

ISSA Proceedings 2006 - The Role Of A Third Party In Argumentative Discourse



1. *The Character of "audience" in argumentative discourse*

The role of the audience in argumentation has been studied since the time of Aristotle, when he discussed "the various types of human character in relation to the emotions and moral states, to the several periods of life and the varieties of fortune" (Aristotle, Book II, pp. 131-32). The very division of modes of persuasion into ethos, pathos and logos implied that the arguments had to be fashioned in such a way that they would appeal to the audience to be persuaded. According to Ede (1984), Aristotle's insights concerning persuasion and the behaviour of people in groups effectively swayed ensuing research on audience analysis in speech communication.

The term "audience" means different things to different scholars. According to Park (1982), an "audience" is the person or group of people to whom we try to adapt our speech or our writing. Writers aim at an audience and assess, define, internalize, construe, represent, imagine, characterize, invent, and evoke it (1982: 248). According to Park, all these verbs tell us that the audience can play different roles, depending on the situation. For Bitzer (1968) an "audience" is a defined presence outside the discourse with certain beliefs, attitudes, and relationships to the speaker or writer and to the situation that require the discourse to have certain characteristics in response. According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), an "audience" is defined "*as the ensemble of those whom the speaker wishes to influence by his argumentation*" (p.19).

Many scholars of various disciplines like Bakhtin (1986), Bitzer (1968), and Burke (1950) all pointed to the fact that discourses are always addressed to an audience. This idea that argumentation is always addressed to an audience is crucial to the rhetorical approach of the argumentation theorists Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca who claimed that all argumentation must be planned in relation to an audience: "A speech must be heard, as a book must be read" (p.40).

In order to determine what audience a discourse is directed at, one need to establish who the persons the speaker wishes to influence are: to whom is the

claim presented? Is this particular group restricted to those who listen to the arguer's speech or to those who read the argument? The answer to these questions varies from situation to situation. In some cases, a protagonist prepares an argument only for a group of persons who will actually be present during the presentation of his argument. This group of persons may then be the only one to whom the arguer directs the argument. In other cases, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca claim, the audience is more a *mental* image of the speaker than a group of people who are physically present to listen to a speech. It is important to bear in mind that the picture that speakers (or writers) have formed of their audience is always a construction of their own making.

It is thus possible to compose an argument for a wider group of persons than those physically present. A politician may, for instance, present a speech in a certain place but hope and expect that the media will report it more widely. In this case, the audience includes but is not confined to the members of this audience that is present during the speech. Sometimes a protagonist composes an argument and presents it to a particular group of people, but intends the argument to affect a section of that group only. In all these cases, the audience is not the person or group that actually hears or reads the argument, but consists of those persons for whom the argument is meant. **[i]**

From this illustration, therefore, we may infer that the term "audience" refers not just to the intended or actual listeners or readers of a discourse, but to all those whose image, ideas, or actions influence a speaker or writer during the process of composition (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). Here we are talking about a set of implied or evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, which may or may not fit with the qualities of actual readers or listeners. Ede and Lunsford (1984) call speeches for the two types of audience as "audience addressed" (physically present), and "audience invoked" (intended). Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) recognize something similar when they talk about the "official antagonist and the listeners or readers who are the real target group" (p. 99). According to these authors, we have an audience that is directly addressed, or the actual audience, and an audience that is appealed to, or the intended audience.

In short, an argument is not always addressing one, single audience. Different understandings of an argument may address various audiences. According to Crosswhite (1996), "any argument must affect one or more audiences resulting in new ways of understanding and experiencing" (p.139). For Crosswhite, "influences run in all directions" (p.140). Recognizing the audience not only as a

group of people who are physically addressed, but also as a group of people who are the real target group beyond those who are physically present listening or reading a particular speech or text, is of paramount importance for the analyst because of problems that might arise in reconstructing a particular argumentative discourse.

2. The role of a "third party" in an argumentative discourse

The speaker or writer of argumentative texts, as indicated earlier, often tries to reach simultaneously at different groups. Scholars like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969), David (2003) and Myers (1999) use the term "composite audience" to refer to this phenomenon. Others like Kengelhart (2004) and Ede (1984) talk about a "heterogeneous audience," whereas Benoit and D'Agostine (1994) talk about a "multiple audience." Finally, authors like Leff (2004), Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999), Aakhus (2003); Weger & Aakhus (2002); Sandvik (1997); Atkin & Richardson (2003) and Bonevac (2003) refer to this audience as "third party" audience. Despite the differences in terminology, these concepts refer to the same thing: the situation where a speaker or writer is supposed to reach different groups inside an audience with different beliefs and values.

For Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, for example, a speaker or writer quite often must persuade a "composite audience," comprising people differing in character, loyalties, and functions (1969: 21). Because members of a composite audience may hold a variety of different values or at least may arrange their values differently, the speaker should use a multiplicity of arguments to gain its adherence:

an orator does not have to be confronted with several organized factions to think of the composite nature of his audience. He is justified in visualizing each one of his listeners as simultaneously belonging to a number of disparate groups. Even when an orator stands before only a few auditors, or indeed, before a single auditor, it is possible that he will not be quite sure what arguments will appear most convincing to his audience. In such a case, he will, by a kind of fiction, insert his audience into a series of different audiences. (1969: 22)

According to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, this picture of a "composite audience" is constructed by the speaker: "the audience, as visualized by one undertaking to argue, is always a more or less systematized construction" (19). This audience is something unreal, a mental construct, a creation of the speaker. In short, when addressing different groups in an audience that has different

beliefs and values, the speaker or writer needs to present different arguments in order to reach at all these different groups.

In this paper, however, I am going to use the concept of “third party” audience in order to illuminate its role in the argumentative discourse. But before we continue any further, it is important to clarify that my use of the “third party” audience differs significantly from its use by other scholars mentioned above. For me, the use of this type of audience does not refer reaching out simultaneously at different groups, but it refers at reaching out a clear defined audience. In other words, the “third party” audience refers at a concrete audience, with concrete values and beliefs that are known to both the protagonist and the antagonist. We can refer to this type of audience as the “unofficial” antagonist that is embedded inside the interlocutor’s discussion forming a kind of a triangle that need to be taken together when evaluating a discussion.

This kind of narrowing down the “third party” audience can be of a significant help in understanding the role that this party might have with regard to those types of discourses that are in “deep disagreement.” It is my believe that those discourses that are in “deep disagreement,” at least some of them, might be treated as normal argumentative discussions aiming the resolution of a difference of opinion, although at first level seem like being too far from this aim. In such types of discussions, the role of “third party” audience can be of tremendous help in reconstructing the discourse as aiming the resolution of a difference of opinion.

3. The role of “deep disagreement” in argumentative discourse

It is believed that parties in a discussion generally share a great many beliefs and a great many preferences (Fogelin, 1985). They share a detailed knowledge of many common issues. Fogelin maintains that it is reasonable to expect people to hold consistent beliefs and to act on them, and at the same time to hold and to act on consistent beliefs ourselves. An important characteristic of these shared beliefs and preferences, argues Fogelin, is that they remain in the background, unmentioned. They guide the discussion, but they are not the subject of it. In short, maintains Fogelin, for an argumentative exchange to be “normal” there have to exist shared procedures for resolving disagreements.

I think it is fair to say that generally speaking discourse is directed at mutual understanding. At a lower level, this means understanding the real issues that divide you from your interlocutor. At a higher level, this means coming to a shared understanding. But if arguments presuppose this rich background of

agreement, asks Fogelin, how does disagreement even arise, and what job is left for argument to do? By the use of rhetorical figure of *hypophora*, Fogelin asks and then gives an answer to these questions. According to Fogelin, one obvious answer is that people involved in an argumentative exchange often have an interest in the way the argument is resolved. It is not that people in an argumentative exchange do not understand a possible disagreement that might arise; they understand it pretty well, but they behave in the way they do because of possible interests they might have in resolving the argument in their own favor. In short, intentionally or unintentionally, disagreement is present in our every day discussions despite the fact that engaging in an argumentative exchange presupposes a background of shared commitments.

If, however, there is no agreement on how certain facts can be tested between the parties, then it is waste of time to talk to each other. The challenge to something obvious would be so bizarre that we would dismiss it rather than attempting to answer it. In conflict situations, for example, things that would normally be taken for granted can suddenly become controversial. There are, for example, cases where parties to a conflict continue challenging each other's positions regardless of the arguments presented by each other. There are many more conflicts concerning issues like positive discrimination, abortion, capital punishment, "witnessing and heckling," **[ii]** that prevent the discussion from developing any further because each party claims to have strong arguments for the position that they hold and not prepared to make any kind of concession to the other party. **[iii]**

According to Fogelin (1985), an argumentative exchange is reasonable (he calls it "normal"), when it takes place within a context of broadly shared beliefs and preferences. There must exist joint procedures for resolving disagreements. Fogelin raises the question of what happens to arguments when the context is neither normal nor nearly normal. According to Fogelin, an argumentative exchange is normal "when it takes place within a context of broadly shared beliefs and preferences... there must exist shared procedures for resolving disagreements" (Fogelin, 1985: p. 6). If the argumentative exchange does not fulfil this condition of "broadly shared beliefs and preferences," asserts Fogelin, the argument becomes impossible. According to Fogelin, everything becomes pointless because argumentative exchange appeals to something that does not exist: no shared background beliefs or preferences. Fogelin refers to this situation as one of "deep disagreement."

Although it is not completely clear what Fogelin meant by “deep disagreement,” he did state clearly what is not included in this notion. Fogelin recognizes that a disagreement can be intense without being deep, and it can be irresolvable without being deep (1985: p. 8). Therefore, “parties may be unbiased, free of prejudice, consistent, coherent, precise, and rigorous, yet still disagree with each other” (p. 8). Deep disagreements, argues Fogelin, persist even when normal criticisms have been answered. They are immune to appeals to facts. According to Fogelin, we get a deep disagreement when the argument is generated by a clash of framework propositions (p. 8). They are disagreements about fundamental principles. In short, deep disagreements are ones in which the “disputing parties lack a ‘normal’ background context of shared standards and beliefs, and are instead confronted with a collision of competing sets of belief, incapable of being disentangled through rational argumentation” (Adams, 2005: p. 66). They are disagreements in which none of the opposing parties is able to advance reasons as part of an argument that would induce their opponent to accept their position. But if “deep disagreements” can arise, what rational procedures can be used for their resolution? Fogelin made some radical and shocking claims when he stated that there is nothing that we can do to resolve such disagreements. There is no way out of adjudicating a clash of this kind, maintained Fogelin, because the argument cannot play any role in resolving the disagreement because there is no shared background of beliefs and preferences. According to Fogelin, we can insist that not every deep disagreement is deep, that even with deep disagreements, people can argue well or badly. In the end, however, we should tell the truth: there are disagreements, sometimes on important issues, which by their nature, are not subject to rational resolution (Fogelin, 1985, p. 11).

The same thing is maintained by Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs (1993), who claim that such types of disagreements pose an empirical challenge to their position because participants have simply not entered into discussion with a resolution-minded attitude (1993: 171). The existence of deep disagreements, claim Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs, sets a limit in principle on the problem solving validity of any procedural conception of argumentative reality (p. 171). According to these authors, the participants who are involved in such disagreements come to the discussion with interests they treat as privileged and as beyond debate. In such types of disagreements, both parties claim that the other is not an appropriate interlocutor. The misengagement is so great that each side sees it as evidence that the other side fails to meet basic requirements of

rationality (Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, and Jacobs (1993: 171-2). Where differences are so immense that parties cannot even engage in procedures to negotiate procedures, argumentation cannot really get started (p. 172).

In order to understand clearly Fogelin's position, I will make a concession by agreeing with him, as do many other authors, that discourses of deep disagreement nature do exist, albeit rare. However, just because an audience is not rational, it is not the case that we cannot argue with it. Just because two parties have nothing in common with regard to a certain problem, does not mean that we should ignore that particular discourse just because it is far away from resolving the disagreement at issue. We can still deal with such type of a discourse and pinpoint the defects of that particular discourse. At the same time, we can do yet another thing by going beyond the superficial level of the discourse trying to find the adequate picture of the audience. In the first level it might be true to find the discourse engaged in deep disagreement, but this discourse, in the second level, might not merely be so because it applies to different situations or different audiences (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969: 477). If this is the case then, I argue that a discourse that has been identified as being engaged in deep disagreement, at the first level, can be resolved by introducing the concept of "third party," at the second level.

I hope that by now it is clear that an inadequate picture of the audience, resulting from either ignorance or an unforeseen set of circumstances, can have unfortunate results both for the discourse itself and for the analyst as well. Having in mind that it often happens that a public speaker must persuade a composite audience, accepting people differing in character, loyalties, and functions, the analyst might find it hard to identify the "real" audience that the speaker is trying to reach. This in turn might pose problems for the discourse itself because it might find itself being engaged precisely in a deep disagreement. In such a situation, I argue, it is necessary to introduce the concept of "third party" as a solution to such types of disagreement. **[iv]** If we do otherwise, not only that the analysts will find themselves disagreeing with each other with regard to deep disagreement, but also they would not do justice to the reconstruction and the analysis of the discourse, and this would immediately pose problems for the evaluation as well.

My point of departure is that it is not very likely that human beings willingly enter into a "deep disagreement." Interlocutors will probably not know in advance that they will be locked into an intractable disagreement and that they will continue to

stick to their position no matter what. I believe that interlocutors often seem to be capable of behaving, more or less, according to the ideal conditions presupposed by the critical discussion model of pragma-dialectical approach. Therefore, the analyst is obliged to look more deeply into discourses that are characterized as being in deep disagreement because of the fact that interlocutors are capable of having a “normal” argumentative exchange. The reason why we are nonetheless faced with such discourses that are engaged in deep disagreement can be answered by the fact that this is happening at the first level of engagement, as mentioned earlier, but this is not so at the second level. In short, I believe that discourses that are in “deep disagreement,” at least some of them, can be treated as discourses that attempt resolution of difference of opinion, if we introduce the concept of “third party” audience.

NOTES

[i] Of course, we cannot read the mind of the speaker or the writer in order to see what are his or her intentions, but I will talk later about finding out the ways how to recognize who the “intended” audience is.

[ii] “Witnessing and heckling” case is an interesting example of such situations. See more Van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs, 1993.

[iii] There are some authors like Lugg (1992), Adam (2005) and Feldman (2005) who disagree with Fogelin with regard to issues like abortion and positive discrimination calling them as issues being in a state of deep disagreement. For them, these issues are reasonable discussions although they have been debated for ages without any positive solution.

[iv] The concept of “third party” is offered only as a solution to my case study, as it is going to be seen in the following chapters. I am not that sure whether this would function for other cases of deep disagreement because it is possible that in such cases we have a “fourth,” “fifth,” or even multiple “parties.”

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