

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Arguing Between The Lines: Grounding Structure In Advertising Discourse



1. Introduction

The widely accepted view that argumentation ‘uses language to justify or refute a standpoint, with the aim of securing agreement in views’ (van Eemeren et al., 1997, 208), rightly suggests that an advertisement could be considered a text-form variant of argumentative discourse.

Like argumentative discourse, the primary goal of advertising discourse is to persuade addressees or potential customers to accept certain viewpoints and ultimately to change their attitude and behaviour.

The present study centres around a prize-winning Dutch press advertisement about organic chickens(i). The advertisement is an instance of consumer advertising that typically ‘is aimed at boosting the consumption of a specific product or service by making potential consumers familiar with the product and building up a positive attitude towards it’ (Gieszinger, 2000, 85). To realize this goal, the organic chicken (OC) advertisement ‘has to convince the reader that the commodity will satisfy some need – or create a need which he has not felt before’ (Vestergaard and Schrøder, 1985, 49). This suggests that the advertisement is also an instance of persuasive discourse that is ‘focused on the decoder and attempts to elicit from him a specific action or emotion or conviction’ (Kinneavy, 1971, 211). In other words, its goal is ‘to move an audience from where it is at the outset of the message to where the source wants it to be at the close of the message’ (McCroskey, 1978, 105).

In persuasive discourse, the encoder, or rather the copywriter, is usually a knowledgeable, authoritative, and credible person. He/she has an *informative intent*, namely to provide readers with the necessary information about the topic at hand. But he/she also has a *persuasive intent*, which is to modify readers’- or potential customers’ – opinions, beliefs, attitudes, and eventually actions. In order to realize the persuasive intent, the copywriter would be expected to argue in favour of the advertized product or service.

Advertisements, of course, vary considerably in many respects such as in the way

they formulate arguments, the degree of explicitness of these arguments, and the location of arguments in the text. Therefore, it is sometimes difficult to unequivocally determine whether an advertisement, or in fact any other type of text, is argumentative or not. Indeed, 'the question of whether, and to what extent, an oral or a written discourse is argumentative is not always easy to answer. Sometimes the discourse, or part of it, is presented explicitly as argumentative. Sometimes it is not, even though it has an argumentative function' (van Eemeren et al., 1996, 290).

The question of how argumentation occurs in discourse is also central to the present study, though not in terms of implicit (vs. explicit) presence of arguments, which means that some disagreed upon issues are not argued about but taken for granted and left for receivers to 'fill in' missing arguments. As will become apparent, 'arguing between the lines' is used here to describe the occurrence of argumentation in the *background* of the text(ii).

2. The study and its approach

The theoretical focus of this study is on grounding (i.e. the *foreground-background* structure) – a central discourse notion and one of the semantic properties of discourse (for details, see Khalil, 2000). Grounding has been extensively studied in narrative and conversational types of discourse, yet it has not received much attention in other types of discourse such as advertising.

This paper examines and explains grounding structure in the OC advertisement, and its relationship to, and interaction with, another structure, namely argumentation. It addresses the question of the extent to which grounding structure reveals the pattern of argumentation in the text, and the global and local (rhetorical) strategies that the copywriter applies. More specifically, the paper attempts to answer the question of where in the *foreground* (FG)-*background* (BG) structure the text argues, that is to say, which components of that structure coincide with argumentative moves in the advertisement. It should be noted that grounding and argumentation are two distinct textual structures, realized at different (levels or) phases in the process of textualization, namely semantic (grounding) and pragmatic (argumentation).

The paper takes a text-level approach to the phenomenon of grounding by focussing on, and explaining, the grounding of whole propositions, and not that of single concepts or lexical items(iii). It also takes a text-level approach to the argumentative structure (or the rhetorical dimension, in the classical sense of persuading), where argumentative operations transcend the sentence-boundary

and characterize sentence-sequence. In addition, the paper takes a pragmatic approach both to argumentation in general and to the advertisement in particular. Argumentation is considered as a form of language use that must be approached pragmatically (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1995, 55); argumentative operations expressed in sentence-sequence exhibit pragmatic (functional) relations and serve the communicative function of argumentation (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992). An advertisement also has to do with the pragmatics of discourse; it is a communicative event in which the writer performs different speech acts that serve a variety of purposes.

3. The grounding continuum

Grounding is a fundamental semantic property of discourse (for details, see Khalil, 2000), distinct from other textual and non-textual structures and levels such as the cognitive, non-textual level of information or knowledge (for example about facts, events, or states of affairs) in mental models of language users, and the textual level of surface structure, which manifests how grounding is expressed.

One way information or knowledge is textually mapped or constructed in semantic representations, viz. text meaning, is in terms of grounding – a phenomenon that exhibits a gradual scale. Propositions in a discourse are not organized in a FG-BG binary opposition but in a gradual scale of meaning distribution. This is in accordance with the basic assumption that human communication does not manifest one and the same FG or BG value throughout, and that events and participants do not have equal significance(**iv**). Therefore, a text or a ‘story in which every character was equally important and every event equally significant can hardly be imagined’ (Callow, 1974, 49), and people – writers or language users in general – who produce and comprehend discourse, ‘lend more importance to some information than to other information’ (Wallace, 1982, 208). One effect of the organization of the propositional content as a FG-BG scalar structure is that it makes texts interesting. It also influences the hierarchical structure of mental models that readers build about participants, events, objects, and states of affairs referred to by individual propositions.

The assignment of grounding values to propositions on the FG-BG continuum is essentially based on the (higher/lower) degrees of importance (in a hierarchy of importance) that information or knowledge has in the mental models of language users. ‘Importance of information is defined relative to the social cognitions (knowledge, attitudes or ideologies) of a social group, including (the repre-

sensation of) their goals, norms and interests' (van Dijk, 1995, 263). It should be noted that degrees of importance are assigned to information in a certain (viz. the present) context, and may therefore be different in other contexts. It should also be noted that other factors such as information relevance (i.e. the usefulness or newsworthiness of information for (some) readers) may constrain the expression of grounding in text. Thus, the writer may consider certain information to be highly relevant – irrespective of its possible low degree of importance – and consequently give prominence to the sentence that expresses the proposition (that maps this information) in surface structure.

4. *Grounding in advertising discourse*

While grounding is a universal property of discourse, text-type specific properties determine the FG-BG distinction in text meaning, and its surface structure expression. Thus, in advertising discourse, the canonical or stereotypical grounding structure does not map propositions on a scale of decreasing importance, as is typically the case for news discourse, where FG meaning is always expressed first, that is to say prominently, in the headline or the lead sentence, and BG meaning occupies the end position. The copywriter may keep – or relegate – the FG and most important proposition (about the main 'point' of the advertisement, such as the main or most crucial claim about a product, a piece of advice, a conclusion) to a later stage in the text, or even to the very last sentence. This means that FG propositions in advertising discourse could be expressed at the beginning as a headline or an opening sentence as well as – or alternatively – at the end as a concluding sentence. The choice is subject to what the writer considers the most effective position in text from which readers can best recognize and remember FG propositions. In fact it has to do with a certain strategy for expressing FG meaning in surface structure: on starting to read the advertisement (which conforms to the *primacy effect* of first expression), or just before finishing it (which conforms to the *recency effect* of last expression). This means that, in advertising discourse, both positions are prominent, and that they are relatively more prominent than other positions in the advertisement. Both positions catch the attention of readers more than other positions do, and hence they are typically occupied by FG propositions. Opting to express FG propositions in these two prominent positions means that other propositions that have lower grounding values than FG are typically expressed elsewhere in the advertisement: in (sentences that appear in) other – relatively less conspicuous – positions.

Communicating grounding, then, depends largely on the way sentences are organized, that is to say, their relative prominence in the text. This means that prominence is part of text strategy; its aim is to communicate 'prominence in the mind'. Since it provides readers with concrete visual signs of the relative conspicuousness of grounding values, it influences readers' perceptions of what is reported. This also means that communicating grounding in surface structure prominence is part of communicating the intended meaning in discourse.

This suggests that a hierarchy of goals plays a crucial role in determining the way the FG-BG structure is organized in advertising discourse. At the top of the hierarchy, there is, of course, the macro-goal, which is to sell the product. But this macro-goal of the advertisement is often not (directly) expressed as a global meaning or a macroproposition: i.e. *Buy x*. The advertisement only creates or spells out the conditions for this conclusion, and the reader is expected 'to draw the (macro) conclusion for himself' (van Dijk, 1980, 73). However, the macro-goal of the advertisement customarily subsumes one or more main goals, expressed in the semantic structure as macropropositions. These macropropositions map highly important information, and hence they are expected to have FG value.

If we examine the OC advertisement (see section 5), three macropropositions (or main topics), representing three main goals can be discerned, namely:

1. To inform readers about the main trait of the OC. This goal is apparent in the macroproposition expressed in the headline and in S1 (FG1): *Our organic chicken turns up her beak at some things*.
2. To inform readers about the practical aspects of preparing the OC. This goal is apparent in the macroproposition expressed in S18 (FG2).
3. To inform readers about the occasional non-availability of the OC as well as about the proposed solution to this problem. This goal is apparent in the macropropositions expressed in sentences S22, S23, and S25 (FG3).

The three macropropositions have FG interpretation. They subsume several lower-level (micro)propositions that are relatively less important, and hence are assigned lower grounding values than FG on the FG-BG continuum.

Another distinct feature of grounding in advertising discourse is recursiveness. The same grounding value may appear more than once in the advertisement. The copywriter may have several propositions - about main- or sub-topics - that share the same degree of importance and hence assigns them the same (FG or BG) grounding value. This means that an advertisement may consist of several FG (i.e.

FG1, FG2, etc.) and/or several BG (i.e. BG1, BG2, etc.) values.

4.1 The default grounding pattern in advertisements

Before examining the FG-BG structure in the OC text, let us first consider briefly the default grounding pattern in advertisements. So far, we have been describing grounding in terms of FG and BG. However, it should be borne in mind that advertisements may consist of multiple (e.g. four or five) levels of grounding values. For analytical purposes, the default grounding pattern in advertisements is described below in terms of a three-level scale of grounding values: foreground (FG), midground (MG), and background (BG).

Foreground

Foreground value is typically assigned to propositions that have the highest degree of importance. FG propositions are about main speech acts that tend to be associated with the main goals of the advertisement such as to make claims about (advantages or good qualities of) the product or to recommend a certain course of action to readers.

Midground

Midground value is typically assigned to propositions that are lower on the scale than FG and that are less important. MG propositions explain main speech acts and tend to be associated with sub-goals. They provide specifics of (main) claims such as properties or constituent parts of the product, reasons, supplementary evidence, illustrative material, or conclusions. MG value may also be assigned to propositions that denote reformulation of other MG propositions in somewhat different words.

Background

Background value is typically assigned to propositions that are lower on the scale than MG and that have the lowest degree of importance. BG propositions denote the setting, context, or circumstance of main speech acts and tend to be associated with subsidiary goals. They may provide further (casual) details of certain phenomena referred to in propositions that have MG value, or further evidence for claims referred to in them. In addition, BG propositions may denote digression to side features or to details that are not (directly) related to main speech acts or main claims. BG value may also be assigned to propositions that denote reformulation of other BG propositions in somewhat different words.



Figure 1 The organic chicken advertisement.

5. The organic chicken advertisement(v)

The OC advertisement (see *Figure 1*) contains an image: a drawing of a haughty chicken. The eye-catching drawing is verbalized in the headline (*Our organic chicken turns up her beak at some things*) as well as in S3 (*She usually turns up her beak at everything else*). The headline in Dutch shows a play of words, as it denotes both a literal meaning of a chicken that does not pick up just any corn, and a figurative or idiomatic meaning of (someone) refusing to

just blindly accept everything (e.g. that is said). The headline also implies a comparison with other types of chicken that are 'not theirs' and that may 'behave' differently.

The following is a translation of the Dutch text(vi). The sentences are numbered for purposes of analysis and indented to indicate paragraph boundaries.

Our organic chicken turns up her beak at some things

1. Our organic chicken can be quite picky.
2. Because, to really be an organic chicken, she only eats grain and perhaps a little maize and soya beans that have been organically grown.
3. She usually turns up her beak at everything else.
4. Ah well, you know how it is, she does swallow a few stones every now and again on her field in France.
5. And so, you think, doesn't she get a stomach-ache from those stones?
6. But actually she doesn't - and in fact she uses those stones to grind up her grain in her stomach, as she doesn't have teeth to do the job.
7. And by the way, that's what chickens do in the wild.
8. And ours do that too.
9. And so they have fun scratching around in the grass and, of course, it's the type of grass that never gets sprayed.
10. Because otherwise she wouldn't be an organic chicken, now would she?
11. And when you think of that grass, you shouldn't think of a bleak polder landscape, but a beautiful, overgrown meadow, with apple trees to provide some

shadow, and now and again an apple falling to the ground.

12. Because our chicken likes that too.

13. By the way, we know exactly what all our other chickens like to eat, what they all eat, which farm they come from, and what the farm is like.

14. Because, of course, we are very strict about that.

15. But anyway, because of that old-fashioned feed and because our chicken can stretch her legs to her heart's desire, you can imagine that she'll be a delicious, plump hen.

16. And of course, because we don't do anything to force-feed her.

17. We give our chickens all the time in the world.

18. And you need to take your time too if you're going to cook one of our chickens.

19. Just like the French do for a chicken to be at its best – no fuss, just put it in the oven for an hour.

20. And you'll really taste how delicious such a chicken is that is so comfortable in her own skin.

21. And, finally, as the French would suggest, open up a bottle of wine and roast a few potatoes.

22. But there is one thing.

23. There aren't yet so many organic chickens.

24. And so, now and again we may not have one in stock.

25. But then, you can always take one of our free-range chickens.

The OC text is a commercial advertisement – one variety of consumer advertising. It is also an instance of rhetorical communication that intends not only to inform but also to persuade and bring about changes in behaviour. (For different perspectives on rhetoric, see Enos and Brown, 1993.) Thus, while providing information, the writer is also concerned with the future behaviour of readers, and hence is expected to perform a persuasive, written monologue that has as one of its aims to impress the audience (on aims of persuasive monologue, see, for example, Reed, 1999). Like an orator, the writer of the advertisement has the floor, intending to persuade readers by including some features of everyday argumentative discourse – justifying claims that are put forward, and providing reasons for purchasing the product. The tone of the presentation is calm and casual, showing a slow and steady unravelling of issues. Like an orator, too, the

writer pauses every now and then, realizing shifts to different issues, and making these shifts clear to readers by means of paragraph indentation.

Table 1 Grounding structure and argumentation in the OC text.

| UNIT | GROUNDING FUNCTION | DESCRIPTION | ARGUMENTATIVE RELATION/MOVE |
|----------|--------------------|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Headline | FG 1 | The first main topic | Main Claim |
| S1 | FG 1 | Reformulation | Main Claim |
| S2 | MG 1 | Explanation | Evidence |
| S3 | MG 1 | Semantic repetition; amplification | Evidence |
| S4 | BG 1 | Digestion | Evidence Modification |
| S5 | BG 1 | Further digestion | Interaction: Question |
| S6 | BG 1 | Contrastive | Counter argument |
| S7 | BG 1 | Generalization | Supporting Evidence |
| S8 | BG 1 | Inclusion of OC | Logical Conclusion |
| S9 | MG 1 | Description | Evidence |
| S10 | BG 1 | Reference to Main Claim | Significance of Evidence |
| S11 | BG 1 | Further details | Evidence Description |
| S12 | BG 1 | Explanation | Reason |
| S13 | BG 2 | Digestion | Claim |
| S14 | BG 2 | Explanation | Warrant |
| S15 | MG 2 | Shift to other OC features | Summative; Claim |
| S16 | BG 3 | Further details | Supporting Reason |
| S17 | BG 3 | Reformulation | Emphatic Claim |
| S18 | FG 2 | The second main topic | Directive |
| S19 | MG 3 | Specification | Illustrative, Instructive |
| S20 | MG 3 | Result of certain acts by readers | Promise |
| S21 | MG 3 | Addition to specification | Illustration, Instruction |
| S22 | FG 3 | The third main topic | Preparatory Statement |
| S23 | FG 3 | Identification of problem | Announcing Problem |
| S24 | MG 4 | Specification of Problem | Logical Consequence |
| S25 | FG 3 | Solving the problem | Announcing Solution |

5.1 Grounding structure in the OC advertisement

The OC advertisement consists of a headline and six paragraphs comprising 25 sentences. Its grounding structure is described on the basis of the criteria outlined earlier, and is summarized in Table 1. The Table also describes the functional relation that each unit has, and the argumentative move that is performed.

The OC text has three FG values, four MG values, and three BG values. The three FG values are expressed in different positions in the text: at the very beginning (Headline, S1), towards the end (S18), and at the very end (S22, S23, S25). By dint of their position, sentences that express FG are prominent, exhibiting the two strategies for expressing this grounding value in surface structure, and conforming to the *primacy effect* and the *recency effect*. Sentences that express MG propositions occupy a relatively less prominent position, and those expressing BG propositions occupy the middle position in the text (see shaded area in Table 1), and hence they are non-prominently expressed.

5.2 Argumentation in the grounding structure of the OC advertisement

Let us look more closely at the grounding structure or values in the advertisement and, at the same time, examine the pattern of argumentation as well as the nature of argumentative moves that the text displays (see also Table 1). It is worth noting that these argumentative moves are part of the global text strategy, and include decisions as to their distribution in the advertisement.

The general picture that one gets from examining Table 1 suggests that propositions that vary in grounding values (i.e. serve different grounding functions) seem to contribute in varying degrees to the pattern of argumentation in the advertisement. In what follows, the co-occurrence of grounding values and types of argumentative moves in the OC text is briefly described.

FG propositions

Foreground propositions are basically informative, reflecting the informative intent of the copywriter: his/her assumption that readers are not (sufficiently) informed about the OC, hence the need to provide them with the necessary information about this type of chicken.

FG propositions are macropropositions that represent the three main goals explained earlier:

1. Informing readers about the OC: the Main Claim (viz. that she is picky and really organic).
2. Informing readers about what they can do when preparing the OC.
3. Informing readers about the occasional non-availability of the OC and about the solution to this problem.

MG propositions

Midground propositions are basically descriptive and explicative. They provide specifics of certain properties of the OC in order to demonstrate to readers why this chicken merits her name. They also include some evidence and illustrative material. As such, MG propositions seem to consolidate the Main Claim about the OC expressed in FG propositions.

BG propositions

Background propositions are basically argumentative. Several details (e.g. about the circumstances of breeding the OC) are provided in order to refute and introduce motivation or supporting evidence, as well as to make emphatic claims. BG propositions also generalize and show the significance of certain details (e.g. about the grass), and conclude about local claims that are made. In this regard, BG propositions seem to be intended to convince readers that the OC is desirable, and – indirectly perhaps – to make them realize the disadvantages of other types of chickens.

5.3 Background argumentation

From this brief description of the nature of argumentation in the FG-BG structure of the OC text, it becomes clear that the three grounding values contribute differently – or in varying degrees – to argumentation, and that the strongest contribution to argumentation comes from BG. It also becomes clear that what I refer to as ‘arguing between the lines’ is considered here in terms of grounding and its expression in surface structure.

In terms of grounding, argumentation occurs basically in the background of the FG-BG continuum. Examination of the grounding structure shows the choice of BG propositions to serve an argumentative function in the text. This low-level grounding value is assigned to sequences of propositions that manifest typical argumentative moves such as claiming, justifying, providing supportive evidence, and concluding. Also in terms of the expression of grounding in surface structure, argumentation occurs in BG propositions that are non-prominently expressed. Sentences that express *background* argumentative moves occupy the middle position in the text, and hence they have a relatively low degree of salience.

In addition to grounding and its expression, *background* argumentation – or arguing between the lines – may also be established in terms of the status of the arguments themselves. Several argumentative sequences in the text are about subsidiary or tangential issues. This is evident for example in digressive propositions such as the one that introduces a local claim, modifying the Main Claim about what the OC picks (S4). It is also evident in the subordinate argument that the OC uses stones to grind corn in her stomach (S6), which denies and counters readers' expectations. Similarly, a local logical conclusion about the behaviour of the OC herself (S8), follows a generalization about the behaviour of all free-range chickens. There is also the reason about a subsidiary issue, provided in the short emphatic statement (S12), following details about the grass with apple trees.

5.3.1 Linguistic marking of background argumentation

Argumentation, of course, is not only a matter of content (e.g. facts, events) but also of linguistic form. That is to say, not only what is said but also how it is said (Caron and Caron-Pargue, 1987, 170). Crucial to argumentation, then, are factors such as how propositions are linguistically encoded, how sentences are sequentially presented, and what the resulting (functional) relation that holds between the various components in the sequence looks like: e.g. claim-justification, justification-conclusion.

One feature of linguistic encoding that is typical for argumentation is emphasis. An example from the OC text is the emphatic statement: *We give our chickens all the time in the world* (S17). Certain linguistic entities may also signal argumentation and provide clues as to the type of argumentative move that the writer makes at a given stage in the process of text production. Among entities that serve this function are those that occur in sentence-initial position. They provide argumentative value to the propositions encoded in the sentences they

introduce. Among markers that refer to standpoints and argumentation are *therefore, hence, so, thus, since, for, because* (van Eemeren et al., 1996, 13).

In what follows, I describe briefly a number of markers or expressions of argumentation that appear in sentences encoding BG propositions in the OC text.

1. *Ah well, you know how it is* (S4). This expression signals a concessive relation, indicative of argumentative discourse (see Werlich, 1976). The writer anticipates – and acknowledges – possible counter-arguments that might be advanced by the reader. By conceding, and hence modifying the (weight of the) prior evidence, the writer assumes – and hopes – that the reader would be more inclined to accept the more realistic picture of the OC depicted in the proposition, and would eventually accept the Main Claim introduced earlier.

2. *But actually she doesn't* (S6). This expression signals an argumentative move that counters the preceding assumption or imaginary question posed by the reader (S5).

3. *And* (S11)(vii). The use of *and* in sentence-initial position contributes to the construction of logical argumentation: by adding or enumerating the benefits of certain things(viii). It may also be intended 'to emphasize the conclusiveness of the argument' (Delin, 2000, 130) as in S8.

Also *and* signals the interactive nature of the text and contributes to the communicative force of the writer's message (see Schiffrin, 1986). Besides, *and* serves the pragmatic function of marking speaker continuation (Schiffrin, 1986). This meaning of *and* is a consequence of the speaker's situated use of *and* (i.e. context-bound), rather than a consequence of the inherent semantic meaning of *and* (Schiffrin, 1986, 62). This is evident in S11, where *and* does not continue – or relate to – the immediately preceding proposition expressed in S10 (which is about a different feature) but signals continuation by the writer of the speech act in S9, which is about the grass.

4. *Because* (S10, S12, S14). The three short sentences prefaced by *because* express a warrant for the claim made before. The last two occurrences of *because* are shorter, serving an emphatic function.

5. *By the way* (S13). This marker signals the introduction of a digression from the current topic about subsidiary claims relating to knowledge of various aspects of breeding these chickens.

6. *The effect of arguing in the background*

At the outset, it may be said that, by arguing in the *background*, the OC advertisement focusses in FG and MG propositions on an *informative* task, which is to describe the main issue and make readers aware of the main properties of the OC. But arguing in the background serves the text's communicative function, which is not so much to inform as to persuade and sell the advertized product. It also demonstrates the copywriter's assumption that readers are aware of the communicative context (i.e. a written advertisement) and the goal of promoting the OC – that the performance of argumentative speech acts seeks to convince readers of the unitary traits of the OC and persuade them to purchase this product.

From this perspective, the informative task, prevalent in higher grounding values, may be regarded as a means, or rather as a prelude, to the argumentative task – realized in the BG of the grounding structure – of achieving a persuasive effect. But since background argumentation occurs in an overwhelmingly informative or expository text, it does not overshadow the informative task. In fact, the text begins and ends with informative and descriptive propositions that have FG and MG values, and between these two poles, it argues in propositions that have a background value. In other words, the argumentative parts are relatively concealed. In addition, opting to argue in the background subtly helps to realize the goal of persuading readers to take a positive stance towards this type of chicken, by working towards altering their beliefs and convincing them of the necessity to make a decision **(ix)**.

That many argumentative speech acts are performed in the BG of the grounding structure makes it look as if argumentation – and the creation of a persuasive effect – is not the main goal of the OC advertisement, and that the copywriter is engaged in an utterly informative task. Yet the fact that both 'components' are present in the advertisement may influence the way the advertisement is received. Thus, it may be regarded – by some receivers at least – as a 'pseudo-informative message', which is 'a persuasive message presented in an apparently informative format' (McCroskey, 1978, 207). In this regard, it should be remembered that 'exposition and argument easily blend. Exposition is often the best argument, or exposition may resort to the kind of reasoning characteristic of argument, the reasoning from cause to effect or from evidence to conclusion' (Brooks and Warren, 1979, 41).

The surface structure of the advertisement also contributes to the picture that readers get. It does not only reveal how grounding is expressed but also how

argumentation is presented in the prominence hierarchy. That argumentative propositions that have background value manifest a relatively low degree of prominence in the text signals to readers how the writer wants or intends certain argumentative speech acts to be received and interpreted. On the other hand, surface structure also shows that the writer gives prominence to the informative and descriptive material in FG and MG propositions.

One significant feature of background argumentation is that, at a certain point in the text, an argument is literally presented 'between the lines' or parenthetically. This feature of parenthetical argumentation is apparent in a background argumentative move (S10) that comments and shows the significance of the subordinate claim made in the narrative-like MG proposition about the grass (S9). Then the writer continues, in the following sentence (S11), to provide descriptive details about other features of the grass. Although the background argumentative move serves the function of directing readers' attention to the Main Claim, it is performed between two sentences that encode much descriptive material.

That this argumentative move as well as several others intend to *justify* certain states of affairs reminds us of the intention of argumentation, which is to justify one's standpoint (van Eemeren et al., 1996, 3) and also of the fact that a justified statement is an *argument* (Geissner, 1987, 115). In this regard, it should be noted that background argumentation in the OC text attempts to justify and persuade by appealing to reason, or by giving a logical explanation of certain states of affairs. This is apparent for example in the BG proposition that provides a claim about knowledge of the circumstances of breeding other chickens (S13), and is followed by a justification in the emphatic statement about being very strict (S14). Similarly, background argumentation about not force-feeding the OC (S16) provides a supporting reason that justifies the claim that the OC is a delicious hen made in the MG proposition (S15). On the other hand, a supporting reason is followed by the emphatic claim in the short sentence (S17) about giving their chickens all the time in the world.

This last example illustrates that background argumentation may serve - or closely cooperate with - other grounding values as well. Thus, it realizes a shift to FG: While engaged in an emphatic claim in a BG proposition that introduces the idea of 'time' (S17), the writer shifts to reader's time in the FG proposition of the following sentence (S18), thus shifting from 'chicken's time', so to speak, to 'reader's time'. In general, shifts in argumentative moves across a sentence boundary may coincide with shifts between grounding values.

It is important to note that, although this is not a conversational type of text, where there is an interaction between two parties (such as in a debate), a number of propositions in background argumentation are interactional. Although they are not frequent in the text, they consolidate the communicative function of the advertisement. This is apparent in some digressive propositions that manifest argumentative moves where the writer is engaged in an (unheard) interactive debate (S5, S6) – posing/anticipating a question by the inquisitive reader and countering the argument in order to ‘disarm’ those who may have a different standpoint. It is also apparent in the emphatic argumentative move of asking the reader for confirmation or approval that the chicken is indeed organic (S10).

7. Conclusion

This paper has examined the central discourse notion of grounding in a press advertisement, and focussed on the hypothesized contribution of grounding to the text’s argumentative structure. The analysis has shown that the argumentative function of the OC advertisement manifests itself differently in terms of grounding values, and that argumentative moves occur primarily in the BG, thus realizing the argumentative function of the text, and reflecting a rather subtle pattern of argumentation as a means to persuade readers.

In addition to arguing in the background of the grounding structure, the non-prominent expression of argumentative moves also seems to contribute to this subtle pattern. This suggests that grounding and its expression in surface structure may provide a crucial means to manipulate the pattern of argumentation for the sake of enhancing the communicative function of advertisements or other types of text that have a similar persuasive intent.

NOTES

[i] The organic chicken advertisement has won the PCM Retail Gala 2000. It has been chosen as the most appealing advertisement for the year 1999.

[ii] The terms ‘text’ and ‘discourse’ will be used interchangeably.

[iii] Roughly, a proposition is the semantic equivalent of a clause.

[iv] A grounding value is a measure of the relative worth of a textual proposition, i.e. propositional importance, on the FG-BG gradient.

[v] Permission of Albert Heijn to use the advertisement is acknowledged with thanks.

[vi] I am grateful to my colleague Catherine Nickerson for the English translation.

[vii] And in sentences S7 and S8 are not included, as they do not appear in the Dutch sentence.

[viii] It is interesting to note that S8 in the original Dutch text has the equivalent for thus in initial position (Thus ours do that too), signaling a logical conclusion.

[ix] BG propositions may also be intended to reinforce readers' existing favourable beliefs or standpoints and attitudes concerning the advantages of (purchasing and) eating this type of chicken.

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