

Genre Analysis of Sri Lankan Secondary School Student Debates

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Abstract

This study seeks to account for discursive, linguistic, psychological, social and cultural factors in the description of genre and conceives discourse as a constitutive part of social and cultural contexts. The study focuses on natural talks produced by Sri Lankan secondary school students. One of the main objectives of the study is describe the general characteristics of the Sri Lankan student debates by the means of Functional theory and to evaluate its applicability in terms of linguistic and cultural use of language. The data of this study are obtained from volunteers who are members of the discourse community of debating society in Sri Lanka and the procedure of data collection employed is observation through recording of descriptive data and discourse analysis. Out of 2,484 clauses complexes produced in the debates, the common turn is defenses, while attacks have the least frequency. Another discourse trend in this study is the deep respect Sri Lankans have for others and avoidance of directness. One form of gesture that is important in persuasive communication is eye contact. Unfortunately, the students appear to avoid eye contact. Generally, gesticulation i.e. up raised and pointed fingers and sideways nods which are typical of Sri Lankans characterized the students' non – verbal communication. Socially, Sri Lanka student debaters are polite in their speeches. On a different note, Sri Lankan student debaters rarely exaggerate as there are only 67 occurrences of hyperbolic expressions produced by only 14 debaters while the remaining 90 students do not utter any hyperbolic words. With regard to mood system, there is a wide variety of the mood of the speakers in the debate with declarative sentences having the highest frequency. Meanwhile, other sentence types are distributed across the debates. Pragmatically, Sri Lankan secondary school student debates belongs to the political discourse because it displays particular discursive institutionalized features and ritualized interaction patterns, while complying with a number of specific rules and constraints. Thus, the discourse community members are always consensus – oriented and mutually supportive to achieve their goals as members do not only depend on the verbal medium to accomplish intelligibility. Rather, their communications involve using ecology as a source; the communicative context, the body and paralinguistic cues help in their communication. Additionally, language among the Sri Lankan secondary school students is regarded as a non-autonomous device. Instead, communication is ingrained in contexts.

Keywords: discourse, genre, debate, discourse community, culture.