

A Proposal for Debate Instruction for Beginner-level Learners of Japanese: Based on Application of “Simplified Debate” in English-language Education in Japan

Nobuyuki Yamauchi (Doshisha University)

Shimpei Hashio (Graduate School of Doshisha University)

Abstract

外国語教育の達成目標の一つは、コミュニケーション能力の育成である。日本語教育においても、学習者の日本での就職や留学のために、理由に基づいて自分の考えを述べて、他者と議論する能力の養成が求められている。コミュニケーション能力や論理的思考力を向上させるための取り組みとして、日本語教育においても、日本語でディベートを行うことは有効であると考えられている。中級・上級学習者に対してディベートの授業が取り入れられているが、初級段階から長期的にこれらの能力を育むために、初級学習者の習熟度を考慮し、従来のディベートを簡略化することで、初級学習者のクラスでもディベートに準じた活動を行うことができると考えられる。本稿では、筆者らが英語教育で提案している初級英語学習者に向けた従来のディベートの内容・フォーマットなどを簡略化した「シンプル・ディベート (simplified debate)」の方法論とその取り組みの一例を紹介し、日本語教育への応用可能性を論じる。

1. Introduction

One attainment target of foreign language teaching is to foster learners' communicative competence. For example, English language teaching in Japan focuses on developing learners' ability to express their opinions based on reasons.

As with English language teaching, Japanese language education gives weight to improving foreign learners' speaking and oral interaction. Learners studying Japanese are often studying and working in Japan and interested in Japanese language, pop culture, history, and literature (Japan Foundation 2012). Thus, many learners of Japanese are required to develop communicative competence and critical thinking when coming up with topics to present and discuss (Naito 2012).

To improve learners' communicative competence and critical thinking in a foreign language, debate can be one of the most effective methods. Matsumoto (2009) insisted that debate in a foreign language can contribute to improving learners' communicative competence. Also, Hashio (2015, 2016a, 2016b) suggested that Japanese learners of English who engaged in English debate for more than one year were better able to learn critical thinking.

Many researchers in the field of Japanese-language education have also revealed the effectiveness of debate in this capacity (Nishitani 2001; Tateoka & Saiki 2003; Shimizu 2006; Sato 2015). These studies indicated that debate in Japanese enables intermediate- or advanced-level learners to improve their communicative competence and critical thinking and foster their confidence and motivation.

Few studies, on the other hand, have focused on debate instruction for beginner-level learners in Japan, so far as the authors know. Debate in foreign languages is generally too hard for low-proficiency learners, and it takes quite a long time for learners of foreign languages to develop communicative competence and critical thinking, so communicative activities such as debate for developing these skills should be introduced even for beginner-level learners (Naito 2012). Classes in writing and conversation for beginner-level learners of Japanese have often been the target of criticism, however, because they focus too much on developing their grammar and vocabulary (Zheng & Tanimori 2012).

We have two purposes in this paper. First, we attempt to introduce “simplified debate,” a new form of debate instruction for beginner-level learners of English in Japan. Second, we consider the possibility of applying simplified debate to Japanese-language education.

2. Beginner-level Learners and Debate Instruction

For beginner-level learners to become capable of demonstrating their opinions and refuting others’ in foreign languages, we should first define what beginner-level learners of foreign languages can do. Next, we need to simplify the content, format, and language structures used in original debate so that learners can engage in debate based on the definition of a beginner in foreign language learning.

2.1. What Are Beginner-level Learners?

There are some guidelines for measuring learners’ proficiency in a foreign language. According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), novice-level learners can communicate short messages on highly predictable and familiar topics. Even intermediate-level learners have trouble dealing with topics unfamiliar with them, but they can produce sentence-level language, from discrete sentences to strings of sentences.

The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) divides beginner levels into two categories. The lower beginner level is called A1, and A1-level learners can understand and use familiar everyday expressions. The upper beginner level is called A2, and A2-level learners can communicate in simple tasks requiring a direct exchange of information on familiar matters. Like in the intermediate level of ACTFL, lower intermediate-level (B1-level) learners have trouble talking about topics beyond familiar matters, but they can produce simple connected texts on familiar matters.

Considering these guidelines, instruction should make beginner-level learners try to exchange information in simple connected texts on familiar matters. It is significant to introduce debate or activities similar to debate in beginner classes. In the next section, we summarize the nature of debate and examine what obstacles can arise when introducing debate in a classroom of beginner-level learners.

2.2. What Is Debate?

This section explains the content and form of debate: what is debated and how debate is carried on? The Japan Debate Association, one of the largest debate-related organizations in Japan, defines debate as follows:

- (i) Participants are divided into two opposed groups according to a given proposition.
- (ii) The two groups argue the topic with each other.
- (iii) The audience is required to judge which group has made a more persuasive presentation.

Of the two groups of participants, one is called the affirmative side (AFF), which is expected to agree with a given proposition, while the other is called the negative side (NEG), which is expected to disagree with it. As suggested in the definition above, whichever side succeeds in convincing the audience wins the debate.

The matter of the “given proposition” in this definition is especially important for the design of debate framework. Propositions in debate have mainly two types, and most competitive debate deals with (government) policy propositions. For example, one might talk about a wide range of topics such as economy, taxation systems, medical care, environmental issues, judicial systems, diplomatic issues, military affairs, and so on. Meanwhile, in some competitions, debaters handle propositions related to people’s values or preferences, which are called value propositions. For example, one might debate which is better for breakfast, rice or bread, or whether it is better to live in the city or in the countryside.

Next, we describe the format of debate. Participants engage in argumentation about the proposition by making multiple speeches. These may be of two kinds: constructive speeches and rebuttal speeches. In the former, participants express their opinions about the proposition. When dealing with propositions related to government policy, constructive speeches have to show proof by evidence such as specialists’ opinions or statistical data. In rebuttal speeches, debaters refute their opponents’ constructive speeches and insist on the superiority of their argument to their opponents’.

In open discussions, learners are relatively free to make their statements. In contrast, when they debate, each participant is given equal opportunities to speak in a set period of time, during which no one else should speak. The organizer of a debate tournament sets the rules related to the number of speeches and the time limit per speech in each group in each debate round. This paper assumes this format, the most representative one set by the National Debate Tournament in the U.S., as shown in Fig. 1.

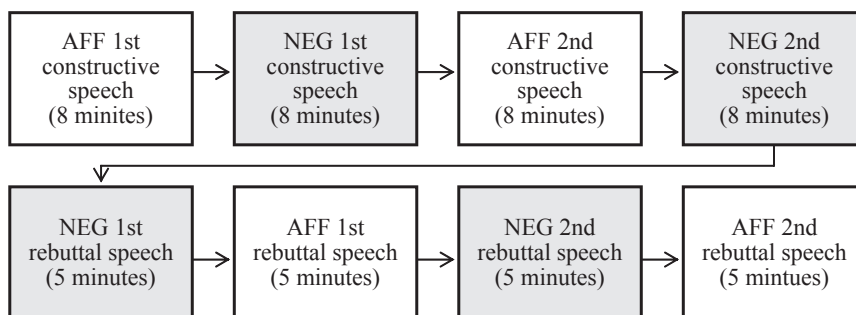


Figure 1. The format of debate (as set by the National Debate Tournament, the U.S.)

As Fig. 1 indicates, in this format, each group gives two constructive speeches, and each speech has to be given within eight minutes, meaning that they involve about 1,200 words. Rebuttal speeches are also given twice per group, and they have to finish each one within five minutes. In addition, four cross-examinations are set, one after each constructive speech.

2.3. Toward the Introduction of Debate in Beginner-level Classrooms

Debate in foreign languages is expected to facilitate learners' communicative competence and critical thinking abilities. However, it seems difficult to introduce these complicated communicative activities in classrooms for beginner-level learners. Kabilan (2000) insisted that complicated activity such as debate requires participants to have high foreign language proficiency. Thus, introducing debate in English and Japanese language classes is unavoidably difficult.

There are three factors that make debate complicated and hard to introduce effectively. First, learners have to handle propositions related to national policy, which requires background knowledge (generally learned through the Internet, related books, etc.), and this knowledge is often difficult for learners to process and understand. In fact, most of them have never discussed or debated such a topic even in their native language, still less in foreign languages. In addition, they must learn many technical terms in foreign languages—another heavy task.

Second, learners will likely have trouble making lengthy speeches. An eight-minute speech requires about 1,200 words, which is difficult for beginner-level learners, who can only use easy phrases and simple sentences as defined by ACTFL and CEFL. In fact, Hashio (2018) reported that most beginner-level learners of English have never tried making speeches or writing essays by the time they enroll in university, and beginner-level learners of Japanese are probably assumed to be in a similar situation.

Third, in debate, learners have to interact with each other. The more arguments they exchange, the more complicated the discourses and individual utterances (in terms of what is needed to reflect the broader debate to that point) become, as suggested by Kabilan (2000). In this way, it is difficult for them to engage in debate even if they have a certain proficiency in foreign languages. This is why few high schools and universities have introduced foreign-language debate so far.

In order to develop learners' communicative competence and critical thinking in foreign languages, the great potential of introducing debate into “every-level” classes should be recognized and attention given to organizing a new framework that supports beginner- and intermediate-level learners who try debating in foreign languages. Before moving on to the concrete proposal of this paper, let us consider what to apply to debate in classrooms from the viewpoint of the competitive debate in which university students are involved in the next section.

Hashio (2015) investigated how the university students who engage in competitive debate in English prepare for debate tournaments, and indicated that they assume many possible arguments related to the proposition and script a large portion of their speeches. The debaters do not spontaneously refute their opponents, because of the fixed format of debate, and what they have to argue in each speech is to some extent predictable, unlike free discussion, which proceeds with more flexibility and with easier reference to the ongoing actions and speeches of the participants.

The most important point to be emphasized here is that composing speech scripts beforehand is essential when students who have had no debate experience are asked to make counterarguments (initial arguments as well) in a non-native language, as this is very difficult to do spontaneously.

In addition, Hashio (2016a), who constructed a corpus of English sentences produced by Japanese university students in competitive English debate and analyzed what lexical characteristics were observed in their interlanguage, found that students with debate experience had acquired certain fixed expressions, for example, those related to causal relationships and numbering. When they tried to refute each argument of their opponent for every proposition, most used phrases like those in Fig. 2, named “templates” in Hashio (2016a), in which debaters fill their counterarguments depending on the precise nature of the argument, just like in pattern practice.

This use of templates for individual speeches may also extend to the introduction of English debate in classrooms, as providing model speeches that learners’ speeches can follow may help them with debate.

<p>Regarding _____, they said that _____.</p> <p>However, _____.</p>
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Figure 2. A template used in rebuttal speeches

Furthermore, in reality, participants in debate competitions give weight to long-term preparation in advance and rarely give spontaneous five-minute or eight-minute speeches, which is different from discussion that puts emphasis on immediate exchanges of opinions as occasion may demand. It is thus thought to be essential to give learners a large amount of preparation time if they are to handle communicative activities such as debate.

3. “Simplified Debate”

3.1. Definition and Objective

In this section, we introduce “simplified debate” for English language teaching in Japan, including simplification of both form and content, which makes the content and format of debate easier. In simplified debate, learners express their opinions and refute their opponent’s opinions on particular propositions. What is simplified in this approach precisely includes various aspects of the system (format and content) of debate: the propositions, the time limit for each speech, the structure from round to round, and the preparation process (using a template).

The objective and significance of the introduction of simplified debate in classrooms is to have beginner-level learners experience public production and interaction in English. Holding simplified debate in classrooms ensures that learners have opportunities to critically analyze familiar matters. In addition, in simplified debate, learners themselves are directed to assess other learners’ speeches. This paper emphasizes why learners themselves evaluate other learners’ speeches and suggests how they can attain their goals.

3.2. System of Simplified Debate

Compared to original debate, the propositions in simplified debate are made easier for beginner-level learners to handle by making them simpler and more familiar. Though propositions related to policy have been shown to be effective to foster learners' English proficiency, instead of these propositions, simplified debate adopts value propositions, related to daily life or learners' interests. These facilitate the use and learning of easier vocabulary and expressions compared to debate on academic or policy topics.

While the time limit per each speech in competitive debate is at most eight-minutes, in simplified debate all the speeches are made within 1 minute (for 50 to 100 words). Fig. 3 shows the simplified debate format. Shiokawa *et al.* (2014) and Izumi & Kadota (2016) already attempted to reduce the format and the time provided for each speech from that in original debate. But the time limit of each speech in simplified debate is 1 minute, within which the speeches of 50 to 100 words are made. The 1-minute speech seems to be the shortest and most suitable for beginner-level learners.

In addition, in simplified debate, learners share scripts of their constructive speeches with the whole class so that learners in the opponent team can more easily refute the constructive opinions, which assists them in preparing rebuttal speeches. This is because immediate, spontaneous interaction and production of rebuttals are presumed to be too difficult for beginner-level learners. Simplified debate gives them time to carefully analyze the constructive speech and prepare a rebuttal speech in English before the round of simplified debate.

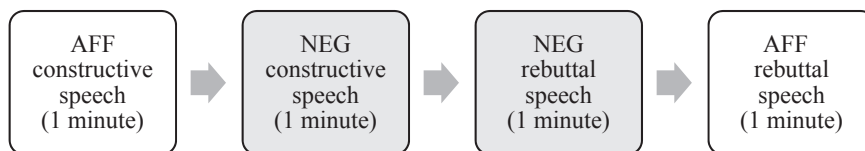


Figure 3. The format of simplified debate

3.3. Instruction in Making Speeches in Debate

3.3.1. Template for simplified debate

We have maintained that the propositions and format of debate can be simplified. However, it is not sufficient to just simplify the round-over-round format of the debate, for few learners at this stage have ever made speeches on their own or practiced critical thinking from diversified viewpoints (Fujioka *et al.* 2017). In fact, it seems that many beginner-level learners of English are reluctant to express themselves in English at all.

In order to overcome these difficulties, we need to set fixed phrases and expressions—that is, a template for simplified debate. We prepared two kinds of worksheets to make constructive speeches and rebuttal speeches in simplified debate. Matsumoto (2009) and Izumi & Kadota (2016) also used a framework in which each speech followed templates. The templates that we propose are further simplified from those they suggested for beginner-level learners.

The template for constructive speeches in simplified debate is given in Fig. 4 for debating whether it

is better to live in the city or in the countryside. Where an option is given, such as “countryside” or “city,” students are expected to choose one, and where there is a blank, they are also expected to fill in the blank, just as when practicing controlled composition.

When learners make constructive speeches, the teacher’s role is to check if the learners can fill grammatically correct sentences into the blanks. Teachers are also required to help their learners understand the difference between “reasons” and “examples” and to fill the blanks with contextually appropriate sentences, since many beginner-level learners need to learn such logical relationships as “reasons” and “examples.”

<p>We think that living in the [countryside / city] is good for two reasons.</p> <p>First, _____.</p> <p>For example, _____.</p> <p>Second, _____.</p> <p>For instance, _____.</p> <p>Therefore, living in the [countryside / city] has many advantages.</p>
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Figure 4. A template for constructive speeches

Next, a template for rebuttal speeches is given in Fig. 5. In making rebuttal speeches, all learners first have to say how many ideas they will refute in their opponents’ constructive speech. Next, they have to state which opinions they will object to and why they are against these arguments. Fig. 5 assumes that the speakers try to make two counterarguments to their opponent’s constructive speech. Teachers should remember to instruct their students in the same way as their constructive speeches, though it might be a little harder for them to make rebuttal speeches, as mentioned earlier.

<p>We would like to object to two ideas in their constructive speeches.</p> <p>First, they said that _____.</p> <p>But we don’t agree because _____.</p> <p>Second, they said that _____.</p> <p>But we also disagree with this idea _____.</p> <p>Therefore, we are against their opinions.</p>
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Figure 5. A template for rebuttal speeches

Certain tips may help learners to smoothly make speeches. First, it might be a good idea to make wordlists related to the propositions and to give them to learners whose vocabulary is still small or restricted before they start to make their speeches. Table 1 is a vocabulary checklist about the city and the countryside, and the list can be used in the handout of the class in simplified debate.

Table 1. A checklist about the city and the countryside

the city	the countryside
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ concerts ■ fast food ■ high salary ■ large train stations ■ many buses and trains ■ movie theaters ■ nice restaurants ■ shopping centers ■ sporting events ■ transportation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> clean air <input type="checkbox"/> clean water <input type="checkbox"/> few buses and trains <input type="checkbox"/> fresh vegetable <input type="checkbox"/> fruit farm <input type="checkbox"/> lake <input type="checkbox"/> mountains <input type="checkbox"/> river <input type="checkbox"/> theme parks <input type="checkbox"/> wild animals

Second, it is likely effective to hold brainstorming sessions and share ideas before having each student make their constructive and rebuttal speeches. If they just give subordinate ideas related to examples in the brainstorming session, we should lead them to consider reasons for their positions based on the examples, as shown in Fig. 6.

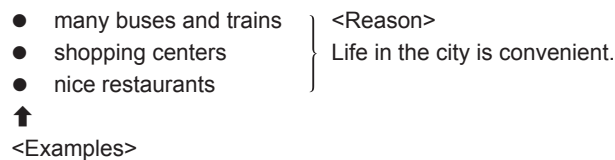


Figure 6. An example of brainstorming sessions

Thanks to the templates, it becomes possible for learners to make speeches in debate. The instructor also needs to make it clear that learners should use the templates in every constructive and rebuttal speech. Using the templates also helps learners acquire relevant discourse markers, which in turn gives listeners cues for processing speeches.

3.4. Judgement

In simplified debate, the audience consists of learners not participating in the debate round. Like original debate, the audience judges which side had more persuasive arguments in the round. Of course, it is difficult for beginner-level learners to judge whether the arguments that the participants show are good or not, and without proper direction they might assess all speeches as excellent out of consideration for friendship and relationships. Izumi & Kadota (2016) and others insisted, however, that it is meaningful for learners to evaluate their speeches with each other, for speakers are more conscious if their speeches are easy for listeners to understand. Thus, it is our next task to suggest more feasible ways for learners to assess other learners' speeches.

We made the evaluation sheet shown in Fig. 7, requiring the speaker to effectively use the template expressions proposed in this paper and demanding that the speaker should not only show the persuasive argument

but also make an easy speech for the listeners to grasp. For example, the speakers are expected to read their speech scripts in appropriate speed between phrases.

	AFF	NEG
<Constructive Speech>	Speaker A	Speaker B
can state the stances at the beginning and the end		
can use expressions indicating order and example		
can make arguments based on clear reasons		
can make the speech within the time limit		
can be conscious of thought groups		
<Rebuttal Speech>	Speaker D	Speaker C
can state the stances at the beginning and in the end		
can use the correct expressions when refuting		
can make arguments based on clear reasons		
can make the speech within the time limit		
can be conscious of thought groups		

Figure 7. An example of the evaluation sheet for simplified debate

Then, the audiences have only to check whether each speaker can do what is stated in the sheet and mark “can” or “can’t” in the sheet. The teachers’ role is to check if each learner properly assesses other learners’ speech. In this way, learners are expected to try to correctly evaluate others’ speeches.

It is expected that grasping the arguments in each round will become easier for learners if they take notes using flow sheets as shown in Fig. 8, just like those of original debate.

	Constructive Speech	Rebuttal Speech
A F F	Reason (i)	Refutation from NEG
	Reason (ii)	Refutation from NEG
N E G	Reason (i)	Refutation from AFF
	Reason (ii)	Refutation from AFF

Figure 8. A flow sheet for simplified debate

4. Practical Study of “Simplified Debate”

4.1. The Participants

Simplified debate instruction was partially introduced at a university where one of the authors teaches English. It was conducted in a class related to English communication, which is an optional course. A

total of 24 students, who had never made over 1-minute English speeches, attended the class, with English proficiency levels assumed to be CEFR A1 level (beginner level). The course was conducted over 15 weekly lessons, and the lessons about simplified debate were given from the 9th to 14th weeks.

4.2. The Procedure and the Method

In class, we had students debate whether using the Internet is good or not. We first had students form pairs. There were 12 pairs in the class, and 6 pairs were expected to support using the Internet and the other 6 pairs were expected to oppose using the Internet. They were randomly assigned a side to support regardless of their own ideas and interests.

Next, students were required to write their constructive speeches. Before each pair began, we conducted a brainstorming session about the use of the Internet and shared certain ideas with everyone. Also, we gave them a list of keywords they might use in their constructive speeches.

Furthermore, they shared the speech scripts they had written and started to script their rebuttal speeches. For example, a pair that was going to support the use of the Internet was given a script of the constructive speech made by a pair that was going to object to using the Internet. Thus, it became easier for students to make counterarguments to their opponent pairs.

Lastly, we actually had them debate whether using the Internet is good or not in their constructive and rebuttal speeches. In each pair, one made the constructive speech and the other did the rebuttal. While two pairs were debating, other students took notes on a flow sheet like in Fig. 8 and assessed debaters using an evaluation sheet like in Fig. 7. In addition, when each debate finished, we gave debaters feedback.

4.3. Result

Throughout the classes, it was observed that all students experienced the communicative activity of expressing and exchanging their own ideas about a given topic with other students. The following passages were written by a student. Passage A is an example of a constructive speech made by a student who thought that using the Internet is bad. Passage B is an instance of the rebuttal speech made by another student who thought that using the Internet is bad, and she gave counterarguments to a constructive speech insisting that using the Internet is good.

- A) I think that using the Internet is bad for the following two reasons. First, using the Internet is dangerous. For example, we get involved in troubles such as crime before I know them. Second, it is tough to use the Internet properly. For instance, it is so difficult to do online shopping. We can get scammed and wrong goods can come to me. So, using the Internet has many disadvantages.

- B) I would like to say two things about those opinions. First, they said that the Internet can quickly give us much information. But I don't agree because there are too much incorrect information on the Internet. Second, they said that the Internet is very convenient. But I also disagree with the idea because many people use it, so we can get involved in troubles. So, I am against those opinions.

According to ACTFL and CEFR, beginner-level learners can only communicate short messages with easy phrases or simple sentences. We emphasize that the methodology of simplified debate enabled them to express themselves in simple connected texts.

Also, following the instruction in simplified debate, their reactions were as follows:

- “If we were given the word list in advance, making our speeches didn’t bother us.”
- “We learned how to construct our speeches.”
- “We found expressing our ideas is fun.”
- “We thought grammatical rules more difficult than making our speeches.”

As is shown above, we insist that the pedagogy of simplified debate can reduce learners’ psychological burdens. Since the debate topic was related to their interests and values, it was easy for them to handle. We also maintain that by holding a brainstorming session and providing a speech model, they were able to more easily write and deliver their speeches.

For further tasks, some problems remain with this practice. First, when they write their speeches using templates, learners are likely to fill grammatically incorrect sentences into the blanks. In the case of Japanese learners of English expressing their opinions about certain topics in English, they tend to place the topics on the position of subjects. This learners’ behavior is called the language transfer from topic-prominent constructions in Japanese. Actually, what they talk about in Japanese is not always placed in the position of subjects in English. For example, if they express their opinions about the use of the Internet, they try to translate the Japanese sentences which begin from “*Intanetto ha*” into their English counterparts and they tend to make every subject “*Intanetto*.” They are thus likely to produce the following incorrect sentences as below:

- (1) *Intanetto wa takusan no jyouhou ga erareru.* (We can get a lot of information on the Internet.)
- (2) The Internet can get a lot of information.

Many low-proficiency outputs are likely to be affected by their own native language, and Japanese beginner-level learners of English frequently make subject-related errors in English when they have simplified debates using templates. We need to continuously instruct and monitor learners so that they can produce grammatical and comprehensive sentences through simplified debate, though this practical study was conducted in only five classes.

In addition, learners were not able to get accustomed to speaking in front of an audience. Students who played the role of the audience were often unable to catch other students’ speeches or take notes on their flow sheets, because speakers had weak voices or read their scripts too rapidly. It is essential, then, for us to give our students more opportunities to communicate with each other and notice their own communicability.

5. Summary & Future Implication

First, we have insisted that even beginner-level learners of foreign languages are required to learn communicative competence and critical thinking. We have also suggested that these skills are expected to develop

through debate in foreign languages, which requires learners to have certain foreign language proficiency. Third, we have introduced “simplified debate” for beginner-level learners of English in Japan, and explained how it reduces the complexity of original debate.

The important points of simplified debate are (i) to have learners deal with familiar topics, (ii) to make the process of interaction easier by shortening speech time and reducing the number of interactions, and (iii) to minimize certain factors of immediate communication by having learners prepare for debate with templates. As a result, in simplified debate, learners express their opinions related to familiar topics in foreign languages in public places like classrooms. Thus, beginner-level learners are expected to get the opportunity to critically and multilaterally analyze certain topics and reflect on them by themselves.

As a future implication, we maintain that simplified debate in English language education in Japan can apply to Japanese-language education. The above three points of simplified debate are deeply rooted in the theory and practice of foreign language teaching. If we simplify such debate that is introduced in intermediate- or advanced-level classes of Japanese, we can help beginner-level learners of Japanese debate in Japanese. In this paper, we call this simplified debate “Japanese-language version of simplified debate.” Fig. 9 shows an example template for a Japanese-language version of simplified debate with which learners of Japanese can easily debate whether using the Internet is good or not in Japanese.

インターネットの使用することは [よい・悪い] ことだと思います。理由は2つあります。1つ目に、_____からです。

例えば、_____。

2つ目に、_____からです。

例えば、_____。

よって、インターネットを使用することは [よい・悪い] ことだと思います。

Figure 9. An example of templates in Japanese-language version of simplified debate

We certainly should consider differences in language structures and logical compositions between Japanese and English, but we strongly believe that this process of learning simplified debate will enable even beginner-level learners of Japanese to achieve the development of Japanese communication skills by improving the quality of debate, inductively suggested by the findings of research in English debate.

Acknowledgment

It is our great pleasure and honorable duty to contribute our paper to celebrate the retirement of Prof. Kuniyo Okumura from Kochi University at the age of 65, who has long been (and hopefully will be) actively engaged in the field of Japanese-language education. We hope that the present paper will be a small contribution in applying our new proposal for simplified debate to Japanese-language education.

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山内信幸 (同志社大学文化情報学部教授)

橋尾晋平 (同志社大学大学院文化情報学研究科博士後期課程)