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ABSTRACT

Academic debate has often been criticized as being "artificial" and "elitist" due to its highly structured format and the specialized skills it often requires. While countless argumentation scholars have advanced reasons why academic debate is pertinent to a comprehensive education, a different source of justification for resolutional theory can be found in the form of Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (1984). This theory postulates that communicative speech acts are aimed toward reaching understanding and consensus; in the everyday use of language, humans use speech acts to relate to the world of "facts," to the world of norms and values, and to the inner "world" of human experience. This paper provides some preliminary reflections on how Habermas's theory of communicative action can justify the traditional resolutional typology of academic debate. Initially, the paper examines Habermas's theory of communicative action. Then, it proceeds to "traditional" resolutional phrasing and theory and applies Habermas's theory to the "traditional" resolutional typology. Finally, the paper concludes by reflecting upon the heuristic and pedagogical advantages of this foundation for resolutional typologies. It contends that debate and argumentation pedagogy can be enhanced, both internally and perceptually, if this link between Habermas's theory of communicative action and resolutional typologies is further developed. (Contains 16 references.) (NKA)

Habermas and Debate Theory: A Putative Link between The Theory of Communicative Action and Traditional Resolutional Typologies

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Introduction

Academic debate has often been criticized as being "artificial" and "elitist" due to its highly structured format and the specialized skills it often requires (Derryberry, 1989; Freeley, 1996). It is holistically criticized for being esoteric through its lack of parallels with the format of "real world" argument (Freeley, 1996). An element in many critiques is the arbitrary and artificial nature that debate structure takes. An archetypal example of this is the standard threefold resolutional typology--fact, value, and policy--that most debate theorists propose in argumentation texts without further grounding (see Branham, 1991; Knapp & Galizio, 1999; Freeley, 1996; Ziegelmueller & Kay, 1997).

While Freeley (1996) and countless other argumentation scholars have advanced reasons why academic debate is pertinent to a comprehensive education, I find a different source of justification for resolutional theory in the form of Jurgen Habermas's theory of communicative action (Habermas, 1984). This theory postulates that communicative speech acts are aimed toward reaching understanding and consensus; these speech acts can be conceptually identified on a tripartite typology of propositions. In the everyday use of language, humans use speech acts to relate to the world of "facts," to the world of norms and values, and to the inner "world" of human experience (Habermas, 1987).

The following discussion provides some preliminary reflections on how Habermas's theory of communicative action can justify the traditional resolutional typology of academic debate. This justification is important in that it connects academic debate to the putatively universal practice of communication. Initially, this paper shall examine Habermas's theory of communicative action; then, the discussion will proceed to "traditional" resolutional phrasing and theory; next, Habermas's theory will be applied to the "traditional" resolutional typology; and finally, the paper will conclude by reflecting upon the heuristic and pedagogical advantages of this foundation for resolutional typologies.

Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action

The contemporary German philosopher Jurgen Habermas has proposed in his seminal work, The Theory of Communicative Action (1984), a theory of how language and communication work to create shared meaning among participants. Following the groundbreaking work of Austin (1997), Habermas has posited that human action can take two general forms: strategic action and communicative action (Habermas, 1984). Strategic action is action that is oriented toward success in some undertaking; it follows technical or rational rules in determining what is "best" or most effective in achieving a desired end. Some examples of strategic behavior would be mowing my lawn or lying to a police officer to avoid trouble.

Communicative action, on the other hand, is action that is "oriented toward reaching understanding" among participants in some discourse (Habermas, 1984, p. 285). Habermas (1996a) indicates that interactions are "*communicative* when the participants coordinate their plans of action consensually, with the agreement reached at any point being evaluated in terms of the intersubjective recognition of validity claims" (p. 58). These interactions must fulfill certain presupposed conditions to truly be "communicative."

The speech acts that are used in communicative action raise "validity claims" because they claim to be a valid or acceptable representation of some facet of the world (Habermas, 1984). Cooke (1994) indicates "Validity claims are always raised by flesh-and-blood individuals in actual socio-cultural and historical situations, but they always at the same time also transcend all given contexts" (p. 35). When validity claims are raised in communicative use of speech acts, the participants implicitly respond either with a "yes" or "no" (Habermas, 1998). Habermas (1984) argues that "with his [or her] 'yes' the speaker accepts a speech-act offer and grounds an agreement" (p. 296). If one does not agree with the speech act, then one demands that reasons or grounds be produced that support why that is a valid statement (or in the stronger case, proposes claims that counter the validity of that speech act). Habermas highlights that communicative action is the exchange of validity claims that demand agreement, rejection, or modifications based upon the strength of the stronger argument or reason (Habermas, 1993). Validity claims enshrine

> ...three different actor-world relations that a subject can take up to something in the world—to something that either obtains or can be brought about in the one objective world, to something recognized as obligatory in the social world supposedly shared by all the members of a collective, or to something that other actors attribute to the speaker's own subjective world (to which he [or she] has privileged access). (Habermas, 1987, p. 120).

Table 1 indicates the three types of speech acts and the validity claims they raise.

Table 1

Typology of Communicative Speech Acts

(Habermas, p. 328, 1984)

	Basic Attitudes	**Validity Claims**	**World Relations**
Constatives	Objectivating	Truth	Objective World
Regulatives	Norm-conformative	Rightness	Social World
Expressives	Expressive	Truthfulness	Subjective World

Constative speech acts deal with the common objective (physical) world all humans occupy (Habermas, 1984). These speech acts take an objectivating attitude toward the world; the discipline of physics is an excellent source of validity claims about the physical world (and objects therein). The validity claims constative speech acts raise deal with issues of truth; one asks the question, "is this a *true* representation of certain objects in the world?" Of course, Habermas does not claim that propositional knowledge ever reaches apodictic certainty. All statements are open to reasoned criticism at all times (Habermas, 1984).

Regulative speech acts address issues of norm-conformance and value that are created by societal and interpersonal interaction (Habermas, 1984). For example, the value of human life is not something that one could observe through a telescope or microscope in the objective world. Since this value is not an *object* in the phenomenal sense, it must belong to the created and sustained world of human interaction, i.e., the social world. Habermas would claim that such "entities" as values and norms exist due to interaction among humans, and validity claims must acknowledge this aspect as differing from the realm of "true" statements about the objective world, i.e., from constative statements. Regulative statements make validity claims to *rightness*, not to propositional *truth*, as do statements about the physical world. The "*rightness*" of a regulative speech act and the reasons/grounds that support this come from and refer to the social world (Habermas, 1987).

Expressive speech acts raise a claim to being a valid representation of a speaker's subjective world (Habermas, 1984). Claims such as "Bob is deliberately deceiving us" and "I am feeling sad" illustrate this form of speech act. These claims can be pronounced as either "truthful/sincere" or "untruthful/insincere." These types of claims ask whether speakers are being truthful in how they linguistically represent their inner state of being, their intentions, or any other knowledge of which they have privileged knowledge, i.e., personal awareness.

Habermas argues that in any utterance, all three of these facets of speech acts will be present. The speaker is at all times in contact with the objective world, the social world, and their subjective world, thus any speech act they use will be embedded in this web of objects, norms, and states (McCarthy, 1994). This concept can be illustrated by using a similar example to one Habermas (1987) uses. A professor could command a student: *Get me a cold glass of beer.* This request explicitly deals with issues of power and norm-conformance. The professor should be able to provide reasons *why* the student should get him or her a glass of beer. The student could raise objections to the validity of this regulative statement by arguing that he or she is not the professor's "slave," beer should not be allowed in class, and other positions that assert the

statement's claim to rightness is invalid. The student could also object to the statement based upon *constative* issues; perhaps the next beer distribution center is too far away to allow for retrieval during the allotted class time. Objections can also be raised concerning the expressive *truthfulness* of the professor's speech act. A student could claim that he or she does not really desire a beer; instead, the professor is just trying to embarrass the student in front of his or her peers.

Take a constative speech act, such as: *Your handwriting is very difficult to read.* This statement makes an explicit claim to represent a fact about the objective world; the ability of one to identify certain scratches of ink upon a piece of paper. This can be criticized as true or false of the objective world, but it can also be objected to on other grounds. One can claim that the statement is not regulatively valid; one does not raise this claim when they are interviewing for an important job, watching the President of the United States sign a bill, etc. While the statement makes an explicit claim, other claims can be relevant. The insight of Habermas's theory of communicative action is that language use is always centered about these three concerns; the objective world, the social world, and the subjective world.

Traditional Resolutional Typologies

Academic debate centers around a carefully worded proposition called a "resolution." While different forms of debate (and different debate organizations) phrase their resolutions in different formats, most debate theorists recognize three types of resolution (Freeley, 1996). Taking Freeley's (1996) argumentation book as a standard for the field, one can easily identify this resolutional typology; debate can focus on resolutions (propositions) of "*fact*, *value*, or *policy*" (Freeley, 1996, p. 46). Resolutions of fact force "the affirmative to [maintain] that a certain thing is true, while the negative maintains that it is false" (Freeley, 1996, p.46). Some typical resolutions of fact could be:

Resolved: Saddam Hussein is a threat to U.S. interests.

This house believes that American citizens monetarily benefit from federal taxes.

These resolutions lead debaters into supporting or undermining a claim about some fact.

The next type of debate proposition is a resolution of value, which Freeley (1996) describes as requiring "the affirmative [to maintain] that a certain belief, value, or fact is justified, that it conforms to the definition or criteria appropriate to evaluate the matter at hand" (p. 46). The negative attempts to maintain the opposite. Some examples of resolutions of value are:

Resolved: An unrestrained media is undesirable.

This house believes that "gangsta rap" is harmful.

These resolutions force debaters to define and argue values that contradict other values, to the extent that one team's interpretation of the resolution is chosen as "superior" by the critic.

The third and final resolutional type that Freeley (1996) proposes is the resolution of policy. In debates centering on this type of resolution, "the affirmative maintains that a policy or course of action should be adopted, while the negative maintains that this policy should be rejected" (Freeley, 1996, p. 48). Two examples of resolutions of policy are:

> Resolved: The U.S. should significantly change its foreign policy toward Belize.
>
> This house would withdraw from N.A.F.T.A.

These resolutions either include or require a specific plan of action; the debaters shall then argue whether the policy should be adopted.

Other debate texts utilize a similar or identical typology (see Branham, 1991; Knapp & Galizio, 1999; Ziegelmueller & Kay, 1997). What most of these texts lack is some type of foundation for their typology; they simply "lay out" the types of resolutions a debater may encounter, and then proceed to examine the strategies of supporting or rebutting these propositions. Freeley (1996) does a commendable job in mentioning the importance and interconnectedness of propositions in "real life" with such phrases as:

> Just as questions of fact, value, and policy are interwoven in the twentieth century's most highly publicized murder trial [the O.J. Simpson case], they are also interwoven in the great debates on public policy and in the unpublicized debates that influence our everyday personal and family lives. (p. 49).

While this is the start of a pragmatic justification for the existence of resolutional typologies, it is not sustained enough to allow for a defense of the proposed typology or for a detailed explication of its link to foundational communication issues. Additionally, no theoretical arguments are proposed that link debate propositions to the forms of propositions that are employed in "everyday life." It is this role that Habermas's theory of communicative action can fill by linking resolutional typologies to the general form of human communication.

Application of the Theory of Communicative Action

Habermas's theory of communicative action can be applied to the traditional resolutional typology as a foundation. If debate resolutions supposedly mimic "real life" communicative acts and parallel reasoning in real life, how exactly does one explain the connection between three "arbitrarily" described resolution types in an argumentation book and the myriad of utterances one uses in life? The theory of communicative action indicates that all actions that aim for understanding fall into one of the three speech acts typed above. The identifying feature of these utterances is that they make validity claims about some aspect of some "world" (as indicated in

Table 1). These speech acts usually raise one explicit validity claim, with implicit validity claims attached (Habermas, 1984). As an aside to the current discussion, Habermas (1996b) argues that this communicative interconnection of the three possible "worlds" is evidence of the overall unity of reason.

Debate resolutions can be subsumed into this tripartite division of communicative speech acts. Keeping in mind that debate resolutions raise an explicit validity claim, the types of resolutions can be identified as constative, regulative, or expressive speech acts. Resolutions of fact seek to describe the physical world; the debaters then attempt to support or disconfirm this proposition (Freeley, 1996). As evident in Table 1, Habermas's conception of constative speech acts is very similar; they make a validity claim about the common objective world in which we all live and to which we all have possible access (intersubjective confirmation). Resolutions of fact can be classified as constative speech acts; whether they are asserted and argued in a debate round or in a supermarket, they deal with the same idea of intersubjective confirmation.
Resolutions such as:

Resolved: The U.S. is a warlike nation.

are very similar in form, content, and in their conditions of verification as "real world" constatives, such as:

Pam is a hard worker.

Both statements purport to describe the world of our common interactions and objects, and thus both can be challenged with a listener (or opponent) asking for reasons *why* he or she should accept this speech act as true. Resolutions of fact are constative speech acts that inevitably must be pronounced "true" or "false" (see Table 1; Habermas, 1984).

Both resolutions of value and resolutions of policy can be classified as regulative speech acts in that they refer to the socially constructed world of ordered human interactions and norms. Resolutions of value judge certain beliefs or positions to be morally superior to others (Freeley, 1996); these types of resolutions deal in the currency of human values and norms (Habermas, 1996c). One is asserting that his or her validity claim of "*A* is superior to *B*," "*A* is evil," or "*A* ought to be held above *B*" is *right*; it is a correct description of how human interaction or judgement should proceed in that societal context. Resolutions of value are identical to many regulative speech acts we encounter in "real world" interactions:

Resolved: Taxes are morally reprehensible.

Taxes are immoral.

These two regulative speech acts both assert claims to rightness over their judgements of certain facets in the speaker's and hearer's social world. The speaker aims for these statements to gain

acceptance by anyone grasping the speaker's reasons for asserting the statement in the first place (Habermas, 1998).

Resolutions of policy can also be labeled as regulative speech acts due to their advisory nature. These resolutions assert a validity claim to a certain type of action in a societal setting. While they differ from resolutions of value in their focus on "specific" actions, they are similar in the crucial aspect of claiming to be the *right* description of action in the situation. Thus, both debaters and non-debaters assert that "*A* is the right thing to do because of reasons *a*, *b*, and *c*." Regulative speech acts refer to the world of norms, values, and interaction; both resolutions of value and policy fit this description of a portion of communicative action.

One of the three speech acts that current resolutional typologies do not utilize is the expressive speech act. This speech act asserts validity claims about an actor's/speaker's subjective (inner) world. Expressive speech acts are judged by the criteria of *truthfulness*; does the listener possess enough evidence or reasons to judge that the speaker is being truthful? Common examples of this type of speech act are when one claims "I am hungry," I am angry," or "that made me feel upset." One must examine consistent actions, admissions of deception, past incidents, etc. to help determine the judgement of truthfulness. While no current resolutional typologies describe or analyze this speech act and its potential for resolutional application, I find that it could be a source of future resolutions. Resolutions could ask the debaters to discuss the "truthfulness" of historic figures:

Resolved: President Truman knew about the Yalta concessions to Russia.

This house believes that Reagan didn't understand what he was saying.

These resolutions ask for probable confirmation or disconfirmation of a judgement of truthfulness on the part of a specified individual (or possibly an organization). The only possible examples of this type of resolution are found in parliamentary debate, but these only occur when debaters unknowingly define the resolution into one of epistemic belief (Stroud, 1999). In resolutions of the form "This house believes that *A*," defining the traditional terms of "this house" and "believes" turns the debate into one over the beliefs of whatever "this house" signifies. Currently, debate theory does not recognize expressive speech acts as being applicable in academic debate contexts. Habermas's theory of communicative action allows for the expansion of the possible types of debate resolutions into the expressive realm.

Heuristic and Pedagogical Advantages

There are two main pedagogical and heuristic advantages that accrue because of theoretical linkage between Habermas's theory of communicative action and traditional resolutional typologies. First of all, the "artificial" and "esoteric" nature of debate (Derryberry,

1989; Freeley, 1996) can be dispelled. If debate resolutions and argumentation classes are approached with the wide "lense" of communicative action, debate will no longer appear to be an academic game, but instead appear to be what it attempts to be--a formalized ritual of confirming the validity of a pre-determined speech act (the resolutional proposition). Argumentation classes can reinforce the idea that academic debate skills can be successfully applied in the non-debate world. Communicative action is fundamentally the same in both debate and non-debate settings.

Another heuristic advantage that theoretically grounding resolutional theory in communicative action accrues is the potential for new avenues of argument. As argued above, an entire new realm for resolutions is opened up in the form of expressive speech acts. Additionally, Habermas (1984; 1987) provides the fundamental insight that explicit validity claims involve implicit validity claims; even if one is explicitly asserting facts about the world, validity claims to norm-conformity of the utterance and truthfulness of the speaker still apply. Theoretical critiques (or "Kritiks") of a team's or the resolution's underlying assumptions could be justified as questioning the implicit validity claim to rightness of the speech act. Teams could question whether this resolution or its assumptions should be supported, or whether a team that uses biased or exclusionary language should be supported. Arguments that demand justification for the legitimization of the resolution or a team's arguments/language use could be theoretically integrated into the foundation of the theory of communicative action.

Conclusion

Debate has been criticized, somewhat justifiably, for its lack of connection to argumentation and discourse in the non-academic world. The very basis of debate, the resolutional propositions, has been continuously described in argumentation texts as simply "resolutions of fact, value, and policy." Further justification is needed in order to ground this basis for debate within the pragmatics of the "everyday world." This paper has sought to demonstrate that a fruitful connection can be made between Habermas's theory of communicative action and traditional resolutional typologies. Habermas's theory of communicative action connects well to the tradition resolutional typology of fact, value, and policy with interesting and heuristic implications. Through Habermas debate theory can not only claim grounding in the same types of speech acts that occur in "real world" communication, but can also enhance the variety of argumentative explorations open to participants and theorists that result. Debate and argumentation pedagogy can be enhanced, both internally and perceptually, if this link between Habermas's theory of communicative action and resolutional typologies is further developed.

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