

Original Research Article

Applicability of Functional Theory to Secondary School Debate

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Abstract

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This paper unveils applicability of functional theory to debates held in a different cultural setting. The material for the paper was derived from Sri Lankan secondary school student debates. It included one hundred and four speeches produced in a competitive setting. The data was taped and transcribed so as to analyze it. One of the major objectives of the paper was to describe the general characteristics of Sri Lankan students' debates by the means of Functional Theory and to evaluate its applicability in terms of cultural use of language. In this paper, communicative culture was perceived beyond ordinary passing or exchanging of information. Rather, it also encompassed how participants communicated with one another in face - to - face setting bearing in mind genre specifics. Although functional theory has been applied to debates across many nations and its results seemed similar, in this paper, manifestations of communicative genre from the perspective of culture were apparent. Contrary to Benoit's predictions, defenses constituted most of the turns which was as a result of responses to attacks from other speakers. Although the FT has worked partly with the Sri Lankan secondary school student debates, the prediction did not manifest in relation to Benoit's claims, because the students debaters used more defenses than attacks, and more acclaims than attacks. The opposite in results could be explained by crucial role culture played in their communicative genre in which direct attacks and praising oneself are both detestable.

Keywords: Acclaims, Attacks, Communication, Culture, Defenses, Genre

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes characteristics of the students' debates by means of Functional Theory so as to evaluate its applicability to the genre of speech discourse typical of Sri Lankan students. This is aimed at ascertaining the extent to which one of the five Axioms of the theory formulated by Benoit (2007) could be applied to this study, and to demonstrate how the relevant predictions could be applied to spontaneous speech produced by students with a different cultural background from America—a country with a different cultural setting.

In Functional Theory of political discourse, Benoit (2007) defines three functions of political messages: acclaiming, attacking and defending. First, candidates use acclaims to praise their accomplishments (e.g. taking

credits for positive results, policy stance and personal qualities) McGraw (2000). In line with Benoit's theory, only Axiom Four was considered most relevant which says candidates establish preferability through acclaiming, attacking, and defending.

The Theory makes the following predictions. First, it is expected that debaters will use acclaims more frequently than attacks. Second, candidates will use attacks more frequently than defenses, Benoit (ibid). Thus, Acclaims refer to assertions or remarks which indicate that something is said to be true but yet to be proved, and the hearer may have believed it. Acclaims persuade, argue, convince, prove or provocatively suggest something to a listener who may or may not initially agree. Academic

claims are often complex, specific, detailed, and debatable or up for inquiry at least within a discipline, acknowledging that some questions are already settled, although they are subject to debate. Thus, academic acclaims exclude the following: 'it is my personal opinion, because my friends or relatives think so, or most people think so; it has always been, because it is a tradition; it is morally right'. Thus, a claim can be substantiated with research, evidence, and testimony. For these reasons, academic claims go on to address the question, 'so what' question, the implications and why certain things should be done. The illustration below indicates a brief debate in which a debater makes a claim in a school debate on the topic: 'This House will mandate all adults undergo compulsory marriage counseling'. See an example of a piece of acclaim below:

Excerpt (1). The divorce rate in Sri Lanka is 0.15 percent. Marriage counseling gives knowledge about family planning (1st Speaker Proposition).

Excerpt (2). Marriage counseling offers safe environment for specific anything. It helps to have deep understanding. It teaches the parties good communication skills, (2nd Speaker proposition).

Attack

Attacks can be defined as messages that provide negative information about a target and its behavior. As found in this paper, even a small piece of negative information can be harmful to the reputations of the target, as negative information is generally more salient than positive information. However, not all attempts at criticizing a person result in negative evaluation of the target. Yet, attacks often lead to more negative judgment of the source than of the target of criticism, a phenomenon known as the backlash effect Carrora et al. (2010). This effect derives from two simultaneous processes: first, when forming an impression about the target of an attack, the audience recognizes the message as an attempt at damaging the opponents' image rather than providing truthful information. Second, when forming an impression of the source of the attack, people make negative dispositional inferences based on its communicative behavior, thus, perceiving the source as aggressive and unscrupulous, rather than sincere. Candidates/speakers can attack their opponents on personal, party or policy issues. Attack consists of two basic elements, Pomerantz (1978). First, an act must be committed by one person, or group that appears to be offensive to another person or group. This may be an act of omission, commission, or poor performance of an action. Also, an attack can also be based on a trait or character (i.e. a person may be accused of possessing offensive qualities). However, if there is no offensive act or a condition, there can be no real attacks. Second, the accused or target of an attack must be perceived to be

responsible for that act by the relevant audience. S/he may be directly or indirectly responsible for the act. The accused may be thought to have performed, authorized, ordered, encouraged, or permitted the offensive act to occur. Even if there is an offensive act, if a person accused has nothing to do with it, it is unreasonable to blame him/her for such act.

Like Pomerantz (ibid), Benoit and Wells (1996) developed a typology of strategy for elaborating the offensiveness of a persuasive attack that is to be employed as the critical primary method for analyzing discourses. They identify and illustrate several strategies for enhancing the two types of attack: apparent offensiveness, and perceived responsibility. Six options can be increase perceived offensiveness: stressing the extent of the damage, emphasizing the persistence of the harmful effects, elucidating effects on the audience of the message, pointing out inconsistencies in the accuser's behavior, and arguing that the victim is affected.

Defense

While attacked by opponents, candidates can defend themselves, responding to external criticisms. Defenses are acts that protect arguments from opponents. It is interesting to note that there is a close synergy between attack and defense in that a target of an attack gives a debater an opportunity to defend, although there are situations in this paper where debaters defended against attacks that has not been made either preemptively, or as a straw argument. In any case, defenses have three setbacks: first, they are likely to take a debater off – message, because attacks are most likely to address opponents' weaknesses; second, defenses may create the impression that a debater is reactive rather than proactive; and third, defenses may remind or inform the audience that the points raised by the current speaker are not debatable at all. Furthermore, both attack and defense may have some setbacks. Attack can sometime backfire, resulting in more negative judgment of the source rather than of the target of attacks. The so – called, 'backlash' effects are especially evident when debaters attack their personal issues Carrora et al (ibid). Furthermore, Kim et al (2006) explain that blame avoidance can sometime backfire and expose the defending speaker as irresponsible, unreasonable, and ultimately untrustworthy. This is the case of many student debaters who devote much of their time responding to opponents' accusations and therefore risk being seen as excessively defensive and reactive.

Thus, in this survey, it was evident that most of the debaters often resorted to indirect communication as an indirect form of attacking or defending. As would be seen in the Tables below, when attacked, debaters tried to defend themselves and restore their image. As in the forms of attack, indirect and subtle forms of

Table 1. Turn - type frequency for debaters by Muslim Ladies College versus Anula College

Debate Topic: This House will allow unrestricted access to online academic Journals (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)

Speakers	1 st prop	1 st opp	2 nd prop	2 nd opp	3 rd prop	3 rd Opp	4 th prop	4 th opp	Total
Acclaims	2	2	4	1	4	0	0	0	13
Attacks	0	0	3	3	0	1	1	1	9
Defense	0	0	0	0	2	1	1	1	5
Address	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	3
Preamble	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	5
Report	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2
Greeting	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1

Table 2. Turn – type frequency for debaters by Royal College versus Colombo International School

Debate Topic: This House believes that Feminists should support Playboy (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)

[illegible]

Table 3. Turn –type frequency for debaters by Ladies College versus Nalanda College:

Debate topic: This House Believes that Government should Ban Illegal Downloading of Academic Journals

Speakers	1 st prop	1 st opp	2 nd prop	2 nd opp	3 rd prop	3 rd opp	4 th prop	4 th opp	Total
Acclaims	4	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	9
Attacks	0	3	4	0	0	11	3	3	27
Defense	1	6	3	6	10	0	4	4	34
Address	1	1	0	1	1	1	1	1	7
Preamble	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Report	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greeting	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1

Table 4. Turn – type frequency for debaters by Saint Lawrence College versus Convent College versus Elizabeth Moir College

Debate Topic: This House will Mandate that all Adults undergo compulsory marriage counseling (Lecture Auditorium University of Colombo)

[illegible]

Table 5. Turn -type frequency for debaters by Methodist College versus D.S. Senanayake College:**Debate topic:** This House will not allow Anti – religious videos on Social Media sites. (Lecture Auditorium University of Colombo)

Speakers	1 st prop	1 st opp	2 nd prop	2 nd opp	3 rd prop	3 rd opp	4 th prop	4 th opp	Total
Acclaim	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	7
Attack	0	4	4	3	2	4	8	0	25
Defense	0	4	5	4	5	5	2	9	34
Address	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	5
Preamble	1	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	5
Report	0	1	1	1	0	0	2	0	5
Greeting	0	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	3

Table 5. Turn – type frequency for intra – school debaters by Lyceum International School**Debate Topic:** Co – education Moulds children better than Single – sex education (Classroom Auditorium Lyceum International School)

Speakers	1 st prop	1 st opp	2 nd prop	2 nd opp	3 rd prop	3 rd opp	4 th prop	4 th opp	Total
Acclaim	3	6	2	1	3	0	nil	Nil	15
Attack	0	0	3	1	3	1	nil	Nil	8
Defense	0	0	3	3	0	3	nil	Nil	9
Address	0	1	0	1	1	0	nil	Nil	3
Preamble	0	1	0	0	0	0	nil	Nil	1
Report	0	0	1	0	0	0	nil	Nil	1
Greeting	0	1	1	0	0	0	nil	Nil	2

Table 6. Turn – type frequency for intra – school debaters by Zahira College:**Debate Topic:** Television Programmes are more dangerous than Guns (Classroom Auditorium Zahira College)

Speakers	1 st prop	1 st opp	2 nd prop	2 nd opp	3 rd prop	3 rd opp	4 th prop	4 th opp	Total
Acclaim	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Attack	0	0	4	2	1	1	1	0	9
Defense	2	3	0	3	0	2	0	2	12
Address	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	2
Preamble	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Report	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Greeting	1	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	3

communication may be used to defend, not only for the avoidance of backlash, but as a mark of compliance to cultural norms. In addition to what Benoit (2007) identifies as functions in debates, in the current research too, it was discovered that speakers in debates also produced utterances which did not fall within the three functions identified. These include addressing, greeting, preambles, and reporting.

Excerpt (3). Experience plays a major role in married life because children learn from their parents. If you want to know family planning and the consequences, you see a specialized doctor, not marriage counselor, (3rd Speaker Opposition).

The debate began with the 1st and 2nd Speakers of the Proposition team making strong claims first, on the divorce rate in Sri Lanka which was buttressed by the 2nd Speaker offering specific examples of the benefits of marriage counseling. The 3rd Speaker Opposition

attacked the Proposition team with a question on those claims using a rhetorical question, and at the same time provides the answer. 'Do we need counselor to communicate?' 'No!' (3rd speaker opposition).

Addressing in Debate Discourse

The use of address forms is one of the most obvious linguistic means that mark and establish the type of relationship between interactants. Brown and Gilman (1972) have analyzed the use of pronouns in European languages and revealed that languages such as French, German, Italian, and Spanish which have two forms for 'you', one for people who deserve deference either because their social status is above the speaker, or because the speaker does not have a sufficiently close personal relationship with them and their specific use in

discourse. Brown and Gilman (*ibid*) propose that the choice of these two forms is basically governed by two semantics, which they call power and solidarity. While 'power' derives from higher or lowers social status, solidarity comes from intimacy and shared fate. The less powerful person uses the deferential pronoun *X* to the more powerful one, and receives the familiar pronoun *Y* in return. However, in social situations (like debates) non reciprocal patterns are used.

In addition to Brown and Gilman (*ibid*), a number of other researchers have identified the significance of addressing in social gathering. For instance, Ervin-Trip (1986) cites a real life example in which a white policeman, after realizing a black psychologist's social identity, still insists on addressing him as 'boy' even though the Psychologist is a doctor. The policeman's perlocutionary act was just to demean and insult his addressee. This explains that the manipulation of language in order to exploit a certain class of people thereby breaking the interactional norms, and gaining selfish desires cannot only be considered as a deviant, colloquial, but sheer rudeness and unacceptable in all social settings.

Chao (1976) classifies address into (1) vocatives or terms of direct address to call participants and (2); designative, or mentioning terms, which one uses as part of addressing a person. Constrained by debate conventions, the debaters in this research were opposed to address one another as vocatives, but mainly designative. However, this convention was only observed at the time one was the current speaker. Members of the audience who have chanted solidarity or mockery chose between vocative and designative. However, the second and the fourth speakers of the opposing team of the debate between Muslim Ladies College and Anula College; the fourth speaker of the opposing side of the debate between Ladies College and Colombo International School; the second speaker of the opposing government of the debate between Saint Lawrence College Convent College violated this convention, i.e. use of obscurity of expression and ambiguity. These speakers did not make any direct reference to the target audience. Although their utterances may be considered obscure, the context of utterance, and the people at the time of speech production could provide listeners with adequate information on who was being addressed. This address strategy has added to Chao (1976) classification that in a real speech situation, speakers may neither use vocative nor designative.

In line with observation, Dickey (1997) in her understanding of variation of addressing someone, says the numbers of different ways in which a person can be referred to are virtually infinite.

It would be ridiculous to attempt to decide how a given person is normally referred to, just as it would be pointless to try to find the normal way in which that person is addressed. Both address and reference vary

according to the speaker's relationship to the address, or person referred to, (p.259).

Dickey's claim seems to correspond with the result of this finding because students consistently varied their use of address forms, depending on socio – cultural, and other situational factors. Examples of greeting in a debate proceeding from this data, 'Mr. Speaker, members of the House...' were Conventional as the speakers used designations.

Personal Names

Personal names represent the most prolific forms of address identified. They are made up of primary names and secondary name. True names are acquired at birth through culturally accepted arrangements. Aceto (2002) argues that true names often remain with a person although they may be changed through a new status acquired by marriage or other circumstances. A secondary name or appellative may be acquired by an individual as s/he grows up. Such name can be given by family members, friends, neighbors, or acquaintances in schools, community, workplace, etc. Afful (2006).

An interesting address form, descriptive phrase (DP) constitutes the most frequently used address form as it provides a description of an addressee such that the listener knows that s/he is being addressed; thus fundamentally functioning as either attention seeker, or an identifier. However, mistaken identity may occur in a situation where two or more people have similar descriptive identities. Yet, some cultures constrain people from addressing people with their primary names. Nevertheless, since addressing takes place in a particular live situation, the use of demonstrative pronouns *this/that/ these/those*, accompanied with a stare at the person being referred to can be effective means of identifying persons such as, 'gentleman sitting very close to the wall', 'this lady,' or names comprising linguistic status such as *alumnus* of a particular school, etc. may serve the purpose. Where one is again constrained by cultural norms from staring at the person, titles such as *Sir/Madam, Dr., Engr., Prof., Rev., Ven., Sheik, Emir, His Excellency, Your Highness, Your Majesty, Honorable, Prince, Princess*, etc. may be used.

In more deliberative communication as observed in this research, student debaters never addressed one another in nicknames, or primary names despite the fact that most of the participants were familiar to another. Rather, they used various form of designative names which reflected their current social functions in the debates. Throughout the exercise, participants' names have been supplanted by their secondary names which were more popular among the participants.

In line with real parliamentary debate systems, the student debaters addressed the coordinators of the program as 'Sir', 'Madam Chair', or a group with the

designation 'Members of proposition/ opposition' as the case may be, or honorific such as 'Honorable Members of the House'. The students' depiction of real debate proceedings explained their commitment, and understanding of genre functions.

Greeting

Another turn function discovered in this research was greeting. Eibl –Eibesfeldt (1977) defines greetings as rituals of appeasing and bonding members of a particular social setting who have face – to – face encounters. This presupposes that humans are potentially aggressive were it not for such adaptive rituals of greetings, individuals would have been involved in anti-social acts capable of causing rancor Kenon and Ferber (1973). This paper unveiled that greetings were not regularly practiced by most Sri Lankan student debates despite wide spread evidence that greetings are important aspects of communicative competence, necessary for being members of the discourse community of school debating across the globe.

In most social setting, there were systematic ways of determining what qualities greetings should be even though there are universal ways of greetings; some communities have activity specifics of greetings. For instance, the Americans informally say, 'hi!', 'Hey!' How are you doing? What's up?

Greetings are expected to occur at the beginning of social encounters, although they may not always be the very first words that are exchanged between parties. The first feature of greetings is related to their potential function as attention – getting devices and their abilities to establish a shared field of interaction. There are differences however, in the timing of greetings. In some cases, talks may be exchanged before the actual greetings take place and are quite extended including long sequences of verses of that are responded to by the parties.

Although it is possible to speak of greetings being a typical part of one or more adjacency pairs, that is, two – part sequences in which the first pair part by one party 'A' 'invites, and creates the expectation for a particular type of reply by another party, 'B' such adjacency pair structure makes sense only if greetings are exchanged in which participants test each other's relationship. However, in the debates under investigation, adjacency pair pattern of greeting was lacking because the setting did not require an immediate response to greetings. Rather, greetings in this regard served to fulfill social, institutional and perhaps cultural obligations which may imply that *all are friends* which allow debate participants to engage in a joint activity that exhibits some evidence of mutual recognition and understanding.

Paradigmatically, the use of greetings (as opposed to its absence) identifies a group of people as members of

the same discourse community. Such a cultural imperative, however, is understood against the background of a social world in which avoiding greetings would be interpreted as a potential threatening situation, Yousssouf et al. (1976). On the other hand, many close contact greetings are accompanied by hand shakings which others interpret as a common gesture of trust, Firth (1972). Generally, greetings are more than expressions of a psychological state. Rather, they compel participants to deal with a wide range of issues of an individual or group's right to have access to information about whereabouts, culture - specific expectations, and the force of questioning as a form of social responsibility, while withholding information is considered a resistance to moral obligations Yousssouf (ibid). In the example of greeting which begin with: 'A very good evening to all of you here today', may be perceived to be informal in that no specific addressee is referred to. However, the use of the pronoun, 'you' and demonstrative 'here' indicated a particular group of people being identified within a frame of time and space.

Preamble

The third function of turn that is called preamble. It is defined as the way and manner in which a speaker introduces her/his topic in a discourse. This includes the first sentence, and the intended discourse segments which the listener is expected to follow. This aspect can also be referred to as staging because it is a dimension of discourse structure which identifies the relative prominence given to various segments of a discourse. The definition of staging also includes rhetorical devices like lexical selection, repetition, use of metaphor, and markers of emphasis which aid at drawing the attention of the listener. This aspect of discourse presentation constitutes a vital part of the students' debates, and should not be ignored when considering their speech because it is at this stage that the listener knows the speaker's focus, what is expected, and how the whole argument is structured. Consider this which is a piece of preamble:

Members of proposition and opposition, the topic of our discussion today are 'This House will allow unrestricted access to online academic journals'. We the proposition already mentioned point of this debate today. So, within the course of my speech, I will mention three key issues of my debate today. I will show you how the proposition stands high to solve that motion. So, moving to my first key issue of the overwhelming need to pass this motion of the need to restrict online academic journals... (3rd Speaker Proposition).

Neglecting the piece of the above discourse in an analysis is tantamount to ignoring the function of introduction in every academic presentation because some speakers at least in research keep making

reference to their introduction to emphasize their arguments, and that strategy often keeps the audience on track.

Reporting

Reporting is another function significant aspect of speakers' turns in debate. Reporting, or projected utterance could be linguistic markers such as use of pronouns, transpositions in syntactic person, or verb tense, speech act verbs, changes in tone or voice, etc. which often, the student debaters made to quote either themselves, or opponents during the course of their presentations. In dealing with reporting, two aspects of reports have been identified: direct and indirect speeches are often used to refer to past utterances and are embedded in personal narratives. In reporting, though speakers are not under any obligation to provide a verbatim recall of what is originally said, Clark and Gerring, (1990) says:

Quotations are types of demonstrations just you demonstrate how games are played...so, you can demonstrate what a person did in saying something. They said quotations serve as replications of what the speaker wants to convey to the recipient. They argue that quotations have two functions. First, detachment, 'when speakers quote, they take responsibility only for presenting the quoted matter – and only for the aspects they choose to depict. Second, it directs experience: when we hear an event quoted, it is as if we directly experience the depicted aspects of the original event (p. 74).

Elaborating on Gerring (ibid), McArthur (1998) rather identifies four types of reporting a discourse: direct speech, indirect speech, free speech, and free direct speech. The researcher indicates that the major markers of direct speech (DP) are the exact words in the report and the quotation marks in writing and print; indirect speech (IS) conveys the report in words of the reporter, with verbs generally back shifted in tense and changes in pronouns and adverbials of time and place are made to align with speech. Free direct speech (FDS) lacks a reporting clause to show the shift from narration to reporting; it is often used in fiction to present the mental reactions of characters to what they see, or experience; Free indirect speech (FIS) resembles indirect speech in shifting tenses and other references, but there is generally no reporting clause and it retains some features of direct speech such as direct questions, and vocatives.

One great advantage that free indirect speech has over others is that it saves people from the burden of recalling every detail expressed by the speaker. Furthermore, when the speaker is independent of any linguistic commitment, s/he possesses certain freedom such that even incomplete sentences can manifest which allows the inner states of the speaker to express his/her

experience which would have been constrained under direct speech situation.

In all the so called reporting speeches analyzed in this study, there is no single occurrence in which the current speaker was able to quote either his/her fellow team member, or opponents correctly. Instead, free indirect speaker speeches characterized their reports. Consider the illustrations below.

Excerpt (1).*Original utterance*: the music industry in Britain, er – the music industry actually earns 350 million dollars (1st speaker proposition, Ladies College).

Reported speech: it's rather ridiculous to talk about 350 million dollars (1st speaker opposition Ladies College).

Excerpt (2).*original utterance*: we put the legal framework in place. We have given access to courts and legal system. We can't have further right (1st speaker opposition Ladies College).

Reported speech: we put the law, that's what we can do (2nd speaker proposition).

Excerpt (3) .*original utterance*: we need to address the core problem of illegal downloading rather than compensation, and secondly, our second argument whether it makes economic sense. Firstly, the music industry is a private industry. We need to understand that market forces govern this industry and we need to understand that 2nd speaker proposition (Ladies College).

Reported utterance: The first speaker said today – when the government intervenes – when the government compensates the music industry, the government is intervening in a private industry.

While it is argued that FIS is the best reporting strategy a speaker should adopt, McArthur (1998), and the current researcher however argue that it is not a healthy practice for amateur debaters because from all indications, what these students rather did was to construct false reports and assigned them to their opponents so that they could have a better ground to link the opponents' claims with a sort of weakness which might be considered a sheer lie. The students succeeded in adopting this style because they knew that the listening skill was basically a perennial problem among virtually all the students. These students failed to realize that listeners' attitudinal state may well be one of the most significant influences on argumentative discourse productions. Unfortunately, many of the student debaters were passive listeners and this was being manifested in misinterpretation, inadequately processing information, and the inability to report exactly what has just being uttered.

Measuring instrument/methodology

In order to meet the requirement of the interactive nature of students in socio – cultural context in which debates occurred, linguistic and non – linguistic data was obtained by audio tape recorder and observation of speech during the competitive interactions. Tape recorder offered the

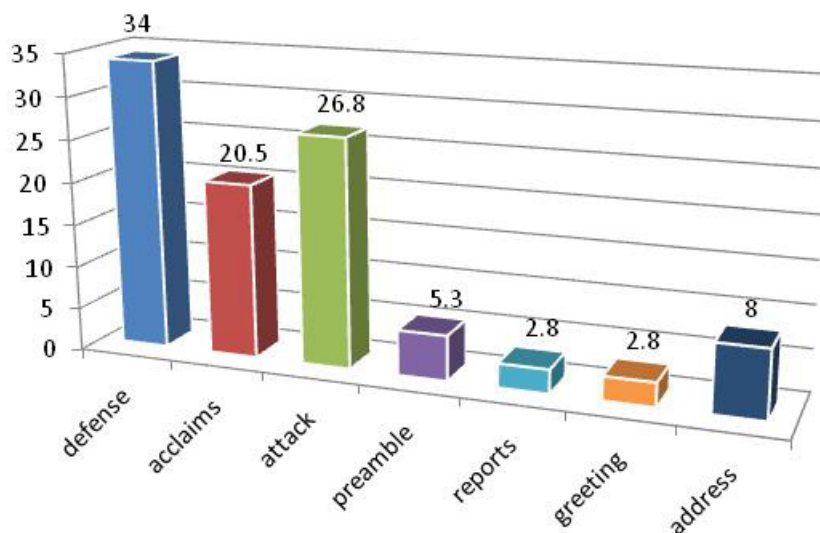


Figure 1. Applicability of the Functional theory to student debates

researcher with dense linguistic information while field notes offered an opportunity to jot down non – linguistic materials which could not be part of audio recording. The field notes were made as soon as possible after an observation was made. This became necessary because the human being what it is, might not recall everything if left for some time. Similarly, the researcher engaged as a participant observer in order to gain insights into conventional, cultural, social and linguistic practices of the population. For the sake of accuracy, the current researcher transcribed the recorded debates into written form, because students' speech become research data only if it was transposed from its original form of production to the activity in which it could be analyzed. The language of the data was English and the students' proficiency level was higher immediate.

For the description of turn – taking, 'turn' was defined as a stretch of speech uttered by one speaker that consisted of one or more utterances. An utterance was defined as the sequence of words between punctuation marks in the part of speech annotation tier.

For this study, both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies were selected based on their distinctive advantages in interpreting human experiences. Practically, it was impossible considering space to involve all Sri Lankan secondary school students' debates. Consequently, the researcher relied on a sample of the population. The results of the survey were trustworthy only from the point of representation.

Each turn was coded as, acclaim, attack, or defense and their accompanying components which includes: greeting, preamble, address and reporting. Items of each turn were counted and presented in simple percentage while certain cultural and social manifestation which could not be accounted for qualitatively was explained quantitatively

RESULTS/DISCUSSIONS

There are a total of eighty turns in all the debates. From the illustrations above, it could be seen that debaters switched freely between multiple functions-acclaims, attacks, defenses, addresses, reports and preambles. Indicated below is statistical evidence of the functions, using modified functional theory. This provides an insight into the applicability of Benoit's prediction. See the Figure 1 above.

Out of 2,483 clause complexes produced in the debates, the most common turn with the highest frequency is defenses, followed by acclaims then attacks while addresses have the least frequency.

As it could be seen, some of the defenses are responses to the other candidates' attacks which were quite often long and for all attacks, they responded to what opponents have said earlier. Some of the attacks were in form of questions. Rarely was the occurrence of direct attacks, but there were several turns which have some sort of criticism or challenge which could better be coded as attacks rather than any other functions.

CONCLUSION

While Benoit (2007) coded some turns as belonging to acclaims, defenses, and attacks, the present researcher discovers through analysis that some aspects of genre do not consist of any sort of definition.

Although the Axiom does function partly with Sri Lankan students' debate genre, the prediction does not seem to work very well as the theory has predictions about the frequency of the three main functions – attacks will occur more frequently than defenses. However, in this research, the students used defenses far more than

attacks which gave an opposite result. This could be attributed to the cultural communication within the Sri Lankan context in which direct attacking in speech was not encouraged because the essence of such a discourse community was to maintain harmony so that conflicting terms were avoided. This means that, communication culture has a great impact on discourse community of this nature.

In this regard, the present researcher wishes to advise that the theory needs further development so as to account for neutral discourse in turn-taking communication. Furthermore, Benoit (2007) failed to realize that all defenses were as a result of attacks which could be cultural.

Finally, although the Sri Lankan student debaters possessed a fair knowledge of intelligibility in terms of discourse use, cultures played a significant role in the students discourse community of students' debaters. Consequently, the present researcher wishes to reiterate that any theory that tests communication genre in the 21st century should take into cognizance local communication cultures.

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