Things to Do with Words
Rhetorical Analysis: Argumentation

Contents

Logic, Syllogisms, and Argumentation

Argumentation, strictly speaking, does not fall under the realm of *rhetoric*. Rather, it is part of *logic*, one of the three components of the *trivium*, together with *grammar*. According to logic, an argument has an internal structure, comprising the following elements:

- a set of assumptions or premises
- a method of reasoning or deduction
- a conclusion or point.

In classical logic, such argumentative structure went under the name of *syllogism*, a logical argument that applies deductive reasoning to arrive at a conclusion based on two or more propositions that are asserted or assumed to be true. Famous, is Aristotle's example:

> All men are mortal
> Socrates is a man
> Therefore, Socrates is mortal

Toulmin's six-part structure of arguments

Among modern philosophers, Perelman and Toulmin (see references below) have studied the formal structure of arguments. Toulmin, in *The Uses of Argument* (1958), proposed a structure containing six interrelated components for the analysis of arguments:

1. **Claim**: Conclusions whose merit must be established. For example, if a person tries to convince a listener that he is not a crook, the claim would be "I am not a crook." (1)
2. **Data**: The facts we appeal to as a foundation for the claim. For example, the person introduced in 1 can support his claim with the supporting data "I have never been convicted or even accused of being one." (2)
3. **Warrant**: The statement authorizing our movement from the data to the claim. In order to move from the data established in 2, "I have never been convicted or even accused of being one," to the claim in 1, "I am not a crook," the person must supply a warrant to

bridge the gap between 1 & 2 with the statement "A crook would have been at least publicly accused, if not convicted, of being one." (3)

4. **Backing**: Credentials designed to certify the statement expressed in the warrant; backing must be introduced when the warrant itself is not convincing enough to the readers or the listeners. For example, if the listener does not deem the warrant in 3 as credible, the speaker will supply further proofs on the legal meaning of being a crook.
5. **Rebuttal**: Statements recognizing the restrictions to which the claim may legitimately be applied. The rebuttal is exemplified as follows, "I have not taken any bribes and, as result, I am not a crook, unless being a crook is knowing someone working for you who has taken bribes."
6. **Qualifier**: Words or phrases expressing the speaker's degree of force or certainty concerning the claim. Such words or phrases include "possible," "probably," "impossible," "certainly," "presumably," "as far as the evidence goes," or "necessarily." The claim "I am definitely not a crook" has a greater degree of force than the claim "I don't believe I am a crook."

The first three elements *claim*, *data*, and *warrant* are required components of any practical argument, while *qualifier*, *backing*, and *rebuttal* may not be needed in some arguments.

If you analyze *journal articles* or *legal proceedings* as part of your textual analysis projects, you will no doubt find these formal structures and you will in fact need to identify the various components in your analysis.

Rhetoric and Argumentation

Syllogisms and logic are not the only types of arguments. There are less formal types of argument, but arguments nonetheless, and for which rhetoric, rather than logic, would help. After all, whenever we try to persuade someone, we make some kind of argument. And persuasion *is* the realm of rhetoric. And you can try to persuade someone to your side, arguing your case, by appealing to pathos (i.e., emotions), logos (i.e., reason), or ethos (i.e., character).

Thus, you can **advertise a car** by showing a horrible car accident where the car's passengers survived unscathed because of the car's safety features (appeal to pathos), telling the audience the car's excellence performance record in terms of speed and acceleration, of low gas mileage or of low maintenance costs (logos), or simply telling the audience "it ain't cheap, but you deserve it!" (ethos).

Similarly, **politicians** can argue over immigration legislation by appealing to the electorate's emotions (typically) or logic or to one's own past record, legislative or otherwise (ethos).

Both **figures** and **topics** can help to setup a non-formal rhetorical analysis of argumentation.

Rhetorical figures

An excellent source of definitions of rhetorical terms and their relation is the website Silva Rhetoricae by Dr. Gideon Burton of Brigham Young University at http://rhetoric.byu.edu

Rhetorical figures are not just embellishments and ornaments (see **TIPS file** on tropes and figures). They are often used in arguments, appealing to one or more of the rhetorical basis of persuasion (pathos, logos, ethos). Second-order figures, or figures of sentences, are clearly grouped by these various functions (e.g., Aporia, Asyndeton, Exclamatio, Prosopopeia, Question for pathos or Parrhesia, Eucharistia, Syngnome, Threnos for ethos). Even quintessential stylistic figures – the figures of words – can serve specific persuasive functions by appealing, for instance, to pathos: such can be some figures of repetition (e.g., symploce, epizeuxis, diacope) and of separation (e.g., articulus). And quintessential third-order figures of logos, figures of amplification, can serve the function of pathos by arousing people's emotions (e.g., auxesis, climax, congeries, exuscitatio, synonymia).

Topics

It is in the topics of invention that we find the main source of argumentation, where invention is one the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery. Aristotle first introduced topics in his *Rhetoric* as the places where to find arguments and divided them into special topics (Book 1, Chapter 3) and common topics (Book II, Chapter 23).[i] Cicero later similarly defined Invention as "the discovery of valid or seemingly valid arguments to render one's cause plausible." (*De inventione* I.VII.9) And that discovery relies on topics (Greek *topoi*, Latin *loci*, literally "places"; "If we want to track down some argument we ought to know the places or topics… the region of an argument", Cicero *Topica* I.II.7-8).

1. ***Common topics*** refer to arguments that apply equally well to all three species of rhetoric. Aristotle discusses common topics in *Rhetoric* (1397a-1403a). Cicero, in *Topica*, lists 17 topics broadly classified into: definition, comparison, relationship, circumstance, and testimony.[ii]
   - *Definition* concerns the definition of an issue and its relation to the larger group to which it belongs. Definition involves several subtopics: *division* (the whole and its parts), *genus/species* (something part of a larger class or *genus*), and *subject/adjuncts* (the essential of something, or subject, and the accidental or adjuncts).
   - *Comparison* looks at things for their *similarity/difference* and *degree* (more/less, inferior/superior). Comparison, dear to Aristotle as the basis of metaphor, is a topic closely related to relationship.
   - *Relationship* builds connections between things: *cause/effect* (the effects of a given cause or the causes contributing to given effects, one of the main sources of argument), *antecedent/consequence* (the relation between former/consequent events), *contraries* (the relation between opposite elements), *contradictions* (concerning the truth or falsity of two propositions). *Definition* and *division* also establish relationships of things to its group and a whole to its parts.
   - *Circumstances* deal with the subtopics of the *possible/impossible* and *past fact/future fact* to establish the probability of something (in combination of these two axes).
   - *Testimony* comprises subtopics that deal with external sources of bolstering one's argument: *authority* (depending upon the expertise and character of an individual called upon to uphold one's argument), *rumors* (the gossips still used today to discredit others), *maxims* or *proverbs* (using famous saying or precept), but also the *supernatural*, laws, precedents, or examples, and oaths, vows, or pledges.[iii]

2. ***Special topics*** deal with the specific content of an argument. Aristotle discusses three special topics, resulting in the three main species of rhetoric: judicial (or forensic), deliberative (legislative), and epideictic (ceremonial) (Aristotle 1358b-1359a, 1359b-1377b). Each species is defined by its subject matter and its relation to time (past, present, future).
   - *Deliberative (or political) oratory* centered on legislative politics. Its primary purpose was to get the audience to engage in action through exhortation and dissuasion. As such, deliberative oratory is concerned with future events that could benefit or harm society. Four topics of invention, grouped in pairs, have been advanced as pertaining to deliberative oratory: good/unworthy and advantageous/harmful (or pleasant/unpleasant).
   - J*udicial (or forensic) oratory* addressed the sphere of forensic argumentation, where narratives of past events are used to defend or accuse an individual in court. Two main topics were associated with this branch of oratory: the just and the unjust (or the right and the wrong).
   - *Epideictic oratory* is used to praise (Lat. *encomium*) or blame (Lat. *vituperatio*, Gr. *psogos*) people or events. It is concerned with present events, e.g., ceremonial speeches. Epideictic oratory uses two specific topics of invention, virtue and vice (honorable/dishonorable).

Topics are not separate from the rest of rhetoric. Topics being the basis of argumentation, there is a close relationship between topics and the figures of amplification, as figures of reason and argument. And just like figures, it would be a mistake to regard topics as mutually exclusive categories.

Figures of definition:

- horismus (providing a clear, brief definition, especially by explaining differences between associated terms),
- antonomasia (substituting a descriptive phrase for a proper name, or substituting a proper name for a quality associated with it),
- circumlocution (supplying a descriptive phrase in place of a name),
- systrophe (listing many qualities or descriptions of someone or something, without providing an explicit definition),
- correction (amend a term or phrase one has just employed),
- auxesis and meiosis (involving a kind of redefining),
- parenthesis (lexical interruption may include a kind of explanation or definition),
- synonymia (employing multiple terms for the same idea as a kind of explanation or definition),
- exergasia (repetition of the same idea in different words, which can serve the purpose of explaining or defining that idea).

Figures of description:

- enargia (generic name for a group of figures aiming at vivid, lively description),

- ecphrasis (vivid description; using details to place an object, person, or event before the listeners' eyes),
- hypotyposis (lively description of an action, event, person, condition, passion, etc. used for creating the illusion of reality),
- but also more specific types, such as topographia, astrothesia, prosopographia, ethopoeia, pragmatographia, chronographia, characterismus, effictio icon, peristalsis, chorographia, geographia, anemographia, dendrographia, topothesia, hydrographia.

Figures of division:

- merismus (dividing of a whole into its parts),
- diaeresis (logical division of a genus into its species),
- distributio (synonym for diaeresis or merismus);
- eutrepismus (numbering and ordering the parts under consideration),
- enumeration (dividing a subject into its adjuncts, a cause into its effects, or an antecedent into its consequents),
- taxis (dividing a subject into its various components or attributes),
- distribution (assigning roles among or specifying the duties of a list of people, sometimes accompanied by a conclusion),
- dialysis (spelling out alternatives),
- expedition (eliminating all but one of enumerated possibilities),
- dilemma (offering a choice between two, equally unfavourable, alternatives),
- prosapodosis (providing a reason for each division of a statement).

Figures of comparison:

- metaphor
- simile
- syncrisis

Figures of relationship:

- apagoresis
- enumeratio
- apagoresis
- cataplexis

Figures of Irony

Figures of Reasoning

- contrarium
- enantiosis
- synoeciosis

- antitheton
- in utrumque partes
- antithesis
- antiphrasis
- antilogy

Both figures and topics are inherently polysemic. Depending upon their use, the same figure may serve both as amplification, i.e., logos, and pathos; the same topic may similarly serve different functions (e.g., definition and division also establish relationships of things to its group and a whole to its parts).

References

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[i] Later rhetoricians also adopted this division (e.g., Cicero, Quintilian). Cicero and Quintilian, however, also introduced different classifications of topics (e.g., topics associated with the person and with the act as part of the theory of circumstances (Leff 1983:24; Lausberg 1998:§374; Mortensen 2008:37, 53).

[ii] On the history of topics and their changing numbers (Joseph 1947:22-31; Lanham 1991:167-168; for a lengthy discussion of these topics and subtopics, adapted for the modern reader, Corbett and Connors 1999:87-121).

[iii] For a treatment of testimony in relation to specific figures (Joseph 1947:92-108). For a modern treatment of testimony that includes statistics (Corbett and Connors 1999:112-120).