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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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Summary

The general objective of this study is twofold: first, to explain the choice for pragmatic argumentation in the context of health brochures; and second, to explain the choice for a specific design of the pragmatic argumentation or, in other words, how a writer chooses one instantiation of pragmatic argumentation over the other. Health brochures, which are usually part of larger public health campaigns, are meant to influence behavior by offering people advice on what they should do to improve their health. Pragmatic argumentation is a crucial type of argumentation in advisory health brochures. It is a type of argumentation in which one points to the desirable or undesirable effects of behavior to advocate or discourage that behavior. Pragmatic argumentation can be used in various designs in which the action and the causal relation between action and effect are presented in different ways.

To gain insight into the choice for pragmatic argumentation and its design, this study makes use of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984, 1992, 2004) and the concept of *strategic maneuvering* (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 2002, 2006; van Eemeren 2010). In the current study, the choice for pragmatic argumentation and a particular design of the argumentation is explained by examining how particular choices in the specific institutional context of health brochures contribute to the writer's dialectical objective of resolving a difference of opinion on the one hand and his rhetorical objective of resolving the difference in his own favor on the other hand.

To answer this question, it is first determined how the institutional conventions of health brochures with an advisory standpoint affect the strategic maneuvering (Chapter 2). Health brochures are regarded as a specific argumentative activity type in which three conventions significantly affect the strategic maneuvering in the argumentation stage: that the issue under discussion is a piece of health advice, that the relation between the health institution responsible for the brochure and the reader is asymmetrical, and that the discussion is implicit.

The type of issue under discussion affects the strategic maneuvering in the sense that arguments that point at beneficial effects of adhering to the advice for the reader's health are particularly relevant in this context. The asymmetrical relation between institution and reader, resulting from the status of the health institution issuing the brochure, affects the maneuvering in the sense that a brochure writer has to offer reliable information and has to be careful not to come across as too imposing. The convention that the discussion about the advice is implicit is due to the fact that the health institution presents its case via a written text to an absent

audience. Because of this convention, it is up to the writer to anticipate the reader's countermoves and respond to them or not. The institutional conventions affect the possibilities for strategic maneuvering with respect to the selection from the topical potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the use of presentational devices. Due to these conventions, the preconditions for strategic maneuvering in the argumentation stage are that the writer selects science-based arguments that point to the advantages of following the advice, these arguments are adapted to the reader's beliefs regarding science and health, and they are presented in a way that sheds a positive light on the recommended action (or a negative light on the discouraged action), without imposing too much on the reader. Strategic maneuvering in this context therefore typically involves the use of pragmatic argumentation that is framed in the way that serves the writer best in getting the advice accepted.

Due to the conventions of the activity type, a writer can only reach this goal by removing anticipated doubt and criticism with respect to his advisory standpoint. Therefore, this study first examines what types of doubt and criticism a writer of health brochures can expect (Chapter 3). On the basis of contextualized correctness conditions of the speech act of advising (partly based on Searle (1969)) a systematic overview of the various types of doubt in this context is provided. The types of doubt concern three aspects of advising: the usefulness of the health advice, the necessity of the health advice, and the responsibility of the writer. With the help of examples from actual brochures it is shown that each of these types of doubt derived from the specified correctness conditions can actually play a role in the argumentation in health brochures. Pragmatic argumentation appears to be systematically connected with the first preparatory condition of advising (which concerns the usefulness of the advice): does the act A benefit the reader's health and the health of (part of) the population by preventing, treating, or detecting a health problem? This condition seems the most crucial to advising, because it guarantees that it is worthwhile for the reader to change his current behavior.

After having determined what kinds of doubt are relevant in discussions about health advice, analysis is conducted into what types of doubt and criticism can be addressed in health brochures with pragmatic argumentation (Chapter 4). A characterization of pragmatic argumentation is provided and four variants of pragmatic argumentation are introduced. It is argued that each of the distinguished variants of pragmatic argumentation can be a dialectically relevant move in a discussion about health advice by addressing a possible countermove concerning the standpoint or the argumentation. In a (simplified) dialectical profile, four dialectical routes are represented in which pragmatic argumentation plays a role and which differ in the kind of countermove they address.

In route 1, the positive and negative form of pragmatic argumentation contribute to the resolution of the presupposed difference of opinion by removing doubt with respect to the preparatory condition of advice concerning the positive effect of

the advocated action on the reader's health. In route 2, the writer puts forward subordinative argumentation in anticipation of critical questions concerning the propositional content of the pragmatic argument. In route 3, the writer anticipates critical questions that represent criticism concerning the justificatory force of the argumentation. The writer puts forward variant III of pragmatic argumentation to address the critical question about possible side-effects or variant IV to deal with the question about possible alternatives to the proposed action. In route 4, the writer employs variant IV of pragmatic argumentation to attack a counterargument, thereby giving an indirect defense of the standpoint. The positive and negative form of pragmatic argumentation thus function as a means to justify advice by showing that the first preparatory condition of advising is fulfilled. Variants III and IV contribute to resolving the difference of opinion by attacking criticism and opposing standpoints, thereby making the defense of the standpoint easier. Distinguishing these four routes shows that there is a systematic connection between each variant of pragmatic argumentation and the types of doubt and criticism that are distinguished.

Once the dialectical function of pragmatic argumentation is examined, it is determined what the rhetorical advantages are of using a particular route with pragmatic argumentation to support an advisory standpoint in health brochures (Chapter 5). To this end, examples of brochures for each of the four routes distinguished in Chapter 4 are analyzed. It is argued that, to be rhetorically effective, a writer must make sure that he considers, within the limited space of a brochure, all relevant criticism the reader may have. At the same time, it may benefit his case to disregard certain potential criticism if he is unable to provide a convincing response to it. Addressing anticipated countermoves has two main advantages: it is a way of taking the reader's concerns regarding the advice and the argumentation into account (and thereby coming across as a reasonable discussion party), and it can contribute to the defense of the writer's initial standpoint. It can also have a negative side: the brochure writer can ascribe a position to the reader that he does not have and the reader might be offended by assumptions made about him. In some situations, it may be better for the brochure writer's case to ignore certain potential critical reactions, or to present the attack on countermoves in a way that appeals to the audience.

Next, it is examined what the rhetorical advantages are of using a particular design of pragmatic argumentation, in any of the routes, to support an advisory standpoint in health brochures (Chapter 6). As a case study, the 2012 British brochure about vaccination against the human papilloma virus (HPV) was used. In the analysis, the focus was placed on the design of the premise 'Action X leads to desirable consequence Y' of the pragmatic argument, which is designed in four different ways. The designs differ from each other in the way that the causal connection and the consequence that is referred to in the premise are expressed. In this HPV brochure, the writer chose to advance pragmatic argumentation by

using variant I in a gain-frame. In terms of strategic maneuvering, this choice entailed that the writer made the topical choice to focus on cervical cancer, the presentational choice to present the causal connection in a way that is both strong and nuanced, and which evokes the images of a weapon of a war and a means of protection to appeal to girls and their parents, respectively. These choices, resulting in a particular design, all contribute to the strategy of showing that vaccination is an effective and desirable way of preventing an undesirable consequence.

It is argued that these choices in the design contribute to achieving the writer's goals in two ways. Firstly, they address potential criticism towards the causal and the evaluative elements of the pragmatic argument by emphasizing the desirability of the effect and representing the causal connection in the strongest way. Secondly, the designs contribute to an argumentative strategy that spans the entire brochure. In combination with the design of other moves in the brochure which lay a strong causal connection between HPV vaccination and the prevention of cervical cancer, the designs of the pragmatic argument create the image that the HPV vaccine is a vaccine against cervical cancer. Particular designs of pragmatic argumentation thus help the brochure writer reach the goal of getting the advisory standpoint accepted in the specific context of a vaccination brochure by addressing anticipated criticism, both on the level of the argumentation stage and on the level of the argumentative move.