

IMPOSSIBLE CONVICTIONS: CONVICTIONS AND INTENTIONALITY IN PERFORMANCE AND SWITCH-SIDE DEBATE

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The article examines two scholarly discussions about the role and effect of sincerity and convictions in competitive debate. A number of debate practices and theories are animated by a desire to regulate students' intentions and beliefs in debate. The essay contends that these efforts are problematic and misunderstand contemporary speech act theory. It draws insights from J. L. Austin, Jacques Derrida, and Judith Butler to contend that we should redefine our understanding of speech acts and switch side debate from a deconstructive perspective.

Since the beginning of tournament style switch-side debates in the early 20th century, forensic educators and other observers have been rather anxious about the marginalization of the role of students' sincere beliefs in competitive debate practice. According to Murphy (1957), President Theodore Roosevelt wrote in his 1913 autobiography that he "was 'exceeding glad' that as a student at Harvard he never 'practiced debating,'" because the contests assigned students sides to debate regardless of their true beliefs on the issues (p. 1). Almost a century later, Massey (2006a) contends that, "college debate is public debate. When we separate the two... administrators and communication professors see debate as a game, with minor education benefits. This is when debate dies" (para. 18). These concerns about the role of debaters' convictions have steered two highly related theoretical discussions in recent years. First, with the expansion of critique/kritik arguments in general and performance debate in particular, debate strategies

increasingly “shift from playing a game to making debate ‘real’” by advocating deeply held beliefs that use personal narratives, enactments, and claims of sincerity as grounds for argument (Woods, 2003, p. 94). Second, recent criticism of the competitive practice of switch-sides debate (SSD), evoking earlier scholarly debate about the ethical implications of the practice from the 1950s and 1960s, also posit a desire to restore student’s true convictions as an important element of contemporary debate advocacy (Greene & Hicks, 2005; Massey, 2006a, 2006b). Both of these theoretical dialogues have generated a number of responses in both academic circles and in-round debates. Yet, despite the intense and somewhat diverse debate about convictions in debate, few, if any, of these exchanges have raised some foundational questions that seem most relevant in our understanding of the role of genuine beliefs in competitive debate: how do we recognize that students are debating from their true convictions? What if a student lies or does not understand his/her true convictions? If utterances in a debate represent speech acts or binding statements of conviction, what conditions and contexts are necessary for those statements to have an effect? And what underlying logic justifies using sincerity as the governing principle of competitive debate and how does it impact our understanding of the force of performative utterances and competitive debate practices like SSD?

In investigating a number of these questions, I examine the two debates about sincere beliefs to explore the assumptions both discussions make about the nature and force of discourse, particularly in relation to how they position intentionality and sincerity as determining the ethics and effects of speech acts. The essay interrogates how our theoretical and in-round competitive discussions about performance and public commitments utilize a limited and problematic understanding of the force and nature of public utterances. In doing so, a number

of insights are drawn from Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler's works on convictions, intentionality, and speech acts.

In this essay, I begin by reviewing scholarly discussion about the recent performative turn in competitive debate and the stakes involved in the debates about SSD. Next, I examine J. L. Austin, Derrida, and Butler's discussions of the nature and function of performative utterances and their relationship to speakers' convictions and intentions and how this debate can inform our understanding of both performances and student beliefs. Lastly, I consider the implications that this understanding of performance and conviction has on competitive debate theory and practice.

Nature and Function of Performance Debate

There is very little theoretical scholarship on the use of performance or speech act theory in competitive debate (Tallungan, 2009). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Albinia, 2011; Cheshier, n.d.; Smith, 2002; Tallungan, 2009; Zompetti, 2004), most discussion of performance debate is made in passing reference within broader ruminations about critique arguments. While most theorists agree that this relatively new type of argumentative strategy is here to stay and has radically altered the game of debate (Albinia, 2011; Loudon, 2004), there is very little agreement on what the term "performance" means in the context of competitive debate. According to Tallungan (2009),

Generally, there is a wide-spectrum of beliefs on [what constitutes performance] with the two extremes being (1) all debate is performative and (2) only speeches that challenge traditional debate styles and substances through non-traditional forms...are performative. (p. 66)

On the non-traditional end of the spectrum, theorists

like Speice and Lyle (2003) comment on this style of debate in arguing that “performance arguments speak to the aesthetic value of speech....they can include reading poetry, offering an ironic justification for the resolution, or arguing that the resolution itself can be read performatively” (para. 4). From this perspective, performance debates recast the role of the judge’s ballot as a vote for the way in which the first affirmative constructive (1AC) was presented (Speice & Lyle, 2003). Somewhat similarly, Smith (2002) describes performance as a perspective that erases the form/substance distinction in argument, which, according to him, transforms just about everything done in a debate into a performance. As Smith (2002) explains, how debaters speak, move, or dress could all constitute a performance from a performative outlook.

On the other end of the spectrum, theorists like Solt (2004) and Cheshier (n.d.) approach performance debate as speech acts, in which the “words uttered in a debate do things” (Solt, 2004, p. 49). Drawing from Austin’s (1975) seminal work on language as performance, Butler’s (1993) work on the performative nature of gender, and Turner’s (1988) understanding of art as a performative opposition, this perspective on performance contends that utterances in debate do more than simply advance true/false statements. Instead, these statements do things, like articulate identities, frame issues, make promises, and in themselves operate as political acts (Cheshier, n. d.; Solt, 2004). While aesthetic elements of a speech act can be included within this perspective, they do not fully constitute the idea of speech acts or performative utterances (Albiniak, 2011).

According to proponents of this latter view, this perspective of performance is valuable for three reasons. First, it avoids the tendency to conflate the form and substance of argument. For example, even after identifying that performance as aesthetics is a critique of

the substance/form divide, Smith (2002) then proceeds to discuss only aesthetic elements of a debate. However, when examining performance as speech acts, form is not particularly important to evaluating the debate. Instead, what matters most is the context and its conventional rules that govern the force or effect of the speech act (Austin, 1975; Culler, 1981). Likewise, Evans (2011b) argues that performance as a speech act allows for the assessment of the “full [speech] act, including who is speaking, what they are speaking (the relationship between the two) and so on” (para. 2). Thus, proponents contend that we should hold teams accountable for what they do in debates and evaluate debates based on the authenticity and sincerity of students’ performances (Evans, 2011b; Massey, 2006a). Second, this view of performance seeks to counter the charge that competitive policy debate is esoteric and insular to the “real world.” Rather than debate for and against policy changes that will not be implemented at the end of the debate, the performance as speech act perspective maintains that the discourse in the debate can challenge and transform our traditional notions of epistemology, ontology, and politics well beyond a singular debate (Solt, 2004; Tallungan, 2009). Third, this approach towards performance is simply more appropriate for the literature base that is often evoked in its defense. Several performance debates will use poetry, music, or other non-traditional forms of evidence or data and then read evidence from political theorists like Bleiker (2000) or Butler (1993) to contend that using these non-traditional forms of argument deconstruct epistemic, gender, and racial hierarchies. These theorists draw from Austin (1975) and Derrida (1988) in order to understand discourse as language in action. For instance, Bleiker (2000) explains, “language thus becomes action itself because ‘we use language not merely to talk about action, but to act’” (p. 209). In addition, Butler’s (1997) seminal book on the politics of the performative, *Excitable Speech*,

uses elements borrowed from Austin (1975), Althusser (2001), and Derrida (1988).

Despite the fact that the theorists who provide the strongest defense for the performative power of discourse draw from Austin (1975) and Derrida (1988), very few debaters read evidence or base their arguments within the performative frameworks articulated by these theorists. As a result, much of academic debate's engagement with the exciting possibilities offered by this literature is lost as the students selectively adopt in self-serving fashion from this work. Examples of these self-serving practices include the debaters who present a hodge-podge of arguments from various critical theorists to generate offensive responses to opponents' arguments with no understanding of the implications and contractions created at the intersections of those theorists' ideas. Or, they realize that there are contradictions but know that it would take the other side too long to explain them and so these problems are simply glossed over. Worse, many of the debate practices adopted to defend elements of performance debate may run contrary to this literature base. For example, opponents of performative arguments will often run quasi-counterplans that select and advocate parts of the 1AC performance or permute part of the negative's performative framework. In response, teams will contend that their opponents cannot "just snatch [the performance] and add it [to their speech]....Kritik is a verb, and not a noun, which means you have to do it in order for it to be done" (Evans, 2011a, para. 15). Similarly, teams will contend that their opponents' attempt to capture part of their performance is inauthentic and insincere because they did not initiate the performance (Zompetti, 2004). However, given Butler's (1997) and Derrida's (1988) perspectives on the performative, which will be discussed at length later in this essay, these claims to an authentic and sincere performance are perhaps problematic. Before we

turn to that discussion, I want to explore a second recent development that relates to sincerity and convictions: the contemporary debate about the ethics and effect of switch-sides debate (SSD).

The Debate about SSD

1950-1960s: SSD as Unethical Indoctrination

Speech communication journals have hosted a number of debates about the ethical implications of the debate tournament practice of having students debate both sides of a given proposition. With the rise of tournament-style debate competitions in the 1930s, debate educators became highly concerned about the ethical and pedagogical value of having students debate against their convictions by having to switch sides on a topic each round. In 1954, the selection of the national college debate topic, Resolved: that the United States should extend diplomatic recognition to the communist government of China, generated a great deal of controversy (English, Llano, Mitchell, Morrison, Rief, & Woods., 2007). At the height of the Cold War and McCarthyism, a number of schools such as the military academies refused to affirm the topic in fear that affirmation would “indoctrinate America’s youth, while giving aid and comfort to the enemy” (English et al., 2007, p. 222).

Within this context, Murphy (1957) outlines the fundamental objection to SSD in arguing, “debate...is a form of public speaking. A public statement is a public commitment. Before one takes the platform, [he/she] should study the question, [he/she] should discuss it until [he/she] knows where [he/she] stands. Then [he/she] should take that stand” (p. 2). In his review of public speaking ethics literature, Murphy (1957) contends that when students argue against their convictions, they are both immoral and “public liar[s]” (p. 2). To avoid this, Murphy (1957) argues that students should debate only

from their sincere beliefs.

In their response to Murphy (1957), both Cripe (1957) and Dell (1958) maintain that tournament-style debating is a unique form of analytic speaking that is different than persuasive debate about political conviction. As such, both scholars suggest that there is great pedagogical value to viewing controversies from both sides within an educational setting. Additionally, Dell (1958) contends that because all ethics are contextual, SSD should be seen as an ethical practice. Of the many arguments raised and debated, the two most frequently discussed were: (1) that debate tournaments are or are not public speaking situations; and (2) that SSD does or does not teach essential logical skills necessary to avoid dogmatism (Cripe, 1957; Galloway, 2007; Murphy, 1957). Put differently, Cripe (1957) explains, “the whole problem seems to be one of definition, of defining what ‘debate’ is, and what ‘ethical’ means” (p. 209).

Central to these broader ethics arguments is the status of students’ convictions. For instance, according to Murphy (1957), students are most likely to have well-developed convictions prior to engaging in debate and SSD only creates confusion for students in what they sincerely believe. In response, Cripe (1957) and Dell (1958) maintain that debaters can separate their true feelings while making the best possible case for a different side for the purposes of competition. In addition, they refute Murphy’s argument that students have firm convictions on a number of complicated topics prior to debating. As they conclude, students’ true beliefs are likely underdeveloped and can be best clarified and strengthened by SSD. Additionally, according to Cripe (1957) and Dell (1958), SSD helps develop good future citizens because it best guards against the development of rigid ideological views. Summarizing the debate aptly, Greene and Hicks (2005) conclude, “at the heart of the ‘debate about debate’...was

the idea of conviction and how it should guide the moral economy of liberal citizenship” (p. 100).

In their later review of the controversy, Klopff and McCroskey (1964) maintain that the debate over the ethics of SSD is over. As they explain,

The relative ethic has been accepted by a large majority of those involved directly with academic debate. Both by their opinions and their actions they believe switch-sides debating is ethical. So do we. The controversy over the ethics of debating both sides is [finished]! (para. 25-26)

While the majority of coaches and directors may have declared SSD ethical, the status and importance of student convictions remained up for debate, as we see in another debate 40 years later.

2000s: SSD as Cultural Technology of Imperialism

Greene and Hicks (2005) revisited the 1950-1960s debate to interrogate the cultural effect that results from the promotion of SSD debate as a corrective for intransigence. Rather than assess the ethical implications of SSD on students, Greene and Hicks (2005) examine:

The articulation of the debate community as a zone of dissent against McCarthyist tendencies developed into a larger and somewhat uncritical affirmation of switch-side debate as a “technology” of liberal participatory democracy....tied to a normative conception of American democracy that justifies imperialism. (English et al., 2007, p. 223-224)

In advancing this argument, Greene and Hicks (2005) contend that SSD creates a gap between a student’s “embodied speech act and his/her speech convictions” that allows for the privileging of a method of conflict resolution that is based on reason rather than beliefs or

authority (p. 120). As they conclude, the controversy “pre-figures how a deliberative theory of democracy requires a moral theory of the subject to prepare that subject for the transformational potential associated with the ‘gentle force of the better argument’” (Greene & Hicks, 2005, p. 120). Greene and Hicks’ implied alternative to SSD returns to the earlier form of debate that “privileges personal conviction” as the governing element of debate (Stannard, 2006, para. 32). In doing so, they suggest that academic debate should close the gap between the speech act of debate and the individual’s first order convictions.

Following Greene and Hicks’ (2005) lead, Massey (2006a) calls on academic debate coaches to reform SSD in order to allow students debating on the affirmative of a topic the space to express their true beliefs. Somewhat mirroring Murphy’s (1957) concerns, Massey (2006a) maintains that “we should not separate speech from conviction...discourse creates reality, and we must examine the effects that verbalizing things [students] might disagree with could have on the [audience]” (para. 17). In a different argument, Massey (2006a) is concerned that students are harmed by SSD because recent debate resolutions always require the affirmative to defend action by the United States federal government and state action. As he further explains, affirmative debaters must always debate from an “exceptionalists view” without ever interrogating the federal government’s role in causing a host of problems (Massey, 2006a, para. 11). Consequently, Massey (2006a) contends that SSD

...forces a one way ideological conformity, rather than a give and take reflection that most proponents of switch side debate want to presume. My position is debate can be a training ground for discussing those issues that are important to debaters, and giving students agency for dealing with your own personal oppressions and inequalities. (para. 11)

To best capture the benefits of SSD, Massey (2006b) claims that students on the negative are required to refute whatever the affirmative team presents, which gains “all the benefits of switch side debate” (para. 2). Ultimately, Massey’s criticism has less to do with Greene and Hicks’s (2005) concern with the cultural effect of promoting a certain model of liberal citizenship and more with the potential exceptionalist effect that having to defend the United States federal government has on students. However, like Greene and Hicks, Massey privileges the verbal expression of conviction as what should regulate student advocacy.

In response to Greene and Hicks (and as an effect, responding to Massey as well), English et al. (2007) defend SSD in arguing that “rather than acting as a cultural technology expanding American exceptionalism, switch side debating originates from a civic attitude that serves as a bulwark against fundamentalism of all stripes” (p. 224). Similarly, Stannard (2006) contends that conviction-driven debate would produce “simultaneous zones of speech activism” that cause students to be:

...so wrapped up in their own micropolitics, or so busy preaching to themselves and their choirs, that they will never understand or confront the rhetorical tropes used to mobilize both resource and true believers in the service of continued material domination. (para. 35)

Thus, for English et al. (2007) and Stannard (2006), SSD is a technology that prevents the very moral and cultural problems that concern Greene and Hicks (2005) and Massey (2006a).

In an additional defense, Galloway (2007) outlines a dialogic model of competitive debate that “preserves the affirmative team’s obligation to uphold the debate resolution” while, at the same time, allowing the speech

act of the debater to take a number of forms (e.g., critical, performative, policy) (p. 2). Once offered, the affirmative speech act awaits response from the negative. The promise of the model, according to Galloway (2007), is that it preserves the stable predictability of a resolution while allowing debaters to engage these propositions in a number of ways. In making this argument, Galloway (2007) responds to advocates of conviction-driven debate in contending that SSD does not cause students to lose their beliefs. Instead, “conviction is not a priori to discussion, it flows from it” through the testing of ideas and beliefs (p. 11).

Ultimately, both debates about SSD are founded on the idea that student convictions are important. However, what is disputed is the impact that communication has on these convictions. For instance, for the opponents of SSD, conviction exists prior to public debate and is grounded in the sincere intentions of the speaker (Murphy, 1957). Yet, these beliefs are fragile, as they are always at risk of being corrupted and lost in public argument. For the supporters of SSD, conviction is something discovered, tested, and sustained through public speech acts. While both of these positions bank a great deal on the importance and role of student convictions in speech acts, there is no discussion in these debates about how students construct or convey these beliefs through communication and performance. Given that academic debate remains a communication activity, how we convey our sincere beliefs and what effect those speech acts have are rather important issues to explore. In that vein, the next section of this essay explores the speech act theories of Austin, Butler, and Derrida and their implications for these debates about sincere beliefs and performance.

Speech Act, Performance Theory, and Convictions

As my review of both performance debate theory

and the reoccurring debate over SSD suggests, a number of questions about the expression of convictions remain unanswered. For instance, how do we recognize that students are debating from their true beliefs? What effect do these convictions have on debates? What are the effects of using convictions as the governing principle to evaluate speech acts or promote competitive debate? Before answers to these questions can be discerned, I now turn to speech act theory, as it may provide a number of insights into the underlying concerns about student convictions in competitive debate.

Austin's Speech Act Theory

For many years in linguistic and rhetorical study, the prevailing explanation of the operation of linguistics was that the conscious speaker and his/her sincere intentions controlled the meaning of communication within a rhetorical situation (Culler, 1981). Argumentation and communication scholarship also often presumed that the "primary purpose of language was to be descriptive or make true or false (constative) statements about the world" (Alfino, 1991, p. 144). However, Austin (1975) maintains that several statements do not fit within the constative category. Rather, many utterances "actually perform the action to which they refer (e.g., 'I promise to pay you tomorrow')" (Culler, 1981, p. 16). In his work, Austin (1975) argues that these performative statements, rather than being a special case, constitute a majority of statements while the constative is a special case of the performative.

Austin (1975) also identifies two levels of effect for any speech act to further clarify the nature and use of performative utterances. The first is the perlocutionary effect, which is the psychological consequences of the speech act, which include motivating and persuading an immediate audience. In swaying or moving the audience,

the speech act may convince someone to change his/her feelings or thoughts or even take action. But these changes may be indirect as they affect an intermediary person and occur over time as a result of the original speech act (Butler, 1997). The second level is illocutionary force, which is the performative effects of declaring, identifying, promising, and requesting. As Austin (1975) explains, illocutionary force is the “performance of an act *in* saying something as opposed to performance of an act *of* saying something” (pp. 99-100). Illocutionary force is a direct consequence of a speech act; however, the force of the speech act is not located within “merely a single moment” and cannot succeed with just a simple utterance (Butler, 1997, p. 3). Rather, illocutionary effects rely on a number of prior conventions and rituals. For example, as Austin (1975) suggests, successful illocutionary acts depend on a number of conditions:

(A.1) There must exist an accepted conventional procedure having a certain conventional effect, that procedure to include the uttering of certain words by certain persons in certain circumstances, and further, (A.2) the particular person and circumstances in a given case must be appropriate for the invocation of the particular procedure invoked. (B.1) The procedure must be executed by all participants both correctly and (B.2) completely. (pp. 14-15)

In outlining these various conditions for effective performances, Austin seeks to demonstrate that the conditions and conventions of a given context are what control the illocutionary effect of discourse. In doing so, he privileges convention and context over the consciousness and intentions of speakers as the source of performative effect.

While elevating the importance of context over speaker’s intentions, Austin (1975) also awkwardly seeks

to exclude non-serious, or what he calls “parasitic,” speech acts (p. 22). For instance, he considers performances by an actor or statements made in jest as intelligible yet parasitic uses of language. Yet, in excluding these fake or infelicitous speech acts, Austin (1975) inadvertently privileges the conscious speaker and his/her sincere intentions as the center of his speech act system—the very thing he sought to avoid (Bérubé, 2004).

Derrida and Butler’s Speech Act Theory

In highlighting the shortcoming of Austin’s (1975) desire to preserve conscious intentions and sincerity, Derrida (1988) asks: can communication have an inherent, intended and sincere meaning? In responding to his own question, Derrida (1988) maintains that sincere intentions cannot control a speech act because it is constantly repeatable—iterable—as it is cited and recited by different speakers in different contexts. While the speaker might have a genuine purpose in making a statement, as the statement is used and repeated by other speakers in different contexts, the meaning and the force of the statement changes. For example, if debate students use this article as evidence in a debate brief, I cannot control how they use material from this essay in their arguments. As more and more students cite the argument, we all become multiple “authors” of the speech act. Likewise, my citation of various scholars within this essay creates an assemblage of ideas that have very different meaning and force once combined into this article. Thus, while many people helped create this document, the absence of their intent and presence allows me to deploy their ideas and thoughts in different ways.

Influenced by de Saussure’s (1972) notions of linguistic structuralism, absence and presence, and diachronic studies of meaning and Barthes’s (1977) work on the “death of the author,” Derrida contends, that the “structure

of absence” in all uses of language allows all utterances to be endlessly cited and iterated (Alfino, 1991, p. 146). This inherent possibility of continuous citation and repetition, according to Derrida, is the very condition in which discourse remains meaningful and has effect, even if the meaning is different in each new context (Alfino, 1991). Within Derrida’s (1988) system of speech acts, authorial intent does not disappear, but instead must be understood as an effect that “no longer [is] able to govern the entire scene and the system of utterance” (p. 20). Additionally, the privileging of the author’s sincere intentions and beliefs in an appropriate context for a performance should be understood as an attempt to restrict the infinite meanings of the performance (Stocker, 2006). In addition, Derrida (1988) contends that sincere intentions and beliefs cannot control systems of meaning because we cannot read the speaker’s mind, our communication always expresses more than we anticipate, and intention and belief is never fully present to the speaker due to the unconscious. Consequently, what matters most in a speech act is how context makes possible the structure, conventions, and meaning of communication.

In making these arguments, Derrida (1988) maintains what Austin wants to exclude—the non-serious and infelicitous performance. In doing so, Derrida argues that the possibility of non-serious or fake performances and reiterations of performances demonstrate that intentionality and sincerity do not regulate the absolute meaning of a speech act. Instead, the system is never fully closed. Rather, it is porous and constantly open to change due to the context and conventions within and outside the immediate context in which the performance occurs (Derrida, 1988).

In her ruminations about the nature of injurious speech and the problems associated with censorship, Butler (1997) builds on Austin’s and Derrida’s works to

argue that a structural gap between intention and sincerity and an utterance is necessary in order for language to have agency. Like Derrida, Butler (1997) contends that language and speech acts are always plagued with excess. As she further explains, the speech act is “always to some extent unknowing about what it performs, that it always says something that it does not intend” (Butler, 1997, p. 10). Even in the situation where a predetermined topic is up for discussion – like a resolution for debate – Butler (1997) would contend that meaning remains unsettled because the words in the topic and the arguments made for either side of the topic do not have stable meaning. For instance, thousands of debates each year occur under a shared national debate resolution, yet each debate is significantly different than the other, even when they deal with similar sub-sets of the resolution. The very fact that there is no consensus on what a debate resolution precisely means at the end of a debate season and debates are performed so differently under one topic throughout a season demonstrates the play and excess of speech acts. This structural inability to master or control our performances and speech acts for Butler (1997) does not mark the failure of communication; instead, it serves as its radical potential. For example, without a gap between intention and beliefs and utterance, discourse is unrecoverable and fixed. However, if a gap does exist, contested and once harmful words like “queer” can be re-appropriated and given new meaning within different contexts by different speakers. This does not mean that the discourse is acceptable uncritically; rather, the new use of the terms demonstrate the exclusive nature of the rhetoric and produces a democratic contestation over formerly racist or misogynist discourse that extend the range of the term. For instance, the activist group Queer Nation re-appropriates the term “queer” in order to contest the exclusive nature of labels such as “gay,” “lesbian,” or “homosexual.” In doing so, the group seeks to highlight

the homophobic fear of what is “queer” by turning the term against itself, as the group’s motto, “We’re here. We’re Queer. Get used to it!” signifies (Brontsema, 2012). Another example of re-appropriation can be seen as a result of the recent decision by Arizona’s Tucson Unified School District to ban certain books from the district’s Mexican-American Studies program. The action caused several activists to form the Librotraficante Caravan, an underground and traveling library featuring the work of writers who were banned by the district. The group’s name – book trafficker – and tactics reclaim a number of negative stereotypes surrounding immigration, like the underground smuggling/trafficking of goods (Steiner, 2012). Through this re-appropriation over time, these terms lose their harmful effect and can be used in new and powerful ways through iteration (Butler, 1993, 1997).

Due to this break between belief, intent, and rhetoric, the force and power of discourse cannot be located in a single speech act. As Butler (1997) explains in the context of hate speech, “racist speech works through the invocation of convention; it circulates, and though it requires a subject for its speaking, it neither begins nor ends with the subject who speaks or with the specific name that is used” (p. 34). In other words, the illocutionary force of a speech act comes from the prior conventions and citational history that both precedes and conditions the use of particular discourse. While an individual can be liable for what is said at a perlocutionary level, reprimanding and rejecting the speech act does little to curb the force and power of the discourse at an illocutionary level of uptake. Indeed, such attempts actually lock into place injurious speech, “preserving their power to injure, and arresting the possibility of a reworking that might shift their context and purpose” (Butler, 1997, p. 38). Instead of preserving this injurious history, efforts to reclaim or re-signify discourse require laying claim to a term or utterance and using it

against its “constitutive historicity” (Butler, 1993, p. 227).

Yet, to Butler (1993), re-signification or the queering of language through performance is not simply a question of will or conviction. Rather, performance requires both the enactment of the utterance and the transference of binding power onto that utterance. The authority of the act is not determined by an external judge or the intent and convictions of the speaker; instead, it is located in the citational history of the discourse (Butler, 1993).

General Implications for Policy Debate

What is the importance of this speech act theory for our understanding of the nature and effect of sincere conviction and performance in competitive debates? Academic policy debate operates as a speech act system that is in many ways similar to Derrida’s idea of citationality and iterability. For instance, debate begins with the construction of argument briefs and blocks. These sets of arguments combine the thoughts and utterances of several experts and writers and are presented in a new context and time. No matter the original intent and convictions of these authors, their ideas are now deployed in a new manner and purpose within a debate. Also, several team members and coaches work on various sets of blocks and briefs, which means that a single student might cite the ideas and beliefs of over a dozen people in his/her speech act. Additionally, debaters post the citations and list of arguments they presented on online case lists that allow other debaters to borrow and use those arguments in new and different rounds and contexts. At the end of the debate, judges compile all of the claims, warrants, and data presented in the round and after rendering a decision, likely recount the arguments to the teams they coach, which redeploys these arguments well beyond the reach of the intent and beliefs of the debaters who constructed the original arguments and briefs. Even when students’

convictions and intentions are introduced into debate, it becomes almost immediately difficult to determine where students' ideas begin and where the excess of meaning produced by the constant iteration of utterances stop. While students may know their personal beliefs, it is difficult for those beliefs to control and contain meaning once it has uptake. Put differently, the constant citation of ideas and beliefs always add additional meaning as more voices (e.g., a quotation from an expert, a coach's language choices on a block) and new contexts are introduced.

Even if students attempt to remain completely authentic by avoiding reference to outside experts or their coaches or teammates by citing nothing other than genuine experience in their arguments, this performance continues to operate as citation for a few reasons. First, in its selection and redeployment of past experiences, the speech act cites prior experience and conventions to make the experiences communicable. Second, the purely authentic performance is intelligible as a debate argument only because it references some competitive debate conventions (e.g., it follows time limits, it is presented as a constructive, it contains different contentions) and the expectations of the judge. Third, once a debate ends, the students have no control over what kind of uptake their arguments have beyond the debate; anyone can use these arguments in new ways and contexts. Thus, debate operates at both levels of discourse as outlined by Austin. On one hand, debate has an expressed political purpose of persuading the judge and perhaps inspiring and convincing the other team at a perlocutionary level. On the other hand, debates also produce illocutionary effects that are determined in the uptake and circulation of arguments after and outside the debate. Both levels are performative in that they produce an effect: winning a ballot, changing an opinion, or even declaring an identity for oneself. However, what becomes very difficult to assess within a

debate is the authenticity and ethics of specific utterances.

Why does it matter that speech acts in debate operate on both levels of effect? It calls into question the common division between explicitly labeled “performance-based” arguments and more traditional debate arguments that center on the use of the federal government as the agent of change. For instance, the seemingly constative statement, “a substantial increase of United State federal government democracy assistance to Egypt stops war” contains the performative statement, “you should affirm a substantial increase of United State federal government democracy assistance to Egypt because it stops war.” This implied performative statement can accomplish two things: (1) persuading the judge to vote in support of U.S. aid; and (2) the performative affirmation of an idea. As Culler (1981) explains, Austin “reaches a surprising conclusion. An utterance such as ‘I hereby affirm that the cat is on the mat’ seems also to possess the crucial feature of accomplishing the act (of affirming) to which it refers” (p. 17). Accordingly, speech act theory demonstrates that both critical and policy debate utterances in a debate operate performatively. If we are going to credit critically inclined debaters with the argument that we should view certain utterances as having a performative effect, it makes little sense to exclude seemingly constative policy-centered statements because within the context of a debate, they may also operate at an illocutionary level.

Speech act theory also disrupts some contemporary assumptions about the effect of individual debate rounds. A common complaint about contemporary policy debate is that the idea that speech acts in a debate will fiat the implementation of a particular policy option is illusory and mistaken. Thus, critics of the fiat view of the role of the ballot contend that policy arguments have no particular effect or impact outside of the round. Instead, they maintain that we should evaluate the discourse

uttered in an individual round because that discourse has illocutionary and interpellative effects on the individuals in the debate and can be cited outside of the individual debate. As my review of speech act theory suggest, these critics have it partially correct. Any utterance in single debates can have illocutionary uptake outside of a debate, particularly in an age of electronic argument lists. Additionally, both critical and traditional policy arguments can have perlocutionary effects on the judge even if they fail to circulate beyond the individual debate. However, just because an argument in a debate has the potential to be cited after a debate does not guarantee that all arguments will reach this level of effect, as there are some necessary conditions for uptake to occur. First, as Butler (1997) contends, language is excessive because it always expresses more than we intend. Particularly for performances, they are embodied, which adds even more excessive meaning to any utterance. As a result, "language is mostly agency, but not mastery or control or closure of system" (Butler, 1997, p. 8). It is impossible for a debater to claim that he/she, the other team, or the judge can master, control, stop, or intentionally direct illocutionary effects. Second, these illocutionary effects of language are not something that can be predicted or described in an immediate context. For instance, discourse located within a single debate has rhetorical effect only because it cites arguments, discourse, and knowledge produced prior to the debate. Consequently, the effect of any debate or speech act is produced somewhat both prior to and after a single debate because citationality provides force to the discourse. Indeed, from the vantage point of an individual debate, no one can accurately assess the potential illocutionary effect of any discourse; that effect depends on how the discourse is later cited in other contexts (Butler, 1997). Even if the debater's only purpose is to persuade at a perlocutionary level, the full range of effects of the speech act are unclear past the casting of a ballot and the judge's

comments after the debate. How that judge, the opposing team, and the audience acts as a result of being persuaded cannot be determined at the time of the utterance (Butler, 1997). Thus, the claim that the discourse of an individual debate is the only reliable effect we can discern from a debate is incorrect. The problem, though, is that little if anything that happens after the debate can be determined at the time of the speech act.

Even if the critical or traditional government-as-agent debate arguments do not reach a level of circulation or citation, this does not mean that the speech acts are any less political or performative at that time they are uttered in a debate. However, it does mean that we need different means to evaluate the argumentative effectiveness of speech acts. The aim of this essay has been to demonstrate the difficulty of using illocutionary performative effects or sincerity as governing forces to decide competitive rounds. Rather than use these indeterminable and unpredictable standards to resolve debates, competitive debate should be evaluated based on the persuasive perlocutionary force of debate speech acts. In other words, debate should be assessed on the localized effects each student's speech act has on the judge. This is not a terribly novel idea, as debate ballots have long asked the judge to assign a win to the team that did the "better job debating" in the round. For example, judges can decide rounds based on which team did the better job persuading them on the cost-benefits of a given action (policy or critical). There is no reason why cost-benefit has to be determined solely by policy consequences; they also can be defined as the ethical, epistemological, or ontological implications of the course of action. Additionally, a judge might evaluate the debate based on which team's arguments ring most true to or motivates him/her at the end of the debate. In this framework, students' personal politics and identity claims still matter, but they are evaluated on a localized

level based on perlocutionary effect rather than as an a priori decision-calculus for who gets to access arguments in the debate. While these options might seem somewhat subjective, it is far less arbitrary than attempting to determine highly uncertain illocutionary speech act effects that might occur beyond the single debate round or indeterminable authenticity of personal convictions.

The argument here is not that conviction-driven speech acts are not important, as they can be rather significant to the students as they reveal important personal life choices or preferences (e.g., gender or sexuality) and their individual politics (e.g., allegiance to a social movement or cause). The expression and use of these beliefs in debate might be important to legitimate those choices and politics and they might motivate students' future career and life choices. The aim here is not to promote a style of debate that is completely depersonalized or abstract, but to detach perlocutionary arguments about identity, experience, and politics from a recently developed ethical imperative that the presence of a singular belief, experience, or identity is unchallengeable, stable, and the absolute decision-rule for a debate. In doing so, this detachment opens up debate to a host of arguments about the perlocutionary effects of identity, experience, and politics without foreclosing the motivational and deeply personal value that these kinds of arguments might have for students.

Evaluating debate speech acts in this way resolves the difficulty involved in distinguishing serious and non-serious speech acts in a debate. As speech act theory suggests, we cannot accurately distinguish the serious from the non-serious speech act in a debate. For instance, what prevents students from lying about their true beliefs in order to win a debate? We have no structures or even incentives to regulate the use of students' prior beliefs in debate. At best, we can only accept their word that they are sincerely debating from their convictions, which is

not reliable. As Derrida (1988) contends, “nothing can distinguish a serious or sincere promise from the same ‘promise’ that is non-serious or insincere except for the intention which informs and animates it” (pp. 68-69). Additionally, the presence of a ballot and competitive debate conventions create an impetus for students to select, overemphasize, deemphasize, and alter parts of their sincere beliefs and experiences to make their arguments more effective. Alternatively, even if both teams believe that they are engaged in a non-competitive sincere discussion about an issue in place of a competitive debate, the need to declare a winner and loser at the end of the discussion often creates a number of complications. For instance, a rather memorable round occurred several years ago where both teams agreed to abandon the traditional debate format in order to have a sincere discussion about the problems with contemporary international relations theory. Instead of speaking switch-sides, both teams spoke their true feelings about the matter and the judge listened to both teams’ thoughts. At the end of the debate, the judge believed both teams provided an excellent discussion and in order to decide the debate, he/she flipped a coin. The losing team was extremely upset with the decision and rather than focus on the productive value of the discussion, all the attention and the consequence of the round centered on the decision calculus rather than the sharing of genuine beliefs. Consequently, competitive pressures can operate as a distraction from the value of disclosing true convictions.

If nothing in the presentation can distinguish a sincere speech act from an insincere one, there seems to be little consequence of disingenuousness. However, Massey (2006a) is concerned that insincerity can cause harm in debate. For example, he argues that because discourse shapes reality and that we impose this frame on an audience, a non-serious performance as the United

State federal government is unethical and might damage an audience. However, how would the audience know otherwise? How am I harmed by the insincere speech of others, particularly when the opposite side of the topic is presented by the other debate team? According to speech act theory, there is no clear reason why this would jeopardize the audience. According to Butler (1997), attributing immediate harm to individual speech acts inappropriately assigns blame and harm to the speaker. Furthermore, assuming immediate harm is problematic because it closes the gap between intention and speech act, which forecloses the possibility that discourse can be re-appropriated and redeployed. As well, this perspective blames the speaker for harm when the individual's speech cannot have that effect without a prior history that gives that discourse its force and power. For instance, the act of blaming an individual debater for evoking a harmful and gendered view of international relations (IR) theory depends on the presence of preceding arguments, history, and theories that tell us that a particular view of IR theory is dangerous. The problematic discourse is not unique or originated by the debater in question. While we can hold the individual accountable for evoking the troubling rhetoric, we cannot maintain that his/her utterance is what causes actual harm; the true source of injury is located in the historicity of the discourse (Butler, 1997).

Implications for Performance Debate

Understanding debate utterances as iterative speech acts has a number of implications for in-round debates about performances and speech acts. First, performances and speech acts cannot be assessed as more or less "correct" or filled with more or less conviction or authenticity. Because of how a performance is constructed through iteration and its prior historicity and the excessive nature of embodied performance, it is nearly impossible to assess the authenticity or sincerity of a performance.

Additionally, if winning or losing is contingent on the purported sincerity of the speech act, there seems to be no disincentive for lying or exaggerating one's performance. For instance, when the University of Louisville first began its style of project debate that critically challenged privilege in academic debate, I judged a debate between Louisville on the affirmative against a team from my region on the negative. I did not know any of the four debaters particularly well. During the course of the debate, the negative argued that they were not privileged and indeed lived in low socio-economic conditions and should not lose because they are more privileged than the Louisville debaters. The negative team also pointed out that the Louisville team had rather expensive computers and speakers that demonstrated that they were not as economically disadvantaged as claimed in the affirmative speeches. I had no way to assess during the round the truthfulness of these claims. Later, I discovered that the one negative debater not from the Louisville team grew up in a highly affluent family in a very rich suburb. While the negative debater's performance was clearly insincere in hindsight, nothing about the appearance or embodied speech act provides clear markers of privilege. As Derrida (1988) maintains, nothing but the unknown intentions of the speaker can distinguish the true and false performance. From a judge's perspective, intent is never known and thus impossible to evaluate as the primary ethical duty or decision-rule for the debate.

Second, attempts to demonstrate or evaluate authenticity serve as a distraction from the larger and more important question of argumentative effectiveness. Instead of discussing how issues of identity, experience, or policy making best persuade the judge, many performance debates that establish authenticity as the key criterion for evaluating the debate fall under great scrutiny about the behavior, beliefs, and intentions of the debaters. For

example, in the debate previously referenced, the round quickly became a question of whose life experiences and beliefs demonstrated privilege the most. Unfortunately, the speech acts in the debate did not make this clear. Instead, as the judge, I had to make rather subjective assessments with no clear evidence to support my decision. Had the debate revolved around the question of which performance was more persuasive based on the cost-benefits of having a more inclusive framework that recognized the role of privilege in debate instead of constantly switching back to the question of who had the most authentic experiences of being economically disadvantaged, it would have been easier to adjudicate. However, the issue of sincerity as the decision-rule for both what counts as evidence in the debate and the ultimate decision at the end of the round creates an unnecessary distraction and heightened inspection of issues that do not arise in other types of debates. For instance, traditional policy debates about the actions of the federal government and the consequences of policy change do not invite this kind of intense scrutiny about the potential inconsistency between the debaters' sincere beliefs and the positions they are advocating in the debate. This problem can be corrected if students' experiences and narratives are allowed to be used as legitimate data or evidence in the debate (and subject to the same tests of evidence as all other evidence in the debate) and we view the debate as competing orientations towards the resolution that have advantages and disadvantages that can be persuasively contested throughout the debate.

In response to the claim that debates about sincere performances are too subjective and unverifiable, some debaters contend that physical skin color and other bodily markers can provide clear signs of authenticity and experience. However, this basis for assessment is problematic. For example, mixed race, ambiguous skin tone, and a host of other factors complicate our ability to

evaluate authentic embodied performances. This argument also raises the problems of heightened scrutiny previously discussed. Additionally, this linkage between experience and the body essentializes experience and identity. For instance, assuming that experience is uncontestably a sign of authentic performance naturalizes identity and its discursive history and “locate[s] resistance outside its discursive construct and reif[ies] agency as an inherent attribute of individuals, thus decontextualizing it” (Scott, 1991, p. 777). Spivak (1996) maintains that attempts to locate and advance a stable and unquestioned genuine subaltern experience are in vain because they uncritically assume that a collectively agreed upon experience in a heterogeneous yet physically similar group is possible, natural, and non-ideological. Overall, such assumptions seem rather troubling as they weaken the underlying assumptions and progressive potential of many critical projects. Thus, evaluation of authenticity and conviction seems rather difficult and an unnecessary distraction from the larger question of argumentative effectiveness. It is worth noting again that the point of this argument is not to exclude genuine beliefs or experiences from debate. The concern here is that using purportedly sincere and stable identities and beliefs as the regulating force to determine what is ethical or who can access the ballot unintentionally draws a line between types of debate and will always invite higher levels of scrutiny from judges and produces a type of ethics that are not helpful to the debate performance.

Third, we should be cautious of claims that any and all utterances in a debate constitute a performance or speech act. While I argue earlier that any statement in a debate – be it policy or critical – has the potential to be have illocutionary effects, judges cannot assess that impact accurately within the round. For example, theorists such as Cheshier (n. d.) suggest that speech acts

can be evaluated on how “politically productive” they are (para. 23). Also, Evans (2011a) contends that, “judges are complicit and must realize that casting their ballot one way or another has material consequences” (para. 15). However, the material and illocutionary effects of any speech act occur through citation, which happens beyond the individual debate. Consequently, judges cannot assess the effect of the act unless it has a certain uptake within the debate community. For instance, using citationality as a standard for evaluating speech acts, we can determine in hindsight that the University of Louisville’s race project had considerable discursive and material effect as it was cited by many other teams and radically changed the nature of critical and performance debate. However, this impact could not be determined inside the localized debate round.

As Butler (1997) argues, an illocutionary performative statement requires the citation of prior convention or history to give it discursive force. In other words, a statement in a debate needs a certain history and affective charge in order for it to resonate within and beyond a debate round. Thus, simply making any statement in a debate and labeling it a “speech act” is not sufficient to meet the conditions of a performative speech act. For instance, debaters on the 2011-2012 democracy assistance to the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) region topic would contend that their discussion of the MENA region or democracy in general constituted an important speech act that should be evaluated equal to or greater than other arguments in the debate. While there is the potential for these claims to be true, many of these debates likely failed to site the rhetorical history or key ideographic terms that would activate the prior controversy or authority of past discussions that would make it citational and thus performative.

Fourth, contemporary speech act theory provides

new avenues for permutations or citation of performances in debates. In many performance debates, it is common to hear performance teams argue that opposing teams' attempts to run plan/performance-inclusive counterplans (PICs), permutations, or other attempts to operate within a performative framework are insincere, inauthentic, or constitute a form of intellectual plagiarism (Zompetti, 2004). Put differently, these efforts should be rejected because they are fake or parasitic performances. However, as Derrida (1988) contends, efforts to regulate speech acts with an organizing center of intention or sincere beliefs undermine the citationality, excess, and structural play of discourse. For both Derrida (1988) and Butler (1997), this approach is flawed for two reasons. First, the attempts to govern speech acts will unavoidably fail because recirculation of discourse is inevitable. Additionally, speech acts always produce excess meanings that are beyond our sovereign control. Second, these regulative approaches provide very limited rhetorical agency as they reject the possibility of re-signification. For instance, without the possibility of citationality, harmful language cannot be re-appropriated for new cultural and political uses. Likewise, the strategic use of essentialized identities to expose the shortcomings of such representations becomes nearly impossible within this perspective of communication (Spivak, 1996). For example, productive critiques of gender and racial identities through parody would likely be excluded if sincerity and intentions regulate acceptable performances. Additionally, if discourse is limited in agency due to intentions and sincerity, then it likely has little power to change reality. Simply put, one cannot simultaneously posit a strong (e.g., discourse changes reality) and weak (e.g., discourse is severely constrained by prior beliefs and intent) theory of discursive agency.

While performance teams might find the prospect of having their opponents strategically capturing their

speech acts unfair, there seems to be greater disadvantages associated with the attempts to strictly police insincere performances. However, this does not mean that these teams are left with no defense against permutations, PICs, or other capture strategies. Indeed, this review of speech act theory suggests that the opposition's citation of the speech act must have some discursive effect or force. While I argue that effect is rather difficult to assess within a single debate round, Salih and Butler (2004) provide a solution to this problem. In discussing the progressive potential of strategic essentialism, Salih and Butler (2004) argue that re-signification of representations and terms can operate as sites for productive contestations over the meaning and exclusiveness of these identities and discourse. As a result, the debate about whether or not permutations or PICs of a performance can move away from questions of conviction and intent and instead focus on argumentative effectiveness, which could examine the exclusions and consequences created by the differences that remain between the performance team and their opponents' orientations. Put rather simply, the debate returns to a question of net-benefits rather than one of mutual exclusivity regulated by true beliefs. Thus, the desire to exclude permutations and PICs solely because they are insincere should be rejected if performance teams want to maintain the strong theory of discursive agency that they need in order to justify the impact of their arguments.

Implications for SSD Theory

Understanding debate utterances as citational illocutionary performance also has a number of implications for the enduring debate about SSD. First, speech act theory calls into question the assumption that SSD is ethically harmful because it produces a gap between public utterances and students' convictions. Not only is this gap benign, it has the advantage of allowing for

strategic redeployment of representations and counter-speech. However, one problem raised by Greene and Hicks (2005) not discussed up to the point is their concern that SSD constitutes a theory of deliberative democracy through a “post-conventional morality – one capable of making moral judgments based on reason and not authority or personal conviction” (p. 120). Yet, this argument presumes a model of citizenship and civic engagement that is rapidly changing in a Web 2.0 environment. For instance, Bennett, Wells, and Frelton (2011) note that since the Progressive Era, a Dutiful Citizenship (DC) model of civic engagement, one in which communication occurs through one-way channels dominated by high authority sources, has governed American media and politics. Additionally, the DC model of civic life posits that citizens engage “in public life out of a sense of personal duty” (Bennett et al., 2011, p. 838). However, with the rise of internet technologies and Web 2.0 user-created content, we are witnessing a shifting civic engagement model that is giving rise to an Actualization Citizenship (AC) in which young citizens are no longer motivated by conviction and a moral personal duty, but, instead, by “self-actualization through social expression” (Bennett et al., 2011, p. 840). In this model, citizens participate in cause-oriented politics driven by individual action and consumer choices.

The AC model of citizenship operates in a media environment that no longer privileges the great orator or authoritative news source. Rather, user created media and the sharing or citation of information creates a sense of engagement and agency (Bennett et al., 2011; Colbert, 2011). Consequently, the author and his/her intentions matter far less within this environment. As Colbert (2011) suggests, “Web 2.0 is the quintessence of post-Structuralist ideology” (para. 17). In particular, Colbert (2011) contends that, “On the web, roles of author and reader, consumer and producer, are not fixed or permanent. User-

created sites allow the entire online public (the readers) to access work while the producers (the authors) remain completely anonymous" (para. 2). Thus, if the source is decentered in the emerging public sphere, there seems to be less need for us to train students and future citizens in communication and civic engagement practices like conviction-driven debate when they seem far less important in today's public sphere. There seems to be little harm on democratic culture created by SSD. Indeed, the developing model of AC citizenship would suggest that our citational understanding of speech acts may be a more appropriate model for debate and civic engagement than one strictly regulated by personal convictions or contemporary SSD ethics.

Second, Greene and Hicks' (2005) concern about the gap created between an embodied speech act and beliefs in the promotion of SSD appears less worrisome from a Derridian perspective. Initially, the gap criticized by Greene and Hicks is an inevitable product of any speech act. A certain distance always exists between an act and speaker's intentions and convictions. We cannot maintain mastery over our speech acts precisely because they are embodied; as such, our performance is always in excess of our intentions. Closure of this gap is impossible in public communication. Moreover, attempts to artificially close this gap foreclose re-appropriation of utterances and discourse. Consequently, anytime we misspeak, argue from a poorly understood assumption, or make other mistakes, we would be held accountable for those mistakes because there is a one-to-one relationship between our public utterances and our sincere beliefs. As a result, closure of the conviction-speech act gap greatly limits discursive agency and fails to properly account for the unwieldy nature of public speech acts.

However, both deconstruction and AC citizenship perspectives suggest that either extreme – SSD as abstract

and depersonalized technocratic information exchange and SSD as highly personalized and conviction-driven – are problematic because both perspectives of SSD assume that convictions or speech acts are stable. For instance, many performance debaters contend that their convictions and the meaning of their experiences are formed and stable prior to communication. These attempts to regulate competitive debate through stable identities and beliefs are problematic. In comparison, supporters of fiat-based policy debate assume that convictions change and are tested through debate. However, these proponents often assume that the meaning of a resolution is always stable and predictable across a number of contexts, which allows for an anticipated switching of sides on the resolution each debate. However, one of the lessons of deconstructive speech act theory is that the meaning of a text is always already shifting and unstable, as texts do not have inherent and secured meaning (Derrida, 1988). As a result, attempts to police and dismiss performance-style debating or regulate access to arguments based on sincerity depend on an inaccurate view of communication and the emerging political sphere. In response, we need a new definition of SSD that recognizes the value of deconstructive speech act theory for both performance- and traditional policy-styles of debate.

Redefining SSD

We should not define switch-side debate in reaction to fears about the conservative (e.g., “acting in support of communist China makes one a communist”) or liberal (e.g., “roleplaying as the state is imperialist”) ideological indoctrination of students and the ethics of those pedagogical choices. These concerns misunderstand the inherent and ontological instability or play or polysemy contained in all communication and its effects (Pada, 2009). Rather than viewing the resolution as defining and stabilizing the inherent meaning of a resolution and clearly

demarcating each side of that statement, we should view the resolution as an artifact that has unstable and contestable meaning. The instability of the resolution as an artifact is inevitable as different teams, judges, tournaments, and documents deploy the resolution in different contexts in many different ways. Even when exact meaning is policed through topicality, no single topicality debate ever plays out the same way, thus ensuring variation and difference through citation.

In this perspective, SSD does not have to be at odds with performative speech acts. Instead, SSD should be defined as switching sides on an orientation or perspective towards a set of words that operate as an unfixed resolutorial text. These orientations would exist on a continuum with many ways to approach the resolution. One of those orientations could be to read for the presence of framers' intention located in the syntax and arrangement of the resolution's terms as a "partial, if not, a total glimpse of the author's intentions" (Pada, 2009, p. 87). This perspective would likely best serve traditional federal government-centered policy debate as it provides a source of predictability found in an unstable resolution. On the other end of the continuum, affirmatives might approach the resolution as a debate about identities and experiences that are both included and excluded by the text. These debates should not be determined on a strict ethical system defined by the authenticity or sincerity of beliefs or performances, but instead on the perlocutionary effects that the speech acts have. This would best preserve a space for performance-style debate while allowing for negative arguments like counterplans and disadvantages.

Maintaining that the resolution is an unstable artifact does not default us into a nihilistic situation without stable communication or debate (Pada, 2009). According to Derrida (1988), the ontological possibility of play and instability does not mean that communication and a semi-

stable resolution is impossible. As Pada (2009) explains, play always “implies a *possibility* and not an absolute condition of mis-communication....Différance does not mark the end of communication, rather, for Derrida, it opens new possibilities that are latent behind the text” (pp. 82-83). Thus, debate can begin with grammar and other cues for intent and meaning of the resolution, but there must always be room for a critique of that reading’s exclusions and consequences. This redefinition of switch-side debate allows a great deal of space for both traditional policy and conviction and performance-style debaters to operate. Additionally, it acknowledges the ontological instability of speech acts and their illocutionary effects, which opens up a number of possibilities for both policy and performance-styles of debate.

Conclusion

Given the unstable and citational structure of contemporary communication networks and competitive debate, regulating debate through strict ethical structures like conviction, experience, and certain resolitional intent seems unworkable and problematic. Even if students know their true beliefs prior to rather than through debate, the unintended and excessive meaning produced by the embodied speech act, the presence of multiple authors of debate arguments, and the risk of the fake performance makes it very difficult for judges to assess true convictions. Likewise, given the latent presence of instability and polysemy in any utterance or text, the idea that debate can be properly governed through a strict adherence to a resolitional utterance is difficult to defend. A redefinition of performance and SSD that is informed by deconstructive speech act theory provides a better balance that best reflects how communication and contemporary politics operate.

Yet, in the age of competitive debate that increasingly

favors rapidly technical exchanges of information rather than public speech and clever strategic tricks over topic content, it is all too easy for outside observers to make reactionary calls to restore the state of argumentative pedagogy to an earlier state that celebrates the singular orator speaking well on a stable topic and full of conviction.¹ However, this model of communication and civic engagement appears to be increasingly displaced by communication interconnectedness and the declining importance of source authority. While conviction still matters to students and should not be discouraged as a motivation to present certain arguments, genuine feelings and intent are very difficult to communicate and present in a citational communication world. The concerns raised in the debates about student convictions in performance debate and SSD as harmful to students and unethical seem misplaced. Worse, these reactionary calls to reestablish student convictions as the governing center of competitive debate or the complete dismissal of performance-style arguments posit a communication and political engagement model that is archaic and offers limited discursive agency to students' speech acts.

Does this mean that current academic debate practices and pedagogy needs no reform in order to meet the needs and challenges created by an increasingly interconnected and technical public sphere? Certainly not. A Derridian account of speech acts maintains that discursive agency is located in the iteration of information and meaning. Unfortunately, current academic debate does not do nearly enough to offer the vast amount of arguments and research produced during a season to outside communities that would benefit from the information. Recent technological advances make it possible for competitive debate speech acts to effect public policy discussions outside of the context of the debate tournament. For instance, Goodnight and Mitchell (2008) and Woods et al. (2006) contend that

academic debate should create a type of Digital Debate Archive (DDA) that catalogs online all the briefs, citations, and flows of a debate season. Through various online statistical measures, the DDA could indicate the most frequently cited material and a host of other valuable open source information for outside scholars and public policy advocates. In these efforts, convictions likely matter a great deal, as students' beliefs and personal politics are what drive them to present thoroughly developed arguments on a frequent basis that become catalogued in the archive. Additionally, personal interest and convictions will bring students and outside activists and scholars to the archive. In implementing these ideas, competitive debate can better actualize a system of communication that is more in line with a model of communication advocated throughout this essay.

Endnote

1. For instance, see Hollihan's (2011) keynote address to the 17th National Communication Association and the American Forensic Association's Biennial Conference on Argument.

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