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Argumentative Style: A Complex Notion

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Abstract

This theoretical expose explores the complex notion of argumentative style, which has so far been largely neglected in argumentation theory. After an introduction of the problems involved, the theoretical tools for identifying the properties of the discourse in which an argumentative style manifests itself are explained from a pragma-dialectical perspective and a theoretical definition of argumentative style is provided that does full justice to its role in argumentative discourse. The article concludes with a short reflection upon the next steps that need to be taken in argumentation theory in further substantiating the notion of argumentative style.

Keywords Analytic overview · Argumentative move · Argumentative pattern · Argumentative strategy · Argumentative style · Dialectical route · Dimension of audience demand · Dimension of presentational devices · Dimension of topical choices · Pragma-dialectics · Strategic consideration · Strategic design · Strategic scenario

1 Introduction

The way in which arguers go about defending their standpoints to others often leads to remarks from bystanders as well as analysts concerning the “style” in which the argumentative discourse is conducted.¹ All kinds of comments are given, varying from general characterisations of the arguer’s argumentative conduct and descriptions of striking properties to judgments of its appropriateness. Although the concept of style also applies to visual and other non-verbal modes of communication,

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the remarks about argumentative style tend to concentrate on spoken and written discourse. Usually the characterisations and other verdicts in the literature are given from a linguistic background. In “stylistics”, the twentieth century successor of the rhetorical study of *elocutio*, this is certainly the dominant perspective. Wales (1991), for one, states in her *Dictionary of Stylistics* that “stylistic features are basically features of language” (p. 436) and Fahnestock (2011) concentrates in her prominent study *Rhetorical Style* on “features of language that might enhance its power over the audience” (p. 6).²

“Style” is by all accounts an elusive notion. As Wales (1991) says in her dictionary, “Although style is used very frequently in literary criticism and especially stylistics [...], it is very difficult to define” (p. 435). “At its simplest”, she states, “style refers to the manner of expression in writing or speaking, just as there is a manner of doing things, like playing squash or painting” (p. 435). Claes and Hulsens (2015: 129) observe in their dictionary of rhetoric that style was in the past seen as literary adornment (*ornatus*), later as a deviation of ordinary language use and nowadays as a choice between language variants. Among the factors involved in stylistic variation mentioned in the literature are the medium that is used for expressing oneself, the degree of formality of the occasion, the norms that are being played with and the contextual domain (or the situation in the case of “registers”) in which the discourse takes place. Sometimes the discussion of style concentrates on the style that is used in a particular speech event (e.g. in Trump’s inaugural address of 20 January 2017), sometimes on the individual style of a certain speaker or writer (e.g. Kennedy or Nabokov), and sometimes on the general characteristics of the style used in a certain type of communicative activity (e.g. love letters) or period (e.g. editorials in the 19th century)—usually viewed in comparison with other communicative activity types or periods.

These general observations may apply equally well to the notion of “argumentative style” that I am concerned with, but for dealing with argumentative style a different kind of perspective is needed. Although, of course, the presentational aspect of argumentative discourse is to be given its due, argumentative style should in my view be analysed for its instrumentality in trying to resolve a difference of opinion by convincing the intended audience or readership by means of argumentative discourse of the acceptability of the standpoint at issue. This means that in my approach the treatment of style will concentrate primarily on its argumentative function. In line with the gist of my general approach to argumentation, my treatment will be at the same time pragmatic in the linguistic sense and dialectical in the philosophical sense. In dealing with argumentative style I will make use of the theoretical insights provided by the extended pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren 2018), in particular those concerning the determining aspects of strategic manoeuvring, the use of argumentative moves, the choice of dialectical routes and the implementation of strategic considerations.

² For some provisional observations concerning the style used in argumentative discourse that is partly or whole conducted by visual means see Tseronis (2017: 348).

Starting from the view that argumentative style is a complex notion that is instrumental in the pursuit of effectiveness in convincing the addressee of a certain standpoint, this article is aimed at capturing the notion of argumentative style in a working definition that relates argumentative style to the properties of argumentative discourse in which it manifests itself in the discourse. In order to get to this definition, I shall in Sect. 2 discuss the concepts that need to be put in a theoretical perspective in describing these properties: the argumentative moves that are used, the dialectical routes that have been chosen and the strategic considerations that have been implemented. Against this background, I shall in Sect. 3 situate the notion of argumentative style conceptually in the framework of pragma-dialectics by providing a definition that covers all dimensions of argumentative style that are relevant from this theoretical perspective and relates argumentative style to the properties of argumentative discourse just mentioned. In Sect. 4, I shall conclude this article with a brief reflection upon the next steps to be taken in argumentation theory in further substantiating the notion of argumentative style.

2 The Manifestation of Argumentative Style in Argumentative Discourse

2.1 The Argumentative Moves that are Made

The first property of argumentative discourse relevant to determining its argumentative style consists of the argumentative moves that are made in the discourse. In pragma-dialectics the various kinds of argumentative moves that can be instrumental in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits are represented in a model of a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 42–68). In this theoretical model it is for each stage of the critical discussion indicated in terms of speech acts which types of argumentative moves can be contributions to the resolution process (van Eemeren 2018: 33–50). Due to their potentially constructive role in the resolution process, these argumentative moves are at a particular point in the discourse considered to be “analytically relevant” (van Eemeren 2018: 74, 92). Which options for making such argumentative moves are available to each of the parties in the difference of opinion is portrayed in full detail in “dialectical profiles” (van Eemeren 2018: 42–49).

In argumentative discourse particular argumentative moves are made at every point in the discourse. In all these cases the argumentative moves concerned involve certain choices regarding the way in which the argumentative discourse is conducted on the part of the arguer. This goes in principle for every argumentative move that is made in the discourse in any of the real-life counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion: the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage, and the concluding stage. In the pragma-dialectical approach, based on a systematic reconstruction of the discourse, in an “analytic overview” a survey is provided of all analytically relevant argumentative moves that are made in an argumentative discourse (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 93–94). The analytic overview gives

a description of all argumentative moves in the discourse that are pertinent to an adequate evaluation (van Eemeren 2018: 96–100).

A complex argumentative move in the conduct of argumentative discourse that is crucial to the resolution of the difference of opinion is the use of argumentation in support of the standpoint at issue. Various types of argumentation can be advanced to enhance the acceptability of a standpoint, each of them characterized by the employment of a specific argument scheme. The argument schemes of “symptomatic”, “comparison” and “causal” argumentation distinguished in pragma-dialectics have a pragmatic basis in the arguers’ human experience regarding the justificatory principles appealed upon in legitimizing the transfer of acceptance from the arguments constituting the argumentation to the standpoints that are defended. In symptomatic argumentation the argument scheme is used to establish a relation of concomitance between the argument concerned and the standpoint that is supported, in comparison argumentation to establish a relation of comparability, and in causal argumentation to establish a relation of causality (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 94–102). The dialectical rationale of the distinction lies in the different kinds of interactional follow-up instigated by the critical questions that are to be dealt with when the various argument schemes are employed. The rationale for distinguishing between subtypes of the three main types of argumentation is in pragma-dialectics also both pragmatic and dialectical.

The first relevant critical reaction to the use of a particular type of argumentation consists of asking the “basic” critical question whether the relationship that the argument scheme employed claims to exist does indeed exist (van Eemeren and Garssen 2019). Because the justificatory principle appealed to varies according to the argument scheme that is employed, the basic critical question will be different for each type of argumentation. The basic critical question associated with the use of symptomatic argumentation is whether what is stated in the standpoint is indeed a sign or token of what is mentioned in the argumentation; the basic critical question associated with the use of comparison argumentation is whether what is stated in the standpoint is indeed comparable to what is mentioned in the argumentation; and the basic critical question associated with the use of causal argumentation is whether what is mentioned in the argumentation does indeed lead to what is stated in the standpoint. Other relevant critical questions may relate specifically to the justificatory point of the particular subtype of argumentation that is used, to certain qualities of the premises or to vital presuppositions.³

In establishing a relationship between the arguments conveyed in argumentation and the standpoint at issue in order to promote a transfer of acceptance, the arguer employs according to Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) the argumentative technique of “association” (pp. 190–191). Another argumentative technique they

³ The dominant role played by the critical questions associated with the argument schemes that are used in bringing about a particular argumentative pattern in the discourse is a reason for paying special attention to them in the identification of argumentative styles. See Sect. 2.2.

distinguish that can be exploited in making argumentative moves is “dissociation”. Dissociation consists of making a distinction between the use of a certain word or expression (“term”) the arguer considers lacking and what he or she considers its proper use and replacing the criticized meaning of the term by a notion denoting the latter.⁴ In pragma-dialectics analytically relevant argumentative moves involving the use of dissociation are realized by means of (*language*) *usage declaratives* aimed at clarifying the meaning of vital terms by providing a definition, a precization, etc. (van Eemeren 2018: 41). As van Rees (2009) emphasizes, dissociations are generally brought to bear in order to resolve a contradiction or an incompatibility.

In making a dissociation the existing problem of usage is solved by splitting up the problematic concept conveyed by the use of a certain word or expression and introducing next to the original concept a new concept. Such a dissociation may lead to giving a new name to the new concept, to the old concept or even to both, but this is neither necessary nor typical. In the “purest” cases of dissociation the original term is without any renaming maintained in another meaning (e.g. “THAT is not what ‘democratic’ means; ‘democratic’ is THIS”).⁵ Dissociation may mean that, compared with its original meaning, the meaning of a term is reduced, because a specification or precization is given so that in the new use of the term only part of the original meaning is maintained,⁶ but the new meaning given to a term can also be broader, more extensive or otherwise richer than the one that is criticized, so that in its new use the term refers to a more elaborate or otherwise different concept.⁷ Wu (2019) distinguishes in a recent study on strategic manoeuvring by Chinese spokespersons responding to questions of journalists at press conferences between four different subtypes of dissociation: (1) the allegedly “distorted” meaning of a term is replaced by its “authentic” meaning; (2) the “ambiguous” meaning given to a term is replaced by the “univocal” meaning it allegedly has; (3) the allegedly “broadened” meaning of a term is replaced by its “exact” meaning; (4) the allegedly “narrowed” meaning of a term is replaced by its “exact” meaning.

Argumentative styles manifest themselves in the empirical counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion in argumentative discourse first of all in the argumentative moves made in introducing the standpoints at issue and defining the difference of opinion, in establishing the material and procedural starting points of the discourse, in advancing the arguments constituting the argumentation in support of the standpoints at issue, and in presenting the outcome of the argumentative process. In determining the argumentative style of the discourse, when considering the

⁴ Dissociation pertains to the use of words and expressions in natural languages, which are in principle always open to various interpretations; in formal languages the possibility of dissociation does not exist because the terms that are used are univocal (or semantically empty).

⁵ In all cases of dissociation the criticized meaning of the term remains in principle the same (even though it may not always be crystal clear what exactly this meaning is). If this is helpful to avoid confusion, the parties might also decide to abandon the term in its old use after the distinction has been accepted (“Let’s no longer call THAT *democratic*, because THIS is the meaning than we intend the term *democratic* to have”).

⁶ This is sometimes indicated by adding a qualifying expression to the original term (e.g. “She is a speed skater, not just a skater”).

⁷ The view of dissociation expounded here involves a slight amendment of the definition provided by van Rees (2009: 9). See also Wu (2019: Section 4.2).

manifestation of analytically relevant argumentative moves in the discourse both the associative and the dissociative uses of argumentative moves must be taken into account. The analytic overview of the argumentative discourse concerned is the most appropriate point of departure in this endeavour, because it provides a survey of the implementation of the various types of argumentative moves that have been put to good use in the discourse.

2.2 The Dialectical Route that is Chosen

The specific critical questions elicited by the use of the various types of argumentation in the argumentative discourse open up different kinds of “dialectical routes”, depending on the argument scheme involved. By specifying the critical questions associated with the argument scheme that has been activated, the dialectical routes instigated by the use of a particular (sub)type of argumentation can be portrayed in a dialectical profile. Such a dialectical profile describes the potential ways of going through the process of resolving a difference of opinion that are initiated by the choice of a particular (sub)type of argumentation in defending the standpoint at issue. The dialectical route that is chosen in the discourse is the second property of argumentative discourse, next to the argumentative moves that are made, that is relevant to determining the argumentative style that is used in the discourse.

When in argumentative discourse the one (sub)type of argumentation is chosen instead of the other the dialectical routes that are available will be different from the dialectical routes that may become the options in the other case. The choice of argument schemes in the main argumentation, advanced at the first level of the defence of a standpoint, will depend primarily on the type of standpoint that is at issue, while the continuation of the dialectical route that is chosen at the next levels of the defence is in the first place dependent on the critical questions associated with the argument scheme employed in the main argumentation to defend the standpoint. The different sets of critical questions going with the various types of argumentation that can be chosen will induce the arguer to make different kinds of argumentative moves to anticipate or respond to the different kinds of critical reactions. Choosing a certain dialectical route in the conduct of argumentative discourse results in this way always in the development of a particular kind of “argumentative pattern” that is manifested in the discourse (van Eemeren 2017: 17–22). Thus the argumentative pattern characterizing the discourse provides a description of the dialectical route that is chosen in an argumentative discourse.

An argumentative pattern consists of a particular constellation of argumentative moves in which in dealing with a particular kind of difference of opinion in defence of a particular type of standpoint a particular argument scheme or combination of argument schemes is used in a particular kind of argumentation structure (van Eemeren 2018: 150). The various argumentative patterns coming about in different kinds of discourse practices can be identified with the help of the theoretical instruments for analysing argumentative discourse developed in pragma-dialectics: the typology of standpoints (descriptive/evaluative/prescriptive), the typology of differences of opinions (single/multiple; non-mixed/mixed), the typology of argument

schemes (symptomatic/comparison/causal), and the typology of argumentation structures (single/multiple/coordinative/subordinative) (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 13–89). The categories and subcategories distinguished in these typologies can be put to good use in describing the way in which argumentative patterns manifest themselves in particular speech events in specific constellations of argumentative moves (van Eemeren 2018: 163–165).

Because each of the three argument schemes calls out its own set of critical questions, the uses of symptomatic argumentation, comparison argumentation and causal argumentation are associated with different dialectical routes that can be taken in resolving a difference of opinion. The differences between the dialectical routes instigated by the use of argumentation in which one of these argument schemes is employed are in the first place determined by the basic critical question connected with the type of argumentation concerned. In case specific subtypes of the various types of argumentation are used, other differences result from the need to respond to the additional question pertaining to the subtype concerned that complements the basic question. Still further differences ensue in the various cases from the critical questions relating to the premises or to vital presuppositions. The responses given to all these critical questions manifest themselves systematically in the discourse in particular kinds of argumentative patterns.

Because it depends partly on the macro-context in which the argumentation takes place exactly which critical questions are pertinent and need to be responded to, the specific conventions of the various communicative activity types established in a certain domain determine to some extent which critical questions will be dealt with in the discourse. Since in a communicative activity type the answers to certain critical questions have in some cases already been agreed upon from the start, dealing with these questions is then superfluous.⁸ This applies, for instance, to a political debate in which pragmatic argumentation is advanced to put an end to the problem of unemployment. The (positive) answer to the critical question whether solving the problem of unemployment is indeed desirable is then already presupposed as a point of departure of the exchange. In other words, the critical questions that need to be dealt with in checking the acceptability of the use of a certain (sub)type of argumentation not only need to be specified, supplemented or otherwise amended to make them applicable to a specific (cluster of) communicative activity type(s) (van Eemeren 2018: 140–143), but they also need to be implemented in accordance with the specific institutional preconditions of that (cluster of) communicative activity type(s) (van Eemeren 2018: 137–140).

When the argumentative patterns coming into being in argumentative discourse result from the use of modes of strategic manoeuvring that are pre-eminently instrumental in realising the institutional point of a certain communicative activity type

⁸ In some argumentative practices it is not only decided (or silently agreed upon) in the empirical counterpart of the opening stage which argument schemes can be exploited but also which critical questions need to be answered to test whether the argument schemes that are used have been applied correctly.

and this strategic manoeuvring reflects directly the influence of the institutional preconditions constraining the strategic manoeuvring in that (cluster of) communicative activity type(s), these argumentative patterns can be considered “prototypical” (van Eemeren 2018: 151). The fact that they are prototypical means that these argumentative patterns are characteristic of the argumentative discourse that is carried out in that particular communicative activity type or cluster of communicative activity types (van Eemeren 2017: 20–22).⁹ Since the institutional point to be realized in the strategic manoeuvring and the institutional conventions and preconditions that are to be taken into account are related to the various kinds of institutionalized macro-contexts, the prototypical argumentative patterns that come into being in the various communicative activity types will vary to a greater or lesser extent.

Although it may be expected that argumentative patterns that are prototypical of a communicative activity type will be found regularly in speech events that are specimens of the kind of argumentative practice concerned, they need not occur frequently, let alone always be present (van Eemeren 2017: 22). Certain prototypical argumentative patterns may in certain argumentative practices occur frequently while other prototypical argumentative patterns may not. Only when its frequency of occurrence is relatively high, can a prototypical argumentative pattern be regarded as “stereotypical” (van Eemeren 2017: 22). The fact that it is stereotypical means that it is a prototypical argumentative pattern that occurs more frequently in the same (cluster of) communicative activity type(s) than some other argumentative patterns or that its frequency of occurrence in this (cluster of) communicative activity type(s) is higher than in other (clusters of) communicative activity types—or both.¹⁰

Next to the basic argumentative patterns developed in argumentative discourse at the first level of the defence of the standpoints at issue, extended argumentative patterns will develop at the next level(s) of the defence when the critical questions that are anticipated or responded to give occasion to lend support to the main argumentation. In principle the basic argumentative pattern of the discourse represents the main line of defence, but this main line can sometimes be reinforced by subordinative argumentation included in the extended argumentative pattern. In such cases the argumentative style of the discourse may manifest itself both in the basic argumentative pattern of the discourse and in (certain parts of) the extended argumentative pattern. In examining the way in which the argumentative style that is used in the discourse manifests itself in the discourse not only the basic argumentative pattern indicating the main line of defence must therefore be taken into account but sometimes also the extended argumentative pattern.

⁹ Prototypical argumentative patterns that have come into being in agreement with the rules for conducting a critical discussion can be viewed as empirical manifestations in argumentative reality of dialectical routes for resolving a difference of opinion on the merits described in the relevant dialectical profiles. Just as dialectical profiles may allow for more dialectical routes, communicative activity types may be characterized by more than one prototypical argumentative pattern.

¹⁰ Why the prototypical and stereotypical argumentative patterns may systematically differ in different geo-political settings (such as China, the United States and Europe) can be explained by differences in institutional constraints ensuing from the cultural or ideological background in which these communicative activity types have been established.

2.3 The Implementation of Strategic Considerations

Starting from the assumption that, in principle, protagonists may be expected to be out to make the strongest possible case for their standpoints in the macro-context in which the argumentative discourse takes place, I will now pay attention to the strategic rationale of the conduct of argumentative discourse. Making the best of argumentative discourse means that in every argumentative move they make arguers may be assumed to be out to ensure that this move is not only considered reasonable but also effective in gaining acceptance from the audience they want to reach. Because of the tension inevitably involved in the simultaneous pursuit of these two aims, in making argumentative moves the arguers always have to manoeuvre strategically to keep the balance.¹¹

The arguer's strategic manoeuvring will manifest itself in every argumentative move in three different but interrelated aspects (van Eemeren 2010: 93–96). First, strategic manoeuvring involves a specific selection from the available “topical potential” of the argumentative moves that could be made at a certain point in the discourse. The selection from the topical potential may result, for instance, in the choice of a particular starting point or a particular (sub)type of argumentation. Second, strategic manoeuvring involves a specific adaptation to “audience demand”, i.e. to the frame of reference and preferences of the listeners or readers the arguer intends to reach. Adaptation to audience demand boils down, for example, to the use of a particular starting point or (sub)type of argumentation that the intended audience is likely to accept. Third, strategic manoeuvring involves making use of a specific “presentational device”, i.e. choosing a particular way of expressing oneself in carrying out the argumentative move concerned. The exploitation of presentational devices can, for instance, amount to formulating a crucial starting point explicitly in a formal way or—just the opposite—leaving the conclusion of the argumentation implicit. In argumentative reality the three analytically distinguished aspects of strategic manoeuvring are interdependent and come simultaneously to the fore in every argumentative move.

The argumentative moves made by the arguers in argumentative discourse may all be supposed to have been aimed at realizing their dialectical and rhetorical aims of resolving the difference of opinion in their own favour. The various strategic manoeuvres the arguers carry out in the discourse may therefore be expected to be as much as possible coordinated in a way that is optimally helpful to achieving this aim. This coordination of strategic manoeuvres is to take place both at the level of the three aspects of the individual manoeuvres and at the level of the succession of the various manoeuvres in the discourse. If the coordination is realized in such a way that the strategic manoeuvres involved systematically cohere and constitute together a combined effort to achieve the dialectical and rhetorical aims pursued by the arguer in the discourse, the argumentative moves involved may be considered

¹¹ Keeping the balance involves trying to reach the optimal result in pursuing effectiveness while maintaining reasonableness.

an “argumentative strategy” (van Eemeren 2010: 45–47; 2018: 116–120).¹² The implementation of strategic considerations is the third property of argumentative discourse that is relevant to determining the argumentative style that is used in the discourse.

Some argumentative strategies that are used pertain exclusively to a particular stage of the process of resolving a difference of opinion and are only carried out in that stage (van Eemeren 2010: 46–47). “Confrontational strategies”, to begin with, are aimed at influencing the definition of the difference of opinion in the confrontation stage. A well-recognized confrontational strategy provisionally named *humpty-dumptying* consists, for example, of choosing standpoints by making self-serving arbitrary choices from the available disagreement space and treating them as the standpoints that are to be dealt with in the discourse (van Eemeren 2018: 117). “Opening strategies” are aimed at influencing the choice of the starting points that constitute the point of departure of the argumentative exchange. The opening strategy known as *creating a smokescreen*, for instance, consists of adding irrelevant starting points to the presumed point of departure in order to blur the outlines of the “zone of agreement” and distract the other party’s attention away from starting points that are really relevant (van Eemeren 2018: 117). “Argumentational strategies” are carried out in the argumentation stage to create lines of defence or attack that determine the direction of the resolution process. A so-called *problem-solving* argumentational strategy used in defending a prescriptive standpoint concerning a recommended action consists, for example, of relying on causal argumentation of a pragmatic (or a more complex) type to suggest that carrying out this action will eventually solve the troublesome problem at issue automatically (Garssen 2017). “Concluding strategies” are aimed at guiding the determination of the outcome of the exchange into a particular direction. An example designated as *making them bite the bullet* consists of getting it through to the other party that a certain outcome needs to be accepted as unavoidable, however undesirable that may be (van Eemeren 2018: 118).

There are also argumentative strategies that are “general”. They are aimed at achieving the general dialectical and rhetorical aims of the arguer by the coordinated use of similarly-aligned kinds of strategic manoeuvres during the whole discussion and are also known as “discussion strategies”. A familiar example of such a general argumentative strategy used in all discussion stages is *playing down the opponent* (van Eemeren 2018: 118). This strategy can, for instance, be implemented by not really acknowledging the other party’s doubts in the confrontation stage, ignoring some of their proposed starting points in the opening stage, denigrating their objections in the argumentation stage and not paying attention to any deviating conclusions they may have reached in the concluding stage.¹³

¹² If the coordination of the strategic manoeuvring concerns only one aspect, a topical, adaptational or presentational strategy may have been employed but not a full-blown argumentative strategy.

¹³ This argumentative strategy can hardly be expected to convince the actual opponent, but may be effective in persuading a third party viewed as the primary audience by the arguer.

The notion of argumentative strategy is in pragma-dialectics developed as a tool for laying bare the “strategic design” of an argumentative discourse. The strategic design explains how in the discourse concerned an effort is made to deal with the argumentative predicament of real-life argumentative discourse of having to combine aiming for effectiveness with maintaining reasonableness. The constitutive components of the strategic design of an argumentative discourse are the argumentative moves that are made, the dialectical routes that are chosen and the strategic considerations that are implemented. The strategic design explains how certain strategic considerations are brought to bear in choosing a certain dialectical route in making certain argumentative moves in the discourse. The strategic considerations underlying the strategic design relate, first of all, to how a protagonist expects to be effective in the communicative activity type concerned in gaining in a reasonable way the antagonist’s acceptance of the standpoint at issue by taking a particular dialectical route consisting of argumentative moves that involve the use of particular argument schemes and particular constellations of single or complex argumentation.

By laying bare in the reconstruction of argumentative discourse what the strategic design of the discourse is, the “strategic plan” can be detected that motivated the implementation of strategic considerations in the choice of a dialectical route in the use of argumentative moves. The strategic plan of the discourse explains as it were the arguer’s rationale for the strategic design of the argumentative discourse. It can therefore be regarded to constitute the *strategic scenario*¹⁴ underlying the conduct of the argumentative discourse that may be ascribed to the arguer (van Eemeren 2018: 166–167).¹⁵ The argumentative style utilized in the argumentative discourse is in my view to be regarded as intended to be instrumental in realizing the arguer’s strategic scenario.

3 The Utilization of Argumentative Style

Style is a notion that denotes a particular way of doing something or dealing with something. In linguistics, where the notion is discussed most intensively, the term *style* has, due to the nature of the discipline, acquired the limited meaning of a particular way of using language. This meaning has also been adopted when style is put in a rhetorical perspective.¹⁶ Utilizing a certain *argumentative* style however means giving a particular shape to one’s argumentative conduct in a much broader sense. For this reason, when dealing with argumentative discourse, it is enlightening, and therefore recommendable, not to treat “style” as merely pertaining to the choice of a

¹⁴ For the terminology of *strategic design* and *strategic scenario* see van Eemeren (2018: 165–167).

¹⁵ For determining which strategic plan can be regarded as motivating a certain strategic design a clear understanding is required of the institutional goals and missions of the participants in the domain and the communicative activity type in which the argumentative discourse occurs.

¹⁶ The stringent separation between form and content that has come into being after the disciplinary division between dialectic and rhetoric in early modernity has resulted in a rather sterile rhetorical concept of style that covers only its formalistic presentational aspect.

particular verbal presentation. It is in that case more productive to define the concept of style in a more encompassing way.

Conducting argumentative discourse means making argumentative moves aimed to be helpful to resolving a difference of opinion and in pursuing this goal more is involved than just using the presentational means of language (or some other means of communication) in a particular way. In my view it is therefore necessary to develop a notion of argumentative style that includes not only the presentational aspect but also other vital aspects of argumentative discourse. This more complex notion of argumentative style should on the one hand be broader and on the other hand be more specific than that of linguistic style. It is to be more specific, to begin with, because it has to focus particularly on the way in which a discourse is conducted that is aimed at resolving a difference of opinion by means of argumentation. As a consequence, it is to be broader, because in using argumentative discourse to resolve a difference of opinion more aspects of the discourse are involved than just the presentational one.

Starting from the basic view of style as a particular way in which something is done or dealt with, the shortest definition of argumentative style we can now provide is: a particular way in which an argumentative discourse is conducted to be helpful in achieving the resolution of the difference of opinion at issue aimed for by the arguer. This definition needs to be made more appropriate for dealing with argumentative discourse by substantiating it theoretically through the use of the conceptual and terminological instruments of argumentation theory. This can be realized by exploiting the pragma-dialectical view that making argumentative moves to resolve a difference of opinion always involves strategic manoeuvring that gives substance to the three aspects of making a selection from the available topical potential, adapting to audience demand and using presentational devices (van Eemeren 2010: 93–127; 2018: 112–113). Regarding the three aspects of strategic manoeuvring as different dimensions of argumentative style makes it possible to characterize utilizing a certain argumentative style as shaping these three dimensions in a particular way in the conduct of argumentative discourse.

Crucial to the identification of argumentative styles in the conduct of argumentative discourse is the observation that in making the argumentative moves constituting the discourse certain choices concerning argumentative style have been made for which the arguer can be held responsible.¹⁷ A first precondition that needs to be satisfied in order to be able to speak of a fully-fledged argumentative style is that these choices concern, next to the presentational devices that are used, also the selection that is made from the topical potential and the adaptation to audience demand. A second precondition is that the choices made in giving substance to the various argumentative moves are intrinsically related to the goals these argumentative moves are

¹⁷ If the arguer involved cannot be held responsible for such choices made in the conduct of argumentative discourse, he or she is not accountable for the argumentative style that is used and then argumentative style is not used deliberately as a tool for resolving a difference of opinion. When this is the case, studying such an argumentative style does not play a vital role in argumentation theory as a discipline that is out to stimulate the improvement of argumentative practices.

supposedly aimed to achieve in the resolution process. A third precondition is that the choices that are made are strategic by potentially contributing to keeping the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness in the discourse. A fourth precondition is that the choices are systematic in the sense of being consistently shaped in a similar fashion. A fifth precondition is that the choices are made throughout a coherent and substantial part of the argumentative discourse, so that they can be considered sustained.

Utilizing a certain argumentative style in argumentative discourse involves giving a particular shape to the topical choices made in the argumentative moves, to the choices made in adapting these argumentative moves to audience demand and to the choices made in using presentational devices to carry out these argumentative moves. The shaping of these three dimensions of argumentative style is manifested in the argumentative discourse in the use of argumentative moves described in the analytic overview of the discourse, the choice of dialectical routes expressed in the argumentative patterns of the discourse and the implementation of strategic considerations captured in the strategic design of the discourse. The identification of the argumentative styles utilized in argumentative discourse should therefore always start from, and be guided by, an adequate reconstruction of the analytic overview, the argumentative patterns and the strategic design of the discourse. Only then can it be made sure that the argumentative style that is provisionally identified can be considered indicative for the way in which the arguer's strategic scenario is realized in the discourse through the implementation in the strategic design of the discourse of strategic considerations relating to the argumentative moves that are made in the strategic routes that are chosen.

Taking these observations concerning the constitutive dimensions of argumentative style and the way in which argumentative style manifests itself in the discourse into account, the following theory-related definition of argumentative style can now be provided:

Argumentative style is the particular shape systematically and consistently given to the selection of topical choices, adaptation to audience demand and exploitation of presentational devices in the strategic manoeuvring taking place in a representative part of an argumentative discourse that manifests itself in the argumentative moves included in the analytic overview of the discourse, the argumentative patterns indicating the dialectical routes that are chosen and the strategic design reflecting the implementation of strategic considerations.

The particular shape given to a discourse by the use of a certain argumentative style is sometimes designated the "tone" of the discourse or the "tune" that is sung. Other metaphorical expressions employed to capture argumentative style are, for instance, that the style "colours" the discourse in a particular way or "puts it in a certain light". Whatever enlightenment the use of these metaphorical expressions may bring, they make argumentative styles not a great deal easier to characterize or to identify. In any case, in talking in such ways about argumentative styles it is as a rule the limited presentational view of style that prevails. When, on the other hand, argumentative style is conceived as the shape in which an argumentative discourse manifests itself

in all its three dimensions in the use of argumentative moves, the choice of dialectical routes and the implementation of strategic considerations, the characterization and identification of such an argumentative style will be considerably easier. Even a style that stands out for its ordinariness will then be clearly marked as a tool used for realizing a certain strategic scenario.

A satisfactory inventory of argumentative styles is not yet available. One of the oldest general divisions, stemming from Antiquity, distinguishes between “low”, “middle” and “grand” style. A rather well-known classification of the styles specifically applying to political discourse is Harriman’s (1995) empirically-based distinction between a “realist”, a “republican”, a “courtly” and a “bureaucratic” style, but this typology sounds odd from a more general perspective. In principle it depends, of course, on the purpose of the classification which kind of division and naming of styles will be appropriate. When it comes to argumentative styles, however, the division and naming should in my view in any case relate to (and if possible even reflect) the ways in which these styles represent in all their dimensions an effort to realize the strategic scenario that, based on the analytic overview of the argumentative moves that are made, the argumentative pattern that has developed and the strategic design of the discourse, can be ascribed to the arguer. Among the possible candidates for being included in such a classification could be such argumentative styles as a “polarizing” and a “reconciliatory” argumentative style, but further reflection is required upon the suitability of these and other candidates before any final decision can be made.

However premature it may be, in order to illustrate the main points of my expose about argumentative style, I will briefly discuss some distinctive features of what I provisionally call a *detached* argumentative style and an *engaged* argumentative style. In argumentative reality these two styles, which are contrasting each other in several respects, can be encountered regularly in various kinds of argumentative practices. I shall indicate how the choices made in the selection from the topical potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the exploitation of presentational devices that give shape to the strategic scenario that is to be realized in the argumentative discourse by utilizing these two argumentative styles may manifest themselves in real-life argumentative discourse in the empirical counterparts of the four stages of a critical discussion in the use of argumentative moves, the choice of dialectical routes and the implementation of strategic considerations.

The particular way in which in the initial situation representing the confrontation stage the choice from the topical potential manifests itself in the discourse in the use of argumentative moves may in the case of a detached argumentative style consist, for instance, in a business-like statement of what is to be discussed and in the case of an engaged argumentative style in a selection of issues that shows the arguer’s close involvement. The adaptation to audience demand may in the first case remain accordingly in line with the quasi-neutral preservation of objectivity of a detached argumentative style while in the second case an engaged argumentative style may be displayed by connecting emphatically with the interests of the audience. If the same kind of choices are made in the use of presentational devices, manifested in unadorned matter-of-fact formulations and in charged phrasings respectively, the argumentative style that is used in realizing the confrontational strategic scenario can be

said to have in the first case the characteristics of being detached and in the second case of being engaged.

Similar indicators of the two argumentative styles may in actual argumentative discourse be detected in the argumentative conduct in the empirical counterparts of the other three stages of a critical discussion. In the parts of the discourse equivalent with the opening stage a detached argumentative style may manifest itself, for instance, in the shape of topical choices consisting of factual starting points that are easily verifiable and an engaged argumentative style may manifest itself in evaluative starting points demonstrating the arguer's involvement in the cause concerned. In a detached argumentative style audience adaptation may then come to the fore through the non-conspicuous choice of starting points likely to be considered undisputable by the audience while in an engaged argumentative style the choice of starting points may demonstrate the arguer's identification with premises close to the heart of the audience. The presentational devices used in shaping the starting points may in a detached argumentative style consist of straightforward factual overviews and enumerations of relevant statistics while in an engaged argumentative style the starting points may be introduced by means of rhetorical questions or other linguistic tools for displaying personal involvement.

In the empirical counterpart of the argumentation stage a detached argumentative style may manifest itself, for instance, in topical choices of pragmatic argumentation indicating certain concrete advantages that ensue automatically from a recommended measure and an engaged argumentative style in the use of analogy argumentation in which the still to be accepted state of affairs referred to in the standpoint is compared with an already familiar or easily recognizable state of affairs. Audience adaptation may in the first case involve arguing quasi-neutrally for a measure that has for the audience an indisputably positive effect and in the second case comparing the situation mentioned in the standpoint with a situation that is fully acceptable to the audience. In a detached argumentative style formalistic expert language may be used as a presentational device to add to the success of the argumentation whereas in an engaged argumentative style the effectiveness might be enhanced by a display of the arguer's commitment through the use of personal language.

Finally, using a detached argumentative style in establishing the outcome of the resolution process in the empirical counterpart of the concluding stage may involve the shaping of topical choices as divergent as drawing a formally-reached non-subjective conclusion and leaving it to the listeners or readers to reach the inescapable conclusion themselves; using an engaged style could, for instance, consist in embracing the conclusion that is reached emphatically as the favoured outcome of the discussion. In the first case adaptation to audience demand could mean making in a non-obtrusive restrained way clear to the audience that the conclusion is a logical consequence of their starting points and in the second case making them realize that the conclusion is based on an argumentative procedure that the two parties have carried out together. The presentational devices can, for instance, be shaped in accordance with a detached style by phrasing the conclusion that is reached in a reporting non-confrontational way and in accordance with an engaged style by using a captivating metaphor that makes the conclusion that is reached sound appealing.

Although the use of a certain argumentative style may in some cases be limited to a particular part of the discourse, covering only a specific stage of the resolution process, more often than not the argumentative style that is adopted will be utilized throughout the discourse. When it has been established that in the various discussion stages one and the same argumentative style has been systematically utilized in all its three dimensions in the argumentative moves that are made, it is necessary to check whether this style is used consistently and sustained in those argumentative moves that constitute together the argumentative patterns characterizing the discourse—most importantly in the moves made in the basic argumentative patterns containing the main argumentation in defence of the standpoint at issue (van Eemeren 2018: 151). If the argumentative style that in the first instance had been identified proves to have been used throughout the most pertinent parts of the argumentative pattern, next the argumentative considerations are to be taken into account that determine together with the argumentative moves and the argumentative patterns the strategic design of the discourse. Only if the argumentative style that has been identified agrees with the strategic scenario that may be supposed to have motivated the strategic design of the discourse, can it be safely concluded that the presumed argumentative style is indeed the argumentative style that is utilized in the discourse.

4 Conclusion

The view propounded in this treatise is that argumentative styles represent specific ways in which in strategic manoeuvring in argumentative discourse the choices that are to be made regarding the selection from the available topical potential, the adaptation to audience demand and the exploitation of presentational devices are dealt with. The ways in which these three dimensions of argumentative style are shaped manifest themselves systematically and consistently in the discourse in the use of argumentative moves, the choice of dialectical routes and the implementation of strategic considerations—the constitutive components of the strategic design of the discourse. The argumentative styles that are adopted in trying to resolve a difference of opinion by means of argumentative discourse are supposed to reflect the strategic scenarios that may be ascribed to the arguer on the basis of the strategic design of the discourse.

The scope of my current contribution to the study of argumentative styles is limited to trying to create an adequate theoretical starting point for including the notion of argumentative style in the research programme of argumentation theory and making use of this notion in analysing argumentative discourse in argumentative reality. The definition of argumentative style that I have developed for this purpose is embedded in the theoretical framework of pragma-dialectics by making use of some relevant concepts developed in this theory. In this way the term *argumentative style* has been given a meaning that is theory-related while remaining at the same time rather closely connected with the meaning of this expression in everyday language—acknowledging frankly that in ordinary usage the expression “argumentative style”

may sometimes also be used in a more general and wider or in a more specific and narrower meaning.

It goes without saying that, even if in this way an adequate theoretical starting point for the treatment of argumentative style in research and analysis has been developed, this does not mean that, all at once, a solution is offered for all problems involved in dealing with argumentative style. Apart from the remaining theoretical issues that still need to be tackled, further analytical and empirical research must be carried out in order to give substance to the proposed treatment of argumentative style. In these endeavours attention not only needs to be paid to argumentative styles that are used in specific speech events (e.g. Searle's "Chinese Room Argument"), but also to argumentative styles that are characteristic of the argumentative discourse of specific individuals (e.g. Prime Minister Theresa May) or groups (e.g. Human Rights campaigners) and argumentative styles that are characteristic of the argumentative discourse in specific communicative activity types (e.g. an academic discussion or an editorial in a newspaper) or domains (e.g. the field of law or the medical domain).

In tackling the most pressing theoretical issues, first of all, argumentative styles should be systematically classified in an adequate typology, which is to be accompanied by an appropriate nomenclature of the various argumentative styles. In order to find out how a sensible division of argumentative styles can be made, careful reflection is required upon the way in which the three dimensions I have distinguished in this contribution can be duly taken into account in the classification and how exactly they interact in the actual formation of argumentative styles. Although the shaping of the selection of topical choices, the shaping of the adaptation to audience demand and the shaping of the selection of presentational devices are in my view the spinal parts of the typology, which will constitute its backbone, additional factors may play a part in establishing the classification more firmly and refining it where necessary. Some of these factors can be more pertinent in pinning down some argumentative styles than in distinguishing between others—just as we see happen in Searle's (1979: 1–29) taxonomy of speech acts.

A topic for further theoretical research that is related to the problem of classification is the problem of how to determine when exactly certain observations concerning the use of argumentative moves, the choice of dialectical routes and the implementation of strategic considerations are to lead to attributing the properties that are observed to a particular argumentative style and assigning a specific name to it. The research involved does not only require more detailed theoretical reflection on the precise characteristics of the various kinds of argumentative styles, but it also calls for theoretically-supported empirical research into the features of argumentative discourse corresponding with these characteristics in the various domains of empirical reality. These investigations, which will be both analytical and empirical in nature, can in fact be considered to constitute the core part of the research into argumentative styles that is to take place in the field of argumentation theory.

Although in some cases the argumentative styles used in argumentative discourse may be completely determined by coincidental strategic preferences of the arguers conducting the discourse, argumentative styles can also be prototypical and even stereotypical of a particular individual, a particular group or a particular communicative

activity type or domain. This means that the use of such an argumentative style is then not exclusively determined by haphazard inclinations of the arguer but is to some extent also influenced by more permanent “structural” preconditions relating to the arguer’s personality or to the institutional or cultural-ideological environment in which the discourse takes place. If the characteristic shape of an argumentative style can be to a great extent explained by the presence of more permanent structural preconditions,¹⁸ due to the prominent display of certain more or less fixed argumentative properties in the discourse relating to them, the use of this argumentative style can be regarded as being—in a broad sense—“prototypical” of the individual, the group, the communicative activity type or the domain concerned. If, in addition, in a representative sample of cases the use of this argumentative style proves to reoccur relatively frequently, the prototypical argumentative style concerned proves to be also “stereotypical” of that category of cases. The relationship between argumentative styles and the various kinds of structural institutional preconditions constitutes a topic of research that is urgently in need of further investigation.

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¹⁸ Wu (2019), for one, indicates along these lines that Chinese spokespersons at press conferences of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign affairs use an argumentative style which is, among other things, characterized by the use of precizing dissociations in dealing with sources cited as authoritative by journalists acting as the spokespersons’ antagonists.

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