

Debating-Experiences with First Year University Students

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要 旨

本稿は、筆者が実際の授業の中で実施した、スピーキング力養成のための『ディベート』(Debate: 討論)形式の学習方法について、その具体的学習および指導内容と成果について報告するものである。

当初、英語スピーキングの授業に『ディベート』を取り入れることには、多くの教師の間に戸惑いがあった。それは、学生の英語力が『ディベート』を行うレベルに達していないという大きな問題点があったからである。筆者自身も、その教育的有効性を確信出来る根拠を持ち得なかったというのが正直なところである。また『ディベート』を行う際には、様々なルールや特殊な技術を要するため、全くの素人である学生に抵抗感があるのではないかという危惧もあった。ところが、当初のこれ等の不安や躊躇に反して、予想以上の成果を見ることが出来た。その背景には、以下の点が満たされていたと考える。

- ・ 討論する話題についての知識が前もって与えられている
- ・ 主張の賛否が確定している
- ・ 主張のための明確な根拠を持っている
- ・ 『原子力発電を断念すべき』『学校の制服は不要』『サッカーは野球よりいい』等、学生が興味を持つテーマを選ぶことができる

『ディベート』は、本来、討論者を育てるのが目的とされているが、以上のような背景が満たされていれば、英語スピーキング力養成のための有効的手段となり、また、学生自身の生活や、社会・世界の出来事を客観的に捉え、時には批判的に主張し、学生の人生に関わる話題についての興味を向上させることができ、その教育的価値は高いと考える。

キーワード

Choice, Debate, Motions, Motivation, Topics.

Introduction

Debating was introduced to the syllabus for first year students at Shinshu University in April 2003. At first it was widely felt among teachers that debating was inappropriate for first year students. As debating is not part of the Junior high or high school curriculum in Japan, it was believed that it would be too difficult.

Over four semesters, debating has been included in first year classes at Shinshu University. During the first year, only my advanced classes tried formal debating, while intermediate classes engaged in more controlled activities based around stating and supporting opinions: for example, proposing a particular invention as the best invention ever, or arguing that a particular environmental problem was more serious than any other. This kind of activity is similar to balloon debating.

Inspired by Junko Yamanaka's assertion (2004) that there is no level of language ability which is too low to express and discuss opinions, from the second year both advanced and intermediate classes have debated, with success. Having initially been left to the last few lessons of the fifteen week course, debating has steadily expanded and been integrated with other activities, such as giving individual short talks, performing class surveys and giving presentations. It now fills more than two thirds of the fifteen week course.

Debating is generally perceived as an advanced skill, requiring sophisticated language ability. However, at its most basic, all that debating requires is an understanding of an issue, ability to explain arguments for and against it, and the ability to provide supporting examples. While those involved in political debates and student union debates draw upon a wide range of linguistic techniques, such high standards are neither required nor helpful in the context of the foreign language classroom.

It is hoped that debating will not only allow students to develop their ability in the English language, but that it will also benefit them in the areas of critical thinking, objectivity, and awareness of issues relevant to their lives.

History

The roots of debating go back to Ancient Greece where Protagoras (481-411BC) believed that there were two sides to every proposition, and subsequently dialectic rhetoric was included in education in Greece and Rome. Throughout the middle ages debating continued among scholars of theology in the form of syllogistic disputation in Latin.

One of the first collegiate debates was held in the 1400s between Oxford and Cambridge, still in Latin, but debating in English became popular in societies both in and out of schools during the eighteenth century on both sides of the Atlantic. The United Debating Society, which became the Oxford Union Society, was established in 1823 and in the US national tournaments for college and high-school students began in the 1920s. Presidents Lincoln and Kennedy, and British Prime ministers Gladstone and Heath all practiced debating (Inoue, 1996).

A Brief History of Debating in Japan

According to Inoue (2004) the word *dibeeto* (debate) first appeared in Japan's newspapers at the end of the 1980s, and has since been used more and more, showing growing interest in debating in Japan. While attempts have been made to include debating in school curricula, there are still few schools that have included debating, either in English or Japanese, and in my experience in over twenty first-year university classes, there have never been more than one or two people in a class who have claimed any experience of debating in either language.

While the Japanese words *tooron* and *toogi* are loose translations of the word 'debate' they are closer in meaning to 'discussion'. In English there is a clear distinction between a debate and a discussion; a discussion simply explores an issue, while in a debate sides must be taken to support or oppose a particular statement (Inoue, 1996). In contrast to the long history in the West of theological and political debate, in Japan the spoken word has been less important than the written word; also in contrast to the West, Japanese society is strongly group orientated, with a great emphasis on *wa*, harmony, which would be disturbed if each individual were to have strong and vocal opinions (Hunter, p.68). These may be some of the reasons why debating has often been avoided in Japan.

Japan has had a turbulent relationship with the English language since Englishman William Adams reached her shores in 1600. During most of the Edo period, the speaking of English was prohibited, sometimes on pain of death (Reesor, 2002). After the Meiji Restoration in 1868, the education system was reformed with much influence from the West. American David Murray became Superintendent of Education in 1873, many foreign teachers were brought to Japan, and lectures were conducted in English at the Imperial University, now the University of Tokyo. In spite of these reforms, debating was not included in the curriculum. There are many possible reasons for this omission, ranging from the government's fear of encouraging dissent, to the unwillingness of Japanese people to argue. However, the most likely reason seems to have been a practical one. The main aim of the educational reforms was to equip Japan with the technological know-how to compete with the west both economically and militarily. Since the defeat of Russia in 1905, this has been manifestly successful (Hunter, p.193).

Only a means to an end, the English language fell out of vogue, along with other things western, as Japan became increasingly nationalistic, and during the 1930s, for example, for baseball expressions Japanese words had to be used rather than phonetic renditions of the English words, 'pitcher' becoming *tooshu*, and 'base' becoming *rui*.

After the war came the second wave of English. Although democratisation was an ostensible aim of the occupying forces, economic and industrial development was again paramount and debating once more escaped the curriculum. Professor Kyoko Fujise (2004) said that we are now witnessing the third wave of English in Japan's education

system, and with more and more native speakers and bilingual Japanese living in the country, as well as increasing travel and a freer flow of information, it is hoped that the noble policies relating to *kokusai-ka* (internationalisation) and the aim of raising the linguistic competence of Japanese students will come to fruition.

While debating has been avoided in Japan, it is important for many reasons. Debating allows students to practise many linguistic tasks, including stating arguments clearly, giving reasons for opinions, formulating counter arguments, and summing up the main points of an argument. In addition to these linguistic skills, debating also develops students' abilities in decision making, critical thinking and the objective assessment of arguments. It also allows classmates to get to know one another better by finding out others' opinions, as well as encouraging students to see both sides of an argument.

Objectives

In the context of a university curriculum where English classes are divided between the four skills, the primary goal of speaking classes is for students to spend as much time as possible on speaking English. Rather than setting out to teach students to be expert debaters, the objective is to allow students to discuss issues relevant to their lives, their society and their world.

Course integration

While debating was initially added on to the end of the course, sharing the last four lessons with other activities such as short talks, it has gradually grown and become increasingly integrated with other course elements. It is now introduced in the fifth lesson of a fifteen week course, and the remaining eleven lessons are all related to debating.

After motions are explained, students form pairs, each pair chooses a topic, and then they make five motions about the topic. In pairs and then groups, through discussion with other members of the class, students choose their best motions, then they prepare and give presentations which they conclude by putting forward their group's best motion.

As a homework activity, students read a transcript of a sample debate. In the next lesson, in new groups the students are tested on their understanding of key elements of debating, through questions about the arguments and rebuttals in the sample debate. Next the class chooses two motions to discuss and debate over the next four classes. Each student will give a short talk either for or against one of the two motions. As each person in the group must choose a different topic, at least one person in each group prepares some arguments about each motion.

The next class is devoted to short talks for and against the first motion. The students

who are to speak first are given the option of speaking once to the whole class, or rotating and speaking several times to small groups. Invariably they have voted to speak to smaller groups, which has at least three advantages. As well as being less intimidating for the speakers, they must repeat their speech several times, so increasing their speaking time. The talks are more informal, so it is easier for members of the audience to ask questions, which they are required to do. As up to eight talks are going on at the same time, there should be eight students speaking, rather than a pregnant silence as the whole class waits for someone else to pluck up the courage to ask a question.

In between the short talks and for homework, students prepare for the debate. With a class of eight groups, two debates are held simultaneously, two teams debating at the back and two at the front of the class. The remaining groups act as audiences and judges and from within them chairpersons and timekeepers are appointed. The position of time keeper is more popular as they get to play with a bell and a stopwatch. In the first debating lesson, there is usually only time for one debate. In the next lesson students give short talks on the other motion, then there are debates in the following lesson. After the second debate, students choose another motion for a third debate. The final lesson is free, and can be used for review, further debates, balloon debates, games or other activities appropriate to the class.

As the debating activities have evolved, there has been a trend to spend more time on fewer motions, allowing students more exposure to particular issues and more opportunity for the input, production and reinforcement of language relevant to a specific topic. In the first year, in each debating lesson groups were given a choice between two motions, which were then debated simultaneously. This year classes have had to choose the same motions for everyone to debate. In the first semester, one lesson was devoted to each motion, beginning with a short talk by one quarter of students and followed by debates by everybody. Most recently, one lesson is devoted to short talks to prepare the topic, then another lesson to debating, with more time at the end of the lesson for review and reflection.

Choice

Choice is a vital tool in the language classroom. Allowing students to choose their own topics and to create their own motions lets them take ownership of the learning process, giving them a stake in the activities and increasing their motivation (Dickinson, p.25).

Choice comes in different flavours: students can choose one option from a list; they can choose between two options; or they can choose to do or not to do something. Open choices allow students to do anything they want, which may not always be practical; most choices are tempered by compromise, in particular where students must work together, as is so often the case in the language classroom. The availability of choice is

confined by the logistics of the classroom; for example, if eight groups are debating one motion, four groups have already chosen to propose the motion and three groups have chosen to oppose the motion, then the remaining eighth group has only one option – to oppose the motion.

While it can be seen as a good thing to encourage students to choose options quickly on a first-come first-served basis, there is a tendency for the slowest students to be left with the fewest choices, so that the stronger students get the easier or most desirable topics and the weaker students are left with the more difficult or less interesting ones. In some cases the most popular topics are not always the easiest: over all classes, 'sport' was the first debating topic to be chosen, and 'politics' was the last, if it was chosen at all. However, it is perhaps easier to make debating motions about politics than it is about sport, and among the motions that were later chosen to be debated, sport was far from the top of the list, and politics was far from the bottom.

One remedy to the problem is to allow later groups to steal topics from groups who have already chosen. For example, suppose that the first group chooses 'sport', then the second group, 'university', the third, 'environment', and then the fourth group also chooses 'sport'. The group that first chose 'sport' must now choose another topic, and the group that chose later gets to keep the topic. This can take a little longer than the first-come first-served system, however, it is fairer to weaker students, and gives an increased sense of ownership as students realise they can take topics from each other and not just from the paper or from the teacher, and provides interesting class interaction and some entertainment.

Motions

After a brief introduction of debating, students were given the lists in Table 1 below and had to link each motion with a topic. Attempts were made to choose topics that would be interesting or relevant to students and to give examples of suitable debating motions.

Motions	Topics
9 o'clock is too early for the first class	Sports
Car driving should be more expensive	University
China is more important than the USA	School
Computers save time	Health
Downloading is stealing	Environment
Growth economics is bad for the environment	Education
Osaka is better than Tokyo	Law
History should always be remembered	Living
Japan should allow free import of rice	Trade
PE is better than music	Personal Freedom
Part time jobs are better than full time	Technology
Small hospitals are better than big ones	Economics
Sportsmen are paid too much	Politics

Table 1

Many of the motions can be categorised under more than one topic, for example, “Car driving should be more expensive” could be technology, environment, economics, law or politics. There are no correct answers, rather the activity serves to alert students to what a motion is, and the kinds of topics they might debate. While students were free to choose any topic to create motions about, it was found that in all but one class, all students chose one of the topics from the list used in the first activity. The exception was a class of agriculture students, who chose the topics ‘agriculture’, ‘science’ and ‘genetic engineering’, which were not on the list.

Good and Bad Motions

In the first debating courses, the teacher provided a list of motions which students had to choose from. However, rather than the teacher providing motions, there are many advantages to students generating their own motions, as well as it being a writing activity in itself. Students have a better idea than teachers of what they are interested in, and allowing students to create, choose and debate their own motions gives them a sense of ownership, increasing intrinsic motivation.

While expert debaters, and indeed many inhabitants of English speaking countries, can happily debate for or against almost any proposition, in the foreign language classroom a good motion meets three criteria: they are ‘clear’, ‘controversial’ and ‘interesting’.

To demonstrate this, the eleven sample motions in Table 2 below were provided, many of which do not meet these criteria.

Motions about English	For/Against	Good/Bad	Why is it a bad motion?
English should be the first language in Japan			
English should become an official language in Japan			
Lots of people speak English			
All English education should be voluntary			
English is boring			
English is an official language in 48 countries			
English is a world language because of Queen Elizabeth I			
Japanese should never be used in an English lesson			
Studying English or Chinese in Japan			
English should be taught at elementary schools			
People who speak English in Japan should be shot			

Table 2

Students were first called upon to decide whether they were for or against each motion. Through a show of hands, the numbers for and against each motion were written on the board. Students were then asked which the best motion was, and the reason why. Students generally chose a motion that seemed relevant to their lives and which divided the class relatively evenly. Next, students were asked to look through the sample motions and decide whether each one was good or bad. If a motion was bad, students were asked to say why. The answers to these questions were elicited and through these examples of bad motions, the three criteria for good motions were demonstrated.

“Lots of people speak English” was disqualified for the lack of clarity of ‘lots of’, and it was unclear whether “Studying English or Chinese in Japan” meant that English should be studied rather than Chinese, either English or Chinese should be studied, or both English and Chinese should be studied. This was demonstrated by finding two students,

one who had voted for and the other who had voted against the motion but who both held the same views.

“English is a world language because of Queen Elizabeth I”, while fascinating for historians of linguistics and of the Tudor period, is not the slightest bit interesting to most first year Japanese University students, and is therefore totally unsuitable as a debating topic.

“English is boring” was eliminated on the ground that it is a matter of personal taste, therefore beyond debate, and “English is an official language in 48 countries” is probably a fact and therefore lacking in any controversy. “English should be the first language in Japan” and “People who speak English in Japan should be shot” usually showed a severe lack of balance, with a majority of at least five to one against. It is hoped that those who supported the latter motion did so through a misunderstanding of the meaning, and indeed explaining what ‘shot’ meant caused some amusement in most classes.

The controversy of a particular motion is perhaps the most tangible of criteria for a good motion. While individual students may not have a very good idea about how many people would be for or against a particular motion, when the class are called to show their hands, and the numbers are written on the board, it is quite clear.

It was found that some students decided motions were bad if they didn’t agree with them, confusing reasons for motions being bad with reasons why they disagreed with them. For example, when asked why “English should be the first language in Japan” was a bad motion, students would write, ‘Because this is Japan and many people can’t speak English.’ When asked what was wrong with “People who speak English in Japan should be shot” they said that it was wrong to kill people. Drawing their attention to the best motions was successful in reducing this problem, although monitoring was necessary to ensure that all students were on the right track.

Good Motions

Each class is different and there is no ideal debate that will work with all groups. Among the eleven motions about English given in Table 2 above, four are fundamentally good debating motions, based on the criteria of clarity and interest. The number of people for and against each of these motions in four different classes demonstrates the range of views, demonstrating that “All English education should be voluntary” would most evenly split each of the classes, as can be seen in Table 3 below. While the controversy of a motion is not the only criteria for assessing its validity, it is at least tangible and measurable.

Good Motions:	Science	Engineering	Medicine	Agriculture	Average
All English education should be voluntary	50/50	40/60	45/55	55/45	45/55
English should become an official language in Japan	20/80	30/70	40/60	40/60	30/70
English should be taught at elementary schools	80/20	80/20	50/50	25/75	60/40
Japanese should never be used in an English lesson	20/80	15/85	30/70	30/70	25/75

Table 3

(Percentages for and against have been rounded. Where both numbers are in bold, the motion was closely balanced. One number in bold shows a severe imbalance.)

Student Generated Motions

At the beginning of the second lesson, students were asked to swap their homework with their partners, then to check whether each other's motions were clear and interesting. A class of 25 students will typically produce eighty to one hundred motions, which must be refined to around three or four for the debates. Groups were made by joining two pairs together, the pairs then swapped their motions, and chose the best five of the other pair's motions. Next, the students would ask each member of their group whether they were for or against each motion, and why, in order to explore the topic. It was suggested that if all students agreed with a motion, or if all students disagreed with a motion, it was probably not a good one. From a potential twenty motions, groups would choose the best five. In the next lesson, groups asked each person in the class whether they were for or against these five motions, and why. The results of this survey were compiled and the group gave a presentation in the fourth lesson, culminating in the announcement of the group's best motion. The first two motions to be used in debates were chosen from the six motions the groups produced.

Out of around seventy-five debates in over twenty classes, the motions in Table 4 have been used in more than one class to the satisfaction of teacher and enjoyment of most students.

Best Motions	Number of Classes	Originator
Atomic power should be abandoned	5*	Both
Living in the country is better than the city	3	Both
School uniforms are not needed	3*	Both
Soccer is better than baseball	3*	Both
People should not live in space	2	Teacher
Alcohol is not good for the health	2	Students
Small hospitals are better than big hospitals	2	Teacher
We should not send troops to Iraq	2	Students

Table 4

* These include different motions about fundamentally the same debate, for example: "Nuclear energy is safe"; "Japanese high school students should wear school uniforms" and "Baseball is better than soccer".

Topics

Table 5 shows the most popular topics that were debated. The 'Before' column shows the speed with which they were chosen by the class before the debates. The order in the 'After' column is based on the frequency of each topic among motions that were chosen to be debated, and their popularity among those chosen afterwards as the best topics to have been debated. Students from different faculties showed different interests: for example, 'health' was first to be chosen by both the medical and agriculture students. While 'Technology' was among the topics chosen by engineering students, 'Economics' was not chosen by any classes of economists.

Topic	Before	After
Health	4	1
Living	10	2
Law	9	3
Education*	6	4
Environment	5	5
School*	3	6
Personal Freedom	11	7
University*	2	8
Sports	1	9
Technology	12	10

Table 5

* Education, School and University were deliberately given as three different topics. Were they added together into one topic, it would seem to be the most popular. However, the fact that there are three topics, and therefore three times as many students working on them, does not necessarily mean that education is the most popular topic. It does, however, seem likely that school and university are topics of interest to first-year students.

In many cases the allocation of a motion to a topic is arbitrary as many motions can be categorised in many different ways. Topics are a stepping stone to creating motions, and the choice of topics will determine what motions are created. For example, the topic 'personal freedom' generated motions about cell phones, homosexual marriage and smoking. If the topic were 'smoking', students may produce motions about smoking age, places where smoking should be allowed and whether cigarettes should be advertised. The fact that a topic is not chosen quickly by the students does not necessarily mean that they are not interested in that topic, as the last topics to be chosen often produce the first motions chosen to be debated.

Preparation

To prepare for the debates, students were given a sheet with spaces for five arguments for and five against, spaces for evidence or examples to support each of these arguments, and spaces for a rebuttal to each argument. After the short talks, students were encouraged to choose the best five arguments for and against the motion which they would be debating the following week, at first working with their groups in class. The rest was set for homework, and groups were encouraged to work together.

In the same way that a teacher should ask the question before choosing the person to answer it, the side that a group takes in a debate, and the role each student performs are decided as late as possible. In order to encourage students to think about both sides of the debate, groups did not decide whether to propose or oppose the motion until just before the debates.

Rules and Regulation

While the rules and regulations of debating unions fill thick books, for the language classroom, they have been boiled down to just three: don't speak unless the chairman tells you to speak; don't speak for more than two minutes; and don't add any new arguments in the closing speech. Props are not expressly forbidden, as is the case in formal debating, although students do not usually use props anyway. Heckling has never been a problem, and in only one case out of scores of debates did a student need to be reprimanded for speaking out of turn.

Debating has its own language which has little use in other situations. Words and expressions such as 'motion', 'rebuttal' and 'point of order' have no use outside the debating chamber, and while they can be found in some dictionaries, the words 'Proposer' and 'Opposer' draw squiggly lines of disapproval from the spell checker of the word processor I write this on. With the aim of giving students as much exposure as possible to the most common words of the English language, I tried at first to avoid using debating jargon. However, the distinctions between a topic, a motion and an argument are critical, and using the word 'rebuttal' makes explanations easier.

Format

During the first year of debating, the first proposer's speech was followed by one minute's thinking time, then the first opposer's rebuttal. This caused some confusion among students, as the first opposers would sometimes start giving a speech of their arguments, and not reply to the arguments in the first proposer's speech, leaving the second opposer, who spoke immediately afterwards, wondering what to say. In addition, the proposers had little to do while the opposers were thinking and giving their rebuttals and vice versa.

Subsequently the following format has been used :

First proposer: speech,	2'
First opposer: speech,	2'
Thinking time	2'
Second opposer: rebuttals,	2'
Second proposer: rebuttals,	2'
Third opposer: summing up	1'
Third proposer: summing up	1'

In this format, the opposers and proposers both have the same length of time to prepare their rebuttals, and are both busy preparing them at the same time, using the class time more efficiently. While they are thinking, the audience has an opportunity to write down what they have been hearing on assessment sheets that are prepared by the

teacher. In keeping with standard debating format, the proposers speak first and last so that the advantage of having the last word is balanced by having to speak first.

Problems and Improvements

Students faced many problems in the process of debating, but, in most cases these have been overcome and learned from. Some of the motions were first vague, non controversial, and containing lexical errors. However, with improved coverage of good and bad motions in class, the content of students' motions has improved. As each group has typically had around fifteen motions to choose from, the five candidate motions that were left at the end of the first lesson have invariably been sound. During the lesson, the teacher was able to steer students towards more natural phrasing, where necessary. In their preparation for the debates, some students produced spurious or weak arguments, flimsy or irrelevant support and ineffective rebuttals, however with teamwork, the material in the debates themselves was usually good.

As native speakers, and through experience in the classroom, teachers have a feeling for what is a good debate motion, which students usually do not. In some cases, what seem to be good motions have been voted out through a lack of understanding of the issue, and easy motions have been chosen over interesting ones. If students are given enough time to explore the motions they have brought to the class, and the teacher injects sufficient enthusiasm where it is lacking, each group should put forward its best motions rather than the easiest ones. Another danger is that the best motion is chosen simply on the criterion of controversy, at the stake of a more interesting but less controversial one, and perhaps more emphasis needs to be made on how interesting each motion is. At the very least, it is hoped that something is learned about the decision making process.

Although students are able to create their own motions, the current system does not encourage them to create their own topics. In order to increase students' freedom of choice, enough topics were provided so that each pair had a choice. Students may create better motions if they are given the freedom to choose topics they are interested in. However, when choosing motions or topics, students must have a good idea of what a debate is, and the best strategy may be to let students choose a motion from a list generated by the teacher for the first debate, then create their own topics and motions for subsequent debates.

In offering students free choices, it is important to give them as much time as possible to create a variety of options to choose from, to avoid the first idea that comes into someone's head being settled upon. Group brainstorming has proved to be a useful tool in creating ideas in a wide range of classes. There are three rules to brainstorming: first, say anything. No idea is too crazy; in fact crazy ideas are better as they encourage more

ideas. Second, write everything down. One member of the group is appointed to record every idea. Third and most important, don't criticise. Every idea is a good idea. Ideally there should be between three and five people in a group. More people means more ideas, however as groups get larger and their intimacy turns to intimidation, students become less willing to offer their ideas.

Although debating has grown and become integrated into other elements of the course, the debate itself has always been the final activity. After the debaters are assessed and the post mortem has been carried out, the motion is buried. However, after the investment of class time and homework hours researching and thinking about a motion which has been created and selected by the class, it should be possible to use further activities to keep the topic alive for the students.

An important part of formal debating is defining the motion, which has not been addressed in this course. The aim has been to give a clear statement so students will understand the meaning of being for or against. For example, in debates on the motion "Japanese history is more important than world history," proposing students used examples such as Pearl Harbour, the Rape of Nanking and the colonisation of Korea as examples of why Japanese history was more important. None of the opposing groups pointed out that all of these events could be seen as world history rather than Japanese history.

Student Performance

In spite of the apprehension with which many teachers embarked upon debating for first year students, I have found it to be an appropriate and successful activity. Students have shown interest in the topics, and enthusiasm for discussing them. Debates have been lively and students have enjoyed them. At the end of one semester, students in six classes were asked for the best activity of the course, and around seventy percent of students said that debating had been the best activity.

Throughout the creation of motions, preparation and delivery of presentations, and giving of short talks, students worked together and used English to interact, whether asking or answering questions, stating their opinions or imparting factual information. While not all students had fully prepared each debate for homework, many of them had done so and they worked together in groups to produce satisfactory arguments and rebuttals. When encouraged to produce more evidence for arguments where it had been lacking in the short talks, many students did so, usually finding data or information in Japanese and translating it into English.

During debating itself, a few students' speeches were excessively short, but for the most part they coherently conveyed their message and some students spoke up to the final bell. Debaters listened carefully to the other team's arguments, and during the

thinking time they worked together to think up rebuttals or choose appropriate ones from those they had already prepared. Audiences keenly followed the debates, writing comments on the assessment sheets. Many students reverted to their first language to discuss the rebuttals with their group members; while ideally students should have been speaking in English, at least they were discussing something relevant to the class, dealing with English input and working towards English output. In the final speeches, students effectively summarised the arguments their team mates had given.

In teacher evaluation questionnaires filled in at the end of each semester, students have made many positive comments. Before debating started, there were calls for it to be included in the curriculum:

二つに分かれて、ディスカッションやって欲しい。もっと積極的に会話ができるようなディベート等を入れて欲しい。

(The class should split in two and have a discussion. Include a debate so students can speak with more enthusiasm.)

もっとみんなでディベートをしたりして、他の人の意見を聞く機会があったらいいと思った。(I thought it would be good to let everyone debate so that we can have a chance to hear each others' opinions.)

After the first semester, the following request was made:

ディベートなどの行い方についてはもう少し詳しく説明がほしかったです。

(A more careful explanation of the debate procedure is necessary.)

Apart from that, all comments have been positive, from the beginning. For example: I think debate and presentation are very good to acquire English speaking skill.

…全体的にみて、ディベートやショートレッスンなどはなかなか良い経験であったと思う。(…overall, I think that debating and short lessons were very good experience.)

全体的に静かだが、課題もうまく出来て、ディベートも面白かった。

(Overall the class was quiet, but the topics were well chosen and debating was interesting.)

ディベートが非常に面白い。

(Debating was great fun.)

クイズ・ディベートなど英語に親しめやすかった。

(Quizzes and debates helped us get to know English better.)

日本語禁止で授業を受けるのはとても大変だったけれど、ディベートなどを実際に英語でする事が出来てとても楽しかった。

(It was difficult not being able to use Japanese, but being able to actually debate in English was a lot of fun.)

英語でディベートさせることで、生徒達により多くの英語を話す時間を与えている。

(We were able to spend a lot of time talking in English with our classmates through debating.)

ディベートは大変だったけど、自分でいろんな意見を英語で考えるようになった。

(Debating was hard work, but now I can think about many opinions in English.)
(author's translations)

Conclusion

Debating is a useful device for facilitating meaningful discussion on relevant issues. In spite of the limitations in linguistic ability and worldly knowledge of first years, it is never too early to start expressing opinions, and debating is an excellent vehicle for students to do so. It is empowering, motivating and a popular part of the course.

In conclusion, while debating should not necessarily be a mandatory part of first year classes, it is highly recommended as an activity that students enjoy and learn from.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank all colleagues at Shinshu University for their support, and in particular Frederick Carruth and Ezra Erker for contributing to the development of debating materials, Kelton Boyer for ideas on student self assessment sheets and allowing later chosers to steal topics, Sean Mehmet for his advice, David Ruzicka for checking my English and Atsuko Otsuki for writing the Japanese summary.

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