

A Comparison of L1 and L2 Argument Structures in Student Writing

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1. Introduction

Cross-cultural differences in the rhetorical organization of written texts and factors instrumental in shaping second language rhetoric are principal areas of enquiry in second language writing research. Early work conducted in this area attributed the problems second language writers experience with discourse structure to first language interference, with implications of linguistically determined cognitive styles (Kaplan, 1966). Subsequent research, however, ascribed the differences in discourse structures between L1 and L2 writers to differences in the educational systems responsible for transmitting culturally preferred discourse patterns (Clyne, 1987a, 1987b). More recently, import has been given to the social and communicative contexts of writing, generating views that the problems experienced by second language writers may be the result of difficulties encountered with participating in the communicative activities of a discourse community, which hinder the acquisition of knowledge required to make appropriate judgments about form and content essential towards producing normative texts of that community (Connor, 1996: 128). Relevant to the academic context is the concept that some of the difficulties experienced by second language writers may be accounted for in part by intercultural differences in study genres. Certain written study genres, including essays, despite bearing similar labels across cultures may be distinctly different so that second language writers may bring with them different assumptions and expectations about the nature of the writing task set for them (Mauranen, 1994: 340).

Argumentative texts provide the opportunity to explore the notions of text linked with theories of second language writing. A reasoning process inextricably bound to cultures, the relevance of argumentation in second language writing contexts is aptly summed up by Zappel, who writes that “argumentation is present in discursive activity, it is linked to the specific socio-cultural context in which a discourse takes place, and it is bound by linguistic and logical rules in order to be intelligible” (Zappel, 1986: 219). The ability to integrate argument within the framework of the written text is integral to academic success in Australian tertiary institutions yet writing the coursework essay is cited as one of the most difficult and persistent problems encountered by overseas students studying within Australian universities (Ballard and Clanchy, 1991; Couchman, 1997: 64). That differences do exist between the argumentative texts of first and second language writers is attested to by the results of previous studies (Connor, 1984; Kobayashi, 1984; Choi, 1988; Kamimura and Oi, 1998; Arsyad, 2000). The precept that the Japanese style of argument is distinctive from a Western style of argument makes investigating the structures of argument in Japanese ESL texts particularly significant (Hinds, 1983; Hazen, 1986; Kamimura and Oi, 1998).

Bearing in mind the key issues arising from research into second language writing discussed above, the present study aimed to:

- (1) Identify and characterise argumentative structures in L1 and L2 English texts;
- (2) Determine the similarities and/or differences between L1 and L2 argumentative structures in English texts; and
- (3) Determine whether there is a distinct style of argument in Japanese ESL writing.

2. The Study

The present study consisted of a small but in-depth case-study investigation into the argument structures employed in the English academic writing of Japanese native speakers and Australian English native speakers in the Arts faculty of an Australian university. A total of 15 students, eight Japanese and seven Australians, from three undergraduate subjects participated in the study. Whereas much of the previous research in argumentation has relied on analysis of set tasks, this study utilised the coursework essays submitted for assessment by the students participating in the study. Investigation into the patterns of argument structure employed by students participating in the normal requirements of their course of study acknowledged the importance of context and processes of writing in shaping written arguments and hoped to provide new insights into naturally occurring written argumentative structures. Furthermore, researchers have typically analysed fixed forms of argument structures, failing to account for variations arising from the recursive, interactive and social practice of the writing process that takes place within communities of learning (Lunsford, 2002: 117). This study attempted to address this aspect of writing by adopting a model of argument structure not limited to fixed forms of argument but that allowed for variation in written arguments. Interviews were also conducted with the students in order to gain insight into the types of problems they experienced and their general expectations when confronting writing tasks in Australian tertiary contexts.

The use of a modified form of Toulmin's (1958) argument model adapted from a study conducted by Crammond (1998) and modified for argument in the academic context permitted both a macrostructural and microstructural analysis of written argument. The modified argument model applicable to the current study is depicted in Figure 1, using a graphic representation similar to that employed by Crammond (1998: 237). Each element of argument structure depicted in Figure 1 has a correlation with either the claim, justification or opposition component of an argument. A Claim and the Data offered in support of it are the minimal requirements of argument structure, while the remaining elements, or substructures, are optional or elaborative structures (Crammond, 1998: 236). The figure also indicates the substructures that can be presented as arguments. The embedded arguments formed through these substructures contribute towards the formation of argument chains, or extended arguments in the written texts. The argument structure depicted in Figure 2, as exemplified in the writing of a Japanese student in the present study, is similar to that used by Crammond to show how embedded arguments can form argument chains (Crammond, 1998: 243). The depth of an argument is determined from the number of embedded arguments used to form the argument chain. Argument chains can form as branches of existing chains and, therefore, multiple argument chains can be related to a single top-level argument. Consequently, the formation of top-level arguments establishes the focus of argumentative discourse. The integration of evidence into

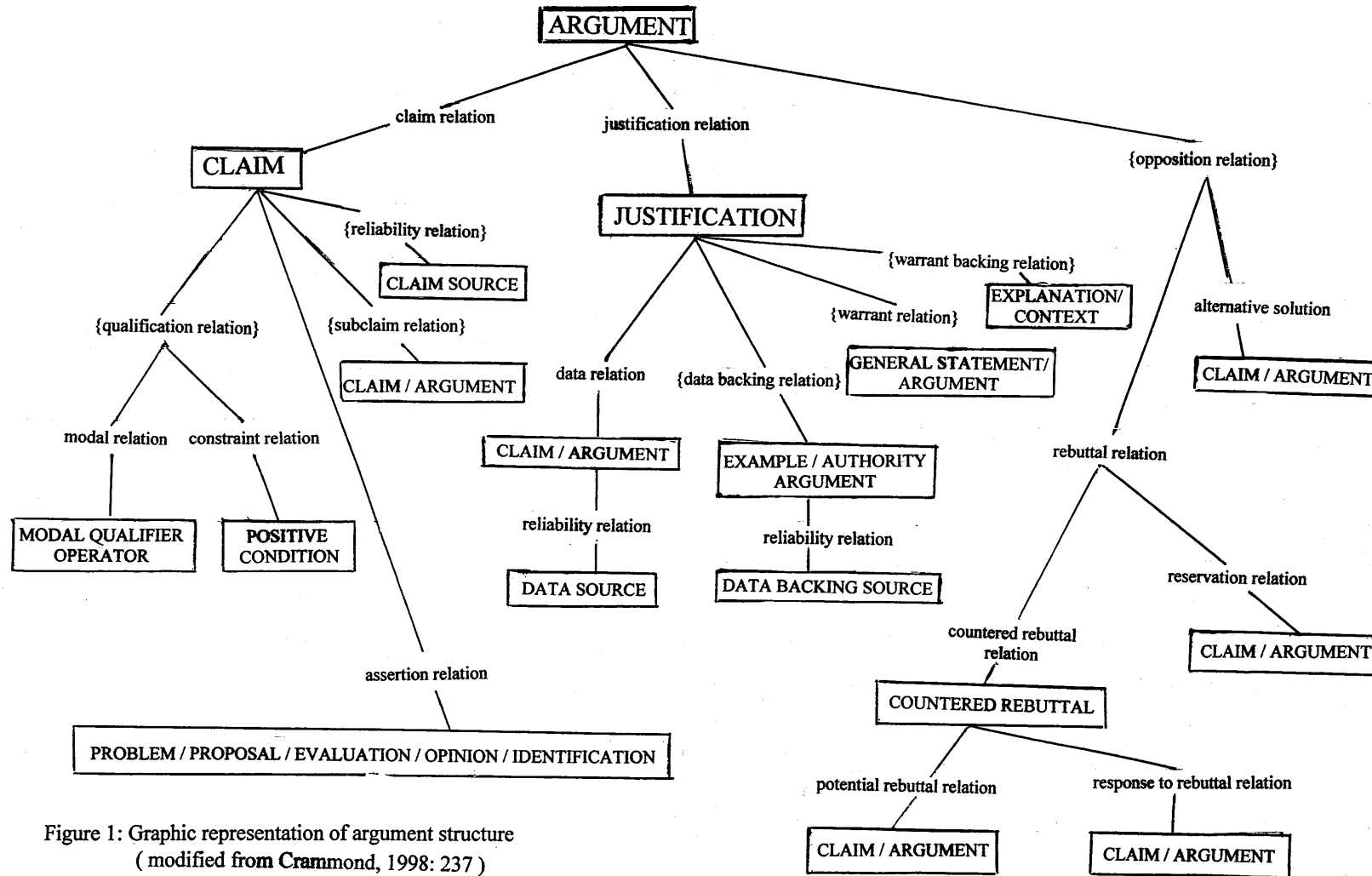


Figure 1: Graphic representation of argument structure
 (modified from Crammond, 1998: 237)

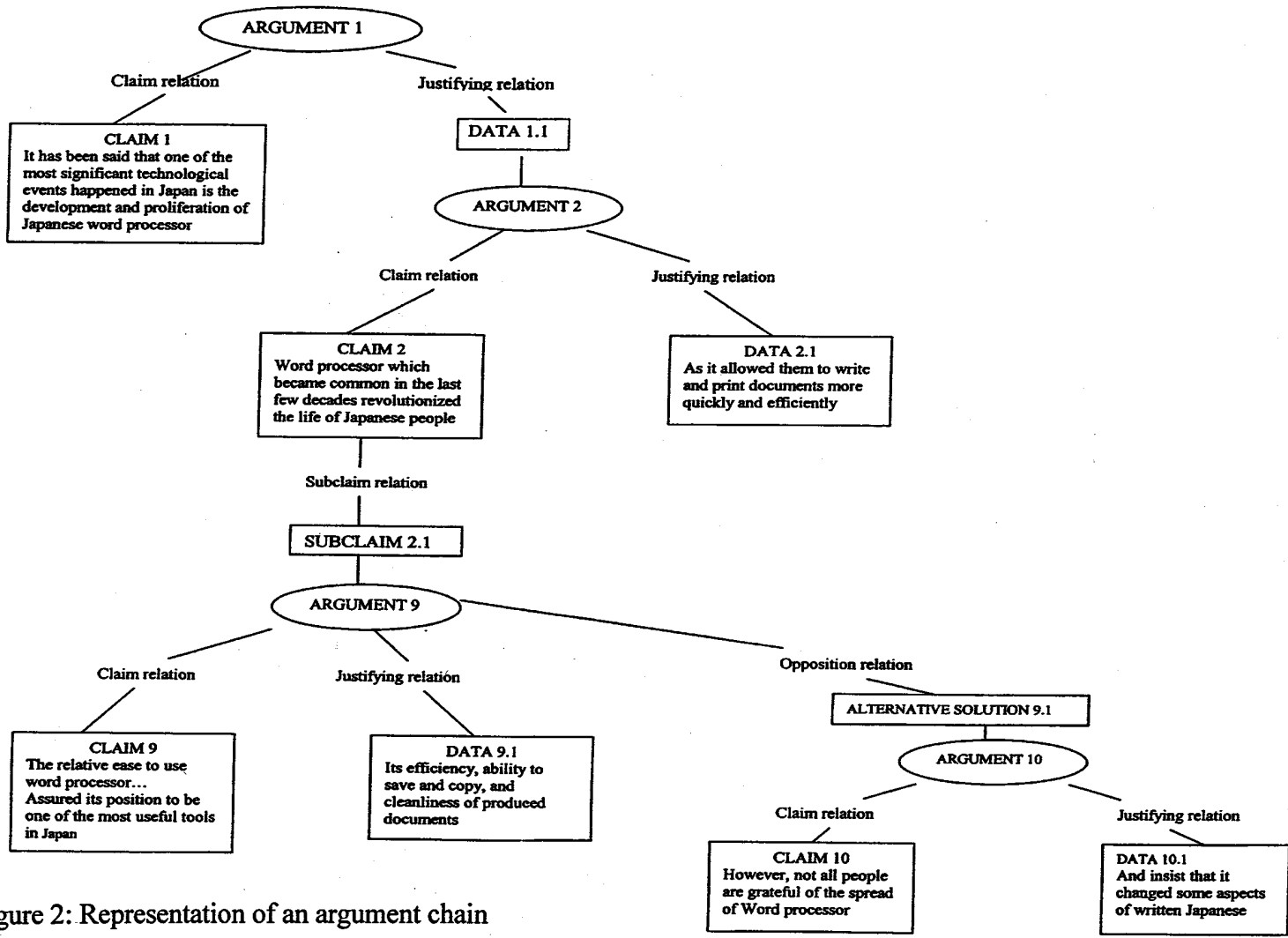


Figure 2: Representation of an argument chain

written argument to gain credibility for the claims advanced is a type of persuasive appeal and a necessary requisite for successful academic performance in tertiary contexts (Stapleton, 2001: 517). This study also considered, therefore, how students integrated evidence to formulate effective persuasion in written argument.

3. Results and Discussion

The findings of the study show that across the two groups of L1 and L2 writers there were commonly shared features of written argument. Successful argumentation in the essays of both groups of writers was strongly influenced by the organisation of argument at the macrostructural level of text. The ability to establish a focus of argument by raising key points of argument that are closely related to the main issues contained within the essay question and by employing chains of embedded arguments to formulate appropriate depths of discussion in relation to these points are strong indicators of successful argumentation in student writing. This pattern of macrostructural organization was present in the texts of both Australian and Japanese students who achieved high grades for their coursework essays in this study. A small number of top-level arguments in relation to the total number of argument chains formed in their texts is indicative of their ability to form complex arguments made up of multiple branching chains and to establish a minimal number of focal points for their arguments. The average depth of argument chains developed by these students was higher when compared with the average depth of chains developed by students forming weak arguments. The consequence of extensive embedding appears to have strengthened the claims of their top-level arguments. Furthermore, these students provided a summary of the key arguments central to their discussions in either the introduction or conclusion sections of their essays, revealing the argument superstructure to the reader. As shown in Example 1, Yumiko, a Japanese student in the study who received an essay mark of 89%, adeptly outlined in the introduction of her essay the three top-level arguments that she used to guide the formation of subsequent arguments in her text (the top-level arguments are indicated in brackets beforehand):

- (1) (Key Argument 1) It has been said that one of the most significant technological events happened in Japan is the development and proliferation of Japanese word processor. (Key Argument 2) Word processor which became common in the last few decades revolutionised the life of Japanese people as it allowed them to write and print documents more quickly and efficiently. (Key Argument 3) However, many people have insisted that this seemingly beneficial tool altered the way Japanese people write their language. This argument led to the notion that the current language policy is no longer valid and that changes are needed to be made.

These bore strong correlations with the issues raised in the essay topic question, shown below:

Discuss the impact of modern communications technology on the Japanese written language. What implications do such changes have for the education of young Japanese, or of non-native speakers who are learning Japanese? (You may discuss one or both of these cases).

Simone, an Australian student in the study, acknowledges the cognitive complexity of structuring an argument that requires her to draw correlations between the numerous points relating to the essay topic that she uncovered during research and the specific

issues raised in the essay question. In relation to the points of an argument, she states in her interview:

“...to connect them all in an argument that also relates back to the question, and specifically answers the essay question, I find that the most difficult thing.”

Interestingly, the importance of the interplay between the implementation of successful argument at the substructural level and the macrostructural level is evident in this study. Students employing weaker argument structures were more likely to use simple argument chains than complex ones, thereby spreading the focus of their argument. They were, however, sometimes able to compensate by use of strong argument structures at the microstructural level of text providing that individual arguments relating to similar issues were placed adjacent to one another in the written text, which strengthened the focus of their argument. In relation to Essay Two, the Japanese student, Kiyoko, who received an essay mark of 84%, compared with the Australian student, Matthew, who received an essay mark of 87%, has a larger number of top-level arguments and uses fewer argument chains than Matthew. This indicates a weaker argument structure. Rather than using an elaboration of key arguments, however, Kiyoko employs a series of related arguments in which she manages to develop an argument by keeping related arguments next to each other in the text. She further enhances this strategy by using appropriate headings to emphasise the focus of each series of related arguments. As indicated by her comments in the interview conducted with her in the course of this study, problems in defining the focus of her argument appear to arise from her lack of confidence in formulating the introduction and conclusion, those parts of the essay that usually point towards the focus of an argument. Her employment of subheadings appears to be a strategy to overcome this. Her comments are shown below:

“I feel like introduction introduce not everything, not the results...but I do struggle with introduction and conclusion.”

“If it’s a longer essay or if the topics have to be changed quite often, yes, I like using subheadings.”

Conversely, students employing strong argument superstructures through integration of individual arguments into argument chains were sometimes permitted to employ weaker structures at the microstructural level of text because the relevance of the individual arguments to the overriding arguments was specified in the superstructure. It appears that successful implementation of an argument superstructure permits the reader to consider the force of individual arguments in relation to the central arguments and ensures that even individual weak arguments have a degree of relevance to the overall text structure.

Failure to adopt an argument superstructure, despite the relevance of individual arguments to the essay topic, contributed towards poor performance. Both Australian and Japanese students in the study who developed weak arguments failed to formulate appropriate top-level arguments with which to organize the argument chains of the text. In some cases, the number of top-level arguments was the same as the number of argument chains, indicating that the students used a series of simple chains to present the arguments in the text. This strategy dissipates the focus of the argument.

Furthermore, the lack of depth in the arguments of these chains implies that the students conducted only a limited discussion of each argument point raised.

In other cases that failed to formulate appropriate top-level arguments, students did not adequately address all components of the essay question. Yomoe, a Japanese student with an essay mark of 63%, provides one such example. Her use of top-level structure based on two argument chains, although providing focus for her subsequent arguments, limited her discussion to only two aspects of the essay question. Despite her attempt at a reasonable argument structure, her failure to address other aspects of the topic caused her teacher to comment on her paper:

“You have done quite well in structuring an argument and providing evidence, but for the number of points you make, this is rather longish.”

This failure to address all issues in the topic may have arisen from her adopting only one stance on the issue, as indicated in an interview with her:

“In this one, you have to be like ‘against’ or ‘for’, so I just like found which one to go...so because I was for this, I just collecting information that helped my thing...”

Alternatively, it may have arisen because she had problems synthesizing information acquired from tutorials and other sources into the written academic form required for the coursework essay, which meant that she was not able to include all the information she had relating to the topic. This is also indicated in her interview:

“Taking the notes in the tute is not difficult but it was hard to...but it was difficult to put in actual essay, like I got the information but I don’t know how to move that...”

While limiting the number of top-level arguments is a useful strategy for defining the focal points of subsequent arguments, it appears that the writer must be careful not to limit the focus of discussion and must ensure that the central issues of the essay question are adequately addressed at the top-level of argument structure.

Conversely, in some cases, although the students addressed the various components of the essay topic question, their text structures reflected a lack of ability to synthesize information into relevant and convincing argumentative discourse. This was exemplified in the essay of the Australian student, Fiona, who received a mark of 63% for her essay. Fiona failed to use embedded structures. In fact, of all the essays in the study, her essay contained the smallest number of argument structures. Despite presenting a number of informative points, her failure to adopt an argument probably led to her poor mark, as indicated by the teacher’s comment on her paper:

“You cover a number of points...but because you do not develop an argument throughout the paper, it feels disjointed.”

At the microstructural level of text, the Claim-Data complex is the essential requirement of argument structure. Various patterns of forming the Claim-Data complex existed in both the Australian and Japanese students’ writing, which influenced the persuasive appeal, or strength, of the arguments. The findings of this study suggest that in strong argument structures, the Claim-Data complex is formed in a way that presents the essential components of argument structure close together in the written text with conciseness and clarity of English expression. Successful

implementation of the Claim-Data complex is shown in Example 2 below where the Claim is presented immediately before the Data (the category of argument substructure appears in brackets after the example, a convention that will be employed in the remainder of this paper):

- (2) *Moreover, the validity of the draft is not strong (Claim) since it is not compulsory for manufacturers to follow the recommendations of the draft, and it is up to them to use their discretion in complying with such recommendations (data).*
(Yumiko, Argument 26)

Example 3 below likewise shows successful implementation of the complex with presentation of the Data immediately before the Claim:

- (3) *The newspaper industries domination by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation shows (Data) Australia's print media lacks diversity of opinion (Claim).*
(Helen, Argument 12)

Examples 2 and 3 above are representative of the dominant patterns of incorporation of the Claim-Data complex in the written essays of both Australian and Japanese students in the study. Indicators of weak argument structures, on the other hand, were lack of brevity, increased distance between the Claim and the Data, and poor linguistic expression. This is exemplified in Example 4 below where the relevance of the Data to the argument remains unclear because it is advanced well before the Claim:

- (4) *In general, "Otokoyaku" wear darker color suits such as black, dark blue or green, which symbolize masculinity. They wear suits or a jacket and a pair of pants. The jacket has pads on the shoulders so it makes them have big and wide shoulders. Long pants make them have long legs. These costumes help "Otokoyaku" actors to imitate men's behaviours such as putting hands in pockets or wearing a jacket. One of the purposes of their costumes is covering their actual female body shape. On the other hand, the colors of "Musumeyaku" are red, pink or white. Most of the time, "Musumeyaku" emphasize to show their body shape (Data). *The comparison of "Musumeyaku" actors' white and fine skin and covered and rectangular "Otokoyaku" actors' figure sense to emphasize the huge differences between femininity and masculinity (Claim).**
(Sachiko, Argument 16)

When considering the elaborative or optional elements of argument at the microstructural level of text, both Australian and Japanese students employed Warrants, Data Backing and Sources to a similar extent in their written arguments, however, the minimal use of Warrants, structures that validate the relationship between the Claim and the Data, by all of the undergraduate students in this study suggests that the explicit statement of the warrant in an argument is not an important component of argument when writing within an academic discipline. This is probably because, in this context, writing takes place within a particular discourse community that shares a mutual or general understanding. This finding contradicts previous studies that associate the use of warrants in argumentative texts with better persuasive writing (Crammond, 1998) but is consistent with interpretations of argument that acknowledge the influence of classroom interactions on argumentative practices (Lunsford, 2002: 120).

The significant employment of Data Backing, occurring with a total frequency of 50 (27.3%) in the essays of Australian students and 70 (27.7%) in those of Japanese

students, to incorporate specific examples and authorities into an argument, and the use of Sources, occurring with a total frequency of 53 (28.9%) in the essays of Australian students and 80 (31.6%) in those of Japanese students, to acknowledge the origin of ideas or evidence advanced in an argument, correlate with general academic requirements that stipulate the importance of incorporating evidence from relevant sources in support of general statements made in written discourse (Clanchy and Ballard, 1997: 8). The similar frequency with which these substructures were employed by both groups of Australian and Japanese students further implicates the importance of contexts of learning in developing common expectations concerning the practices of written discourse.

Evident, also, is that Subclaims are important components of argument in student academic discourse. Subclaims were the most frequently employed elaborative substructures of argument in the written discourse of the Australian students in this study, occurring in this group with a frequency of 64 (35.0%), and the second most frequently employed elaborative substructures of Japanese students, occurring in this group with a frequency of 52 (20.6%). Significant from the findings of this study is that the use of Subclaims as embedded arguments appears to correlate with the development of an effective argument superstructure, probably because Subclaims provide the means to elaborate on major claims advanced in the argumentative text. Consequently, both the Australian and Japanese students in this study who developed strong arguments showed a predilection to presenting Subclaims as embedded arguments.

From the findings of this study, differences between the written English arguments of native speakers and Japanese non-native speakers of English were also discerned. Underpinning these differences was the tendency of the Japanese writers in this study to focus on the justification of their argument through the modes of presentation of the Data substructures. Although Subclaim substructures were the preferred means of presenting embedded arguments in both groups, the Australian students in this study showed a greater predilection to form embedded arguments with Subclaim substructures compared with Japanese students. In the essays of Australian students, Subclaims were used to present embedded arguments with a total frequency of 59 (78.7%) and in the essays of Japanese students, with a total frequency of 45 (42.9%). Conversely, the Japanese students in this study showed a greater predilection to form embedded arguments with Data substructures compared with Australian students. Data substructures were used to present embedded arguments with a total frequency of 9 (12.0%) in the essays of Australian students and 36 (34.3%) in the essays of Japanese students. This is significant in light of the fact mentioned above that the employment of Subclaims as embedded arguments correlates with the formation of effective argument superstructures in the essays of both the Japanese and Australian students in the study. For example, although Yumiko employed Data as embedded arguments at a higher rate than six of the seven Australian students, Yumiko still employed Subclaims as embedded arguments at a frequency of 24 (69%) while she employed Data as embedded arguments at a frequency of 11 (27%). She managed, therefore, to implement a successful argument structure. It appears that the pattern of argument formation that emphasizes Data substructures in the English discourse of the majority of Japanese students in this study may influence their ability to implement effective argument in academic English texts. Further research into the influence of different types of embedded arguments on argument structure should

provide useful insight into the successful management or otherwise of argument structure. The greater emphasis on Data in the written arguments of Japanese students compared with Australian students is also indicated by the employment of a slightly greater frequency of Data Sources in the essays of the Japanese students in this study.

The use of other elements of argument structure did not appear particularly significant to written argument in the academic context. The use of Modal Qualifiers, although with slightly higher frequency among the Japanese students of this study, did not correlate with skilful ability to develop a persuasive argument in the academic context. The low frequency of employment of these elements of argument in all the essays in this study contrasts with the findings of previous studies that implicate their use with good persuasive writing (Crammond, 1998).

The findings of this study imply that although considering alternative points of view is important in the written argumentation of students, adopting a particular stance on the topic of discussion is not a requirement for effective persuasive argument in the academic context. Therefore, although the Japanese students showed a slightly greater tendency to employ opposition structures, which included Reservations, Alternative Solutions and Countered Rebuttals, in written arguments, this did not improve the strength of their arguments.

Both the Australian and Japanese students in this study used a wide variety of types of evidence in their written arguments, with both groups showing a preference for using Facts and Logical Explanations to present evidence in Data substructures. This suggests that when writing English essays for coursework requirements in the tertiary context, both Australian and Japanese students use concrete and rational evidence to support their arguments. Japanese students showed, however, a preference for employing Logical Explanations rather than Facts, using 106 (46.9%) Logical Explanations compared with 67 (29.6%) Facts in Data substructures. This contrasted with the Australian students in the study, who employed 55 (36.9%) Logical Explanations compared with 74 (49.7%) Facts in Data substructures and dispels claims by other researchers that Japanese are more likely to integrate concrete facts than logical or rational explanations in their written arguments in English discourse (Kamimura and Oi, 1998: 318).

Also significant from these findings is that both Australian and Japanese students were unlikely to use Personal Experience to present evidence in their written arguments, with only one Australian student and one Japanese student employing Personal Experience on one occasion each to present evidence as Data. This finding also contrasts with previous statements in the literature suggesting that Japanese have “a clear preference for the subjective over the factual or objective data” (Hazen, 1986: 229) and discounts the findings in other research that indicates Japanese are more likely to use affective strategies of appeal through striking empathy in relation to the topic of discussion (Kamimura and Oi, 1998: 317).

Both Australian and Japanese students showed a preference for using Examples in Data Backing substructures, where Australians employed 27 (56.3%) and Japanese employed 33 (53.2%) Examples. The common means employed by both Australian and Japanese students to apply Examples in the Data Backing substructure in support of the Data of written argument is shown in Example 5 below:

- (5) The American concept of content analysis is a quantitative form of analysing the media (Claim). It has the ability to indicate trends and patterns forming within texts (Data). For example, using content analysis one might count the number of times the ALP is mentioned in *The Age* in order to identify whether there may be a bias for or against the party (Data Backing).
(Helen, Argument 13)

Quotes occurred with relatively low frequencies in the essays of Australian and Japanese students, although were still more common than other types of evidence. Interestingly, there were significant differences between the essays of Australian and Japanese students in the manner with which these were incorporated into argument structures in the written texts. Australian students appeared more skilful at maintaining the flow of the text when integrating the quote into the argument structure. Example 6 below shows how a Quote (presented in italics in the example) was integrated to form part of the sentence without interrupting the flow of the text:

- (6) Behn and Centlivre were not using their writing to make any sort of political commentary on women (Claim), they simply used stock characters from stock plots, which *'for financial and aesthetic reasons, they wrote in the traditional forms of the theatre of their time'* (Case, 1988: 40) (Data).

(Simone, Argument 8)

In contrast, Japanese students inserted quotes not within sentences, but as separate sentences that interrupted the flow of the text, as shown in Example 7 below:

- (7) Cook says *"the earlier a learner arrives in a country, the better he/she is at detecting ungrammatical use of grammatical morphemes such as 'the' and plural '-s' and other properties of English such as wh-questions and word order"* (Data). Therefore if started learning second language in earlier period, young learners will be able to achieve good quality writing skills, even without proper language training (Claim).

(Yomoe, Argument 15)

In some cases in the essays of Japanese students, not only does the quote interrupt the text but it also appears irrelevant to the argument, as shown in Example 8 below:

- (8) Furthermore, children have more advantage to attain language even in instruction than adults (Claim). *"The natural L2 situation may favour children. The teaching of adults requires the creation of language situation in the classroom that in some ways compensates for this lack"* (Cook, 1996: 112) (Data).

(Senju, Argument 12)

The example above suggests that Senju didn't really understand the content or message contained in the statement made by the author of the quote. Alternatively, maybe Senju had a problem in stating her own argument in English and attempted to overcome this by using a quote that she thought was a close approximation to the point she wanted to make. Because the quote does not seem directly related to the claim of the argument, the argument loses its persuasive appeal since good data, or evidence, need to be directly related to the claim to be considered effective persuasion (Connor, 1990: 75).

This study not only identified elements of argument structure integral to written discourse in the academic context, but also attempted to investigate the ways students implemented the use of these structures. Although there were some occasions noted in the essays by Japanese students where problems with integrating a successful

argument structure appeared to be related to linguistic competence, in particular with successful integration of Quotes into written argument, other problems concerning the manipulation of argument structures were common across both groups of students. This resulted in a variety of representations of the constituent structures of argument among the essays of the students, which invariably affected the strength of individual arguments.

4. Conclusion

Employing natural data for the analysis of this study meant that only the argument structures in a small number of essays could be investigated. The collection of a larger quantity of data could not be accomplished given that there were not sufficient numbers of Japanese students studying in the Arts Faculty where the research was conducted. The nature of the coursework essay, which may require students to undertake some independent enquiry and use library resources within their particular course of study to construct an answer to an essay question, meant that not all essays analysed were on the same topic. Attempts were made to group essays according to Essay Topic Questions for parts of the analysis but differences still existed to some degree in the lengths of individual essays.

These shortcomings obviously mean that the findings of this study may not be representative of all Australian and Japanese students in the Australian tertiary institution where the research was conducted, or indeed of students in other Australian tertiary institutions. Nevertheless, this small-scale study permitted an in-depth and thorough investigation into the patterns of argument structure employed by students participating in the normal requirements of their course of study. Although set tasks utilising larger quantities of data, as employed in previous studies, permit greater comparative power, by using natural data, this study acknowledged the importance of context and processes of writing in shaping written arguments and so hoped to provide new insights into naturally occurring written argumentative structures.

Immediate pedagogical implications arise from this study. Given the important function of argument superstructure in determining the strength of written argumentation in English texts, as indicated by the findings of this study, it seems that raising the awareness of the importance of this aspect of argument structure among Japanese L2 writers will contribute towards improvement in their academic writing. Furthermore, it will empower them with the means to improve their academic performance despite shortcomings in English language proficiency, since a strong argument superstructure will compensate for weaker argumentation at the microstructural level of text, which requires higher levels of English proficiency for successful implementation. This might, therefore, improve the confidence of Japanese students who confront writing tasks, such as the coursework essay, as part of their academic assessment in Australian tertiary institutions. Furthermore, learning strategies for organizing written discourse will hopefully improve Japanese students' comprehension of tutorial notes and associated readings related to the essay topic of discussion because it will force them to ascertain the relevance of information contained in readings and notes to main arguments relating to the essay topic question.

At the finer level of argument structure, it appears relevant to increase awareness among Japanese students about other means available to strengthen an argument besides manipulation of the Data component of argument structure. The findings of this study indicate that advancing Subclaims in relation to the main Claim appears to be an effective means of elaborating an argument. Furthermore, as mentioned above, Subclaims can be used in a way that contributes towards the development of an argument superstructure, integral to effective argumentation in academic writing. Explicit instruction regarding argument structure at this level may be necessary. It is apparent from this study that not only some ESL students but some native speakers of English also experience difficulties with formulating written arguments. The results of this study showed that the weak structures of argument adopted by Australian students were similar to the weak structures used by Japanese students, especially in relation to the organization of argument macrostructure. The findings of this study are, therefore, also relevant for Australian students seeking to improve their written arguments.

As evident from the findings of this study, students writing in academic contexts employ common patterns of argument structure. It appears, therefore, that contexts of learning are influential in determining the discourse structures of both L1 and L2 writers. Furthermore, this seems to suggest that differences in argument structures observed in the texts of L1 and L2 writers may be due to different interpretations of discourse expectations, not merely problems of English language proficiency. It seems worthwhile that further research concerned with the development of written argument in academic contexts investigates the effect on argument of the level of participation within the various genres of learning associated with particular discourse communities and, in particular, explores the problems L2 writers experience with participating in and interpreting these genres. Contextualising argument in this way would provide a meaningful analysis of argumentative forms and might help teachers understand better the complexity of argument and its relevance to discourse competency. Given that proficiency in argument is integral to successful academic performance, there is obvious benefit in improving specific knowledge on the forms and functions of argument in written discourse and in understanding the processes that influence its construction.

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