

# The variation of linguistic and rhetorical features across different functions of argument.

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## Abstract

While primarily believed that argumentation was solely used to persuade, this notion has since been challenged, and more argument functions have been recognised. In this study, I employ a typology of argument functions which builds on work by Asen (2005), Goodwin (2007), and Doury (2011). It includes five basic functions of arguments: Persuasion, Explanation, Expression, Exploration, and Provocation. The list expands the notion presented by Michael Gilbert that an argument may be intended to “irritate, provoke, test, explore, undermine, upstage, hurt, and so on” (Gilbert 1997). The study is based on the analysis of a corpus of arguments from a range of social media. The principal methods for this research are drawn from the field of corpus linguistics and argumentation studies. I examine the various argument functions found in real-world discourse, and investigate the language of those arguments in order to analyse how the linguistic and rhetorical features of arguments vary across different argument functions.

However, it has been suggested that argumentation has more functions than just persuasion (Asen 2005, Goodwin 2007), and it may be surmised that different functions involve the use of different forms of language. In order to correctly formulate one’s argument, it is important to identify linguistic features which occur in different types of arguments. In this research, these features will be analysed with emphasis on their role in performing the relevant function and their significance in identity projection. According to Watzlawick et al, every message conveys something about one’s identity and also makes projections about both the other’s identity and the nature of the relationship between the two people (Watzlawick et al. 1967). These aspects of identity and relationships between arguers remain an under-researched area of argumentation studies. The main goal of this dissertation is to analyse how the linguistic features of arguments vary across different argument functions. The goal will be achieved by examining the various argument functions found in real-world discourse, and investigating the language of those arguments. This investigation means specifically the analysis of metaphors, idioms, emotional and evaluative language, and other rhetorical features, as well as dialectical techniques such as rephrase and exemplification.

## 1 Introduction

A fundamental part of language and communication is the act of convincing another person to accept one’s beliefs and reasons through argumentation. In order to do so, alongside the presentation of evidence and steps of inference, a number of linguistic and rhetorical techniques may be applied. These include: the use of metaphors, inclusive language, repetition, the backing of authority, the use of jargon, hyperboles, and emotive language, i.e. persuasion through emotions.

## 2 Method

The principal methods for this research programme will be drawn from the field of corpus linguistics and argumentation studies. The corpus techniques include the construction,

annotation and analysis of corpora of arguments.

The corpus containing arguments taken from social media, i.e. comprising real-world discourse, has been created and is currently being further developed. It is annotated to include data such as: source, identification of the argument type and function, and linguistic qualities. The corpus approach allows for both qualitative and quantitative results, giving a range of possibilities for further development.

The argument analysis is being conducted using the newly developed typology of argument functions in conjunction with the Argument Type Identification Process (ATIP) and Periodic Table of Arguments, developed by Jean Wagemans (2016). The table was created as a means for the analysis and description of argumentative and persuasive discourse. As this device employs a systematic identification procedure it is used in order to ensure a reliable classification of the gathered arguments. Argument evaluation is carried out using the Comprehensive Assessment Procedure for Natural Argumentation (CAPNA) developed by Hinton (2021). The CAPNA is a tool designed to capture as many aspects of a given argument as possible and is flexible as to the purpose of the discourse. After the arguments have been evaluated, they are then placed in the existing corresponding corpus.

Three types of analysis are being used. First of all, descriptive analysis is employed in order to generate summaries of the gathered data. I will also use exploratory analysis so as to have a better understanding of the presented phenomenon. Thanks to this analysis I will be able to draw conclusions about the linguistic and rhetorical features present in arguments, as well as these occurrences in identity arguments. I am currently using statistical analysis tools in order to gather, summarise, and analyse the data.

### 3 Discussion

In the field of argumentation various scholars have discussed the notion of an argument having more than the sole function of persuasion. A paper written by Asen puts forward the func-

tions of: ‘agenda expansion’, ‘responsibility attribution’, and ‘identity formation’ (Asen 2005). Jean Goodwin includes examples such as ‘relationship building’ (2007). Gilbert includes the function of irritation (1997). What these papers have in common is that while they provide a classification of argument functions, there is no proper categorisation, there is not a typology present which is something that appears in my work.

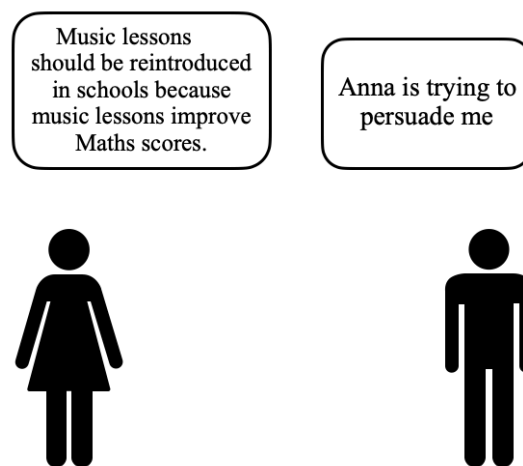


Figure 1: Standard function of argument

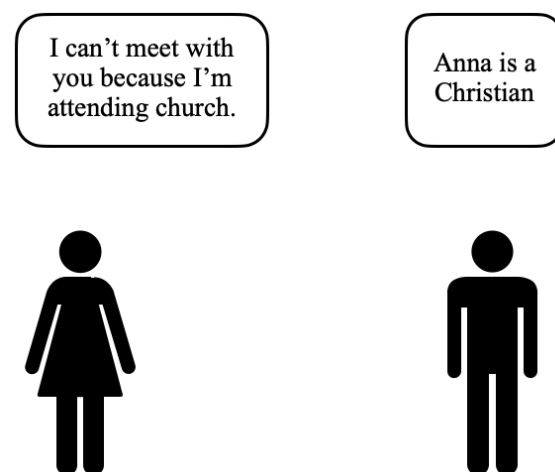


Figure 2: Identity function - showing identity through argumentation

The two figures displayed above serve as a visual representation of the functions of argument. Primarily thought to only be used as a tool of persuasion; as a justification for the truth of a given statement or claim, it means that the standard function of argument is seen

as: A is X with the intention that the audience agrees that A is X.

Figure 2 showcases the non-standard function of argumentation which is the Expression function. It is concerned with showing one’s identity through argumentation — building and reinforcing one’s identity as well as allowing the audience to draw their own conclusions regarding the identity of the arguer. The format in this scheme is: A is X with the intention that the audience draws conclusions that the arguer is Y.

The investigation of relevant literature mentioned earlier serves as a foundation on which the typology relies, as well as establishing the necessary background and framework for further steps.

Research done on a small scale corpus consisting of arguments taken from the social media platform X has shown that Internet users include features of language such as: vulgarity, metaphors, rhetorical questions, and rephrase. This means that people use some of the features that are planned to be examined, ensuring that they are part of real-world discourse. An article presented at the international conference OSSA 13 The Thirteenth Conference of the Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation, University of Windsor, Canada is currently in press concerning argument functions, as of now five main argument functions have been established, referred to as the PEEEP functions — Persuasion, Expression, Explanation, Exploration, and Provocation with more to be determined. To date, I have expanded this typology by adding several sub-functions to the already existing ones. The functions of argument are gathered below in Table 1.

<b>Persuasion</b> (Resolution, Encouragement)
<b>Expression</b> (Identity building)
<b>Explanation</b> (Describing, Demonstrating)
<b>Exploration</b> (Devil's advocate, Testing)
<b>Provocation</b> (Incitement, Entrapment)

Table 1: Argument functions & their corresponding sub-functions.

Each of the mentioned functions in Table 1 has various sub-functions, which are used in ordinary language to express instances of the main functions. For example, an arguer may wish to establish their identity through argumentation as a way of finding their place in a particular group.

An expanded version of the corpus is currently being developed, already containing over a hundred examples taken from various social media platforms, including X, Reddit, and Instagram. The corpus spans across five different topics: Social, Abortion, Politics, Environment, and Culture. Annotation guidelines were established, including giving clearly defined definitions for the language features in order to provide a detailed and accurate annotation of the gathered arguments. An example of these established guidelines includes annotating argument function — by looking at references to linguistic tagging within surrounding text, such a phrase being to ‘play devil’s advocate’.

Initial results show that all of the functions mentioned above are found across different social media platforms. Analysis of language use indicates that metaphors and rephrase appear frequently across all functions. This highlights the importance of figurative and adaptive language as users make use of these linguistic and rhetorical features in order to clarify their statements and intentions, engage with the audience, as well as present their complex thoughts in a more effective way. It could also provide further insights into the notion of linguistic politeness when interacting with other people.

What is novel about this work is the relationship between argumentation and identity. Pairing the use of different uses of language with argumentative functions offers a new perspective on the language of argumentation, especially in the case of identity arguments. Analysing the way in which people argue sheds light on how they wish to convey their identity to others. It may also be used to reject identity positions.

Understanding the variations in style and vocabulary between different uses of arguments leads to useful insights in the understanding of how rhetoric relates to argument. By gaining a better understanding of how arguments work and how they function in regards to real-world discourse, the findings of this study improve the interpretation and evaluation process of arguments.

## 4 Conclusion

In my work I employ a typology of argument functions, which aims to be expanded in future work. I also created a corpus in order to analyse real-world discourse. In the future, the corpus will also be annotated for identity arguments to further examine the relationship between identity and argumentation. It will need to be decided whether the presented argument meets the criteria for an identity argument.

Further examinations may lead to useful insights in the understanding of issues of public discourse, as well as strategies in critical thinking. The research allows for the findings to be applied to various areas of language and communication.

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