Question-Declaration Coupling in a University Meeting Talk: Discourse of Social Inequality and Collegiality

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Abstract
Conversational Analysis (CA) deals with the description of the microscopic and corpus-driven data in an ‘unmotivating looking’ analytical fashion. As long as there are new, interesting, or deviant features from the data, they are always worthy of a micro analysis. For this paper, we report the ‘question-declaration coupling’ in meeting talks as a new feature and explicate it through the discourse of social inequality and collegiality in the academy. The data came from a total of five recorded meetings from three departments, such as Education, Arts & Science, and Social Work, in a private university in Manila, Philippines. The meetings lasted for five hours and 50 minutes. From adjacency pairs of question-answer, the sequential pattern shows that the questions deserve conspicuous answers from the subordinates, but the Chair automatically couples them with declarative sentences and other utterances that serve as continuers. The pattern is categorized as a strategic turn-suppressing mechanism to hold back the members from possibly challenging the existing policies of the institution. It is also seen as a strategic mechanism to deprive the members of extending the litanies of possible counter-arguments. From a positive perspective, we argue that it is through the air of social inequality and

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collegiality that people are able to know their boundaries in an ongoing interaction. Toward the end, we state the implications of the results for teaching and learning socio-pragmalinguistics. We also recommend future cross-linguistic comparisons for these microscopic features under study, considering the small corpus of this study.

**Keywords:** Collegiality, conversation analysis, faculty meeting, social inequality, question-declaration coupling.

1. **INTRODUCTION**

   Interrogativity is a resource in every language (cf. Siemund 2017; Stivers & Robinson, 2006). Specifically, a question from the point of view of Conversation Analysis (CA) is the first-pair part of the adjacency pair. It is operationalised vis-à-vis the default and expected responses or answers (Schegloff, 2007; Steensig & Drew 2008). In like manner, a question is a turn-taking yielding mechanism that obligates the hearer to take the next relevant turn to satisfy the first-pair part (DeVito, 2001; Mori, 2002), “either by providing an answer or by accounting for non-answer responses” (Stivers & Rossano, 2010, p. 7). To Boyd and Heritage (2006), questions are obligating speech acts because they place constraints and restrictions on the recipient. The obligatory second-pair part eventually shapes the succeeding relevant turns because it is normal when the hearer becomes accountable to the obligatory answers (Schegloff & Sacks, 1973).

   The question-answer system is common in institutional talks with established and pre-determined turn-taking infrastructures, such as in debates, ceremonies, proceedings, testing sessions, meetings (Schegloff, 1999; Wilson & Wilson, 2005), and other rule-governed conversations. In the context of psychotherapy, for example, questions are considered constructive because they provide the client the chance to join the conversation (McGee et al., 2005). Heritage (2010) also studied questions in an institutional talk in medicine. He maintains that physicians have to construct questions that can boost a compassionate relationship with the patients. This has something to do with the linguistic constructions of the questions that can beget answers. Prescriptively, all unanswered questions should be avoided to do away with possible ambiguities, uncertainties, and misunderstandings (Luck, 2013).

   Many cumulative works on CA for the past fifty years have focused on both institutional and ordinary talks. The last decade has seen an increasing number of studies active in institutional meetings (Månsson, 2015; Saft, 2001, 2004; Vöge, 2010), parent-teacher conferences (Markström, 2011), in cross-cultural researches (Sidnell, 2009), in an ESL/EFL setting or CA-based pedagogical approach (Barraja-Rohan, 2011; Filipi & Barraja-Rohan, 2015), in a bilingual setting (Gafaranga, 2012), in legal domains (Travers, 2013), in media such as television and radio interviews (Hutchby, 2006), in computer-mediated communication (Gonzalez-Lloret, 2011; Suzuki, 2013), and in medical practices (Maseide, 2011; Ruusuvuori, 2005).

   However, amid this burgeoning research enterprise, it may be hard to unify some CA-related studies because CA tradition is microscopic that focuses on specific sequential features (Clifton, 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Sacks et al., 1974; cf. Schiffrin, 2000). CA tradition is corpus/data-driven which widely accepts the premise that as
long as there are new, interesting or deviant features from the data, they can be analysed and described in great detail to further enhance an understanding of the discourse of the talk (Clifton, 2006; Kress, 2001; Psathas & Anderson, 1990; Wong & Olsher, 2000). The case-by-case analysis favoured in CA (Raymond, 2003). Schegloff (1987) also assures that any corpus-driven feature is worthy of analysis.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

Motivated by the ‘unmotivated looking’ (Clifton, 2006) conversation analytic approach, this present study aimed to describe the sequential pattern of the corpus-driven feature of question-declaration coupling, and describe its discourse with regard to social inequality and collegiality. These objectives could account for this turn-taking mechanism of the Chair who holds the default authority in a meeting talk.

The study assumes that the turn-taking system of the meeting is Chair-led. Nonetheless, the adjacency pair of question-answer allows the hearer to respond to the giver. Based on the different pragmatic inferences from the questions, the faculty members can actually grab the speaking turn for some corresponding answers. It should be noted that the answering turns are not considered as deviations from the normative structure of the talk because questions deserve answers. Members can wrestle with the default structure based on the necessity to respond to the questions posed. To this end, the way the Chair and the members orient and respond to the question reflects the prototype framing of social inequality and collegiality.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Faculty Meeting as an Institutional Talk

The institutionality of the talk like a faculty meeting can be lumped up with an assertion that the social order of the talk is achieved through the relevant task-based and role-based activities performed with some institutional goals in mind (Drew & Sorjonen, 1997; Gardner, 2004; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1991). One universal notion about the institutionality of the meeting is through some turn-taking mechanisms controlled by the Chair. The logic of this institutionality is clear: The Chair is entrusted with power and authority by virtue of his or her role in an organisation (cf. Vickers, 2014) to lead the social actions of the meeting. Consequently, the Chair allocates the “turns in a way that considers the distribution of rights to speak among co-participants, and the respect of the topical agenda of the meeting as well as the time schedule” (Markaki & Mondada, 2012, p. 33).

The study of Markaki and Mondada (2012) reported that the mention of national categories during the multinational meeting grants the members for the next possible relevant turns. This manner provides the representative of the country the “special rights and obligations to confirm or to invalidate and correct information provided about the country” (Markaki & Mondada, 2012, p. 33). Mirzaee and Yaqubi (2016) shared that the teacher had to observe silence to create a space for the participants for the achievement of the goals of the conference. Silence as an interactional device was also used to prepare the meeting members for their accountability for the ongoing project as shown in the study of Månsson (2015). Lastly, a doctoral study by Rixon
found out that the workshop leader demonstrated copious use of instructions with or without separate closing. These studies exemplify that the turns may or not be relinquished depending on the current speaker’s style of turn allocation.

The faculty meeting is expected to be loaded with many cases of speech acts, such as questioning, complaining, clarifying, suggesting, commanding, apologising, and directives, to mention a few. Predominantly, it was massively expected that most of these illocutionary speech acts are adjacency pairs of questions and answers. Although a meeting has minutes, questions are not primarily planned but are contingent on the prior and next relevant turns. In this case, the questions should be formulated in such a way that it gets the right answer.

2.2 On Turn-Yielding Mechanisms

In turn-yielding mechanisms, the speaker wishes to become a listener, thus using some turn-yielding cues, such as the clear use of falling intonation, paralanguage and gesticulation, sociocentric sequences, and syntax. Expressions, such as ‘but oh’, ‘or something’, or ‘you know’, are sociocentric sequences. Different kinds of paralanguage, such as rate, accent, pitch, laughter, volume, and other turn-taking cues accompany verbal communication. Other mechanisms include gesticulation, eye movement, and backchanneling using head-nodding; vocalisations, such as ‘mm’ or ‘uhuh,’ ‘yeah,’ ‘okay,’ and ‘wow,’ and by gestural and positional cues including gaze, head movements such as nodding, and orientation of the upper body (DeVito, 2001; Hall, 2005; Young & Lee, 2004) signal that the speaker relinquishes his or her turn to the other speaker.

2.2.1 On adjacency pairs

Related to turn-yielding are the adjacency pairs. They refer to the explicit coupling of successive utterances of speakers. Their concept can be extended to a ‘more generic notion of ‘next positioning’’. Adjacency pair requires a current action to receive a reciprocal action, right immediately after the completion of the first part (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990).

Different pairs have been noted by many scholars with the idea in mind that the absence of the second pair means that the hearer takes for granted the first pair. For example, Heritage (2012) lists ‘hello’ and ‘goodbye’ as the most common paradigmatic cases of adjacency pairs. On the one hand, Schegloff (1986) enumerates four sequence types in a telephone conversation, such as (a) summons-answer, (b) identification-recognition, (c) greeting, and (d) ‘how are you’. ‘Hello’ is regarded as the most common form of telephone summons. Its utterance may hint at the caller for initial recognition of the one who answers it (Wong, 2002).

Other pairs may take in a form compliment and compliment responses, requests, invitations, and their corresponding acceptance or rejection, greetings, and so forth (Macaulay, 1994; Placencia, 2014), including “highly ritualized actions such as greetings, farewells and summonses” (Stivers & Rossano, 2010, p. 52). Richards (1980) offers examples, such as a request for information-grant, request-grant, compliant-apology, and summons-answer. In short, adjacency pairs prototypically take the form AB-AB or AB-BA that is common to questions, commands, and
requests), not typically the form of AA, BB, or otherwise considered as a rhetorical question.

2.3 On Social Inequality and Collegiality

The meeting may be heightened by some institutional power. The “constitution of power effects” (Samra-Fredericks, 2005, p. 804) is expected to be flaunted or flouted during the meeting. The meeting talk may not be not innocent with respect to the ‘use and abuse’ of power whose achieved status of the Chair is dependent on his or her educational attainment and qualifications (Hewitt, 1997). The Chair can always exercise his or her power in order to get things done. As Weber (1947, p. 152) believes, “power is the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his/her own will despite resistance regardless of the basis on which this probability rests”. As a result, the subordinates are laminated into an acceptance that the superordinate’s manner of controlling the turns is the default structure. In short, unequal rights, access, and opportunities to a speaking turn may be indisputable in a meeting. Additionally, the control of meeting would still be based on the ideologies of the Chair, whether or not he or she believes the achieved and ascribed power is absolute or not, whether or not he or she believes in egalitarianism and collegiality in the talk.

The turns at talk can also be a manifestation of collegiality in the speech community. Collegiality is foremost brought to the fore using some politeness principles. Theoretically, a speaker’s attempt to take turns during a conversation must be carried out with some politeness strategies. Brown and Levinson (1987) expound on this theory of the negative and positive face – all considered a public self-image. These strategies are social prescriptions, and an act of considering somebody’s feelings (Wardhaugh, 2009), which is meant to enhance, maintain, or protect an individual face (Scollon & Scollon, 1983), promote social order, solidarity, and stability (Schiffrin, 2009), and maximise the positive effects on the interlocutors. Rühlemann (2007) believes that a conversation contains context, co-construction, sequential organisation or real-time processing, discourse management, and relation management. Thus, the superordinate-subordinate relationship in the meeting hastens the air of collegiality and camaraderie.

The practice of collegiality sits well with the idea of Philippine cultural orientations of pakikisama or smooth interpersonal relationships (Andres, 1981; Munalim & Genuino, 2019b; Munalim & Genuino, 2021b). It is observed not to strain good relationships because Filipinos avoid a direct conflict with other people. Other traits include euphemisms, the use of go-between, and the sensitivity to personal affronts, such as hiya (Ledesma et al., 1981). With this in mind, subordinates may accept the default structure of the Chair given the asymmetrical relationship as regards social distance, relative power, and absolute ranking (Brown & Levinson 1987). Hence, the levy of collegiality is inextricably hemmed within some cultural underpinnings in a given speech community.

Saft (2004) analysed arguments in two different sets of university faculty meetings and discussed the issues of external institutional and cultural aspects. Accordingly, the Japanese orient themselves to the pre-established cultural orientations to harmony and social hierarchy, which is pakikisama in the Philippine context. These concepts were also investigated in the previous studies by Saft (2001),
showing that the meeting members are oriented to the cultural concepts of *wa* (harmony), *emoiyari* (empathy), and *enryo* (restraint) significantly shape social interaction in Japanese society. Saft (2001) does not fully reject the influence of core cultural values in Japanese culture that might have precipitated the social actions of the attendees in these sets of faculty meetings. Culture enhances one’s understanding of social actors’ behaviours in any conversation.

In spoken discourse, silence may be expected. Its deployment may convey a pre-established cultural orientation of submission to authority. The turn-denying gesture like silence is a manifestation of a ‘playing safe’ attitude of a participant. In the Philippine culture, as a general observation, the participants’ non-participation, non-assertion, or silence during the meeting is a deliberate intention not to appear assertive and combative to the authority. The tendency to be assertive probably may mean a bold attempt to question the persons in authority. The silence may hint that they rely on the prior knowledge of what is generally expected from them, thus what is regarded as appropriate in a shared social interaction with someone in authority manoeuvring the talk. Therefore, silence is a keyframing that orients them to be a passive audience, a social reality (cf. Mumby & Clair, 1997) among the subordinates.

2.4. Issues of Conversation Analysis

CA has catapulted many studies that aim to understand the nature and discourse of a naturally occurring talk. To date, CA is a growing field of inquiry which has been enriched by multidisciplinary contributions (Clifton, 2006; Gumperz, 1982; Sacks et al., 1974; cf. Schiffrin, 2000). Although ten Have (1999) claims that the core topic of interest in CA is turn-taking, Drew (2017) dispels this impression that CA is only ‘about’ turn-taking. He points out that what speakers ‘do’ with the words (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) in those turns, and how these turns are calibrated for and understood in an ongoing social action can be a significant contribution of CA. This is where the description of the corpus-driven feature identified from this study springs from to account for the discourse of social inequality and collegiality in a meeting talk as manifested in the members’ linguistic and paralinguistic resources at their disposal.

In CA studies, analysts are encouraged to respect the data and allow them to emerge and speak for themselves (cf. Wooffitt, 2005). Consequently, it is quite a challenge to establish the gap borne out from the related studies (cf. Munalim & Genuino, 2019a; Munalim & Genuino, 2021a). The present study claims that the feature of question-declaration coupling has not been identified by the previous studies yet. Hence, it is assumed that this paper will offer new perspectives and insights, especially because the context of the utterances falls under the Filipino cultural terrains. To attest to this claim, Brown (2010) maintains that there are massive differences between and among the languages in terms of the linguistic structures, cultural orientations, social pragmatic functions of some linguistic items, and features.
3. METHODS

3.1 CA Design

This present study has been coursed through the Conversation Analytic approach. Schegloff (2010, p. 42) explicates that “one of the key tasks of researchers is not to sacrifice the detailed examination of single cases on the altar of broad claims...to examine the detailed analysis of single cases as episodes with their own reality, deserving of their own rigorous analysis without respect to their bearing on the larger argument for which they are being put forward”.

3.2 Data and Instruments

Five meetings from three departments in a private university in Manila, Philippines formed the corpus of the study. School A had three meetings, School B with one meeting, and School C with one meeting, respectively. School B had the longest duration of meetings which lasted for two hours. The rest of the meetings were conducted in forty-five minutes and one hour. The total duration of the meetings recorded was five hours and 50 minutes. It should be noted that the unequal number of minutes did not affect the qualitative analysis because CA does not adhere to any statistical irregularity (Raymond, 2003; Schegloff, 1987) of the talk. Meanwhile, the five sets of the meetings would suffice (cf. Itakura & Tsui, 2004; O’Sullivan, 2010; Park, 2009; Vettin & Todt, 2004) given the microscopic nature of CA.

Meanwhile, the agenda of the meetings were not uniform. Schools A and B concentrated on accreditation while School B was intended to discuss the commencement of the academic year. Differences in agenda neither affected the qualitative analysis, as CA studies are not comparative in nature, and do not look at the commonality of practices. Arminen (2000) underlines that the defining feature of CA does not study talk in general, but is directed at specifying the practices in an aggregate where the generic properties and the social action that generate the fashion of social reality are illuminated.

Participants in the study were the intact group from the three departments of a non-sectarian university in Manila, Philippines, where the first author is affiliated. They were the official full and part-time employees, composed of a mix of 34 male and female part-time and full-time faculty members (School A- 8, School B- 6, School C- 20). These departments are the School of Education, School of Arts & Sciences, and School of Social Work. The selection was purposive and was purely based on the official number of faculty members from each of the three departments. The case for other faculty members who were absent during the meeting was not consequential to the analyses. The deans/chair of the department chaired all the meetings.

The choice of a faculty meeting from the university where the researcher is connected was intentional for three reasons. First, CA investigates human behaviours from inside the system, thus avoiding the imposition of the researcher’s constructs (Berry et al., 2011; Morris et al., 1999). Second, some concerns ranging from personal to managerial which are only exclusive to the invited and employed participants may transpire during the meeting. Lastly, CA tries to mitigate the possible ‘observer’s paradox’ (Labov, 1984) when the target participants would behave unusually and would deliberately modify their linguistic behaviours during the recording.
The first author of this study only sat in the School C meeting where he is part of the faculty. He begged off from joining in the discussion and remained as an official ratified audience while writing the minutes of the meeting. The researcher’s presence must have affected the usual actuation of the meeting participants, somehow, but the effects must have been mitigated because the researcher has been their colleague for five years. Sitting in a faculty meeting as an outsider is expected to affect the members’ linguistic behaviours at a more serious level.

Although Labov (1984) warns that candid recordings have little value for linguistic research, an illicit recording (Bowern, 2008) was never applied in this study. After all ethical qualms were addressed to safeguard the well-being and dignity (DeCosta, 2015; Heigham & Croker, 2009) of the faculty, audios and videos were recorded with the help of two videographers who were Communication Arts students of the same university. Data were transcribed using the selected transcription conventions by Jefferson (2004), following Liddicoat’s (2007) recommendations that they are robust and useful. All transcriptions with possible identifiable details such as names were anonymised to make sure no part of the transcripts could be traced to any member in the meeting. English glosses were also indicated for Tagalog utterances.

3.3 Data Analysis

A descriptive qualitative analysis, emic perspective, and corpus-driven methodological approach of ‘ethnomethods’ CA was used to identify and describe the microscopic feature and its sequential organisations (cf. Clifton, 2006; Gardner, 2004; Psathas & Anderson, 1990; Raymond, 2003; Wooffitt, 2005). From the starting point of CA, the analysis became eclectic, iterative, and integrative in nature, encompassing critical discourse analytical approaches, especially in the analysis of how collegiality and social inequality are manifested and resisted.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Sequential Pattern of Question-Declaration Coupling

In the study, the term ‘question-declaration coupling’ was coined to refer to the microscopic corpus-driven feature from the meeting under analysis. That is, the first-pair part question is immediately followed by and transformed into a declarative utterance, or followed by another utterance to deprive the hearer of taking the answering turn.

It is argued that the Chair immediately couples the questions with declarations as an attempt to deprive the members of answering even if the questions deserve conspicuous answers.

(1) Corpus 2, Extract 53, School A

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TimeStamp</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>827</td>
<td>Graduate School Advising and Editing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>kasi nga ito brinought up ni Dr. Yu, ang</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>828</td>
<td>Doctoral Adviser <em>ang bayad: 14,000</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because the fee of 14,000 for doctoral advising was brought up by Dr. Yu.
Our fee is bigger than that of XOXO University.

But Ma’am

What is the bottom line?

That’s the question of Dr. Yu

You have to look into it.

Because somebody brought the editing out to Dr. Yun. Students are paying outside.

We are settled, right?

We are settled.

The previous ones, Ma’am, because I will look for the previous minutes.

Because in my case, I did it in journal type

The discourse in (1) manifests how Chair suppresses the rightful turn of Villa who attempts to answer at 836 with her line, “Yes, Ma’am.” However, the Chair is too emphatic with the through-put question, “ANO ANG BOTTOM LINE n’on? ANO ANG BOTTOM line?” ((What’s the bottom line?)). Although the question seems to elicit a direct and sincere answer, the Chair fails to offer the answering turn to Villa and the members. The rather emphatic voice subjects Villa to backchannel as an expression of empathy and sympathy (Ruu suvuori, 2005) at lines 836 and 838 but fails to grab the answering turn.

Another proof of another intentional question-declaration coupling is at lines 1064 and 1065 in (2). The second pair is a repeat of the prior utterance whose pragmatic meaning is altered using rising and falling intonational contour. There is a clear possible assumption on this matter that may explain why Chair employs this strategic turn-denying mechanism. Firstly, Chair’s attempt to yield an answering turn
to the members may challenge the present issues at hand. She then abruptly pairs with a declaration of ‘settlement’ with the end in mind that she is providing the members to question another case of the issues at hand. In return, the members cede to this structure as the Chair proceeds to the next agendum (lines 1066 and 1067). Members, at the same time, manifest some politeness strategies by avoiding challenging the declaration of settlement. They perform this through an off-record-indirect strategy that tries to avoid direct face-threatening action (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

4.2 Discourse of Social Inequality and Collegiality

At the same time, the members do not attempt to take the speaking floor even if it is their opportunity to grab the speaking turn. The turn bounces back to the Chair. Consequently, all members behave quietly to the agitated gesture of the Chair. Chair answers her own questions from lines 839 to 844.

On the contrary, the Chair perhaps has the orientation that her question is only rhetorical and is not meant to be answered by any of the members. Villa’s attempt to get in is a manifestation that she treats the question as if it intends to solicit answers from the group. The intention of Chair to the speech act is elucidated at line 845, “Ganoon lang naman ‘yon, di ba? Kasi alam mo yun eh ‘di ba?’” ((That’s how simple it is, right? Because you know it, don’t you?)) This means that any answer from the group is irrelevant, and the intention of Chair 1 is only to “so just a matter of informing you ‘no. Ayan” at lines 848 and 849.

Seen from this point, the absence of part B in the sequence should not be treated as an offense to the Chair-questioner, but should be treated as a systematic mechanism that allows the Chair to keep maintaining the floor as she is rightful to. This conduct is demonstrated by the attendees that enable the Chair to keep talking and do the lecture framing.

The discourse in (3) contains the coupling of question and the succeeding declarative statement suppresses the member’s possible next sequences of utterances. In line 73, the Chair’s utterance starts with the word ‘if’ is supposed to be asking for answers from Villa. However, with respect to the Chair, Villa never attempts either to agree or disagree. In effect, the Chair takes another turn asking Villa with a post-positioned tag question (Steensig & Drew, 2008), “ano?/what? Villa in the same manner displays an affiliative act by not answering the Chair because perhaps if the answer is a disagreement, it could possibly offend the Chair.

(3) Corpus 2, Extract 3: School of Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIMESTAMP</th>
<th>English Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Villa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Villa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
74 Villa (looking down her notes))
75 Chair -> Walang problema ano?  
76 -> So, thank you Ma’am Ms. Villa ano for that (0.1)
77  Okay so XOXO ((accrediting body)) syllabi.
78  Okay, we are done with that.

However, the Chair’s follow-up question at line 75 could have been an opportunity for Villa to take her turn, but the Chair immediately suppresses Villa’s possible turn with a succeeding utterance at lines 77 and 78. The declarative statements compel the hearer to stop asserting because the Chair couples immediately with a statement.

It is noted that the issue at hand in (3) is considered a major thing for discussion during the meeting, but the Chair thanks and proceeds to the next minutes at line 77. This may be an indication of depriving the members to react that will further extend the discussions and allow the members to rationalise and ‘defend’ themselves. This means that if the Chair allows silence, and calls specific members to react from lines 73 and 75, then it could somehow challenge this position of the priorities for the accreditation processes. Consequently, no one dares to bargain the deadline of the update of the curriculum. The time at line 74 could have been the chance to grab the speaking turns when the Chair looks at her minutes of the meeting.

The multi-party setup of meetings may allow the Chair to ‘name-call’ in order to allocate the next speaking recipient. As a multi-party talk, the Chair has several options when giving the participants the opportunity to grab the speaking floor. She can use gaze to signal the next speaker to take turns. Likewise, she may call by honorific names or by simply calling their first names. Oftentimes, the Chair addresses the audience as a general group without mentioning specific names. These mechanisms were not in utility in the Chair’s linguistic resources.

The members’ orientation to question-declaration coupling that suppresses the turns is a good point of the analysis of the sense of collegiality. As already discussed, (1) manifests how the Chair suppresses the rightful turn of Villa who attempts to answer at 836 with a prefatory line, “Yes, Ma’am”. Villa’s short and un-competitive turns at lines 833 and 836 display that she does not want to challenge the Chair’s emphatic turns. Challenging and even asserting to take an answering turn may only provoke the seemingly annoyed tone of the Chair. Villa’s silence and even the silence of all other faculty members provide a default structure than Reg has the authority to somehow lecture them as regards the protocols of thesis and dissertation advising. This gesture of acceptance purports a sense of collegiality with the idea in mind, at the same time, that being silent means being polite and respectful to the authority of the Chair.

5. DISCUSSION

From the patterns, it may be averred that the turns in the meeting are not devoid of the push and pull of social inequality and collegiality. Whether or not it was intentional, the Chair attempts to consolidate and monopolise her default turn-taking power. This widely held notion is based on the fact that organisation and workplace power relations reside and are suffused in a meeting (Mumby & Clair, 1997; Roscigno
et al., 2009), which suggests that the Chair is the most powerful figure in this type of institutional talk. Meanwhile, the faculty members frame their identities of powerlessness by laminating themselves in a default status (Brown, 2007).

Although the subordinates attempt to wrestle with the default structure of the Chair, their attempts have not been successful, thereby allowing them to concede to the concept of collegiality, respect, and smooth interpersonal relationship with the person in authority. Steensig and Drew (2008) maintain that the social practice of questioning also has its pragmatic functions and consequences specific in a sociolinguistic environment. This suggests that the dispute between social inequality and collegiality is about expectations and prototype of talk, of what is expected of the default status between the superordinate and subordinate, including the conditions of the local conditions of social distance, relative power, and absolute ranking (Brown & Levinson, 1987) in the academe.

Though the default structure of the subordinate sits well with the concept of politeness principles (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and is precipitated by some cultural orientations, the study is concerned about the dire need to answer the questions. It is assumed that rhetorical questions should have a pragmatic role in an institutional talk like a faculty meeting where issues and concerns deserve clarifications, expansions of arguments, and resolutions. Decisions and resolutions do not always come on the spot. They are managed collaboratively, and as an emergent process, decisions undergo a process of deliberation, arguments, harmony, and compromise. These formulations of agreement and disagreements are desired in order to move toward the intended goals or agenda. From the cultural vantage point of view, the study is also concerned about shielding the participants from being labelled as impolite in their attempts to be collegial in the academe even if the questions deserve true answers and rationalisation from the subordinate. After all, the Chair may be cognisant that a good speaker also allows the other speakers to take their own speaking turns (Johnstone, 1996).

Although the data came from a Filipino context, these findings have several implications for teaching and learning socio-pragmalinguistics at the universal sphere. The results can help the students to look at language in actual social interactions that place more emphasis on socio-pragmatic competences. Consequently, the results may be used as sample materials in the classroom to pinpoint how a meeting can be organised (Odermatt et al., 2015). For example, Barraja-Rohan (2011) aims to help teachers teach interactional competence among second language learners to raise awareness of the norms, mechanisms, and even expectations of interactions. It illuminates insights into how this talk is organised by professionals who are believed to be the model of communicative competence. Eventually, students may be more competent speakers when they are engaged in professional discourse like a meeting.

6. CONCLUSION

The sequential pattern shows that the questions deserve conspicuous answers from the subordinates, but the Chair automatically couples them with declarative sentences and other utterances that serve as continuers. The pattern is categorised as a strategic turn-suppressing mechanism to hold back the members from possibly challenging the existing policies of the institution. It is also seen as a strategic mechanism to deprive the members of extending the litanies of possible counter-
arguments. From a positive perspective, this explicit hierarchy as manifested in the question-declaration coupling is intended to sustain the backbone of an organisation where power coheres all people together to the idea of collegial and hierarchical relationships. It reminds the members about the fact of the matter that there is a figure of authority in a talk that is taking place. It is through the air of social inequality and collegiality that people are able to know their boundaries in an ongoing interaction.

The microscopic feature under study engenders a future lens of analysis. The use of this coupling should also be investigated whether or not the time constraint forebears it. Potential strategies to overcome barriers to answering questions include scheduling more time or more visits. Another triangulation should also be done to find out if the subordinate’s silence is consequential to the leadership style and personal characteristics of the Chair who has been in the position for five years. Thirdly, there must have been several contextual factors that hastened the production of question-declaration coupling. Tracing them needs triangulation and case analysis with the Chair herself before we come up with a hazy generalisation that the Chair exhibits the ‘use and abuse’ default speaking turn in the meeting talk even at the microscopic level. To this end, we hope we have provided a base study for future cross-linguistic comparisons for these microscopic features under study.

REFERENCES


