

Argumentation in French and English: A Japanese Perspective

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This research investigates the influence of Japanese causal expression patterns on their realization in French and English as foreign languages (FFL and EFL), with particular attention to argumentative discourse. Adopting a contrastive framework, it compares the use of the connective *kara* with *parce que* in French as well as *because* in English, and the sequencing of topic and supporting sentences in English. The analysis reveals instances of interlinguistic pragmatic transfer, or priming, and examines how these phenomena affect the argumentative effectiveness of explanations produced by Japanese learners in semi-structured interviews. After establishing the impact of such priming on the strength of argumentation in learner productions in the target languages, the study proposes pedagogical directions that teachers of English and French may consider to enhance Japanese learners' argumentative competence in both written and oral productions.

本研究は、フランス語及び英語を外国語として学ぶ日本人学習者における論理的展開を対象としている。日本語の因果関係の語用論的特徴に基づいて、外国語での議論で生じる問題点を明確にする。コーパス分析を通じて、因果関係を示す日本語の接続詞「から」を、フランス語の *parce que* ならびに英語の *because* と比較した上で、いわゆる「プライミング」の事例を日本人学習者の談話的特徴から明らかにする。また、フランス語及び英語での論理と異なる面を指摘し、日本人学習者に適した議論構築力を高めるために活用しうる教授法を提案する。

Teaching argumentation in a foreign language represents a major pedagogical challenge, particularly for learners whose mother tongue presents different discursive structures. Current didactic approaches tend to overlook the influence of the causal structures of the learners' native language on the argumentative strength of productions in the target language. The central question from a pedagogical viewpoint is the following: to what extent do Japanese causal forms influence those produced in L2, and what activities can French and English teachers offer in order to mitigate its influence? After a concise explanation of the key concepts used in this study, this article analyzes learner productions considering the characteristics of Japanese and further develops a targeted pedagogical framework to strengthen the specific argumentative abilities of this population.

Problem Statement and Research Questions

Although interlinguistic pragmatic transfer has been documented across a range of language pairs, its specific consequences for the argumentative discourse of Japanese learners of French and English remain underexplored, particularly with respect to how causal connectives are pressed into argumentative service. Without a clearer account of this transfer, teachers of French and English in Japan lack an empirically grounded basis for designing activities that target the specific argumentative weaknesses of this learner population, and instead risk treating these weaknesses as general proficiency deficits rather than as structured, L1-influenced patterns.

This study addresses the following research questions:

RQ1. To what extent do Japanese causal discourse patterns influence the argumentative use of causal connectives (*parce que*) in French productions of Japanese learners?

- RQ2. To what extent do comparable patterns surface in the sequencing of topic and supporting sentences in the English productions of the same learner population?
- RQ3. What pedagogical activities can French and English teachers derive from these patterns to strengthen learners' argumentative competence?

Literature Review

Definition of Causality

Causality is not only a metaphysical category but also a discursive one, central to how speakers construct and justify claims. Hume's (1739) account of causality rests on three necessary conditions: temporal priority (the cause precedes the effect), contiguity (the two events are spatially/temporally adjacent), and a necessary connection between them. Descartes's (1641) causal adequacy principle, though grounded in a different metaphysical framework, shares with Hume's account a common enlightenment inheritance, and together the two have shaped how causality is understood and argued across Western intellectual traditions more broadly. This shared genealogy stands in contrast to the rather different assumptions underlying causality and argumentation in the Japanese context. However, not every causal relation gives rise to an argumentative effect. As Moeschler (2009) shows, this distinction depends on how causal chains are discursively organized on their pragmatic scope. Explanatory causality is characterized by a direct relationship between cause and consequence within a single causal chain. In this configuration, the logical consequence generally precedes the cause in the discourse order.

[1] Peu d'étudiants ont réussi à l'examen **parce que** le cours était trop difficile.

[1] Few students passed the exam **because** the course was too difficult.

Example [1] illustrates the mechanism: a single causal chain directly links the level of difficulty of the course to the low success rate. The function of *parce que* / *because* is to explain the observed situation. Argumentation, on the other hand, mobilizes a more complex structure involving two distinct causal chains. The discursive order reverses the logical interpretation by placing the logical cause before the effect, so that *parce que* / *because* introduces a consequence.

[2] Le cours était trop difficile **parce que** peu d'étudiants ont réussi à l'examen.

[2] The course was too difficult **because** few students passed the exam.

Two causal inferences overlap:

1. The level of the course determines the level of the exam (causal chain 1);
2. The level of the exam determines the success rate (causal chain 2).

The causal rule linking them functions argumentatively through a process of generalization. That is, in general, when few students succeed, one assumes that the course must have been difficult.

This distinction shows that the argumentative effect does not lie in the mere existence of a causal link but in the speaker's ability to construct a discursive truth aimed at convincing the interlocutor by connecting distinct causal chains. Discursive organization shapes pragmatic interpretation and argumentative robustness.

Condition in Causal Relations

This causal architecture unfolds according to two main argumentative modalities: condition and generalization, each exhibiting specific logical and persuasive properties. The conditional follows a hypothetical pattern. It is Hume's three principles, according to which the same causal chain will lead to the same effects: if A, then B, and conversely, as in the following example: Water is flowing because I have turned on the tap.

In this conditional logic, the causal relationship is embedded within a single chain in which the act of turning on the tap necessarily triggers the water flow. However, this modality presents an intrinsic argumentative vulnerability: its hypothetical nature makes it susceptible to counterexamples. The causal rule of condition, by positing a systematic dependence between the propositions, collapses as soon as a single case contradicts this interdependence. In the aforementioned example, a broken pipe would suffice to stop the water from flowing, thereby destroying the causal relation.

Generalization in Causal Relations

Generalization, as argued by Ducrot (1982), operates by drawing on the mechanisms of inductive reasoning, contrary to the deductive reasoning of the condition, to construct an argumentative truth. The following example illustrates this claim: Wildfires start every year **because** tourists throw away their cigarette butts. We identify two causal chains: the carelessness of holidaymakers leads to cigarette butts being thrown into nature (causal chain 1), and the act of discarding a cigarette butt can cause a fire (causal chain 2). This modality has the advantage of argumentative robustness: it does not claim absolute causal truth but constructs persuasive plausibility. A generalization can produce

an argumentative effect regardless of its exact statistical truthfulness. However, this logical weakness becomes a rhetorical resource for opponents to the proposal who can question the statistical validity of the claim in rebuttal. This typology, which is defined in the traditional enunciative tradition as the systematic categorization of recurrent ways of structuring discourse according to what they do in French (Huyghe & Legallois, 2024), shows that argumentative force does not stem solely from the causal relation itself but from its discursive structuring. The distinction between condition and generalization is not merely a logical typology, it is a pragmatic analysis of persuasive resources (Anscombe & Ducrot, 1983). It can be summarized in the table below.

Table 1
Pragmatic Characteristics of Discursive Modalities According to their Causal Structure

	Antecedent	Consequent	Causal chain	Pragmatics
Explanation	Consequence	Cause	1	Condition
Argumentation	Cause	Consequence	2	Generalization

The Pragmatics of *kara*: The Conditional Dimension

If the distinction between condition and generalization is pragmatic rather than purely logical, Japanese offers a particularly clear test case: Shirakawa's (1995; 2009) work on *kara* demonstrates that conditionality pervades the connective's uses far beyond canonical causal readings. He reveals a fundamental pragmatic property of *kara*: conditionality. The theory of generalized condition developed by Shirakawa proposes that the notion of condition encompasses many uses of *kara*, extending far beyond strict causal relations. This theoretical framework accounts for cases in which *kara* functions according to a conditional logic: if $A \rightarrow \neg B$ / if $\neg A \rightarrow B$.

[3]「今晩どこへ行きますか。」「宿題がたくさんありますから、どこも行きません。」

« konban doko e ikimasuka ? » « shukudai ga takusan arimasu **kara**, doko mo ikimasen »

Where are you going tonight? — “I’m not going anywhere, **because** I have a lot of homework.

In this interaction, *kara* does not express a simple causal relation but encodes a causal condition: if I have homework, I cannot go out. The underlying structure follows

a conditional logic in which the presence of homework necessarily determines the impossibility of going out, and conversely, the absence of homework would allow it.

Request constructions reveal a further pragmatic extension of this conditional dimension. The following example illustrates a non-causal use of *kara*:

[4]「明日の正午までには、必ず、必ず、七億そろえておきますから、それまで、これだけは、ここに預けておいてください。お願いします。」

« ashita no shougo made niwa, kanarazu, kanarazu, nanaoku soroete okimasu **kara**, soremade, koredakewa, kokoni azukete kudasai. Onegai shimasu »

By tomorrow noon, I will have collected 700 million yen, **so** please keep this here for me. I beg you!

Here, *kara* establishes a request condition: the promise to collect the sum constitutes the prerequisite for the fulfillment of the request. The relationship is no longer causal but pragmatic, with *kara* negotiating the conditions for acceptance. The analysis shows that *kara* operates according to conditional pragmatics, in which strictly causal relations represent only one particular case within a broader system.

Taken together, these analyses point to a fundamental asymmetry between *kara* and its English/French counterparts *because/parce que*. Where *because* and *parce que* remain tethered, in their default and most frequent uses, to a strictly causal relation inherited from the Enlightenment logics discussed above—cause preceding and necessarily connected to effect—*kara* operates at a more abstract pragmatic level, of which causality is only one instantiation among several (condition, generalization, justification, request). This is not simply a matter of polysemy: it reflects a difference in what the connective is fundamentally for. *Because/parce que* encode a relation between events or propositions; *kara* encodes a relation between a speaker's utterance and its conditions of acceptability in discourse. As a result, the authors claim that the consequences of this asymmetry are pedagogical rather than just terminological: if teachers remain unaware of it, *kara* and 'because' will continue to be treated as interchangeable in academic writing classrooms, directly shaping how students construct, and are assessed on, causal reasoning in English.

Methodology and Corpus

This study draws on a contrastive analysis of oral corpora to examine interlinguistic transfer in the argumentative uses of *parce que*, comparing native speakers and Japanese learners of French. The learner corpus consists of seven hours of semi-structured

interviews in Eastern and Western Japan in 2021 with Japanese learners of French at CEFR levels B1 to C2, aged from their 20s to their 60s, collected with participants' consent and ethics clearance from the main author's affiliation in 2021; the interviews followed a protocol designed to elicit argumentative discourse, covering topics such as education, remote work, and learners' relationship to French. The native corpus comprises 150 hours of interviews drawn from the Enquête SocioLinguistique à Orléans (ESLO2) corpus. This methodological design prioritizes spontaneous spoken data in order to capture pragmatic priming phenomena that are more likely to surface in oral production than in written language, thereby revealing underlying L1-based argumentative structures where "L1" refers to Japanese in our case. All occurrences of *parce que* were analyzed for their argumentative function and classified according to a three-part typology adapted from Moeschler (2009) and Shirakawa (1995, 2009): conditional use, expressing hypothetical relations and generalizing use, and linking causal chains to construct argumentative inferences. This classification enables the quantitative identification of pragmatic priming phenomena prior to qualitative analysis. This empirical base lends further support to the claims developed so far, and points to a clear gap: no comparable corpus currently exists for English and building one would allow the asymmetry identified here to be tested directly rather than inferred by extension from French. Despite their paucity, English productions of Japanese learners that are analysed in this study come from major EFL corpora, including VOICE (2021).

Argumentation in French

Takagaki's research (2011) shows that French and Japanese rely on different mechanisms of discursive cohesion, which helps explain Japanese learners' struggles with argumentation in that target language. Indeed, French favors explicit cohesion, characterized by systematic marking of coreference that clearly guides the recipient's interpretive path. Responsibility for textual coherence lies primarily with the writer, who must provide the linguistic cues necessary for reconstructing the reasoning. Conversely, Japanese favors a looser structure with implicit cohesion, delegating the interpretive work to the interlocutor and relying on "associative linkage," in which coreference is not systematically indicated. This "associative linkage" is the causal and argumentative links that the interlocutor must reconstruct from contextual and pragmatic cues. Studies (Huang, 2022; Takagaki, 2011) reveal that learners transfer discursive habits from their mother tongue into French, creating a mismatch with the normative expectations of explicit cohesion in French.

Structural Similarities and Differences Between *kara* and *parce que*

The comparative analysis conducted by Akihiro (2016) on oral corpora reveals a complex system of convergences and divergences between *kara* and *parce que*, which is particularly enlightening for understanding how Japanese learners misuse *parce que*. On the syntactic level, the two connectives show remarkable functional similarities: both operate as dependent and non-dependent conjunctions, allowing flexible syntactic integration into various phrasal configurations. This structural compatibility facilitates syntactic priming from L1 to L2.

However, the discursive autonomy of *kara* constitutes a major distinction. Unlike *parce que*, *kara* can function as an autonomous final particle, going beyond its strict causal function to fulfill an interpersonal role (e.g., "tabako kaini iku **kara**" I am going to buy cigarettes). This property allows it to express relations that are not strictly causal, considerably expanding its pragmatic scope. It enables *kara* to operate beyond the simple expression of causality, assuming complex pragmatic functions in managing interaction. *Kara* can thus mark conditional relations, request strategies, or enunciative stances that exceed the bounds of strict causal meaning.

Analysis: English

Argumentation in English: The Role of Supporting Sentences

In academic English and English for Academic Purposes (EAP), the persuasiveness of an argument is largely shaped by the clarity of the topic sentence and the quality of the subsequent supporting sentences. This organization reflects an argumentative causal sequencing that is also observed in French, but distinct from Japanese discourse patterns. In other words, both intra-sentential and inter-sentential causal ordering in French and English follow similar discourse sequencing, which differs substantially from Japanese pragmatic causality. This explains why comparable discourse tendencies are observable in Japanese learners' argumentative productions in both French and English. As prescribed by a vast number of writing centers throughout the English-speaking world (Universities of Wisconsin; South California; Indiana, 2025), clearly stating the controlling idea in a strong topic sentence anchors all subsequent sentences to a coherent goal. Supporting sentences are then responsible for justifying that claim through facts, definitions, rationale, expert evidence, or examples that substantiate the paragraph's central claim, thereby enhancing the quality of the argument. Without such elaboration, an argument becomes less compelling because readers have no basis for accepting the stated claim as credible or convincing (Siekman et al., 2022; Mallahi, 2024). Instead of assessing the

strength of the argumentation, the recipient is tasked with the reconstruction of the chain of causality.

Contrasts in Sequencing

As mentioned above, Japanese favors a loosely structured discourse pattern with implicit cohesion, assigning interpretive responsibility to the interlocutor and relying on associative linkage rather than explicit coreference. Many native-speaking teachers of English or French appear to place greater emphasis on explicit linguistic markers and may be less inclined to infer implicit causal connections, partly in an effort to avoid over-interpretation. For example, when a learner states, “Remote work is beneficial. I don’t have to commute,” a teacher may hesitate to interpret the second proposition as a causal argument supporting the first. Although such a relation is readily inferable, the second proposition could also function as an illustration, an additional benefit, or simply an associated observation. Without an explicit causal marker such as *because*, *therefore*, or *as a result*, attributing a specific argumentative relation to the learner risks imposing an interpretation that has not been linguistically encoded. Consequently, teachers who prioritize explicit marking may encourage learners to make the intended relation overt rather than relying on the interlocutor to infer it. This generally leads to regular misalignments in how causality chains are structured across Japanese and foreign languages like French or English. Consequently, the resulting sequence of topic and supporting sentences often fails to meet the coherence and cohesion expectations of English readers. This in turn results in a diminished argumentative strength. Studies in EFL contexts (Hosoda, 2025; 2023) have documented that many learners conceptualize argumentation as merely expressing isolated claims without effectively connecting them to corresponding evidence and explanations, contributing to weaker overall arguments. This finding suggests that a coherent series of supporting sentences—which logically link back to a clear topic sentence—is a defining feature of strong argumentation in academic writing. Similarly, longitudinal studies of argumentative writing development in EAP settings highlight that elements such as data and warrants are crucial to substantive argument quality. When these elements are explicitly encoded in the text through supporting sentences, the writer’s argument is both more relevant and logically acceptable (Yang, 2025; Jackson, 2024). The explicit encoding of reasons and justifications means that supporting sentences do not simply repeat the claim but articulate how and why the evidence supports it, often through explanation and example. Such explicit structuring helps prevent gaps in logic that can weaken an argument.

Discussion

Integration of Cultural and Linguistic Referential

The analyses highlight the need to fundamentally rethink the teaching of argumentation in foreign languages by considering not only the linguistic features of the learners’ L1 (Qu, & Miwa, 2025; Serratrice, 2023), but also its cultural aspects. Developing argumentative writing competence in Japanese EAP and French writing contexts requires pedagogical approaches that recognize learners’ existing linguistic and cultural resources rather than imposing monolithic Anglo-academic norms. Japanese learners frequently demonstrate difficulty in producing the explicitly structured, generalized, and stance-driven arguments expected in academic writing (Hijikata, 2021). These challenges should not be interpreted as deficits but rather as manifestations of culturally and linguistically shaped discourse tendencies (Author, 2022) that can be alleviated when writing in a foreign language. We suggest a framework for activities that build on learners’ existing expression patterns while gradually scaffolding target-language argumentative conventions rather than surface-level textual conformity.

A central focus of instruction is therefore placed on teaching argumentation as a process of abstraction and generalization. Learners are guided from concrete, experience-based expressions toward more abstract, generalizable claims that characterize academic discourse. This developmental trajectory aligns with research showing that Japanese learners often rely heavily on examples and narrative elaboration, but underuse explicit generalization and claim articulation (Amiliah et al., 2025). To address this, the following pedagogical framework explicitly teaches the canonical structure of an English academic paragraph, particularly the organization of topic sentences followed by supporting sentences. Students learn that the topic sentence establishes the paragraph’s central claim, subsequent sentences elaborate or justify this claim, and an illustrative example serves to concretize the argument. Ideally, this example is further qualified and generalized, thereby transforming specific evidence into broader analytical meaning and creating a logical transition to the following paragraph.

To operationalize this developmental pathway, classroom activities are designed around an opinion → example → generalization sequence. This structure mirrors learners’ natural preferences for concrete exemplification while systematically guiding them toward abstract reasoning. Through repeated engagement with prototypical examples, students are likely to develop metalinguistic awareness of how specific experiences can be reframed as generalized academic claims. Game-based and pattern-recognition activities such as “odd-one-out” further support this process by encouraging learners to

identify, manipulate, and reconstruct paragraph components (Micallef & Newton, 2022), thereby internalizing the rhetorical logic of academic argumentation in an experiential and accessible manner.

An important component of this pedagogy is the explicit teaching of linguistic tools that enable generalization. Learners are introduced to strategies such as nominalization, subject adjustment, and syntactic restructuring, which allow them to shift from personal, concrete subjects (e.g., “I think,” “my friend”) to more abstract and academically appropriate formulations (e.g., “this tendency,” “such practices”) (Bychkovska & Lee, 2023). These tools empower students to reframe experiential content into disciplinary discourse, facilitating their entry into academic communities of practice.

Finally, instructions should foreground the argumentative function of connectors, particularly causal connectives. A distinction is drawn between causal usage, which merely explains reasons, and argumentative usage, which constructs logical justification and warrants (Schumann et al., 2021). By examining forms such as *parce que* in French or causal connectors in English, learners develop sensitivity to how grammatical choices contribute to argumentative force rather than simple explanation (Schumann et al., 2021). This focus aligns with emerging research on interlinguistic pragmatic transfer (Qian et al., 2020) and highlights the necessity of teaching not only what linguistic forms mean, but what they do in academic argumentation.

Together, these pedagogical principles promote the development of argumentation skills as a gradual, culturally responsive process, positioning Japanese EAP learners not as deficient novices but as developing academic writers whose existing discourse practices serve as foundations for advanced argumentative competence. For Japanese learners, the method draws on the particularly salient conditional dimension, reinforcing it and expanding argumentative scope through generalization by teaching the linguistic structures suited to this operation, which is very frequent in native argumentations according to the data.

Table 2
*Distribution of the uses of *parce que* among native speakers and learners of French*

	Conditional	Exemplification	Generalization	Total
Native Speakers	0 (0%)	44 (35%)	82 (65%)	126
Japanese Learners	7 (9,4%)	32 (41,6%)	38 (49%)	77

Generalization consists of using adequate linguistic devices, such as nominalization and expletive pronoun, to broaden causal relationships. A misuse of them can lead to weaker persuasiveness. Example [8] illustrates this process:

[8] Quelques entreprises continueront à télétravailler **parce qu’une** personne peut gagner beaucoup de temps.

[8] Some companies will continue to allow remote working **because** a person can save a lot of time.

This formulation presents a flaw in argumentative coherence: an individual example (“a person”) cannot logically justify a collective decision (“some companies”). The argument fails due to the mismatch between the scope of the example and that of the conclusion.

Correction through subject generalization can enhance the argumentative effectiveness.

[8a] Quelques entreprises continueront à télétravailler **parce qu’on** peut gagner beaucoup de temps.

[8a] Some companies will continue to allow working remotely **because** we can save a lot of time.

Substituting the generic pronoun “on”/“we” restores argumentative coherence by redirecting the discourse toward a generalization.

This integrative approach thus transforms interlinguistic specificities from obstacles into pedagogical levers, enhancing argumentative effectiveness in French or English.

This study has revealed the complexity of interlinguistic transfer phenomena and priming in the teaching of argumentation in FFL/EFL and aims to complement other approaches centered on writing and/or on the rhetorical norms of the target language (Huang, 2022; Takagaki, 2011). The analysis of Japanese learners’ productions shows that the specific features of the source language form the structural basis of explanatory sequences in French. In this respect, the conditional uses of *parce que* found in these learners reflect a conception of causality rooted in Japanese, yet they prove to be poorly suited as a persuasive strategy in French.

The recurrence of these uses suggests that they stem from an interlinguistic transfer that applies a native pragmatic competence rarely found among speakers of the target language. Furthermore, they reveal argumentative fragilities that call for intercultural adjustment.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that argumentative weakness in Japanese learners' French and English productions cannot be adequately explained by grammatical deficiency alone. Rather, it emerges from deeper discursive and pragmatic transfer effects rooted in Japanese causal structuring, particularly the predominance of conditional and implicit associative linkage. Through a discourse-functional typology of causality, this paper shows that the persuasive force of argumentation depends not simply on the presence of causal relations, but on their discursive organization into generalized, explicitly articulated causal chains.

The findings further reveal that Japanese learners' reliance on conditional causal patterns and example-based reasoning leads to underdeveloped generalization and weakened argumentative sequencing in both French and English. These patterns systematically affect the structuring of topic sentences and supporting sentences, resulting in arguments that remain interpretively coherent but rhetorically less persuasive in academic contexts.

From a pedagogical perspective, the proposed framework reconceptualizes argumentation instruction as a process of abstraction and generalization grounded in learners' existing discourse practices. By scaffolding the transition from concrete exemplification to generalized claims and explicitly teaching the linguistic tools that enable causal generalization, teachers can transform interlinguistic transfer from a source of difficulty into a pedagogical resource. This culturally responsive model thus provides a principled pathway for strengthening argumentative competence in Japanese EFL and FFL contexts.

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Bio Data

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Having taught English and French in higher education for over 10 years, **Sophie Otsuru** studied bilingual acquisition of prepositions for her MSc at Edinburgh University and now researches L2-L3 cross-linguistic transfer in vocabulary acquisition in Japan. She is also a PhD candidate at Juntendo University where she investigates how students negotiate content understanding through talk in a foreign language by examining peer dialogue in EMI classrooms. She also coordinates the university's International Learning Commons.

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