hand, has been forthcoming from the practice of relying on competing catastrophes as the sole basis for deciding CEDA debates.

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DEFINITIONAL ISSUES IN THE PURSUIT OF ARGUMENTATIVE UNDERSTANDINGS: A CRITIQUE OF CONTEMPORARY PRACTICE[1]

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While it is customary for scholars of human communication to recognize the complex nature of symbolic interaction, casual observation reveals our tendency to avoid any great concern over the actual use of words. So very often we fail to appreciate the need for clarity when we rely upon language in the commerce of daily affairs. Rather, most of us assume that an element of common understanding exists between individuals and that the meaning of a specific term is shared. It is only when ambiguities arise or when we interact in unique environments requiring explicit definitional analyses that the fundamental shortcomings associated with the use of words become apparent.

Among other specialized activities (e.g., jurisprudence), academic debate is one of those contrived situations in which, ostensibly, the clarity of terms is essential. However, the practice of tournament debating frequently gives short shrift to the role of definitions and obscures the fact that the meaning of words rests on more than a first affirmative's construction of argument. The following pages support this indictment by discussing three problematic trends concerning the definition of terms in academic debate, examining the basis for those problems as rooted in the misconceptions of participants, and reassessing what definitions are meant to be vis-a-vis debate while specifying rules for the appropriate clarification of terms in any given round. Ultimately, coaches and debaters may be guided to a deeper appreciation of definitional disputes and encouraged to use methods for critically inspecting the nature and utility of definitions in academic debate.

The traditional importance of definitions in reasoning and debate almost goes without mentioning. Textbooks uniformly highlight the need to clarify the terms of a resolution (e.g., Baird, 1950; Church & Wilbanks, 1986; Freeley, 1981; Rieke & Sillars, 1984; Toulmin, Rieke, & Janik, 1984). Furthermore, recent scholarship in social argumentation (e.g., Miller & Nicholson, 1976; Nelson, 1985) and tournament debate has explored the analytic distinctions between policy and value controversies regarding definitions. In policy debate, definitions are governed by either a "reasonability" (e.g., Herbeck & Katsulas, 1985) or a "more reasonable" (e.g., Parson, 1981) standard. Others (e.g., Ulrich, 1984; Warnick, 1981) argue that even more stringent justifications must be applied to definitions in the realm of value debate.

Regardless of policy/value distinctions, however, all would seem to grant the affirmative the right and obligation to define key terms at the start of a debate. Consequently, debate coaches and teams spend considerable portions of time analyzing

resolutions from a definitional standpoint prior to developing affirmative and negative positions. And, most of the time, we caution ourselves that poor definitional analysis is fraught with danger. First, since even "reasonability" is field-dependent, we must seek avenues that secure warrantability within specific academic or social domains (Brownlee, 1981; Herbeck & Katsulas, 1985). Second, we must appreciate the positive relationship that exists between the precision of definitions and the applicability of particular theories (e.g., drawn from political science) we employ in analyzing issues (Miller & Nicholson, 1976). And third, evidence of definitional ambiguity serves to signpost a *prima facie* violation since all subsequent argumentative analysis would not be based on a truly "common" understanding of argument (Brockriede, 1975; Brownlee, 1981).

Problematic Trends

In light of the importance of clear definitions in academic debate, one expects the standards articulated in textbooks and scholarly exposes would be reflected in tournament practice. Nonetheless, even a cursory examination of what often appears in competition reveals three subtle, though important, abuses of definitions. First, it is overly common to observe debaters defining terms via the method of substitution. While not explicitly condoned by most contemporary textbooks, debaters all too frequently attempt to clarify a resolution by simply indicating synonymous usage of terms. For example, in the Fall 1987 "covert involvement" was sometimes defined as "hidden participation" inviting the further substitution of "unacknowledged activity,""concealed actions," or "undercover operations." In short, definition by substitution results in an infinite regress and most theories of conventional meaning (e.g., Davidson, 1974; Grice, 1969; Lewis, 1969; Strawson, 1971; cf. Tarski, 1941) indicate that the ability of interactants to agree on what constitutes the meaning of a term is difficult to achieve through this method of delineation. In practice, the substitution method allows debaters to subsequently shift to a more precise and case-saving level of analysis; the final rebuttalist might easily claim, "Of course, hidden participation simply means plausible deniability." Certainly, some may argue that the context of argumentation adequately clarifies issues, prevents undue shifting, and renders the regress objection moot. However, since definitions should specify the contexts in which terms apply (e.g., "In today's debate, we define 'covert involvement' as ...."), it is inherently the case that the argumentative ground also shifts if the analysis is not restricted a priori to a specific parameter.

Generally, second, there is little insurance that terms, as they are defined in resolutional analysis, are commensurate with meanings embedded in specific pieces of documentation. That is, the way debaters define certain words may not be the same way as the cited authorities do. Clearly, situated texts and testimonies are enacted with particular intentions in mind (Nelson, 1985). Yet debaters rarely, if ever, seek access to the underlying intentions of the authorities they cite in support of claims. Even more alarming is the fact that debaters so often fail to check or challenge opponent's intentions

in the use of language. Hence, a pervasive sin of omission results in tangled perceptions of what should be the evidentiary basis for argument.

A third, and quite bothersome, practice involves the issuing of off-case extensions that may not be compatible with the definitions established in the initial analysis of the resolution. The manner in which debaters customarily prepare for tournament competition hastens this problem. Since value objections and "shell" arguments are generally created well in advance of specific rounds and assume a generic form, debaters often lack definition-specific applications so as to actually counter the thrust of an opponent's case. And it is to our discredit that advocates who advance, say, warrants that bear little relationship to the resolution as defined are seldom held accountable for the trespass by the other team.

Overall, one could surmise that debaters, as a matter of course, do not fathom the fundamental assumption of common ground that undergirds the rationality of argumentation. Arguably, the conventions of language may reduce the need for detailed verification in a particular round of debate. However, assertions have meaningful utility in argument if and only if they are uttered with certain intentions and all interactants are aware of the chain of intentions leading to a specific statement (Platts, 1979; Rollin, 1976). Without some measure of reality-checking, opponent's and authorities' true intentions must always remain suspect.

Basis for Problems

Most of the foregoing problems are fostered by a number of misconceptions regarding what definitions are and how they should be used in the context of intercollegiate debate. Perhaps the best way to explore these misconceptions would be to suggest the types of reasoning debaters often engage in when considering definitions in the context of competition. Such errors in reasoning revolve around violations of field propriety, authoritative meaning, and/or appropriate operationalizations.

Field Violations. Fields designate the purpose of an activity or, at best, domains of inquiry. Hence, any terms drawn from a field must be based on an appreciation of how those words are employed within the context of that specific realm of human affairs (Parson, 1981). This requirement is especially true for value justifications (Brownlee, 1987; Warnick, 1981). Yet, commonly, debaters seem to believe that while an attempt should be made to include field-dependent definitions, our activity provides the freedom to justify or negate resolutions by ranging widely across fields in the analysis of issues. For example, an affirmative might define "covert" by drawing upon the context of clandestine military operations such as reconnaissance activities yet go on to establish resolutional justification by relying almost exclusively upon public administrators who consider the term to encompass a wider range of actions (e.g., economic sabotage).

Authoritative Violations. Definitions should specify necessary and sufficient conditions for determining the meaningfulness of every assertion that is subsequently made

(Davidson, 1974). Even if field integrity is maintained (i.e., all analysis pertains to domain specific definitions), debaters should be cautioned that any specific example of testimony will contain subtle to dramatic differences regarding meaning-in-use. A common misconception easily follows: since advocates do not know the precise meaning context employed by an authority, they are free to assume mutuality in intended meaning. For example, though debaters may define and analyze "covert involvement" as if it constituted only clandestine military activities, much of the specific support used to discuss the resolution may originate with authorities focusing more precisely on the paramilitary actions of the CIA or the intelligence gathering capacities of the NSA.

Operationalization Violations. Within the last decade, it has become more or less fashionable to employ operational definitions in order to reserve the time required for lengthy resolutional analysis. Unfortunately, very few debaters appreciate the scientific analog championed by Bridgman (1938) and even fewer understand the rather stringent requirements for the use of operationalizations. To be useful, operational definitions mandate the specification of how concepts are being applied in concrete situations rather than the simple reportage of use itself (Ervin, 1970). That is, debaters (especially IAC) must be able to point to a specific statement which identifies how a term is to be considered. While operational definitions may preclude the subsequent modification of words over the course of a debate, the approach is quite risky (Gill, 1986) since most terms in a resolution cannot be defined as rigorously as, say, "mass" or "temperature." Furthermore, though debaters often indicate that the operational linkage is located in the context of the case itself, they seldom recognize the need to demonstrate specific instantiations of concepts. In 1987 and upon cross-examination, some first affirmatives could not locate either particular evidence or constructed arguments which clearly specified the operationalization delimiting "covert involvement." And the fact that they were rarely challenged to do so is even more disturbing.

Overall, the practice of using definitions in tournament competition can be indicted on at least two counts: debaters demonstrate confusion over what definitions should be and how they are to be used in the resolution of controversy. Of course, debaters can select from a rather wide array of methods available for delimiting the meaning of terms; Cooper (1973) and Robinson (1950) identify at least 14 different types of definitions. For practical purposes, however, and setting aside the problematic operational and substitution methods, two types of definitional analysis seem most representative of the actual practice of debate. Definitions are viewed as specifying the meaning of words or, alternatively, serving as references to particular assertions in which the words are to be used (Sidgwick, 1901). These two methods correspond to Robinson's (1950) distinction between lexical and stipulative definitions and should not be confused with each other.

The first type of definition, lexical, is only applicable to situations where the rough intent of an expression is known within its particular context; the second is to be used when words are largely unfamiliar or ambiguous in the context of usage. For example, in intercollegiate debate the term *prima facie* is useful because debaters generally know that their arguments must provide good and sufficient reasons for the adoption of a

resolution without clarification. On the other hand, "continued covert involvement" requires an advocate to choose and demonstrate how the phrase will function and mean in the context of the round. Both types of definition have utility but the lexical and stipulative methods are not equally appropriate in all situations.

Lexical definitions report the history of a word's usage and are usually found in either general (e.g., Random House) or field-specific (e.g., Black's Law) dictionaries. Arguably, most affirmative analyses of a given resolution employ this method of definition; debaters most often identified covert as "not openly shown, engaged in, or avowed" or a similar characterization. Yet, there are significant problems with the use of dictionary definitions. The method does not account for more than how the term has been used in the past and considers neither persons' intentions in the current use of terms nor currently associated meanings tied to ongoing contexts. It is doubtful that a CIA operative believes that covert involvement means "not avowed"; rather, she might assume that discovery of an operation is unlikely given this form of activity.

Additionally, lexical definitions are compromised by a bias toward "preferred" usage. Deviations from generally accepted referents are earmarked as slang regardless of how well they function in communication. Yet one could easily assume that field operatives know what covert means without having to consult a dictionary. Robinson (1950) argues that dictionaries are biased toward the elites of society who may be more esteemed by lexicographers than they are representative of a language community. Finally, the lexical method does not detail all historical usage; popular meanings come and go and the foci of dictionaries obscure the fact that different people adopt different meanings at different times in different contexts. In the 1960's, the American public was hardly aware that the CIA was engaged in the overthrow of popularly elected governments; in contemporary theatres such as Nicaragua, covert operations are readily apparent to the polity and target alike. Overall, we should suspect lexical definitions for the ulterior motives they may serve; what some debaters do with the lexical method (e.g., surreptitiously define negative analyses out of the round) should evidence the ease by which it can be and is abused.

Stipulative definitions, on the other hand, designate the ways in which terms ought be employed. In a sense, the method rejects the utility of "commonplace" understandings and advocates the adoption of context specific definitions. To stipulate a definition is to identify context-relevant meaning(s) for all subsequent usage of a term. The method has the advantage of greatly reducing ambiguity, preventing shifts in meaning, and making intentions explicit by holding debaters to the definitional ground established in the first affirmative constructive. By illustration, some debaters consciously limited their analysis of covert involvement to solely arms transfers through third-party proxies and, while demonstrating the overall significance of this type of covert activity, refused to deal with additional case areas. Consequently, their opponents and critics knew the nature of the disputed activity (i.e., giving/selling arms indirectly) and could hold them accountable for raising extratopical examples (e.g., mining harbors) or relying on documentation that did not have arms transfers as the focus for the term "covert." In this

manner, debaters and critics were provided with a more utilitarian basis for developing and processing argumentation. Thus, definitions in debate should stipulate meaning rather than index lexical usage.

Understanding what definitions should accomplish is one thing; to indicate how they should be used in academic debate is quite another. Currently, most debaters seem to treat definitional issues as an isolated aspect of gamesmanship instead of examining definitions with an eye toward their holistic impact in a round. That is, arguments concerning definitions only appear at the top of case-side analysis or in reference to topicality presses. For instance, despite the need to justify the entirety of value resolutions (Bile, 1987), debaters ordinarily do not treat definitional disputes as precursors to lines of argument in support of voting issues. In fact, the reasonability of definitions and the consistency of their application in a debate should be considered a jurisdictional matter; argumentation should be ignored on *prima facie* grounds if its stipulative basis rests upon warrantless contexts or field-shifting propensities (Brownlee, 1981).

Furthermore, the explicit support for stipulative definitions should occur via both authoritative, field-dependent endorsements demonstrably compatible with the intentions of an advocate and the consistent emeshment of arguments within the net of those definitional parameters. If continued covert involvement were argued as "undesirable" in light of a pragmatic foreign policy then a debater would have to use authoritative foreign policy analysts who associated pragmatism with desirability, insure that the affirmative case adhered to that definitional basis, and certify that all documentation originated in a compatible point-of-view (e.g., the moralistic charges of various policy critics would be of little use unless moralism was shown to be pragmatic). Thus, advocates should be required to flush all argumentation through the sieve of warranted definitions to secure any given ballot.

Rules for Clarification of Terms

To reasonably argue a jurisdictional standard regarding definitions, specific guidelines indicating what constitutes the sound and consistent development of stipulative definitions in debate must be established. In this regard, most traditional argumentation texts (e.g., Baird, 1950) offer only vague, pithy advice. Numerous scholars from various fields (e.g., Black, 1970; Miller & Nicholson, 1976; Platts, 1979; Rollin, 1976), alternatively, provide much clearer direction. In general, these analyses also support Robinson's (1950) listing of the requirements for stipulative definitions. As adapted to the context of tournament debate, Robinson might suggest that debaters bear in mind the criteria of necessity, exactitude, consistency, and intentionality of the definitions they employ.

1. Necessity. Debaters should stipulate definitions only when clarification is needed to further argumentation. As suggested earlier, conditions requiring the stipulation of terms are products of various shortcomings in our ordinary, commonsensical use of language. If the field in which resolutional analysis resides employs multiple meanings for a term, debaters should stipulate and justify a single parametric approach

to clarify the meaning in the round. Additionally, due to the social context that surrounds any dispute over values, words often become emotionally-laden (e.g., "Covert involvement is loathsome.") and stipulation is needed to undercut nonrational appraisals of key terms. By this criterion, a field-dependent stipulative definition is always required for the evaluatum in non-policy debate. Conversely, not all terms require stipulation. Words which modify the temporal nature of resolutions need not be stipulated since they are not germane to the specific fields being discussed and the construction of argument generally offers an account for past, present, or potential implications of policy choice. Prepositional phrases would also be clarified by the context in which arguments are developed. Consequently, if debaters use the stipulative method then their opponents would not be justified in making truly meaningless topicality presses regarding field-invariant terms. A requirement to define unambiguous terms (e.g., "would be") mandates the violation of a basic language convention: one should not be redundant in communication (Grice, 1975).

2. Exactitude. In using stipulative definitions, advocates should establish unique and exacting associations between words and their use. Contrary to a great deal of popular practice, debaters would not be permitted to isolate a term and then define it via the listing of several attributes. If a word is applicable to any number of, say, actions, then those employing the concept should identify a meaning which encompasses all those activities. If covert involvement is associated with all sorts of devious activities (e.g., assassination, propaganda, surveillance, arms transfers, etc.), then one should indicate the fundamental policy option (e.g., secret attempts to promote national interests) that undergirds each of those activities. Alternatively, debaters who also meet the consistency criterion (below) need not, and should not, substitute terms in documentation or analysis once a stipulative definition has been applied to a specific word. The criterion of exactitude forces advocates to develop lines of argument commensurate with the explicitly delimited foci of analysis.

3. Consistency. The criterion of consistency for stipulative definitions is certainly the most stringent of those suggested. Not only must debaters insure that they stick to the meanings they have established but they must also be confident that authoritative backing equally embraces the perspective. Arguably, in some situations this later mandate may be highly impractical. Nonetheless, steps can and should be taken to increase the likelihood that evidence more or less adopts the stipulations in a debate. Knowledge of the entire work from which a piece of documentation is extracted would increase the definitional probity of analysis as would cross-referencing other works authored by the same source. And reliance upon rigorous and scholarly analyses of issues is more likely to result in consistency than can be associated with journalistic diatribes or prejudicial explorations in the popular press (Brownlee, 1981). And reasonable certainty in the consistency between evidence and resolutional analysis is all this criterion entails; as noted earlier, we very seldom have direct access to the actual intentions of the authorities we rely upon in debate.

4. Intentionality. There is an ethical dimension to the use of stipulative definitions.

To the extent that the method is designed to clarify meanings and enhance actual clash in a debate, advocates should not stipulate to deceive opponents or to obscure meaningful distinctions in self-serving ways. On the one hand, stipulations must clearly state the intention of an individual in using a term; a lack of stipulative clarity may thinly disguise a person's desire to shift ground as arguments are extended. On the other hand, debaters must take into account and explicitly exclude from their analysis alternative field-appropriate interpretations of a particular word. For example, "NATO commitments" might equally apply to issues of manpower or financial backing under the auspices of the alliance. Here, a first affirmative could not stipulate the former meaning only to subsequently employ the latter in an unscrupulous manner (e.g., claim that issues of finance are a subconcern of manpower). Similarly, the advocate is ethically bound to inform opponents of the fact that alternative interpretations are being excluded from the analysis even if silence would be more strategically advisable.

In conclusion, the foregoing arguments indicting contemporary debate and favoring stipulative definitions are meant to be more provocative than prescriptive. Surely, the practice of intercollegiate debate would be worthwhile even if the activity did not adopt the fundamental changes suggested above. And, the analysis, agreeably, focused upon definitional abuses to the exclusion of instances where meaning has not been obscured by the shoddy analysis of terms. However, a reexamination of the role of definitions in debate is warranted and the activity can be improved upon; most of us can easily recall and still detest examples of poor definitions and questionable practices in this regard. For our enjoyment of intercollegiate debate, for the scholarship of students and critics alike, we might well reconsider just how "common" understanding is assumed to be in tournament practice.

Notes

[1] A version of this article was presented at the Speech Communication Association annual convention, Boston , MA, 1987.

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