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Author(s)	Suzuki, Shinobu
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Perceptions of the Qualities of Written Arguments by Japanese Students

Shinobu Suzuki

Institutional affiliation: Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University

Mailing address: Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies, Hokkaido University, N17 W8, Kita-ku, Sapporo, 060-0817, Japan

Email: shinobu@imc.hokudai.ac.jp

Biographical information about the author: Shinobu Suzuki is Associate Professor in the Graduate School of International Media, Communication, and Tourism Studies at Hokkaido University. She is interested in how culture, either by itself or in conjunction with gender, traits or states, affects individuals' verbal communication styles and behaviors. Her research has been published in *Communication Monographs*, *Human Communication Research*, *Communication Research*, *Women's Studies in Communication*, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, and *Communication Quarterly*.

Abstract

This study examines how Japanese students perceive the qualities of written arguments that were constructed to have different forms. Based on the theoretical dimensions of verbal communication styles that Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey proposed, the research questions asked whether the respondents would perceive direct arguments to be of higher quality than indirect arguments. They also asked whether they would perceive elaborate arguments to be of higher quality than succinct arguments. Japanese college students voluntarily responded to a questionnaire. The results revealed that they gave higher ratings to direct arguments than to indirect arguments for both of the two indicators, and higher ratings to elaborate arguments than to succinct arguments for two indicators out of the three. The results were discussed and implications were offered.

Keywords: argument forms, argument quality, direct-indirect arguments, elaborate-succinct arguments, verbal communication styles, Japanese students

Perceptions of the Qualities of Written Arguments by Japanese Students

The critical and ubiquitous nature of arguments has long attracted researchers. In recent decades, their interest in arguments has diverged in different directions, and now includes research on cultural variations in argument practices. Researchers have suggested that there are differences in how people think about and approach arguments between different cultural groups. Their research topics include the preferred types of logic or reasoning (Glenn, Witmeyer, & Stevenson, 1977; Mizutani, 1981; Nakamura, 1964), general attitudes toward argumentation (Becker, 1988), rhetorical choices in making arguments (Johnstone, 1986; Okabe, 1983), and trait argumentativeness (M. S. Kim, Aune, Hunter, H. J. Kim, & J. S. Kim, 2001; Prunty, Klopff, & Ishii, 1990). Based on the review of these studies, Suzuki (2010) points out that they are either impressionistic or provide too little information as to how ordinary people from different cultural groups actually differ in the manner in which they construct arguments. To address the issue, she examined the forms of written arguments employed by college students between Japan and the U.S., and found empirical evidence to support the claim that Japanese students are different from the U.S. students in the likelihood of using different forms.

One facet that has not been investigated concerning the relationship between culture and forms of written arguments is whether or not perceptions of the qualities of written arguments differ between cultures. Wolfe, Britt, and Butler (2009) claim that individuals use the argumentation schema in reading arguments and it is a culturally derived set of expectations. However, we have little evidence as to how culture affects people's perceptions of different argument forms. This issue is important because, as Lasswell (1948) points out, one of the missions of communication research is to determine what effects communication has on people

to help them form impressions or make decisions as well as to examine the senders, messages, receivers, and channels.

Given that, the present study examines Japanese students' perceptions of argument forms. Suzuki (2010) found that Japanese students are more likely to use indirect and succinct forms than their U.S. counterparts when they write arguments. However, we cannot necessarily assume that they are likely to perceive arguments of indirect and succinct forms to be of better quality than arguments of direct and elaborate forms. In other words, what kind of messages people produce and how they evaluate the messages or what effects the messages have on the people are two different issues. The issue that the present study deals with, therefore, is to examine whether or not Japanese students evaluate forms of written arguments according to the evaluative standards that have been found in past research (e.g., Britt & Larson, 2003; Read & Marcus-Newhall, 1993; Wolfe, Britt, & Butler, 2009).

Examining Japanese culture is meaningful because it is one of the cultures at a distance from the traditional study and teaching of argumentation, with different values that affect communication behaviors and perceptions of communication (e.g., Barnlund, 1975; Gudykunst & Nishida, 1983, 1984; Hall, 1976; Hirokawa & Miyahara, 1986; Hofstede, 1980; Kim & Paulk, 1994; Klopff, 1991). Since its beginning as a study of formal logic (Zarefsky, 1990), argumentation research has been conducted predominantly in some of the Western cultures. For that reason, there are researchers (e.g., Johnstone, 1986; Warnick & Manusov, 2000) who argue that our knowledge of reasoning and argument is based mainly on the models developed in these cultures. Our recognition of the standards for evaluating arguments may also be centered in these existing models. Focusing on Japanese culture, therefore, will reveal whether or not the existing standards for evaluating arguments cross boundaries between cultures. Examining

this issue will add to the understanding of the exact nature of cross-cultural similarities and differences in written arguments between cultures.

The present study focuses on argument forms because form, which concerns the problem of ordering and organizing a discourse, is one of the five nuclear components of communication and rhetoric (Scott, 1969). This study defines argument as “a set of statements to express the communicator’s opinion or belief, which may involve reasoning and logical appeals” (Suzuki, 2006, p. 196). The definition is rather different from the conventional definition of argument which places emphasis on logic and rational appeals (Reinard, 1991, as cited in Suzuki, 2006). However, it is able to encompass multiple objectives of making an argument, such as informing and expressing as well as persuading and influencing others. With this definition in mind, the present study examines Japanese students’ perceptions of argument qualities.

What the present study means by the term argument quality is the degree of goodness or excellence of an argument, regardless of its point of view. To be more specific, the quality of argument is evaluated in terms of the argument’s strength, convincingness, and relevance (Lee, 2008; Munch & Swasy, 1988) in this study.

Theoretical Background: Dimensions of Communication Styles

The present study employs two dimensions of communication: direct-indirect and elaborate-succinct. These dimensions are two of the four stylistic modes of verbal communication that Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey (1988) proposed to compare cultural groups: direct-indirect, elaborate-succinct, personal-contextual, and instrumental-affective. According to Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey, children learn various patterns and styles of language interaction through socialization processes and become competent communicators in various

situational contexts. They maintain, “Verbal interaction styles reflect and embody the affective, moral, and aesthetic patterns of culture” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 100). As Suzuki (2010) acknowledges, the first two dimensions are more relevant than the other two to the analysis of argument forms. Because the same is true for analyzing perceived qualities of argument forms, the present study employs the direct-indirect and the elaborate-succinct dimensions of communication styles (See Table 1 for the outline of this study).

Table 1

Study Overview

Dimensions	Indicators
Direct-Indirect	(a) Vertical versus horizontal macro-structure (b) Anticlimactic versus climactic macro-structure
Elaborate-Succinct	(c) Presence versus absence of serial-type micro-reasoning structure (d) Presence versus absence of a compound-type micro-reasoning structure (e) Long versus short argument.
Argument quality ratings by Japanese students	Significant Results
RQ1: Macro-structure: Vertical > Horizontal?	Yes
RQ2: Macro-structure: Anticlimactic > Climactic?	Yes
RQ3: Serial-type micro-reasoning structure: Used > Not used?	Yes
RQ4: Compound micro-reasoning structure: Used > Not used?	No
RQ5: Argument length: Long > Short?	Yes

Direct-Indirect Dimension

The direct-indirect dimension concerns the extent to which speakers make clear their intentions through communicating verbally, using explicit, precise, and straightforward

language behaviors. High-context cultures (Hall, 1976) such as Japan should be characterized by indirect communication styles. According to Hall, a lot of information is preprogrammed either in the setting or in the receiver in high-context cultures, and only minimal information needs to be transmitted in the form of verbal messages. The verbal styles in high-context communication, therefore, tend to be indirect and succinct. In contrast, because little information is preprogrammed in the setting or in the receiver in low-context cultures, a lot of information must be transmitted through verbal messages. The verbal styles in low-context communication, therefore, tend to be direct and elaborate. According to Hall, most Asian countries including Japan, China, and Korea fall toward the higher end of the continuum, while the U.S., Canada, German, and Scandinavian, and Swiss cultures fall toward the lower end.

Past research supports the direct-indirect contrast of communication styles between high- and low-context cultures. For example, Clancy (1986) pointed out Japanese reliance on indirection in verbal communication, which she attributed to Japanese children's socialization processes. Okabe (1983) commented on the indirect styles of rhetoric in Japan. Hirokawa and Miyahara's cross-cultural study (1986) provided empirical evidence to support indirect verbal communication styles of Japanese managers as opposed to direct styles of managers from the U.S., a low-context culture.

Suzuki (2010) proposed two sets of argument forms as the indicators that measure the extent to which a written argument is direct or indirect: horizontal versus vertical macro-structure and climactic versus anticlimactic macro-structure. Macro-structure means the argument's global organizational pattern (Suzuki, 2006, 2010, 2011). Horizontal macro-structure is composed exclusively of horizontal, or extending and expanding, functions with no support by reasoning for the central claim or the thesis (Suzuki, 2006). When

individuals are cautious or tentative, they are likely to use no reason to support their central claim, possibly avoiding being too direct (See Argument 4-2 in Appendix for a sample argument with horizontal macro-structure). Vertical macro-structure, on the other hand, has a central claim supported by at least one reason, which is regarded to be more direct than horizontal macro-structure (See Argument 4-1 in Appendix for a sample argument with vertical macro-structure).

Climactic macro-structure has its central claim or the thesis toward the end, rather than at the beginning, while anticlimactic macro-structure has its central claim earlier in the argument. With delayed introduction of the main claim, climactic macro-structure should be regarded as more indirect than anti-climactic structure (See Arguments 1-1 and 1-2 in Appendix for sample arguments with anticlimactic and climactic macro-structures). The extent to which an argument is climactic can be measured first by identifying the location of the central statement, which is represented by the order in which it appears in the argument, then dividing it by the total number of units in each argument (Suzuki, 2010, 2011). A unit means a thought turn, and it is operationalized essentially as an independent clause. Suzuki (2011) examined the use of these two argument forms in Japan and the U.S. and found that arguments constructed by the Japanese respondents were significantly more indirect than the arguments constructed by their U.S. counterparts. Essentially, the Japanese respondents used horizontal macro-structure and climactic macro-structure more frequently than the U.S. counterparts. The finding is consistent with the expected cross-cultural differences based on the above discussion of the direct-indirect dimension of verbal communication styles across cultures.

Regarding perceptions of the two sets of direct versus indirect argument forms, one query in the present study is whether or not Japanese students perceive arguments with direct

argument forms, i.e., with vertical or reason-based and anticlimactic macro-structures, to be of higher quality than arguments with indirect argument forms, i.e., horizontal or non-reason-based and climactic macro-structures.

There is an assumption shared in past research that reason-based arguments should be highly evaluated. For example, Kuhn, Amsel, and O'Loughlin (1998) examined the U.S. students. In their discussion of the development of scientific thinking skills, they note that individuals' failure to make reason-based arguments demonstrates their lack of ability with verbal expression or failure to understand the question. Reinard (1991) writes in his textbook on argumentation, "Since argumentation involves the perception of reason-giving behavior, it is important for both reason-makers and perceivers to understand the process of reasoning" (p. 168). Wolfe, Britt, and Butler (2009) conducted an empirical study of written arguments and found that reasons had great impacts on the quality ratings by college students from the U.S. culture. Past research thus suggests that arguments with vertical or reason-based macro-structure are more highly valued than those with horizontal or non-reason-based macro-structure. The present study examines whether the same holds true for Japanese students.

Let us turn to the other form of arguments that represents the direct-indirect dimension; climactic versus anticlimactic macro-structure. Authors of argumentation textbooks regard the anticlimactic form, which is characterized by deductive reasoning in reason-based arguments, to be more straightforward and logically rigorous (Campbell & Huxman, 2003), and they regard the climactic form, which is characterized by inductive reasoning in reason-based arguments, to be based on incomplete evidence (Reinard, 1991). Britt and Larson (2003) conducted an empirical study and found that college students from the U.S. culture read written

arguments with claim-first, or anticlimactic, order in shorter time and recalled them better than those with reason-first, or climactic, order. The present study examines whether or not Japanese students have similar evaluative standards.

Elaborate-Succinct Dimension

The elaborate-succinct dimension concerns the “quantity of talk that is valued in different cultures” (Gudykunst & Ting-Toomey, 1988, p. 105). The elaborate style typically uses rich and expressive statements in verbal communication, while the succinct style typically uses understatements, pauses, and silence. High-context cultures, such as Japan’s, are generally characterized by the succinct communication style; people do not necessarily need to communicate all their intentions through explicit verbal messages and much information is shared among members in a specific context. Past research supports the elaborate-succinct contrast of communication styles between high- and low-context cultures. For example, C. Johnson and F. Johnson (1975), as a result of observing the Japanese and Caucasians in Honolulu, noted that the Japanese tend to instill verbal inhibition and that their communication styles are characterized by reticence as well as indirection. Barnlund (1975), in his study of Japanese and U.S. students, reported that the Japanese students were less talkative than their U.S. counterparts.

Suzuki (2010) proposed three types of argument forms as the indicators that measure the extent to which an argument is elaborate or succinct: the serial-type micro-reasoning structure, the compound-type micro-reasoning structure, and argument length. Micro-structure refers to “the configuration of specific supporting or extending relationships among units of arguments, which compose at least a part of an argument” (Suzuki, 2006, p. 198). The serial-type micro-reasoning structure represents a depth of reasoning used to support the points offered in

an argument, with a statement supported by a reason that is further supported by one or more reasons in a serial fashion (See Argument 2-1 in Appendix for a sample argument with a serial-type micro-reasoning structure). The compound-type micro-reasoning structure represents the scope or reasoning, with a statement directly supported by two or more reasons (See Arguments 3-1 in Appendix for a sample argument with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure). Argument length is another factor that determines the extent to which an argument is succinct or elaborate. Suzuki (2010) compared the use of the three argument forms between Japan and the U.S. and found that arguments constructed by the Japanese respondents were significantly more succinct than the arguments constructed by their U.S. counterparts. That is, the Japanese respondents used the serial- and compound-type micro-reasoning structures less frequently and constructed shorter arguments than their U.S. counterparts did.

Regarding perceptions of the first two micro-reasoning structures, Read and Marcus-Newhall (1993), in their study of explanatory coherence, provided empirical evidence to support the claim that their U.S. respondents give higher ratings to arguments with either of these two reasoning structures than to those without these structures. With regard to perceptions of long versus short arguments, researchers have observed that low-context cultures tend to prefer elaborate forms of verbal communication (Okabe, 1983; Hall, 1976). The present study examines whether Japanese students, members of a higher-context culture, would do likewise.

Research Questions

Regarding the perceived qualities of written arguments by Japanese college students, we can make predictions in two different ways. First, we can predict that Japanese students'

standards for evaluating the qualities of arguments would differ from the standards that have been found in past research. That is, we can predict that Japanese students would value indirect and succinct arguments more highly than direct and elaborate arguments. This prediction is possible if we suppose the differences in communication-related values between high- and low-context cultures to have great influence on individuals' perceptions of argument qualities.

Alternatively, we can also predict that Japanese students' standards for evaluating the qualities of arguments would be similar to those that have been found in past research. That is, Japanese students would value direct and elaborate arguments more highly than indirect and succinct arguments. This prediction may seem to go against the image of Japanese students who are more likely than their U.S. counterparts to prefer to use indirect and succinct argument forms (Suzuki, 2010). However, there is a reason to believe that this may be the case.

Suzuki (1997) reported that the average value per item for her Japanese respondents' ($n = 716$) perceived motivation to approach argument was 2.93 on a five-point scale (1 = hardly ever applies; 5 = almost always applies). The value was very close to the mid-point value (3 = sometimes applies) and only slightly lower than the value, 3.34, for their U.S. counterparts ($n = 755$). The finding suggests that Japanese students have positive perceptions of argument or attitudes toward argument. Further, Suzuki and Rancer (1994) found that their Japanese respondents considered argumentativeness as an independent concept from verbal aggressiveness, the latter of which was found to be a counterproductive form of aggressive communication. Stated differently, they found that their Japanese respondents' conceptualization of argument was similar to that of their U.S. counterparts'. On the ground of these findings, it is possible to reason that the standards for evaluating the qualities of arguments is not so radically different between cultures.

Because we can make predictions in these two different ways, both of which are plausible, the present study asked the following research questions. They were:

RQ1: Do Japanese students perceive arguments that have vertical macro-structure to be of higher quality than arguments that have horizontal macro-structure?

RQ2: Do Japanese students perceive arguments that have anticlimactic macro-structure to be of higher quality than arguments that have climactic macro-structure?

RQ3: Do Japanese students perceive arguments that have a serial-type micro-reasoning structure to be of higher quality than arguments that do not have a serial-type micro-reasoning structure?

RQ4: Do Japanese students perceive arguments that have a compound-type micro-reasoning structure to be of higher quality than arguments that do not have a compound-type micro-reasoning structure?

RQ5: Do Japanese students perceive longer arguments to be of higher quality than shorter arguments?

If these research questions are answered in the affirmative, that means that Japanese standards for evaluating the qualities of arguments are similar to the ones found in past research. It will extend generalizability of the existing framework of evaluating argument qualities. If the research questions fail to be answered in the affirmative, that points to the possibility that the Japanese students' standards for evaluating the qualities of arguments may not be the same as the standards found in past research. It will limit generalizability the conventional framework of evaluating argument qualities.

Method

Participants

Data for this study were collected in a questionnaire survey of Japanese college students. The students were from a university in the northern part of Japan. They were asked to respond to a questionnaire during English classes for freshmen. Their participation was voluntary. A total of 112 students responded to the questionnaires. Out of the 112 responses, 110 responses, which include 87 men and 23 women, turned out to be usable. Non-usable responses included those that were incomplete. The average age of the respondents was 18.69 ($SD = 0.79$).

Procedure

In creating questionnaires, two comparable versions were made for the purpose of checking whether or not particular contents of arguments influence the ratings given. They were written in Japanese. Two independent sets of respondents were randomly assigned to either one of the two versions. Each version contained five pairs of arguments written on the issue of whether or not capital punishment should be retained in Japan. Each pair was designed to represent the use of either one of the five sets of argument forms that corresponded to the five indicators of the direct-indirect and elaborate-succinct dimensions. The five indicators were: (a) vertical versus horizontal macro-structure, (b) anticlimactic versus climactic macro-structure, (c) presence versus absence of a serial-type micro-reasoning structure, (d) presence versus absence of a compound-type micro-reasoning structure, and (e) long versus short argument.

Other conditions than the set of argument forms in focus were made equal for the two arguments in each pair. Take the case of constructing arguments for indicator (b) in the above, for example. One argument in the pair was designed to have a climactic macro-structure, while the other argument was designed to have an anticlimactic macro-structure. In this case, the two arguments in the pair had an equal length or an equal number of units or independent clauses,

the same central statement or NC (nuclear clause), the same two reasons or VSs (vertically supporting statements) supporting the NC, each of which was explained by the same horizontally continuing (HC) statement. The only difference between the two arguments was the location of the central statement or the thesis; the anticlimactic argument had its NC at the beginning, while the climactic argument had its NC at the end. In addition to making the number of units equal in each pair of arguments when argument length was not in focus, it was decided to use a similar number of Japanese characters for the two arguments in each pair; neither of the arguments in each pair was ever more than four Japanese characters longer or shorter than the other.

When argument length was in focus as in the case of constructing arguments for indicator (e) in the above, the two arguments in the pair were made to have the same central claim (NC) supported by the same one reason (VC) respectively. However, they were made to have different numbers of horizontally continuing statements. See Appendix for details of how the stimulus materials were made and for the English translation of the sample arguments included in one of the two versions of the questionnaires. To exclude the possibility that the order of presenting the two arguments in each pair may affect the respondents' ratings, the order of presenting them in each pair was randomized for each version of the questionnaire.

The participants were asked to rate on a seven-point scale the quality of each argument in terms of its strength (1 = very weak; 7 = very strong), convincingness (1 = not at all convincing; 7 = very convincing), and relevance (1 = not at all relevant; 7 = very relevant), following Lee (2008) and Munch and Swasy (1988). Exploratory factor analysis on the three items revealed unidimensionality, with 70.95-85.46% of variance accounted for by the only factor extracted. Cronbach's alpha scores ranged from .88 to .95. Given that, the scores for the

three items were summed and divided by three to calculate the mean, which was decided to be the quality rating for each argument.

Analysis

The present study set the level of significance at .05 (two-tailed). Prior to the data analysis for answering the research questions, it was checked whether specific contents of arguments in the questionnaire influence the ratings given. To do that, I ran an independent sample *t*-test for each of the five indicators, testing for the equivalence between the two versions of the questionnaire. The questionnaire version, having two conditions 1 and 2, was the independent variable, while the difference in the argument quality rating between the two arguments in each pair was the dependent variable. I found that the two versions were equivalent. That is, the two versions did not significantly differ in the difference of the argument quality rating between the two arguments in each pair for every one of the five indicators.

Given the results, it was decided that the data for the two versions were to be combined. The research questions were tested through a series of paired *t*-tests. The purpose of each paired *t*-test was to see whether the two arguments in each pair were significantly different in the quality rating. In the paired *t*-tests, the argument quality rating was the dependent variable, and each indicator having two conditions (e.g., climactic versus anticlimactic forms) was the independent variable.

Results

The first research question asked whether Japanese students would perceive arguments with vertical macro-structure to be of higher quality than arguments with horizontal macro-structure. As a result of a paired *t*-test, it was found that arguments with vertical

macro-structure were rated significantly higher than arguments with horizontal macro-structure ($t = 4.05$, $df = 109$, $p < .01$). The mean value for the former was 4.47 ($SD = 1.33$), while that for the latter was 3.86 ($SD = 1.28$). The first research question was answered in the affirmative. That is, the respondents found arguments with vertical macro-structure to be of higher quality than arguments with horizontal macro-structure.

The second research question asked whether Japanese students would perceive arguments that have anticlimactic macro-structure to be of higher quality than arguments that have climactic macro-structure. As a result of a paired t -test, it was found that arguments with an anticlimactic macro-structure were rated significantly higher than arguments with a climactic macro-structure ($t = 5.06$, $df = 109$, $p < .01$). The mean value for the former was 4.78 ($SD = 1.38$), while that for the latter was 4.32 ($SD = 1.32$). The second research question was answered in the affirmative. That is, the respondents found anticlimactic arguments to be of higher quality than climactic arguments.

The third research question asked whether Japanese students would perceive arguments that have a serial-type micro-reasoning structure to be of higher quality than arguments that do not have a serial-type micro-reasoning structure. As a result of a paired t -test, it was found that arguments with a serial-type micro-reasoning structure were rated significantly higher than arguments without it ($t = 2.75$, $df = 108$, $p < .01$). The mean value for the former was 4.53 ($SD = 1.45$), while that for the latter was 4.14 ($SD = 1.28$). The third research question was answered in the affirmative. That is, the respondents found arguments with a serial-type micro-reasoning structure to be of higher quality than arguments without the structure.

The fourth research question asked whether Japanese students would perceive arguments that have a compound-type micro-reasoning structure to be of higher quality than arguments

that do not have a compound-type micro-reasoning structure. As a result of a paired *t*-test, the difference in argument quality rating between arguments with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure and arguments without it was non-significant ($t = 1.23$, $df = 109$, $p = .22$). The mean value for the former was 4.88 ($SD = 1.21$), while that for the latter was 4.73 ($SD = 1.22$). The fourth research question failed to be answered in the affirmative. That is, the results did not provide evidence to support the claim that the respondents rate arguments with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure higher than those without the structure.

The final research question asked whether Japanese students would perceive longer arguments to be of higher quality than shorter arguments. As a result of a paired *t*-test, it was found that longer arguments were rated significantly higher than shorter arguments ($t = 4.05$, $df = 109$, $p < .01$). The mean value for the former was 4.96 ($SD = 1.44$), while that for the latter was 3.79 ($SD = 1.48$). The final research question was answered in the affirmative. That is, the respondents found longer arguments to be of higher quality than shorter arguments.

Discussion

The results of the present study suggest that Japanese students' standards of evaluating the qualities of written arguments generally favor direct and elaborate forms. We must be aware of the fact that this study dealt with a single issue of capital punishment as the topic of the arguments. Within this limitation, the results answered the first two research questions (RQ1 and RQ2) in the affirmative. They suggest that that the Japanese respondents give higher ratings to arguments with vertical macro-structure than to those with horizontal macro-structure, and higher ratings to arguments with anticlimactic macro-structure than to those with climactic macro-structure.

Providing reasons is considered central to the behavior of argumentation in the

traditional teaching of argument. The results of the present study suggest that Japanese students do appreciate the value of vertical reason-based macro-structure as long as their perceptions of argument forms are concerned. The results of the present study also suggest that Japanese students do value highly anticlimactic macro-structure as long as their perceptions of argument forms are concerned. With the central claim being the focal point of an argument, placing the central claim in the initial position, then adding a reason or other details, may possibly make a reader easily follow the logic of argument, regardless of the reader's cultural background. Indeed, Britt and Larson (2003) argue that claim-first order is likely to reduce demand on readers' processing resources, facilitating reading of arguments. If this is the case across cultures, it is possible that individuals, who are rather indirect in constructing their own argument, prefer direct forms when they are asked to evaluate the qualities of given arguments.

The respondents gave higher ratings to arguments with a serial-type micro-reasoning structure (RQ3) and longer arguments (RQ5), while they gave similar ratings both to arguments with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure and those without the structure (RQ3). As these findings indicate, the present study suggests that Japanese students generally appear to favor moderately elaborate argument forms. To assess the quality of an argument, one needs to obtain reasonable amount of information related to its central claim, which may include structured reasons and other necessary details. Thus, it is possible that individuals, who tend to be rather succinct in constructing their own argument, prefer moderately elaborate forms when they are asked to evaluate the qualities of given arguments.

One exception in the present study is that no significant difference was found in the rating between arguments with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure and those without the structure. Given the results, for Japanese students it may not be necessarily the fact that the

argument is elaborate merely in terms of the number of reasons directly supporting the main claim that positively affects their perception of argument qualities. Read and Markus-Newall (1993) found that the U.S. respondents evaluated arguments whose main claim is directly supported by two reasons significantly more highly than those whose the main claim is supported by one reason. So, the perceptions of the use of the compound-type micro-reasoning structure may not be equivalent across cultures. Future research will be necessary to investigate this issue further.

The findings have implications for the study of written communication in general, pointing out that there could be a gap between what kind of messages people produce and what kind of messages they evaluate highly. Japanese culture has been characterized by different communication styles that have been attributed to the culture's values (e.g., Gudykunst & Nishida, 1983, 1984; Hall, 1976; Hofstede, 1980; Klopff, 1991). When it comes to the issue of arguments, we have empirical evidence that Japanese students tend to construct more indirect and succinct arguments than their U.S. counterparts (Suzuki, 2010). As the present study suggests, regarding perceptions of the qualities of argumentative messages, Japanese students appear to share many of the basic standards for evaluating arguments that have been found in past research. The influence of culture could be more apparent in how people construct arguments than in how they perceive or evaluate arguments. For the Japanese students and for the present topic of argument, the gap was found.

One possible interpretation for the gap is that they are relatively less skilled in constructing arguments. It is likely that Japanese students have relatively less opportunities at school to learn how to make arguments. In a high-context culture such as Japan, people may not be encouraged to learn the skills of making arguments as in many low-context cultures. The

present study suggests that Japanese students do evaluate direct and elaborate argument forms generally in a positive light. Accordingly, it is possible that their manners of making arguments may change in the future depending on the social imperatives that would encourage them to learn more about the skills of making direct and elaborate arguments.

The present study has implications for the intercultural study of written communication as well. That is because the findings from the present study caution us against exaggerating differences in communication styles and attitudes toward communication between cultures. At the same time, the findings also urge us to locate specifically where the similarities and the differences are.

This study is limited in two respects. First, the issue dealt with in the questionnaires in both of the two different versions was a single social issue. It is possible that receivers' perceptions of argument qualities differ depending on the type of issues, i.e., simple or complex and social or personal. Future research is necessary to examine the generalizability of the findings from the present study by using a different type of topic for the questionnaires. Second, the present study targeted Japanese culture. It limits the generalizability of the findings from this study. As a next step, it will be valuable to compare multiple cultural groups in terms of their perceptions of the qualities of arguments.

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Appendix

Sample Stimulus Materials (translated from Japanese into English: Version 1)

Version 2 of the questionnaire includes arguments that differ in contents from those in the first version, with the same sets of argument forms to be examined. Other than that, it has been made in the same way as the first version. Here, the script for each argument is unitized and coded using a scheme (Suzuki, 2006, 2010, 2011) for the readers. The arguments presented to the respondents were neither unitized nor coded. The coding scheme included: the argument's central claim or nuclear (NC) statement, a horizontally continuing (HC) clause, extending or expanding another statement to which it is connected, a vertically subordinate (VS) clause, supporting another statement by means of reasoning, and a non-relevant (NR) clause.

Subcategories for horizontally continuing clauses include: (-CL) for clarification, (-RE) for repetition or rephrasing, (-AD) for addition, (-CI) for circumstance, and (-QU) for qualification.

Subcategories for vertically subordinate clauses include: (-GE) for generalization, (-CE) for cause and effect, (-AN) for analogy, (-DI) for discount, and (-QL) for quasi-logic. See Suzuki (2006) for more detailed explanation of the coding scheme. The arguments were presented in

pairs (i.e., 1-1 and 1-2; 2-1 and 2-2; 3-1 and 3-2; 4-1 and 4-2; 5-1 and 5-2) to the respondents to help them compare the arguments in each pair.

Argument 1-1 (anticlimactic macro-structure; the central claim or NC placed at the beginning)

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	I think we should abolish capital punishment.	[NC]
(2)	Death terminates everything	[HC-CI (3)]
(3)	and the convict can no longer reflect on what he/she did or apologize to the victim's family.	[VS-QL (1)]
(4)	If a convict who rightly confessed to having committed a very serious crime could be imprisoned for life without parole, he/she would have time to think about what he/she did.	[VS-QL (1)]
(5)	That would help him/her make up for the crime he/she committed and make reparation to the victim's family.	[HC-CL (4)]

Argument 1-2 (climactic macro-structure; the central claim or NC placed in the end)

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	Death terminates everything	[HC-CI (2)]
(2)	and the convict can no longer reflect on what he/she did or apologize to the victim's family.	[VS-QL (5)]
(3)	If a convict who rightly confessed to having committed a very serious crime could be imprisoned for life without parole, he/she would have time to think about what he/she did.	[VS-QL (5)]
(4)	That would help him/her make up for the crime he/she committed and make reparation to the victim's family.	[HC-CL (3)]
(5)	So, I think we should abolish capital punishment.	[NC]

Argument 2-1 (argument with a serial-type micro-reasoning structure; NC supported by reason (5) which is further supported by reason (3))

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	I disagree with retaining the death penalty.	[NC]
(2)	I admit that committing an awful crime is inexcusable.	[HC-QU (3)]

- (3) However, executing a convict is another kind of murder, [VS-QL (5)]
 (4) even though he/she has committed an extremely serious crime, such as
 serial murder. [HC-QU (3)]
 (5) Therefore, capital punishment is an intolerable violation of human rights. [VS-QL (1)]

Argument 2-2 (argument without a serial-type micro-reasoning structure; NC supported by reason (3))

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	I disagree with retaining the death penalty.	[NC]
(2)	I admit that committing an awful crime is inexcusable.	[HC-QU (3)]
(3)	However, capital punishment is an intolerable violation of human rights	[VS-QL (1)]
(4)	even though a convict has committed an extremely serious crime, such as serial murder.	[HC-QU (3)]
(5)	Of course, capital punishment may alleviate the pain of the families of some victims.	[HC-QU (1)]

Argument 3-1 (argument with a compound-type micro-reasoning structure; NC directly supported by two reasons (4) and (5))

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	It is of utmost importance that judges be extremely careful in deciding whether or not to apply the death penalty to criminals.	[HC-CL (2)]
(2)	If we can assure ourselves that the decisions are made in such a manner, we should retain the death penalty.	[NC]
(3)	Some may say that even criminals have human rights.	[HC-QU (4)]
(4)	However, we should never neglect the rights of victims or the victims' families.	[VS-QL (2)]
(5)	Further, if we introduce life imprisonment without parole in place of the death penalty, a vast amount of taxpayers' money must be spent on keeping criminals alive for life in jail.	[VS-CE (2)]
(6)	So, we should retain capital punishment.	[HC-RE (2)]

Argument 3-2 (argument without a compound-type micro-reasoning structure; NC supported by reason (5))

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
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- (1) It is of utmost importance that judges be extremely careful in deciding whether or not to apply the death penalty to criminals. [HC-CL (2)]
- (2) If we can assure ourselves that the decisions are made in such a manner, we should retain the death penalty. [NC]
- (3) Particularly for those criminals who committed heinous crimes, the death penalty is appropriate. [HC-CL (2)]
- (4) Some may say that even criminals have human rights. [HC-QU (5)]
- (5) However, we should never neglect the rights of victims or the victims' families. [VS-QL (2)]
- (6) So, we should retain capital punishment. [HC-RE (2)]

Argument 4-1 (vertical macro-structure; NC supported by reason (6))

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	Although murder should not be tolerated,	[HC-QU (2)]
(2)	I do not agree with retaining capital punishment.	[NC]
(3)	Some may think that criminals who committed terrible crimes should die	[HC-QU (6)]
(4)	because they do not deserve to live.	[VS-QL (3)]
(5)	Also, I guess that victims' families would not want to see the murderers again.	[HC-QU (6)]
(6)	However, I believe that true reparation for the convicted is to live in jail with the knowledge and psychological guilt of the crime for the rest of his/her life.	[VS-QL (2)]

Argument 4-2 (horizontal macro-structure: NC not supported by any reason)

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	Although murder should not be tolerated,	[HC-QU (2)]
(2)	I do not agree with retaining capital punishment.	[NC]
(3)	Some may think that criminals who committed terrible crimes should die	[HC-QU (6)]
(4)	because they do not deserve to live.	[VS-QL (3)]
(5)	Also, I guess that victims' families would not want to see the murderers again.	[HC-QU (6)]
(6)	However, I am not very much in favor of the opinion that capital punishment is the best penalty for criminals who had committed terrible crimes.	[HC-CL (2)]

Argument 5-1 (longer argument; NC supported by reason (2), with two horizontally continuing units)

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	It is appropriate to apply capital punishment to the criminals who committed crimes that deserve it.	[NC]
(2)	That is because punishing horrible crimes with reasonable penalties is one way to achieve social justice.	[VS-CE (1)]
(3)	Horrible crimes include murder for insurance money, serial murder after rape, and so on.	[HC-CL (2)]
(4)	Social justice will not prevail where a perpetrator's future is promised while the victim loses his/her life and the victim's family must suffer from the tragic loss of their loved one for the rest of their lives.	[HC-CL (2)]

Argument 5-2 (shorter argument; NC supported by reason (2) with no horizontally continuing units)

unit number	argument	code & connecting unit number
(1)	It is appropriate to apply capital punishment to the criminals who committed crimes that deserve it.	[NC]
(2)	That is because punishing horrible crimes with reasonable penalties is one way to achieve social justice.	[VS-CE (1)]