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How & Why Toulmin Model Became Triangular

(Over)simplification in Japan

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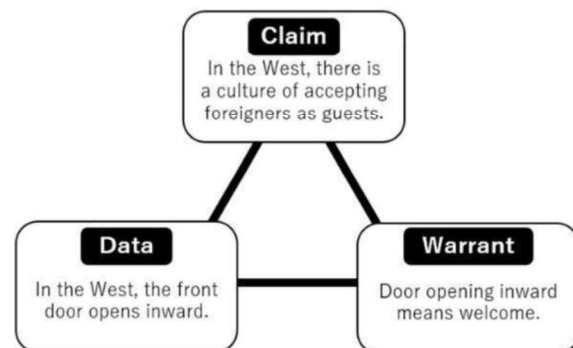
ABSTRACT: The Toulmin Model is introduced also to Japan, but in a unique way. While the original model consists of 6 elements, the model in Japan, called Triangular Logic Model, consists of 3 (claim, data, warrant). This paper discusses 1) the process of and reasons for the triangularization of the model and 2) pros/cons of this phenomenon. Though triangularization succeeds in making the model popular in educational practice, this (over)simplification lets the model go in the opposite direction to which Toulmin wanted to.

KEYWORDS: Argument Fields, Debate, Education, S. Toulmin, Triangular Logic Model.

1. INTRODUCTION

Toulmin Model is well known all over the world. This is also the case in Japan. Toulmin Model is used in school in various subjects (mainly in Japanese and social studies, and even in science), and now is in official textbooks (Sanseido, 2020, pp. 104-105; Kyoiku- Shuppan, 2020, pp. 115-117). However, the model has been modified in a unique way¹. While the original model consists of six elements (data [ground], claim, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal), the model in Japan is constructed with just the former three (data, claim, and warrant) and puts them in a triangle form (Figure 1). This model called Triangular Logic Model is introduced as if Toulmin had developed and named it. Thus, most people in Japan come up with the triangle when they hear the name “Toulmin” or “Toulmin Model”.

Although Toulmin emphasized the importance of field-dependency, the practice in schools in Japan eliminates the perspective of argument fields and uses the Triangular Model as a kind of panacea. In this paper, I make considerations on how and why such modification to simplify the model happened. In short, the purpose of this simplification was to make the model and debate activities more popular in



¹ This phenomenon seems unique to Japan as prior research pointed out () and the listers to this presentation at ISSA 2023 did not disagree.

school, which was accomplished, but on the other hand, there were some negative effects at the same time.

First, I see the abstract history of accepting Toulmin in Japan and clarify the process of making the model triangular (section 2). Then I argue the pros and cons of the modification (section 3) and especially focus on the cons, negative effects, in argumentation education (section 4). I conclude by arguing the necessity of rethinking the model and Toulmin's philosophy behind the model.

2. PROCESS OF ACCEPTING TOULMIN IN JAPAN

Toulmin published *The Uses of Argument* in 1958. After about a decade, Toulmin was introduced to Japan in the 1970s. Debate activities became popular and some communities were established in 1980-1990 (e.g., Japan Debate Conference in 1986, the National Association of Debate in Education in 1996). As interest in active learning grew, discussion and debate practice were introduced into classrooms. One of the purposes was to let middle and high school students learn to search and collect the materials and to use them in arguments better in 2010s as preparation for lowering the voting age.

Here the point is that the official textbooks were published earlier than the Japanese translation of *The Uses of Argument*. While Triangular Logic Model appeared in the textbooks in school in April 2011, the translated edition of *The Uses of Argument* was published in May 2011. Therefore, the textbooks might be written without referring to the Toulmin's original texts. In fact, the textbooks introduced Triangular Logic Model without showing that it is derived from Toulmin (though the textbooks emphasize the importance of showing evidence).

Then we have to scope at 1970s, when as I mentioned Toulmin was introduced to Japan. At this time, none of his books has been translated yet: only some passages were quoted and introduced. Here is one key person, M. Matsumoto, a professor of teaching English, who introduced Toulmin Model in his books and contributed the most to the birth of Triangular Logic Model. In 1970s, Matsumoto wrote a series of 2 books. One is *The Method of Intellectual Combat* in 1975, and the other is *The Logic of Intellectual Combat* in 1979. In *Method*, he argued that the causal relationship is shown in the form of a triangle. In *Logic*, the structure of 3 elements (claim-warrant-data) appeared, but not triangular yet.

Then he concluded his idea of using Toulmin in his book *Introduction to "Debate"* in 1982. As I quote below, he introduced the original Toulmin Model with 6 elements as the method of inference and distinguished the main 3 elements and the additional 3 elements.

You can see the 3 elements (claim, data, and warrant) are parallel to the major premise, minor premise, and conclusion in syllogism. The other elements (backing, qualifier, and rebuttal) are, to say, the points in order to support them. Therefore, when we construct arguments or rebuttals, **it is important to fill the main 3 elements first of all (claim, data, and warrant). The remaining three can be filled in later.** (Matsumoto, 1982, p. 69)

Here are two key points. One is Matsumoto made it clear that the 6 elements can be divided into the main ones and the others. This perspective itself is not so rare, but was innovative for Japan at that time. The other point is that Matsumoto did not eliminate backing, qualifier,

and rebuttal. He just insisted that these 3 elements could be filled later and did not that they were useless or needless.

So next we have to consider the reason why these 3 elements vanished. In this paper, I hypothesize that this modification occurred because of practical concerns. In short, Toulmin Model became triangular in Japan in order to make it easier to use in educational practice. They thought the simpler the model is, the easier to use in school, as Inoue (1977), a contemporary of Matsumoto, professor of teaching Japanese, wrote:

However, there are some problems in Toulmin Model. In some cases, Q (Qualifier) or B (Backing) may be needed for both D (Data) and W (Warrant). Also, if we reconstruct the W as C, B can be interrupted as its D. In short, this layout needs to be fixed. Then, **the model will be clear theoretically and easy to use practically if Q, R, and B are lumped together as "provisos (conditionals)" for C, D, and W (considered as subcategories within those categories).** (Inoue, 1977, p. 107)

From this perspective, Matsumoto made Triangular Logic Model. Nevertheless, as I wrote, Matsumoto used Toulmin's idea sometimes without showing that it derived from Toulmin, which made it difficult for subsequent researchers and literature to refer to Toulmin's original source. After several decades, Triangular Logic Model is now in official textbooks, but there is not Toulmin's name nor Matsumoto's name (for his sin?). Therefore, the circumstances are as follows. When teachers want to use Toulmin Model in their class, there is a high bar for them to check Toulmin's original texts in English. Then they use the articles or books introducing Toulmin in Japanese, i.e. Matsumoto's or its following texts, and they find not Toulmin's original theory but only the arranged and modified model. Whatever reservation Matsumoto made, most of the following texts introduce only Triangular Logic Model without declaring such reservation. Obviously, by seeing with our eyes, there is no backing, qualifier, or rebuttal in Triangular Logic Model.

Now we can understand the process of and reasons for the birth of Triangular Logic Model. In the next section we will see the output of this modification.

3. PROS AND CONS OF TRIANGULAR LOGIC MODEL

Now that we understand the process of triangularization, it is time to consider the results of this phenomenon. There are pros and cons of the triangularization of the model, so in this section I check the both and lay the foundation for the next section.

The merit of the triangularization is making the model easier to use in education, as mentioned already in the last section. Matsumoto wanted to make debate practice more general and popular in Japan for some reasons. Japanese were (have been) said to be not good at debating, and Matsumoto was afraid that Japan would lose out in international competitions if it did not develop the ability to debate (Matsumoto, 1975). In this point, simplification succeeds in making the model popular. One easy but interesting example that shows the soundness of this proposition is search results on the internet. When we throw the words 'Triangular Logic' into Google Scholar, we can find almost twice as many references as on Toulmin model (in July 2023, 839 hits with 'Triangular Logic (三角ロジック)' while 476 hits with 'Toulmin Model (トウルミン(・)モデル)'). So now in

Japan, the simplified Toulmin model, Triangular Logic Model is more well-used than the original one.

On the other hand, we have to check the negative side of this simplification. To give the conclusion first, it goes opposite to which Toulmin wanted to go. How opposite? Toulmin made his argument model in order to criticize and update the syllogism. But now, since Triangular Logic is interpreted as Toulmin Model (or to say, Toulmin Model is replaced with Triangular Logic Model), people in Japan mix up Toulmin Model with syllogism as follows.

Toulmin Model is well-known. In this paper, we employ Triangular Logic Model as simplified Toulmin Model. (.) In this paper, Triangular Logic Model is regarded as a representation of syllogism. (Kitamura et al., 2017, pp. 1-2)

Then why did Toulmin criticize and try to update syllogism? Toulmin questioned the universality and invariance of the validity of syllogism and added some conditions. Toulmin thought that validity depends on its contexts and tried to make the contexts clear by inventing 3 additional elements: backing, qualifier, and rebuttal. In this experiment, the challenge Toulmin faced was how consensus is possible in a pluralistic situation (Ujikawa 2007), so he emphasized the necessity of limiting our ideas even though they seemed perfect.

What we should do is not to establish a universal, new, and inclusive theory but to limit the range of the theory even if it is formed in the best way. (Toulmin, 1990=2001, p. 314)

This limitation also applies to Toulmin Model.

I'd approve of anything people find fruitful, so long as they don't use my ideas dogmatically. (.) So, you have to find out as you go along in what areas this model works best and in what areas one has to use it with qualifications. (interview with Olson, 1993)

Unfortunately, however, few educational practices using Triangular Logic Model or Toulmin Model (=T(L)M) in Japan pay attention to this point. In many cases, T(L)M is used as if it is a kind of panacea. Most of the textbooks in school encourage students to apply the "omnipotent" triangle to any kind of text regardless of the genre (e.g. novel, essay, thesis) or discipline (e.g. sociology, biology, geology), and never to recreate the model based on the text types. Toulmin emphasized the importance of such differences of genres or disciplines by the concept of 'argument field(s)', but this point has been left out. To say, the Japanese textbooks prevent students from "finding out as you go along in what areas this model works best and in what areas one has to use it with qualifications."

Why is the model seen as invariable and changeless in Japan? One hypothesis is that it is because *An Introduction to Reasoning* has not been translated into Japanese yet. This is a textbook written by Toulmin and Janik, and in the last part of the book they list some fields as examples (law, science, arts, management, and ethics) and make considerations on the variations of the model. In Japan, this book is not easy to read nor

introduced as a guide for teachers², so the idea that the model can and should be modified in accordance with the fields is not familiar. Since Toulmin Model and argumentative practices are implemented in school in a context of critical thinking, also the model itself needs to be examined. Viewed in this way, this situation must be changed.

4. FORGOTTEN ‘ARGUMENT FIELDS’

In the last section, I list the pros/cons of the Triangular Logic Model and make consideration on the issue of overlooking the context by the triangularization. Although it is unable to check the causal relationship statistically here, in this section I argue the problems that might be caused by not paying attention to argument fields.

One problem is the ‘Rompa boom’. Rompa means refutation in Japanese. Hiroyuki, an influencer on SNS, became popular in recent Japan. He is regarded as good at debating (actually just good at fallacies like ignoratio elenchi) and Japan is experiencing a ‘debate’ boom (not academic nor educational) as an entertainment because of him. Herewith, it is reported that many kids say ‘Hi, Rompa (論破)!’ meaning ‘Yes, now you’re refuted!’ to their parents, teachers, and friends (Asahi, 2023). The most famous and popular spell is ‘Sorette anata-no kansou desuyone (それってあなたの感想ですよ?)’ meaning that ‘It is just your subjective feeling’ or ‘Is there any data supporting it?’. They say this phrase even when scolded for not doing their homework: their parents say ‘You had better started doing your homework earlier, hadn’t you?’ and they reply ‘It is just your subjective feeling’.

They say such phrases to display their superiority over their counterparts, but in many cases, they fail to make a refutation, or at least manage to refute only one perspective. They are not able to take into consideration the plurality of argument fields. With the perspective of argument fields, they might notice how their ‘refutation’ is nonsense. There are both fields where feelings are essential elements for arguments and where talking about feelings is needless. Without understanding such plurality of fields, strange situations occur in which they fail to construct arguments correctly while they are sure that they win the game.

On the other hand, too much attention to the plurality of argument fields leads to another problem. The other problem is historical revisionism. In Japan, super right wings have taken advantage of debate activities as a tool to empower themselves. Debate sets the theme in a form of dichotomy, so two positions are treated equally. This scheme enables them to act as if their minor theory is on an equal level to the mainstream theory (Kurahashi, 2018), and they say the cliché historical revisionists often use: ‘While you are right in one sense, we are right in another sense’.

Although Toulmin insisted he doesn’t support either relativism or universalism, the concept argument fields is criticized for leading to relativism (Pineau, 2013). Even though reconsidering Toulmin’s philosophy behind Toulmin Model is worthwhile, emphasizing the plurality of argument fields leads to the problem common with the ‘plurality of narratives’. While the theory of plurality of narratives criticizes evidence-centrism and enhances the

² Only do few papers (like Aoki, 2016) refer to *An Introduction to Reasoning* and the necessity to recreate the model.

value of witness and verbal dictation on one hand, it also empowers historical revisionism on the other hand (Kurahashi, 2018, p. 86).

As far as I have researched there are few studies investigating the concept argument fields and even no study connecting it with educational practices in Japan, so this is the issue I think worthy of further investigation.

5. CONCLUSION

This paper revealed the process of and reason for shifting Toulmin Model to Triangular Logic Model. Toulmin was introduced to Japan before translating his books so that only did Toulmin Model spread in the context of education without conducting research on his philosophy behind the model. Toulmin Model was recreated into the form of a triangle in order to make itself easier to use, which was accomplished to the extent to which Triangular Logic Model is now in official textbooks. However, at the same time, it had a side effect which was to cut off the contextual (=field-dependent) terms from the model and prevent students from “finding out as you go along in what areas this model works best and in what areas one has to use it with qualifications” although it was the very aim and purpose of Toulmin. The lack of research on Toulmin’s philosophy including the concept of argument fields in Japan may lead to some problems like Rompa boom or historical revisionism using debate activities.

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