

XISSA Proceedings 2006 - Russian Political Talk Show: Glamour Of Argumentative Discussion - A Case Study



Summary

In this paper [i], I present an argumentation analysis of a popular Russian political talk show “K barrieru” (hereafter referred to as “KB!”), a duel of words that could be translated something like “To the Wall”. I argue that the type of the discussion plays an important role in the analysis of argumentation. The task of describing the type of discussion goes beyond describing the actual interaction. In order to reveal fallacies and tricks one should take into account the pragmatic framework of the discussion: the preliminary rules, the responsibility rules, the rules of the Gricean principle and the type of the discussion. The latter involves the initial situation, the goal of the discussion and the participants` goals. I argue that we can employ the Gricean principle to identify the type of discussion.

Key words: argumentation, discussion, fallacies, pragma-dialectics, pragmatic rules, Gricean principle of cooperation.

One of the most usual rational ways to surmount disagreements is to discuss them. Discussion opens opportunity for expressing opinions as well as for arguing in favor or against them. Arriving at a reasonable solution that would be satisfactory to all parties is commonly considered to be the most successful result of a discussion. Sometimes it is enough that not all but at least most parties share the decision. Obviously, not all discussions are successful as far as reaching an agreed opinion is concerned.

Some arguers do not seek such a resolution and therefore such discussions are not argumentative. A discussion is argumentative if for every discussant to persuade the other party is the ultimate goal. According to the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, this condition functions as pragmatic constitutive system of rules; this consists of two kinds of rules: preliminary and responsibility

rules.

The preliminary rule says that a disputant should (P1) have a viewpoint and let her audience know that she has it and (P2) consider the latter to disagree with the expressed viewpoint. At the same time, the disputant expects (P3) that the audience that she addresses is ready to accept the arguments in favor of the viewpoint both in principle as an action aiming at persuasion and essentially as possibly true propositions.

J.R. Searle was the first to introduce the responsibility rule, which he originally referred to as the sincerity condition (Searle J.R. et al. 1980, p. 27 and ff). It provides the basis of persuasive power for the whole act of argumentation and says that the speaker (R1) has to be sincere in adhering to her viewpoint and to the arguments meant to support it and (R2) should believe that the arguments contribute to the success of the whole process of argumentation (Eemeren, Frans, van, Grootendorst R., 1994, p. 52-56).

In cases when at least one party does not meet the whole or part of the condition, the discussion bears somewhat different character. It may happen that no party meets the abovementioned rules but still there is a discussion. For instance, it happens in an information-seeking discussion in which parties just exchange their views and neither intends to argue them. Apparently, such a brainstorming discussion is non-argumentative.

D. Walton and E.C.N. Krabbe provide an extensive classification of discussions using the initial situation, main goals and discussants' aims as the criteria of identifying discussion types (D.N. Walton, E.C.W. Krabbe, 1966, p. 66). According to them, there are seven types of discussions: persuasion, negotiation, inquiry, deliberation, information-seeking, eristic and mixed discussions.

The first six types of discussion are monotonous in their character, which means that during the discussion both its type and the discussants' goals remain unchanged. Some real life discussions are obviously non-monotonous in the sense that any one or all the parameters can vary during the dialogue. This non-monotonous type of discussion is referred to as a mixed discussion. Most real life discussions are of that type.

Moreover, it may well happen that the discussants' aims are not the same but asymmetric, i.e., the participants pursue different goals at different stages of the discussion depending on the type of the discussion and on their opponent's position, which may shift as well.

Sometimes all the parties fulfill the preliminary rule and the rule of responsibility, but the direction of this fulfillment depends on the addressee. For instance, in the framework of election campaign debates among politicians, none of them normally is going to persuade her opponent or be persuaded by them. Instead, all of them do their best in arguing against each other in order to influence the audience watching the debates and all the discussants aim at is getting votes. It means that the rules should apply only to the addressee whom a disputant seeks to persuade.

It may well happen that the vectors of the fulfillment of the rules in a discussion are directed asymmetrically so that in a three-party discussion two disputants, while arguing against each other, try to win the approval of the third party, which may not be actively involved in the dispute at all. In such a triangle-like argumentative discussion, the passive participant is called a rational judge; she is never expected to provide any arguments in favor of her position or against someone else's view.

In court, for instance, the jury plays the role of a rational judge, for it is the jury against which the prosecutor and the barrister are expected to prove their case and it is the jury's approval or disapproval that signals the disputants' success. However, nobody asks the jury to explain the motives for their decision while the judge is obliged to justify her decision. In other words, persuasion is directed from the prosecutor and the barrister (barristers) to the judge, the jury and the audience and not from prosecutor to the barrister (barristers) or from one barrister to another. Therefore, argumentative activities in a court setting are asymmetric. The fulfillment of the pragmatic rules is structured accordingly. Argumentation in court involves an institutional framework that eliminates the need to determine whether the parties are observing the rules or not.

As we have seen, in theory the two types of pragmatic rules are meant to work as a necessary condition for detecting the type of discussion. The only problem is that it is often quite hard to determine a party's motives. When analyzing verbal communication, one has just words that involve arguments and certain rhetorical devices such as making a pause or coughing. In addition to the abovementioned pragmatic rules Grice developed what he referred to as Cooperative Principle Postulates. Grice thought that in verbal communications most people omit parts of what they were going to say (G.P. Grice, 1985, p. 66). It concerns, of course, shared information, i.e., basic legal and moral principles, conventions and

generally accepted facts.

Sometimes people misuse language by widening or narrowing a conventional expression meaning. Grice referred to such phenomena as conversational implicatures. According to him, the conversational implicature is a fundamental mode of verbal communication. When a conversational implicature is used, the conventional meaning of an expression is transformed into a new meaning, which lies beyond the wide or narrow meaning of the expression to be found in the dictionary. To decipher a conversational implicature the analyst needs to take into account background information, body language and the communication setting. Grice's idea is that in many cases conversational implicature signals a violation of the Cooperation Principle. According to some post-Gricean studies (Walton Douglas, 1996, p.254 and ff)**[ii]**, verbal ambiguities, which are conversational implicatures of a certain type, also indicate a violation of the principle.

Grice's Cooperation Principle consists of four postulates (quantity, quality, relation, manner) that determine the relation between the proponent and her audience, the relation between the proponent and the content of the arguments, the relation between the proponent and the topic of discussion, and finally the relation between the content and the manner of expression. The persuasive power of arguments depends not only on their meaning or on the argumentation schemes, but also on the means of expression and the proponent's attitude to the discussion as whole. It is the speakers' verbal and emotional behavior during the discussion rather than the semantics of their argumentation that indicate the speakers' real positions. A speaker may pursue goals in the discussion that differ from her original goals, e.g. persuasion. By doing that she changes the type of discussion. To achieve, for instance, self-promotion, and they may use an ad hominem attack but it should not necessarily be considered a fallacious move but as an indicator that a shift of the type of discussion has occurred. My suggestion is that in controversial cases we should first look for implicit premises and conversational implicatures instead of suspecting a fallacy or a violation of the Cooperation Principle. This does not mean that fallacies never occur, rather that the Gricean postulates are an indispensable condition for any communication to take place and a necessary condition for detecting fallacies.

Let us turn to the NTV's live weekly political talk show 'K barrieru'. In the talk show, two participants advocating opposing views on a problem of public concern debate in the TV-studio. Normally the discussion is rather unfriendly and even

hostile. The participants` verbal attacks aim to persuade TV viewers who vote for one or the other arguer during the show.

My main question is why obviously illicit methods used by some participants nevertheless work quite effectively. I argue that such tricks are persuasive because most of them are conversational implicatures. In order to make an implication explicit, people usually reason enthymematically and based on the Cooperation Principle. Most of illicit techniques traditionally are classified as fallacies or as violations of the principle after which a misunderstanding occurs and the verbal communication stops. My point is that (1) illicit methods are made possible only when participants keep to the principle; (2) the persuasive power of illicit tricks rests on the fact that the principle regulates communication both between the participants and their audience and between the participants themselves, but because the goals of these kinds of communication are different, the principle works differently from case to case.

My first point is to show that the debate between the two discussants is not an argumentative one for neither of them has in mind to persuade the other.

KB! 10 Nov 2005

V. Soloviev (moderator): *The latest developments in France make us project them upon Russia. In a tolerant Europe Islamized a long time ago, one tiny spark was enough to fire up whole towns. Is the fire coming to Russia as well, or is there going to be a somewhat different Russian revolt against overpopulation of immigrants who have no wish to be assimilated like the residents of Parisian suburbs?*

Let us reconstruct the presuppositions of the presenter`s question:

1. Europe is tolerant and Islamized unlike Russia;
2. Russia is intolerant or has not been Islamized yet;
3. The residents of Parisian suburbs have not been assimilated yet or they do not want to;
4. There are too many immigrants in Russia;
5. Russian immigrants, like those of Parisian suburbs, have no wish to be assimilated;
6. A Russian revolt, if there is going to be one, will be directed against immigrant domination.

The analogy between Russia and Europe rests in (3) and (5), and there are many more points, (1), (2), (4), (6), where they obviously differ. Therefore, the initial topic for the discussion is tolerance towards immigrants in Russia, as it becomes clear from the views that are put forward by the discussants.

Geidar Dzhemal (President of the Russian Muslim Association and a Russian Muslim Rights Activist): *“Zhirinovskiy is the most well known nationalist in public politics of the post-Soviet Russia. His activity is a consistent dismantling of all Soviet values, a demolition of internationally oriented world perception and a public appeal for a bourgeois consciousness and for a bourgeois social structure. Both the bourgeois consciousness and bourgeois social structure, which characterize consumption society, are baneful”.*

(D1) *Soviet values, such as internationalism and socialist economics, are true values.*

(D2) *Bourgeois consciousness and bourgeois social structure are opposite to Soviet values.*

(D3) *Zhirinovskiy is a nationalist.*

(D4) *Zhirinovskiy advocates a demolition of the Soviet values.*

(D5) *His activities are baneful.*

Vladimir Zhirinovskiy (Leader of the Russian Liberal Democratic Party): *Europe is already burning. This is the beginning of a clash of civilizations with elements of religious, social, ethnic and cultural discord, which can lead to world civil war in Europe and in Russia. You are one of the participants of this worldwide political provocation.*

(Z1) *There are ethnically different incompatible civilizations in the world.*

(Z2) *Russians and Muslims are representatives of such incompatible civilizations.*

(Z3) *It is baneful to unleash a conflict between them.*

(Z4) *Dzhemal' activity is unleashing a conflict between the incompatible civilizations.*

(Z5) *Dzhemal' activity is baneful.*

Basic disagreement rests in (Z1) and (D1): Soviet values, and internationalism is among them, mean that there are no incompatible civilizations. Dzhemal's idea is that the reasons underlying the existence of incompatible civilizations are economic and political, namely, bourgeois social structure, which should be

abolished and this is exactly what is being done by upheaval mongers in France. That is why he likes the developments in France. Contrary to that, Zhirinovskiy considers that it is inevitable that incompatible civilizations do exist, and if so, provoking them to enter into conflict with each other is fatal, because social conflicts are always fatal.

Let us check whether the discussion meets the necessary conditions, namely, the preliminary rules and the rules of responsibility. Both Dzhemal and Zhirinovskiy have confronting opinions expressed in (Z1) and (D1), and they express them at the very beginning of the show: (P1), (P2). Obviously, they sincerely disagree with each other's views (R1) and are going to provide arguments in support of their positions, otherwise there would be no reason to participate in the talk show. But do they really expect that the opponent will accept their arguments in principle and essentially (P3)? It is difficult to answer the question whether the participants have any or have no intention to accept the arguments of each other, but hardly one of them could ever accept Z5 or D3 and D5 as essentially persuasive arguments! It is clear that these statements are not arguments. There is also a doubt concerning the R2-rule, which says that they should believe that their arguments would contribute to the success of the whole process of argumentation.

Let us deal with P3 first. I argue that neither participant observes the rule, for otherwise they would never have said something like Z5 or D3 and D5. By adducing these, the participants not only disapprove of each other's views, but also say that they disapprove of them essentially. If they both were keeping the P3 rule, then Z5, D3 and D5 would definitely mean committing the fallacy *ad hominem*, but does it? If it were an *ad hominem* fallacy, it would mean that the argumentative move was not a legitimate one. In this case the arguer committed the fallacy without realizing that he was committing a fallacy: he either meant something else, i.e. he meant to express his disapproval of the opponent's view rather than attack the opponent's character or just awkwardly expressed his ideas.

'KB' is a verbal duel and when the discussants attack each other they aim at striking the other party in the eyes of TV viewers. Therefore, not attacking the other party would definitely be a mistake.

Another reason why there is no fallacy *ad hominem* in Z5, D3 and D5 is that in the show such personal attacks are often just unintentional mistakes.

(D6) G. Dzhemal: *Your nationalism is reproachable!*

(D7) G. Dzhemal: *You are always seeking to join the golden billion.*

(D8) G. Dzhemal: *In Russia, only a small group of skinheads manipulated by the Ministry of Internal Affairs supports your racist ideology!*

(Z6) V. Zhirinovskiy: *... Then do say that you need more space for your living space and that you are certain to use any means to occupy it and France is the first to be occupied!*

(Z7) V. Zhirinovskiy: *Tell us of your plan to Islamize Russia!*

Both participants attack each other and it is obvious that the two mean to fight each other; neither of them has misread the other's intentions so far, both understand that his opponent is seeking a victory in the eyes of the audience. The discussion between them is of a quarrel type and there is no space for a persuasive dialogue. The quarrel-like discussion between the participants is symmetric, but there is a third in the discussion, TV viewers whose calls determine who has won the debate. Perhaps, for the participants their votes are even more valuable than just as an indicator of the victory in the talk show. Callers are their real life electorate as well.

With respect to the audience, the discussion between the participants seems to be argumentative. Let us now suppose that the discussion is argumentative not just with respect to TV viewers but also with respect to the participants in the studio. Their personal attacks cannot be qualified as ad hominem fallacies, as I have shown earlier. Then because of the argumentative type of the discussion, these attacks should mean anything else but personal attacks, for personal attack in an argumentative discussion is either ad hominem fallacy or, in case it is a conscious step, a symptom of a violation of P3-rule. Therefore, such steps should be taken as conversational implicatures and as signals of a violation of the Gricean Postulate of Manner: instead of saying clearly that nationalism is a bad thing to support Dzhemal puts forward D5 and instead of saying that provoking a conflict is very dangerous Zhirinovskiy puts forward Z3. Indeed, this way they attack their each other personally but in fact it seems to them to be the right way of criticizing each other.

So the postulate would have been violated just if the words of discussants were taken to signify something different in the sense of a conversational implicature. I suggest that both discussants are observing the principle and that they are

obeying all the pragmatic rules. Moreover, if they were not, the conversational duel between them would have never been possible. The necessary condition for a successful discussion consists of three important points:

- 1) the participants` goals should correspond to each other;
- 2) these goals taken together should meet pragmatic rules;
- 3) the participants` activities should meet the requirements of the Cooperation Principle. The idea itself is far from being a new one, but when applied to a real case it can function as a method for detecting both illicit tricks and fallacies.

Quantity	Optimal number of arguments	From the audience towards the speaker	(Z8) However, you will never capture Russia, it will never occur. We have stopped Chingizkhan, Napoleon, and the Nazis. We will stop you as well!
Quality	Validity and reasonableness of arguments	From the speaker towards his arguments	(Z9) Who ruined the USSR? Why have the fifteen new states come into being?
Relation	Following the topic of discussion	From the speaker to the topic discussed	(Z10) Russia is an orthodox country. There is the national ideology and some people also have religious ideologies, but in Russia the state was created by Russians together with others and it should remain Russian, Slavic and Orthodox, but should never become Islamic or Buddhist.
Manner	Clarity and intelligibility of arguments	From the contents towards the manner of expression	(Z11) Are you for internationalism or for the Islamic nationalism? Do you want Russia to fall? Do you plan to Islamize Russia? Where is your Islamic socialism or internationalism? Tell us of your plan to Islamize Russia!

In the following table V. Zhirinovskiy`s words are understood as conversational implicatures. As we have seen earlier, the communicative structure of the talk show is asymmetric, and his words are meant to be arguments in favor of Z1 in respect to the audience and verbal attacks in respect to his opponent. This does not necessarily mean that the same conversational implicature should be interpreted consequently in each case though it may well be the case. For the present issue it is enough to say that in the following phrases he attaches new meanings to certain expressions.

In Z8 Zhirinovskiy obviously does not mean that Dzhemal himself has in mind capturing Russia. His idea seems to be that Muslims need more living space and because of that they are going to occupy France (Cf. Z6) and it may well be the case that they would like to do the same in Russia, so he warns that they will never succeed in doing that in Russia, for nobody had done that before (Chingizkhan, Napoleon, and the Nazis). To accuse Dzhemal or Muslims of invading Russia would be an enormous exaggeration, indeed. Zhirinovskiy`s idea is that excessive immigration is dangerous because of Z1-Z2. Therefore, I suggest that Zhirinovskiy is keeping the quantity postulate because his arguments aim at supporting the idea of incompatible civilizations: some civilizations are incompatible; no positive communication between them is possible for whenever in history it has taken place it ended up in war or conflict.

In Z9 he seems to blame Dzhemal for ruining the USSR, but this is not so. He obeys the quality postulate and there is no accusation. Zhirinovskiy`s goal here is to strike his opponent in the eyes of onlookers. It is well known that in 90s, most

Russian people have been supporting the idea of the USSR, but today nobody of sound mind blames Muslims for ruining it. Most likely that in Z9 Zhirinovskiy once again speaks of his ideas expressed in Z1, Z3, and he means that the Soviet state has collapsed because of the excessive number of non-Russian residents that have been enjoying economic privileges:

V. Zhirinovskiy: *In the USSR, Russians` well-being was the lowest. In all the national republics people were living better than Russians, therefore in 1991 they have quickly scattered.*

In Z10, he is recalling these ideas again though when he is saying that Russia should remain Russian Orthodox and it will never become Buddhist or Islamic it might seem that he shifts away from the topic of the discussion. In Z11, Zhirinovskiy attacks his opponent with a series of questions and again it might seem as if he breaks the Postulate of Manner. Obviously, it would have been the case if there were a persuasive discussion between Zhirinovskiy and Dzhemal. The former accuses the latter of a series of dangerous intentions and I suggest that he says just what he means without any conversational implicatures, for he does so because these accusations in fact support his basic ideas Z1-Z5.

In the framework of argumentative discussion, Z9-Z11 would definitely be analyzed as a fallacy, or as instances of a violation of either a pragmatic rule or the Cooperation Principle. Therefore, the type of discussion plays an important role for the analysis of argumentation; the task of detecting the type of discussion goes beyond the participants` actual behavior and involves identifying its pragmatic framework. In order to have fallacies and illicit tricks successfully revealed the actual pragmatic framework of the discussion should necessarily be taken into account: the preliminary rules, the responsibility rules, the rules of the Cooperation Principle and the type of discussion. The latter is a complex notion involving the initial situation, the goal of the discussion and the participants` aims. I suggest that the Cooperation Principle is a useful tool for identifying the participants` aims.

NOTES

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ii. Cf. Walton Douglas. *Fallacies Arising from Ambiguity*. Kluwer Academic Publishers 1996

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