Understanding political issues through argumentation analysis

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Introduction

Is political discourse intrinsically linked to argumentation? Today, public opinion is often inclined to doubt it, partly due to the popular notion that politicians resort to rhetorical strategies in order to better manipulate their audience, with little consideration for valid reasoning and genuine debate. If we follow Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, however, the answer to this question can be considered as a matter of fact: political discourse corresponds to the ‘deliberative’ mode, one of the three genres upon which rhetorical argumentation is traditionally built (together with the forensic and the epideictic). Deliberation is mainly ‘concerned with determining whether a course of action or a policy [is] useful or harmful (expedient or inexpedient)’ (Jasinski 2001, p. 160). It can be defined as a verbal attempt to reach an agreement on the most suitable choice for the common good in situations where different, if not contradictory, opinions are possible. The practice of *logos* as both discourse and reason is supposed to pave the way for conflict resolution, thus allowing for a peaceful management of the various problems facing the *polis*. This view is at the basis of quite divergent approaches to argumentation such as that of Perelman’s and Olbrecht Tyteca’s *New rhetoric* (1969 [1958]) and van Eemeren’s Amsterdam School of Pragmadaeectics (1996).

Argumentation in political discourse is not, however, limited to an activity of reason weighing the *pros* and *contra* of a line of action, or of looking for a negotiated solution on controversial issues. Although practical reasoning does rely on logical processes linking premises to a conclusion, rhetorical argumentation in the Aristotelian tradition includes *pathos*, or appeals to emotions that act upon the audience, and *ethos*, or the presentation of self that confers credibility upon the orator (Amossy 2001, 2010b). The relevance of these elements for contemporary political discourse is obvious. Notably, *ethos* is understood more and more in light of the necessity for speakers to build a favourable image of themselves, so that it can enhance their public reputations and add weight to their propositions or programmes – or simply bring about their election, or maintain them in power.

Two more dimensions of rhetorical argumentation in its relation to political discourse should be emphasised: the epideictic and the polemical. Political discourse is meant not only
to persuade by rationally justifying a choice, but also to reinforce existing values and shared opinions, so that citizens can be mobilised, in times of crisis, to defend these values. This is why the epideictic mode (although, in its traditional form – speeches of praise and blame, eulogies, and so on – it is often defined as merely ceremonial), actually plays a crucial socio-political role (Perelman & Olbrechts Tyteca 1969 [1958], pp. 47–55). Last but not least, political discourse displays fierce controversies in which two or more parties, overtly hostile to each other, do not necessarily reach an agreement. This polemical dimension, often blamed for its excess of passion and verbal violence, tends to be excluded from the realm of argumentation by those who promote a purely rational definition of public debate. However, in a pluralistic democracy where divergences of opinions are permanent and conflicts constitute the very heart of political life (Mouffe 2000), polemical exchanges constitute a fully argumentative modality defined by the confrontation of dichotomised stances in a dynamic of polarisation (dividing the public into antagonistic groups) (Amossy 2010a, 2014). In short, political argumentation includes not only deliberation as rational debate, but also a value-based discourse looking for communion, and an adversarial discourse that highlights sharp confrontations.

This extension of the limits and goals of political discourse has to be understood against the background of contemporary practice with its various institutional sub-genres, going from formal debate at the Chamber to TV addresses or informal discussions on the Web. If we view political discourse as the oral and written discourse of the politicians, but also as any discourse dealing with the problems of the polis (public affairs), we can see that the aforementioned aspects of argumentation are differently integrated in each political genre. Thus, a debate in Parliament is by definition deliberative, although it presents a varying degree of ethos building and of polemical confrontation. Electoral discourse heavily relies on ethos construction as a means of persuasion, while also playing on direct or indirect verbal confrontation. Each generic framework has its own constraints, allowing speakers to use its rules for their own purposes on the condition that they do not transgress the borderlines of what is allowed and tolerable in a given institutional or social space.

In the subsequent section, I will clarify the meaning of argumentation, before looking in the next section (p. 264) at argumentative analysis in relation to discourse analysis and giving an overview (p. 266) of a few contemporary approaches, some normative (such as Critical Discourse Analysis), and some non-committed and analytical. There will then follow an argumentative and discursive approach to political discourse –mainly borrowed from Amossy’s ‘argumentation in discourse’, exemplified on a UN speech delivered by Israeli Prime Minister (PM) Benjamin Netanyahu (2014).

What is argumentative analysis? A communicational and discursive perspective

The main objective of argumentation analysis is to disclose the mechanisms and internal logic of political discourse through the way it constructs patterns of reasoning and puts them into words in a given generic and institutional framework. Practically, it unveils the way underlying arguments and argument schemes are embedded into words in order to act upon an audience, orient collective decisions and action, oppose conflicting stances, or simply reinforce pre-existing choices and points of view. Examining how political discourse works does not mean confining the exploration to formal features. Argumentation analysis sheds light on the intrinsic link between discursive elements, logical patterns of reasoning, and political issues in their specific socio-historical and cultural environment. In this perspective,
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it aspires to a better understanding of how discourse frames reality, defines collective problems, manages disagreement, reinforces power or allows for empowerment.

Such an approach to argumentation is communicational and discursive, defining argumentation as a verbal exchange (be it actual or virtual) between speakers who use *logos* – language and reason – in order to act on the outside world by acting upon each other. This is the perspective of the New rhetoric (Perelman & Olbrechts Tyteca 1969 [1958]), anchored in the great Aristotelian tradition. Defining rhetorical argumentation as the verbal attempt to bring about the adherence of an audience to a thesis, Perelman and Olbrechts Tyteca place addressees and their premises at the heart of the persuasion enterprise. Speakers have to adapt to their audiences; moreover, an audience can be defined as a construction of the orator who builds attempts at persuasion on the beliefs and ways of thinking attributed to the addressee (1969 [1958], p. 18). Common deliberation and mutual persuasion feed not on absolute truth – which does not exist in human affairs – but on *doxa* defined as common knowledge and common opinion: the series of values and recognised truths or facts that are widely circulated in a given community (Amossy & Sternberg 2002). The main task of the orator is to transfer to the conclusion the adherence that the audience grants to the shared premises.

The communicational bias entails a discursive one. When viewed not as reasoning *per se*, but as a social practice in which the participants share and discuss ways of defining and interpreting reality, argumentative patterns are necessarily rooted in natural language. Refusing to isolate logical propositions from the discourse that conveys them, argumentation analysis does not view natural language as an obstacle (as is the case in frameworks privileging abstract reasoning and logically valid arguments). On the contrary, natural language, with its polysemy and unavoidable ambiguity, is ‘the necessary condition for argumentation’ (Plantin 1995, p. 259). In short, argumentative speech does not take place within the space of pure logic, but within a communication situation and a socio-cultural context in which speakers interact by using a whole array of verbal means. All these discursive elements contribute to the argumentative enterprise in its social and cultural dimensions, and have to be closely analysed.

**Argumentation analysis and discourse analysis**

Viewing argumentation analysis as the attempt at understanding how political discourse, in its communicational and discursive dimensions, works in the field raises the question of its similarity and difference with discourse analysis (DA) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Although the latter promotes social critique, whereas DA offers a non-committed analytical approach, both are trends subsuming a variety of approaches, which deal not only with language in use and in context, but more broadly with discourse as a social practice. For Maingueneau, a main representative of the French trend, the object of DA is ‘to apprehend discourse as articulating texts and social places. Consequently, its object is not textual organisation, nor communicative situation (as it can be described by traditional sociology), but what knots them together is a certain genre of discourse practice’ (2007, p. 7). In CDA terms, the analyst explores ‘the dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and all the diverse elements of the situation(s), institution(s) and social structures which frame it’ (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak 2013, p. 79). In the same perspective, the American branch of DA emphasises that ‘Discourse is shaped by the world, and discourse shapes the world’ (Johnstone 2008, p.10). Claiming that ‘functionally, discourse is used (simultaneously) to represent, evaluate, argue for and against, and ultimately to legitimate or delegitimate social actions’ (Hart & Cap 2014, p.1), and focusing
on ‘how decisions are made, resources allocated, and social adaptation or conflict accomplished in public and private life’ (Johnstone 2008, p. 7), such an analytical framework is quite close to argumentation analysis in the study of the verbal management of social problems and collective choices. Some theories even consider that argumentativity constitutes an inherent feature of any discourse (Amossy 2009, p. 254; Reisigl 2014, p. 69).

Thus, argumentation analysis calls for laying bare the various patterns of reasoning underlying the verbal surface, thus exposing the logical foundation of political communication and its attempts at mutual influence. Patterns of reasoning include various argument structures such as syllogisms and enthymemes, examples and analogies, manifold types of arguments (arguments by the cause, from consequences, by the definition, etc.). They feed on topos pertaining to invention and understood as logical underlying structures – such as the topos of quantity: what is good for a greater number is better than what is good for a smaller number; or the topos of quality: what is considered good by superior beings is better than what is considered good by the crowd. The analyst can use the tools provided by various argumentation treatises going from Aristotle to Perelman, Toulmin (2003 [1958]) or informal logicians (Johnson & Blair 2000). However, in order to explore discourse as a social practice, argumentation analysis needs linguistic insights and tools that neither ancient rhetoric nor contemporary theories of argumentation based on philosophical grounds can provide. Having uncovered the underlying abstract schemes, the analyst has to examine how they are put into words. In so doing, the analyst can feed on the notions and analytic tools of today’s language studies, including major linguistic trends such as Benveniste’s theory of enunciation (1974, 2014), Bakhtin’s explorations of dialogism² (1986), pragmatics – with its emphasis on performatives, Ducrot’s study of connectives and polyphony (1972, 1996, Anscombre & Ducrot 1988), and many others. The analyst can thus explore political discourse with the help of notions such as speaker and addressee, intersubjectivity and interaction, axiological and affective markers (Kerbrat Orecchioni 1980), presuppositions and implicatures (Amossy 2012 [2000], pp. 190–196; Wodak 2013a), nominalisation, connectives and hedges, phraseology, repetition and rhythm, and so on.³

This is why argumentation analysis calls for a merging of disciplines that, although very close, have historically developed as autonomous fields often ignoring each other, and are to this day institutionally kept apart. To develop a comprehensive approach of argumentation in discourse, analytical tools have to be borrowed from both fields of studies, while trying to work out a coherent framework where rhetorical argumentation and DA (or CDA) can harmoniously complement and enrich each other.

Last, but not least, let us emphasise that argumentation analysis in its connection to DA and CDA closely links verbal patterns of reasoning and figural constructions to their social and cultural context and promotes the notion of interdiscourse. ‘‘Interdiscursivity’’ signifies that discourses are linked to each other in various ways’ (Reisigl & Wodak 2015, p. 28). A central notion in all DA and CDA approaches, it reframes the rhetorical tradition of doxa, now conceived in a socio-historical perspective as the totality of the discourses circulating in the public space at a particular moment, with their stereotypes and frozen formulas, collective images, symbols and myths, basic beliefs and dominant ideas expressed through recurrent verbal means. Interdiscourse includes topos understood, not as formal structures leading to a conclusion, but rather as content-related arguments, in the vein of Cicero’s or Quintilianus’ rhetoric (the so called commonplaces): ‘they tell about […] subjects’ positions, controversial claims, justification strategies, ideologies, etc.’ (Reisigl 2014, p. 77). Interdiscourse also includes fixed sets of arguments that have taken the form of reservoirs – a ‘repertoire of arguments’ in the formulation of Rennes
(2007), or ‘rhetorical arsenal’ as coined by Angenot (1997, 2004) (the French conveniently use the term ‘argumentaire’). The discursive and argumentative analysis has to show how interdiscourse is interwoven in the fabric of the new discourse that integrates, modifies and sometimes subverts it.

This leads us to a question partly accounting for the divide that often separates rhetorical argumentation from DA and CDA. The latter, with their strong emphasis on interdiscursivity, as well as on institutional and generic frameworks, emphasise the constraints put on speakers, and the extent to which they are determined and ‘spoken’ by the discourse of the time. As a consequence, the autonomy of the speaking subject as a unique individual endowed with reason will appear as illusory. Rhetorical argumentation, on the contrary, traditionally emphasises agency – free choice and the capacity to act by verbal means. This apparent incompatibility can, however, be resolved by a balanced approach, taking into account both the constraints determining discourse and, in this very framework, the possibility for individual or collective initiative and choice at the heart of the rhetorical enterprise.

**DA or CDA**

Before going back to argumentation analysis of political discourse, a short comment on the way the connection between (rhetorical) argumentation and DA has been viewed in different theoretical frameworks is needed. We have first to distinguish normative approaches based on CDA and mainly drawing on Pragma-dialectics, from non-normative DA approaches aiming at analytical understanding rather than assessment, based on the tradition of rhetorical argumentation and Perelman’s and Olbrechts Tyteca’s *New rhetoric*. The vocation of CDA is social critique: it ‘studies the way ideology, identity and inequality are (re)enacted through texts produced in social and political contexts’ (van Dijk 2001, p. 352); it is ‘characterized by the common interests in demystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductible investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken, or visual)’ (Wodak 2013b, p. xxiii.). No wonder, thus, that Fairclough or Wodak turned to a normative theory of argumentation distinguishing between sound and fallacious argumentation. Pragma-dialectics provides ten rules for rational dispute, such as: parties must not prevent each other from advancing or casting doubts on standpoints, or whoever advances a standpoint has the obligation to defend it, and so on (van Eemeren et al. 1996). The violation of these rules points to fallacies – arguments that look valid on the surface but are not. Thus, arguments can be both described and assessed, denouncing manipulation and unethical discussions.

Other approaches are analytical rather than overtly critical: they do not seek to pass judgement on the texts they explore, nor do they confront them with a pre-established model (implying a preliminary ideological or political choice, and thus a declared commitment, on the part of the analyst). In this perspective, Amossy’s Argumentation in discourse (2012 [2000]) borrows from the *New rhetoric* rather than from Pragma-dialectics, or Informal logic, that focuses on the detection of fallacies. In other words, argumentation analysis does not deal with the validity of arguments, nor does it confront the analysed address or debate to pre-established norms of political communication in order to assess its capacity of solving conflicts, or its adequacy as regards genuine democracy (in opposition, for instance, to Habermas’ approach). Drawing on the French trend of DA (as represented by Charaudeau & Maingueneau 2002) that does not focus on social critique, Argumentation in discourse, unlike CDA, does not demand any overt commitment on the part of the
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analyst. According to Maingueneau, however, this mission has by itself a critical force: it ‘destroys any illusion of transparency and self-evidence by linking discourses to the institutional settings that produce them, to the social practices of which they are part, and to situated power relationships’ (Maingueneau 2012, p. 206). Johnstone (2008, p. 29) also claims that beyond the difference between critical and non-critical approaches, ‘discourse analysis is, at root, a highly systematic, thorough approach to critical reading […] and critical reading almost inevitably leads to questioning the status quo’ – even when social critique is not the objective.

Let us start with CDA’s efforts at integrating argumentation. A theoretical framework was worked out in 2008 by Fairclough and Fairclough on the basis of Norman Fairclough’s version of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The latter is understood as a branch of critical social analysis, throwing light on its crucial linguistic dimension, and defined as a normative enterprise (criticising political reality on normative grounds). Political Discourse Analysis adds to this theory an argumentative approach called for by the deliberative nature of political discourse: according to the authors, practical reasoning has to be thoroughly explored because it determines choices leading to action. Thus, the necessity to find out formal models of practical reasoning in order to see how they are constructed in political discourse – which is done here in terms of claims and counter-claims in their relation to goals anchored in values, to circumstances, to means of achieving the goal, with a view on possible negative consequences (see Fairclough & Fairclough 2012, pp. 45, 51, 126, 148).

The uncovering of underlying schemes – namely, argument reconstruction – is accompanied by a critical evaluation of the argument partly based on the normative approach of Pragmadialectics, and called for by CDA’s objective to disclose power relations, to denounce forces associated with capitalism, and so on, an approach justified by the idea that CDA is part of a social critique meant to change reality. Thus, this CDA approach to argumentation analysis is both explanatory, and evaluative.

Another interesting attempt at integrating discursive and argumentative analysis can be found in the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), another version of CDA ‘with a strong and organized focus on argumentation’ (Reisigl 2014, p. 67). Borrowing from Kopperschmidt (2000), its promoters understand argumentation as a persuasion enterprise focusing on the ‘systematic challenging or justification of validity claims, such as truth and normative rightness’, the first relating to knowledge and degrees of certainty, the second to practical norms or ethical and moral standards (Reisigl & Wodak 2016, p. 27). Thus, validity in argumentation is both logical, and ethical. Argumentation analysis is functional (it looks at claim, argument/premise, conclusion rule; here, Toulmin provides a good model); formal (it lays bare the formal topoi and arguments underlying discourse); macro structural (it investigate stages and complexity of argumentation as well as the interdependency of arguments); and content-related (it analyses topoi as recurrent elements of content) (ibidem).

For DHA, content-related topoi are of the utmost importance, as they unveil world-views and ways of reasoning typical of a given period and place: they allow for ideological analysis and disclose subject positions as well as justification strategies. An example of a content-related topos would be the anger of the person in the street as expressed in Austrian populist discourse (according to Reisigl 2014, p. 78): it claims that if the ordinary citizen is angry, political action has to be taken (or not) in order to resolve that anger. Moreover, the DHA proposes a context-dependent approach, trying to integrate in its analysis ‘all available background information’, and examining each utterance in context: its analytical practice is by definition socio-historical. It also combines argumentative and discursive analysis as it explores the linguistic means mobilised by the discourse in contexts – for example,
antisemitic language behaviour is studied by Wodak (2013a, p. 360), who also closely links CDA with pragmatics as the study of insinuations and allusions, presuppositions and implicatures, and so on. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the DHA is normative insofar as its mission is to assess the cognitive and ethical validity of the respective discourse. In other words, it highlights the detection of fallacies – here again, on the basis of the Pragmatic-dialectic rules, to which Reisigl would, however, like to add some insights from Hannah Arendt or Jürgen Habermas, and include ‘democratic norms and ethical principles of justice and equality’ (2014, p. 22).

Among the non-normative approaches, let us first mention Barbara Johnstone’s interesting attempt at linking linguistic investigation with rhetoric. Though mainly working in sociolinguistics, the American scholar has published a book on Discourse analysis (2008 [2007]), followed by a collective work edited by herself and Christopher Eisenhart, entitled Rhetoric in detail (2008). Their premises are that ‘linguistic discourse analysis can provide a grounded, rigorous set of analytical methods for answering rhetorical questions’ (2008, p. 13). The book presents a series of detailed analyses showing how stylistic moves and variations, rhetorical micro-strategies, use of transitivity and naming, representation of the others’ voices, and so on, allow for an understanding of political issues such as the construction of political legitimacy, government control, agency of disabled or disadvantaged groups, and so on. In its focus on specific linguistic and stylistic devices and on their social functions, Rhetoric in detail is a valuable contribution to an argumentation analysis of political discourse – formulated by the editors as the filling of a gap in rhetorical studies (2008, p. 18), a statement to be understood against the background of the institutional importance conferred upon rhetoric in American academic studies.

Another non-normative approach is Argumentation in discourse (AD) as elaborated by Amossy from 2000 onwards. It aims at integrating the study of arguments, argumentative structures and figures as described by traditional and contemporary rhetorical argumentation in discourse analysis, understood as a non-normative and non-ideological enterprise in the wake of both the New rhetoric of Perelman, and the French contemporary trend of DA. In L’argumentation dans le discours (2012 [2000]), argumentation is defined in a broad sense as the totality of verbal means trying to elicit adherence to a thesis (when discourse has an argumentative goal), or to orient ways of thinking, perceiving the surrounding world, and feeling (when discourse has an argumentative dimension with no declared persuasive aim). Unlike some other trends (for instance, Pragmatic-dialectics and Fairclough’s work borrowing from it), this approach does not make a clear-cut distinction between argumentation and rhetoric, nor does it confine it to the art of persuading by reasoning: logos is closely connected to ethos and pathos. Moreover, persuasion, as well as ethos construction, value-based agreement or polemics are achieved, not only through rational arguments, but also through the multiple and complex discursive means in which schemes of reasoning are embedded. Thus, the reconstruction of arguments and the exploration of discursive features mingle in a single analytical enterprise. The argumentative patterns underlying discourse are brought to the surface, while minute attention is paid to micro-discursive phenomena in order to see how the respective argument is embodied in natural language. At the same time, discourse is analysed in context, and in its generic and institutional frameworks. A central place is given to its dialogical (or interdiscursive) dimension, thus actual or virtual reactions (of confirmation, re-elaboration or opposition) to pre-existing discourses. In this perspective, the study of political discourse explores the way interpretations of the surrounding reality are constructed, and how social problems are framed and managed.
Analysis of an example: Israeli PM Netanyahu’s address at the UN (2014)

In order to show how argumentation theory and DA can be used in an integrated approach, I will analyse a short fragment of Israeli PM Netanyahu’s speech at the UN 69th General Assembly (September 2014). The address participates in political deliberation insofar as it deals with the UN assessment of the military operation (Protective Edge) launched in July 2014 by Israel against Gaza, governed by the Islamic Hamas (labelled as a terrorist organisation), and put under Israeli blockade. Systematic launching of rockets from Gaza on Israeli cities resulted in retaliation, taking the form of a massive bombing of the Gaza strip. Two contradictory stances confronted each other at the UN, expressed in the speech of Mahmud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, speaking in the name of all Palestinians, despite his tense relations with Hamas (26 September 2014), and in Netanyahu’s address on 29 September 2014. Even if the session of the General Assembly is not meant to take an immediate practical decision, the judgement passed by its members on Protective Edge was bound to have an impact, both on the international image of Israel (which was quite damaged by multiple UN condemnations), and on the future resolutions concerning the management of the Middle East conflict. However, the address also dealt with ethos construction – trying to reinforce the authority of the speaker in a period of crisis, and displayed a polemical confrontation – it fiercely attacked the Palestinian discourse, intending to undermine its credibility and that Mahmud Abbas cannot, consequently, be a valid partner for the peace process.

The audience (a crucial element of rhetorical argumentation) is by definition heterogeneous: in the Assembly as well as in the international public watching the speech on TV or the internet, or reading it in its totality, or in fragments, through the press, we can find unconditional pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli members, but also relatively neutral ones. Moreover, the performance is also meant for the Israelis; it contributes to the construction of the PM’s ethos at home. In this perspective, the speech has to impress a variety of addressees who hold divergent, if not contradictory, views. Let us first explore the following passage of Netanyahu’s address, while shortly elaborating on the means and procedures of the analysis:

Antisemitism […] is now spreading in polite society, where it masquerades as legitimate criticism of Israel. For centuries the Jewish people have been demonised with blood libels and charges of deicide. Today, the Jewish state is demonised with the apartheid libel and charges of genocide.

(Haaretz 2014)

Our first stage will be to look for the underlying argumentative structures of the PM’s speech. Obviously, the central one is analogy, one of the two main modes of reasoning (together with syllogism) according to Aristotle. Perelman describes it as ‘A is to B as C is to D’. The first one (A is to B) is the theme dealt with, which has to be clarified and better understood (here: today’s accusations against Israel); the second is called the phoros, and consists of familiar elements (here the traditional accusations against the Jews), which can throw light on the theme being discussed (Perelman 1982 [1977], pp. 114–120). Thus, apartheid libels and charges of genocide (A) are to Israel (B) what blood libels and charges of deicide (C) were to the Jewish people (D). Accusations against Israel are presented as analogous with antisemitic defamation and thus factually and morally wrong. As the charges of having killed Christ and of using the blood of innocent children for Passover have long
been held against the Jews, the *phoros* is here grounded in history: the analogy takes the form of a historical example, or of what Reisigl and Wodak (2001, p. 80) call the *topos* of history: ‘because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example referred to’. Forchtner (2014, p. 34) offers a category into which Netanyahu’s example perfectly fits: ‘the rhetoric of judging’, where ‘the *topos* links the data (a past wrongdoing committed by an out-group) and the conclusion (that similar actions proposed today by *others* should be avoided)’.

The conclusion of the argument is given at the beginning of the paragraph to make it more salient: being equivalent to antisemitism, sharp political criticism against Israel should not only be avoided, but condemned and silenced. The metaphor of the ‘masquerade’ is meant to denounce false appearances. But above all, the affirmative utterance, examined separately from the arguments by analogy that sustain it, has its own force insofar as it reproduces a recurrent and already-familiar argument. The notion that the new antisemitism acquires its legitimacy today by usurping the form of a political criticism of Israel is a commonplace (a content-related argument) elaborated both in the academic and in lay debates; it has become part of an argumentative arsenal on which defenders of Israel regularly draw, so that the reader can easily recognise it (for the best if adhering to the stereotypical judgement, for the worst if disagreeing).

On the stylistic level, a well-wrought syntactic, semantic and even phonetic parallelism emphasises the similitude between political critique of Israel and antisemitism, suggesting that the one cannot be distinguished from the other. The *Jewish* people are equated with the *Jewish* State (the very Zionist definition of Israel that the Palestinians refused to recognise), blood libels with apartheid (where the common denominator is the axiological term ‘libel’), charges of deicide with charges of genocide (where repetition is reinforced by the play upon dei- and genocide, both built on the suffix, *cidius*, killing). Although contents change from one period of time and one domain to the other, what remains the same over the ages is the process, the perpetual and unjustified act of accusation against the Jews.

On the lexical level, the choice of ‘demonisation’, borrowed from an interdiscourse familiar to all, is particularly poignant. The Jew is depicted as Satan, the incarnation of evil on earth, with the only difference being that religious accusations have been translated into political ones. The selection and repetition of ‘demonised’, with its strong religious and symbolic connotations, connects the speech to a widely circulated discourse in the pro-Israeli spheres, with its long memory of antisemitic violence. The lexical choice of terms referring to the history of antisemitism (Poliakov 1980) is quite loaded from the axiological and affective vantage: human beings should not be presented as targets of fear, hatred and rejection, if not of murder. Let us also emphasise that in the context of antisemitism, the genocide attributed to Israel is brought back to its supposed etymological source – it was coined by the legal scholar Raphael Lemkin in 1944 in reference to the extermination of the Jews by the Nazis, and discloses the rhetorical process of ‘*retorsion*’ (turning the argument against the arguer) through which the Jews are accused of the very crime committed against them by those who negated their humanity.

These argumentative and discursive features allow for a plea that refutes the accusations by proposing an alternative script. It tacitly inverts the dominant distribution of roles where Israel is the oppressor, and the colonised and massacred Palestinians, the victim. This script, meant to reframe the situation, is tuned to a global context of ‘competition between victims’, as well as to the Israeli imaginary, obsessed by a history of hatred and persecution culminating in the Holocaust. It addresses both the feelings of the Jews, and the democratic (mostly...
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Western) countries that acknowledge their guilt and vehemently condemn antisemitism. *Pathos* appears here as a powerful adjuvant to *logos*, meaning that emotions and reasoning are closely interconnected and not, as some would have it, that the presence of emotions is synonymous with lack of reasoning.\(^6\) On the stage of the international community, the address endeavours to construct an alternative image of Israel, better suited to elicit understanding and compassion, if not indignation against an unremitting injustice.

In the following utterances of the same paragraph, the claim made by Netanyahu about the illegitimacy of a political critique feeding on antisemitism is supported by a development on the already-mentioned notion of genocide. The passage is overtly polemical as it endeavours to refute and discredit the discourse of Mahmud Abbas, who launched the following accusation in the opening sentence of his UN speech (September 26, 2014): ‘In this year, proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, Israel has chosen to make it a year of a new war of genocide perpetrated against the Palestinian people.’

To this, Netanyahu replies with a vehement counter-discourse:

Genocide? In what moral universe does genocide include warning the enemy’s civilian population to get out of harm’s way? Or ensuring that they receive tons, tons of humanitarian aid each day, even as thousands of rockets are being fired at us? Or setting up a field hospital to aid their wounded?

(Netanyahu, United Nations 2014)

The focus on ‘genocide’ rather than on the current accusations of ‘massacres’ or ‘disproportionate use of force’, allows for a reframing of the problem, if not a shift from the ongoing debate. The question is no longer whether Israel reacted in the right manner and proportion to Palestinian attacks, but whether it is acting with the intention to annihilate the Palestinian people. Moreover, the deliberation as an attempt to weigh the pros and the cons of Defensive Edge is replaced by a polemical exchange with its dichotomisation (radicalisation of two options presented as incompatible), its polarisation (reinforcing antagonism between groups) and its attempt at discrediting the Other (Amossy 2014). This does not mean that formal arguments are not mobilised. In his polemical attack, Netanyahu refutes the charge against Israel on the basis of an argument by definition: genocide being the deliberate extermination of an ethnic group or a people, helping the civil population to survive not only does not fit the definition, but even appears as the antonym of genocide.

The argumentative strategy is completed by a discursive one. The utterances heavily rely on the use of implicit elements to be filled in by the addressee, so that the latter is called upon to co-operate by co-constructing the meaning of the discourse. The definition of genocide at the basis of the argument is not formulated and the audience has to supply it from common knowledge; the denial of the accusation is not achieved in negative form, but through rhetorical questions that include their own (negative) answer, so that the conclusion has to be drawn by the audience. Moreover, by uncovering the incompatibility between the nature of genocide and what he presents as the reality on the ground, Netanyahu taints his comment with irony, calling for the audience’s complicity.

To this, we have to add the functions of the presuppositions. ‘In what moral universe does genocide include warning the enemy’s civilian population to get out of harm’s way?’ does not raise the question of whether or not this warning actually existed, it takes it for granted, presupposing that the Israelis did ask the population to leave the premises before bombing. Presuppositions present the alleged facts as already known and escaping discussion (Ducrot
But they do not necessarily rely on common knowledge: thus Abbott (2000, pp. 1422–1423), following Grice, emphasises that they can bring in a new information, which the addressee activates as if he already knew it. Thus, information about the way Israel dealt with civilians can be brought indirectly to the knowledge of the audience. Netanyahu also uses a technique of indirection to link the military actions of Israel to ethics by using the term ‘moral universe’, implying that the fighting was a matter, not only of military efficiency, but also of moral values (this is an allusion to the topic of ‘purity of arms’ related to Tsahal, presented in Israel as a ‘moral army’).

Denying the Palestinian claim of genocide and replacing it by a moral representation of Israel amounts to a process of image reparation (Benoit 1995). A crescendo is reached with the *chiasmus* of ‘tons, tons of humanitarian aid’ (for the Gaza civilians) and ‘thousands of rockets fired at us’. The hyperbolic tone emphasises the importance of humanitarian considerations for Israel, and its capacity to transcend a war situation in favour of an act of decency and generosity. This picture encapsulates the image of Protective Edge as the majority of Israeli citizens – as well as large parts of the Jewish populations in the world – see it, thus fulfilling an epideictic role: the community can gather around the same beliefs. It also aspires to enlightening those who ignore the facts presented by the PM – thus playing a persuasive role. Here again, *pathos* in the guise of questions (‘Genocide?’), repetitions and oppositions, reinforces the argumentative structure by colouring the speech with indignation at an accusation considered as distorted and abusive.

Through his UN speech, Netanyahu constructs an *ethos* targeting both the international audience, and his home audience. His speech aims to present him in the face of the world as a leader fiercely defending his country, and a principled orator moved by moral feelings. At the same time, the Israeli PM seizes the opportunity to improve an image of self severely impaired during a war during which (Israel being for weeks under rocket attacks) he was severely criticised in his own country. He was attacked by his right wing who claimed that he was not reacting powerfully enough against Hamas and failed to defeat it. He was blamed by the left who claimed that such a bloody military operation was unnecessary and, moreover, that the disastrous situation as a whole was a result of Netanyahu government’s failure to engage in a real peace process. A large part of the population, especially in the south of the country – where the bombing was the most intense and where murderous tunnels leading to civil habitations were discovered – simply felt that the government was not able to protect the population. This explains the necessity to refurbish a tarnished image and to project, on a prestigious international stage, an image of a leader able to confront the world and make a vibrant plea for his people, representing them on all the topics where a wide national consensus was achieved. Caring for his own power position, as well as for Israel’s international reputation, Netanyahu thus engages in a double process of image repair intended to maintain his own power and prestige as well as to influence the UN’s future deliberations.

**Conclusion**

I have chosen to engage in a brief analysis of a situated discursive fragment in order to exemplify the procedures and notions of argumentation analysis, and show how they interact on different levels, shifting from deliberation to polemical exchange and exploiting *ethos* construction and image reparation. In the limits of a short presentation where an extensive survey of argumentative and discursive means is not possible, my main purpose has been to show how we can use various analytical tools borrowed from different trends of language.
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studies, as well as argumentation theories, while linking the text to its targeted audience as well as to its context, and examining the particular management of verbal argumentation in its generic framework. Argumentation in discourse unveils the mechanisms of the discourse without engaging in explicit critique – it analyses without assessing.

Although I have chosen to exemplify a non-normative approach, drawing on DA rather than on CDA, and despite the differences in approaches (notably, in what concerns critique and commitment), we can see that the various trends of argumentation analysis share some features: focus on arguments, argumentative schemes and formal topoi (with occasional preference for content-related topoi); emphasis on the socio-historical and institutional situation in which the argumentation is embedded; close linguistic analysis of the way arguments are put into words, and of the discursive means (syntactic, lexical, pragmatic, etc.) mobilised by the overall persuasion enterprise; and use of discursive and argumentative analysis to shed light on political issues and the management of public affairs.

Notes

1 ‘Its object is neither the textual organization, nor the communication situation, but what links them together through an enunciation system. Such a system falls both within the verbal and the institutional provinces’ (Maingueneau in Charaudeau & Maingueneau 2002, p. 43).

2 For an interesting integration of Bakhtin’s dialogism into argumentation theory, see Tindale 2004, ch. 4.

3 It goes without saying that these few bibliographical items are purely indicative.

4 Hamas – its military wing, together with several charities it runs – has been designated as a terrorist organisation by Israel (1989), the United States (1996), Canada (2002), the European Union (2001/2003), Japan (2006) and Egypt (2015), and it was outlawed in Jordan (1999). It is not regarded as a terrorist organisation by Iran, Russia, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, China and Brazil. An EU court found the EU’s earlier designation flawed, but its decision has been appealed by the European Council. It is a point of debate in political and academic circles over whether or not to classify Hamas as a terrorist group (Wikipedia ND).

5 It is fully elaborated in the writing of Taguieff – among others (Taguieff 2002).

6 On this much-debated topic, see Walton 1992; Micheli 2010.

References


