

# **ISSA Proceedings 2014 - Creating Disagreement By Self-Abasement. Apologizing As A Means Of Confrontational Strategic Maneuvering**

*Abstract:* The analysis of the different stages in a preface to a stage play (1617) by Gerbrand Bredero makes clear that antitheses, exaggerated modesty and self-humiliation may be used as strategic tools in the confrontation stage. The disagreement between protagonist and the primary audience has been created in the confrontation stage by polarizing the parties' attitude towards each other.

*Keywords:* Antitheses, Apologizing, Confrontational Strategic Maneuvering, Disagreement, Double audience, Modesty, Polarization, Self-Humiliation

## *1. Introduction*

It is an open secret that European debate, which is characterized as a rather formal discussion, becomes livelier and even biting in election time. The discussants have in fact a double role. On the one hand they discuss with each other in a reasonable way, in accordance with the parliamentary conventions. On the other hand, conscious of the role of media in forming impressions of public opinion, they push the boundaries to play to their electoral audiences, aiming at successes with a much wider circle of voters and public opinion. The parliament is a public discussion arena with plenty of possibilities to engage the public and voters (Van Haaften, 2010; Te Velde, 2003). Therefore, parliamentary debate has two main audiences, the parliament as well as the society. As a consequence, it has a double institutional goal, reaching decisions by prevailing rules and procedures, but also giving an account to the public, a goal that is linked to the protagonist's relation to public and voters. To win the support of potential voters, members of parliament try to get – to quote Yvon Tonnard (2011) – their party's priority issues 'on the table'. Moreover, this addressing of a dual audience has a direct influence on the way one has to maneuver strategically: in the choice from the topical potential, in audience-directed framing of argumentative moves, as

well as in the purposive use of presentational choices one not only has to deal with parliamentary rules for the debate but also with one's personal relation to the voters and with public opinion (Van Haaften, 2010).

However, my paper is not on European parliamentary debate, but on the preface of a Dutch stage play of which the first edition appeared in 1617 (Bredero, 1999, pp. 14-17). The author of both the preface and the stage play is the famous seventeenth century Amsterdam playwright Gerbrand Bredero (1585-1618). The text in question is a preface to Bredero's comedy *Moortje* ('The little Moor'). This comedy is an adaptation in Dutch of the comedy *Eunuch* by the ancient Roman playwright Terence (2th century BC).

The comparison between this preface and the parliamentary situation has been drawn as a preface in a printed book is also a public arena in which the author may strategically exploit a comparable double focus towards a primary addressed antagonist and a wider audience (Cf. Van Eemeren, 2010, pp. 108-110). In this specific preface, the starting point is the protagonist's explicitly addressing of Neo-Latin professors (of the Leiden University), a relatively small elite group in society, whereas his secondary audience will have consisted in a general reading public of non Neo-Latinists, common, vernacular readers comparable with the protagonist's background. As we will see this dual audience enabled him to strategically exploit antitheses, exaggerated modesty and self-humiliation. In fact they are strategic tools in the confrontation stage of this preface and the double audience-group has influenced the way in which strategic maneuvering is accomplished, especially by way of the polarizing moves.

The use of antitheses in this preface has made it possible for the protagonist to start the defence in the argumentation stage from a seemingly underdog position, reacting on the issues raised in the confrontation and opening stages. This underdog position constitutes an optimal possibility to defend the standpoint at issue and to constitute an attack on the standpoint of the antagonist that the adaptation and publication of the play is not justified, as it enables the author to deal with the (supposed) criticism of the scholarly Neo-Latinists.

## 2. Polarizing moves

How has this strategy been prepared in the confrontation stage? [i] As we will see, the supposed criticism of the antagonist is designed and shaped by a kind of self-reflection, including self-abasement and apologizing phrasings. Obviously, as an

apology may be regarded as a reaction to a “willful violation of a mutually binding norm”, the ‘offence’ (in this case the publication of Bredero’s adaptation) could have been considered as “an apologizable offense”, the responsible actor as a ‘wrongdoer’ reacting in terms of sorrow and asking a contrition for the harm done, seeking “forgiveness from the offended party” (Tavuchis, 1991, pp. 120-121). In my view though, Bredero’s apologizing has not really been used in its role of litigation (cf. Taft, 2000), but rather to bring about an antithesis that is crucial for the way in which the issue is discussed. The difference of opinion is created by firstly yielding with the supposed criticism (‘... I fear that you will condemn me alive as a murderer’), depicting the own act and the product of it as something inferior.

In the confrontation stage Bredero is maneuvering strategically with the choice of presentational devices. It starts with the proposition that the author of the play has been very audacious in adapting Terence, as he is an ‘unlearned’ writer and belongs to the non-scholars. Without having been in a Latin school he still has chosen this model of pure Latin to write an adapted version in the Amsterdam dialect. It marks the start of a difference of opinion between protagonist and antagonist initially on the basis that Bredero has published this adaptation; the preface is an introduction to (and justification of) this publication.

The difference of opinion is created by way of a polarizing maneuver, suggesting that the opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint to the protagonist and will condemn the act of translating and adapting a Latin play to vernacular by an unlearned writer, as well as the publication of it. The address to the small elite group of learned Latin scholars is as strategic as understandable. These Leiden professors are authorities in the classical field and supposed experts in the Latin play by Terence. Moreover, this address enables the protagonist to make a polarizing move, effectively aiming at starting the discussion with a situation of created difference of opinion, attributing a counter-standpoint to his opponents (cf. Tonnard, 2011, pp. 73ff., 112ff.). In terms of presentational devices, Bredero’s use of antitheses in the confrontation and opening stages shows a lot of indulgence concerning the difference of opinion about the publication, like: the antagonists are right; the author has been most daring; the product is miserable and the condemnation of it will be appropriate. Bredero uses a kind of *conciliatio*, in which the propositional content of his argument must have been acceptable for the antagonist (cf. Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 208). In the end it will support

Bredero's own standpoint.

But there the 'tolerance' seems to end. As Bredero has published this play, the intended purpose of the preface is explaining why he did so. From a strategic perspective the indulgence showed by the protagonist shapes a kind of common ground from which he can argue with the most beneficial effect in a later stage.

In fact the confrontation and the opening stage overlap: the topic at issue is identified and the positions assumed by the participants in the difference of opinion are taken. Hereby the standpoint of the antagonist is elaborated by the protagonist. At the same time the protagonist clearly appoints where the parties engaged in the difference of opinion has to commit themselves to act as a protagonist and antagonist. Common ground is easily found where the protagonist takes the lower rank and praises the Latin and the author Terence. Moreover, his excuses continue in expressions of self-abasement:

*Not only have I let him [Terence] change his unsurpassed excellence of talking but I have impertinently taken the invented history from the treasury of the world, from that imperial Rome. But the awful thing is, that I dragged it towards my hometown and broke it on the wheel. For this reason I fear that you will condemn me alive as a murderer. [...] If I tortured him a bit, I am dearly sorry. I did not mean to treat him in such a harsh way.*

These apologies are obvious responses to an implicit accusation (Kauffeld, 1998). But is it with that an 'authentic apology' (cf. Taft, 2000, p. 1147)? Rather does the apologizing function as to confront and argue about commonly accepted opinions, informing the reader about generally accepted norms and values (cf. Villadsen, 2014): Bredero is looking after the interest of his non-Latinist fellow citizens (see below). The antitheses by way of oppositional textual elements have been strategically used as they underline the protagonist's attempts to prevent any criticism of having published his drama.

Reasonableness is shown, "in a well-considered way in view of the situation concerned" (Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 29), as the protagonist has thought for intersubjective arguments from both protagonist and antagonist, and tries to resolve a (shaped) difference of opinion (Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 32). In other words, the moves that are made are in agreement with the prevailing standards of reasonableness and in the opening stage the point of departure is reasonably

established.

However, the contrasted wording is not only capable of attracting the attention of the reader but it enables him to create new contraries out of terms that have not been previously opposed for the reader (Andone, 2006, p. 88). In her study on rhetorical figures in science Fahnestock analyses how the argumentative effects of antithesis, a pattern consisting of opposing terms, may be experienced encouraging the readers to follow it (Fahnestock, 1999, p. 69): "The ability to perceive the pattern in an antithesis, to fulfill its predictions and even to feel its force, is part of the competence of an experienced user of the language". The antagonist is invited to interpret the protagonist's intention as a true, heartfelt and fair-minded opinion about himself and the addressee. In other words the antithesis clearly has functional patterns, giving presence to a selection of elements and placing others into the background. In the meantime the readers are framed as to accept the proposed oppositions (Fahnestock, 1999: pp. 68-70; Andone, 2006, p. 88). From an argumentative view, however, this antithesis enables Bredero to explain his own standpoint and to formulate arguments to easily reject those of the antagonist who is appointed an opposite position. Whether the antagonist actually takes this standpoint, is irrelevant in this monologue text: the antagonist is expected to do so as the protagonist is defending himself against an implicit accusation that belongs to such an opposite position.

Thus the difference of opinion exists by the antagonist's interpretation of a (proleptically formulated) accusation from the antagonist that needs at least clarification (cf. Andone, 2010, p. 88). But instead of clarifying it from the start, the protagonist first and foremost puts on the hair shirt, characterizing the own position as low and weak, describing the own act as audacious and as a "foolish boldness". By self-abasement the distance between protagonist and antagonist is further accentuated. In this way, the dialectical goal of defining the difference of opinion has been deliberately brought out of balance in order to enlarge the starting situation from which the protagonist, in the argumentation stage, achieves the rhetorical goal in his favor. In other words, in the confrontation and opening stages the balance between satisfying the dialectical and pursuing the rhetorical goals is in fact undermined by the desire to be rhetorically effective in a later stage and may have overridden the concern to remain dialectically reasonable, without becoming fallacious however. The exaggeration of the own

position may be slightly overdone according to modern standards, as is the politeness throughout this preface, but the social gap between Bredero and the Latin professors must have been immense. More interesting however is how Bredero makes use of this gap. How does he exploit the polarizing moves?

### 3. *Double audience*

‘If I [Bredero] tortured him [Terence] a bit, I am dearly sorry. I did not mean to treat him in such a harsh way’. If we consider this preface as an *apologia*, it would be one of self-defence, where the author is concerned with restoring his image and does so by ‘denial of intent to achieve persuasiveness’ (Ware & Linkugel, 1973, p. 276). Moreover, the apologizing has been used as a strategic tool to divide the antagonist in a primary audience and secondary audience.**[ii]** In my definition and interpretation of these groups the primary audience is made up by the explicitly addressed Latin professors, while the secondary audience is constituted by the implicit wider audience of common readers, being non Latin professors.

Let’s have a closer look at the way he organizes his argument in this respect. By sketching his own capacities in line with those of common people (like “a simple Amsterdam citizen to whom only a small school knowledge of French shakes in the head”), the protagonist takes up a position at the level of the wider, secondary, audience that also judges the acceptability of the argumentative moves and whose verdict will even be the more important one (Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 109). The self-abasement has been strategically deployed as to create a polarization and a different standpoint with the primary audience of professors. The polarization becomes manifest by way of presentational devices, the difference in wording used to describe the Latin professors and the Latin example Terence versus himself and his adaptation: “Honoured, high-esteemed masters of the generally celebrated Latin language” versus “the great audacity of a simple Amsterdam citizen (to whom only a small school knowledge of French shakes in the head)” (the latter remark as to explain how he has managed to cope with the Latin material, i.e. via a French intermediate). Especially the contrast between Terence as a “Latinist, who expresses himself properly” and Bredero as an author who “mumbles and cackles” in a “strange Dutch”, portrays, in a proleptic way, the supposed standpoint of the antagonist. In the opening stage Bredero’s act of adapting Terence is still characterized as a “foolish boldness”, as “imperti-nent”, and as an “awful thing”. With these opposing qualifications the starting point of

the discussion is established. The opponent will condemn the dramatist “as a murderer”, who has “broken” the Latin play “on the wheel”. Therefore, the publication of this play does not seem to be justified. That is, in the eyes of the primary audience.

Are the soundness conditions for confrontational strategic maneuvering fulfilled? The topical choice in the confrontation and opening stage is sound, as the protagonist selects the issues that are to be discussed from the available disagreement space. Not only the addressees, but also the apologizing move and the self-abasement have been chosen strategically as they enable the protagonist to answer the expected criticism on his adaptation of Terence in advance. It offers the protagonist not only an opportunity to ‘name’ the offense, to identify himself with the action and to become clear about the ‘norm’ that has been violated (Taft, 2000, p. 140), but it enables him also to defend himself later on from *selected* issues: it furthers the achievement of a desired outcome of this stage as it creates a non-mixed difference of opinion by introducing a discussion and two standpoints: “here you will see (if you like) the great audacity...” means: the product is ready and has been published. And you won’t agree. But Bredero is not arguing at forgiveness. He rather defences himself and explains his considerations to this ‘offense’.

The second soundness condition, presentational choice, concerns the formulation “in such a way that it can be interpreted as enabling a relevant continuation and being responsive to the preceding move” (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2009, p. 14). The protagonist aims at enforcing the different views by way of a clear and accentuated distinction between the high-esteemed Latin circuit and the simple vernacular one of the common readers.

#### 4. *Audience demands*

The third soundness condition of strategic maneuvering, audience adaptation, is fulfilled as well, as his move of clarification is relevant to the (supposed) move of the other party in the discussion that expects clarification and giving account for the publication. The protagonist starts the discussion in a perspective that is expected to appeal his addressees, the Latin scholars. The (general) readers of this preface will have known the tradition of the genre to be a place of topical issues like feigned modesty and benevolence as to please the addressed readers. The act of a prefatorial addressing of a stage play to a specific group is quite common in seventeenth-century Dutch drama.<sup>[iii]</sup> Drama introductions mostly

address the common reader. They imply, within the cultural tradition of the genre, an attitude of respect, of humbleness, as the writer usually explains why and how he has chosen the subject of the play, which sources he has used, and in what way the reader may expect poetical peculiarities in the literary text. In this respect the address to the Latin professors is striking.

Bredero's choice from the 'topical potential' in the confrontation stage especially finds expression in his addressing the Latin scholars and not the group he represents, the group of vernacular readers, non-learned people without knowledge of Latin. These readers are supposed to be in the protagonist's camp, as the protagonist looks after their interests, implicitly by having published the adaptation, and explicitly by a remark later on in the preface. He hopes the professors will accept his adaptation, and argues why he did it in this way:

As I have mostly changed it [his adaptation of Terence] to accommodate the common people, who knows little of the Greek customs and traditions, and who understood these characters the best.

This remark is a move adapted to the preferences of the secondary audience and responds to specific audience demands. It functions not only as an defensive explanation of the own position (the adaptation and its publication), but creates at the same time a sense of collectivity with especially this secondary audience.

As stated earlier, the whole preface is overflowing with politeness towards the Latinists, but in the argumentation stage the protagonist launches an attack, disguised in flattering words ("this, you professors, will know the best, because you are at home in anything"), and cloaked in his own feelings of regret and sadness. This attack has been formulated as blaming the antagonists that they do not share their knowledge with the common people. At the same time the attack is a defence of Bredero's own standpoint. The author suggests that he had to act like he did because of this negligence of the Latin professors. As a matter of fact, he brings charges against the professors that they "teach their learning rather to the scholarly savants than to us, non-scholars, who have no knowledge of foreign languages whatsoever".**[iv]** Such utterances underline the discrepancy between the dual audiences. They also strengthen the fact that the protagonist takes up the defence not only of himself but also of the universal audience, strengthening the common ground with this secondary audience.



## 5. *Conclusion*

In this specific case self-abasement has been demonstrated a suitable means to create disagreement by bringing about an antithesis between two audiences: the classical university circuit of Latin professors who should have condemn this publication, and ordinary vernacular people, the common reader who would have welcomed and supported it. By starting with some well-chosen antitheses the protagonist engages both audiences, through the “experiential nature and collaborative invitation” of such antitheses (Tindale, 2004, p. 85; Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 125). Thus, the polarization may be regarded as a strategic move (Tonnard, 2011, pp. 47-48), suggesting that the opponent actually holds the opposite standpoint to the protagonist. The process of polarization in the preface may be regarded as a rhetorical strategy directed to both audiences, because the protagonist will have gained satisfaction from primary addressees (his critics), by showing respect for the Latin circuit. And at the same time he has taken up the position of the common reader, adopting an attitude of humbleness, convincing his common readers of the acceptability and sincerity of his acting.

After the explanation of the opponent’s opinion towards the protagonist and his adaptation, the polarization between the Latin and vernacular circuit will become a fertile soil in which the standpoint that this publication is justified can be defended fruitfully and the protagonist hits back in the argumentation stage. The confrontation and opening stage are therefore most advantageous for the protagonist, to argue in defence of supposed criticism by his opponent. In the concluding stage, which overlaps with the argumentation stage, we find most of all repetition, not only the request to the scholars again, but also the praise of Terence, his esteem for the Neo-Latin scholars, excuses and politeness. Final excuses imply that if the author in their view had failed in adapting the play, then this was to blame to a lack of understanding by or to shortcomings of the French intermediate translation (“because of the shortcomings of the bad example”). He passes the buck to a French intermediate. But here we also find a strong argument as to make clear that the standpoint defended can be maintained, whereas the antagonists will have to conclude that their supposed standpoint cannot (cf. Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 44). This final argument include that he has made his vernacular adaptation for the common people, who know little of Greek customs and traditions, and who understand the characters of the adaptation the best.

The addressing of a double audience in this preface has a direct influence on the way the protagonist maneuvers. The apologies that belong to the self-abasement are obvious responses to an implicit accusation. Therefore, in this case self-abasement functions not only to 'get the issues on the table', i.e. the (in)acceptability of the protagonist's act of adaptation including his arguments for doing it, but also to achieve clarity about the issues that are at stake in the difference of opinion, selecting those issues that are most beneficial from the protagonist's own perspective to argue or to shirk his responsibility. In sum, making excuses in the confrontation stage is an excellent means to maneuver strategically with the choice of presentational devices.

## APPENDIX

G.A. Bredero, 'Preface' (december 1616) to: G.A. Bredero, *Moortje, Waar in hy Terentii Eunuchum heeft Nae-ghevolght*. Amsterdam: Paulus van Ravesteyn, 1617 (Bredero, 2011, pp. 200-202). (my translation, JJ)

### *Confrontation stage*

Oration to the scholarly Latinists, Honoured, high-esteemed masters of the generally celebrated Latin language, here you will see (if you like) the great audacity of a simple Amsterdam citizen (to whom only a small school knowledge of French shakes in the head), who unabashedly dares to take in hand Terence praised by you all, and dares to make this Latinist, who expresses himself properly, to mumble and to cackle not only strange Dutch, but (that by everyone of the neighbouring cities mocked) the Amsterdam dialect.

### *Opening stage*

But nonetheless, this foolish boldness of mine will possibly not only surprise you, but maybe also happily make you laugh, because of the amusing strangeness of our accent, in particularly by the shortening of words, or by the (in your eyes) unusualness or special nature of them. Not only have I let him [Terence] change his unsurpassed excellence of talking but I have impertinently taken the invented history from the treasury of the world, from that imperial Rome. But the awful thing is that I dragged it towards my hometown and broke it on the wheel. For this reason I fear that you will condemn me alive as a murderer.

### *Argumentation stage*

But, most prudent doctors, at least if you were prepared to take trouble over it, you will find that I have been merciful, because before his [Terence's] death I have decently and consequentially dressed him similarly, in our way and to the best of my ability, not with beggar's clothes of a hundred thousand bits and pieces, of foreign rags and other outlandish borrowed pieces of tatters, like he was rigged out in Brabant sixty years ago [by Cornelis van Ghistele]. He didn't look then, if you will permit, dissimilar to the raven of Aesop, so that if everybody had appropriated his own part, he definitely would have escaped very featherless. If I tortured him a bit, I am dearly sorry. I did not mean to treat him in such a harsh way. But it would seem that he, having been raised delicately, couldn't endure rough Amsterdam embraces, so that, despite my best intentions, he expired.

If I would have heard him in his mother tongue, undoubtedly (if I could have done that) I would have been fair to him. But look, I just spoke to him via a French interpreter [Jean Bourlier], whom I myself barely understood, and who I think did not understand him thoroughly either. Look, I have read so much about his immense eloquence that I loved him before I saw him. But when he appeared to me in that strange, many-colored Antwerp dialect, I was doubtful whether I would cry or laugh. If you like, you will come across an example here and there that you may like well or that will bring you joy, if you like language full of bombastic or embellished words, like it is employed by many parrots of courtiers and town clerks.

Hello, busy merchants and others who impoverish and violate their own language, and rather show off a patched-up cap and bells than that they would like to shine in an impeccable plain coat. Ah! What voluntarily chosen poverty I hear through all the Netherlands. Should there be even one nation under the sun that is so much overcome by this self-preferred foolishness as ours? It could be, but I don't think so. But this, you professors, will know the best, because you are at home in anything. Don't you agree, Gentlemen, that this mishmash of language comes from a kind of people that uses this corruption or confusion of words as were it a lofty beauty? Or is it perhaps borrowed from such folk that knows other languages before they learn their own language, and who for convenience often have to manage with a foreign word when they speak Dutch in later years?

One thing I have often regretted and it still saddens me, namely that the scholars teach their learning rather to the scholarly savants than to us, non-scholars, who

have no knowledge of foreign languages whatsoever. How will we know what you know and understand if you don't share your knowledge in how wise you are yourselves? All your knowledge counts for nothing insofar as you only know it yourselves. Nobody is born for himself alone [*Cic., Off.* 1.22].

### *Concluding stage*

Therefore, let your fatherland enjoy your wisdom as much as the Romans or other far-away nations did, then you will make your fellow-countrymen, who are not the most stupid ones, more sensible and wiser. This I have wished many times, and I request you hereby, honourable, highly esteemed teachers of this generally praised Latin language, that you with your scholarly reason will kindly accept my venturesome undertaking in changing and adding time, place, names and other things like that. As I have mostly changed it to accommodate the common people, who knows little of Greek customs and traditions, and who understand these characters the best. If I haven't portrayed his [Terence's] features, his little pleasantries well, then perhaps that's because of a lack of understanding or because of the shortcomings of the bad example, not those of the Carthaginian [Terence], but of the Frenchman.

I don't need to tell you, my lords, about the excellence of his exceptional knowledge of worldly affairs and of the different sides of human life, how strikingly he depicts everybody's character and nature, their manners, language and life. For if I intended to do so, I would light a candle to the sun, or carry sand to the dunes. For me it is enough to ask you once again that you want to pardon me, who don't know any Latin, for the fact that I have put my ignorant hands in the significant dough of that acute man, and kneaded it in a Dutch way, and baked it for the mouth of my choosy fellow citizens. That you will do so, honoured, high-esteemed masters of the generally celebrated Latin language, is not doubted by your in every way obedient servant and friend

*G.A. Bredero*

*It's all in the game*

### **NOTES**

- i.** See the Appendix. The Dutch version of this preface in: Bredero, 2011, pp. 200-213
- ii.** I don't go along with the definition of primary and secondary audience by Van Eemeren, 2010, p. 109. In my definition the primary audience is the explicitly

addressed audience, while the secondary audience is constituted by the more important to reach but implicit wider audience of common readers.

One could say this wider audience is the 'universal audience' (cf. Tindale, 2004, p. 128). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958-1969, pp. 28-29) distinguish between a particular audience, consisting of a specific collection of people, and the universal audience, which is supposed to represent reasonableness (cf. Van Eemeren, 2010, pp. 116-117).

**iii.** Notice that Bredero only addresses and that he does not dedicate this stage play to the group of Latin scholars. The dedication of *Moortje* is addressed to Jacob van Dyck (1564-1631), a Dutch adviser of the Swedish king and Maecenas of artists, asking him for protection and/or money (cf. Bredero, 2011, pp. 154-163).

**iv.** However, the attack remains mostly implicit and may be reconstructed as follows. It is your own fault, Latin professors, that I, Bredero, being an outsider, had to accomplish such an adaptation: this was in fact your task: you have neglected your duty towards your fellow-Dutchmen by not using our beautiful Dutch language and by keeping from the vernacular public all the wisdom and richness you have gained in classical writers and culture. By burying this wisdom in Latin writings, you obstruct a breakthrough of the Dutch language (being a valuable medium of knowledge).

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