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?
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
Strange Days (K. Bigelow, 1995), 0:21:03–0:21:58
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.
Bibliography


• **Wildfeuer, Janina** (in print), “It's all about logics!? Analyzing the rhetorical structure of multimodal filmic text.” *Semiotica* [Special Issue on Multimodal Rhetoric].