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Competitive debate formats analysed in light of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation's rules

I formati di dibattito competitivo analizzati alla luce delle regole della teoria pragma-dialettica dell'argomentazione

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Abstract

This study analyses the value of some of the most commonly used competitive debate formats around the globe. In particular, they are analysed in light of the rules of the ideal model of a critical discussion developed by the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation. It is observed that, in many respects, these formats differ from the pragma-dialectical norms. While this may hinder their usefulness for being conducive to the resolution of a difference of opinion in an intersubjectively acceptable way for the participants, these formats may be useful to promote other valuable purposes.

Keywords: Debate; Education; Argumentation; Rhetoric; Pragma-dialectics.

Sintesi

Questo studio analizza il valore di alcuni dei formati di *debate* competitivo più comunemente utilizzati in tutto il mondo. In particolare, questi formati sono analizzati alla luce delle regole del modello ideale di discussione critica sviluppato dalla teoria pragma-dialettica dell'argomentazione. Si osserva che per molti aspetti questi formati differiscono dalle norme pragma-dialettiche. Sebbene ciò possa ostacolare la loro utilità per essere favorevoli alla risoluzione di una divergenza di opinioni in modo intersoggettivamente accettabile per i partecipanti, questi formati possono essere utili per promuovere altri scopi preziosi.

Parole chiave: *Debate*; Educazione; Argomentazione; Retorica; Pragma-dialettica.

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1. Introduction

Every year, hundreds of university students assist to the World Universities Debating Championship (WUDC) to carry out, for several days, an exercise that, in short, consists of defending in teams opposing positions on different issues before judges who will decide who pled their case better. This championship follows a style of debate known as British Parliamentary, which has shown rapid international growth in recent decades (Eckstein & Bartanen, 2014). In addition to being used in this world championship - conducted in English - it is also adopted in many other interuniversity competitions, such as the Campeonato Mundial Universitario de Debate en Español [World University Debating Championship in Spanish] (CMUDE) and other prestigious European tournaments, such as the European Universities Debating Championship (Giangrande, 2019).

At the school level, there is also an annual global competition known as the World Schools Debating Championships (WSDC). With a different format but still sharing many characteristics with the British Parliamentary, this championship brings high school students from more than seventy nations (WSDC, n.d.) together and serves as a guide for the organisation of many school debate tournaments around the world.

Both the format used by college students at the WUDC and by scholars at the WSDC are examples of debate styles that are sometimes referred to as “competitive debate format”, “formal debates”, or

“regulated debates”. They are often used for educational purposes, both inside and outside the classroom. Although each format has its own variations, they share some of its main characteristics (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010).

This study seeks to make a theoretical contribution, which consists of a reflection on the value of these competitive debate formats in light of a particular theory: the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation.

Pragma-dialectic considers argumentation as a means to resolve differences of opinion in consonance with the rules of a “critical discussion” (Groarke, 2017). According to van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2009), the model of a critical discussion constitutes a guide for analysis, as it allows theoretically detecting and interpreting each element and aspect of the discourse that is relevant for a critical evaluation. At the same time, it serves as a standard for evaluation, since it provides norms for determining how far an argumentative exchange deviates from the most favourable procedure for resolving a difference of opinion. Likewise, the use of the model as a point of reference provides a coherence that facilitates the characterisation and systematic comparison of the different types of communicative activities in which argumentation is important (van Eemeren, 2018).

Considering this framework, the paper is presented as follows. In section 2, I offer a description of the main features commonly shared by competitive debate formats. In section 3, I describe the pragma-dialectical model of a critical discussion. In section 4, I explain salient points of each one of the

fifteen rules that the pragma-dialectical theory develops for the different stages of the critical discussion; they are contrasted with the typical norms of debate formats and the value of these formats is also analysed in relation to the differences identified. Finally, in section 5, I present the conclusions drawn from the analysis.

2. Competitive debate formats

This section will focus on the debate formats that are commonly used in student tournaments. Although there are many small variations between the different formats, the description will focus in particular on the two formats used in the world championships mentioned in the introduction in order to simplify their characterisation. As mentioned, and explained by Giangrande (2019), these formats are widely used globally. Of course, there are many other formats and adaptations of these same models, but for the purposes of this discussion it is not necessary to recognise the minor details of each of them. Knowing the most salient features of these two formats will be enough to show how this activity is usually organised.

These formats share some key features (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010; Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016; WSDC - Tournament Committee and Debate Rules [TCDR], 2019). On the one hand, there is a “motion”, a usually short phrase that defines the topic of the debate, for example, “recreational drug use should be legal”. In addition, there are teams that meet to debate, which are

assigned to be in favour or against that motion: those who debate do not decide which position to defend. The rules establish the times and the order in which each person intervenes in the discussion, in addition to identifying the tasks that they must carry out: for example, presenting arguments to defend their position, refuting opposing arguments and reconstructing their own in the face of objections received. Finally, there are usually judges who determine, once the debate concludes, who did a better job, considering the argumentative contributions, the communication skills, and the overall respect for the established rules.

In particular, the format used at the school level in the WSDC has the following characteristics (Skr̄t, 2014; WSDC - TCDR, 2019). Two teams participate in a debate, and each team has three members. Each team presents four speeches, in the following order and with the following time limits:

1. First affirmative speaker (in favour of the motion): 8 minutes
2. First negative speaker (against the motion): 8 minutes
3. Second affirmative speaker: 8 minutes
4. Second negative speaker: 8 minutes
5. Third affirmative speaker: 8 minutes
6. Third negative speaker: 8 minutes
7. Negative closing speech: 4 minutes (presented by the first or second speaker of the team)
8. Affirmative closing speech: 4 minutes (presented by the first or second speaker of the team)

The first affirmative speaker must offer an interpretation of the motion, that is, they

must delimit the issues that may arise from it and define the terms that may be unclear. Normally, the arguments in favour of each position are presented and developed in the first four speeches of the debate. Rebuttals and reconstructions of the arguments take place up to third negative speech, inclusive. Closing speeches are essentially an opportunity for each team to synthesise what happened during the debate, with a perspective that is favourable to their own side.

In addition, during the first six speeches, speakers from the opposing team should try to pose short questions or comments known as “points of information”. These can only be presented in the central six minutes of each speech. In general, each speaker is expected to accept at least two of these interventions.

For its part, the format used by university students in the WUDC has some different characteristics (Johnson, 2009; Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). In this case, four teams participate in each debate: two in favour of the motion and two against it. Each team has two members and each one presents a single speech in the following order (each speech being limited to 7 minutes):

1. First affirmative speaker (member of the first affirmative team)
2. First negative speaker (member of the first negative team)
3. Second affirmative speaker (member of the first affirmative team)
4. Second negative speaker (member of the first negative team)
5. Third affirmative speaker (member of the second affirmative team)

6. Third negative speaker (member of the second negative team)
7. Fourth affirmative speaker (member of the second affirmative team)
8. Fourth negative speaker (member of the second negative team)

Again, the first speaker of the debate must offer an interpretation of the motion. In addition, they must present their own argumentative material, which includes arguments, proofs, specific examples, etc. Thereafter, the first three speakers on each side are expected to present both their own argumentative material and rebuttals to opposing arguments. During the final speeches, the speakers are expected to continue debating about the ongoing arguments, rather than presenting new argumentative material. The introduction of one's own, new, argumentative material in the last speech of each side of the debate is often prohibited, although it is sometimes permitted in the closing affirmative speech, which is still followed by a negative speech in which that material could be criticised.

In this format there are also those so-called points of information: all speakers should try to ask questions or make comments during the opposing side's speeches. These points must be requested during the central five minutes of each speech. In general, each speaker is expected to accept at least two of these interventions.

In both formats, debates are usually judged by an odd number of judges who, after the debate, evaluate the work of each individual and team and rank them based on their performance. At the school level, it is common for judges to differentiate three

aspects in their evaluation: “content”, “style”, and “strategy” (De Conti, 2019). At the university level, on the other hand, judges do not usually have to explicitly differentiate between different aspects, but the rules indicate that they must consider both the “content” and the “style” (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). As for the content, the rules of the four-team format dictate that it must be consistent not only within each speech or team, but also in relation to what was said by both teams of the same side.

In order to characterize the standard that judges should use to assess the debates, it is common the use some particular expressions. At the school level, for example, sometimes the rules invite the judges to make an analysis as an “ordinary intelligent person” (WSDC - TCDR, 2019) and the manuals usually refer to adopting the standpoint of the “average reasonable person” (Skrt, 2014). This last expression is used many times also in the context of the university debate; it implies, for example, that the judges must analyse the material and consider how persuasive it is without taking into account any specialised knowledge they may have on the subject of the debate (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016).

Different features seen in these characterisations of debate formats will be later analysed. However, having already discussed these points and before moving on to the next section of the article, it is worth wondering about the goal of this type of debate. What motivates those who participate in these debates to do so? What goals are pursued by those who promote

debates with these formats?

As Block (2013) explains, it is difficult to find a clear, unanimous, uniform answer to these questions. It is possible, for example, to focus on its pedagogical value or to consider it a useful mechanism to test one’s skills. Likewise, it can be understood as an educational tool, a class game, a political simulation, or even in some cases, simply as entertainment. Debaters can pursue many different goals, including learning about politics, exercising rhetoric, taking part in a challenging competition, training the mind, discussing interesting topics, or practising for a future job. Debate lacks a goal shared by all who engage in its practice. It is not that people do it without having clear reasons, but that there are many participants with many different purposes which sometimes may even interfere with each other.

In the same sense, when promoting this practice, many possible benefits of the activity are usually mentioned. Rybold (2006), for example, mentions the development of skills related to research, writing, listening, teamwork, and critical thinking. De Conti (2019) identifies three main transversal skills that debates allow to develop: functional literacy skills, competence in mathematics and science, and competence in matters of citizenship. Bonomo *et al.* (2010), for their part, mention several goals usually pursued by promoting debates: active participation in the knowledge construction process, exploration of a wide range of arguments on the same topic, training to speak in public, leadership development, the encouragement of active citizenship, and

the promotion of tolerance. Finally, Hogan and Kurr (2017, p. 85) state that «[s]tudent debaters develop a better understanding of the rights and responsibilities of free speech, and they become more attuned to the tricks and deceptions of demagogues and propagandists», as well as «a better appreciation for the diversity of perspectives and opinions in our complex, multicultural society».

3. The pragma-dialectical theory and the model of a critical discussion

The pragma-dialectical theory conceives argumentation as a critical discussion procedure whose objective is to reasonably resolve a difference of opinion (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014). A difference of opinion occurs when two parties do not fully agree on a point of view (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2006) and it is resolved when the arguments presented lead the antagonist to accept the defended point of view or when the protagonist withdraws their point of view as a consequence of the criticism from the antagonist (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2011). In this context, an argumentative discussion is relevant, understood as one in which - through argumentation - an attempt is made to determine how defensible a point of view is (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2006).

In the ideal model, this argumentative discussion through which a difference of opinion is sought to be resolved is understood as a critical discussion, in which one party

defends a point of view and the other challenges it (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2006). Both parties try to reach an agreement about the acceptability of the point of view in question through an analysis of how sustainable it is in the face of doubt and criticism, given the mutually accepted starting points (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014).

A critical discussion consists of four stages, which correspond to the different phases that an argumentative discourse must go through for the reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion to take place: confrontation stage, opening stage, argumentation stage and concluding stage (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014). In the confrontation stage, the parties establish that they have a difference of opinion. In the opening stage, they decide to try to resolve the difference of opinion, assign roles, and agree on the rules of the debate and the starting points in terms of content. During the argumentation stage, one party defends their point of view against criticism from the other. Finally, in the concluding stage, the parties assess the extent of the resolution of the difference of opinion and in favour of which position it occurred (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2006; van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014).

As van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2009) explain, the pragma-dialectical theory develops a set of relevant rules for the different stages of a critical discussion. Its fulfilment is necessary because the violation of the rules threatens the possibility of resolving the difference of opinion in a reasonable manner. In particular, fifteen rules that reflect the dialectical perspective in which they are framed are detailed. The reasonableness of

the procedure derives from the possibility it creates of resolving differences of opinion in combination with its acceptability by those who participate in the discussion.

Thus, the rules of the discussion must be evaluated in terms of their efficacy for the resolution of the dispute and the degree of intersubjective acceptability (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). Furthermore, the pragma-dialectical theory systematically connects these rules with the concept of “fallacy”. In particular, the theory defines a fallacy as a discussion move that violates a rule for critical discussion, with the rationale that these moves obstruct or hinder the reasonable resolution of a difference of opinion (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014).

As mentioned in the introduction, according to van Eemeren (2018), the use of this model as a reference provides a coherence that facilitates the characterisation and systematic comparison of the different types of communicative activities in which argumentation is important. In this sense, the following section focuses on analysing typical features of competition debate formats taking this pragma-dialectical model as reference.

4. Analysis of competitive debate formats in relation to the rules of a critical discussion

As mentioned in the previous section and explained by van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2009), pragma-dialectics understands argumentation as part of a procedure

to resolve a difference of opinion on the acceptability of one or more points of view through a discussion criticism. The difference of opinion is resolved when the arguments presented lead the antagonist to accept the protagonist's point of view or when the protagonist withdraws their point of view as a result of the antagonist's criticism. The fulfilment of the rules developed by the theory is necessary because their violation goes against the rational resolution of the difference of opinion. Although, according to the theory, following these rules is not a sufficient condition to resolve differences of opinion, it is necessary to respect them in order to reach a resolution in an acceptable way.

This section comprises an analysis of the fifteen rules mentioned by pragma-dialectics, focusing especially on the ways in which competitive debate formats deviate from them. This is complemented by a conceptual reflection on the value of this type of debate, taking each of the identified differences as a reference. What value can these divergences between the ideal model and these particular practices imply? What can motivate the promotion of argumentative exchanges with the characteristics of the competitive debate formats seen in the previous sections?

First of all, rule 1 of pragma-dialectics establishes that those who discuss must be able to present and question any point of view (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). This is very restricted in these discussion formats. On the one hand, in general the debate must be about a motion that is assigned to the debaters, they do not choose

it, and the points of view must refer to it, both for its defence and for its rejection (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010). In addition, the debaters also do not choose which position to defend, on the contrary, the teams are assigned to be in favour or against the motion (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010).

This practice of assigning a topic and specific positions, without allowing their choice by the participants, can serve several purposes. Among them, it is possible to identify the purpose of stimulating the understanding of the arguments and opinions of those who think differently from their own (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010) and, more generally, to generate incentives to get involved, understand and be able to argue about a wide range of topics and positions (Harvey-Smith, 2011). Thus, in order to motivate participants to learn about various topics, it may be reasonable to restrict their ability to choose. If they have the possibility of choosing them, they could, for example, only opt for those of their own interest, and the same could happen with the positions to be defended. In contrast to that, in this case, instead of being considered a difference of opinion in which the participants have, in principle, a genuine interest, the argumentative exchange is different and also valuable to analyse a point of view critically, but on an issue and from positions that the participants themselves do not choose.

In the same sense, these debate formats present more restrictions to the principle of freedom when presenting and questioning any point of view. One of them is that, in general, each speaker must present content that is consistent with what was

said during their own speech and with what was presented by their teammates. This can be valuable in promoting the development not only of active listening skills, but also of teamwork (De Conti, 2019; Rybold, 2006; Snider & Schnurer, 2002).

In the British Parliamentary format, in addition, the content must also be consistent with what is presented by the members of the other team who defend the same position. In this way, as Johnson (2013) explains, the participation of two teams per side allows to stimulate - in addition to the confrontation with an opposing position - the cooperative work with other defences of the same point of view. Also, all debaters compete for a ranking order at the end of the debate. This can reinforce active listening and also promote the development of creativity and research to find a wide variety of reasons and resources that serve to defend the same point of view, which is essential for one to be able to differentiate oneself from what has already been said by others and receive credit accordingly.

Finally, there are time constraints that prevent total freedom for the presentation and questioning of points of view. Debates have a limited duration: they last approximately one hour at most in total and debaters usually participate in many different debates within the same tournament (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016; WSDC - TCDR, 2019). This may be due, for example, to trying to make the exercise more entertaining and diverse, by facing multiple opponents during the tournament, debating on different topics and before judges who also vary, or simply to the difficulty that the people involved - debaters,

judges, audience - would find to simply bear, enjoy, and understand very long debates.

These points could become less important if the objective were to reasonably resolve a difference of opinion. In that case, we could be willing to lengthen the exchange to the extent that the procedure is valuable for that purpose, as the pragma-dialectical model stipulates. But this does not happen in these debate formats. In them, these restrictions entail a practice closer in form to many other argumentative exchanges that usually take place in the public sphere, such as trials or political debates. In this way, instruction and training for argumentation in these contexts can be favoured.

What was explained above about time also applies as a restriction to rule 2, which establishes that whoever questions a point of view of another participant in the confrontation stage always has the right to challenge that participant to defend their point of view (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). This may be desirable if a difference of opinion is to be reasonably resolved - in the sense that it is intersubjectively acceptable - but it may be incompatible with perspectives that pursue other goals. As mentioned, restricting that freedom based on delimited times can give rise to the recognition of rhetorical and practical aspects that resemble more institutionalised - often adversarial - argumentative contexts. In this way, these divergences with the ideal pragma-dialectical model can lead to participants to have a better performance in those contexts.

For its part, rule 3 establishes that when a participant is challenged to defend their

point of view, they must always accept it, unless the challenger is not willing to accept the shared premises or the rules of the discussion; the participant remains obliged to defend their point of view as long as they do not retract it or successfully defend it against criticism, based on the agreed premises and rules (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2011). These guidelines reflect the intersubjective nature of the pragma-dialectical proposal and seem acceptable if one seeks to resolve a difference of opinion between the parties. But the value of competitive debates is not necessarily there, and it is to be expected that sometimes participants reasonably decide not to follow these rules.

The goal of the debaters during the competition is to persuade a third party - the judges - that their position in the debate should prevail, essentially thanks to their own contributions, in order to be ranked higher up (Johnson, 2009). To this end, debaters may choose to stop responding to the other side's challenges if they feel that an average reasonable person, according to the judges, would not give sufficient weight to those challenges, as that is the standard by which the judges must evaluate the exchange (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). Also, given that time is limited, even if they believed that an objection would be plausible to that average reasonable person, they would likely choose not to raise the issue if they thought another contribution from you would be more persuasive than responding to that point. All this is reflected in the usual suggestion to focus on responding to the strongest arguments of the opponents and

not on their weakest points, in order to receive greater credit (Miller, 2009; Skrt, 2014).

Rules 4 and 5 refer to the definition of the rules for the exchange (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2011). In the first place, it is established that a participant who, during the opening stage, has accepted the challenge of another participant to defend their point of view will play the role of the protagonist in the argument stage, and the other participant will play the role of the antagonist, unless they agree to do otherwise. Likewise, it is stipulated that before the argumentation stage participants agree on the rules by which each one has to defend or criticise the point of view. It is also defined when one or the other will have done it successfully. Both these rules and the distribution of roles are maintained until the end of the discussion and cannot be questioned during its development.

However, unlike what happens in the ideal model of critical discussion, in the debate formats under analysis, in general terms, the participants do not decide on the distribution of roles or the rules to follow. Instead, the rules are set by tournament regulations, which may be plausible if certain instrumental values are sought. Using rules in a uniform way makes it easier to learn and practise the same exercise in different contexts, and this later helps to bring participants from different backgrounds together. Thus, the intercultural exchange that occurs, for example, in the world championships is favoured by this uniformity. And those meetings are a reference to a large set of activities guided by these same guidelines around the world, in different places, with different languages. Thus, many

times, those interested in participating do not define the rules, but simply learn them, which allows them to join the practice.

For its part, in relation to rule 6 of the pragma-dialectical model, van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2009) explain that the protagonist will not have completely defended a point of view until the antagonist has fully accepted the argument. As a complement, in rules 7, 8 and 9 they refer to the intersubjective acceptance of both the propositional content of the argumentation and its force of justification or refutation. In both senses, they establish that for the evaluation of the argument it is necessary to contrast it with what was agreed upon by the parties when defining the starting points and the standards to evaluate the inferences.

When the goal is to resolve a difference of opinion in an intersubjectively acceptable way, it makes sense for the parties to be able to define the starting points and the standards to be used in the evaluation. But in these competitive debates, such resolution of a difference of opinion is not necessarily sought, and the possibility of the participants to define the starting points and the evaluation standards is restricted. In fact, those who organise the competitions establish an evaluation criterion that must be followed by both the participants during the debates and the judges when making their evaluation. As already mentioned, this is usually the standard of the average reasonable person - or similar constructions, which in practice have the same role. In short, then, in these debates, the speakers seek to persuade a third party - the judges - who must adopt the perspective

of that average person, characterised as indicated by the organisers.

This characterisation can encourage the debaters to focus their efforts on different perspectives, regardless of the parameters that they themselves might consider convenient for the intersubjective evaluation of other exchanges in other contexts. The exercise does not focus on the participants persuading each other, but rather on them being persuasive to the mentioned average reasonable person. While this might coincidentally fit the pattern of pragma-dialectics - if the standard of the debaters matches that of the average person - this need not be the case.

For example, the debaters could have a very low standard for the quality of the arguments, lower than that of the average reasonable person. This could lead them, outside the debate, to consider the defence of a point of view satisfactory, even in cases in which they should consider it insufficient within the debate. In such cases, from the point of view of the judges, the contribution would be weak even if the debaters believed otherwise, and they should evaluate it accordingly (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). In this way, these formats of debate could lead to an evaluation of the argumentation with a higher standard than that which would take place under the pragma-dialectical rules. Thus, through the standard of the average reasonable person, it is possible to contribute to promoting the development of argumentation skills beyond those that an exchange between parties with a lower standard would require.

By the same principle, it can be said that this practice in other contexts could encourage some simplification if the standard of the average person were established, in some sense, lower than that of the participants. As already mentioned, each application of these discussion models pursues different purposes, and such simplification could be a purpose especially sought in some cases. For example, it could be sought to train highly specialised people in a field - who could have, for example, a very high linguistic standard - so that they can construct speeches that are more understandable and, thus, persuasive for a more universal audience. In this way, this adaptation could motivate and allow valuable argumentative exchanges between participants - and before audiences - that could otherwise be excluded.

It is possible to illustrate how precision is often given to the principle of the average reasonable person by taking, for example, what is sometimes established by supplementary guidelines from the world championship among university students:

«[J]udges are asked to conceive of themselves as if they were a hypothetical 'ordinary intelligent voter' (sometimes also termed 'average reasonable person' or 'informed global citizen'). This hypothetical ordinary intelligent voter doesn't have pre-formed views on the topic of the debate and isn't convinced by sophistry, deception or logical fallacies. They are well informed about political and social affairs but lack specialist knowledge. They are open-minded and concerned to decide how to vote (...). They are intelligent to the point of being able to understand and assess contrasting arguments

(including sophisticated arguments), that are presented to them; but they keep themselves constrained to the material presented unless it patently contradicts common knowledge or is otherwise wildly implausible». (The WUDC Debating and Judging Manual, n. d., p. 12)

In this way, by defining the characterisation of the average reasonable person, those who organise the competitions can give rise to argumentative exchanges with different standards and that do not necessarily coincide with that corresponding to a discussion in which the participants could choose the evaluation standards. In practice, then, that characterisation defines the criteria for weighing the force of justification or refutation of the content presented as acceptable or not. For example, if a debater believed that the judges - adopting that characterisation - would understand and accept something in a convenient way for the defence of their own case, they could proceed without providing further details about it, even if the other parties did not understand it or did not consider it appropriate.

It is possible to make an additional observation regarding the concept of "fallacy". As illustrated in the quoted excerpt, it is common for debate guidelines to direct participants to avoid committing fallacies. For instance, judges are advised not to be convinced by "logical fallacies" (The WUDC Debating and Judging Manual, n.d., p. 12). Given that the pragma-dialectical theory defines fallacies as moves that violate the rules for critical discussion (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014), and that this analysis shows that

debates often deviate from those rules, it could be argued that such deviations imply the commission of fallacies.

However, it is important to bear in mind that according to the pragma-dialectical theory, «an argumentative move may be regarded a fallacy only if the discourse in which it occurs may be viewed as aimed at resolving a difference of opinion» (van Eemeren *et al.*, 2014, p. 545). In these debates, in contrast, the intended purpose may be different. As a consequence, the pragma-dialectical theory itself could suggest that it is not appropriate to conclude that, in the practice of these debates, moving apart from the rules of the critical discussion necessarily imply a fallacious movement, in the sense in which it is conceived by the theory.

In fact, debate guidelines such as those previously mentioned - which encourage judges not to be persuaded by fallacies - may consider alternative interpretations of the concept of fallacy. For instance, fallacies are sometimes thought of as arguments that seem valid but are not valid; in fact, this is in some cases known as the standard definition of fallacies (Hansen, 2023). In this way, these guidelines may be seen as aimed at preventing the presentation of such material during the debates.

For their part, rules 10, 11, and 12 for a critical discussion refer to the rights to attack by the antagonist and to defend by the protagonist (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). Regarding the former, it is established that during the entire exchange the antagonist has the right to question the propositional content and the force of

justification or refutation of the speech acts of the protagonist's argumentation that have not yet been successfully defended. Similarly, they stipulate that during the entire discussion the protagonist can defend the propositional content and the force of justification or refutation of their own speech acts of argumentation that have not yet been successfully defended against the attacks from the antagonist. Finally, the right of the protagonist to retract any of their acts of argumentation and remove their obligation to defend it is guaranteed through the entire discussion.

On these points, again, the practice of debate moves away from the pragma-dialectical model for reasons that have already been mentioned. On the one hand, speakers must present content that is consistent with what is said in their own speech and what is presented by their teammates. In the British Parliamentary format, they also need to be consistent with speakers on the other team that is on their same side. Thus, the freedom to question, defend, and retract is limited by the rules of the competition. If someone presents material that is inconsistent with the rest of their speech, that of their partner or that of the other team on the same side, that inconsistency should normally be negatively evaluated by the judges (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). In addition to that, the aforementioned time restrictions are in place: each speaker can present a speech only when the format allows it and only during the stipulated time. Outside of that, they can only try to present content through brief interventions during the speeches of the

opponent speakers.

These differences with the model, as already explained, may seek to stimulate the development of certain skills and the training of participants to perform better in situations similar to those proposed by the debating formats. In particular, just to illustrate some of the possible objectives pursued, the requirement of coherence, for example, could be associated with the development of critical thinking skills, and the presence of time restrictions can be linked with the development of public speaking skills, both usually mentioned in the literature on this specific matter (see, for example, O'Donnell, 2010).

An additional limitation arises in the last speeches of the debate, when it is often not allowed to introduce new own argumentative material or new arguments that were not yet under discussion (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016; Skrt, 2014). This procedural impediment is usually understood in light of the work of judges. Since no one would be guaranteed the floor afterward, as the debate would end, the judges would not have an answer - even if it was just a "no answer" - with which to weigh that material. In competitive terms, then, judges are usually instructed to dismiss this material if it were to appear (Reglamentos - CMUDE Córdoba, 2016). At the same time, these restrictions encourage debaters to present arguments in a way where they leave reasonable time to expose them to criticism during the debate.

In this way, these restrictions can be plausible as rules to promote discussion and fairness in competitions. However, if the goal

of the exercise were to reasonably resolve a difference of opinion in a way intersubjectively acceptable to the participants instead, it would also be reasonable, for example, to remove the time constraints or to allow new points to be raised at any moment, to let participants decide with the freedom of having contrasted all their concerns.

Rule 13 refers to the order in the discussion, and it establishes that the participants can only perform the same speech act or complex speech act with the same role once in the discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). This differs from what happens in the analysed debates. To understand the value of certain repetitions that usually take place, it may again be important to keep in mind that the speakers seek to persuade a third party, the judges. Had it only been the protagonist and the antagonist seeking to resolve a difference of opinion, in many cases it might not be reasonable to perform the same act more than once. However, even if the participants in the discussion did not learn anything from such repetitions, sometimes it might be reasonable to do so, for example, if the judges simply had not incorporated their content, because they had not listened carefully.

In line with what has already been stated about other divergences, the value of this one can be found, for example, if one thinks of preparing people to persuade third parties who do not actively participate in a discussion, such as in many political debates or oral litigation. One can think that the interlocutor has already understood and, nevertheless, insist on some points that in

the ideal model of pragma-dialectical critical discussion could be redundant, but could be very relevant from a rhetorical perspective. In fact, repetitions are very common in these debates. This can be reflected in the fact that in different handbooks that introduce readers to the practice of debate, it is common to find the following old saying about the interaction with the audience when speaking in public: «Tell them what you're going to tell them, then tell them, then tell them what you told them» (see, for example, Bonomo *et al.*, 2010, or Quinn, 2009).

Rule 14, about the closing stage, indicates that the protagonist has to retract the initial point of view if the antagonist has conclusively attacked it in the argumentation stage. For their part, the antagonist must withdraw their questioning if the protagonist has conclusively defended it (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2009). This is plausible since reasonable resolution of the difference of opinion is sought in the pragma-dialectical ideal model. If parties no longer find reasons to object, it is sensible for them to reach an agreement.

However, this is different in the analysed debates. In them, the resolution of the difference of opinion is not necessarily present as an objective, and there is no mechanism in which the parties can eliminate their disagreement. Instead, teams agree to disagree on a motion (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010). Thus, they maintain that role during the entire debate, and the approach is more oriented to the persuasion of the audience than to the resolution of a difference of opinion (Fuentes Bravo & Santibáñez Yáñez, 2011).

This practice can be consistent with the pursuit of different goals. On the one hand, asking the parties to explain their views outside of their roles could be considered harmful because it goes against a fundamental principle of the exercise: all the parties involved understand that the ideas expressed in the debates do not necessarily correspond to their personal opinions (Bonomo *et al.*, 2010). This separation between the people who present the ideas and the ideas themselves can make it easier for the discussion to focus on the ideas and not on those who present them, thus creating an environment that is more favourable to the presentation of diverse ideas even in contexts of social pressure. On the other hand, the exercise of maintaining an assigned position can stimulate debaters to strive to find reasons to defend positions even when it is difficult to do so. For example, sometimes there could be reasons that are not very widespread in everyday life or that are not very easy to express. If the debaters could give in, there might be less incentive to try to defend a certain position, and this might even lead to less diversity in the argumentative exchange.

In addition, the fact of defending the same position throughout the debate is associated with the practice of presenting, at the end of the debate, closing speeches in which a position is synthesised and an attempt is made to stimulate the audience to believe in it, based on what was discussed. This can be reflected in some descriptions of the role of the speakers who close the debate. Miller (2009), for example, indicates that it is about summarizing the debate from the perspective

of their own side, showing the main points of the discussion, and explaining why their position should prevail. In agreement, Harvey-Smith (2011) explains that the last speakers essentially synthesise the debate and present and characterise what happened in it in a favourable way to their position. Beyond the development of specific skills, such as the already mentioned, all this can be considered part of a reasonable training for professional life in different specific fields. For example, in relation to legal practice, this largely simulates the presentation of closing arguments in court.

Finally, rule 15 refers to the understanding of speech acts and establishes that, at any stage of the discussion, those who participate have the right to require the other to make a statement of use - definition, specification, etc. - and to make one themselves (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2011). In addition, if one participant requests it from the other, the latter is obliged to do so. From the perspective of those seeking to reasonably resolve a difference of opinion, this is plausible. If either party is unclear in formulating or questioning views, or if formulations are misunderstood, they are likely to be misunderstood. However, as already pointed out, in the case of the competitive debates aforementioned, this may be limited by time constraints due to the pursuit of other objectives. In addition, those who debate can take as a standard not the degree of understanding of their opponents but their perception of the evaluation that the judges make from the perspective of the average reasonable person.

At the beginning of this section, it was

mentioned that it would include a reflection on the value that the divergences between the ideal model of the pragma-dialectics theory and these debate formats could imply, and the possible motivations behind promoting exchanges guided by these formats. Thus, throughout the analysis it was pointed out that these debates may have valuable objectives that are different from resolving a difference of opinion and contribute to the achievement of these goals. Therefore, from an educational perspective, the use of these formats can be motivated, for example, by the objective of developing skills in public speaking, active listening, research, and constructing and analyzing arguments.

Furthermore, even when a difference of opinion is sought to be resolved, these debate formats can be valuable as well, and their value can be enhanced by integrating them with other methodologies. On the one hand, the communication and argumentation skills developed through these debates can be instrumental, in general, to perform in environments other than debate, which may be oriented to resolving differences of opinion. In addition, these debate formats may be part of a larger practice, in which, for example, they are incorporated as an instance of analysis of reasons, and later complemented with other procedures. These alternative methods may not necessarily entail adversarial exchanges; instead, they may be directed towards the resolution of differences of opinion and designed accordingly.

5. Conclusions

This study shows that, in many aspects, competitive debate formats differ from the guidelines of the ideal model of critical discussion developed by pragma-dialectical theory. These divergences reasonably correspond with the possible search for different objectives, not necessarily aligned with the one stipulated by the pragma-dialectical model, that is, resolving a difference of opinion in a way that is intersubjectively acceptable to the participants. Even if they could hinder that resolution, the rules of the debate formats here analysed can promote the satisfaction of other goals that can also be considered reasonable and desirable.

On the one hand, the mechanisms for assigning topics and positions can motivate the investigation of a wide range of topics and points of view, probably different from those that would be investigated for pure personal interest. Furthermore, by characterizing the average reasonable person, organisers can introduce standards of evaluation that differ from what debaters might otherwise have. In this way, they can stimulate adaptation to different scenarios and promote exchanges with argumentative standards different from those that would be expected to be achieved if the practice conformed to the ideal model of critical discussion.

For its part, the exercise has other procedural restrictions. The presence of relatively uniform rules, not chosen by the participants, simplifies the organisation of tournaments between people of different

origins. At the same time, those particular restrictions make the practice resemble specific contexts relevant to the public sphere, such as trials or political debates.

Consequently, competitive debate formats can promote a type of education and training aimed at the persuasion of third parties in contexts such as these.

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