CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0   Introduction

> "Much of the most significant communication in our lives is conducted in the form of debates. These may take place in interpersonal communication, in which we weigh the pros and cons of an important decision in our own minds, or they may take place in interpersonal communication, in which we listen to arguments intended to influence our decision or participate in exchanges to influence the decisions of others."
>
> (Freeley & Steinberg, 2000, p. 2)

Based loosely on the deliberative discussions of the British House of Commons, parliamentary debate has been a predominant form of competitive academic debate in most English-speaking nations (Branham & Meany, 1998).

1.1   Historical Background

According to Nisbett (2003, p. 2), the ancient Greeks had a remarkable sense of personal agency - the sense that they were in charge of their lives and were free to act as they choose, and it was this sense of agency that fueled the tradition of debate.

Homer had made it clear that a man is defined almost as much by his ability to debate as his prowess as a warrior. In settings like the marketplace or a political assembly, commoners could challenge even a king and live to tell the tale, especially if they managed to sway the audience in their favour (Nisbett, 2003, p. 3).

Debating, or deliberating discussions, forms the basis of parliamentary procedure. Though the roots of democracy may be from ancient Greece ("Democracy", 2007), parliamentary procedure that has been adopted and adapted in many democracies worldwide, was born in medieval England with the establishment of the Parliament of England back in 1215 through the Magna Carta ("Magna Carta", 2007), when armed knights and lords had to disarm and engage in verbal argument in a civilized manner. The main aims of this procedure were to impose the will of the majority non-violently, to force the group to rigidly discuss only one problem or main motion of the floor at a time, to provide a platform for arguments for and against the main motion, to give a voice to the

minority and last but not least, to ensure that the participants have equal opportunity to participate (Cragan, Kasch and Wright, 2004, p. 103).

Today, parliamentary debate has transcended into the classrooms and evolved into many forms of competitive academic debates like the World School Debates, the Australasian Debates, the ASIADS, World Universities Debates, amongst others. In Malaysia, parliamentary debate has been incorporated as a co- academic activity to encourage students to use the language. The format of the debate has been adapted from the World School Debate and the local format is known as the Parliamentary Style Debate (Bahas Ala Parlimen).

1.2   Debating in the Malaysian School System

The Parliamentary Style Debate (PSD) format made its debut in Malaysian secondary schools back in 1997. The implementation, which covered both the English Language and Bahasa Malaysia category, began in the Residential School System (Sekolah Berasrama Penuh) and was soon adopted by the day schools.

The *Piala Wira Haji Arshad* is the coveted trophy for the Parliamentary Style Debate competition among day school contenders (English category), whilst the *Prime Minister's Trophy* is the grand prize for competitors from the residential school system.

The PSD made its way to our shores when the upper echelon of our education system felt that the British Traditional Style Debates (old format), implemented 23 years prior to 1997, had only produced skilful memorisers or "regurgitaters" (APPENDIX A).

The traditional format allowed the speakers' time to put forward their points without any interjection or query from the other side. Both sides could come up with as many points as they wanted to and do their best to convince the crowd within their allotted time.

PSD, on the hand, would demand its debaters to speak off the cuff, based on notes they had made during preparation time and the debate itself (Branham & Meany, 1998).

1.2.1 Conversion from Old Format to the Current Format.

PSD rules and conventions vary in different nations and leagues. Due to its flexible nature, speaking time, number of speakers, judging and other elements of debate format may be altered to accommodate particular needs and purposes (Branham & Meany, 1998).

In a working paper to the then Education Minister, Yang Berbahagia Datuk Seri Mohd Najib b Tun Haji Abdul Razak , the Residential School Unit (Sektor Berasrama Penuh, Bahagian Sekolah, Kementerian Pelajaran Malaysia), stated that the focus of any debate should be the ability to argue and rationalise a point effectively. More

importantly, it should occur in spontaneity. They stated that the skill to argue spontaneously will only be honed if the format provides sufficient leeway for debaters to instantly rebut or refute claims brought up by the opposing side during the course of the debate (APPENDIX A).

1.2.1.1   Areas or Mechanisms Affected by the Conversion

The proposal for format conversion highlighted four areas that would either be introduced or undergo changes. The areas were speech text, rebuttal, Points Of Information (POI) and debate sides (APPENDIX A).

1.2.1.1.1   Speech Text

Under the traditional format, debaters argued entirely on preconceived notions or prepared texts without taking into consideration what was being said by the opposing side, during the course of the debate. The older version did not limit the number of arguments that must support the angle from which they were arguing.

PSD would require debaters to continuously evaluate, and refute arguments 'in situ'. Notes prepared prior to the debates would serve as guidelines or data sheets to help debaters substantiate their claims.

The traditional format emphasized on better delivery of text rather than the ability to think and respond instantaneously on the point of contention during the debate. There would be no room for prepared text in PSD as debaters would have to be alert in identifying 'loopholes' or 'flawed' arguments during the course of the debate.

1.2.1.1.2   Rebuttal

Under the traditional format, debaters would only rebut when it was their turn to speak. Furthermore, allocation of time and marks was 20% of the overall debate.

PSD allocates time for rebuttal on an increasing scale; from 25% for the first speaker to 70% for the second speaker and on to 80% for the third speaker. Not only do the debaters get to rebut points brought up when it is their turn to speak, they get to formally interject while the opposing speaker is speaking. This form of interjection is called a 'Point Of Information'. Taking no more than 15 seconds, any member of the opposing team may question or offer information that they feel can contradict or discredit the burden of proof offered by the current speaker. Now the onus will fall upon the speaker to respond to the challenge hence highlighting spontaneous verbal discourse of arguments and counter arguments.

1.2.1.1.3　　Point Of Information (POI)

Point Of Information (POI) in PSD will ensure that all students are engaged throughout the debate. The traditional format would render a debater a passive participant once he or she has spoken. POI in PSD allows the debater to challenge the status quo of the initial argument by utilizing points brought up by the speaker to substantiate the arguments. During the course of the debate, each debater is required to offer and accept two POIs. A debater who takes no part in offering or receiving POIs would be marked down for substance and strategy (APPENDIX A).

1.2.1.1.4　　Debate Sides.

The topics for debate are usually announced a week or even a month prior to competition. However, under the traditional format, the sides are also determined during that time. Therefore, both teams will only prepare for their sides of the debate, be it government or opposition. The trainers will also be present to the very last minute to give tips or to help fortify arguments.

Debaters involved in PSD will only find out their sides an hour before they are to debate. Once they have drawn their sides via ballot or a flip of the coin, these debaters are quarantined until the start of the debate. They are not allowed to have any contact with the outside world. This

includes gadgets that can help them to access the internet or multimedia versions of the encyclopedia.

1.2.2 Format Of Parliamentary Style Debate

Each team representing a school consists of 3 main debaters and one reserve. The proposing team is known as the Government and the opposing is known as the Opposition.

The first debater of the Government is known as the Prime Minister and the other two will be speakers in the team are addressed as the second and third minister respectively. The first member of the opposition is known as the Opposition Leader, whereas the second and third team members are known as the second and third Speaker respectively.

The debate is controlled by the Speaker of the House or Chairperson. The Chairperson regulates who speaks by formally recognizing the debater. If necessary, the Chairperson can also rule a debater out of order if his or her comments do not germane to the main motion (Cragan et al., 2004, p. 103).

Time allocation and speaking order are as follows:-

	GOVERNMENT		OPPOSITION	TIME
1	1st Speaker	2	1st Speaker	8 minutes
3	2nd Speaker	4	2nd Speaker	8 minutes
5	3rd Speaker	6	3rd Speaker	8 minutes
8	Reply Speech 1st /2nd Government	7	Reply Speech 1st /2nd Opposition	4 minutes

Table 1   Time allocation and speaking order

The first debater of both teams will introduce only one argument whereas the second debater will present two arguments. The third debater will not introduce any new arguments. His or her role is only to rebut.

The first debater of each side will also be required to outline their teams stand of the motion, the definition of the motion for debate and the roles of their fellow debaters in fortifying their case lines.

While the debater is speaking, the opposing team can offer Points Of Information (POI) - formal interjections. The debater may accept or decline it politely.

After all the debaters have made their primary speeches, the first or second speaker from each team will do a summary of the entire debate. This round, called the reply speech round, will be commenced by the Opposition, followed by the Government.

Each debater will be assessed based on substance, strategy, style and language. Substance, which is awarded 30 marks refers to the content of the case line. Adjudicators are reminded not to pre-judge a debate based on the motion or penalize debating teams for not having specific content knowledge that may be known or available to the adjudicator. The adjudicators are to identify if the stand as well as points support the individual team's case line.

Style, which is also awarded 30 marks (this is based on the Piala Datuk Wira Challenge), refers to mannerism; projection of confidence, style of delivery, positive body language, and politeness or charm.

Strategy and language are both awarded 20 marks each. Strategy refers to how well the team members play their roles, manage their time as well as utilize their cache of POI's.

Language refers to the use of appropriate expressions containing correct sentence structure and grammar. It also covers pronunciation, fluency, rhythm, intonation and clarity of speech. Appropriate use of figures of speech, idioms and any good language expression may also merit positive marks for language.   Refer to APPENDIX B for detailed assessment scheme**.**

(Source: English Language Parliamentary Style Debate,

Prime Minister's Challenge Trophy, Residential Schools Unit,

Ministry of Education, Malaysia. Version 2001)

1.3   Significance Of Study.

Debate is goal oriented action. Pragmatically, communication during debates is not principally aimed at sharing or expressing something, but rather at attaining a goal (Cragan et al., 2004, p. 170). In other words, debating is all about swaying the audience with persuasive arguments. In order to garner the support of the audience, or more importantly the adjudicators, debaters have to make strategic considerations in presentation.

How best to analyse the matter, how much of the analysis to present, how best to minimize the impact of the opposing arguments are all aspects that must be taken into account by any debater.

In their book, *Argumentation. Inquiry and Advocacy.* Ziegelmueller and Dause (1975) have outlined communication strategies, or strategic considerations **(SC),** that are be needed to convince a specific audience. They have outlined four classes of communication strategies needed to win a debate or argument.

The four classes of strategies are:-

a)   altering the perception of major aspects of analysis (SC1)

b)   altering the perceptions of the advocates (SC2)

c)   gaining emphasis through adaptation to formal procedures (SC3)

d)   gaining emphasis through adaptation to informal codes of conduct (SC4)

When proposing research on the PSD in Malaysia, it became a challenge sourcing studies in this field that had been carried out in an English as a Second Language (ESL) scenario.

At a time when academics are pondering on whether to include communication strategies **(CS)** in the curriculum for non-native users of English (Dornyei, 1995; Dornyei & Thurell, 1991, 1994; Tarone, 1984 - as cited in Faucette, 2001) or exclude it (Bailystok,1990; Kellerman, 1991 – as cited in Faucette, 2001), this researcher is wondering how debaters in rural settings in Malaysia are coping with the communicative needs of PSD.

As highlighted in Section 1.2.1, the focus of debating should be the ability to argue off the cuff and rationalize a point effectively. Transition from the old format to the new format has been a challenge for both trainers and debaters. In the ten years of personal involvement in PSD, the researcher has heard many claims regarding debaters and debates in rural settings.

Some trainers say that they still have to write the scripts for their debaters as the English language is sometimes the second or third language for these debaters. In some scenarios, the arguments are literal translations; they think in their mother tongue and say it in English. Even if they do write their own text, they will never veer off the text, or attempt any POIs. This sometimes leads to a two-pronged debate, where there is no clash.

However, amidst all these claims, there have also been positive developments. A few trainers report that some of their trainees are very motivated and will say whatever they can to elaborate on their case or rebut the opposing arguments. However, all these claims remain as they are, mere claims. Noticing this gap, the researcher was keen to document the realities of PSD in a rural setting.

Winning a debate also depends heavily on how well the arguments are articulated. In a setting where English is the second or third language, the user may encounter difficulties expressing himself or herself in the target language, English. As a result, the user "will resort to certain devices as he or she tries to communicate in the target language" (Varadi, 1980).

The following are some studies within a Malaysian context that have focused on CS in an ESL situation (as in Malaysian context) are:-

a)   CS used during simulated job interviews (Hazilah bt Omar. 2003. Communication Strategies in a Job Interview. Unpublished Thesis, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur)

b)   CS used during predetermined exercises in a residential school situation (Rocky, Sheila March. 1998. Communication Strategies in Second Language Interaction in a Fully Residential School. Unpublished Thesis, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur)

c)   CS employed by ESL learners in group interaction among MUET students (Lim Siew Hoon. 2004. An Analysis of Communication

Strategies Employed by ESL Learners in Group Interaction. Unpublished Thesis, Universiti Malaya, Kuala Lumpur)

Thus far the studies listed above have been either simulated or facilitated in a controlled manner. This researcher wanted to look at CS generated spontaneously *in-situ* in a competitive situation. The aim was also to overcome the Researcher's Paradox (Labov's Paradox) where the respondents or this case, the debaters, would not be caught in a pattern to behave in a certain way due to the presence of the observer (Labov, 1997).

Other than fill a void in documentation, this research also ponders on whether CS should be included in debate training. It could interest debaters in Malaysia, who use English as a second or third or even fourth language and help boost confidence which could then spill over into the classroom.

The 1979 Cabinet Report on the Review of the Implementation of the Education Policy states that English is taught in schools to empower the students to use English in every day situations and also to prepare them for higher education (Foo and Richards, 2004, p. 235). Therefore, suitable approaches to teaching techniques of the language should be worked out quickly and the existing models enhanced (Jamaliah, 2000, p. 23). One wonders if the inclusion and formal acceptance of CS could be the accelerant.

1.4   Outline of the Study

This research aims to document the use of CS in PSD by debaters in a rural setting.

The researcher embarked on this study for the two following reasons. When debating, Ziegelmueller & Dause (1975) outlined the 4 classes of SC that need to be adhered to in order to win a debate. The researcher would like to document the level of adherence and the implications.

Second, in an environment where English is the third language, this research aims to document CS debaters use to cope with the language requirements of PSD.

The data gathered is in the form of video recording, feedback from a semi structured questionnaire and informal unstructured interview as well as the researcher's observation notes.

The video recording is transcribed using transcription conventions set up by Du Bois, Schuetze-Coburn, Cumming and Paolino (1993, p. 45-90). Interpretation of the data is based solely on the interpretations of the researcher. Data is looked at quantitatively as well as qualitatively to provide answers to the research questions posed.

1.5   Research Questions

The researcher wants to study the use of SC and its implications during PSD in a rural setting. Furthermore, the researcher wants to study the functions of CS used during the debates. Finally the researcher also hopes to identify the relationship between the frequency of CS employed and the outcome of each debate being analysed.

Based on the objectives above, the following research questions have been structured:-

i)   Which classes of strategic considerations **(SC)** are used by the debate teams during the tournaments? **(RQ1)**

ii)   What are the implications of using SC in a debate? **(RQ2)**

iii)   What is the frequency and function of each type of CS used during the debates? **(RQ3)**

iv)   What is the relationship between the frequency of CS employed and the outcome of the debate? **(RQ4)**

1.6   Limitation of Study

The sample size in this study is small and localized as this study only focuses on language output during a formal PSD in a rural setting, of teams 3Y and 3Z and feedback from the semi-structured questionnaire. In addition, the analysis of the data collected is based solely on the personal

interpretations of the researcher. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized. However, one can note the findings and attempt to verify and even extend on them, as well as add further insight to this study.

1.7   Conclusion

This research aims to understand the roles of SC and CS in winning a PSD debate as well as to identify the various CS used by debaters to get their arguments across and win the debate.

The following chapter will provide an outline of the theories pertaining to CS and SC as well as the theoretical framework that will be used in the analysis.