

# ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Strategic Manoeuvring With Direct Evidential Strategies



## *1. Introduction*

In this paper[i] , the linguistic expressions pointing to a sensorial type of information source are taken into account within the framework provided by the argumentation theories of pragma-dialectics in order to highlight the argumentative values that these expressions acquire in a particular context. The paper aims at confirming the previously mentioned hypothesis (Gata 2007) according to which evidential strategies do not serve only to indicate the information source, but they are endowed with argumentative value. In this context, they are approached in terms of presentational devices meant to sustain a standpoint by putting forward hardly refutable evidence. The general framework of this study is provided on the one hand by traditional and recent studies in the field of evidentiality theory (Chafe 1986; Journal of Pragmatics, vol. 33, March 2001; Aikhenvald 2003; Gata 2007, 2009(1)) and on the other hand by the Argumentation Theory, developed by van Eemeren & Grootendorst in the 1980's and enriched later on due to the contributions of Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans, namely by means of the concept of strategic manoeuvring.

The first part of the paper aims at providing a clear cut distinction between several evidential strategies. The focus is placed on the verbs of visual and auditory perceptions (see, hear) which, according to the context, pertain to both types of evidentiality, namely direct vs indirect evidentiality. The second part approaches direct evidential strategies within argumentative discourses in the attempt to identify the types of strategic manoeuvring that stand out in the stages of the resolution process. The analysis is performed on several excerpts of discourse[ii] taken from the Internet in which the authors attempt to convince the readers of the truthfulness of a particular standpoint.

## *2. Critical discussion and strategic manoeuvring*

The model for critical discussion incorporates four stages which occur in the resolution process as well as "verbal moves that are instrumental in each of these

stages" (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans 1996, p. 280). It also puts forward, under the form of Ten Commandments, the rules both parties involved should observe in order to be dialectically reasonable, i.e. to "lead to generally acceptable opinions or points of view". (*Idem*, p. 32) Violation of these rules equals fallacies defined as "discussion moves which damage the quality of argumentative discourse" (*Idem*, p.21).

According to Van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans (2002, p. 25), the four stages analytically identified in the model of critical discussion include:

- 1) the confrontation stage (the parties agree they are dealing with a difference of opinion);
- 2) the opening stage (the parties take up their roles of protagonist and antagonist, implicitly accepting the rules which govern the critical discussion);
- 3) the argumentation stage (the protagonist defends his standpoint against the critical responses of the antagonist);
- 4) the concluding stage (they evaluate whether the protagonist has successfully defended his standpoint).

Although aware that real-life argumentative discussions hardly fit into the given model, we admit that it may function as a useful pattern in relation to which the analysed argumentative discourses should be further placed.

More often than not, in argumentative discussions, the parties do not attempt only to reach the resolution of the difference of opinion, but they aim at resolving it in their own favour. In this context, the parties try to reconcile both their goals of increasing the acceptability of the standpoint at issue while intending to convince the audience of the correctness of the particular standpoint. This simultaneous pursuit of the dialectical and rhetorical aims leads to strategic manoeuvring. This concept is not always easy to grasp in a particular discussion since "the habitat of strategic manoeuvring is a context of controversy and critical testing where one party tries to steer the resolution process so as to serve his personal aims." (Krabbe 2008, p. 455)

Strategic manoeuvring refers to the "continual efforts made in principal by all parties in argumentative discourse to reconcile their simultaneous pursuit of rhetorical aims of effectiveness with maintaining dialectical standards of reasonableness". (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2009, p. 5) Strategic manoeuvring is a theoretical concept meant to bridge the gap between dialectic and rhetoric, between a "collaborative method of putting logic into use so as to move from

conjecture and opinion to more secure belief” and a “theoretical study of the potential effectiveness of argumentative discourse in convincing or persuading an audience in actual argumentative practice” (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2006, p. 383). In each of the four stages for critical discussion, the parties, while keeping within the dialectical procedures of reasonableness and logic, make use of rhetorical devices with a view to making things go their way and to convincing the audience of the correctness of a standpoint.

Strategic manoeuvring becomes manifest at three levels in argumentative discourse, namely “in the choices that are made from the ‘topical potential’ available at a certain stage in the discourse, in audience-directed ‘adjustments’ of the argumentative moves that are made, and in the purposive use of linguistic (or other) ‘devices’ in presenting these moves”. (*Ibidem*) To put it differently, speakers / writers may choose the material they find easiest to handle, the perspective most agreeable to the audience and they can present their contribution in the most effective wordings. (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 1999, p. 484)

Despite the fact that these three levels of strategic manoeuvring have been analytically distinguished, in real-life argumentative practice, these aspects occur and function together. (Tindale, quoted by Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2009, p. 5) I argue in this paper that direct evidential strategies should be considered among presentational devices that are put to good use by the speaker / writer in order to convey optimal rhetorical efficiency.

### *3. Direct evidential strategies*

In general, *evidentiality* is referred to as the linguistic phenomenon, specific to some non-Indo European languages, indicating the way the source of information is grammatically marked in an utterance (Aikenveld 2003). The linguistic markers that point to the information source are called *evidentials*.

Plungian (2001, pp. 351-352), based on Guentchéva’s work (1996), provides the following classification of evidential values:

- a) the speaker has observed the situation directly, through visual experience;
- b) the speaker has perceived the situation directly, but not through visual experience; we are dealing with a value that points to other senses (hearing and smelling);
- c) the speaker has not noticed the situation directly since he was spatially and temporally separated from it; at this point, literature provides three possibilities that render indirect perception:

- 1) the speaker has directly perceived the situation S' which triggers an inferential process that leads the speaker to the initial situation S (inferential value);
- 2) he knows something which allows him to consider the situation S as probable (presumptive value);
- 3) he acquires the information concerning S from a third instance (hearsay value).

This typology is further enriched by Gata (2009(1), pp. 484-490) who provides a refined taxonomy of evidential functions starting from the same distinction between direct evidentiality (divided at a first level in performative evidentiality and non-performative / sensorial / experimental evidentiality) and indirect evidentiality (firstly classified in inferential and non-inferential evidentiality). The final classification comprises eight sub-classes for direct evidentiality and eight for indirect evidentiality.

In this paper, I have used the term evidential strategy to separate from the non-Indo European languages where affixes or particles are specialized in indicating the information source. In English, evidentiality is rendered by both lexical strategies and grammatical markers including verb tenses, epistemic verbs, adverbs, *verba dicendi*, and other various expressions.

Direct evidential strategies highlight the fact that the speaker has had access to the information conveyed in the utterance through visual or auditory experience and, moreover, that this information plays a significant part in the actual argumentative discourse (Gata 2007).

The most explicit evidential strategies belonging to this category are the perception verbs (*see, hear*): *I see her coming down the hall*. The use of present continuous may also have an evidential value. Chafe (1986, p. 267) argues that the sentences *I see her coming down the hall* and *She's coming down the hall* are equivalent, except for the lack of evidential specification in the latter. However, my opinion is that the two assertions are not equivalent, since in the latter case, the knowledge can be issued from direct, auditory experience and not necessarily visual (*when hearing her walking down the hall, wearing high hills*, for instance). An inventory of possible direct evidential strategies should also encompass expressions (*Here it is!*) and interjections (*Whoops! My God!*) usually accompanied by an admiring value (Scripnic & Gata 2008, p. 381).

From the whole range of direct evidential strategies, I deal in this paper with evidential structures centred on a perception verb such as *I see / saw he is / was ill. I hear / heard he is / was coming.*

By adopting the pragma-dialectical perspective according to which any discourse is a priori argumentative since it aims more or less overtly at convincing the interlocutor / audience / readers about the acceptability of a standpoint, I attempt to highlight the part evidential strategies play in dialectically solving the difference of opinion and in reaching the rhetorical goals that the parties involved have set. I assume that these strategies contribute to supporting a standpoint by putting forward visual and auditory type of evidence as well as to obtaining and to enhancing the other party's commitment to this argumentation presented as objective, although through the speaker's subjectivity.

Before approaching direct evidential strategies in the framework of the critical discussion, it is worth assessing the relation between the verbs see, hear and the type of evidential strategy they are likely to bring to the fore.

#### *4. Types of evidential strategies centred on the verbs see and hear*

##### *4.1. See*

The verb see, according to its meaning, may point to two types of evidential values:

- a) *I see mom leaving the house* (direct evidentiality - visual perception of the event);
- b) *I see mom has left the house* (indirect evidentiality - inferential process triggered by other clues that the speaker took notice of: *door locked, absence of his mom's coat, etc.*).

In order to account for their argumentative function, the two utterances may be followed by another one such as *So we can come in and listen to music without being disturbed*. In both cases, we are dealing with visual perception, but the difference lies in the fact that, in the first case (a), the speaker is a direct witness to the event (*his mother's departure*), while in the second case (b), the speaker visually notices certain clues which lead him, through an inferential type of reasoning, to the conclusion that *his mother has left the building*.

The two evidential values (direct and indirect) become manifest in the real life argumentative discourse:

- (1) *I see that death is the only option...*

I sit on the edge of my bed every night with thoughts of pulling the trigger...

(<http://help.com/post/342555-i-see-that-death-is-the-only-optio>)

In (1), the verb *see* functions as a verb of opinion, namely *I believe that, I think that*; it points out that the speaker has had access to the information conveyed (*death is the only option*) through reasoning based on the direct experience of a

series of situations related to the situation described.

When the verb *see* occurs in the present perfect or past tense, it commonly functions as a direct evidential strategy. This value is reinforced in some contexts by the use of the facultative and pleonastic element with *one's one eyes*[iii]. Gata (2009(2)) explains that the adding of the element *with one's own eyes* may be justified by the fact that the speaker feels the need to make a distinction between the multiple meanings which the verb *see* has developed besides the meaning of sensorial perception: (for instance, *understand, imagine, seize the reasons of*).

Direct evidential strategies centred on the verb *see* can be envisaged as having the following general schematic form, by means of which the speaker attempts to impose the truthfulness of a propositional content on the audience (Figure 1):

*I see*<sub>past tense / past perfect</sub> + [that] *P* (propositional content) → *P* is true (standpoint at issue)  
In other cases, the verb *see* occurs in independent clauses in which the speaker aims at convincing the audience that an object is real:  
*I see*<sub>past tense / past perfect</sub> + *O* (object of the perception) → *O* is real (standpoint at issue)

Figure 1

(2) *I've seen* the Honda Fury, and It's..... uh, real. And unfortunately that's all I can say about it until January 16th, due to an embargo agreement I signed.

(<http://motorcycles.about.com/b/2008/12/18/ive-seen-the-honda-fury-and-its.htm>)

(3) "*I saw it with my own eyes how civilians were shot.*"

*I was an eyewitness.* I was on vacation at home taking a break from my studies at school in Rezekne. There was a cemetery 3 kilometers away from us. My father said that there was a Nazi order for all the people in the village to take spades and go - I did not know where and why. When we came, we saw a big pit, a ditch around 15 meters deep. The bottom was covered with sand. It was very strange, and it turned out that 800 Jews had been shot dead in Karstov. It was such a psychological blow for me. I realized what Nazi rule meant (Vladislaus Buklovskis, Latvia)

(<http://victory1945.rt.com/witnesses/saw-shot-dead-nazi/>)

In (2) and (3), we can identify direct evidential strategies which point to a visual perception of the events (*the creation of a new type of motorbike; the civilians shot by the Nazis*). According to the different propositional content as well as the rhetorical effect pursued, the speakers have adopted different ways of using direct evidential strategies: in (2), the speaker gives as a single argument for the existence of the motorbike Honda Fury his visual perception of the object: *it*

*exists because I saw it*, enhancing therefore his ethos as a trustworthy person whose words cannot be questioned; in (3), the speaker makes use of two direct evidential strategies which point to the same way of access to the information conveyed (*I saw it with my own eyes, I was an eye witness*); these expressions are endowed with powerful rhetorical effect since he attempts not to convince the readers of the events described (everybody being aware of the Nazis' horrors), but to draw their attention in order not to forget that such atrocities took place. Moreover, the repetition of the information source aims at dismissing any attempt of attack from the other party and at imposing the standpoint on the audience.

#### 4.2. Hear

The verb *hear* may enter two types of evidential strategies, according to the context:

- a) *I hear / I've heard people shouting in the street.* (direct evidentiality – auditory perception of the event);
- b) *I've heard he has been dismissed.* (indirect evidentiality – reportative value since the speaker has got the information from a third instance, not overtly mentioned in discourse; in this case *I've heard* can be considered synonymous to *I was told*).

When the verb *hear* points to an indirect access to the knowledge conveyed in the utterance, this knowledge proves to be uncertain; that is why, more often than not, the speaker requires a confirmation of the knowledge peddled by the community and related to the speaker's interests.

(4) *I've heard that the police are now using lasers in addition to radar to catch speeders on the highway. How does a laser measure the speed of a car?*

(<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article.cfm?id=ive-heard-that-the-police>)

In example (4), the speaker is not obviously an auditory witness to the use of lasers to catch speeders on the highway. He derives this knowledge from the public opinion which peddles certain information whose truthfulness needs to be confirmed by the appropriate authorities.

Direct evidential strategies centred on the verb *hear* usually have the following schematic form (*Figure 2*):

*I hear<sub>present / present perfect / past tense</sub> + X (entity)-minute] / [minute] dealt with in the utterance + verb<sub>affirmative</sub>(act of saying or act of doing) → it is true X said / did it.*

Figure 2

I hearpresent / present perfect / past tense + X (entity[+animate] / [-animate] dealt with in the utterance) + verbinfinitive (act of saying or act of doing) □ it is true X said / did it.

(5) In February 2001, *I heard* Colin Powell say that Saddam Hussein ‘has not developed any significant capability with respect to weapons of mass destruction. He is unable to project conventional power against his neighbours.’

(<http://www.lrb.co.uk/v27/n03/eliot-weinberger/what-i-heard-about-iraq>)

In (5), the verb *hear* points to the speaker’s direct perception of the act of saying; he attempts to avoid any doubt that may raise whether the act of saying took place or not. Therefore, the information cannot be questioned since it is presented as issuing from the speaker’s perception which cannot be misleading.

Furthermore, this paper approaches direct evidential strategies with the view to identifying their place within the critical discussion as well as their role in argumentatively supporting a standpoint.

##### *5. Direct evidential strategies – presentational devices of strategic manoeuvring*

The examples meant to highlight the hypothesis are taken from blogs and discussion forums; therefore, it may be assumed that we are dealing with a special type of argumentative discourse in which the protagonist is defending a standpoint against the implicit attacks of a virtual antagonist (readers, public opinion).

Firstly, I aim at establishing in which stage of the critical discussion direct evidential strategies are likely to occur. Secondly, the enquiry is directed towards approaching evidential strategies as strategic manoeuvring devices.

As it has been mentioned in part 2, in the model of critical discussion, the resolution of a difference of opinion goes through four stages that are not always explicitly retraceable in a real-life discussion. The evidential strategies *I saw / I’ve seen (that)* and *I heard / I’ve heard (that)* are most likely to occur in the argumentation stage when the protagonist “methodically defends the standpoint at issue against the critical responses of the antagonist” (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans 1996, p. 282).

##### *(6) I saw it with my own eyes, so it must be true (title)*

Every day that the courts are in session, person after person tells lies in the witness box. Each will swear to tell ‘the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,’ and the majority will fail miserably to do so. Because the absolute truth is a tricky business to pin down.

(<http://brianclegg.blogspot.com/2010/02/i-saw-it-with-my-own-eyes-so-it-must-be.html>)

In (6), the protagonist claims to stay within the bounds of reasonableness as he attempts to convince the audience that in the courts of justice, people tell lies despite of having sworn to tell the truth. The single argument that the protagonist puts forward is the fact that he was an eye witness to such behaviour in court. This single argumentation displays the basic structure in which we can identify one explicit and one unexpressed premise:

- the explicit premise: *I saw people in court telling lies after they had sworn to tell the truth;*
- the unexpressed premise: *the situations that one can perceive are true;*
- conclusion: *it is true people lie in court.*

In this case, the argumentation can be also interpreted as: a) a symptomatic type of argument scheme: if I saw the event (and all that can be seen are true), the event is real and everybody should represent it as I have seen it (Gata 2009(2)); b) a causal type of argument scheme: the event is true because I've seen it.

This single argument issued from visual (and auditory) perception is assumed to have a high degree of tenability in the light of critical responses. Therefore it cannot be attacked through rational moves since it is presented as coming from visual experience which cannot normally be deceptive. The feeling that we are dealing with hardly refutable evidence allowed the protagonist to draw himself the conclusion (*it must be true*), instead of letting the audience reach the same conclusion and accepting the standpoint at issue as true. However, the argument can be undermined in two ways: a) by attacking the relation existing between the premises; b) by violating the rules for critical discussion, namely by casting doubt on the protagonist's credibility and image.

The direct evidential strategy based on auditory perception is likely to have the same values as the visual evidential:

(7) *I heard Palfrey with my own ears tell an Austin radio host that if she is ever found dead, it wasn't suicide and that she would never do that. Debra Jean Palfrey was murdered.*

([http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view\\_all&address=389x3232114](http://www.democraticunderground.com/discuss/duboard.php?az=view_all&address=389x3232114))

In (7), the protagonist attempts to impose a standpoint on the audience (Debra Jean Palfrey was murdered). In doing so, he does not introduce himself as someone who was an auditory witness to the crime itself, but as a witness to an

act of speech (*Palfrey's statement according to which she would never commit suicide*). Therefore, in this case, the protagonist commits himself to the truthfulness of the propositional content of the act of saying while aiming at convincing the audience of the truthfulness of an act of doing (*Palfrey's being murdered*).

In both cases of direct evidential strategies (visual and auditory), the protagonist strategically manoeuvres the pole of ethos by appealing to his previously built image as a man whose words are to be trusted. We can speak about manoeuvring with argument from authority: we refer here to the case when the protagonist evokes his own authority in order to impose the standpoint at issue on the audience. In this way, one can speak about the speaker's intent to manipulate the readers.

(8) "I saw the match yesterday and they play well, they have big chances to promote from the second league if they go on playing like this." (Iuliu Muresan, president of the football team CFR Cluj)

(<http://www.citynews.ro/cluj/sport-9/muresan-am-vazut-cu-ochii-mei-sacosa-4312/>)  
In this example, the protagonist backs his standpoint (*the football team has big chances to promote*) with some information derived from his direct experience (*he was a visual witness to a match where the team played well*). At the same time, he attempts to manipulate the audience since his argumentation is based more on ethos and less on logos; he exploits his image as an experienced manager who is able to draw a conclusion about the trajectory of a football team just by witnessing one of its performances.

In the light of these observations, it can be argued that direct evidential strategies may function as strong rhetorical devices (the visual and auditory perceptions expressed by the verb *see / hear* are increased by the use of the pseudo-pleonastic expressions with *my own eyes / with my own ears*) by means of which the party aims at convincing the readers of the correctness of the standpoint. This observation is underlined by Gata (2009(2)) who states that the use of evidential expressions in discourse aims at making the others believe that an event E took place and this equals presenting the propositional content as true.

Speech acts are accomplished at every stage of the critical discussion. They account for the pragmatic insights that the dialectic of the critical discussion puts forward. In the argumentation stage, direct evidential strategies (*I've seen with my own eyes, I've heard with my own ears*) attempt to advance arguments

through an assertive speech act. Gata (2009(2)) introduces the notion of covert directivity which involves a persuasive act (the perlocutory effect of getting the audience committed to the representation of reality proposed by the speaker) and can be understood as follows: *You must believe me because I've seen / heard it*. In this case, the commitment to the propositional content may be enhanced. This is the reason why the argument based on visual and auditory perception proves to be efficient and tenable in the light of critical responses and it can only be attacked by violating the rules for critical discussion (for instance, by a fallacy such as *ad hominem*, attacking the person).

## 6. Conclusions

The analysis of perception evidential strategies points out how the rhetorical opportunities of strategic manoeuvring are used in argumentative discourse so that one party could resolve the difference of opinion in his favour. The model for critical discussion provided by pragma-dialectics allowed for the approach of these strategies in terms of the stages where they are likely to occur. In this context, it has been established that direct evidential strategies can generally be used in the argumentation stage (with a view to defending the standpoint at issue) so that the arguer could strategically manoeuvre the discussion in such a way so as to reach both his dialectical and rhetorical goals. Evidential strategies usually perform the act of asserting, bringing to the fore a very tenable argument in the light of critical responses.

Firstly, I highlighted the evidential value of the strategies centred on the verbs *see* and *hear*. At this point, it was shown that the structures under study do not always function as direct evidential strategies. According to the context and the verb tense, these verbs render both direct and indirect evidentiality: visual perception and inferential values (for the verb *see*) and auditory perception and reportative values (for the verb *hear*).

In analyzing direct evidential strategies in discourse, I pointed out that they are likely to occur in the argumentation stage when the protagonist defends his standpoint against the implicit attacks of a virtual antagonist (the readers). They put forward strong evidence since issued from direct experience which is not normally misleading. The speaker aims at increasing the acceptability of a standpoint which he fully commits to. While accomplishing assertive speech acts which cover however a directive value, these strategies represent reader oriented rhetorical devices. The party may use the strategy of the argument from authority (his/her own authority), enhancing his/her ethos as a trustworthy person whose

words cannot be cast doubt on.

## NOTES

[i] This study is part of the research developed within the PNII-PCE 1209 / 2007 Project financed by the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation.

[ii] The examples are provided with their original spelling.

[iii] For a thorough study of the stylistic, semantic, pragmatic and rhetorical values of the pleonasm like constructions see with one's (own) eyes, hear with one's (own) ears, see Gata (20092).

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