlled expository writing, that is, one with a title assigned, freshmen were taught to use some rhetorical patterns. Then, by listing up some compositions written by college freshmen, the following was shown: understanding of deductive and inductive reasoning could be learned by studying global errors. It was also shown that inadequate understanding of such reasoning results in a lack of accountability. The latter is culturally linked and is further discussed below.

Lack of Accountability

Japanese leaders lack expertise and are not able to account for their own policies in English. According to Mainichi Daily News, the Treasury Secretary in the U.S. said in a speech in Georgetown University, in 1998 that a “weak Japan” was the cause of the Asian crisis. Yet Japanese politicians and diplomats did not account for its policy to him and to the rest of the world. In other words, they were lacking in accountability. According to the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, accountability means being required to give an explanation for one's actions.

The following is another example of a lack of accountability. A Japanese exchange student came back to Japan without completing his one-year study in the U.S.. Before going abroad, he was able to speak English well, and had leadership ability because he was captain in his baseball team in high school days. Yet, he could not accomplish his aim. This left a scar in his heart. It turned out that the reason why he came back without accomplishment was his trouble with his host mother. He could not get along well with her, because on returning home from school each day, he did not chat about or account for his American school life, as she wished. He did not think it a duty to explain to his host mother what happened at school. He was not brought up in a culture which

values objective reality, as Condon states.

High-Context Culture and Low-Context Culture

According to Condon, the United States places great value on objectivity. Facts and specifics are important. In Japan, interpersonal reality is more important than objective reality. That is, the feelings of people involved in a situation are more important, and of greater value, than a mere fact. (1980). In the United States, unconsciously the exchange student above respected the high-context culture he had cultivated in Japan. The culture that he represented does not value accountability. Hall says that high-context cultures—those which call for considerable programming of individuals to each other—have greater mass and that they are therefore more predictable, if and only if, one is familiar with the system (1976). Condon interpreted the two terms as follows: High-context culture is a culture where the message conveyed through context is more important than the one through language while in a low-context culture, the message is more instilled into language than into context. Therefore, context should be more respected in the high-context culture than in the low-context culture. In Japan, people are unconsciously requested to read between the lines from context. This indicates that Japanese belong to high-context culture which respects the hidden and implicit message, as Hinds says (1987). Thus, an inadequacy to come to terms with Western reasoning entails serious consequences in various fields, not only among Japanese college and high school students but also among Japanese politicians.

Analysis of Global Errors

In my previous paper, four developmental tools were pointed out to improve analytical and organizational skills: (A) a fluency journal to write about everyday life without worrying about grammatical errors, (B) a working journal to exchange opinions between teacher and student, (C) controlled expository writing to express opinions, with a title assigned, using rhetorical patterns effectively and (D) free expository writing (1998). Some examples have been picked up from the first three tools: all are compositions written by college freshmen. The errors in the examples remain unchanged.

Example 1 (From Fluency Journal)

Since I entered college, I have lived apart from my parents. My mother came for the first time, since I became a college student. She and I went to Sannomiya. So I was ashamed.

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| (1) Kind of global errors — — lack of warrant (2) Reasoning — — deductive reasoning
(3) Suggestions for improvement — — Confirmation should be made whether a warrant is mentioned or not. |
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This sentence does not tell us the reason why this student was ashamed of going to Sannomiya with her mother. Based on the datum that she and her mother went to Sannomiya and the warrant that Sannomiya is the main hangout for the young people, readers can understand why she was ashamed. She forgot to include a warrant. The deductive reasoning is to prove the validity of a particular statement with a universal statement. A particular statement can not be proved valid if a universal statement or a warrant is missing or not always true. This example shows that a warrant is missing.

Example 2 (From Controlled Expository Writing)

I think the curriculum in my university should be changed. The first thing is 90 minutes' class. It is too long. So we can't concentrate the class for 90 minutes. I think 60 minutes' class is the best. Because we don't become sleepy and tired.

The second thing is the time when the first period starts. It is too early. Many students are late for the first class every day. Moreover, our brain can't work in the morning.

- (1) Kind of global errors -- false warrant and lack of evidence (2) Reasoning -- deductive and inductive reasoning
- (3) Suggestions for improvement -- Confirmation should be made whether a warrant is true and whether sufficient evidence is given

Students were asked to write on the title: "There are some things that should be changed in our university." This was assigned three months after they entered university. In the first paragraph, the statement that they can't concentrate on a ninety-minute class because of its length, can not refute the claim that they will not become sleepy even in a 90-minute class so long as it is attractive and instructive. This student had an idea: the longer the duration of class is, the more boring class becomes. This idea was considered as a warrant and a prerequisite to deductive reasoning. However, what is stated as a prerequisite is not always true. This is an example of the universal statement not always being true.

In the second paragraph, what is needed to make the conclusion more objective, is to assume the following conflicting assertion or apply two-valued logic: in order to prove a statement, you take its opposite and assume it to be "true" until you find it to be wrong. Thus, lazy students may be late even if the beginning of the first period is set later than now, indicating that they may be late not because the opening hour is too early, but because they are just lazy. Next, the following should be listed as evidence or datum: ① other universities don't set their opening hour at such an early time, and ② a lot of students require a lot of time to commute to this university. To make the statement convincing, the opening hour should be clarified. "The first --" in the second sentence of the first paragraph, and "The second --" in the first sentence of the sec-

ond paragraph are used. In addition, these two things are not related to curriculum but to the time schedule. Therefore, an expression such as “Two things should be changed in terms of the time schedule.” should be incorporated at the very beginning of the composition as the thesis statement. Appropriate division of headings or subheadings are needed, and such skills can be taught through outlining, by having students submit outlines and giving comments on them. The thesis statement is not good enough in this example.

Example 3 (From Controlled Expository Writing)

I want everyone not to smoke in our university. Because smoking is bad to our health. Especially it is more harmful to second-hand smokers than smokers themselves. In the classroom everyone does not smoke. But many people smoke in front of classrooms. I think everyone can not smoke in our university.

I feel unusual that our university begins at 8:40. A univeristy starts at 9:00. There is a big difference between 8:40 and 9:00. I think the reason why many students are late for the first period is this difference. We had better begin at 9:00. If our school begins at 9:00, latecomers may come at 9:20.

- (1) Kind of global errors — lack of evidence and definition (2) Reasoning — deductive reasoning
(3) Suggestions for improvement — Confirmation should be made whether sufficient evidence is given and whether a certain word is defined.

This assignment was on the same title as the example 2. Before giving this assignment, they were taught that each text needs a thesis statement at the beginning, just like a topic sentence in a paragraph. In this text, however, a thesis statement such as, “There are the two things to be changed in our university, is missing. This student needs the following conflicting assertion, too: you are free to choose whether to smoke or not to smoke. This makes the reasoning more convincing. He is lacking in two-valued logic.

A grammatical error in the topic sentence of the first paragraph may make it difficult for readers to understand the whole paragraph. It should read “no one should be allowed to smoke in our university.” This student needs to show the following sentence as a piece of evidence: reliable data prove that second-hand smoking is harmful. Without this sentence the composition is less convincing. In other words, this is an example of a lack of evidence. Furthermore, there may be some readers who don’t know what second-hand smokers are. In Japan, this smoking issue is not considered so important. Therefore, this term should be defined. It is good that two-valued logic was applied in the last sentence.

Example 4 (From Controlled Expository Writing)

Our university students can be divided into three groups. The first group are students of sports clubs. They are very active. The second group are students of culture clubs. Though they are less brilliant than students of sports clubs, they do their activities very hard.

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| (1) Kind of global errors— —lack of evidence, overgeneralization (2) Reasoning—
—deductive and inductive reasoning |
| (3) Suggestions for improvement— —Confirmation should be made whether
enough evidence is presented and whether a statement is overgeneralized. |

This student should mention the reason why students of culture clubs are less brilliant than those of sports clubs. This is an example of a lack of evidence. Furthermore, this student made a hasty conclusion from a small number of friends he knew. This is an example of overgeneralization. The problem comes from the fact that the number of particular examples in the inductive reasoning is too small.

Example 5

I was asked by a teacher in class, “Which type do you like, making-policy-type woman or making-cookie-type woman as your future spouse?” I answered, “Making-cookie-type.” Then the girl next to me answered, “Making-policy-type.” I felt strongly that a boy’s idea is different from a girl’s idea.

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| (1) Kind of global errors— —overgeneralization (2) Reasoning— —inductive reasoning |
| (3) Suggestions for improvement— —Confirmation should be made whether a
statement is overgeneralized. |

After students watched a segment of the ABC news from the U.S., they were asked to express orally opinions on the type of the spouse that he or she wants to have or to be in the future and then write their opinions. This student thought the female student seated next to him would represent the idea of all the female students. In other words, he overgeneralized.

Example 6 (From Working Journal)

Foreigners and old people say, “Japanese university students are not so good. They go to universities to play.” I have an objection to this opinion. Many university students play because we don’t have what we want to do. We are looking for what we want to do and our goal at our university life.

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| (1) Kind of global errors— —lack of warrant (2) Reasoning— —deductive reasoning |
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(3) Suggestions for improvement -- Confirmation should be made whether the warrant is true.

First, let me change two words. The word, "play" in the second and fourth sentence should be "fool around." The word, "we" should be "they." An assertion in the fourth sentence is based on the high-context culture in Japan that Hall pointed out. The student takes it for granted that his audience will understand that many Japanese students are searching for their goal in university. However, he must explain this and account for his statement so that non-Japanese readers can understand. What is taken for granted in the high-context culture should be accounted for to ensure clarity.

Table 1 Analysis of Problems in the Examples

	Analysis of Problems	Reasoning
Example 1	A warrant is missing.	Deductive
Example 2	A warrant is not true. Lack of evidence	Deductive & Inductive
Example 3	Lack of evidence Lack of definition	Deductive
Example 4	Lack of evidence Overgeneralization	Deductive & Inductive
Example 5	Overgeneralization	Inductive
Example 6	A warrant is missing.	Deductive

Shift From Local Errors to Global Errors

How should Japanese learners proceed in order to acquire Western reasoning? Basically, through examining global errors, not local errors in EFL writing class. Then what should be done in order to learn reasoning from global errors? In class, some composition examples were listed up, and not only local errors but also global errors were identified. I had students share them in class. This was followed by an explanation of why global errors were made and how they should be changed. Discussion was made on the cultural differences between Westerners who respect objectivity and Japanese who do not respect it so much as Westerners. After sharing, I had students revise their first drafts.

After the writing course was completed, questionnaires were given and students were asked to choose whether the seven items below were very useful, useful, or not so useful. The seven items are as follows:

- ① Did you find rhetorical patterns useful?
- ② Did you find controlled expository writing useful?
- ③ Did you find outlining useful?
- ④ Did you find sharing useful?

- ⑤ Did you find revision useful?
- ⑥ Did you find the teacher's analysis of students' writing useful?
- ⑦ Did you find overall instructions on writing useful?

The sixth item whether a teacher's analysis on what should not be given a credit in students' writing and how it should be changed got the most positive response. 100% of respondents said it was very useful or useful. The second – most positive response was to item 5, whether revision is useful or not. 97.6% of respondents chose very useful or useful. The number of respondents was 86, although only 85 students answered in the three items. In pedagogical terms, sharing, revision and outlining proved useful. With these approaches, deductive and inductive reasoning can be effectively used.

Table 2 The result of the questionnaire

	contents of each question	very useful	useful	not so useful
Question 1	Did you find rhetorical patterns useful?	39(45)	46(55)	0(0)
Question 2	Did you find controlled expository writing useful?	43(50)	34(40)	9(10)
Question 3	Did you find outlining useful?	49(57)	32(37)	5(6)
Question 4	Did you find sharing useful?	30(35)	40(47)	15(18)
Question 5	Did you find revision useful?	61(72)	22(26)	2(2)
Question 6	Did you find the teacher's analysis of students' writing useful?	67(72)	19(22)	0(0)
Question 7	Did you find the overall instructions on writing useful?	22(26)	50(58)	14(16)

The number in the parenthesis indicates the percentage of each response.

How Western reasoning should be learned.

1. To intentionally assume a conflicting statement or to apply two-valued logic.
2. To make sure there is a topic sentence in a paragraph and a thesis statement in a text to achieve deductive development .
3. To confirm the validity of evidence and warrants.
4. To confirm cohesiveness by placing an appropriate heading or subheading for outlining.
5. To make definition, when necessary.

As Zamel pointed out, an important dimension of the writing process involves the period before the actual writing begins, how writers get and form the ideas before putting pen to paper. Therefore, acquiring Western reasoning is vital in the writing process (1982). By shifting the focus from local errors to global errors, students can explore and develop their ideas, because writing in the process-centered approach, is a back and forth movement, as Spack and Sadow pointed out (1983). Zamel says that teachers

overwhelmingly view themselves as language teachers rather than writing teachers; they attend primarily to the surface-level features of writing and seem to read and react to a text as a series of separate sentences rather than as a whole unit of discourse (1985).

Conclusion

The Japanese lack of skill in getting to the point is attributed to the lack of acquiring deductive and inductive reasoning. This lack of Western reasoning triggers a lack of accountability which is very important in low-context cultures which respect objectivity. Western reasoning should be learned from examining global errors through sharing, revision and outlining, in writing class for college students. Global errors are not easily detected, unlike local errors, because Japanese students and even teachers unconsciously perceived things in their own reasoning. Therefore, applying two-valued logic, confirming the validity of evidence and warrants and defining when necessary have become of supreme importance when students write in English.

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