An Analysis of Chinese Excellent Debater’s Use of Supports in BP Debate

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Abstract: In BP debate system, each debater endeavors to convince judges and audiences with arguments, in which the use of supports determines whether the argument is effective or not. This thesis adopts the transcripts in final round of 20th and 21th “FLTRP” National English Debating Competition as the samples to figure out how excellent debaters use the support to strengthen their claims. With analysis of statistic data, it is discovered that each claim is strengthened by at least two or more types of supports. Besides, explanation and sub-claim are used most frequently among four kinds of supports, followed by evidence and analogy. This might be related with the impromptunature of BP debate and debaters’ critical thinking ability.

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1. Introduction

As both the teacher and debater, the writer has taken part in FLTRP NEDC (Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press National English Debating Competition) for the last three years. One of the problem is that debaters don’t have enough supports to strengthen their claims, making their arguments less effective.

Therefore, this thesis is undertaken to investigate four types of supports in the final round of 2017 and 2018 “FLTRP” National English Debating Contest, in order to figure out how the excellent debaters employ supports to enhance their arguments. To make it being, this study takes the followings as the main research questions 1) What are the general characteristics of supporting materials used in 2017 and 2018 “FLTRP” National English Debating Contest? 2) What are the possible reasons behind the general characteristics?

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2. General Review of Support in BP Debate

Support means an idea or set of ideas the audience accepts as true and provides foundation for their acceptance of the claim. According to Robert Trapp (2016), support can be classified to four categories: evidence, explanation, analogy and sub-claims.

Evidence is supporting materials that has been observed or is potentially observable. For instance, people claim that humans evolved from other species with the support of the data from National Bureau of Statistics. In this case, fossil record is the object that can be used as the evidence to support the claim.

Explanation is offered to reveal why the claim is a correct one (Trapp Robert, 2016). In real debate, the common signs of using explanation are the signals like “Why?” “Because . . . ”

An analogy is another form of support where an advocate begins with an object or concept, for which the audience already has a positive or negative evaluation, then compares that object or concept to another for which the audience has no such existing evaluation. (Trapp Robert, 2016)

Sub-claims is frequently used in practical competition, especially when debaters need to make a deep analysis around a complicated issue and try to explain a grand theme or value by combining two or more sub-claims such as “claim A + claim B = claim C(claim A and claim B both serve as supports ).”(Trapp Robert, 2016)

3. General Characteristics of Supports Employed in the Final Debating Contest

Through data analysis, it is found that explanation and sub-claims are most frequently used to support one claim, followed by evidence and analogy. It can also be discovered that excellent debaters prefer to resort to the combination of two or more types of supports.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Argument component</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analogy</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-claims</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claim</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(1) Frequency of Independent Use of Supports

This part analyzes four types of independent supports successively based on their frequency of occurrence in the arguments.

1) High Frequency - Explanation and Sub-claims
With the highest frequency of occurrence in the final debate, explanation(100%) obviously is adopted most frequently by debaters as a kind of support, which means that all debaters resort to support.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>It is problematic for the schools if you actually allow this system (privatized) to be carried out.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanation 1 (Support)</td>
<td>You will be given larger incentives for the schools to manipulate the privatized exam. The schools do concerns about the recommendation letter, which means that the school want to make the exam paper much more easier for the students, in order to allow their students to obtain a higher scores.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, in order to strength the claim of problematic privatized system, the speaker used the explanation. Through the cause and effects, the speaker supported his claims by explaining how problematic it might be to the private school in the aspect of exam.

2) Medium Frequency - Evidence
From the table above, it is obvious that the evidence, with the percentage of 41.7%, ranks second among four types of supports. There are generally 10 claims using evidence to support its claim among 24 claims in 12 transcripts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Private sector have a large incentive.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence (Support)</td>
<td>We can see the rise of learning leaders of the Sixiangka, of the ETS, of every organizations existing here.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, “Sixiangka” and “ETS” are famous debate we-media which educate users how to become a better debater. By mentioning “Sixiangka” “ETS”, the celebrated we-chat platforms, the debater struck a chord among debaters and enhanced the abstract claim that private sector are highly motivated.

3) Low Frequency - Analogy
As a type of support, analogy only appears twice in totally six speeches and accounts for 208% among 24 claims, which is least utilized compared with other kinds of supports.
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Example (PM’s speech)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>It’s especially because in the current states quo, the state has a large incentive to monopolize all the current system and to make anything inside.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analogy (Support)</td>
<td>That is the case happening in China in 1950s where we say that the lack of competition and lack of people participating inside to make out all the things.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this case, the debater made a comparison between the world in 1950s and that under current situation, in order to establish the similarity between two examples. With the use of analogy, audience were easier to understand and recognize the incentive for state to monopolize all current systems. To make such an support of analogy, the speaker also described some features of situation in 1950s to crystallize the consequences that people don’t want to witness again.

(2) Frequency of Integrated Use of Supports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of types of combined supports</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Combination of 2 types of supports</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of 3 types of supports</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Combination of 4 types of supports</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table shows that among total number of 24 claims, every claims are supported by the combination of more than one supports. About 54.2% of claims are supported by 3 types of supports and 41.7% of claims are proved by the combination of 2 kinds of supports.

This actually illustrates one of the differences between novice and excellent debaters. Most novice debaters like to spend too much time proposing various personal opinions. On the contrary, Excellent debaters prefer to take more time to prove their claims with various kinds of supports because they know that the efficiency and integrity of supports are the means to make arguments more effective.

4. Possible Reasons

From the research and data analysis, general characteristics of supporting materials employed in this debated can be found. Firstly, in this debate, each claim are supported by supporting materials. Secondly, among four types of supports, explanation and sub-claims are most frequently used but evidence and analogy are less employed. Thirdly, each debater are more likely to use the combination of at least two or more kinds of supports to strengthen their claims.

The reason behind these general characteristics can be found in two: the nature
of BP debate and debaters’ critical thinking ability.

(1) Debate as an Impromptu Contest

One of the unique nature of BP debate is that it is an impromptu contest, which limit the time to prepare and speak. Specifically speaking, after the motion is publicized, each debater only have 15 minutes for preparation. This explains why explanation and sub-claims are employed so frequently while analogy and evidence are employed much less frequently by excellent English debaters in China. The latter two acquire more time to think.

(2) Debaters’ Critical Thinking Ability

On one hand, the results shows that all the debaters have critical thinking ability. For example, they have the awareness of burden of proof --- debater’s duty to provide appropriate supports to consolidate the arguments. Excellent or experienced debaters are always highly aware of this, which demonstrates the reason why they all employ supports in their speeches.

On the other hand, their critical thinking ability are not advanced. During debate, their speeches also reveal their lack of relevant information accumulation and analogy analysis. This explains why evidence and analogy are much less frequently employed. Only with abundant knowledge about all issues can debaters resort to the specific statistics or authority. The same is true to the use of analogy. With no accumulation of knowledge, debaters are hard to make comparative analysis.

5. Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study have a few pedagogical implications. Firstly, to the novice debaters, they need to be trained to support their claims with different types of support. Among them, the explanation and sub-claims should be taught first since they are easier to be mastered.

Secondly, to the excellent debaters, the urgent need is how to improve critical thinking ability.

For one thing, they need to develop the habit of accumulating information and categorizing in a way that they can immediately use as evidence in debate. For another, to be more excellent, cause and effect analysis is far from enough. They need more complicated comparative analysis such as analogy in order to enhance the effectiveness of their speech.
Works Cited