Getting the vaccine now will protect you in the future! A pragma-dialectical analysis of strategic maneuvering with pragmatic argumentation in health brochures
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‘Getting the vaccine now will protect you in the future’ is an example of pragmatic argumentation in a health brochure aimed at convincing the reader of a piece of health advice. A brochure writer can be expected to attempt to choose the most convincing arguments and formulate them in the most appealing way. This study aims to explain why a health brochure writer might choose pragmatic argumentation and how a writer might design the argumentation to convince people to accept his advice. Based on the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation and the notion of strategic maneuvering, it is explained how the conventions of health brochures influence what arguments writers can advance and how they can present them. For example, writers are expected to advance arguments that are relevant for justifying health advice and they should enable readers to make an informed decision. This study shows that four variants of pragmatic argumentation can each contribute to the writer’s goals by addressing a specific type of anticipated doubt or criticism concerning the standpoint or the argumentation. Examples of health brochures (e.g. about smoking, vaccination, antibiotics) are used to examine the rhetorical advantages of these variants of pragmatic argumentation in this specific context. A case study of a vaccination brochure reveals that a particular design can make pragmatic argumentation appear stronger and the advocated behavior more appealing than it perhaps is.

Lotte van Poppel (1981) obtained a master’s degree in Languages and Cultures of Latin America from Leiden University and in Rhetoric, Argumentation Theory, and Philosophy from the University of Amsterdam. She works as an instructor and researcher at the Department of Speech Communication, Argumentation Theory and Rhetoric at the University of Amsterdam.