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Pragmatic Insights for Analysing Multimodal Argumentative Discourse
Panel @ 14th International Pragmatics Conference
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How Semiotic Modes Work Together in Multimodal Argumentation: A Pattern-Based Approach



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Overview

- Patterns in argumentation
- Multimodal pattern analysis
- Verbalisation as an analysis tool
- Three examples
- Beyond the propositional bias



Patterns and schemes in argumentation

- Argumentation **schemes** (Walton 1989, Blair/Walton 1999)
- Argumentation **patterns** (Kienpointner 1992)

Furthermore and according to Aristotle, rhetorical competence allows finding persuasive and faith-awakening patterns (the so-called *pithanón*) in the artefact that cause effects and expectations of the recipient. (Wildfeuer 2014)

- **Schematisation** (natural logic, cf. Borel, Grize)



Patterns and schemes in argumentation

During the process of argumentation, relationships among the arguments link them with each other in a certain pattern to support the ultimate conclusion. Such linking patterns are called 'Argumentation Schemes' which provide a way to perform reasoning over the set of premises and conclusion. (Janjua 2014: 20)

- **Deductive** vs **inductive** vs **abductive** argumentation
- Logical **inference rules**: *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, *modus non excipiens* ...

But what about multimodal patterns?



Multimodal patterns

- **Multimodal patterns**: semiotic ‘partition of work’ in multimodal texts leads to specific recognisable patterns
 - Multimodal patterns are specific constellations of textual and semiotic properties that involve more than one mode, have gestalt properties, and/or recur more often than would be statistically expected.
- Might be used in **argumentation** theory: specific **distribution of argumentative functions** over modes



Example from film: Slow cross-fading

- Specific multimodal text type (**narrative film**)
- Expression in the mode **moving images**: slow cross-fading
- Other modes: specific changes in **background noise** and **speech**
- Holistic meaning: beginning or end of **flashback** or **dream** sequence



The question of visuals in argumentation

- **Dove 2012**: images only as evidence for verbally expressed claims
- **Groarke 2013**: visual elements can also be premises
- **Tseronis 2013**: argument is neither verbal nor visual

Premise 1: Communication is multimodal

Premise 2: Argumentation is a form of communication

Conclusion: Argumentation is multimodal!



Visuals in argumentation

- The role of **visuals** might depend on an overall pattern of interpretation
- Images can be **evidence**, (part of) a **premise**, **support for a premise**, (part of) a **conclusion**; they can even demonstrate the **inference rule** (warrant)
- They could also be used in still further ways, i.e. to support an argument **emotionally**, involve the audience, show similarities with other situations (**argument from analogy**) or with a less controversial case (**argument from precedence**)



Example 1



Claim: Police brutality is a social problem

Premise: Suspects are hurt while being arrested

???: *Image, cf. left*



Example 1: Possible verbalisations

i. 'In the depicted arrest, the police are using excessive force.'

A possible example for P1

→ **Referential function** (Bühler, Jakobson)

ii. 'Asymmetry of number, protective clothing, and weaponry (e.g. batons) used in some arrests amount to a grossly unfair situation.'

→ A visualisation of emotional aspects of P1

→ **Expressive/conative function** (Bühler, Jakobson)

→ P1 should be taken seriously, given weight in the argumentation

→ T (supported by P1) should be taken seriously and acted upon



Example 1: Possible verbalisations

iii. (a) 'This article is about police brutality.'

- **Drawing attention** towards a text (e.g. in a newspaper)
- Anchoring the multimodal text in a **discourse**
- **Evoking precedents** (other cases of police brutality)



Example 2

Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), 1:33:25–1:34:23

- A rapper famous for his radical political stance has been killed, and the LAPD seems to be involved
- Max, a police officer, **presents the theory** that a ‘death squad’, that wants to take justice into its own hands, might be responsible
- How does he argue? How does the film **multimodally present** his argumentation?
- Can we assume that the film takes a **position** in the argumentation?



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Strange Days (K. Bigelow, 1995), 1:33:25–1:34:23





Example 2 – Analysis

Claim: ‘A secret death squad is involved in the murder.’

Premise: ‘The LAPD has formed a secret death squad.’

Support for premise:

- *verbal*: motivations for frustrated cops to form a death squad
- *kinesic*: looking behind himself (to see if someone’s listening)
[interpersonal function]
- [directed towards the viewer] *moving images*: scene inserted that shows strong police presence on the streets



Example 3

Strange Days (Kathryn Bigelow, 1995), 0:21:03–0:21:58

- Dystopic future in which experiences (perception) can be recorded and stored
- This technology, called **wire tripping**, is used by some as a drug
- In this dialogue, Lenny **tries to sell** so-called clips to a rich customer



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Example 3 – Analysis

Claim: 'Wire tripping is worth your money.'

Premise: 'Wire tripping allows you to experience first-hand another person's life.'

Support for premise:

- *verbal*: explanations: 'Pure and uncut, straight from the cerebral cortex'
- *kinesic*: moving nearer towards the interlocutor, presumably to demonstrate the 'private' nature of the conversation [*interpersonal function*]
- [directed towards the viewer] *music*: extradiegetic, slow music begins, changing the atmosphere and blocking out background noises, supporting Lenny's claim that wire tripping allows you to experience a different reality



Conclusion

- ▶ Modes can contribute to arguments **in many different ways**
- ▶ Modes other than language and image should also be considered: **gesture**, **music**, **colours**, etc.
- ▶ ‘**Verbalising**’ contributions of modes such as music is partly possible (e.g. by describing how they make plausible a scenario such as ‘entering a different world’), but **something is lost** (different semiotic properties of modes)
- ▶ We should be wary of a ‘**propositional bias**’: the convincing power of music, emotions, kinesics (body language) should not be dismissed as merely deceptive
- ▶ We need fine-grained models to show how modes interact, to understand the contribution, for example, of both **music** and **gesture** to argumentation



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