

# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - The Pragma-Dialectics of Visual Argument



*1. Introduction* A number of recent commentators (among them Birdsell & Groarke 1996, Blair 1996, Groarke 1998, and Shelley 1996) have discussed the role that visual images play in public argument. The present paper is an attempt to sketch a pragma-dialectical account of this role. I will call the argumentation which employs such

images “visual argumentation” in order to stress the extent to which the images in question can be compared to verbal claims. Because a detailed account of the pragma-dialectics of visual argument is beyond the scope of a short paper, I will more modestly attempt to sketch some central features of such an account. In the process I will emphasize two aspects of pragma-dialectics: (i) its commitment to speech act theory and (ii) the principles of communication it uses to explain implicit and indirect speech acts. I end with some remarks on an approach to visual argumentation which is fundamentally at odds with the one that I propose.

*2. Visual Images as Speech Acts* Any pragma-dialectical attempt to understand how visual images inform public argument must begin with the recognition that such images can, like verbal claims, function as speech acts in argumentative exchange. Understanding such exchange in a pragma-dialectical way, we can say that argumentation is a reasoned attempt to resolve a dispute, that a dispute centers on a standpoint which is “entails a certain position in a dispute,” and that an argument is an attempt to defend a standpoint (Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 14). The question whether visual argumentation is possible thus reduces to the question whether visual images can be used to express standpoints and defend them, and can in this way contribute to the critical discussion which revolves around disputes.[i] A comprehensive account of visual images in argumentative contexts requires a detailed account of visual meaning. Because such an account is beyond the scope of the present paper[ii], I will instead demonstrate the possibility of visual argumentation with some select examples. The first is reproduced below. It is a World War I American political cartoon drawn by Luther Bradley and published in the *Chicago Daily News*. Though the

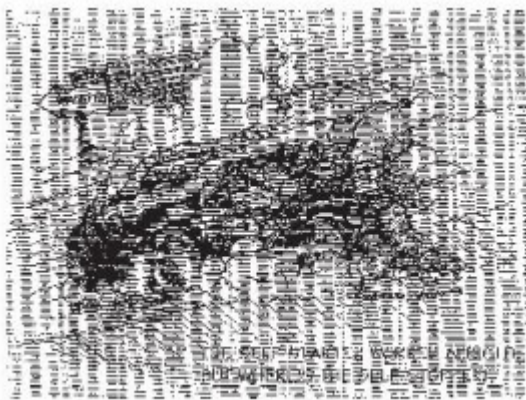
message is in part visual, it functions as a pointed comment on the causes of the war. Ingeniously, Bradley portrays the world at war as a person afflicted with a terrible tooth ache and the world's "old" monarchies as dental crowns. The nurse labelled "The Spirit of Peace" provides his own diagnosis: the war will end and the world will enjoy peace and comfort only when its old crowns are removed.



"The Spirit of Peace"

Press has described the view of international politics which characterizes this and other American cartoons of the same period in his book, *The Political Cartoon*. "War is," it holds, "made necessary by the machinations of corrupt and archaic feudal monarchs. Such outmoded feudal leaders seek war because they glory in the pomp of military splendour and aggrandizement, or else they are prone to excesses and saber rattling that inadvertently leads to war. The root cause of war is thus... feudal monarchs and self-proclaimed Emperors [who] vie with each other for the spoils of empire, in a manner suited to the Middle Ages or to Graustark or Zenda, but not to modern times. The solution to war is to replace an outdated feudalism..." (Press 1981, 158). In presenting the standpoint this implies, Bradley's cartoon functions as a speech act which may appropriately be called an "assertive." The proposition it asserts might be summarized as the claim that "If the world is to enjoy peace, then old monarchies must be removed." In the present context, it illustrates the point that a visual image may present a standpoint and in this way initiate or contribute to critical discussion. As in the case of standpoints expressed in purely verbal ways, one might agree with Bradley's position and adduce evidence in support of it. Alternatively, one might – like Press – argue that it is founded on the simple minded view that American democracy is a panacea which can, if propagated, solve the world's problems. The important point is that Bradley's standpoint can thus become the locus of argumentative exchange. Bradley's cartoon might usefully be described as a

sophisticated visual metaphor. His standpoint might therefore be said to express the view that “The world is (like) a person with a bad tooth ache who needs old crowns (monarchies) removed.” Not all visual images can be classed as metaphors, but the role that visual and verbal metaphors play in critical discussion makes the important point that standpoints are often expressed in ways that extend beyond literally intended verbal claims. The study of visual argumentation in this way extends argumentation theory beyond this narrow compass. But critical discussion implies something more than the expression of a standpoint. It is, therefore, important to see that visual images can occupy other argumentative roles. Most significantly, they can incorporate attempts to justify a standpoint and can in this way function as arguments, not only in a pragma-dialectical sense, but also in the traditional sense which implies premises and a conclusion. The nature of visual images can be illustrated with another Luther Bradley cartoon, this one from September 15, 1914, shortly after World War I began (below). In this case, the cartoon presents war as a run away automobile speeding down a slope. The driver, EUROPE, sits beside the car’s “self-starter,” looking in dismay for its “self-stopper.” Much to her chagrin, it turns out that war is not equipped with one. The message might be summarized as follows.



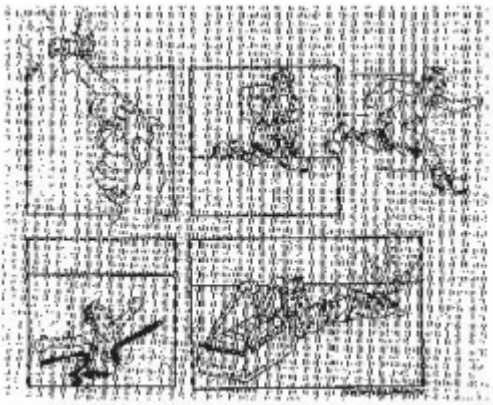
(Standpoint/Conclusion:) Europe is naive and foolish beginning a war for (Premise:) it should know that war is not easily stopped and is bound to end - like Bradley’s runaway automobile - in ultimate disaster. The sign beside the car that points ahead to “Bankruptcy” clearly tells us that there will be an economic side to this disaster. So understood, Bradley’s

cartoon expresses a standpoint but also provides grounds for believing that it is true. It can, therefore, be understood as a visual argument. Once we recognize Bradley’s second cartoon as a visual argument, we can analyze it in much the way that we analyze verbal arguments. It is in this regard significant that the argument has close affinities to slippery slope arguments, for they also argue against some action by suggesting that it will initiate a chain of consequences which will have some undesirable result. It might be added that the argument is founded on a generalization about war which is applied to a particular war. The argument is in this way comparable to many verbal appeals to general and universal statements. Many other examples of visual argumentation can easily be

found in other political cartoons, in visual art, in magazine and television advertising, and in political campaigns of all sorts. The prevalence of such argument well establishes it as an important species of reasoning which needs to be recognized by any comprehensive theory of argumentation. In the case of pragma-dialectics, the first step in this direction must be a more explicit recognition of the role that speech acts often play in critical discussion, especially in the public sphere. This said, something more is required if visual arguments are to be fully integrated into a pragma-dialectical account of argument. This “something more” can be achieved by turning to the pragma-dialectical account of implicit and indirect speech acts, for it readily explains the way in which visual images function as contributions to argumentative exchange. It is here that pragma-dialectics has the most to offer to our understanding of visual argument, for its account of the principles of communication provides a ready explanation of the mechanics of visual argumentation and the indirect arguments that makes it possible.

3. *Visual Images as Implicit and Indirect Speech Acts* Often, the possibility of visual argumentation has been overlooked because the visual images which function as argumentative speech acts are best classified as implicit and indirect. It would be a mistake to conclude that visual argumentation is necessarily vague and imprecise. Visual images are often explicit in the sense that their meaning is clear and unambiguous. Our first examples are a case in point. Visual images are necessarily implicit and indirect only in the sense that they are not explicitly verbal and must, therefore, be made verbally explicit when we pursue argument analysis. In many ways, the suggestion that argumentative visual images function as indirect speech acts is very much in keeping with a pragma-dialectical point of view, for it holds that “[i]n practice, the explicit performance of a speech act is the exception rather than the rule” (Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 44). If we extend its account of other implicit and indirect speech acts to the visual realm, then we must give argumentation visuals a “maximally argumentative interpretation,” in order to ensure that their argumentative function is fully recognized. In doing so, we can apply the “principles of communication” that govern all speech acts (Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 49-55). They can be summarized by stipulating that speech acts should not be (i) incomprehensible, (ii) insincere, (iii) superfluous, (iv) futile, or (v) inappropriately connected to other speech acts. The extent to which the principles of communication can be usefully applied to visual images warrants special comment. Consider the cartoon I have reproduced below. Because I want to stress the wide applicability of the principles of communication in the visual

realm, I have in this case picked an image which is not an example of visual argumentation. Instead, it functions as a simple joke. Significantly, it is a joke which is founded on a visual contradiction. Its punch line is found in the last frame, which visually contradicts the earlier frames, which portray the runner running and winning a race. We instinctively avoid this contradiction by interpreting the sequence of visuals in the comic strip in a way that adheres to the principles of communication and avoids the conclusion that they are incomprehensible, superfluous, etc. We do so by interpreting the runner in the different frames as the same runner, and by interpreting the first four frames as an account of his imagination. The joke occurs because his athletic prowess and accomplishments are, in no uncertain terms, revealed to be a figment of his imagination when he crashes to the floor in the final drawing. No verbal or visual cues are needed to guarantee this interpretation because it is instinctively established by our commitment to the principles of communication. Similar appeals to the principles of communication explain how we understand many images that occur in critical discussion. In the present paper, I want to illustrate this point with two examples. The first is the following 1997 recruitment poster for the British Army (reported in *The Guardian Weekly*, Vol. 157, No. 16, Oct. 19, p. 9). It is a remake of a famous World War I recruitment poster which featured Lord Kitchener pointing his gloved hand at the viewer declaring "Your country needs YOU." In due course the poster became a patriotic symbol. In the 1997 version it is altered by replacing Lord Kitchener's face with the face of a black officer. Looked at from the point of view of the principles of communication, the purposeful disruption of the traditional image calls for an interpretation of the poster which does renders this disruption meaningful and significant. We can begin to construct a plausible interpretation by noting that the 1914 poster which is the basis of the 1997 remake is readily understood as a visual argument which attempts to convince potential recruits that "(Conclusion/Standpoint:) You should join the army because (Premise:) Your country needs you." One might include as an implicit premise or assumption the patriotic principle that you should do what



your country needs you to do. The 1997 version of the poster presents a similar argument, but with a new twist which overshadows the original meaning. Clearly, the poster is an attempt to “reach out” to ethnic minorities which are now explicitly recognized by the poster, even though they do not fit the traditional image of the white anglo saxon British

soldier. This change in the image has two significant consequences for its meaning. First, it directs the original argument of the poster to a particular audience, i.e. ethnic minorities. Second, and perhaps more significantly, it attempts to convince this audience that the British Army is committed to ethnic diversity. We might therefore summarize the 1997 argument as follows. Premise 1: Your country needs you. Implicit Premise 2: You should do what your country needs. Premise 3: The army is committed to ethnic diversity. Standpoint/Conclusion: You (i.e. members of ethnic minorities) should join the British Army. It is in passing worth noting that this is a case in which the existence of the visual image in an argument is itself offered as evidence for its conclusion. A second example which can illustrate the way in which the principles of communication allow the interpretation of visual argumentation is a recent advertisement for Bacardi Rum. Under the title “Just add Bacardi” it features a huge bottle of Bacardi which is being emptied on a sleepy little village. In a different light and from a different angle, the village scene could be a charming rustic landscape scene, but the time of day (dusk), the lack of activity, and the lonely lights in the windows now suggest a boring hamlet where there is nothing to do. The lack of activity contrasts sharply with the image which appears where the Bacardi splashes onto the scene below. Like a miracle fertilizer, it produces a bustling Manhattan-like cityscape complete with skyscrapers, lights, nightclubs, glitzy restaurants and a thriving night life. Taken as a whole, the advertisement contrasts this exciting scene with the sleepy village which surrounds it. The message is obvious: “If you drink Bacardi, your sleepy life will be transformed into something as exciting as downtown Manhattan.” As this suggestion is offered as a reason for believing that “You should buy Bacardi Rum,” this is another good example of a visual argument. Significantly, this is a visual argument which seems guilty of the fallacy affirming the consequent, for it argues that you will have an exciting night life if you drink Bacardi, implicitly assumes that you want an



exciting night life and concludes that you should drink Bacardi. In the present context, it is enough to note that the meaning is clear, even though any attempt to understand the picture literally entails a series of absurdities – bottles of Bacardi are not so absurdly huge, they do not pour their contents onto sleepy unexpected villages and if they did the result would be sticky streets and dead plants rather than a Manhattan streetscape. Looked at literally the image is therefore incongruous. We nonetheless manage to easily understand it because we automatically assume the principles of communication, which require that we find some plausible way to make the visual images coherently tied to one another in a way that produces a plausible meaning. We succeed by interpreting the image as a metaphor which is not intended literally. We use the principles of communication in a similar way when we interpret verbal metaphors. We do not, therefore, have problems understanding the verbal claim that “Jackie is a block of ice” and do not interpret it to mean that her temperature is zero degrees celsius, she turns into liquid at room temperature, is composed of nothing but water and so on. Drastic misunderstandings of this sort are as infrequent in the visual as the verbal sphere, because in both cases the principles of communication undermine them.

4. *Two Approaches to Visual Argument* Because the role that visual images play in public argument can be explained in the way I have suggested, pragma-dialectics provides a relatively simple way to assess and evaluate visual argumentation. In the present context, it is enough to say that the account I have proposed suggests that it can assess visual argumentation in essentially the same way in which it assesses other instances of indirect argument. While I will not pursue this point, it is one of the strengths of the proposed approach, for it allows us to assess visual argumentation as fallacious, valid, sound, etc. without requiring that we devise a new theory of argument which is restricted to the visual realm. One might therefore contrast my approach to visual argumentation with attempts to formulate a theory of visual argument which treats it and verbal argument as irreconcilably distinct. One approach to non-verbal arguments which tends in this direction is found in Gilbert 1997, but I will in this paper focus on the account of advertising found in Johnson and Blair 1994. In the present context advertising is significant because it tends to emphasize visual components and is in this way heavily committed to visual argument. Given this feature, one might expect an attempt to come to grips with advertising to result in an expansion of the standard account of argumentation which allows it to encompass visual statements and arguments, in a manner analogous to the expansion of pragma-dialectics I have suggested here. Instead, Johnson and Blair argue that

advertising only “mimics argumentation,” that its argumentative leanings are a “facade,” and that “most advertising works not at the rational level but at a deeper level” which implies a fundamental difference between its “logic” and “the logic of real arguments” (Johnson and Blair 1994, 220-221). One might summarize their view by saying that it treats advertising as a form of persuasion which is distinct from argument. It in this way suggests that the visual images that proliferate in advertising should be seen as instances of persuasion, and not in the manner I have proposed – as instances of argument. In many ways, Johnson and Blair’s account of advertising is impressive and insightful. It convincingly makes the point that advertising is characterized by many sophistic ploys, and is firmly built upon a self-interested attempt to understand what motivates human action. Granting all these points, one might take their comparison of advertising and ancient sophism in the direction I have already proposed. For though one might criticize the sophists for their slippery tactics, it is clear that they saw themselves as experts in argumentation, and not as individuals who gave up argument for some other form of persuasion. Protagoras’ famous claim is, therefore, the claim that he can make the weaker argument (*logos*) the stronger. In view of this, one might compare advertisers to sophists without concluding that they exchange argument for persuasion. Such a view is more in keeping with the pragma-dialectical approach I have developed here, for it proposes a “maximally argumentative” interpretation of the visual images which are employed in advertising contexts, and this implies an emphasis on the attempt to interpret a visual as an explicit argument or the expression of a standpoint which calls for



one. It does not follow that the criticisms of advertisements which Johnson and Blair make no longer apply, but that they must frequently be applied to attempts to argue rather than persuade. Suppressed evidence is not, for example, less problematic (and perhaps more problematic) when one describes a visual advertisement as an attempt to argue for the conclusion that one should buy a certain product. The illegitimate appeals to pity, fear and other emotions which Johnson and Blair identify as a key ingredient of advertising

remain similarly problematic even when advertising is understood as a form of argumentative appeal. Looked at from this point of view, it might seem that my



approach and the approach to visuals implicit in Johnson and Blair are equal, for either can explain the problems with the images that characterize contemporary advertising. To some extent this is true, though I believe that there are four problems with the attempt to drive a wedge between argument and advertising and, more specifically, argument and advertising visuals. I will end this paper by proposing them as four reasons which favour a theoretical approach to visual argumentation which construes it as an extension of verbal arguments rather than a species of persuasion which abides by a different 'logic.' One problem with the attempt to treat advertising visuals as persuasion rather than argument arises in the context of the sophistic features of the former which motivate this view. Here the problem is that these aspects of advertising have clear analogues in verbal argumentation. Purposeful ambiguity and vagueness, slippery allusions, the suppression of evidence, and self-serving appeals to fears, pity and other emotions are not, for example, the sole preserve of advertising and their visuals. They are, on the contrary, a constant feature of verbal critical discussion, especially in the public sphere. So long as their existence there does not show that verbal argumentation of this sort needs to be classified as persuasion rather than argument, it is difficult to see why it should entail this conclusion in the case of advertising images. It is precisely because there is this kind of overlap that it is useful to apply pragma-dialectical accounts of fallacies to visual argumentation. In marked contrast, the attempt to divorce visual and verbal arguments seems to unnecessarily separate two kinds of arguments which may be more efficiently understood in terms of a unified theory of argument. A second problem with the attempt to treat visual advertising images as instances of mere persuasion arises in cases in which they do not seem to be sophistical, even if they are problematic. Here the problem is that many instances of visual argument seem to clearly conform to standard forms of argument. A Canadian television advertisement for Cooper hockey equipment features players from the National Hockey League using and recommending Cooper equipment. Though the appeal was primarily visual this seems a clear case of argument by authority. The same can be said of many other advertisements which are similarly constructed around some alleged expertise. When a man with horn rimmed glasses, a white lab coat, and a stethoscope tells us that this pain killer relieves headaches faster than that one, we know that he is being presented as a medical expert. Because visual appeals to authority of this sort demand the same kind of analysis as verbal appeals to authority - an analysis which asks whether the authority's credentials have been properly presented, whether he or she is an appropriate authority in the case in

question, whether they have a vested interest in a particular conclusion, etc. – it seems a mistake to treat them as anything other than arguments in the traditional sense. One might respond to such examples by trying to distinguish between visual images which function as arguments and those which function only as persuasion. But this requires some principle of division which can clearly distinguish these two sets of images. I propose this as a third problem for the persuasion account, for it is not clear what principles can be employed in this regard. In contrast, the interpretation strategy which I have gleaned from pragma-dialectics – which proposes that we interpret argumentative visuals in a maximally argumentative way – establishes clear priorities which are relatively easy to implement in the practice of argument analysis. A fourth and final problem with the kind of approach proposed by Johnson and Blair is its emphasis on the negative aspects of advertising and the visuals it employs. This is in many ways in keeping with their emphasis on fallacies, which teach argumentation skills by identifying the mistakes that frequently occur in ordinary argumentation. A number of commentators have criticized this approach on the grounds that it emphasizes instances of poor rather than good reasoning (see, for example, Hitchcock 1995 and Tindale 1997). In their own discussion of advertising, Johnson and Blair themselves point out that it is a mistake to dismiss all advertisements as deceptive and misleading, but their decision to treat them as attempts at persuasion which only mimic arguments still has a very negative slant and invites this conclusion, especially in students. It is in this regard worth noting that the persuasion approach to visual argumentation supports a common prejudice against the visual which has tended to characterize argumentation theory. In view of this prejudice, it is all the more important that we emphasize the possibility of good visual argumentation. In some ways and in some contexts, I would argue that visual argumentation is actually preferable to verbal argument. If one wishes to argue about the horrors of war or the desperate plight of children in the developing world, for example, then it is arguable that it is not visual images but words which tend to be inadequate conveyers of important truths. If this is right, then there are practical contexts in which visual argumentation is more appropriate than its verbal analogue. A more detailed discussion of visual argumentation lies beyond the scope of the present paper. In the present circumstances, I hope I have given some reasons for believing both that we should accept the possibility of visual argumentation, and that pragma-dialectics can provide a basis for an understanding of its content. NOTES i. The most-cited study here is by Tversky and Kahneman. They conducted an experiment in which

a witness' testimony had to be combined with knowledge of prior probability to yield a value for claim probability – a simpler situation than the one being discussed here. Their subjects were told the following story. A cab was involved in a hit and run accident at night. Two cab companies, the Green and the Blue, operate in the city. You are given the following data: (a) 85% of the cabs in the city are Green and 15% are Blue, (b) a witness identified the cab as Blue. The court tested the reliability of the witness under the same circumstances that existed on the night of the accident and concluded that the witness correctly identified each one of the two colors 80% of the time and failed 20% of the time. What is the probability that the cab involved in the accident was Blue rather than Green?" (From Baron, J., *Thinking and Deciding*, 1988, p.205) Most subjects gave estimates near 80%, as if ignoring the base rate for Blue cabs, which is 15%. The Bayes Theorem shows that the correct answer is 41%! Using the procedure advocated in this paper, we would not accept the eyewitness claim that it was a Blue cab. To warrant accepting the claim, the witness' error rate would have to be less than  $\frac{1}{4}$  (we are dealing with a claim, not an argument)  $\times 0.15$  (the initial probability that a cab would be a Blue cab), or 0.04. But it is actually 0.20. ii. In part because visual images may gain meaning in such a great variety of ways (by convention, by demonstration, by purposeful exaggeration, and so on).

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# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - On The Fallacy Of Fallacy: Arguing For Methodological Difference: Producing vs Processing



## 1. Introduction

Fallacies have always been in the centre, or near the centre, of argumentation studies. In fact they lie at their roots in two senses: most approaches to argumentation have sprung from a consideration of what is amiss in human reasoning or thought, and theories of argumentation stand and fall with their capacity for detecting errors. In other words, fallacies are the cornerstone of argumentation theories very much like paradoxes once perceived by Russell as the stumbling block of scientific theories: they constitute the boundary conditions within which human thought and action remain to be *rational*. For a long time fallacies and rationality had been taken to be the two sides of the same coin, until certain evidences appeared to undermine their interdependence. They came basically from two sources: the psychology of decision making and the semantics and pragmatics of inferences in language use. Now it is no longer the exclusive power of argumentation theory that matters but their inclusivity, i.e. how charitable they are with faulty reasoning, error making and unjustified action. If fallacy theory does constitute a major divide, it works rather like a filter through which the beyond normal is let upon the territory of the rational; or at most it is a tradeoff between the rational and the irrational.

In this paper I am not going to take stock of the enormous data corroborating the “legal status” of irrational moves in thought and action; I only elaborate a little on the diagnosis that with the *cognitive turn* in the 70s a new look on the methodological basis of argumentation is needed. Yet I will not adumbrate a methodology here because, as I see it, there is an important, and not clearly noted, distinction underlying most of the insights in cognitive science that should

be reckoned with in the first place before any stand on argumentation can be taken. Since there is not enough room here to fully elaborate this distinction, I have to suffice with some important consequences. Thus I am doing a kind of archeology of knowledge in the Foucaultian sense, which may fall beyond the proper scope of argumentation theory, but if there is anything wrong with the idea of fallacy, as I think there is, it can only be identified in its undepinnings and its undepinnings are in cognition.

It is a most common opinion that the idea of fallacy is theory-laden: no fallacy without a theory. Now I want to oppose that view and try to argue for a rather strong claim that there are – at least some interesting – cases of language use when what appears to be fallacious or misplaced is not the given move itself but rather the *attempt* to judge what has been said or done as acceptable by some pre-set theoretical standards. Fallacies result then from a fallacious methodology; the methodology is fallacious for two reasons, which are however related.

## *2. The outline of the argument*

I start then with the first reason why fallacies are originally methodological. It is constituted by what I take to be a major tension between the *descriptive* and *normative* ideal of argumentation theories. It is the basic claim of this paper that conflating the two inevitably leads to apocalypse. Thus it is because of the trafficking between the two ideals that John Woods could once call relevance theory as developed by D. Sperber and D. Wilson *apocalyptic*.

Since most frequently argumentative structures are the result of re-descriptions of utterances, in illustrating the first reason I will draw upon certain tenets from linguistic theory. This does not mean that I am necessarily biased by linguistic theorizing; rather the principles of understanding and producing language like relevance, graduality, similarity or structure mapping etc. should cohere with the more general principles of argumentation. If our understanding of language, i.e. of what is said, is apocalyptic, there is not much chance of constructing a – let alone sound – argument out of it.

Next I present my second reason by outlining a basic distinction that results from the findings of cognitive science. The distinction is between *producing* and *understanding*. My supposition is that even if the structure of our cognitive apparatus might at some future time be found the same in both cases, the terms of its operation, the aims and the procedural conditions, significantly differ.

The distinction has much to do with the debate of the continuity thesis of

*similarity* and *rule-governedness* that has recently surfaced in cognitive psychology. (See e.g. the special issue of *Cognition* (65) 1998) Thus in this part I will cite some examples from categorization and topical research in linguistics and criticize their treatment for not taking heed of the above distinction. The basic idea is that rules are abstract and context-independent, whereas similarity-driven processes are particular and contextual.

Finally I bring together the two distinctions within general rationality in terms of Donald Davidson's principle of charity. I also hint at an evolutionary framework to be developed along the lines proposed by R. Garrett-Millikan. The basic idea is two-tiered: i.) what is fallacious or not depends on the evolving of discourse and thus it cannot and should not be stated *a priori*; ii.) tampering with a rule is acceptable as long as both verbal and non verbal behavior preserve the biologically and culturally vital boundaries. This may be taken as a solution to the paradox of the sorites to which boundaries which are not fallacy-proof can easily give rise to. It is the reason why I consider my approach anti-apocalyptic.

To sum up: cases of rule-governedness, which is descriptive, cannot always mean rule-following, which is normative, and vice versa: cases of not following a rule does not necessarily result in violation *simpliciter*: it may amount to tampering with meaningful content: the domain covered by the the rules in question. One may wish to distinguish between motor activities, which *appear* to be rule-following to the external observer because they respect the evolutionary important boundaries without a proper representation of content, whereas higher cognitive activities *appear* to be rule-following to the internal observer because they are truth-preserving in inferencing and representing content. However, if the continuity thesis is correct, any attempt to separate out the normative element in the two cases is doomed to fail. One should look instead at how much producing speech and action and interpreting incoming stimuli are task-centred.

### 3. The graduality principle

Producing and interpreting differ in the first place as to their criteria of success. No doubt that in producing some behavior I have to cope with certain constraints or expectation environmentally determined. My behavior is rule-governed precisely in the sense that the constraints are out there: it is always rational to respect them and set the aim of my action accordingly. Yet their observance need not be normative in the full sense: I may be careless or lazy enough, or too roughly - even differently -disposed to come up with an optimal "solution". What I thus



produce, my performance, is rarely ideal or “well-formed”. This does not exclude that I may consciously chose to follow some abstract rule and approximate an ideal as closely as possible. Most (re)actions are however coarse-grained and/or come off the target, while their aims may be properly defined.

In contrast when I interpret natural signs or other people’s behavior, I always do it by relating it to what is given inside my mind, to what I know and believe. But it cannot be said that they are a kind of inner constraints with which strictly speaking I have to cope; rather they form the background for my understanding. Thus it follows naturally that *any way* I interpret what has been said to, or performed before, me IS rational. In other words the descriptive and normative ideals coincide. What I do is *eo ipso* optimal with respect to the *available* alternatives. Most interpretations are fine-grained and relevant to previous knowledge, although they can many times become automatic and similarity-driven. It appears then that, though rules and similarity in principle form a continuum, they are prototypical of two diagonally different activities: producing and processing. And while rule-following is the prototype of producing and shows more flexibility as a result of the working principle of optimality, similarity being the prototype of processing yields more rigidity in structure because of the underlying principle of mapping.

One – if not the only – reason that producing and processing are not mirror-images and rely on different mechanisms is that language use in humans amounts to more than communicating information. The idea is at least as old as the Gricean maxims. Today the clearest formulation of the common core of its “additional” – if not *sui generis* – dimensions is the *graduality principle* (GP). It is a structural principle of human knowledge in that it places the items in long term memory upon a scale or within a hierarchy of levels on the basis of the similarity among them. (Cf. Dubois \ Resche-Rigon 1996: 37) We can identify three important characteristics of GP. First that it allows for a categorical structure based on typicality *à la* Rosch. Second that it is value-laden in that it expresses a point of view and hence it can be utilized for argumentation. And third that it figures in lexical-linguistic structure. (Cf. Raccach 1993) Thus it results that the structure of cognition need not reflect – counter what Rosch claims – the ontological structure of our world, and neither does it follow formal-logical rules; rather it is governed by the orientations expressed in graduality. Language use “involves the application of general principles which we call *topoi* (*pace* Aristotle).” (Anscombe \ Ducrot 1989: 80) The *topoi* constitute an argumentative potential: they are correspondences among a series of gradations which allow for

a set of possible inferences and can be exemplified with a comparative (the more/the less..., the less/the more...) structure.

Clearly, the aim here is to discover a common basis for our conceptual and linguistic apparatus. Accordingly, the commonality is found in the task-centredness of categorization as well as of the manipulation of knowledge: it is always relative to a given task that category judgements are made and decisions are arrived at. And the list is by all means extendable to many kinds of contextual approaches, especially to relevance theory proposed by D. Sperber and D. Wilson where contextual selection is a primitive, an unreducible hallmark of rationality, rather than something awaiting rational explanation. It is the bare fact that the stimulus is "worth the audience's attention. Any utterance addressed to someone automatically conveys a presumption of its own relevance. This fact, we call, the *principle of relevance*. ... it is not something that they (the people) obey or might disobey; it is an exceptionless generalization about human communicative behaviour." (Wilson \ Sperber 1988: 140)

The authors' purpose is to find the rock bottom of communicative activity where a deviation from the norm comes to constitute the norm itself. No wonder that John Woods found this conception apocalyptic. If relevance theory is however aligned with typicality and topical argumentation, its rationale appears to be not so much the wielding of formal-logical structure – although Sperber \ Wilson do make such a claim – but rather the search for non-logical constraints on interpretation. Whether the constraints imposed by what is known include or not the utilization of demonstrative logic is a separate matter. As prototypical categorization represents a move away from taxomical systems, so do relevance theory – and other context selection approaches – make a step toward informal inferencing. That the idea of relevance in question leads to apocalypse in logic may well be true. Sperber\Wilson's real fault does not lie there. It lies rather in occupying two contrastive positions concerning rationality in cognition and in argumentative behavior. On the one hand they set the task to explain how communication even without an explicate code can become successful; that is how things can be inferred instead of being decoded. But if this is so, it appears on the other hand that what people in fact do is not understanding each other but rather conducting a monologue. In order to be otherwise, the speakers should be saddled with the extra burden of optimizing their talk *in such a way* that it facilitate the context selection by the hearers. To do that they should also be ascribed the mutual knowledge the pertinence of which Sperber \ Wilson argue against. Thus,

however, we would soon be lead back to the original code model. And indeed, if the speaker were so keen on communicating the same idea, it would be more economic for her to use the latter than sending the hearer into an amazinglabirynth of dubious and intricate – i.e. non-computable – inferences. Moreover, we have seen that, while we are more often than not optimizers as interpreters, we are quite nonchalant in producing proper behavior. So if the apocalypse is there, it is on the side of the speakers, not on that of the hearers. I will even venture to add that the more we are optimizers as producers, the more hard wired the given reaction becomes. In fact, as we will later see, *it is precisely because we ascribe the same optimizing rationality to others that we are prone to be nonchalant in producing behavior*. Sperber \ Wilson cannot have it both ways: retaining the rich inferential potential on the part of the hearers and securing the uptake of the communicative intent of the speakers. That is they cannot account for the fact that we are cognitive satisficers and productive optimizers at the same time. Yet that is what “the exceptionless generalization about human communicative behaviour” would require them to do. Else there is no rational explanation for language to have evolved.

#### 4. The categorization problem

I illustrate the above point with a categorization problem. Thus the second reason for the methodological character of fallacy theories surfaces in cognitive psychology. Subjects are often tested for categorizing with a selection task in which they must perform pairings of figures and/or names, while it is the whole structure of training and testing they have undergone that should explain why they succeeded or not in their task. Yet it is highly dubious that the structure of the experiment correctly mirrors the structure of “inner” processing, i.e. the bridging between stimuli and output. In many cases “subjects are asked to provide a report under conditions where they would ordinarily not see anything meaningful. Knowing that the figure contains a familiar object results in a search for cues.” (Pylyshyn 1998) Still in other cases subjects must judge a statement like “A canary is a bird” either true or false. Such tasks are rather imposed on them and constitute “closed paradigms”. (Cf. Dubois 1991: 43) What psychological experiments are supposed to show is that the same principles that discriminate among the categories are also working within the categories themselves in producing prototypical effects. Thus – as Rosch puts it – there would be no sense in dissociating these principles. But since furthermore prototypicality is only a matter of best example within a category and not to be

confused with the question of belonging, in many cases it seems to be enough if only the boundaries between categories (such as human and non-human, friend and enemy, etc.) are represented and the content either simply does not matter, or if it matters, it matters only to the extent of delineating contrastive categories. Note that in such psychological experiments what goes on in the mind is taken to be mirrored by how the subject reacts to the target problem, that is by producing. Psychological testing reduces inner processes to simulation, that is to outward behavior and thus it commits the methodological fallacy of pulling down the distinction between interpretation and production. Such analyses are open to the criticism that representations are emptied out of content. By content I mean anything from feature-detection to nearest neighbour or averaged vectorial distance among affiliated items in connectionist networks. Representing boundaries may be as congenial (or conducive) to survival as ranking an instance within some category. Representing boundaries, however, implies that behavior relies so heavily on context that it is neither rule-based, nor similarity-based. It is not rule-based because it is an essential feature of rules that they are non-contextual. But it is neither similarity-based because, as e.g. Ellard reports, certain species “respond to *all stimuli* as threatening or to *no stimuli* as threatening depending on their familiarity with the context in which the stimulus is presented” irrespective of the local configuration of the stimulus, since there is an “obvious adaptive advantage... that it pushes the time-consuming and computationally expensive problem of stimulus recognition to a point in time that actually *precedes* stimulus onset.” (Ellard 1995: 681) In other words it does not imply structural mapping, but rather a pre-tuning to current context. I do not see any reason why such behavior could not appear to be significant in man.

A particularly interesting case is the experiment reported by Smith and Sloman who repeated a test by Rips to highlight the difference between the two categorization processes (similarity-based and rule-based). The task was to decide whether the test object with some characteristic attribute(s) belong to one of two target categories, of which one was fixed, while the other was variable with respect to the given attributes. (The attribute was shape falling in between the regular sizes of quarters and pizzas.) When there was only one such attribute, namely size (a round object 3-inch in diameter), most subjects judged that it belong to the category of pizzas rather than to the category of quarters. The explanation went that in case of boundary conditions subjects categorize on the basis of rules and rank the vague object with the variable category, while, and

despite, noticing its similarity with the members of the fixed category. Whereas with the test object having more attributes similar to the members of the fixed category (e.g. silver color) subjects tended to judge it not only more similar, “but also as more likely to belong” to the fixed category. (Smith et alii 1998: 182) This experiment however does not prove -as the authors want it - that categorization is similarity-based, since the attributes in question were necessary and/or perceptually *salient* features, which attest rather the application of rules. Experiments with boundary conditions do not show that people, if made to give all-or-none responses, indeed *represent* the test object as this or that. They rather show to the contrary that subjects are reluctant to tamper with represented boundaries, and so they temper with content: if presented with something conspicuously similar to the target object, they adjust, or temper with, the precise “rule” of what belongs to that category. Note also that such experiments completely disregard the role of context. How would subjects decide if the test object is presented to them within a restaurant or buy-and-sell frame?

Thus we reach the conclusion: the fact that people follow rules in their behavior above - behavior in processing stimuli - is a phenomenon resulting from the contrived character of the situations they are tested or observed. There is nothing like inherently normative here. It is rather that the horizontal organization of categorial structure appears to be far more *relevant* to selective action than the vertical structure. To sum up:

(T1) Human categorization is such that it reflects the evolutionary important boundaries among the objects of environment, but there is no objective mapping between the content of coded categories and external reality. (Cf. Pólya \ Tarnay 1997)

Coded boundaries may naturally shift with evolution, hence there is objective necessity for the semantic transparency of the boundaries themselves. Yet it is crucial that there be observed boundaries, which can be reflected linguistically as well.

##### *5. Normative vs descriptive: rule-governed vs similarity-based*

Thus we are confronted with contrastive evidences or conflictive demands: on the one side we have experimental results in developmental psychology, pathology and animal behavior which attest of high contextuality and dispositionality in behavior; hence they point to similarity-based rather than rule-governed behavior. Yet - and this is partly my point here - they *appear* to be rule-following to the

external observer since – at most – coding of category boundaries may be inferred in certain cases. Furthermore, it turned out that prototypical categorization prompted by E. Rosch and her followers frequently mirror prior training and external activity rather than the inner structure of representation; thus typicality should also be ranked here, which accords well with the fact that they are similarity-based.

On the other side we have the *topoi* or argumentative inference conceived along the lines of J.-C. Anscombe and O. Ducrot. By all means inferential activity implies rule-following, hence it cannot exclude normativity in its entirety. Given the rhetorical nature of language it arises that the scope of inferential activities cannot be wholly captured by a theory of relevance as Sperber \ Wilson want it. Yet it must have also become clear that their theory occupies a middle position in my ranking in that for them context selection is primary and similarity based, while it is only fuel and/or input to the main operation: the producing of contextual effects by means of – demonstrative – rules.

Suppose for the moment that the picture linguists and psychologist with an argumentative bent is close to the truth. Suppose furthermore that it is the best explanation one can offer of what goes on in the hearer's mind. Then we have a blatant inconsistency. When we interpret we are cognitive satisficers, that is we try to extract with the least effort as much content as we can from what has been said. In other words we set our aims too high: we strive to construct a distinctive – fine-grained – picture of the world on the basis of structural and inferential relations between incoming new and retrievable old information. But when it comes down to responding or (re)acting, unless we are *rationalized* experts – we observe only the most “relevant” – coarse-grained -boundaries of our cognitive structure.

Whence such an inconsistency? I have already hinted at one possible answer: evolution driven selectivity. This may well cover low-level – dispositional – action. But I have presented high-level, categorical thinking very much like autonomous, similarity-based action. Can I be justified in making that move? Now here is the source for a second answer, quite orthogonal to the first; it is the principle of charity proposed by Donald Davidson. It says briefly that in evaluating the speakers' behavior we aim at giving the best possible explanation of their – linguistic – behavior. That is we rationalize their activity. At face value, rationality is not an ideal by which we automatically assess their action, but it is rather a result of our interpretative activity. The question is: Can we reconcile the principle of charity with the principle of relevance or argumentative normativity?



At first sight it seems yes, since both approaches aim at a full-blown interpretation of utterances, at exploiting its inferential potential, at resolving conflicts, etc. This latter task most often amounts to supplying missing premises. But on what basis should such premises be determined? On the argumentative approach, it is a set of agreed upon rules – either semantic or pragmatic – that constrain both interpretation and possible responses (i.e. speech acts). Violations of such rules would then naturally amount to committing a fallacy. But if so, most argumentative-communicative situations are doomed to break down. For what if the best possible explanation of inconsistent or incoherent speech behavior comes from unique or “irregular” sources of the situation in question, from ideosyncratic aspects which are not given or statable once for all. What if the point of a semantic or pragmatic rule consists precisely in tampering with, or manipulating, it? This is a moral to be learnt from oral communication, ordinary and artistic, in primitive and as well as higher cultures. But a moral also rendered by categorization testing in experimental psychology when it is acknowledged that “a change in the activation level of a feature has the effect of changing the criteria of arbitrarily many categories into which that feature could enter, including ones that the investigator may have no interest in or may not have thought to test.” (Pylyshyn 1998)

If we take the principle of charity in an argumentative vein we have our second answer: we are nonchalant in our behavior *just because* we ascribe the same kind of rationality to others. We suppose there is a rock bottom of rule-following, some abstract set of rules upon which agreement must sooner or later be reached. It is an overgeneralization: *an extrapolation of external behavior onto the domain of what goes on in the head*. But it is just this supposition of general rationality that appears to be a fallacy as soon as we take content seriously. Inconsistency may not be right word to apply to what is meant here: tampering with the rules may well be just another metaphor of constantly jostling the boundaries of our inner categorical structure. Redrawing the horizontal structure of our categories cannot be made to follow some pre-set rule, it cannot be normative. There may well be external constraints originating with the changing of our environment, but there is no direct internal response to that change; cognition has its own plasticity but it is essentially constrained by its former structure. If relevance bears any selective advantage, it is in (re-)utilizing “cognitive parts” as building blocks already there rather than starting anew. (Cf. The Gouldian idea of evolution as assembling old parts together – ones adapted to a previous purpose – for a new purpose.)

This may be taken to be a stretched – even a too charitable – interpretation of the principle of charity to cover cases of blatant inconsistency. Yet I think it is not. I agree with Z. Pylyshyn that inference is an activity “where the semantic property truth is preserved. But we also count various heuristic reasoning and decision-making strategies (e.g. satisficing, approximating, or even guessing) as rational because, however suboptimal they may be by some normative criterion, they do not transform representations in a semantically arbitrary way: they are in some sense at least quasi-logical. This is the essence of what we mean by cognitive penetration: It is an influence that is coherent or quasi-rational when the meaning of the representation is taken into account.” (Pylyshyn 1998) The use of term “rational” is meant to indicate that in characterizing such processes we need to refer to what the beliefs are about – to their semantics. The important point is that such processes can be suboptimal. I think Pylyshyn hits the right note when he asserts that “most psychological processes are cognitively penetrable, which is why (cognitive) behavior is so plastic and why it appears to be so highly stimulus-independent.” Hence cognition is both stimulus-independent and meaning dependent. That could well be the reason of its suboptimality. Suboptimality does not mean however that cognition is not task-centred as most cognitivist conceive of it. But that is not enough reason to treat motor and processing activity on a par. The difference may be analogous to that between “systems that have constraints on interpretation built into them that reflect certain properties of the world” (Pylyshyn 1998) and systems that access and use knowledge. While the first is cognitively impenetrable, the second is not.

To sum up: higher cognition may *appear* rule-governed to the extent that it is stimulus-independent and meaning-preserving in exploiting more or less abstract structural correspondences. Even so, even if it is cognitively penetrable, it cannot become normative, since it always works with used materials.

## *6. Concluding remarks*

Let me conclude with giving vent to a good and a bad consequence. The good one may be that the black box of the mind has not been wholly and adequately opened yet, so there is much work to be done in this field. It is plausible that man is capable of high-level cognitively penetrable activity, of understanding complex relation structure, etc. I take it to be part of the good news that such ability is highly plastic, and even if abstract, it cannot be ranked with rule-following. Quite clearly so because it involves analogical thinking which has much in common with primary similarity-governed processing. But there is the bad news. It starts with

the simple observation that if communication (and cognition) is task-centred, then an important part of it must be constituted by the attempt of securing the uptake and the “correct” interpretation of any utterance. Otherwise – and in lack of some other meaning independent social function – selection should have driven it out. But should it? If what has been said of production is only partially true, we are surrounded with a huge mess of carelessly formulated and misfired talk and misunderstanding. How is it that selection has not already driven out our communicative ability? I can give two brief answers here. The first is simple and a bit cheating. It runs that the evolutionary story of literacy is too short to be a proof of its selective advantage. The second is more complex but I cannot elaborate it here. It starts by seemingly overturning my argument in this paper in that it claims that what we are almost smothered with is not a mess of misfired talk, but rather a “cognitive” technology, factories of ideologies, which not only reproduce the same forms of talk like e.g. the ads, but they self-reproduce as well. That is they do not overturn the communicative function but overexercise it. So far so good. Communication should not be wiped out then. But there is a corollary to this answer: the overarching function of exact communication will result in the wiping out of the meaning-dependent and rule tampering cognitively penetrable higher activity, since any tampering with the rules slows communication down or may even end up blocking it completely. But once again our past is only a drop in the evolutionary ocean. So we are stuck with our morsel of hope.

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# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Totalitarian Argumentation: Theory And Practice



In the history of the 20-th century totalitarianism has left a deep and bloody trace. It has been connected not only with destroying civil public institutes and different deformations of people's private and social life. This century totalitarianism turned out to be an Intellect of Devil with a capital letter which forced people to realize the necessity of replacing monistic Ratio by numbers of autonomous and competing with each other intellect instances. The connection between totalitarianism and intellect is paradoxical. Destroying the intellect with a small letter and thus discrediting the great Ratio totalitarianism created special

communicative practices.

It's wrong to believe that the power of totalitarianism can be explained exceptionally by the power of its repressive structures. A great role in its expansion is played by unrepressive mostly [first of all] verbal practices the core of which was an argumentation. "Argumentation is a social, intellectual, verbal activity serving to justify or refute an opinion, consisting of a constellation of statements and directed towards obtaining the approbation of an audience" (Eemeren, Grootendorst, Kruiger 1987:7). Argumentation is a way of human deeds coordination.

As Ch. Perelman says, that activity is the communication of intellects, American philosopher H.W. Yohnstone says, that activity is the most adequate way of realizing the human nature. In connection with totalitarianism argumentation becomes the devil of homo sapiens and needs the most serious attention. Analysing it we may probably come to answer the question inspired by H. Arendt: How a physically normal healthy person may lose the interest to his own being to realize himself as a screw, soldier of Totalitarian one. (Arendt 1951) Totalitarianism isn't the antipode of democracy, but its another genesis, plebiscite-acclamatorian form, as J. Habermas says on the point. Some democracy theorists consider that totalitarianism and democracy are antipodes. There are two forms of democracy: a representative democracy and a democracy of participation "For the survival of democracy in Eastern Europe, where touch economic and social measures are to be taken, participation is a prerequisite. But more participation will also be indispensable in solving some of the problems inherent in the democratic system institutionalised in the West" (Eemeren 1996:9) Only an inaccurate look perceives acclamation as one of false democracy. The estimation of totalitarianism as external displaying of domination and as a false arche is also simplified. It's more realistic without declaring the totalitarianism visibility what is forbidden by the voice of its victims, which is knocking in the contemporaries hearts, to try to understand which properties the argumentation must have to be an effective megaphone, the way of totalitarianism implementation. These properties were dissolved in communicative practices of totalitarianism and were not recorded by means of language.

On the one hand, we can't speak about one as totalitarian one without putting it into a complete totalitarian content. The concept of "totalitarian control" will be intelligent if and only if, the control will be really total.

On the other hand, the control can't be organized. A screw of the totalitarian State isn't an atom in sense of Epicurus and isn't capable of self deviation. Totalitarian argumentation must provide forming of a screw, which is capable of self deviation in principle as a screw. We conducted an empirical analysis of totalitarian argumentation features based on the content analysis of the Soviet press, and it enables to note the following features of totalitarian argumentation. Soviet republican and regional newspapers in 1950-s had practically no one issue which didn't contain a totalitarian argumentation text. Usually, there were two or three messages in one issue which couldn't be qualified as patterns of the totalitarian argumentation usage.

Studying these messages shows that there were communicative, control and motive-organizing functions of totalitarian argumentation. Any problem discussed in the newspaper's texts we are interested in was covering in the way to set up an invisible control over intellects and hearts of the readers using its ideology.

An empirical study of structural properties of totalitarian argumentation shows that in the epoch of stalinism the motive - organising function of totalitarian argumentation was not connected with such argumentation elements (according to St. Toulmin) as qualifier and rebuttal. It's not surprising that almost 80 per cent of ordinary totalitarian messages were built with a peripheral course (O'Keefe 1995) of persuasion. They were based on using very simple and primitive arguments oriented on actualization of the masses' basic instincts. The processual structural properties of totalitarian argumentation were connected with a canon compound (in sense of F. van Eemeren) argumentation.

According to the canon argumentation is the system all elements of which are intelligent only in the totalitarian total message context. We discovered compound argumentation in 60,5 per cent of analyzed totalitarian issues.

One may speak about such property of totalitarian argumentation as strategy of its claim immunization (Andersen 1995:193). According to the strategy a slight criticism of the claim of totalitarian argumentation is strengthening its persuasiveness and acceptance. That strategy was used in 70 per cent of analyzed totalitarian messages.

Between relatively independent elements of totalitarian argumentation text as something whole such subarguments as arguments to authority, provincialism, death are notable. An argument to the authority (or *ad verecundiam*) can be effective due to totalitarian power mechanism. A listener is more likely to accept



what State says the more he is afraid of it. This argument is a special totalitarian kind of argument *ad verecundiam*. Even such a statement as “Elephants Fly” backed by the Authority of a Totalitarian State is acceptable to its recipients.

An argument to provincialism was very widespread in the USSR and is used in the CIS. It means that something is unacceptable to an audience if it is connected with a deviation from the general canon of totalitarian ideology. This deviation is a special kind of ignorance in sense of one's inability to accept totalitarian ideas. An argument to provincialism is a totalitarian turned form of the argument *ad ignorantiam*.

There are three levels of an argument to death: logical, rhetorical and dialectical. Syllogisms: “All humans are mortal; Socrates is a man; Socrates is mortal” is an example of ‘argument to death’ logical version. It illustrates a high level of validity and persuasiveness of a verbal message appealing to limits of life. ‘Argument to death’ rhetorical form appealing to limits of human life may be persuasive not being valid in a logical sense.

What is more this form may be logically contradictory’. The argument to death’ dialectical form illustrates principle impossibility to continue human intercourse after the use of argument to death. This argument shows an unsteady border between totalitarian argumentation as an example of the verbal violence and totalitarian physical repressions as a brutal and bloody force. The most popular for users of totalitarian argumentation were the arguments located in the following order: to[ad] authority, death, provincialism. If the argument to authority in totalitarian argumentation being subargument played a role of support also, the next arguments to provincialism and death, being relatively independent subarguments, were connected with the methods of totalitarian statements backing.

Despite the ordinary structure and organisation of totalitarian argumentation in the epoch of stalinism internally, it was a rather complex formation being very dynamic and relatively independent phenomenon in comparison with its supporting state institutes.

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# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Arguing For Bakhtin



*"Bakhtin's thought is so many-sided and fertile that he is inevitably open to colonization by others."* David Lodge, *After Bakhtin*.

In a recent paper, J. Anthony Blair (1998) laments a proliferation of terms that appear to be employed without discrimination or distinction: 'dialogue', 'dialogical', 'dialectic', 'dialectics', and 'dialectical'. While he doubts it will occur, Blair proposes that 'dialectical' be reserved for "the properties of all arguments related to their involving doubts or disagreements with at least two sides, and the term 'dialogical'...for those belonging exclusively to turn-taking verbal exchanges." Setting aside his pessimism, what Blair identifies amounts to a clear trend toward 'dialectical' or 'dialogical' models of argumentation, a trend that has become more pronounced particularly among informal logicians in the last few years (Cf. Gilbert, 1997; Johnson, 1996; Walton, 1996, 1997).**[i]**

Of course, emphasizing the two-sidedness or turn-taking nature of argumentation may not amount to very much. Douglas Walton's centralizing of 'dialogue' in his pragmatic account means that the dialogue provides the context which will determine the argument by virtue of telling us how the set of inferences or propositions at its core is being used (1996:40-41). And Ralph Johnson's recent focus on a dialectical tier exists in relation to an underlying illative tier which is the premise-conclusion part of the argument's structure (1996:264). But with

these senses, it is possible (though not necessarily the case) for dialogue-focussed or dialectical argumentation to involve no more than an exchange of distanced, monological positions (perhaps through turn-taking, perhaps in whole), where each side presents its argument for acceptance or rejection (Shotter, 1997). Were such to occur, the current drive for a more genuinely interactive or 'involved' perspective might be lost.**[ii]**

It is here that the dialogism of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) seems particularly appropriate and in many ways an anticipation of current trends in argumentation theory (as with so much else). Shotter (1997) turns to Bakhtin's views for an understanding of dialogical communication and argument within actual communities. I want to take this further and look for an actual perspective on argumentation, one that really captures the interactive nature of dialogue.

While Bakhtin was a philosopher of language and literature, it is primarily the latter that has been championed in the west where his theory of the novel has been particularly influential. But for argumentation theorists, there is much more to be culled from his ideas on language and communication generally. This paper will both explore what 'arguing' is for Bakhtin, showing how his general theory of speech and meaning implicates a particular concept of 'argument', and argue for Bakhtin's role as an important figure in argumentation studies. I will approach the first task through paying attention to special features of Bakhtin's concept of dialogism (here understood provisionally as the relationship of every utterance to other utterances). Extending beyond Shotter (1997), I derive a concept of argument totally embedded in context (no detached reconstruction of premises and conclusions can be true to it), where even the situation itself enters as a constitutive element. Arguments are essentially co-operative enterprises, opening up meanings to mutual (and third party) understanding, exploring others' positions, and developing consensus.

Limited by the constraints of time and page-length, I illustrate the prospects for success with the second task by exploring ways in which Bakhtin anticipates an important aspect of Perelman's work. In particular, I discuss Bakhtin's treatment of audiences and the importance for him of the "hovering presence" behind conversation of a third part "superaddressee" (1986, 126)**[iii]**. This concept and Bakhtin's associated discussion has compelling and instructive parallels with the "universal audience" of the *New Rhetoric*.

## 1. Dialogism

Let's begin with the utterance. For Bakhtin the utterance is the basic linguistic act, and utterances acquire their meaning only in a dialogue. Words and sentences are impersonal, belonging to nobody. They can become the tools of the logician who may centre them on a page and look at *their* relations, the relations of statements. By contrast, an 'utterance' is marked by "its quality of being directed to someone, its *addressivity*" (Bakhtin, 1986:95). An utterance, then, has essentially both an author and an addressee.**[iv]**

Moreover, the utterance arises within the context of a particular situation. Or, to put it in Bakhtinian terms, the situation is a constitutive element of the utterance. As Todorov (1984) notes, the existence of a nonverbal element to an utterance that corresponds to the context was known prior to Bakhtin. But he treated it not as external to the utterance, but integral to it. The extraverbal does not influence the utterance from the outside. "On the contrary, *the situation enters into the utterance as a necessary constitutive element* of its semantic structure" (Todorov, 1984:41).

So understood, 'utterance' can help us to appreciate how Bakhtin employs the term 'dialogism'. Enough has been said to indicate that more is at stake than what we might commonly associate with the term 'dialogue' or with 'speaking'. As Michael Holquist (1990) indicates, normally 'dialogue' suggests two people in conversation. "But what gives dialogue its central place in dialogism is precisely the kind of *relation* conversations manifest, the conditions that must be met if any exchange between different speakers is to occur" (1990:40).

Bakhtin himself marvelled at the way that linguistics and the philosophy of discourse had valued an artificial, preconditioned notion of the word, which was lifted out of context and taken as the norm. By contrast, "[t]he word is born in a dialogue as a living rejoinder within it; the word is shaped in dialogic interaction with an alien word that is already in the object" (1981:279). In this dynamic conception the word finds its meaning. Bakhtin continues: But this does not exhaust the internal dialogism of the word. It encounters an alien word not only in the object itself: every word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates.

The word in living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction... Responsive understanding is a fundamental force, one that participates in the formulation of discourse, and it is moreover an *active* understanding, one that discourse senses as resistance or support enriching the

discourse.

Linguistics and the philosophy of language acknowledge only a passive understanding of discourse, and moreover this takes place by and large on the level of the common language, that is, it is an understanding of an utterance's *neutral signification* and not its *actual meaning* (280-281).

This clarifies, or furthers, the essential notion of addressivity mentioned earlier. The word is directed towards a reply, it "anticipates it and structures itself in the answer's direction."

## 2. Argument

"We learn to cast our speech in generic forms, and, when hearing others' speech, we guess its genre from the very first words" (1986:79). I want, in these terms, to treat argumentation (broadly conceived here as the activity of arguing) as such a speech genre. A 'speech genre', as defined by Bakhtin (1986:60) is a sphere of communication which has its own relatively stable types of utterances. I take it as uncontroversial that 'argumentation' fits this description. We can also take confirmation of this judgement from the kinds of things Bakhtin himself includes as speech genres, beyond the frequently studied literary genres. Bakhtin includes the "short rejoinders of daily dialogues...everyday narration, writing (in all of its various forms), the brief standard military command, the elaborate and detailed order, the fairly variegated world of business documents," (60) as well as scientific statements. The types of utterances specific to arguers, and identifiable as parts of arguments such that "we guess its genre from the very first words," given the kinds of contextual considerations mentioned earlier, clearly delineate the sphere 'argumentation'. [v]

This said, I want now to turn to considering what important elements Bakhtin contributes to a model of argument. That is, as a speech genre, argumentation will be characterized by the features common to it. I want to focus upon three specific ideas.

(1) A concept of argument conceived along Bakhtinian lines will not pull discourse from reality and treat it as a series of statements (premises and conclusions) disconnected from arguer and audience/respondent. In this, Bakhtin would not differ from some recent proposals (cf. Gilbert, 1997). But Bakhtin stresses the uniqueness of meaning that a sentence has within an utterance (that rich concept discussed earlier) to the extent of insisting that the repetition of the sentence makes it a new part of the utterance (1986:109). A sentence changes (or adds to) its meaning in the course of an utterance. In fact, Bakhtin specifically excludes

logical relations, like negations and deductions, from those relations that are dialogical (Todorov, 1984:61), presumably for reasons noted here. Dialogical relations are “profoundly specific,” (Cited in Todorov, 61) logical relations are not. This sets a Bakhtinian model of argument quite beyond the boundaries of traditional formal deductive logic, a point that cannot be stressed too strongly.

(2) The second thing to note about a Bakhtinian model is that it will be a context-dependent model where the context includes the particular agents involved. Again, this does not at first seem remarkable, but the notion of addressivity brings a very original element to the discussion. Here, we might conceive argumentation as being predicated upon response. “It” is a site of response. And Bakhtin captures this responsiveness. But this is more than the accommodation of a reply, the anticipation of objections to one’s position. Here, “addressivity” captures the way an argument is always *addressed* to someone, and thus needs to include an understanding of that other (audience/respondent) in its structures or organization.**[vi]** Hence, the argument while having the arguer as its principal author, can be said on this level to be co-authored by the addressee. Bakhtin suggests more of what I have in mind here when he writes:

“[E]very word is directed toward an *answer* and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates. The word in a living conversation is directly, blatantly, oriented toward a future answer-word: it provokes an answer, anticipates it, and structures itself in the answer’s direction” (1981:280). We can imagine here two people in a dialogue (the site Walton envisages for pragmatic argument), anticipating and responding in a way that makes their argument a common discourse, and in a way that precludes the isolation of positions, speaking back and forth across a gulf. This is clearly to bring dialogism to the arena of argument. And in particular, speaks to the trend in argumentation that I identified earlier. It implies the importance to argument that listening must have. It is also a model of argument that aims for agreement.**[vii]** According to Todorov (1998:7), for Bakhtin “[t]he goal of a human community should be neither silent submission nor chaotic cacophony, but the striving for the infinitely more difficult state: “agreement.”” The Russian word used here, *soglasie*, means, at root, “co-voicing.”

In the first case here we might note that directing a discussion of language or words in terms of voices personalizes it in a way that a traditional model of argument would not. Secondly, it would be important to recognize that agreement, where achieved, does not mean an identity between positions, it does



not involve a winner and a loser who gives up her or his position. Rather than the holding of the same position, agreement stresses an understanding of the position involved. As Todorov (1984:22) recognizes, understanding is a type of reply, it is that to which both arguer and respondent move through the utterance. In this sense, understanding is dialogical, and can be seen as a goal of argumentation within the perspective being extrapolated from Bakhtin's statements.

(3) This last remark leads to a third, briefer, point. And this has to do with the affect that arguing has on the arguer. Typically, in similar kinds of models we might talk about the way the arguer/argument aims to persuade the audience. The movement of change is centrifugal. Where change does take place, it is in the audience. Overlooked is the way in which the act of engaging in argument can change the arguer her or himself. The dialogical argument being discussed here lays stress on the relation between the arguer and respondent in the form of the utterance/argument they co-author and come to understand.

As we might anticipate from what has been said so far, Bakhtin's work offers a particular notion of the self or I that is not isolated from its context (nothing is anything in itself for Bakhtin). The self arises in relation with others. While there is no room here to pursue this particular notion of the self, it suggests a sense in which we can think about the thought of the self being tied to the thought of the audience. As an arguer, when I consider my audience, I must of necessity consider my self, my beliefs and attitudes. And articulating my position for my audience, I also articulate it for myself. Arguing is self-discovery. And with such insight comes the possibility of change, of development of the person initiating the argument. **[viii]** This clearly relates to the sense of agreement as understanding expressed above. Accordingly, we will have here a model of argument that eschews the metaphors of war that have been the subject of a number of critiques (Cohen, 1995; Berrill, 1996), and adopts the kinds of metaphors more agreeable to recent feminists critics (Gearhart, 1979; Foss & Griffin, 1995).

### *3. Bakhtin & Perelman*

Enough has been said to show the plausibility of extracting a rich and useful 'dialogical' model of argument from Bakhtin's work. Obviously, such a model needs development, and there is much to be addressed by way of concerns and problems. But I want now to turn to a more explicit way in which Bakhtin anticipates twentieth century argumentation, and to illustrate this through a brief discussion of Perelman's notion of the universal audience.

There are a number of audiences recognized in Perelman's texts (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969:30). But he makes an important distinction between the particular audience being addressed and the universal audience somehow lying within, or framed by, or participating in, that particular audience. The relationship between the two audiences has occasioned considerable debate and several key criticisms have been brought against it. As a concept, it is deemed to be riddled with inconsistencies (Ray, 1978; Ede, 1989), or even unnecessary for Perelman's (and Olbrechts-Tyteca's) own project (Johnstone, 1978:105).

To a certain extent, Perelman must share some responsibility for criticisms laid against his notion of the universal audience, insofar as those criticisms may be based on misunderstandings. Perelman is a writer who often discusses ideas or views without clarifying his attitude towards them. Only in a subsequent discussion do we realize that an idea he has been explaining is not one he is endorsing, or at least, not one he is endorsing in the way it has been explained.

Thus, some charges that the universal audience is too ideal or hypothetical a concept (Ray, 1978; Ede, 1989) stem from the following passage:

Argumentation addressed to a universal audience must convince the reader that the reasons adduced are of a compelling character, that they are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local or historical contingencies (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969:32).

Simply put, the view expressed here *is not* Perelman's view. What he is outlining is the traditional conception of a universal audience to which philosophers have long appealed. It is *against* this conception, and more generally the conception of certitude in philosophy it characterizes, that Perelman's new rhetoric is reacting. His reason for rejecting the traditional conception is simple: "[It] links importance to previously guaranteed objectivity and not to the adherence of an audience, rejects all rhetoric not based on knowledge of the truth" (Perelman, 1989:244). Elsewhere he calls it a "supraindividual and antihistorical conception of reason" (1967:82). So, we must recognize at least two notions of 'universal audience'. That employed in the tradition being rejected; and the modification proposed by Perelman.

James Crosswhite (1989), in his apology for Perelman's concept, distinguishes the universal audience from ideal audiences and criticizes the latter. On Crosswhite's thinking, argumentation addressed to ideal audiences must be couched in the most abstract and formal terms. "The agreements such audiences are capable of reaching never concern the concrete and substantive kinds of issue such

audiences were designed to deal with" (1989:161). This contrasts markedly with Perelman's universal audience, which is designed to consider concrete issues addressed in arguments directed across times and cultures.

There is an important connection between the immediate, particular audience and the universal model drawn from it. Perelman begins with a particular audience and then looks at *its* universal features. Constructing these universal audiences involves defending one's conception of universality. The philosopher addresses the universal audience as he or she conceives it (Perelman, 1989:244).

Perelman likens this universalizing to that of Kant's categorical imperative (1967:82; 1989:245), and not to the general will of Rousseau's small political community, as Ray (1978:366) had proposed. The philosopher attempts to universalize the specific features of the situation and solicits general agreement for them in this way. Only arguments which can be universally admitted are judged reasonable. This does not preclude arguments about what constitutes the universal audience for a specific case. Dialectical exchanges may ensue where opponents disagree on this. This is, after all, an essential feature of what is at stake in argumentation. Here agreement on the universal audience must be achieved through dialogue before the stage of appealing to that audience (Perelman 1982:16-17).

The universal audience is not an abstraction, then, but a populated community. It derives from its conceiver, conditioned by her or his milieu (Perelman 1989:248). The universal audience is a concrete audience which changes with time and the speaker's conception of it (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969:491). It is far from being a transcendental concept borne out of a rationalism (Ray, 1978). But although the universal audience will change, the test of universality goes on – *it* transcends a milieu or a given epoch.

Universal audiences can be constructed from particular ones by universalizing techniques that imaginatively expand audiences across cultures and time and apply notions like competence and rationality. What results is an audience that can assent to concrete propositions and not simply formal proofs and empty platitudes. But the starting point, here and in all argumentation, has been a fully-conceived audience, real or imagined, which listens, reads, and reacts. The universal is fully grounded in the practical requirements of the real. Perelman stresses this when he indicates the need for the philosopher (arguer) to guard against errors in her or his argumentation by testing theses through "submitting them to the *actual* approval of the members of that audience" (1967:83; my

emphasis).

So the universal audience, it transpires, is the distillation of the concrete audience, comprised of the common features as imagined by the arguer (speaker). For an argument to be strong it should elicit the agreement of this universal audience, insofar as the arguer determines it. Put another way, a convincing argument is one whose premises are universalizable (1982:18).

While being a hypothetical construction, the Perelman model is not, on this reading, an ideal model. What this allows us to do is to keep our focus on the immediate audience with its particular cognitive claims, while recognizing a standard of reasonableness which should envelop that audience and which it should acknowledge whenever recourse to the universal audience is required. In this way we can understand Perelman's repeated insistence that the strength of an argument is a function of the audience, and that in evaluating arguments we must look first and foremost at the audience.

One can appreciate from the preceding discussion of the universal audience why critics might be moved to charge that Perelman espouses a relativism. As van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1995:124) explain it, Perelman reduces the soundness of argumentation to the determinations of the audience. "This means that the standard of reasonableness is extremely relative. Ultimately, there could be just as many definitions of reasonableness as there are audiences." Introducing the universal audience as *the* principle of reasonableness to mitigate this problem only shifts the source of the concern to the arguer. Since the universal audience is a mental construct of the arguer, now there will be as many definitions of reasonableness as there are arguers.

Turning back to Bakhtin, let us recall that the utterance is a contextually-grounded event of which the speaker and respondent (first and second parties) are constituents. Now, to these two Bakhtin adds a third: "Each dialogue takes place as if against the background of the responsive understanding of an invisibly present third party who stands above all the participants in the dialogue (partners) (1986:126)." This third party has a special dialogic position (because, of course, there can be an unlimited number of participants in a dialogue, so this is not simply a third member). As Bakhtin (1986:126) further explains this role:

But in addition to this addressee (the second party), the author of the utterance, with a greater or lesser awareness, presupposes a higher *superaddressee* (third), whose absolutely just responsive understanding is presumed, either in some metaphysical distance or in distant historical time (the loophole addressee). In

various ages and with various understandings of the world, this superaddressee and his ideally true responsive understanding assume various ideological expressions (God, absolute truth, the court of dispassionate human conscience, the people, the court of history, science, and so forth).

That we have here an entity on par with Perelman's universal audience, a similar active participant, is clear. How exactly we should understand it is less clear. On the face of it, it *looks like* the more traditional model of the universal audience, against which Perelman is rebelling. Yet at the same time, a reliance on such a traditional model seems inconsistent with what we have understood of Bakhtin's project. Bakhtin uses the analogues of "including the experimenter within the experimental system...or the observer in the observed world in microphysics" (1986:126), to stress that there is no *outside* position. Likewise, we cannot expect the superaddressee to stand outside of the utterance, unaffected by it.

Insofar as the superaddressee represents responsive understanding, and understanding cannot be from the outside, then the superaddressee is internal to the utterance. Furthermore, this superaddressee is "presupposed" by the author of the utterance, it is controlled by the author like Perelman's arguer "creates" the hypothetical universal audience. What is less clear is whether the third party superaddressee is related to the second party respondent in as intricate a way as Perelman's universal audience is related to the particular audience. But here again, a remark of Bakhtin's is instructive: "The aforementioned third party is not any mystical or metaphysical being (although, given a certain understanding of the world, he can be expressed as such) - he is a constitutive aspect of the whole utterance who, under deeper analysis, can be revealed in it (126-127)." Like the first and second parties (and other features discussed earlier) the third party is a constitutive aspect of the utterance. As presupposed by the author, this party must be understood in some essential relation to the second party who is being addressed and who is, as we have seen, co-authoring the utterance itself. Still, there is more that needs to be explored here at a later date, especially as we look to transfer the discussion to the specific concerns of argumentation.

On another front, understanding the superaddressee/universal audience from within Bakhtin's project may allow us to resolve some of the concerns about Perelman's model. In particular, the concern that we have an extreme relativism at work here, where there will be as many universal audiences as there are arguers.

What this criticism misses that Bakhtin has made clear, is that in a very real sense the "arguer" will only exist for us in relation to an "argument" (understood now in

these dialogical terms). And this argument is a unique event involving the particulars of speakers and their situation and the universal audience relevant to them. It is not a matter of each arguer deciding the universal audience in some arbitrary way, such that there are as many universal audience as there are arguers. It is a matter of the argumentative context dictating to the arguer how the universal audience can be conceived, and the respondent/particular audience playing a co-authoring role in that decision. More appropriately, then, there will be as many universal audiences as there are arguments; as many arguers as there are arguments; as many audiences, and so on. But this relativism is no relativism at all in the way that concerns the critics.

#### *4. Conclusion*

What I have attempted here is to show the ways in which Bakhtin's ideas bear upon the concerns of argumentation in order to further the attention that Bakhtin has received in this field (Billig, 1996; Shotter, 1997). There is obviously much more to be said, and I have only made a start here. But I hope at least to have shown the viability of such a project. In one of the few specific references Bakhtin makes to argument he refers to the narrow understanding of dialogism involved (1986:121). But this is argument as conceived in the tradition, not argument as currently understood in argumentation theory which, in many of its essential elements is much closer to the kind of notion that Bakhtin could embrace. **[ix]**

#### NOTEN

- i.** The interest in dialogue models is not itself recent, of course- see Barth & Krabbe (1982), or the pragma-dialectical model of van Eemeren & Grootendorst (1984; 1992). But the latest innovations, in some cases developing out of what have become the received models like that of the pragma-dialecticians, mark a clear departure from the logical model of the premise/conclusion set tradition.
- ii.** I have in mind here Gilbert's (1997) mutual investigation of positions and Johnson's insistence that exchange must be present for there to be an argument.
- iii.** Or "super-receiver", as Todorov (1984:110) translates it.
- iv.** Where an actual interlocutor is not present, "one is presupposed in the person of a normal representative, so to speak, of the social group to which the speaker belongs" (Todorov, 1984:43). I do not want to overlook the kinds of problems that can come with such a projected "objective" standard, but this is not the place to take them up.
- v.** This is the place where I can imagine revisiting the debate of the past decade

as to whether or not argument/informal logic/critical thinking is discipline specific (here, read 'genre specific'). I will not pursue this particular tangent; it suffices that we can recognize the utterances and contexts of 'arguments'.

**vi.** A text like the *Cratylus* indicates what is involved here: depending on who is being addressed, we see three very different kinds of discourse. I am grateful to John Burbidge for suggesting this example.

**vii.** Not all commentators interpret Bakhtin this way: some stress the sense of social struggle rather than amicable disagreement. Cf. Ken Hirschkop, 'A response to the forum on Mikhail Bakhtin' in Morson, 1986: 73-79.

**viii.** 'Person', for Bakhtin, "is a dialogic, still-unfolding, unique event" (Holquist, 1990: 162).

**ix.** The presentation of this paper at the Fourth ISSA International Conference on Argumentation was made possible by a travel grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

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# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - The Usefulness Of Platitudes In Arguments About Conduct



## *Excerpt from a School Board Election Debate*

We need leaders who will listen and work with parents, teachers and administrators to provide the best possible education for our kids. Our children should always be the focus of our efforts, not Board behavior. Imagine the possibilities if we could tap the vision of every concerned parent, teacher and citizen to come up with a school system that reflects the best of all that all of us have to offer. Sounds better than fighting with each other doesn't it? In elections for public office, a candidate's record of conduct will influence how citizens vote. Whether consideration of conduct (i.e., character, personality, communicative style) is reasonable and should affect citizens' votes, or whether it should not, is neither an easy judgment call nor one about which involved parties usually agree. As a consequence, making arguments about

others' conduct can be delicate business. The purpose of this paper is to take a close look at one community's arguments about conduct. The site: A school board election in a medium-sized school district in the Western United States. In this election that set records for voter turn out and spending, candidates did not agree as to what were (or should be) the focal issues. Incumbents considered substantive concerns about directions for education as the main issue; the non-incumbents considered process problems – how school board members had been and should be conducting themselves in making decisions – to be the main issue. The election resulted in a decisive victory for the non-incumbents. **[i]** As the local newspaper proclaimed in a front page quote from one victorious challenger: "I think this election result really sends a message that rudeness is something people don't want to see in local officials." **[ii]**

After providing background on the school district, the materials, and some key events that preceded the election, I focus on the debate that occurred among the seven candidates. In particular, I show that the non-incumbents' arguments as to why they should be elected (and the incumbents defeated) were heavily reliant on platitudes about conduct. Platitudes, I claim, are useful, perhaps even necessary conversational devices, when a candidate is criticizing a fellow candidate's conduct. They assign responsibility without explicitly so doing, they evoke particular events for an audience yet do not explicate how a person's handling of the event was inappropriate, and they minimize the likelihood of counter charges.

### *Rocky Mountain School District's School Board*

Rocky Mountain School District serves a population of a quarter of a million people. Its main city of roughly 100,000 is the home of a research university that educates a good number of the teachers and administrators that staff its schools. The district is geographically diverse, including not only the university city that is the hub, but bedroom suburbs of the city, and difficult-to-reach mountain towns. Twenty-five thousand children attend its 54 different schools. School board meetings are open to the public, occur twice a month, and are broadcast on a local public channel. Meeting involve school board members, the superintendent, the school system's attorney and other school district officials, as well as members of the public. The Board is comprised of seven members elected for four year terms, with half of the board up for election every two years. Following each election, the Board selects its president and other officers. In the November 1997 election that is the focus of this paper four positions were at stake with seven candidates running (one district had an uncontested election). Although

candidates were required to live in the district from which they ran, citizens voted in every district's contest.

### *Materials and Method*

The focal materials for this analysis were (1) transcription of the locally broadcast election debate (two hours), (2) transcription of two meeting segments in which the board crafted a conduct policy for itself, and (3) news articles, editorials, and campaign ads about the election that occurred in the major local newspaper. In addition to the focal materials, the analysis is informed by two years of observation, note-taking, recording of meetings, and newspaper clipping. Data include about 200 hours of videotaped meetings, [iii] extensive notes about most meetings, and an archive of articles and letters from the local newspaper. The debate and meetings were transcribed simply; attention was given to capturing exact words, word repairs, phrase restarts, vocalized particles (uhm, uh), but not to vocal intonation, pausing or turn timing. In analyzing the materials I use action-implicative discourse analysis, an ethnographically informed type of talk/textual analysis that seeks to understand the problems in a communicative practice and the conversational strategies that reflect and manage the practice's problems (see Tracy, 1995). [iv]

### *Key Events Preceding the 1997 Election*

In 1995, Helene Stetson, [v] who two years earlier had campaigned on a back to basics and educational excellence platform, was selected as the new board president. Interpreting the results of the '95 election as evidence of the public's desire for change, Stetson launched a series of high visibility changes. Included among the changes that the Stetson board instituted were :

(1) "Demotion" of the then superintendent. The superintendent's seat at board meetings was moved off the central dais to a lower side table; several months later he resigned and was replaced by an acting superintendent who unexpectedly retired at the end of the next year.

(2) The appointment of a new superintendent and district budget director who had no experience in public schools. The superintendent had been a military officer and the budget director had worked for business;

(3) Adding a world literature course to graduation requirements despite the affected high school teachers voting 75-2 against the requirement; [vi]

(4) changing the middle school program from its recently adopted team teaching approach (which required teacher coordination time) back to an earlier junior

high model;

(5) facilitating rapid expansion of alternative schools within the public school system. A recently passed state law required school districts to develop alternative schools; however, school districts were varying considerably in how quickly they were implementing the policy; and

(6) the mid-year “promotion/firing” of the principal in the district’s largest high school. This person went on to campaign against Stetson in the 1997 election. Votes at Board meetings in the 1995-97 time period frequently split into a majority and a minority with the same people in each group.

In addition to these policy and personnel changes, during this time period there had been an unsuccessful recall petition aimed at Stetson that had been signed by two of the three “minority” Board members who often voted as a bloc, a resignation mid-term of the other minority Board member who had a reputation as fair-minded and reasonable, and the appointment by the local newspaper of a 13-person “Citizens’ Task Force” to deliberate about “The Schools We Want.” The second report, issued in September 1997, 18 months after the task force had been convened and a month before the election, was critical of the school board. Communication, the task force argued, needed to be a top priority. To be a “successful and widely respected school system” attention needed to be given to “establishing significantly better communications internally and externally.”**[vii]** Board meetings during the Stetson presidency frequently occurred in packed rooms where attending citizen booed and applauded. As a result of the high level of expressiveness at meetings, the Board introduced the following statement as a preface to public participation:

### *Participation Preface*

We are glad to hear from the public and look forward to receiving your comments. The Board has unanimously resolved, however, that it cannot tolerate personal attacks upon Board members, administrators, teachers or staff. We must all encourage and insist upon a more civil public discourse.**[viii]**

A year into the Stetson presidency, The Board had an all-day retreat with a facilitator, the purpose of which was to reflect about its own processes. Following the retreat, the Board passed a conduct policy in the hope of improving its collective behavior. In reviewing the policy to be voted on, the Board member (a majority member) who had drafted the policy said, “this is our best effort so far of what we can do and how we can get along and I think it’s a great role model for

the whole community in civic discourse, civil discourse.” The conduct policy included ten commitments.

#### Rocky Mountain School District’s Conduct Policy

1. Be respectful of one another; address issues rather than personalities.
2. Attempt to be clear and concise in comments.
3. Admit mistakes.
4. Share information and avoid surprises.
5. Keep confidences among board members. Act ethically and responsibly. Keep confidential the discussions held in closed session.
6. Use our best efforts to bring people together rather than push them apart.
7. Recognize that consensus is a majority opinion.**[ix]**
8. Support presentation of both sides of issues by staff and committees.
9. When a major decision has been made, agree to a time in the future to review the decision and leave further discussion until that time.
10. Encourage communications which enhance mutual understanding and provide for mutual support; involve taxpayers, parents, teachers, and administrators in the decision-making process where appropriate.

With the exception of Principle 7, there was little disagreement. All Board members agreed on the importance of being ethical, consulting with others to make decisions, speaking respectfully, avoiding personal attack, and so on. Simply put, the Board’s conduct policy was a set of platitudes – insipid, banal remarks with which no one on this Board, or in most American communities, was likely to disagree.

In argument terms, I would define platitudes as abstract, noncontentious policy/value claims that do not engage with, or specify, particular persons, actions, and choices. One important use of platitudes is to create a sense that the group is largely in agreement. That formulating a proposal abstractly will engender more agreement than the “same” proposal at a more concrete level has long been recognized. For instance, in a widely cited study, 95% of Americans were found to agree with the statement, “I believe in free speech for all, no matter what view.” At the same time, large numbers of these ordinary citizens also agreed with statements that advocated book banning or prohibiting certain kinds of expression (McClosky, 1964). An upshot of the gap between abstract and concrete proposals is that agreement at an abstract level says little about whether agreement will be forthcoming when the topic gets specific. Applying this

generalization to the Rocky Mountain Board, it seems likely that it was only because the Board avoided discussing what counted as respectful treatment of people (#1) or what involving teachers in decision-making (#10) meant, that it was able to achieve agreement about conduct. That the Board's agreement was a veneer overlaying deep opinion differences as to what was reasonable Board behavior became visible during the election.

In the 1997 election, Stetson and two other majority Board members (one of whom was the person appointed mid-term to replace the Board member who resigned) were running for re-election. In addition, there was an uncontested seat in a district where a minority member was retiring and the new candidate had expressed the intent of carrying forward many of the minority member's positions.

From the outset the election was seen as two slates rather than seven distinct candidates. The four challengers were running as a bloc against the three incumbents. An ad the day before the election epitomized this division. Under a large ballot box with checks next to the names of the four challengers were the names of "819 current and past teachers, staff, and administrators" of "the Rocky Mountain School District community[x]" supporting the non-incumbents.

### *The Election Debate*

The election debate, a two hour event sponsored by the League of Women Voters and occurring a month before the election, required the seven candidates to make brief opening and closing statements (90 seconds), and to field unrehearsed questions. Questions asked candidates to delineate the role of teachers and Board members in curriculum development, whether Board members should be on personnel search committees, their views about site-based management, class size, and the district's diversity goal, to provide a few examples.

Candidates' opening statements tended to include information about who a candidate was, evidence of the candidate's commitment to public education, and an implicit proposal as to what the primary issue(s) should be for election. Consider what Board President Stetson said:

Stetson (Speaker 4)[xi]

This is a good school district. It can be a great school district. What we have to do is try to make some of the changes though in some of the basics that are delivered to our children as well as some of those that aren't basic. We need to improve vocational education. We need to make sure our children can spell and punctuate, that they know grammar and history, that they understand math and can do

simple math calculations without a calculator. We need to make sure that our children are the best prepared that they can be for the next century. This is not about teachers, this is not about parents and taxpayers. But this is about children, and I am an advocate for children. Thank You.

Stetsen's opening statement frames key election issues to be about education policies: improving the quality of vocational education, schools giving more attention to spelling and grammar, and so on. To the degree she attends to conduct it is embedded in her final comment that the election is not about "teachers, parents and taxpayers" but about "children." No orientation to conduct as an issue is seen in the second member of the majority bloc's opening comment. Like Stetson, Draper frames the election as being about educational policy issues.

Draper (Speaker 6)

We have made significant gains in the following areas: raised academic standards for all students, increased time teachers spend with each student, we've confronted the Middle School controversy, we've started to reduce class size, we've made the budget understandable, we've used existing space more wisely, we've regained financial credibility. Personally, my goals are to improve student achievement, and also to promote accountability. I believe I am headed in the right direction, and I Ruth Draper ask to be retained on the Board.

The most direct acknowledgment that conduct was an issue was seen in the opening comment from the majority member who had crafted the Board's conduct policy. After highlighting some of the things she had accomplished as Board treasurer, Kingston said,

Kingston (Speaker 1)

No more fads, such as Open Space classrooms, will occur which cost millions to correct. Decisions need to be made with more collaboration. Participants must work together towards common understandings. All must listen to learn and to realize that we all have pieces of the puzzle and together we can make the complete picture. I have led the Board toward working together in productive ways. Results include the Board Protocol agreement and unanimously agreed upon visions and goals.

Kingston's statement implicates that tension and disagreement have occurred. Her formulations ("all must listen" "all have pieces of the puzzle"), though, imply

that all parties (parents, teachers, administrators, Board members) have contributed to the difficulties. Strikingly different are the opening statements of the challenging candidates. Of note is that all challengers referenced Board conduct as a major concern. Each candidate offered platitudes about generally desirable conduct that, because of the larger context soon to be elaborated, became a speech action that was a strong indictment of incumbent communicative behavior. I label the rhetorical move that challengers used “platitudes plus” to highlight its dependence on the existence of a context of a particular type.

(Speaker 2)

I believe in high academic standards, inclusivity of our experts in decision making and accountability on all levels with the Board setting the standards. I believe it is the Board’s responsibility to model the behaviors we are expecting from the community. We are a community divided in this debate, and it does not have to be this way. As a Board member I will model the behaviors which I expect from the community: leadership, cooperation, listening, seeing the big picture, educational excellence and problem solving. We have to consider the messages we are giving our young people when we behave in ways that create divisions in the community. This election is not only about educational excellence, it is about leadership excellence.

(Speaker 5)

The School Board must model responsible leadership. I’ll listen to others and work cooperatively to achieve consensus on controversial issues. This November you have a choice. You can vote to change the School Board’s focus to creating opportunities for kids in the classroom or vote to keep the focus on Board behavior.

(Speaker 7)

We have a good school district, we’ve always had a good school district, and I want to bring my experiences, my common sense, my ability to make good decisions to this School Board, because I think it will help improve the Board, the Board process. In none of these three opening statement is the speaker clear how the current Board members have acted inappropriately. That the speakers regard something as problematic is cued by vague references to “creating divisions in the community,” the election being about “leadership excellence” (Speaker 2), changing the focus from “Board behavior” (Speaker 5) and “Board process”



(Speaker 7). In contrast to these three candidates, Speaker 3, the ex-high school principal, was less vague in her negative assessment.

(Speaker 3)

I am running for the Board to bring balance and cooperation, a climate of civility, better communication, and a sense of service back to Board practices. Board operations should not be a battleground of win-lose. Our communities deserve better.... There is no trust between the teachers and this Board. And without trust, there is no commitment. We are not going forward, and compared to other excellent districts, they call our efforts pathetic. With a School Board that the teachers and communities can trust to work cooperatively and to listen well, one that is not pursuing personal agendas, we can build a well-understood and valid K-12 curriculum, and we can be a superbly functioning district.

Similar to the other challengers, Speaker 3 offers a set of platitudes about good Board conduct. But in referring to the lack of trust between teachers and “this Board,” characterizing the overall efforts of the district as “pathetic” and asserting that current Board members are “pursuing personal agendas” she is less vague in conveying her negative assessment. Interestingly, of all the challenging candidates, she was most often accused in editorial letters in the paper of engaging in personal attack. That Speaker 3 was characterized this way, I suggest, is because she mixed the platitudes plus strategy with language commonly regarded as hostile.

In contrast to the Board conduct policy in which platitudes were self-contained proposals used to affirm Board members’ shared values and accomplish agreement, the challengers used platitudes to mark difference and criticize opponents’ actions. In everyday interaction, a common way people complain about circumstances or another person to unsympathetic listeners is to use idiomatic phrases (Drew & Holt, 1989). Complaints against another, for instance, are summarized by saying “It was like hitting your head against a brick wall,” or “I had to talk till I was blue in the face.” The interactional usefulness of idiomatic expression, Drew and Holt suggest, is that in removing a complaint from its supporting circumstantial details, the idiomatic expression becomes difficult to challenge. A related interactional purpose is served by platitudes, although accomplished in a more inferentially complex fashion.

Platitudes about conduct are statements with which no one would disagree. No one is likely to argue against “cooperation, listening, seeing the big picture,” “a

climate of civility, better communication, building trust, listening well” or “modeling responsible leadership.” These are basic, taken-for-granted values of democratic institutions. Yet when these values are invoked in the context of a debate – an argumentation context typically described as hostile advocacy (Blair, 1995, Walton, 1992) – they frequently become instruments of person-directed attack. Platitudes are especially useful in a public argument context for they promote the sense that a speaker is addressing a policy concern rather than actually criticizing (attacking?) a person. That is, platitudinous proposals about desirable conduct avoid the impression that one is hostile or engaging in an ad hominem attack on one’s opponent. If one candidate’s claim concerns the inappropriateness of the other candidate’s conduct – a situation in which the speaker has an obvious stake – then the speaker needs to display that he or she is uninterested in personal attack (Potter, 1996). Platitudes are instruments of gentle criticism.

To be rhetorically effective, however, platitudes need to be embedded in a textual and environmental context where certain kinds of occurrences are salient. A first part of the necessary context is the situation frame. The frame within which these platitudes were heard was an election debate. Frames, as several scholars have noted (Bateson, 1972, Tannen, 1993; Tracy, 1997), are kinds of social occasions that guide interpretation of talk. In a debate frame, audience members make sense of what candidates say with an assumption in place that they should hear what a candidate says as highlighting how he or she differs from the opponent. Within this frame, then, consider what meaning is likely to be inferred from Speaker 2’s platitudinous statement.

I believe it is the Board’s responsibility to model the behaviors we are expecting from the community... As a Board member I will model the behaviors which I expect from the community: leadership, cooperation, listening, seeing the big picture, educational excellence and problem solving,

Speaker 2’s statement is formulated as a broad principle: stating what she believes is desirable Board behavior and what she is committed to doing. Yet given the frame, the statement implicitly functions as a criticism of her opponents’ beliefs and actions. The statement is understood as asserting that her opponents do not favor acting in ways that model good behavior – leadership, cooperation, listening, etc. Left unspecified, however, is exactly how her opponents are not listening, not being cooperative, not modeling responsible

behavior, and so on. Imagine if rather than what she said, Speaker 2 had said: I believe Board members should not argue with each other; intellectual differences should not make people feel badly. Nor should a school board take an action that the vast majority of the teachers oppose, such as changing a course required for graduation. Furthermore, Board members should not “throw the finger” at members of the public.”

A comment that was more specific, such as exemplified above, has all kinds of logical and identity problems that the platitudinous statement does not. Although not doing what the vast majority opposes is generally reasonable, it is easy to think of instances where this should not apply. In addition, most people would not want to equate listening and cooperating with doing what another party wants, even though it is reasonable to assume some link. Similarly, to mention a specific instance of irresponsible behavior such as “throwing a finger” seems to be getting personal in just the ways public figures are expected to avoid. The usefulness of a platitude is that when events have transpired in a community and are in its public consciousness, a platitude can evoke these events without incurring the interactional costs that would accrue from being specific.

Just as in therapy psychiatrists used the conversational device of the litote to navigate between competing moral and medical frames, thereby enabling them to refer to morally problematic actions delicately (e.g., Saying to a patient, “ the report indicates you ran through the street not fully clothed” when the patient ran through the street naked) (Bergmann, 1992), so too do platitudes about conduct enable a candidate to navigate an ever present dilemma. Stated simply the dilemma is this: How does a candidate for public office legitimate that an other’s (opposing candidate) communicative conduct deserve serious attention – how a person talks to and about others is important – without problematizing that the speaker, himself or herself, adheres to the norms of fair and respectful treatment that the other is being criticized as lacking.

In an editorial, the newspaper editor summarized the community’s difficulties this way:

People in Rocky Mountain hold strong views on education, but many are tired of seeing the practical business of the public schools conducted in the spirit of a holy war. They’re tired of the “Be civil, you moron” approach to public debate in which partisans on both sides, on and off the board, call for reason in one breath and issue personal attacks in the next. They suspect that issues such as school choice, at-risk students, and fiscal management can be addressed in a spirit of

compromise and reconciliation. So do we. And we'll be looking for candidates – in both camps – who can bring that spirit to the Rocky Mountain School Board.[xii]

### *Conclusion*

In the 1970's Zeigler et al. (1974) described school board elections in the United States as "uncontested" and "issueless." As this examination of Rocky Mountain's school board shows, this description no longer applies. In the 1990's all across the United States school boards are active sites for controversy. Whether the controversy is over the worth of vouchers, national tests, teacher training, bilingual education, or, as was the case here, how officials should conduct themselves as they work with others in their community, public arguments about education deserve a more careful look. US President James A. Garfield went so far as to argue that "Next in importance to freedom and justice is popular education, without which neither freedom nor justice can be permanently maintained (Tuttle, 1958: 15). It is certainly the case that meetings involving decisions about local schools (people's own children as well as those of neighbors, family and friends) are one of the few places where large numbers of citizens participate in extended, focused, critical discussion. Local school board talk deserves serious scholarly attention.

In this paper I focused on conduct arguments in one community's school board election debates. Of interest was the fact that conduct was not treated as an issue by both sets of candidates. The challengers, who were arguing that the incumbents were behaving inappropriately, foregrounded the issue whereas the incumbents largely ignored it. As Crosswhite (1996: 112) has noted, "there can be a conflict about what a conflict is about." Conflicts about how to frame "the real issue" seem especially probable when one party is proposing that it is the other party's conduct that is the issue. In the Rocky Mountain instance, the challenging candidates' position that conduct should be the focal election issue was persuasive. This outcome, I expect, is often not the case as conduct arguments are delicate endeavors with high potential for backfiring. To sum it up, a speaker's conversational style in making conduct arguments is inevitably treated as a lived display of the speaker's own code of conduct. In making claims about conduct the space between issues and persons becomes microscopic. When the issue is an other's conduct, a speaker's own conduct becomes an issue. In arguments about conduct, platitudes are useful: They enable speakers to render evaluation, to mean considerably than they say, and do so without appearing nasty and attacking.

## NOTES

- i.** Non-incumbents in the three contested districts carried between 57.8% and 63.6% of the vote. The Daily Camera, (November 5, 1997).
- ii.** The Daily Camera, (November 5, 1997).
- iii.** In the early stages I did audiotaping. Roughly 20% of the tapes are in audiotape form only.
- iv.** Action-implicative discourse analysis is a method to aid developing grounded practical theories (Craig, 1989, Craig & Tracy, 1995). In addition to identifying problems and conversational practices, it also investigates participants' normative beliefs about the focal practice.
- v.** Names of the candidates and school district have been changed.
- vi.** The numbers "75-2" came from a public comment made to the Board by a high school Language Arts teacher (December 19, 1996). Whether there were exactly 77 language arts teachers who voted or whether the speaker is using the number "75" as an approximate round number to represent the relative degree of opposition is unclear.
- vii.** The Sunday Camera (September 7, 1997).
- viii.** Statement added to agenda in October, 1996.
- ix.** This statement was the main one that was discussed. Consensus decision-making is routinely distinguished from majority rule decision-making. Whether the group's confusion about these terms was ignorance about the term's meanings or a strategic move to define and associate majority rule decisions with the more positive and socially valued term (consensus) is not entirely clear. The 1995-97 Board was a highly educated group of people. No one had less than a college degree, two of the members had law degrees and two others had Ph.D.s. It was this item about consensus and majority rule that led one Board member in the minority faction to vote against the protocol. In voting negatively, though, she marked her agreement with the rest of the conduct statements.
- x.** The Daily Camera, (November 3, 1997).
- xi.** Speaker numbers indicate the position order in which the candidate gave opening comments.
- xii.** Sunday Camera, (September 7, 1997).

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# ISSA Proceedings 1998 - Sustainable Development: New Paradigms In Discourse Linguistics



The main concern of this presentation is to outline those tendencies in linguistic approach to discourse analysis as they are seen from the perspective of the new ideas of open systems. First, there will be discussed some major facts that are taken into account as background for dynamic analysis of texts: the idea of the Noosphere, preference of the term paradigm applied to dynamic analysis. Then we shall deal with three main tendencies in discourse linguistics connected with open systems which are all connected with reconstruction of discourse configurations that have an integral character. Finally we shall dwell on the main similarities that of discourse paradigms.

1. Sustainable development is a term and concept that implies certain interdisciplinary global approach of vision of nature and man by both sciences and the humanities. This term is one of the most radical ones that allows Prothagor's old formula. 'Man is a measure of all things' to be understood in a different way at the turn of this millenium - man, being the measure should be concerned with reasonable attitudes to natural and social spheres of his activity so that man sustains his development. Antropocentric ideas of communication turn to Noocentric founded on the basis of dialogue systems. Modern complex social and political configurations in contemporary society bring forth the problem of communication on a very specific level - dialogue is considered to be not only an interactive means of information exchange between people but as a means of interactive activity between men, nature and mind. This interaction is carried through the language. The language becomes a certain liaison between man and different forms of life thus reflecting changes in types and methods of communication.

In Russia the idea of reasonable attitudes is connected with the concept of the Nooshere ("the sphere of reason"). The term was suggested by Eduourd le Roy

(1870-1954) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) and taken by Vladimir I. Vernadsky (1863-1945) when he came to Paris to work in Sorbonne. According to Vernadsky the Noosphere is a new evolutionary condition of the biosphere in which there should be met certain ecological and social orders. Vernadsky wrote that from evidence of global upheavals in both the natural and social indivisibility the only imperative is uniting humanity under the auspice of science. It was science that he ascribed a special role to in the transition to the Noosphere.

He thought that science has a strongest universal binding force as being the realm where humanity has appeared to make continuous progress. This sounds very idealistic, of course, but it should be born in mind that Vernadsky was the man who launched research programs on radioactivity and radioactive elements by founding the Radium Research Institute and he was very much concerned with the utilization of atomic energy. His theory thus stands at the very intersection of the most powerful trends of the modern and postmodern world.

The concept of the Noosphere arose as a result of confluence of several creative streams. The first is the concept of the Biosphere as one which considers the view of all living matter (with the global view of material), and second is the concept of humanistic knowledge. These concepts had an integral conception of development. One cannot deny that the idea of reasonable attitude to social discourse is the core idea in the Noosphere that gave an impetus for a number of new linguistic paradigms. Analytical and pragmatic research paradigms tend to change their orientation from anthropocentric to more socio- and ecologically centric ideas.

These paradigms are based on the principles of complex dynamic and open systems of non-linear type where time and space come as one integral part. Professor Prigogine's work has become an inspiration for new generations of analysts in pointing out that chaotic phenomenon are unpredictable by definition. This does not necessarily mean coherent ontological development but rather the temptation to match natural and artificial intelligence studies. It is not improvement of the existing analytical practices but finding new explanatory apparatus. In this case we tend to stick to the term paradigm as a more suitable one, allowing on one hand the lack of standard interpretations and using old terms on the other. This means that the sciences of chaos and complex self-organized systems that rank nowadays very high among scholars can give enough of mobility for not just setting rigid rules for analysis but for solving meaning puzzles in quite different scholarly environment.



The transition from an old paradigm to a new one is a cumulative process. Successions of paradigms are incoherent in many ways. If we take the history of science, then "Newton's mechanics improves on Aristotel's and that of Einstein's improves on Newton's as instruments for puzzle-solving". "... but in some important respects "Einstein's general theory of relativity is closer to Aristotel's than either of them is to Newton's" (Kuhn 1970:206-207). Paradigms of sustainable development are connected with open functional systems elements of which have certain energy to destabilize the whole system. These elements may have weakly or strongly interactive character and discourse paradigms cannot but envisage them.

1. The Argumentation theory as an integrated discipline is connected with the development of philosophical and linguistic problems in respect of civilizing influence of discourse on the society. This process is defined in its turn by changing strategies and tactics of power, which has a legitimate right to manipulate human behavior. This brings forth the idea of argumentation in the evolution of the society. Here we mean not necessarily political institutions but discursive practices at large that influence mentality. Ideological discourse includes science, literature, and mass media. Nowadays we revision the view of the ideological discourse as a closed system of logical schemes helping manipulating language users. The process of modeling communicative situations becomes an open system in many ways. It involves interpretation as a procedural work that becomes possible because of inherent potential of elements to have an ability to participate in schemes and model formation. This rather bulky statement means that in our linguistic approach to discourse we are to bear in mind complexity of system that becomes a subject of the study. Analytical paradigms are no longer reflecting the potentials language material.

Rhetorical and dialectical approaches are seen as close to each other. Both are concerned with the problems of persuasion. If we take the methodology of dialogism of the text (Bakhtin 1986) any utterance can be looked upon as an argumentative text as any utterance is not entirely an act of choice but it is an answer to another utterance that precedes it. Dialogism does not envision an absolute separation of text producing and text perception as both of them deal with the act of influencing other people. Whenever we take a text as an influential phenomenon we are turning to discourse. The sphere of rhetoric is connected with winning the favorable position in the confrontation and this seems contrary to the dialectical aim of dispute resolution. This contradiction brings dialogue

system into movement. Though contradialectics is not permitted in this kind of reconstruction, this is not always the case (Eemeren, Houtlosser 1998).

Rhetorical and argumentative aspects are integrated into one another through language use. In this case if we take everyday conversations logical rationality is discussed as related to the criterion of acceptability which is related which is done through various types of relevance: propositional, illocutionary, elocutionary and perlocutionary (Rees 1996).

Besides rhetorical and dialectical aspects there appear cognitive patterns of arguments which can be defined in terms of types. They can be abstracted from any particular content showing the procedures involved. Examples of types or patterns as A. Blair called them are as following: inductive arguments from analogy, appeals to authority, generalizations of many kinds, arguments from rules and principles, arguments from implications, from sequences and precedents (Blair 1990). There is one more abstraction that is involved in this type of approach that is the relation between what is stated as a premise and what is stated as a standpoint. Thus the argumentative discourse may be analyzed as an interconnection of logical, rhetorical levels plus schematic interconnection. It is the aim of a linguist using types or schemes to find language instruments that these schemes are based (Tretyakova 1995).

2. Another type of linguistic paradigm which attracts linguists connected with sustainable development is quantum linguistics. It is developed through the showing of intertextual phenomena and various salient features of the text. The main principle in physical theories is using relativism between laboratory experiment and mathematical or other theoretical interpretation as it was done by Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr. For a linguist it is important to deal with the idea of presentation that the founders of quantum theory had. For example, Heisenberg's book "Physical Principles of Quantum Theory" is of a very specific character as abstract theory is done in a manner that can be understood as philosophy or poetics of time and space speculations. By this here we would like to stress special influence of scientific texts on the development of other diverse theories in far-fetched fields. From the very beginning Quantum theory was a baffle in its presentation because theoretical "elementariness" was appealing to many people involved in social sciences and this produced a number of hoaxes as it was easily implemented into literary analysis. Here Noosperic ideas lie in the approach of implementation one scientific paradigm to another field of research. Unlike ironic "Transgressing boundaries" by Alan Sakal (1996) we would like to

stress that this new approach does not necessarily mean a blind implementation of all physical and mathematical concepts into linguistic analysis but rather the possibility of diverse interpreting schemes applied to the text.

Quantum scientific apparatus introduced to poetics give linguists an opportunity to look for quantum energy sense elements. Thus it is possible to show the analogy existing between the functions of discrete quanta transmitting radial light energy and the elements of poetic texts transmitting aesthetic information. This paradigm is in accordance with Florensky's thesis of discontinuity, Bakhtin's dialogism and Zhyrmunsky's definition of poetics as depending on the reader's impression. The possibilities of the approach can be demonstrated by identifying sense quanta in Pushkin and Pasternak poems devoted to the figure of Russian tsar Peter where Quantum analysis allows constructing impressions of Stalin epoch. Here again a linguistic paradigm helps disclosing salient features of sense formation and sense interpretation using the idea of time meaning (impression) and relevance. Unlike a post-modernistic approach to the analysis of the text when the text was not integrity but a structural model this type of textual interpretation includes mentalistic reflections such as phnemosphere of Florensky (Arnold 1998).

Noospheric ideas are taken not mechanically but as rudiments belonging to another sphere that is Semiosphere as a sign space. It has certain limitation (otgranichennost) which are defined through the number of interpretive "filters" and irregularity (neravnomernost) that is the intrusion of heterogeneous texts. Open and esoteric approaches are studied in this approach. This semiosphere as a part of semiotics is a kind of linguistic programme that involves rhetoric studies and stylistics as interpretive structures based on intertextuality. Sustainable development from a linguistic view in this approach is carried out through sign-sense- interpretation modeling. (Lotman 1992).

3. One more linguistic paradigm connected with open dynamic system is connected with the idiomaticity of human interaction. Idiom structures that linguists studied from the nominalistic point of view can be presented as elements of dynamic systems. They are developing their semantic potentials through constant use in certain linguistic environment. These idiomatic or pragma-idiomatic expressions are discourse instruments, shifters, organizing speech on one hand and they are micro systems accumulating communicative situation models. Thus they make in language a social interactive system, open and dynamic. These small elements in this case may be looked at as minidiscourses

that cover the domain of ritual, communication through conversational formulas, prescriptive domain through imperatives, evaluation domain through replies and comments. On one hand they belong to the semiosphere as they are signes (indexes and symbols) reflecting human behavioral habits. On the other hand they are interactional units that should meet all demands of relevance when used in communication process. For example, in the process of Argumentation such expressions are used too, e.g. anyway, even (Snoek-Henkemmans 1995). Their open system is dependent on time and space of the functioning potentials that they have. Dialectics of this kind of phrases lies in the fluctuations they have within the language – being either used as communicative expressive devices or as nominative elements. Their sustainable development depends much on time and social environment and the existing language repertoire. The language seldom invents new elements but uses the old ones in a new environment. A linguistic paradigm should take into account discursive character of these structures.

Among semiotic systems social semiotics is of special importance for finding a special place for these structures and as semantic elements which are relevant to dialogical use that matters most for finding systemic features of these idioms. A means of understanding (interpretation) together with the mode of thinking provide a linguist with of expressive language. This type of the paradigm is based on interactively conditioned interpretive systems. Interpretation again comes as an energetic potential of an element that gives it possibility to take in the system a certain slot in a communicative frame. Frames may be defined in various ways according to social thesaurus that we have. Say, legal dialogue, feministic quarrel, political debate etc.

The process of acquiring the slot is connected with the procedures of interpretation. Procedural semantics allows defining know-how of communicative idioms showing sustainable development of this system. Thus we can proceed from the initial and conclusive meanings (*S init-S fin*). Procedural semantics as a method for description of dynamic system has several attractive features. For one thing, real time is included into analysis and then, literal meaning is not necessarily taken into account. This gives the opportunity to look at the language as a socially changing system. Next, recursive meaning is used as component of semantic description.

Finally, procedures allow using integral descriptions. of pragmatics and semantic elements. In conclusion it should be stressed that sustainable development in the discussed three paradigms as an approach to study open dynamic systems

presupposes involvement of integral procedural semantic interpretation.

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