

# TOPICS, DOMINATION, AND CONTROL: AN ANALYSIS OF TURN – TAKING IN STUDENTS DEBATES

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## ABSTRACT

*Whereas many communicative processes are produced as spontaneous processes, some processes of communicative transmission such as the academic debates are fixed in genres. This means that the composition of a series of communicative elements and the various possibilities of their implementation are pre - patterned. As a discourse community, the transmission of socially relevant knowledge and sharing of socially communicative responsibilities and membership relied on conventionalized patterns, because virtually all members are familiar with the genres. Thus, the knowledge of a communicative process with a specific function occurring in certain social situations has guided the students' communication actions as well as their interpretations. The increasing percentage of time the current speaker spends in audience/participants directed gazes as the episodes draws to an end indicate that the floor is about to be relinquished, preparing the debate coordinator to announce the taking over of the floor by another speaker from the other team. Similarly, the Sri Lankan culture presents an interesting scenario in which prolonged eye contacts or repeated head nods could be interpreted as a request for the participant to interrupt. On the other hand, speakers stare at their audience than at their interlocutors while talking. One possible reason for this trend of communication is that, by looking away, speakers have improved their concentration on their verbal messages. Status hierarchy is formed and maintained throughout communication process by the means of allocating roles. This form of social dominance is established on who performs certain function within the social order. Thus, first and last speakers of both proposition and opposition teams assume sort domination and control.*

**Keywords:** *debate, turn – taking, genre, power, domination, control.*

## INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on how student debaters overwhelmingly cooperate in turn –taking and to account for effect of cultural constraints on turn sizes. Also, the paper is designed to explain the strategies employed by the students in order to produce sequences of utterance that are constructed and built upon each other to produce a stretch of discourse. Turns are constructed out of turn – construction units (TCU) which can vary in size or length and linguistic texture, (Herman, 1998, p.21). Each speaker is entitled to having a turn to one such unit, the completion

(speakers may be required to relinquish the floor if his/her time finishes in institutionalized debates) of which constitutes an initial transition relevance place or TCP (Sacks et al 1974, p.403) where speakership changes. Itakura (2001) argues that everyday conversation (debate inclusive) is rarely symmetrical; rather, it is asymmetry which could be the cause of one speaker's dominating over others as longer turns may hinder access to the floor for potential speakers, (Herman, p.21). (Itakura, *ibid*, p.188) describes conversational dominance as, 'a multi-dimensional construct consisting of sequential, participatory and quantitative dimensions'. According to Itakura a speaker can be seen to exercise quantitative conversational dominance in the excerpt measured in terms of number of words spoken by participants. On the other hand, Fairclough (1994) acknowledges political position, social values and awareness of unequal relations of power in society involving hierarchical dimensions of domination and subordination, and a consciousness of how language contributes to the domination of some people by others. He further understands discourse and texts as other areas where people suffer from inequality.

Since language portrays differentiation in social stratum, it then implies that language could be used for both good and bad intentions. Similarly, Fairclough (*ibid*) gives interpretive stage of descriptive socio-linguistic conventions in which he offers credible understanding of the interrelationship of language and social practices. According to Fairclough (*ibid*), hierarchical social relationships of authority, control and manipulation are natural state of affair which is embedded in language and people behavior is borne out of inequalities in society. By implication, one's social status affects s/he linguistic application as Eheart and Bauman (2009) lament that linguistic recipes guide what people say and do in a particular role in a specific situation, and that language has the power to create social culture, and words are used to communicate more than informational contents; they communicate the image and personality since words produced have personal characteristics on the users.

## METHODOLOGY

The procedure of this paper was accompanied through analysis based on the evidence of talks that were produced by members of a discourse community of Sri Lanka secondary school student debates. The way to study the talks were through recording in audio tape of naturally occurring events. The analysis was conducted by replaying and listening, whilst transcribing it such that the analyst became familiar with the data even before the analysis began. The analyst only transcribed what was audible and seeable in the data, and interpreted it through the context of the talks. Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were employed. The use of tape recorder and observations have revealed further ways in which the analyst mobilized a range of linguistic and non linguistic elements in the analysis of the interactions.

The quantitative method was used to account for turn-sizes, while qualitative technique was employed to explain causes of domination using culture as well as discourse conventions.

Eleven Sri Lankan secondary schools were involved in the live debates that made up the data, and they included: D.S. Sennayake College versus Methodist College; Muslims Ladies College versus Anula College; Ladies College versus Nalanda College; Saint Lawrence Convent College versus Methodist College; Intra school debate by Lyceum International College; Intra school debate by Zahira College; Royal College versus Colombo International School. These schools represented three major religious and ethnic groups in Sri Lanka.

## ANALYSIS /RESULTS

### Topics

In secondary school debating programme, students debated a different topic in each debate. The topics for each tournament were chosen in advance by teachers /administrators as the case may be, and was released seven day days before each competition. This process allowed teachers to integrate research, preparations and practice into after school sessions. Students overwhelmingly reported that they enjoyed having debate on diversity of topics. Furthermore, coaches and students adapted topics which reflected contemporary political, social crises and issues of immediate concern to the community. Usually, senior coaches who were themselves debaters but currently did not have teams to coach were chosen to discuss and select themes for the debate. The themes were selected based on current global and local issues, depending largely on whether or not the debate was a local one or meant for international competitions although, even global matters that have localized effects were sometimes debated upon. For instance, in the 2014 debate tournament that just ended in Sri Lanka, a recent global issue was debated, '*This House support the use of Experimental Drugs on Ebola patients irrespective of their Consent*'. When a theme was selected, the participants were informed, but the actual topic was kept secret until the very day of the competition, usually 15- 30 minutes preparatory time was given.

Topic authors carefully examined each topic; they also considered tournament topics that were balance and diverse with three or four topics for a league tournament. In particular, topic authors, league officials or tournament hosts evaluated the topics to ensure that students debated some familiar issues as well as more challenging and lesser – known matters. Due to the serious nature of educational tasks, debate topic writing involved the efforts of several people. Consequently, trusted people reviewed the topics before final topic was announced.

In Sri Lankan debating society, a discussion with the Society's President, Mr. M. B.M. Sajith revealed interesting information in which he said, 'no topic was a taboo as we debate on every topic so long as the topic has a case (proposition/opposition) whether or not the topic is controversial. However, we try to avoid topics that have effects on personal individuals'.

Debating on flexible topics taught students about a wide variety of events and policies as it encouraged students to adapt their arguments to the subject at hand, while relying on original research on a continuing basis. This strategy motivated the students to seek for different sources of information so as to help them debate issues of interest. The researcher's observation has shown that students appeared to be doing a very serious original research in their debates as they consulted the internet, libraries, and other sources of relevant information. Furthermore, debating on varieties of topics has taught a unique skill which impromptu argumentation and interdisciplinary learning. In addition, the ability to debate on changing topics mirrored and amplified classroom competence as the ability to speak in an informed way on varieties of topics were critical to success in secondary school and beyond.

Secondary school student debates comprised both extemporaneous topics and impromptu topics. An extemporaneous debate is one for which students have limited preparation before debating. There may be several weeks for thinking about the topics, researching the main points of arguments for and against the topic and carefully organizing some notes about the better arguments. An impromptu topic is one that is not known before the debate is ready to begin. In Sri Lankan secondary school student debates, both topic types described above have been debated upon. Generally, debate topics are classified according to colonies. For instance, under **environmental** issues, the following topics are debated: 'This House Believes that it is high time that China takes the leadership in initiatives counteracting climate change initiatives'.

'This House makes agro – chemical companies pay for medical treatments of farmers suffering from chronic kidney disease'.

'This House will protest the reclamation of the sea in order to construct luxurious commercial cities'.

**Human right:** 'This House will hold entities /organizations maintaining private information of others in databases liable for damage caused by security breaches'

**International:** 'This House supports the relocation of all Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza to neighboring Arab countries'.

'This House believes that the economic sanctions on Russia relation will be counter – productive'.

'This House believes it is better to embrace Assad than to support the Jihadists in Syria'.

**Popular culture:** 'This House mourns the glorification of hipsters (hipsters who associate themselves with a non – conformist sub culture that promotes sense of detached discontentment with all thing mainstreams)'.

‘This House will reject popular culture that encourages youths not to pursue economic wealth’.

Coaches narrowed down debate topics to clear world issues; they avoided a broad discussion of various physical and metaphysical dangers that confronted the world. Instead, coaches encouraged students to be clear, hard fight debate topics between directly opposed sides as coaches/teams also defined the scope. The scope of a debate is simply the part of the world which should be included in the definition. For instance, in the topic: ‘that school should be longer’. The definition of school should be definite to include a specific scope because the world has different time zones and circumstances of the world like, ‘we’ or ‘us’. Even if the topic does not have such a word, teams still need to clearly set down the scope. It is important to realize that setting the scope is about limiting the area for which a topic must be proven and not about limiting the material that can be introduced.

In a debate limited to Sri Lankan situation which says, ‘that we should reintroduce the death penalty’, the scope should probably be narrowed to Sri Lanka, but teams could still look to policies in countries which have the death penalty to demonstrate what might happen if it were reintroduced in Sri Lanka. Also, when setting out a debate topic, coaches considered the age and experience of the debaters to ensure suitability so that topics chosen did not give unfair advantage to either side. On the other hand, literal topics that drew on their interests and knowledge were encouraged for young novice debaters. As they got mature in experience and understanding, literal topics that drew on wider knowledge which were complicated in structures were introduced.

At a competition, students arrived and registered for debates. They came to a central place, Faculty of Law, University of Colombo where the pairing for debates were posted or kept. The pairing sheets gave students information about the upcoming debate, including what side (proposition or opposition) they were represent; who their judges would be, and the room number for their debate. Once all students have had a chance to see the pairing sheets, the topic for the debate was announced. Students were given 15 – 30 minutes of preparation time to create their notes for the debate. At the conclusion of the preparation time, the debate must begin.

The preparation time was usually one of the most exciting times of the competition. Students summarized relevant parts of their notes, outlined their speeches and worked with other students on their team or squad to gather last minute ideas for arguments and speaking techniques. The time pressure of the preparation time has encouraged students to work together in a dynamic way as they constructed arguments, organized themselves and others into ad hoc collective learning communities. Materials created prior to the preparation time were not permitted in the debate itself. This means that students could not read out a speech that someone else wrote for them.

### Turn – taking in Institutionalized Discourse

Spontaneous speeches such as school debates could accommodate a wide range of situations as they are tools for interaction in which persons of various identities were operating. For this reason, it was sensitive to various combinations that required a formal approach that itself was context-sensitive such as the whole exercise manifested an appropriate sort of general and particular potentials. The extents of size of turns were equal and their ordering was pre-specific, valued and shaped as appropriate to the genre of debates. Furthermore, there were various unit – types which speakers set out to construct a turn. Unit – types of English include: sentential clausal, phrasal, and lexical constructions. For the unit – types, a speaker was entitled to just a turn unit, and the possible completion of a first such unit constituted an initial transition – relevance place. Transfer of speakership was coordinated not only by debate conventions and discourse community norms but also by reference to such T R P.

In this study turn – allocation techniques were distributed into two groups: (a) those in which the next turn was allocated at the completion of the current speaker; (b) those in which the next turn was allocated according to a hierarchy of speakership in a particular team: proposition versus opposition. Thus, at the completion of the current first speaker proposition, the first speaker of the opposing party was obliged to take the turn and no other speakers has the right except if the current speaker selected a next speaker which manifested in form of inquiry. In other words, the current speaker maintained the turn until a norm - based selection was made otherwise, the current speaker could not self – select another speaker.

Overwhelmingly, one party talked at a time and this was provided for by the two features of the debate convention where the system allocated a single turn to a single speaker, any speaker getting the turn has exclusive rights to talk first, with possible completion of an initial instance of a unit – type right that was renewable only for questioning purposes which sometime took the form of interruptions. The importance of turn – by –turn debate was meant for proper monitoring, for hearing, understanding, agreement, etc. In fact, it was directly after any turn that problems related to the conducting debates were raised. Furthermore, the order in which the participants spoke was directly related to the character of what they were to say with the parties being characterized as *pro* and *con* and the turn in which they spoke. For example, ‘rebuttals and counter rebuttals ‘were characterized by question featuring questions in which the current speaker yielded a turn temporally, and questions in which the asker interrupted the current speaker. This rigidity was the consequence of features of turn – taking organization and thus conventional activity of the students’ debate procedures. One nonverbal yielding behavior was audience directed gazes. Also, speakers who did not want their turns to be interrupted reduced eye contacts with their listeners and rather stared at judges and non – participating people who were in attendance. However, when speakers wanted their turns relinquished, they usually indicated this by turning their heads towards their interlocutors, making increased eye contacts.

Predominantly, the turns began with institutional and a familiar class of constructions of particular interest, for instance, ‘Members of the House...,’ Mr. Speaker, Members of the House..., Honourable Members of the House..., Members of the Proposition/Opposition...’ and they clearly seemed to satisfy the norms of a conventional beginning. However, the result of this finding revealed that they did not very much unveil the constructional features of the utterances which followed, because a particular speaker might wish to make a rebuttal, debunking a certain claim before venturing into making the team’s claims, defense and attack. On the other hand, turn – yielding techniques comprised utterances such as:

through this, we should uphold this, (which is a kind of an appeal), ...we stated that this point cannot stand, ... my third speaker will prove that to you, that is why we are saying that this debate should go in favor of the proposition, so, ...therefore, side Proposition is right’, ‘...therefore, we on opposition stand..., thank you, etc.

Through this set of utterance – types – adjacency pairs was used to accomplish the turns, and indicated the next selection. However, neither party nor individual debater was constrained to use any of the techniques mentioned. On the contrary, any party has a considerable set of utterance types to choose from, each of which may accomplish the yielding and selection. Nevertheless, a party that was ordered to talk would be constrained in what to say (e.g. being under some constraint to answer if the technique was that of asking). However, there were instances in which this right was violated as in the following excerpts:

Excerpt (1) .We are going to differentiate between playboy and normal mothers and how it enfranchises and secondly I am going to tell you about the empowerment of women. **Question:** Mr. Speaker, what is enfranchise?

In excerpt (1), the speaker resisted the right to answer the question.

Excerpt (2) .We believe financial security could lead to separate law but let’s find record to this argument. **Question:** How are going to do? **Response:** Firstly, we believe that feminist actively support these people and if the feminists believe that there is something wrong in the playboy enfranchises were exploited enough to objectify.

In (2), the current speaker complied by yielding the floor for the sake of questioning.

The availability of the *tag question* was of special importance for it was a rare exit technique for a turn. A current speaker having constructed a turn’s talk to a possible transition – relevance place without showing any sign of relinquishing the floor, and using no other transition relevance place (TRP) device, employed this option to continue with a tag question’s completion, and thereby exiting the turn. For instance,

Excerpt (3). Isn't this social media? Isn't giving people more er - more knowledge of what happened, and making them globalized?

The question tag in (3) was produced by the fourth speaker of the proposition, making an emotional appeal to the audience as an exiting strategy.

Structurally, turns as analyzed in this paper displayed organizational features that reflected their occurrence in a series. They regularly have a three – part structure: (a) a part which addressed the relation of a turn to a prior turn. Basically, this was the function of the first speaker of the opposition, second speaker of the proposition, third speaker proposition, third speaker opposition, and fourth speakers of both proposing and opposing teams. For example, second speakers of both sides were charged with the duties of supporting, or opposing the proposition as the case maybe. Similarly, third speakers of both teams were expected to present a unique perspective; defend the general direction of the side as the case may be. In any of these crucial roles, prior mentioning was eminent as that was the basis for proper debating as demonstrated in:

Excerpt (5). I am going to give a case to the side proposition...let me give a re – battle to some issues that the side proposition brought. They brought the issue of choice.

Excerpt (6).Now let me tell what they said. They told us about feminism, about a strong independent woman...

In (5), an anaphoric relation was made between the current speaker who was a member of the opposition and preceding speech by the first speaker of the proposition.

As explained above, first, second speakers of either sides set the ground for others to build upon so that the whole procedure was networked so much that each speaker's contribution was complementary to the other. For instance, an interruption in a debate proceeding or, laughter, may exhibit a relationship to a prior turn and a question tag has a close synergy with what has preceded it.

Thus, academic debate genres as investigated in this paper could be defined as pre-patterned with a sort of expectable or predictable outcome as the production of one action entailed a preference for production of another and not living up to the expectation may bring an indirect sanction which could come in the form of laughter, shouts, or outright corrections which could be detrimental to the team's scoring point because the participants were expected to communicate in accordance with genre rules/conventions, as argued by Bakhtin 1986.

We learn to cast our speech in generic form and, when hearing others' speech we guess its genres from the very first words; we predict a certain length and a certain compositional structure; we foresee the end; that is, the very beginning we have a sense of the speech whole which is only later differentiated during the speech process (Bakhtin, 1986, p.78).

### Turn – size

As analyzed above, turn – taking comprised a multi – dimensional construct of sequential, participatory and quantitative dominance in terms both specific roles and number of words spoken by each of the debate participants. See Tables below.

**Table .1.0. Muslim Ladies College versus Anula College Debate**

**Topic: This House will allow Unrestricted Access to Online Academic Journals: 3<sup>rd</sup> December, 2013 (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)**

Speakers	First speaker proposition	First speaker opposition.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> Speaker oppo.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker Prop.	3rd speaker Oppo.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker pop.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker oppo.
No. of words produced	443	71	414	185	691	154	80	127

**Table .2.0. Royal College versus Colombo International School**

**Debate Topic: This House believes that feminists should support Playboy 8<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)**

Speakers	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker Prop.	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker oppo.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker Prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker oppo.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker Prop.	3rd speaker Oppo.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker Prop.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker oppo.
No. of words produced	915	773	1,111	729	1,092	943	1,052	826

**Table .3.0: Ladies College versus Nalanda College**

**Debate Topic: This House should Compensate Illegal Downloads of online academic journals 14<sup>th</sup> December, 2012 (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)**

Speakers	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker prop	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker oppo.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker Prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker Oppo.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker Prop.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker Oppo.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker Prop.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker oppo.
No. of words produced	856	1,187	1,064	984	803	927	1,314	1,250

**Table 4.0 .: Saint Lawrence Convent College**

**Debate Topic: This House will Mandate all Adults undergo Compulsory Marriage Counseling 6<sup>th</sup> December, 2013 (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)**

Speakers	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker proposition.	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker opposition	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker oppo.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker prop.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker oppo.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker prop.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker oppo.
No. of words produced	502	769	649	498	403	442	420	633

**Table 4.4: Methodist College versus D.S. Senanayake College**

**Debate Topic: This House will not allow anti – religious videos on social media sites 10<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 (Faculty of Law University of Colombo)**

speaker	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker prop.	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker oppo.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker opp.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker prop.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker opp..	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker prop.	4 <sup>th</sup> speaker opp.
No. of words produced	686	1,104	1,255	1,189	862	1,013	974	1,328

**Table 4.5. Intra – School debate by Lyceum International College**

**Debate Topic: Television is more dangerous than guns 7<sup>th</sup> November, 2013 (Lyceum International School Auditorium Nugegoda)**

speakers	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker prop.	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker opp.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker opp.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker Prop.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker opp.	Nil	Nil
No. of words produced	450	509	375	544	556	306	Nil	Nil

**Table 4.6: Intra - School debate by Zahira College**

**Topic: Television Program are more dangerous than guns 12<sup>th</sup> December 2013 (Zahira College classroom Colombo)**

speakers	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker prop.	1 <sup>st</sup> speaker opp.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker prop.	2 <sup>nd</sup> speaker opp.	3 <sup>rd</sup> speaker prop.	Nil	Nil	Nil
No. of words produced	370	184	228	103	139	Nil	Nil	Nil

Items in Tables (1 – 7) indicated a huge discrepancy in the number of words spoken by each participant despite equality in the size of turns and communicative roles played by the students. Some of the possible causes of shortfall in word production as seen above included implications of forms of interaction that were culturally bound, as investigation showed that Sri Lankan students' debaters did not imbibe the culture of direct attacking in expressing disagreement, because language is an integral part of how culture operates as a social force. In addition to cultural constraints on these students, each of them to some extent exhibited unique characteristics which reflected individual beliefs, values and actions which have prevailed over community norms and conventions. Consequently, their defenses were quite often longer than attacks, and that characterized most of their turns thereby leaving out ample time unutilized.

The challenges which these students faced in the interactions could only be understood by resorting to the concept of discourse community, because it was important for them to indicate how competent they were through the use of 'right discourse' as many participants failed to present themselves in the interactions as members of the discourse community of debaters by

displaying expert knowledge, using ideology of the production. A typical example could be seen in the utterances of all speakers in Tables (1, 4, 6 and 7).

Only gradually did this category of debaters realize that their texts had to indicate expertise by demonstrating membership in the discourse community of debaters. This therefore explained that membership was maintained by paying attention to the conventions, what 'normally' was communicated, how this was communicated, and which genres were used.

## **DOMINATION AND CONTROL**

Dominant role in this paper is defined as someone who is knowledgeable, conversant, sensitive to genre function, context sensitive, confident, relaxed and in control of the discourse situation; s/he leads the communication while the dominated is s/he whose discourse contributions are anchored on what the dominant person has presented in the communication acts. This definition helps in understanding the different social functions played by the participants.

Looking at the Tables above, it was apparent that the debates were characterized by competitiveness with speakers struggling for domination through the device of word production. The length of words uttered may imply an attempt to overshadow the role of other speakers.

The debates comprised four speakers from each team: proposition and opposition. The roles played by each speaker were dissimilar. For instance, the first speaker proposition was charged with the duty of defining and interpreting the motion of the debate in a reasonable way. This was a crucial and complex task that required specialty in selecting which speaker should handle the task. The choice of a particular person as against other could be termed, a sort of domination or preference. On the other hand, the first speaker opposition has three responsibilities: to accept the definition and interpretation of the proposition, and present one or some arguments in opposition. This also demanded a specialist who possessed skills in narration, listening, argumentation, and refutation. Again, the task of selecting one speaker as opposed to another implied domination or superiority. The second speaker of each side had lesser functions compared to the duty of the substantive speakers. The 4<sup>th</sup> speaker proposition and opposition had the duty to summarize the debates from the viewpoint of either side. The summary may be accomplished in a number of ways: one of the ways was to identify the most crucial issues in the debate and discuss how each side dealt with the issues. Again, these debaters had to refute the extension offered, defend the extension by either the proposition or opposition as the case may be. Again, these desired skillfully placed speakers who possessed adequate listening skills, summary, etc.

Considering these role differentiation, one could conclude that status hierarchy was established and maintained throughout the interaction via the device of social functions. Dominance in this context did not imply authority over other interlocutors; rather, it signified contests, serving as a

medium for allocating linguistic responsibilities which indirectly symbolized control over who performed certain roles. This included the opening speeches, and the ending talks. Such nonlexical signs of control determined the actual words spoken, and word lengths which reflected status differentiation among speakers. Thus, first speaker proposition, first speaker opposition and the 4<sup>th</sup> speakers of both sides were considered most dominant in view of the fact that they presented first substantive speeches, thus directing the opening of the whole communication. The differentiation – speaking members of the discourse community did not imply ‘better than’ as the participants were oblivion of any form of social/ academic hierarchy; rather, their communication strategy depicted tacit partnership and cooperation.

## **CONCLUSION**

The debates were coordinated into patterned sequences through which particular activities were accomplished. Those loci of order were formed by treating the transition between turns in which specific interactional constraints were operated, with certain categories of utterances. For instance, what was said, was monitored and was conditioned on what followed. While some crucial indicators of turn – taking were sentential, clausal phrasal and lexical, others were cultural, because structured debates typical of Sri Lankan students appeared complex in view of socio – cultural inputs which characterized some aspects of the interactions. Furthermore, while TRP played a vital role in signaling relinquishing the floor, gestures, usually sideways head nods were equally employed as floor yielding mechanism. Similarly, power and privileges were impliedly demonstrated through roles played by speakers in the interactions.

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