ISSA Proceedings 2006 – The Invocation Of Time Within Argumentative Discourse In An Asynchronous Internet Environment

Interactive online environments often contain arguments. Research has been conducted on flaming behavior (Lee, 2005), but other linguistic elements of online conflict do not receive much attention. One such element is the invocation of time. While such a move makes use of a solitary concept, this strategy is one that has yet to be examined. It is useful to understand what takes place when people invoke time in order to have a better understanding of online argumentative discourse in general.

Several different areas of theoretical research provide ways of understanding possible ways to examine how people introduce and use time within online argumentative discourse. These include linguistics (Clark, 1992; Lakoff, 1987), chronemics (Bruneau, 1977, 1979; Laguerre, 2004), pragma-dialectics (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jacobs, & Jackson, 1993), and strategic maneuvering. The discursive inclusion of time may in fact prove to be fallacious, which requires a further theoretical understanding of fallacy theory.

To examine the invocation of time requires acknowledging that time can be considered a distinct linguistic category. Cognitive linguistics provides a way to examine categorization. Lakoff (1987) broke from previous theories regarding language and categorization by using examples to demonstrate that language categories are linked to human cognition. These examples led to a final dismissal of elements of classical categorization in exchange for a theory of categorization based on internal cognitive models. While Lakoff's work has limited applicability to argumentation theory as a whole, it does shed light on how certain words or phrases may connect logically to one another to create an overall argument. This cognitive linkage suggests that more difficult to follow metaphors and language

use can also be examined based on the way that concepts are categorized in order to understand the rationale behind the argument.

Chronemics was initially conceived as a way to examine time as a variable influencing human communication (Bruneau, 1977, 1979). He defined chronemics as "the study of human temporality as it relates to human communication" (Bruneau, 1977, p. 3), later expanding the definition to include the influence and interdependence between temporality and communication. In his examination of chronemics, he defined eight interdependent levels of time-experiencing. Despite these levels, Bruneau (1977) opened chronemics as an area for further research without creating any definitive way to categorize time.

Later Bruneau (1979) studied chronemics relative to organizational communication, further developing the understanding of time to include the relations between personal, group, and organizational time. Ballard and Seibold (2004) also worked in organizational communication, demonstrating that variation in three communication structures associated with organizations influenced the way people perceived time on numerous dimensions. The way work members perceived time was created through interaction and their intersubjective experience.

While this research focused on organizational communication, it is important to note that there may be competing ideas about time. The multiple dimensions of time lead to different reasons for people to invoke time. Other research has also demonstrated the possibility for competing conceptions of time to create conflict (Jaffe, 1975). This conflict demonstrates the cultural construction of time, which may influence how time is invoked and understood within argumentative discourse. Therefore, time contains several complexities that may influence its invocation.

The advent of the Internet also influenced the category of time. Laguerre (2004) examined the notion of the cyberweek and how it compared to our previous understanding of the civil week. The cyberweek is further broken down into the concepts of 'cybertiming' and 'flexitiming', which blur the boundaries between work and leisure time, the workweek and the weekend, and public and domestic spheres online. Using the idea of an interactional model, with the cyberweek being both part of the civil week and apart, a cyberweek is defined as "a set of times electronically produced through the intervention of a human agency – measured with no reference to the rotation of the moon or sun – all of which are

equivalent and contained in linear or non-linear sequences, or in both, in a flexible, cyclical temporal domain" (Laguerre, 2004, pp. 226-227). While it does not take temporal aspects like time zones into account, virtual time is still rooted in civil time. For example, responses across time zones may take a while because the receiver is sleeping while the sender works.

While Laguerre's (2004) focus on the cyberweek is more concerned with its connection to organizational matters, other researchers examined virtual time in a more general manner. Lee (2005) demonstrated that asynchronous written communication on the Internet might also affect the expression of hostility. McMillan and Hwang (2002) pointed out the importance of the time something takes to load on interactivity, an aspect that does not factor as much into other discussions on time. While the authors studied interactivity related to advertising, this could have an impact on how people invoke time in argumentative discourse in other places.

The realm of invocation occurs within an overarching interaction. Clark's (1992) arenas of language use provide a way to examine how this discursive move affects the interaction between the participants. In this pragmatic approach to the collaborative nature of language use, arenas of language use are considered structural arenas of actions. There are three properties of arenas of language use: participants, social processes, and collaborative actions. These properties demonstrate that there are multiple people directly involved to accomplish some social process working independently and together, which create the setting for language use. Therefore participants are responsible for managing both the content of the conversation as well as the process. There cannot be argumentation between arenas as there are in fields of argumentation (van Eemeren et al., 1993) because arenas include all of the participants within the discourse. However, from Clark's standpoint argumentation may be a possible arena.

Pragma-dialectical theory integrates descriptive and normative concerns regarding argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; van Eemeren et al., 1993). It uses the ideal of critical discussion as a basis on which to evaluate argumentative discourse. With a clearly defined ideal form of argumentation, argument reconstruction can then note the departures from the ideal (van Eemeren et al., 1993).

Fallacy is one form of departure from critical discussion. According to the pragma-dialectical approach, a fallacy is a discussion move that violates a

discussion rule, thus hindering the resolution of the disagreement (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992). However, this approach has been critiqued. Siegel and Biro (1997) were in favor of a normative theory of argumentation, but criticized the lack of an epistemic dimension they felt was central to understanding both argumentation in general and fallacy. Ikuenobe (2002) claimed the pragma-dialectical approach to fallacy did not take the different types and degrees of fallacies into question and ignored the issue of motivation. Hansen (2002) criticized van Eemeren and Grootendorst for referring to Hamblin's view of the dominant understanding of fallacy in previous literature as the standard definition of fallacy. He surveyed some of the major literature from Aristotle to Hamblin to demonstrate that Hamblin's often-quoted sentence is likely an exaggeration. The surveyed literature supported a more general definition of fallacy as a "segment that appears to be a better argument of its kind than it really is" (Hansen, 2002, p. 152).

Other research (Goodwin, 1998; Rühl, 1999; Cummings 2002, 2003; Ikuenobe, 2002) suggests there are difficulties inherent in defining and understanding fallacies on a general level. What is agreed on is that fallacies do take place and that they need to be studied. The pragma-dialectical mode has been criticized for ignoring the epistemic dimension and not distinguishing between different levels of fallacy, but it does provide a normative approach that is useful when looking more generally at fallacies.

Pragma-dialectics has expanded on its discussion of fallacy through the development of strategic maneuvering, which incorporates the rhetorical aims of the participants (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999). It demonstrates that participants want each stage of the resolution process to end in their favor, but does not mean that they will be unreasonable. According to van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2003), "persuasive aims need not necessarily be realized at the expense of achieving critical objectives" (p. 290). Fallacies then become "derailments of strategic maneuvering" (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2003). Strategic maneuvering may attempt to balance competing rhetorical and critical discussion demands, but that might not always occur. The imbalance that takes place when rhetorical concerns win out results in fallacious moves (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2003).

I became aware of a possible fallacious use of time in a study of online gossip (Greenfeld 2005). Participants appeared to occasionally disregard the affordances of asynchronous communication. This resulted in something akin to the following

interaction begun by dhjelm (2005):

(1)
6.1.1.1.1. dhjelm: 2005-11-03 12:21 am UTC
You wouldn't have as much time to talk on your cell phone, or play with the radio, or eat, or spill coffee on yourself if you had to keep shifting gears.

6.1.1.1.1.2. rabid_violence: 2005-11-04 07:01 am UTC
You act as if people still wouldn't do these activities een [sic] if they had a stick. Face it, they'd do all of them, while grinding their gears in.

Put the Kool-Aid down then get back to me.

6.1.1.1.1.2.1. dhjelm: 2005-11-04 04:40 pm UTC
It took you two days to think of that?

6.1.1.1.1.2.1.1. rabid_violence: 2005-11-04 09:01 pm UTC
This was my frist [sic] time checking debate all week.

From a pragma-dialectical perspective, this is a clear violation of Rule 1. The poster dhjelm attempts to prevent rabid_violence from putting forth or clarifying his position. What is interesting is that dhjelm attempts to close off discussion about an opposing opinion without addressing the topic. Although the asynchronous environment allows people to return to older information when it is convenient for them, such an attack operates on the assumption that other posters who responded were able to see the post close to the time the comment was written. This being the case, the case can be made that rabid_violence responded at a later date because he/she was thinking of a response, rather than coming across the comment closer to the time the comment was written. However, the time stamps indicate that it had not even taken the two days mentioned to respond. While posting in an asynchronous environment, people may assume that other posters visit the site more frequently than they actually do, leading to a fallacious argument based on the first poster's own habits.
This example raises questions about the way online argumentative discourse takes place and how time plays a role in this discourse. Examining the invocation of time provides a way to understand broader reasoning in online fora. Noting the occasions where time is used fallaciously serves as a way to understand the function and uses of fallacy. This leads to the following research question: how do people invoke time within online argumentative discourse?

Method

Grounded analysis served as the primary method for collecting and analyzing the data. Two online journal communities were selected from the Livejournal (LJ) site, one centered around debate and the other a leisure-oriented community for *Harry Potter* fans. Both communities were active, meaning that there were multiple posts each week and responses to these posts that appeared in the community. The posts were also publicly available so that anybody could view the entries and comments in the community.

There are a number of affordances (Hutchby, 2001) for community journals that affected posting. The journal communities allowed anybody to join, and members could then post a topic-related entry to the community journal. Personal journal owners had the option of watching the community or selecting whether community posts would appear in their "friends list" view. Respondents could respond to the initial post or to other comments within the post. The posts were threaded based on to whom the response was given and in chronological order for each thread or subthread. Those who had a livejournal name could also choose to have comments posted in response to anything they wrote emailed to them. Otherwise a poster would have to keep track of the entry itself to see whether somebody responded to a comment.

The two journal communities were studied for a period of two months, starting in November 2005 and ending before the New Year. All instances where posters invoked time in an online disagreement were collected. Most examples came from the debate community, while very few took place in the leisure community. Examples where time served as the basis of the disagreement were discarded. Examples where time usage referred to an instance rather than the passage of time were also discarded. The remaining examples served as the basis for the development of categories of time usage. As a result of the threading that took place in the communities, comments were identified according to their place within the overall tree. A new number was added for each indentation within the thread. Finally, the categories were examined to see if there were any fallacious uses of time according to the pragma-dialectical model.

Results

Fifteen basic categories for time usage were discovered. They include history, information, time comparison, the current state, conditionals, projections, suspension of time, appropriate time, demonstration of like/dislike, humor/sarcasm, human capabilities, attacks, expertise, facesaving, and

references to an individual poster's time. All of these categories are non-exclusive. Posts referencing time often contain multiple categories within one post. Table 1 lists examples for each category.

The first three categories, history, information and time comparison, are highly similar. Often history is invoked in order to provide information. Statistics are another form of information. It is possible to refer to the past for other purposes, just as one can refer to current events to provide information. For example, time comparisons consist primarily of past/present comparisons. Linked to both past/present comparisons and history are comments about past experiences. These experiences often demonstrate stability or change in a poster's views. Using time to describe history allows posters to demonstrate continuity/discontinuity and to place events in the past, allowing for future movement.

While references to the past are easily found, posters also refer to current, possible future, future, and suspended times. The current state applies to both posters (as in Table 1) and events. The conditional category operates in a formulaic way that can be described as "when x, then y." Similarly projections refer to a possible future, but are not dependent on another action taking place first. Hypothetical situations that mention time are moments where time is suspended.

The next two categories occur both separately and together. Appropriate time can be linked to like/dislike. However, appropriate time within argumentative discourse also refers to when something should occur. The time link to like/dislike is primarily associated with media such as television shows and films.

Humor and sarcasm primarily appear in conjunction with another category. Nevertheless, there is a construction that stands on its own. The example for this category in Table 1 resembles the face-to-face joke that begins with "back in my day…". This demonstrates that not all time references are meant to be taken seriously, even within argumentative discourse.

Human capabilities and attacks are also linked. The issue of what people are capable of doing at the same moment can be used to attack another position. In general, attacks refer to both attacking another position and attacking another poster. Most attacks including a time reference relate to the position rather than a poster.

Expertise can be linked either to the person posting a comment or another poster. There are three main uses of expertise and time: to demonstrate time spent,

admit to lack of expertise, and question someone else's expertise. Most of these are tied to the amount of time spent in a particular community.

The final two categories also relate to individual posters. Facesaving refers to the actions individual posters take to minimize potential argument about a comment. It often occurs in conjunction with other moves, not all of which invoke time. Finally, reference to an individual poster's time applies to the inclusion of what time it is offline for a particular poster.

As shown through the smaller categories, the majority of time references appear as a combination of different categories. Take the following piece of a quarrel between gerbilsage and chrissie (gerbilsage, 2005):

(2)

2.1.1.1.2.1.1.1.1. gerbilsage: 2005-11-08 10:55 am UTC

You'll get over me and meet somebody of your own kind. They'll probably live under a bridge and eat slime just like you.

– M.

2.1.1.1.2.1.1.1.1.1. chrissie: 2005-11-08 10:58 am UTC

That would have been a good one were I thirteen. You've insulted me much more efficiently in the past. I know you can do better.

2.1.1.1.2.1.1.1.1.1.1. gerbilsage: 2005-11-08 11:00 am UTC

You overestimate me. I'm not a troll like you. I'm just a random lad who uses LJ for procrastination. Unlike you, I don't feel the need to milk as many comments as possible out of people by making inane comments designed solely to provoke a reaction.

– M.

While this argument has clearly departed from critical discussion, the two posters are continuing to debate whether or not chrissie can be considered an Internet troll. Chrissie invokes time in the categories of both appropriate time and time comparison to suggest that gerbilsage has not insulted her enough. If her behavior does match the description of gerbilsage's following comment, then it serves to continue the argument, although not in the way chrissie appears to want.

Within the categories, there are both fallacious and non-fallacious instances according to the pragma-dialectical model. The attack category is one place that

demonstrates both proper and fallacious uses of time. For example, there is the following attack on theloudcafe's (2005) attempt to end an argument:

(3)
2.1.2.2.1.1. theloudcafe: 2005-11-07 05:35 am UTC
I also want to make it clear that *stop goes for EVERYONE.*

I don't care if you hate Emma with every fiber of your being or love her with all your heart –

Insults are insults, and I don't want them traded in my thread. [sic]

2.1.2.2.1.1.1. bunney: 2005-11-07 05:40 am UTC
The only person who's been insulted here is Emma and I don't think she's reading.

2.1.2.2.1.1.1.1. theloudcafe: 2005-11-07 05:46 am UTC
OK, seriously. Don't act like you guys haven't been 'debating heatedly' or WHATEVER you want to call it. I'm not saying the comment should have been made, but that doesn't mean others should have either. If it kills you that they really do not like the look of Emma's breasts — please please please don't use my thread as an excuse to get offensive. You can say I'm being power abusive or whatever, I don't care. Drama is just not for me. Or the threads that I hold.

2.1.2.2.1.1.1.1.1. bunney: 2005-11-07 05:59 am UTC
When was I being offensive? Besides, this is a community and these sorts of things crop up on communities. You can always delete the thread if you don't want to read it.

Furthermore, are you aware that you hotlinked every single one of those pictures and hotlinking is so internet illegal it's not even funny?

2.1.2.2.1.1.1.1.1. theloudcafe: 2005-11-07 06:06 am UTC
Oh my god, what do you have against respecting my rules? Everyone else commented saying that they would drop it. You however keep it up. Why are you posting in a thread, when you don't even RESPECT the maker of the thread?! Seriously, you want to know how your being offensive? Read your posts.

And my hotlinking has nothing to do with this. Why do you insist on bringing it up? You bring up an arguement about how I'm hotlinking — and then you ask how

you're being offensive?

Seriously. I want you to drop it. It's midnight, and I want to go to sleep. All I'm asking of you is to go some place else to argue...

Bunney's response attacks the use of the word 'offensive' in the preceding post. This requires theloudcafe to further defend her standpoint that posters, and bunney in particular, were being offensive. It is a clear demonstration of Rule 3 as bunney's attack remains focused on theloudcafe's previous comments. Since this develops into a multiple, mixed dispute, the rest of bunney's post provides an alternative before shifting into another standpoint altogether. The argument concludes on theloudcafe's end with a fallacious use of individual time.

The fallacious attack is more easily spotted in attacks on another poster. For example, mrexcess (2005) responds to a post in the community that results in the following quarrel:

(4)
2. mrexcess: 2005-11-02 04:54 pm UTC
Such an independent libertarian you are! It's not at all like you just swallow and repeat whatever the current brand of neocon Kool-Aid every BushBut in the country is presently dishing out in unison. Not-at-all!

And your obvious, seething partisan hatred for "liberals", man, how could anyone ever have confused you with yet another BushBot?

These internet folks are just wacky, I tells ya! Wacky!

2.1. whip_lash: 2005-11-02 05:01 pm UTC
It talks, but nothing meaningful comes out.

Yes, I have an obvious, seething hatred for liberals. And social conservatives. And dogmatic libertarians. And socialists. And morons. Wacky!

2.1.1. mrexcess: 2005-11-02 05:31 pm UTC
Sorry I was still too busy laughing at your last Plamegate post (the one where you spend several paragraphs uncomfortably zipping and dodging around the central issue of the case) to include any fresh content here.

2.1.1.1. whip_lash: 2005-11-02 05:50 pm

What, not that I expect this to be very enlightening, do you propose to be the central issue of the case?

This humorous attack on whip_lash's initial post about Valerie Plame compares his post against anti-war comments to current Bush supporters' talk on the same issue despite the poster's previous claim to be a member of a different party. What makes this comment fallacious is that it violates Rule 3 by distorting whip_lash's standpoint into one associated with the Republican Party, resulting in oversimplification and exaggeration. The second comment by mrexcess is also fallacious because he attacks whip_lash, yet never responds to the challenge to support his standpoint that whip_lash missed the central issue of the case.

Discussion
As demonstrated by these examples, the invocation of time can take place in relation to the content of the argument or to manage the overall discussion. This is similar to Clark's (1992) discussion of collaborative actions, where participants are responsible for coordinating both content and process. That time is used for both demonstrates the practical problem of managing interaction in everyday discourse, which can be problematic for the pragma-dialectical model as it relies on having the time for a critical discussion to take place.

There are also a few regular conditions where time usage appears in argumentative discourse. Most occur in posts regarding current events, while others appear in posts/comments that restate older information, posts/comments about television shows and films and when it is late at night for a particular poster. Posts about current events where time invocation occurs typically have ties to other events that have occurred previously or are similar to something that may be done. The restating of older information or something already provided by another poster leads to sanction as what is restated is considered common ground for the participants. This also reflects the collaborative actions of participants (Clark, 1992). Television shows and film discussions that relate to time refer primarily to the length of the film/show rather than the content. Finally, the lateness of the hour for an individual poster only emerges through self-disclosure. One would think that the asynchronous environment of the online communities would provide a place for critical discussion to take place as it removes the constraint of available time. However, some of the fallacious uses of time demonstrate that people interact within argumentative discourse online as though it is real-time interaction. Examples (1) and (3) show how this reasoning emerges

in online discourse.

Strategic maneuvering provides a way to explain the way time is invoked in online discourse. All three levels of strategic maneuvering, topical potential, auditorial demand and presentational devices (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, 2001), fit the categories of time invocation mentioned previously. Topical potential links to history, information, time comparison, current state, conditional, projection, suspension of time, appropriate time, and human capabilities. Auditorial demand is more difficult as there can be time invocation tailored to the audience, but in a way that is not directly tied to the invocation of time. For example, living4theblue's (2005) comment, "I hope this doesn't come off as bitchy, but I posted this a few days ago." It clearly is presented in a strategic way to minimize conflict and produce a particular response, but the strategy lies in the first part of the sentence while the time invocation remains separate. Humor/sarcasm can be considered another aspect of auditorial demand in that it often contains the type of humor that is associated with the community. It also can be a presentational device. In fact, the presentational device level can be applied to most of the categories, depending on how time is being invoked.

Examples (1) and (3) demonstrate how a desire to end discourse results in a fallacious move. Example (4) also demonstrates that an attack can become fallacious if proof is not provided or the attack distorts what was previously presented. In all of these cases the desire to win the argument is not in balance with the aims of critical discussion, resulting in fallacy. Another way to think of these competing aims is as dialectical shifts (Walton, 2000b; van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2003). The application of formal dialogue to actual dialogue as a form of comparison is similar to the comparison in the pragma-dialectical model of actual discourse to critical discussion.

While fallacy theory has been criticized for being *ad hoc* (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2003), the fallacious examples demonstrate that fallacy emerges from the discourse. The interaction between posters leads to the fallacy. This appears most clearly in example (3), where theloudcafe continues to attempt to end debate, which culminates in a fallacious invocation of time.

The affordances of the online journal communities also may have ties to the fallacious use of time. For example, the fallacious use of time in example (1) may have resulted from dhjelm receiving an email notifying him of rabid_violence's comment in response to him rather than his going back to the community entry to

discover the comment. It is possible that the email would have been more likely to prompt a response questioning the timing of the response than had dhjelm returned to the post's comments and found it. Unfortunately, there is no way to determine how posters learned of other posters commenting to them from the text itself. Therefore, further research into affordances and whether people use all available affordances may provide a better understanding of how people consider time within online environments.

In addition, the overall concept of time still requires further examination. The categories here reflect the usage of time more than the metaphors and understandings of time, which would relate to Lakoff's (1987) work. Further investigation into the ways time is invoked in these categories may demonstrate that some metaphors are predominant in certain categories. The fallacious moves that result when posters ignore the affordances of asynchronous communication available in the community demonstrate that virtual time is firmly rooted in offline time for posters, supporting Laguerre's (2004) description of virtual and civil time. All of these have an impact of our understanding of time.

Interestingly, all the examples except for the first involve debates that have a quick turn-around between comments. The longest pause takes place in example (4), where almost half an hour takes place between two of the comments. Self-selection may lead to this result, as posters may not consider it worth debating after a certain period of time has passed between when the comment initially was posted and when somebody else who wants to respond sees it. A possible link may be to the type of argumentative discourse that appears in Internet chat rooms where the affordances of chat rooms work against critical discussion (Weger & Aakhus, 2003). Since journal communities developed after chat rooms, journal users may have started in chat rooms and operated based on the affordances they were used to rather than adapting to the affordances of the journal system. Other precursors to journal communities are Usenet and electronic bulletin boards. Their affordances may link more closely to LJ community affordances.

There are a number of limitations to this study. First, only two communities were studied for two months so more rarer categories may not have been discovered. Second, the only asynchronous environment studied was the online journal community and there are other asynchronous Internet environments. Third, the debate-centered community was largely political and the leisure community tied to one popular film/book series so there may be other uses that occur in different

types of communities. Finally, it operates on the assumption that time is used differently in general from the way it is invoked in argumentative discourse. Nevertheless, this study opens up several avenues for future research. There is plenty of room to further examine the use of time in argumentation, both on and off the Internet. A more in-depth understanding of the categories proposed here may lead to further discoveries of the way people invoke time in argumentative discourse. The fact that fallacious time use can demonstrate a dismissal of asynchronous communication affordances suggests that further research not only on the affordances of a particular environment but also the affordances employed by users in argumentative discourse might help explain the way arguments take place online. The links between time and the different levels of strategic maneuvering also require further investigation to see how invoking time relates to both rhetorical strategy and critical discussion. All of these provide a deeper understanding of broader aspects of online argumentation and can contribute to a greater knowledge of fallacy.

The asynchronous Internet environment of online journal communities contains argumentative discourse that includes the invocation of time. This invocation has ties to linguistics (Lakoff, 1987; Clark, 1992) as well as strategic maneuvering (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 1999, 2001, 2003) and fallacy (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 1992; van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2003). Some posters even ignore the affordances of the asynchronous environment within argumentative discourse to result in a fallacious move based on the real time of the poster. This move has broader implications for the study of online argumentative discourse. Further research will help us understand the way in which time emerges into online arguments and how it has implications for the way we examine affordances, strategic maneuvering and fallacy.

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