

And you think anyone would believe that? *On how presentation can be instrumental in bypassing discussion issues*

Introduction

(1) By **maneuvering strategically**, arguers try to uphold a reasonable discussion attitude aimed at resolving the difference of opinion (dialectical aim), and at the same time further their own case and try to win the discussion (rhetorical aim).

Analytically, strategic maneuvering manifests itself by **1)** making an expedient choice from the options constituting the topical potential of a particular discussion stage, **2)** selecting a responsive adaptation to audience demand and **3) exploiting the appropriate presentational devices**.

(Van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002 / Snoeck Henkemans 2005 & 2007)

My PhD-research aims at describing the stylistic characteristics of confrontational ways of strategic maneuvering in an attempt to indicate how strategies aimed at shutting a standpoint out of the discussion can be identified by the way they are presented. One of these strategies could be described as trying to bypass (or avoid) a discussion issue.

(2) **The strategy of bypassing a discussion issue** aims at excluding a standpoint from being discussed without really attacking it and without discussing why it should not be discussed, in order to put forward a different standpoint. Such an avoiding move can be made in different ways: this paper focuses on arguer's attempts to shift the other party's position regarding a proposition (= trying to change (+)P into (-)P).

(3) An example:

Wilders: *Does our Minister of housing and integration want me to believe that she can transform problematic neighborhoods into proud and powerful neighborhoods with some extra paint and youth homes? As if Mohammed B would not have murdered Theo van Gogh when his window frames had been painted once more!*

The goals of the strategy of bypassing

The goals can be described in terms of speech acts by describing the argumentative moves that are *relevant* in light of that particular goal; for the dialectical goal these are the moves that are in line with the dialectical ideal of reasonableness, for the rhetorical goal these moves have to contribute to the rhetorical ideal of persuasiveness.

(4) **A dialectically relevant move** 1) contributes to the goal of the discussion stage because it furthers the resolution process (analytically relevant) and 2) is a rational response or sequel to the previous speech act (conditionally relevant).

The obstacles for accepting a standpoint (because one of the felicity conditions for accepting the assertive is not fulfilled) are possible dialectically relevant responses to a standpoint ('L' has to be understood as the arguer who wants to bypass the standpoint of his opponent (S)):

1. **L (listener) does not believe P is true.**
 2. L does not believe P is of importance.
 3. L does not believe S (speaker) is able to produce reasons in support of P.
 4. L is not prepared to commit himself to all the assertives that express a proposition implied by the proposition expressed in the propositional content of the performed assertive.
 5. L is not prepared to commit himself to all the presuppositions that belong to the proposition expressed in the propositional content of the performed assertive.
- (Houtlosser 1995: 106-107)

(5) **A rhetorically relevant move** establishes an immediate commitment to the perlocutionary effect of accepting not to discuss a proposition (+)P ('S is not committed to (+)P'), without the need for argumentation.

Presentation of the strategy of bypassing

To reconcile the dialectical goal with the rhetorical goal one of the obstacles for accepting a standpoint has to be presented *as if the perlocutionary effect of acceptance is a matter of course for the audience*.

(6) Syntactical ways for expressing 'L does not believe P is true' as a response to a standpoint (P), for example '*the airport must be able to grow*'.

- a. Nobody believes that to be good idea (direct).
- b. That is, of course, not a good idea (implicit).
- c. And you think I believe that to be a good idea? (indirect).

Literature:

Eemeren, F.H. van (1986) For reason's sake: maximal argumentative analysis of discourse. In (eds.) F.H. van Eemeren e.a.: *Proceedings of the conference on argumentation 1986*. Dordrecht [etc]: Foris Publications. p. 201- 215.

Eemeren, F.H. van & R. Grootendorst (1984) *Speech acts in argumentative discourse*. Dordrecht [etc]: Foris Publications.

Eemeren, F.H. van & R. Grootendorst (2004) *A systematic theory of argumentation: the pragma-dialectical approach*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eemeren, F.H. van & P. Houtlosser (2002) Strategic manoeuvring in argumentative discourse. Maintaining a delicate balance. In: *Dialectic and rhetoric. The warp and woof argumentation analysis*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. p.131-159

Houtlosser, P. (1995) *Standpunten in een kritische discussie. Een pragma-dialectisch perspectief op de identificatie en reconstructie van standpunten*. Dissertation. Amsterdam: IFOTT.

Jackson, S & S. Jacobs (1983) Speech act structures in conversation: rational aspects of pragmatic coherence. In (eds.) K. Tracy & R. T. Craig: *Conversational Coherence. Form, structure and strategy*. Beverley Hills: Sage. p. 47-66.

Slot, P. (1993) *How can you say that?* Dissertation. Amsterdam: IFOTT

Snoeck Henkemans, A.F (2005) Strategisch manoeuvreren met metonymie. In: *Tijdschrift voor Taalbeheersing*. Vol. 27, No. 3, p. 245-255.

Snoeck Henkemans, A.F. (2007) Manoeuvring strategically with rhetorical questions. In (eds.) F.H van Eemeren e.a.: *Proceedings of the sixth conference of the international society for the study of argumentation*. Amsterdam: SicSat, p. 1309-1315.