

The Argumentative Structure of Persuasive Definitions

Fabrizio Macagno · Douglas Walton

Accepted: 19 May 2008
© Springer Science + Business Media B.V. 2008

Abstract In this paper we present an analysis of persuasive definition based on argumentation schemes. Using the medieval notion of *differentia* and the traditional approach to topics, we explain the persuasiveness of emotive terms in persuasive definitions by applying the argumentation schemes for argument from classification and argument from values. Persuasive definitions, we hold, are persuasive because their goal is to modify the emotive meaning denotation of a persuasive term in a way that contains an implicit argument from values. However, our theory is different from Stevenson's, a positivistic view that sees emotive meaning as subjective, and defines it as a behavioral effect. Our proposal is to treat the persuasiveness produced by the use of emotive words and persuasive definitions as due to implicit arguments that an interlocutor may not be aware of. We use congruence theory to provide the linguistic framework for connecting a term with the function it is supposed to play in a text. Our account allows us to distinguish between conflicts of values and conflicts of classifications.

Keywords Values · Emotive words · Persuasion · Approval · Condemnation · Argument from values · Definitions

The use of definitions is one of the fundamental instruments of argumentation. By employing definitions we commonly distinguish between the different possible meanings of terms and direct our arguments towards what is really at stake. By means of definitions, our

F. Macagno
Department of Linguistics, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore,
20100 Milan, Italy
e-mail: fabrizio.macagno@unicatt.it

D. Walton (✉)
Centre for Research on Reasoning, Argumentation and Rhetoric,
University of Windsor,
Ontario, Canada
e-mail: d.walton@uwinnipeg.ca
URL: www.uwinnipeg.ca/~walton

reasoning can be based on the facts of a matter of a discussion as well as on the words (*Topics* I 18, 108a 21–22). Words, however, can be used to lead to conclusions by trading on their emotive meanings. For instance, the sentence ‘This person is a blackguard’ hardly can be employed to elicit positive conclusions towards the subject of the predication. Stevenson (1938, 1944) noticed the fact that words are not only used to strictly refer to reality, to describe it, but also to carry an emotive judgment on it. In his view, the meaning of a term is a dispositional property, that is, a relation between a stimulus and a response, which can be cognitive and emotive (1944, p. 54). His account of meaning, as a direct consequence, is based on the theory of definition. For Stevenson, defining a term means modifying the extension, the descriptive meaning of a term, or its emotive meaning. The first definitional process is called persuasive definition (PD), the latter quasi-definition. In quasi-definitions, the emotive meaning of a word is changed without affecting its extension. For instance, a derogatory term, such as ‘blackguard’ can be quasi-defined in a positive fashion, and used to praise a person. On the other hand, a positively evaluated word, such as ‘culture’, can be persuasively defined as ‘originality’. Its emotional meaning remains unaltered, but by the new definition, even people whom we would normally take to be uncultured can now be classified as being persons of culture. The interlocutor’s positive attitude is directed towards an object that before the persuasive definition would not have brought with it any positive reaction.

Stevenson’s study introduced several related problems. The first, and the most inquired into, is when persuasive definitions are legitimate. The analysis of them presented in (Walton 2003) has shown that they are sometimes reasonable, even though they can be tricky and deceptive in several important ways. It was shown that the use of persuasive definitions is often characteristic of legitimate ethical argumentation. In (Walton 2005) a number of extensive case studies of persuasive definitions provided the basis for concluding that a definition should be evaluated in light of its purpose as a speech act, leading to a dialectical analysis of persuasive definitions. Another approach to the problem was advanced by Burgess-Jackson (1995), who connected the legitimacy of a PD to the vagueness of the term redefined. A similar approach was proposed by Aberdein (2000) who related the legitimacy of a PD to the conflict of theories underlying the definition of the term and to the preservation of the core meaning of the term redefined.

These theories directly or indirectly deal with another basic question about persuasive definition: why is this type of definition persuasive? The aim of this paper is to inquire why certain words, and thereby certain definitions, can be used to support a thesis or a decision by means of emotions and values. Our purpose is to inquire into the argumentative structure of the use of certain words, and in particular, ethical value terms. This study forms part of the basis for the wider research project of analyzing persuasive definitions from the point of view of their argumentative role.

1 Argumentativity of Words and Argumentativity in Words

Theories on persuasive definitions present different approaches to the particular effect words have to lead an argument in a specific direction. We call these different accounts of the relation between a word and its persuasive effect argumentativity *of* words, *in* words, and *of and by* words.

Stevenson introduces the notion, based on his behavioristic linguistic theory of emotive meaning, Burgess-Jackson, Aberdein and Schiappa defend the view that words’ meaning basically stem from theories. Supporting a definition becomes, in this view, supporting the

thesis it is based on. The persuasiveness of words depend, in these cases, on a meaning which is already given in the term, or in the theory constituting the instrument of evaluation. On the other hand, the linguistic theory of Ducrot introduces argumentation into the linguistic system. For Ducrot, the meaning of the word is constituted by the possible conclusions it leads to. Using a word, in his view, means choosing a line of argumentation already given in the language.

1.1 Argumentativity of Words

As seen above, Stevenson founds his theory on the distinction between emotive versus descriptive meaning. For Stevenson, the meaning of a term is a particular dispositional property of the term (1944 p. 54). It is a stable correlation between the sign, a stimulus, and a psychological reaction of the addressee. There can be two different kinds of reactions, the cognitive and the emotive reaction, to which correspond two kinds of meaning, descriptive (or denotative) meaning and emotive meaning. While cognitive meaning can contribute to the attitude of the agent towards the action, emotive meaning can evoke a feeling or an emotion. Stevenson maintains that emotive meaning can be only characterized, never described, while the denotative meaning can be defined. However, descriptive and emotive meanings can be interrelated or independent to each other. Some terms have a negative emotional meaning because their referent is negatively assessed by the community of speakers. In other cases, the difference between two terms (such as “elderly maid” and “old maid” (see Stevenson 1937, p. 23)) is only emotive. One of the most interesting applications of this distinction of meaning regards ethical terms. In ethical terms, such as ‘good’, it is not possible to distinguish the descriptive meaning from the emotive one (p. 206). For instance, ‘good’ can be described as “x has the properties X, Y, Z”, and at the same time it emotively means the approval of the speaker and evokes a positive attitude in the hearer. Redefining ethical terms means re-directing the attitudes of the interlocutors towards a fragment of reality. For this reason, the definition of ethical terms carries a persuasive intent, that is, the definition always defends a viewpoint.

Stevenson’s account of persuasive and quasi-definitions is based upon this approach to meaning. In persuasive definitions, the descriptive meaning of a word is modified without altering the emotive meaning. In such a fashion, the attitudes of the interlocutors are re-directed towards a new object. For instance, we can think about the re-definition of culture as originality. An original, but illiterate person can be classified as “cultured” by means of this persuasive definition, invoking in the interlocutor an attitude of praise towards the subject. The mirror-image of persuasive definition is quasi-definition. In quasi-definitions the descriptive meaning remains untouched, while the emotive meaning is modified. For instance, words such as ‘blackguard’ can be quasi-defined describing the reality they refer to as praiseworthy. The emotive meaning in this fashion is changed, modifying the original attitude evoked by the term. Re-definitions can be applied to non-ethical terms with a persuasive effect. For instance, the re-definition of the legal–medical term ‘insanity’ can affect the evaluation of the classification, leading to an attitude of indulgence, for instance.

In Stevenson’s account we can notice that emotive meanings are described from a psychological point of view. Stevenson’s account is basically grounded upon a behaviouristic theory of meaning. Meaning means the achievement of a reaction.

Stevenson’s approach is the basis of Robinson’s account of ethical and emotive terms. For Robinson words have a indicative and a pragmatic or emotive function (or dimension). The two aspects of a word’s meaning are, however, not on the same level. The emotive dimension is somehow accessory to the main “indicative” function (1950, p. 57). Emotive

meaning consists in association holding for most of the speakers, it is a kind of secondary and improper meaning in addition to the principal one (p. 109).

Hallden (1960) analyses the different types of redefining a term as an “essence definition”, that is, using the terms “true X”. Following Stevenson, Halldén distinguishes between a descriptive and an emotive meaning. However, PD’s can change the evaluation of the term defined. The evaluation can be emphasized, or changed. The persuasive (or propagandistic) effect depends upon the fact that in the essence statement “True A is B” B can add an evaluation to A, or select, emphasizing or deleting, the evaluation it already had, or emphasize the importance of A. For instance, “true religion is love” adds a positive evaluation to “religion” by means of the positive meaning of “love”, while “true pornography is describing sexual life in an overt way” deletes the emotive meaning.

These accounts of meaning are similar to many linguistic approaches to connotation of words (Rigotti and Rocci 2006). Connotation, in Bloomfield’s theory, is an accessory response, which, in a first phase of his proposal describes as individual, in a second, revised version, generalized. For Hjelmslev, connotation corresponds to a level of content associated not with the expression of the sign, such as denotation, but with the sign itself. The expression plane of a connotative language is a semiotic system, which carries a content, while denotative language is a semiotic system because there is an association between an expression plane and a content plane. The contents of connotative languages are, for instance, dialects, voices, genres, etc. For instance, the very fact that a person uses the word “steer” instead of “horse” connotes literariness. Connotation, at least, has been associated by Eco to pragmatic implications drawn from a common ground. However, it is the notion of this type of implication which is particularly interesting in Eco. The implication coincides, in fact, with the knowledge of the connotative semiotic code. In other words, the knowledge upon which the inference is grounded is part of the knowledge of the connotative code. Connotation, in these terms, becomes de-codification (Rigotti and Rocci 2006, p. 7).

These approaches represent some of the most important theories of what we called argumentativity of words. Words, in other terms, have a persuasive effect, which is not, however, inquired. In the following subsection the theory of argumentativity in words will be analyzed. In this view, the argumentative structure of words is examined, but as a linguistic aspect. The very meaning of words is the argumentative process.

1.2 Argumentativity in Words

In the Argumentative Structuralism of Oswald Ducrot, sentences are analysed in their argumentative effects, that is, the conclusion they lead to. For instance (Ducrot 1993 p. 111), the sentence “I won’t be the first president to lose a war” implies the conclusion that “I won’t lose the war”. The conclusion is reached by means of discourse laws (a rhetorical component) acting upon a linguistic, structural component, constituted by the content asserted and presupposed. In the development of Ducrot’s theory, the rhetorical component becomes integrated in the presupposed component of meaning. The possible conclusions, or better, the argumentative effects of a sentence become first integrated in the connectives as an effect on the interlocutor, and then in the meaning of the words. The integration of the argumentativity in the structure can be explained by means of an example (Ducrot 1983, p. 159). If we consider the sentence “the barrel is full”, we can notice that it has an effect on the interlocutor (for instance, the satisfaction), that we can represent as *r*. The effect depends on a quality, *R*, that is in this case the fullness. The link between *R* and *r* is

represented by a *topos*, a path of inference of the kind “the more a barrel is full, the more the satisfaction”. *Topoi*, in the latter developments, are part of the meaning of words. Words, in other terms, have as meaning the possible conclusions they lead to. *Topoi* are described as paths of an argumentative passage from a premise to a conclusion. The representation of the words, the conceptual elements they signify, are seen in function of the sentence sense, the possible continuation of the dialogue, the move the opponent is lead to make by proponent’s words. For this reason, representations are seen in function of the *topoi*: they are parts of the *topos* the sentence is based on. In other words, the meaning of the sentence is founded on the *topos*. Words are defined as bundles of *topoi* or modifiers of *topoi*¹: words, i.e., that have as meaning a set of *topoi* and words (like the connectives as “but”, “and”, adjectives, adverbs) that make a selection among these *topoi*, or enhance or weaken the strength of the *topos*. For instance, a word such as “to work” is seen as a set of *topoi*, such as “the more work, the more remuneration”, or “the more work, the more fatigue”. If a person asserts “Bob worked hard”, the conclusion “he must be tired” is in the structure of the language, or better, in the meaning of “to work”. In this perspective, de-codification is extended to all the possible argumentative uses of language. If for Eco connotation is conceived as a form of linguistic ability, for Ducrot argumentation is a linguistic ability.

This perspective is extremely interesting for the analysis of emotive terms. It offers an explanation to the “effects” emotive or ethical words have. They are, in a certain way, starting points for *topoi*, leading to a desired conclusion. Ducrot tries to answer to the crucial problem of why and how words are argumentative. Defining, in his perspective, becomes making the possible *topoi* of a word explicit.

1.3 Argumentativity of Words and in Words

The next group of theories on the argumentative force of words is focused on the relation between a definition of a term and the conclusion it supports. These theories maintain that words have emotive meanings, but their inquiry is directed towards the connection between definition and values, or theory. A definition, in this perspective, is always grounded upon a theory, and the theory in its turn defends a system of values. The persuasive effect of words, in the development of this proposal advanced by Schiappa, consists in the very definition and in the values it defends. Every definition is in itself an act of persuasion. Persuasiveness is both in words and of words. It is of words, because words have an emotive meaning. It is in words, because the persuasive effect is an element of their structure, of their definition, that is, the values they advocate. Using a word means using an implicit argument to attain certain goals by means of the system of evaluation the definition of the word defends.

In Burgess-Jackson’s view, a PD is intended to be the increase or decrease of the extension of a term having a positive or negative emotive meaning (1995, pp. 426–427). In

¹ «[...] d’une façon générale, nous décrivons les prédicats de la langue –par exemple le verbe travailler, comme des faisceaux de *topoi*. Comprendre le mot travailler, c’est s’estimer capable d’établir une gradation G0 dans un certain domaine d’activité, définie par le fait qu’elle est en correspondance avec une série d’autres gradations G’1, G’2... Chacune de ces correspondances est un *topos* (...) Chacune des gradations est elle-même en correspondance, via d’autres *topoi*, avec une série d’autres gradations. Le champ lexical devient donc une sorte de champ *topique*.» (Ducrot and Anscombe (1986), p. 89).

the analysis of the definition of the term ‘rape’, Burgess-Jackson highlights how the definition of the word ‘rape’ is grounded upon a particular theory, a perspective on the role of woman in marriage and society. Defining ‘rape’ as a violent sexual act against a woman who is not the aggressor’s spouse, or as sexual abuse of a woman, means defending two particular conceptions of marriage. The different definitions, in other words, are relative to different theories about the nature of marriage. The theory is the ground of the definition. A redefinition is possible when the concepts defined are vague—that is, when their semantic (that is extensional, in Burgess-Jackson’s view) borderlines are not clear. Redefinition allows one to decide how an object falling into the grey zone (that is the set of objects not included into the extension of the term, nor excluded from it) can be classified. By means of redefinition new criteria are introduced, eliminating the indeterminacy of the term.

The dependence between theory and definition has been developed by Schiappa (2003). Definitions, for Schiappa, have nothing to do with essence of things, but only with perception of reality. Language, for Schiappa, depends on learning, that is, on the persuasive process leading to organize reality in a certain fashion. Defining, therefore, means imposing a particular perception of the world, a particular theory, on the recipients of the definition. When a person accepts a definition, he accepts also the evaluation and perspective on reality it imposes, and the course of actions and decisions it implies. For this reason, definitions are always political—that is, they are always aimed at attaining certain goals by means of altering or framing our valuation of reality. Defining ‘rape’ or ‘death’ does not only mean embracing a theory, but also imposing a whole organization of beliefs and values, such as the role of woman or of human life. Since the evaluation of a situation depends on the theory presupposed by the definition, the definer will choose the definition that better supports his goal. Definition thereby is a pragmatic matter of interests and goals.

Using a word, as a consequence, with a determinate definition, means framing reality in a certain way, leading to determinate conclusions by means of the values the word presupposes. Schiappa describes this form of argument as argumentation by definition. Argumentation by definition is based upon the classification scheme X is Y . The classification itself is an implicit argument leading to a certain conclusion, by means of the theory and the system of evaluation carried by the definition of the term. For instance, using the term ‘quarantine’ to describe sanctions against Cuba is an implicit argument that defends the perspective that this action is a justified therapeutic intervention instead of an act of war. The use of the word ‘quarantine’, in other words, supports the view that the intervention was justified, because it implicitly encompasses a perspective and an evaluation of the situation described. The use of every word and every definition are, following Schiappa, persuasive, because they frame the situation in a particular way, adopting a certain system of values, and encouraging a particular attitude and evaluation. The same situation can be described as “a tree has been murdered” or “an organic object has been rotated from a vertical to a horizontal position”. The difference lies in their goals. Such argumentativity of definitions is explained by Schiappa by means of the system of values (theory) they imply. Theory, evaluation and persuasiveness are interdependent.

1.4 Argumentation *of, in, and by* Words

These theories are extremely useful for the analysis of the problem of words used to emotionally support a viewpoint. Stevenson’s approach, while it introduced the basic notion of emotional meaning, is not useful to explain how it can be used to defend a thesis and what its nature is, unless a behavioristic perspective is accepted. The notion of emotive

meaning is conceived as an effect, more or less generalized. However, the same word can achieve different effects on different speakers. The meaning, in this view, would be different from interlocutor to interlocutor. Ducrot's argumentative structuralism can better explain the emotive meaning of words. Certain words, in his view, can defend a viewpoint because their meaning is the particular *topos* leading to the desired conclusion. Burgess-Jackson's and Aberdein's positions give an explanation of how an emotive word can be redefined, leading to argumentative implications of the redefinition. Schiappa developed the idea of the interrelation between definition, meaning, and theory, making every definition a persuasive process. Every definition carries a system of values and defends a particular viewpoint.

These three approaches defend a particular perspective on the argumentativity of words. Words are conceived as persuasive, or as presupposing argumentation, and as persuasive and implying argumentation. In our view, the persuasive power of words can be explained by means of argument schemes. A word is persuasive not because it is an implicit argument, as in Ducrot's view, but because its pragmatic role can only be explained by means of the argumentative process stemming from it and presupposed by the role the word plays in the communication.

2 Argumentation by Words

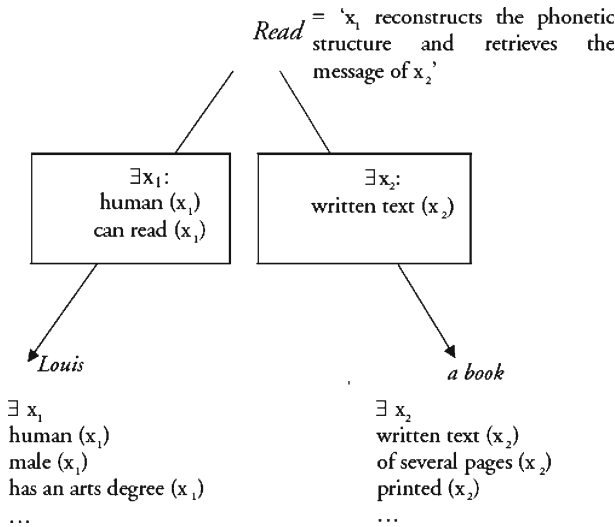
The purpose of this section is to show how emotive or "propagandistic" words work as argumentative strategies. We want to explain the structure of the reasoning underlying the argumentative use of words. Our approach is grounded on argument schemes, that is, reasoning patterns or patterns of inference. Words, in our view, can, in their definition, contain value judgments. However, words are not persuasive or propagandistic in virtue of their meaning, but in virtue of the conclusion they are used to implicitly support. Words can be conceived as starting points for arguments, and arguments are presupposed by the function of the word. This proposal is grounded on two observations: the distinction between the evaluation in the meaning of a word, the persuasiveness in its use and the relation between function of a word and argumentation based on it.

If we analyze the accounts given in the theories above of emotive meaning, we can notice that in some cases words have an emotive meaning depending on their descriptive content, while in other cases the emotive content is a kind of additional, secondary meaning. Words are not in themselves persuasive. They can have a "connotation", an "evaluative meaning", but it is not clear how these features can be persuasive. Persuasion is always relative to an object of doubt. In this perspective, words are persuasive only when they are used to draw a conclusion. Connotation, on the other hand, is considered in the linguistic theories presented above to be a secondary meaning, depending upon implications. In a certain sense, this suggestion links the meaning of word with the conclusion wanted.

2.1 Argumentative Function of a Word

The connection between the use of a word and the conclusion it is used to support can be explained by means of the congruity theory. This theory is based on the concept of predication. A predicate like "to read", for example, selects a number of arguments, and imposes on them a certain set of features they have to possess in order for the predicate to

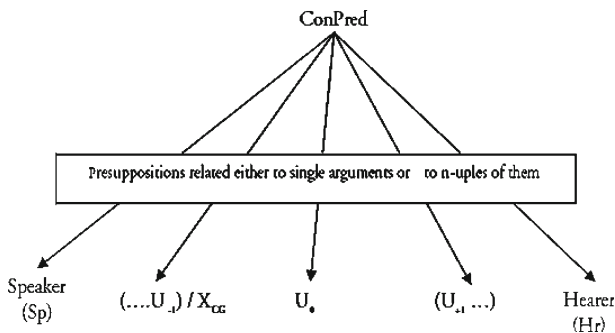
meaningfully predicated of them. We can represent the structure of a predicate such as follows (Rigotti 2005a, p. 79):



The conditions the predicate imposes on its arguments are presuppositions, conditions of meaningfulness. An argument is congruent with the predicate when it fits the conditions it imposes on it. For instance, a sentence such as ‘Bob is reading the stone’ fails to fulfill the presupposition ‘written text x₂’ and is thereby not congruent, and is therefore meaningless. A text can be conceived as a hierarchy of predicates, imposing certain functions upon other sub-ordered predicates. For instance, we can consider the following text (Rigotti 2005b, p. 81):

My son does not drive. He is five.

The function of the second sentence can be explained only in relation to the first. In particular, we notice that the second sentence has the role of explaining the first. If we conceive the relation between sentences as a predicate, we would represent this predicate as below Rigotti (2005a, p. 83)



The predicate, called the connective predicate, connects the Speaker and the Hearer to the Utterances of a text. An utterance, in this view, makes sense only in relation to the role the predicate imposes on it, in relation to its context and the communicative situation. In the

example above, the second sequence of text is an explanation of the first. In its turn, the sequence fulfils its role by means of the rhematic predicate, that is, the predicate that makes the sequence fulfill the function in the text. For instance, the function “to be an explanation of the first sequence” is fulfilled by the fact that the son is young (he is five). It is the predicate “younghness” that explains the reason why the son cannot drive.

Using the congruence theory, it is possible to explain the argumentative role of the “persuasive” words. They can be conceived as predicates playing a particular role in the text, that is, to support a conclusion.

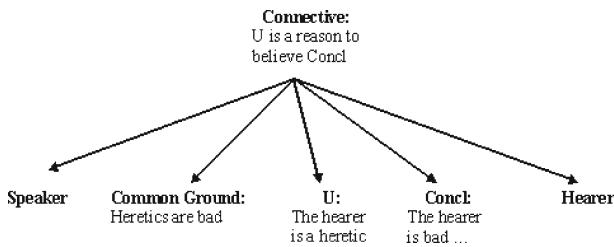
2.2 Rheme, *Differentia* and Argument Achemes

If we apply this explanation of the function of a word in a text, we can analyze the “persuasiveness” of some words in relation to the role they play in an explicit or implicit argumentation. For instance, we can consider the sequence, and reconstruct its role in a possible text:

Case 1

You are a heretic!

In order to understand this sequence we can imagine a context in which the speaker wants to support the conclusion that the interlocutor is a bad person, or is not believable, etc. The final conclusion is a value judgment on the hearer. We can reconstruct the text as follows:



The property of being a heretic, in this example, is considered from the point of view of “reason of classification”. Obviously, we can imagine other possible conclusions, characterizing different possible texts. However, we maintain this text as having as a conclusion the negative character of the hearer.

The relationship between argumentation and function of a predicate in a text can be explained by means of the traditional concept of topical difference. In the Terministic tradition (twelfth century), the relation between a term in an argument and its conclusion was conceived as a relation. This way of conceiving an argument comes from Abelard, that represented an enthymeme, an imperfect inference in his view, as an inference holding in virtue of a relation between two extramental things (Stump 1989, p. 93; see also Green-Pedersen 1984, p. 166). For instance, the conditional “if it is a man, it is an animal” holds true in virtue of the relation (*habitudo*), from species to genus, between “man” and “animal”. The relation is spelled out in form of a maxima proposition, namely a generalization of the form “whatever the species is predicated of, the genus is also predicated of”. In the Terminist tradition, this relation between terms is called *Differentia*. For instance, in the example of Abelard, the differential would be “from genus to species”. The differentiae are kinds of genera of the *maximae propositiones* warranting the conclusion of the argument (see also Stump 1989, p. 146).

We can interpret the concept of *differentia*, or *habitus* between the terms, as the role the emotive or persuasive word has to fulfill in order to make sense in the argumentation (see also Bigi 2006). The rheme, in this sense, can be seen as constituted by the relationship. The rhematic predicate has to fulfill the argumentative role the connective imposes on it. We represent case 1 above as a relation holding in virtue of a classification from species to individuals (see for the notion of topical inference Stump 1989, p. 36; Rigotti and Rocci 2006).

Premise	You are a heretic
Endoxon	Heretics are bad
Relationship	From classification (from species)
Maxima proposition 1	What is predicated of the species is predicated of the individuals falling under it
Implicit conclusion	You are bad

This type of reasoning is grounded on the notion of *endoxon*, or proposition accepted by everybody, the majority, or the wise. According to Stump (1989), the *endoxon* is usually a generalization holding for the majority. The passage from the predication of a species to the individual, does not necessarily holds in virtue of a syllogistic inference. On the contrary, the inference is supported by a topical relation, in this case related to the notion of species (see Aristotle, *Topics* B 2 109b 20–25). This analysis can be applied to more difficult cases Rocci (2005, p. 102):

Case 2

I am going to marry Sean. He is handsome, bright and incredibly rich.

In this case the predicates handsome, brilliant and rich constitute the reasons for the choice of marriage. The argumentation can be represented as “he is desirable as a husband, therefore I choose to marry him”. The goal of the second sequence can be interpreted as giving reasons to support the fact that *x* is good (desirable) as husband. Below, we analyze the last predicate, rich.

Premise	<i>X</i> is incredibly rich
Endoxon	Richness of a husband leads to pleasure
Endoxon 2	Pleasure is good ²
Maxima proposition	If the effect is good, the cause is good ³
Conclusion 1	Richness of a husband is good
Maxima proposition 2	When any one member, whatever its kind, of the same kindred series is shown to be good or praiseworthy, then all the rest as well come to be shown to be so ⁴
Conclusion 2	A rich husband is good (from maxima proposition 2; conclusion 1)

² “Let us resume our inquiry and state, in view of the fact that all knowledge and every pursuit aims at some good, what it is that we say political science aims at and what is the highest of all goods achievable by action. Verbally there is very general agreement; for both the general run of men and people of superior refinement say that it is happiness, and identify living well and doing well with being happy; but with regard to what happiness is they differ, and the many do not give the same account as the wise. For the former think it is some plain and obvious thing, like **pleasure**, wealth, or honour” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 4); “To judge from the lives that men lead, most men, and men of the most vulgar type, seem (not without some ground) to identify the good, or happiness, with pleasure; which is the reason why they love the life of enjoyment” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I, 5). See also *Topics* III, 7: “Also, the same things are more valuable if accompanied than if unaccompanied by pleasure, and likewise when free from pain than when attended with pain”.

³ «[...] quod enim uniuscuiusque causa est, id eam rem efficit cuius est causa» (Boethius, *De Differentiis Topics*, 1189c).

⁴ Aristotle (1939), *Topics* II, 9.

The argumentation from classification, in this case, is highly complex and is grounded on the topics of the preferable (*Topics* III) or, in our interpretation, from classification. In this analysis, it is proposed that classification always stems from an *endoxon*, an aspect of the common ground which can be a viewpoint or the definition of the term itself.

2.3 Argumentation by Words: Conclusions

In this section we highlight the argumentative function of words. The notion of emotive meaning of a term, even though useful to explain the persuasive effect of a word, does not show the process of reasoning underlying the use of the term and its linguistic function. In our view, the argumentativity of words can be shown by means of the notion of function of a words and the concept of differentia. Words have an argumentative power because they are the starting point of topics. Their use, or better, the relationship between their use and the conclusion they implicitly defend, presupposes a topical link warranting a passage of inference from what has been asserted and what has taken for granted. These principles can be applied to argumentation schemes, representing common patterns of inference in argumentation. In particular, the argumentative use of emotive words is usually grounded on arguments from classification and values. Instead of an intrinsic emotive meaning of words, we consider the semantic, definitional meaning of the word and the common knowledge about an object. Both these concepts in our interpretation of topics are considered to be *endoxa*, even though if we analyze them at a level of predicables their properties are essentially different. This account allows one to inquire into emotive words from an argumentative point of view presented in detail in the next section.

3 Ethics, Values, and Persuasion

Words, as mentioned in the previous section, are strictly connected with choice and with *endoxa* regarding quality of an action or state of affairs. This relation can explain the persuasiveness of naming reality and, consequently, of defining and redefining words. In order to explain the persuasiveness of words, it is necessary to distinguish between two interrelated aspects of meaning, which Stevenson calls “descriptive meaning” and “emotive meaning”. While the descriptive meaning represents the conditions for the attribution of a predicate to a subject, the emotive meaning can be interpreted using the Aristotelian categories of desirable and objectionable (see for instance *Topics*, III, 3). The choice of what is relatively or absolutely good is the principle upon which the decision-making is built and values, intended to be reasons to act, are grounded.

3.1 Topics and Argument from Classification

The descriptive meaning of a word can be conceived as a principle of classification, or characterization, of entities and states of affairs. From an argumentative point of view, it can be interpreted as a dimension of meaning corresponding to the characteristics needed for a characterization and working as a premise in a reasoning from verbal classification. The scheme from classification is basically the representation of different types of argumentation that in the topical tradition were considered as from genus, definition, property and, in some cases, from accident. The argument from classification consists in the attribution of a property *G* in virtue of a property *F*. In other words, if an *x* has the property *F*, *x* has

property G as well. The scheme for the argument from verbal classification can be represented as follows (see Walton 2006, p. 129):

Argument from Verbal Classification

Individual premise	a has property F .
Classification premise	For all x , if x has property F , then x can be classified as having property G .
Conclusion	a has property G .

Critical Questions

- CQ₁: What evidence is there that a definitely has property F , as opposed to evidence indicating room for doubt on whether it should be so classified?
- CQ₂: Is the verbal classification in the classification premise based merely on an assumption about word usage that is subject to doubt?

In this scheme there are two aspects that differentiate the modern conception of inference schemes from the tradition: the different types of relations between F and G are not considered, and the inference from the general proposition to the singular case is not warranted by a *topos*, but a form of reasoning called “defeasible” or “presumptive” reasoning.

As shown in (Walton and Macagno 2008), in Aristotle’s account, continued in the medieval tradition, the possible relations of predication (or classification) were divided into four predicables: genus, definition, accident and property. We can represent the four predicables in the following fashion (see Rigotti and Rocci 2006):

Showing the essence of the thing		Not showing the essence of the thing	
Definition	Genus	Property	Accident
Convertible with the thing. Expresses the essence.	Not convertible with the thing. Expresses the essence.	Convertible with the thing. Does not express the essence.	Not convertible with the thing. Does not express the essence.
Ex: Man is a reasonable animal.	Ex: Man is an animal	Ex: Talkative (man)	Ex: Man is strong

An accident is the simple predication, the attribution to a subject of a predicate not showing what the subject is, neither convertible with it. What a man is, in other terms, is not strong, neither a strong thing is necessarily a man. On the contrary, something that is “talkative” is necessarily a man, “animal” represents part of what man is, and “reasonable animal” is necessarily a man and represents what man is. Aristotle formulated a set of topics for each predicable, some of which were intrinsic, making the possible syntagmatic relations of the predicable explicit (see also Rigotti and Rocci 2006). For instance, some of the rules of inference concerning the predicable ‘genus’ were stated as follows (*Topics*, IV, 120b 12–123a 27):

- The species can be predicated of the definition of the genus, not vice versa.
- The genus must include all the members of the species it is predicated of.
- It is impossible for something to be predicated of the genus if it is not predicated of one of its species.

Similarly, topics were stated for each predicable. We represent some of them in the following table:

Accident	If the definition of the accident cannot be attributed to the definition of the subject, the predication of the accident is not possible. If we show that in any case whatever the attribute does not belong, we shall have demolished the universal assertion of it, and likewise also if we show that it belongs in a single case, we shall demolish the universal denial of it.
Property	Take a look at each subject of which he has rendered the property, and see (e.g.) if it fails to belong to any of them at all, or to be true of them in that particular respect, or to be a property of each of them in respect of that character of which he has rendered the property: for then what is stated to be a property will not be a property.
Definition	See if anything contained in the definition fails to apply to everything that falls under the same species: for this sort of definition is worse than those which include an attribute belonging to all things universally.

If the argument from verbal classification gives the general principle governing the (logical) passage from premises to conclusion, without specifying the semantic nature of this link, the topics show the principle of inference the reasoning is grounded on. The argument scheme can therefore be integrated by topics, accounting for the reasonableness of the inference:

Individual premise	a has property F .
Classification premise	For all x , if x has property F , and F is the definition (genus; definite description) of G , then x can be classified as having property G .
Conclusion	a has property G .

Critical Questions

CQ₃: Is F the accepted definition (genus, definite description) of G ?

Argument schemes, integrated by the ancient topics, can explain the nature of reasoning stemming from the descriptive meaning of a word. Changing the descriptive meaning, in this perspective, means changing the endoxical propositions the classification is based on, namely the definition (genus or property) of G that is commonly accepted. The redefinition can be analyzed in this account as a potential violation of *endoxa*, which should be assessed by taking into account the shared semantic system (or word use).

3.2 Emotive Meaning and Ethical Inference

The second dimension of meaning Stevenson distinguished, namely the “emotive meaning”, can be revisited in an argumentative perspective taking into account the modern tradition on ethical inferences.

The relation between word and evaluation can be analyzed starting from Toulmin’s and Hare’s theories on ethical judgments. On Toulmin’s view (see Toulmin 1958, p. 68), ethical judgments are constituted by the attribution to a subject of a property, which might represent the opinion that the subject is desirable or praiseworthy, such as in “Jones is a good man”. This attribution of an “ethical” property to a subject is always grounded, on Toulmin’s view, on a factual reason. For instance, a reason (R) which may be given to support the ethical judgment (E) above might be “Jones is extremely generous”. The relation between the factual reason (R)

and the ethical conclusion (E) is called evaluative inference (see Toulmin 1958, p. 38. for the notion of evaluative inference, see Brown 1955; Welsh 1957). Toulmin's relationship between evaluation and reasons has been interpreted by Hare (Hare 1952, chapter 7) as a value standard, or a shared evaluation criterion. On Hare's view, the inference "This strawberry is good; in fact, it is sweet and juicy" is grounded on a culture-dependent criterion, namely "A good strawberry must be juicy". This link between evaluative judgment, shared values, and reasons⁵ allows one to explain in an argumentative perspective the persuasive structure of definitions, which can be developed by taking into consideration another aspect of Hare's theory, namely the relation between ethics and action. Hare, distinguishing the frastic dimension (corresponding to Stevenson's descriptive meaning), from the neustic dimension (corresponding to Stevenson's dynamic meaning, or illocutive force of an utterance), notices that words expressing a moral judgment (such as "good", "just"...) are often used to lead the interlocutor to act, even though the utterance is not directive. Hare analyzes the possible inferences ethical terms can be used in, such as the following enthymeme (see Hare 1952, p. 44):

You must do your homework. It is your duty.

Here the conclusion is grounded on a missing premise which can be represented as "You must do your duty", belonging to the shared values and norms of behaviour. Ethical judgments, in other words, are means to lead the interlocutor to action on the basis of common knowledge.

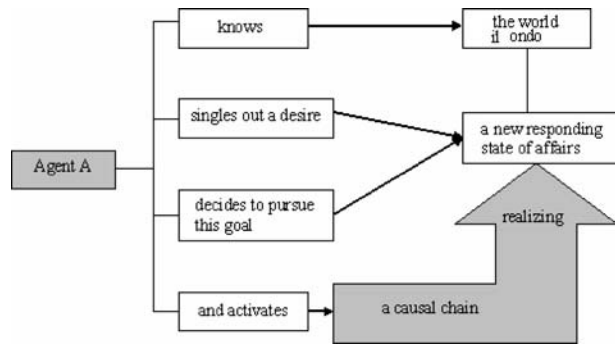
The two dimensions of ethical judgments, namely the inference supporting their predication and their pragmatic effect of leading to action can be analyzed starting from *Nicomachean Ethics* by Aristotle (1985). The level of justifying the predication can be examined taking into consideration Vendler's interpretation of Aristotle's semantic analysis of "good" (see Vendler 1964). Vendler notices how the predicate "good" always expresses a function. For instance, a "good dinner" is on this perspective a dinner which carries out well its function, namely which is good to be eaten. In a similar fashion, a "good dog" is a dog that carries out well the typical function of a dog, namely guarding. The semantic of "good" is examined in this interpretation of Aristotle's *Ethics* in relation to the typical function which in a given community is associated to the subject. We can conceive the predication of ethical terms as grounded a kind of argumentation whose major premise is constituted by endoxical propositions presented by Aristotle (1851) in the *Rhetoric* and in the *Topics* as topics allowing one to classify an object as good or desirable. For instance, these topics are (*Rhetoric* I 7)

We may define a good thing as that which ought to be chosen for its own sake; or as that for the sake of which we choose something else; or as that which is sought after by all things, or by all things that have sensation or reason, or which will be sought after by any things that acquire reason; or as that which must be prescribed for a given individual by reason generally, or is prescribed for him by his individual reason, this being his individual good;

These topics can be imagined as different shared criteria used to determine what can be desirable. On this view, not only are moral judgments seen as the product of a reasoning

⁵ The relation between emotive words and reasons given to support the predication is pointed out also in Manicas and Kruger's studies on decision-making: "[...] it might be possible to bring to bear a rational criticism, for usually the expressions of feelings of like and dislike are predicated on reasons, which, when explored, are often seen to contain a mixture of factual presuppositions and broad evaluative considerations. Thus, reasons for liking the play might be its witty dialogue, its fast "pace", and the insights it reveals into the psychology of adolescents. Reasons for disliking the play might be its superficial characterization, its lack of a coherent plot, and its "forced" ending. But all of these reasons are of a factual nature and presuppose certain norms for plays, and are thus subject to rational discussion" (Manicas and Kruger 1968, p. 427).

Fig 1 Values and action



process (see Baier 1965), but as the result of specific inferences grounded on endoxical propositions.

The relation between persuasion and the semantic and argumentative criteria of “good” and the other ethical terms can be explained considering Aristotle’s ethical model of action. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle highlights the role of the will in an action. A decision is always relative to a goal, and the goal can be what is good, or what appears to be good (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1113a15); in fact, “everything aims at the good” (*Topics* III, 1, 116a 18). The decision making process can be described in this perspective as the reasoning at the basis of action, in which an agent is lead to action on the basis of reasons grounded on what he considers desirable (ἀρετόν) or objectionable (φευκτόν), or more desirable or less objectionable. What is to be chosen (ἀρετόν) becomes, in Aristotle’s *Ethics* and *Topics*, the goal that determines the action. The teleological interpretation of action can be represented in the following diagram (Rigotti 2005b, p. 64; Fig. 1)

In this diagram we can notice how the final cause of action is the agent’s desire, which the agent decides to realize through a causal chain. Desire and the corresponding state of affairs stem from agent’s experiences. In this perspective, the link between the “emotive meaning” (or rather representation of a state of affairs responding to the interlocutor’s desires) and action allows one to explain how “ethical terms” can influence the interlocutor’s choices in terms of implicit enthymemes. In the modern tradition of argument schemes, the concept of “desirable” and the ethical action model is the basis of the a pattern of inference called *argument from values* (see Bench-Capon 2003a, b; Walton et al. 2008, ch. 9). “Value” is here intended to mean “the quality (positive or negative) that renders something desirable or valuable”, namely the goal leading an agent to action. The argument from values represents, therefore, the process of reasoning leading the interlocutor to consider a certain state of affairs as desirable and consequently as a reason of action (conceived as including also dialogical actions and commitments). The argument from values is a kind of teleological argumentation grounded on the *endoxa* of desirable and objectionable, and can be described as follows: x (a state of affairs) is classified as V (a value, which can be positive or negative on the ground of *endoxa*⁶); value V (which

⁶ The relation between desirability, choice, and *endoxa* can be found in Cicero’s *De Inventione*. Cicero, analyzing deliberation, gives a value scale: «Rerum expetandarum tria genera sunt; par autem numerus vitandarum ex contraria parte. Nam est quidam, quod sua vi nos adlicitat ad sese, non emolumento captans aliquo, sed trahens sua dignitate, quod genus virtus, scientia, veritas. Est aliud autem non propter suam vim et naturam, sed propter fructum atque utilitatem petendum; quod <genus> pecunia est. Est porro quiddam ex horum partibus iunctum, quod et sua vi et dignitate nos inlectos ducit et prae se quamdam gerit utilitatem, quo magis expetatur, ut amicitia, bona existimatio.» (Cicero, *De Inventione*, II, 52).

represents the reason of the (non) desirability of x) implies that agent A should consider positively (negatively) goal G , necessary to carry out x (Walton et al. 2008, ch. 9; Fig. 2)

ARGUMENT FROM VALUES

Variant 1: Positive Value

Premise 1 Value V is *positive* as judged by agent A (judgment value)
 Premise 2 The fact that value V is *positive* affects the interpretation and therefore the evaluation of goal G of agent A (If value V is *good*, it supports commitment to goal G).
 Conclusion V is a reason for retaining commitment to goal G

Variant 2: Negative Value.

Premise 1 Value V is *negative* as judged by agent A (judgment value)
 Premise 2 The fact that value V is *negative* affects the interpretation and therefore the evaluation of goal G of agent A (If value V is *bad*, it goes against commitment to goal G).
 Conclusion V is a reason for retracting commitment to goal G

For instance we can analyze how argumentation from values works taking into account case 2 above:

I want to marry Sean. He is handsome, bright, and incredibly rich.

Argument from values and the *endoxa* relative to the desirable are useful to analyze conflicting ethical arguments as conflicts of values and *endoxa*. For instance, we can analyze the case examined by Bench-Capon (2003a, 2003b). He offered the case of Hal and Carla as an example. Diabetic Hal needs insulin to survive, but cannot get any in time to save his life except by taking some form Carla's house without her permission. The argument from positive value for preserving life is weighed against the argument from negative value of taking someone's property without his or her permission. In this case, we can represent the argumentation as follows (Fig. 3).

Obviously, we can notice, values are not on the same level. In the *Nicomachean Ethics* (*Nicomachean Ethics* I, 5) for instance, Aristotle analyzes the different types of life and the hierarchy of values. In the third book of the *Topics*, Aristotle applies the ethical principles to argumentation by means of the topics of "the better". These topics can be interpreted as strategies for the decision making and for resolving conflicts of values:

Fig. 2 Argument from values

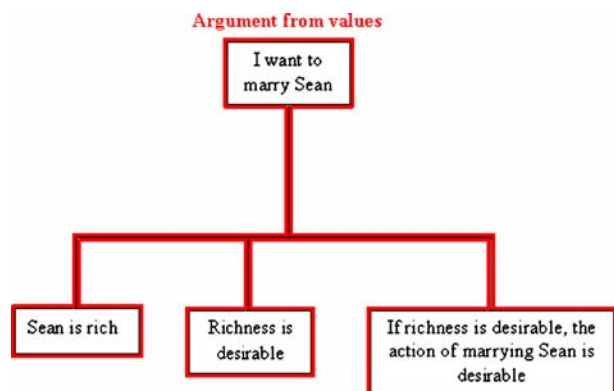
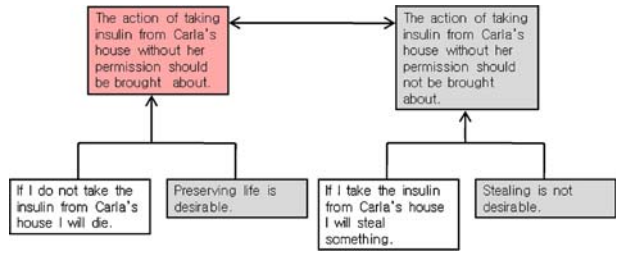


Fig. 3 Argument diagram of the Hal and Carla example



Also, that which is desired for itself is more desirable than that which is desired for something else; e.g. health is more desirable than gymnastics: for the former is desired for itself, the latter for something else. (*Topics* III, 1).

We can apply these principles to the example above as represented in Fig. 4 at the bottom of the page.

The two argumentative dimensions of meaning can be integrated into a meta-ethical theory of emotions.

3.3 Metaethics and the Reasonableness of Emotions

The argumentative approach to descriptive and emotive meaning emphasize the role of values in persuasion. This account can also highlight another important relation, namely between values (or reasons to act), descriptive meaning, and emotions. On this perspective,

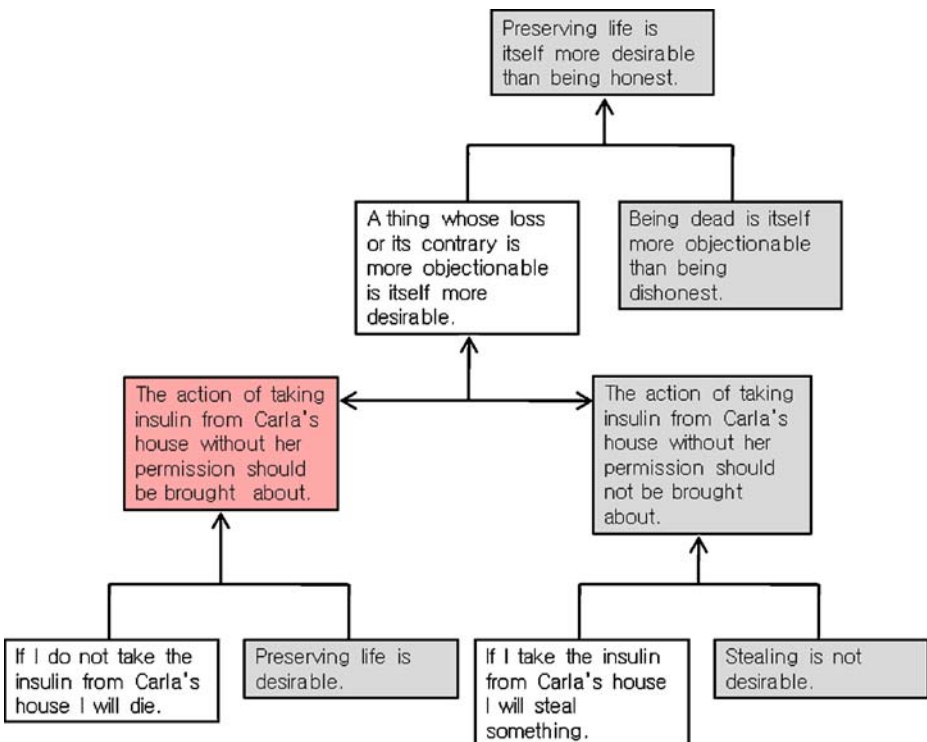


Fig. 4 Conflict of values and scale of values in Hal and Carla example

words can be “ethical” because of their relation with representations and the fragment of reality which is considered desirable or objectionable by the interlocutor.

The grounds of this account can be found in the concept of “vivid representation” mentioned by Quintilian. In the ancient rhetoric emotions were in fact a fundamental component of persuasive discourse. Quintilian acknowledged how the judge’s will could be influenced by emotions, which in some cases might be more useful for the decision-making than the proofs themselves⁷. In order to generate emotions, Quintilian points out, it is necessary to know what their origin is. On Quintilian’s view, emotions stem from the identification of an event with the personal experiences (Quintilian 1996, *Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 2, 34):

Again, when we desire to awaken pity, we must actually believe that the ills of which we complain have befallen our own selves, and must persuade our minds that this is really the case. We must identify ourselves with the persons of whom we complain that they have suffered grievous, unmerited and bitter misfortune, and must plead their case and for a brief space feel their suffering as though it were our own, while our words must be such as we should use if we stood in their shoes..

Emotions, on Quintilian’s view, are their essentially cognitive processes, connecting the agent to the represented situation. Interpreting Quintilian’s account in a psychological perspective, emotions can be seen as cognitive representations by means of which an individual is linked with the external world, adapting his own behaviour to different states of affairs (Damasio 2000, pp. 281–282).

The rationality of emotions, or rather the relation between representations and emotions, can be explained starting from the ontology of emotions which can be found in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. In (*Rhetoric* II), Aristotle analyzes emotions in terms of representations, or, using the modern cognitive studies terminology, scenarios (Solomon 2003). For instance, the feeling of anger can be examined as presupposing the perception of an offence together with the desire of action (Solomon 2003, p. 92). Other emotions, such as fear, presuppose that the feared situation is not desirable, together with the desire of avoiding it (Solomon 2003, p. 107). Desire, we can notice in these examples, is the key notion for understanding the link between subjectivity and representation, and the essential component of every emotion⁸. Without a system of values, that is, a system of reasons to act (or objects of desire), a situation or state of affairs cannot be assessed as “good” or “bad” for the agent. Without assessment, the agent cannot relate himself to the situation. Consequently, he cannot be interested in it, and thereby cannot experience an emotion (see for instance Damasio 1994, p. 191 for the notion of emotions as voluntary evaluative processes). Emotions are in fact assessments that are perceived as particularly important for the agent (Solomon 2003, p. 104), that is, they are evaluations of a situation in relation to the agent’s system of desires and values. In the examples mentioned above, for instance, we pointed out that anger or fear presuppose that the agent perceives the situation as an offense or as undesirable (Solomon 2003, pp. 7–8):

[...] emotions are interestingly similar to beliefs. We can now explain this similarity by claiming that emotions are judgments—normative and often moral judgments. “I am

⁷ M.F. Quintiliani *Institutionis Oratoriae*, VI, 2, 5: « Probationes enim efficiant sane ut causam nostram meliorem esse iudices putent, adfectus praestant ut etiam velint; sed id quod volunt credunt quoque».

⁸ “[...] emotions essentially involve desires, expectations, purposes, and attitude. Emotions are motivated by desires, sometimes distinguished by desires, and in virtually every case some desire is essential to an emotion” ((Solomon, 2003, p. 20)

angry at John for taking (“stealing” begs the question) my car” entails that I believe that John has somehow wronged me [...]. The moral judgment entailed by anger is not a judgment about my anger [...]. My anger is that judgment. If I do not believe that I have somehow been wronged, I cannot be angry (though I might be upset, or sad). Similarly, if I cannot praise my lover, I cannot be in love (though I might want her or need her, which, traditional wisdom aside, is entirely different). If I do not find my situation awkward, I cannot be ashamed or embarrassed. If I do not judge that I have suffered a loss, I cannot be sad or jealous. [...] emotions in general do appear to require this feature: to have an emotion is to hold a normative judgment about one’s situation.

The relation between emotions, values and desires is constituted by the representation of a situation through words (Cigada 2006, p. 113), which the agent evaluates (*Institutio Oratoria*, VI, 29–31):

But how are we to generate these emotions in ourselves, since emotion is not in our own power? I will try to explain as best I may. There are certain experiences which the Greeks call φαντασίαι, and the Romans *visions*, whereby things absent are presented to our imagination with such extreme vividness that they seem actually to be before our very eyes. It is the man who is really sensitive to such impressions who will have the greatest power over the emotions. Some writers describe the possessor of this power of **vivid imagination, whereby things, words and actions are presented in the most realistic manner**, by the Greek word εὐφαντασίωτος; and it is a power which all may readily acquire if they will. [...] I am complaining that a man has been murdered. Shall I not bring before my eyes all the circumstances which it is reasonable to imagine must have occurred in such a connexion? Shall I not see the assassin burst suddenly from his hiding-place, the victim tremble, cry for help, beg for mercy, or turn to run? Shall I not see the fatal blow delivered and the stricken body fall? Will not the blood, the deathly pallor, the groan of agony, the death-rattle, be indelibly impressed upon my mind?

Words can depict a past or possible situation connected to the interlocutor’s experiences, which can evoke emotions previously experienced. Emotions, in virtue of their connection with an agent’s desires, are essential components of action. They are, in fact, forms of choice. The centrality of emotions in the process of decision-making has been pointed out in neuropsychiatry by Damasio (2000, p. 302; 1994, pp. 269–272), who showed how people incapable of experiencing emotions because of brain injuries were incapable of making decisions. Emotions, in fact, derive from the positive or negative experiences (which might be individual or common) associated through learning to a situation. Plantin notices how a described event could arouse emotions because it represents a possible source of happiness or pain (Plantin 2004, p. 272); on this view, a description can direct the interlocutor’s choices in relation to what he considers desirable or objectionable, namely in relation to his values. The perception of an event as pleasant or painful can in fact be subjective (such as the pleasure of the smell of the flowers) or social, stemming from the values shared in a community. For instance, money might be a socially accepted value, and therefore generate an emotion of pleasure and influence in this fashion the interlocutor’s choices.

Emotions are therefore essentially assessments and interpretations of reality through a system of values, which can derive from the agent’s past experiences or culture. The past experiences of the positive or negative consequences brought about by a determinate state of affairs determine, in fact, the criteria for judging similar situations in relation to their

possible future outcomes. For instance, the negative experience of a bee bite constitutes a criterion for forecasting certain possible outcomes of a situation, such as, for instance, the sight of a bee (see for this concept Damasio 1994, p. 246). The experience of past emotions are therefore cognitive instruments, through which an individual interprets a situation and emotively reacts to it. If we analyze values as decisional criteria corresponding to what an agent considers to be desirable, we can notice that they cannot be separated from the individual or common experience. People appraise state of affairs or entities on the basis of their personal past experiences of what can cause positive or negative consequences. On the other hand, the knowledge of positive or negative outcomes is the result of the process of learning; in other terms, values are in part culture-dependant (Solomon 2003, p. 87):

An emotion is a system of concepts, beliefs, attitudes, and desires, virtually all of which are context-bound, historically developed, and culture-specific.

If we consider values in relation to choice, namely what makes an action worth, it is clear how decision making and arguing from values are consequences of emotions generated by the representation of a state of affairs. Emotions are both the result of past choices and past experiences and evaluations of present and future state of affairs. The notion of representing a situation, which corresponds to generating emotions in connection with the interlocutor's system of desires (his interests), is the pivotal link between words and actions. This account can explain the relation between emotive and descriptive meaning on the basis of an ontology of values grounded on the notions of desire, emotion, and judgment.²

4 Argumentative Words and Persuasive Definitions

If we analyze the persuasiveness of words in terms of argument schemes and not from the point of view of meanings, we can explain both the phenomena of persuasive definition and quasi-definition, which we will refer to as two different aspects of the same argumentative strategy, the persuasive definition. The persuasive definition, in its turn, can be considered to be the explicit move to change endoxical knowledge associated to a word or to the fragment of reality it refers to, that is, to its definition or to the way we conceive the reality it is used to refer to. Other tactics, such as the fallacy of loaded words presupposes a persuasive redefinition, using the term with a different definition from the commonly accepted one.

4.1 Quasi-definitions

The persuasive definition can, in our view, affect the argument in two ways. In the so called "quasi-definitions" it is the complex argumentation from values that is the target of the maneuvering, while in the Stevensonian persuasive definitions it is the definition of the term that is modified. We can examine a case of quasi-definition (Stevenson 1944, 280, 281):

Case 3

Blackguards are the most fascinating people.

You don't say so? Exclaimed Sarudine, smiling.

Of course they are. There's nothing so boring in all the worlds as your so-called honest man. ... With the programme of honesty and virtue everybody is long familiar;

and so it contains nothing that is new. Such antiquated rubbish robs a man of all individuality, and his life is lived within the narrow, tedious limits of virtue... Yes, blackguards are the most sincere and interesting people imaginable, for they have no conception of the bounds of human baseness.

The whole bulk of this argument can be described as the evaluation of the couple virtue–vice according to the two predicates boringness–originality. The original argumentation from values (virtue is desirable, therefore it should be achieved) is substituted with a new one (vice is original and fun, originality and fun are desirable, therefore vice should be praised). This argumentation cannot be simply analyzed by means of argument from classification, since it involves two opposite values, that is, parameters of evaluation of desirability. To the value “virtue” is opposed the value “pleasure” or “fun”, and the latter is stated to be superior to the former. We can represent the argumentation in the following diagram (Fig. 5).

In this analysis, we can notice that the speaker, in arguing from values, grounds his argument on the *endoxon* that “boringness is less desirable than vice”. This opinion can be hardly accepted by his interlocutor, but it is taken for granted. We can notice, in this case, how a conflict of common ground is actually a conflict of values. The speaker takes for granted the better desirableness of a value that the interlocutor thinks to be inferior to virtue. In this case, the argumentation can be evaluated from the point of view of a manipulative use of discursive implicit. In other terms, the speaker presupposes, or takes for granted, a proposition not acceptable by the interlocutor.

4.2 Persuasive Definitions

Persuasive definitions consist in a redefinition of a term, which is used to support a conclusion. It is, in other words, a redefinition of a term used argumentatively. While quasi-definitions

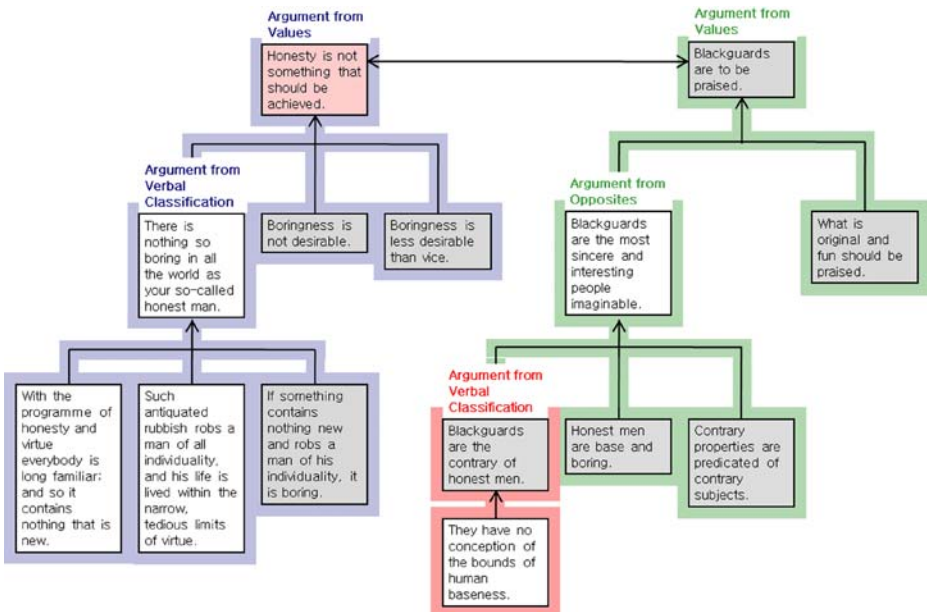


Fig. 5 Argument diagram of the persuasive definition in the blackguard example

concern an argumentation from values, persuasive definitions are aimed at trading on argumentation from values that is developed from the use of a redefined term. A concept, endoxically associated to an evaluation, is modified in order for a particular fragment of reality to be classified as falling within it. We can observe the following example to explain this type of strategy Stevenson (1944, p. 211):

Case 4

A: He has had but little formal education, as is plainly evident from his conversation. His sentences are often roughly cast, his historical and literary references rather obvious, and his thinking is wanting in that subtlety and sophistication which mark a trained intellect. He is definitely lacking in culture.

B: Much of what you say is true, but I should call him a man of culture notwithstanding.

A: Aren't the characteristics I mention the antithesis of culture, contrary to the very meaning, of the term?

B: By no means. You are stressing the outward forms, simply the empty shell of culture. In the true and full sense of the term, "culture" means imaginative sensitivity and originality. These qualities he has; and so I say, and indeed with no little humility, that he is a man of far deeper culture than many of us who have had superior advantages in education.

Here, we can notice, both the terms 'culture' and 'originality' are praiseworthy. However, they can be used to support different conclusions, different types of commitments. In this text, the opposition is not between culture and originality, but between culture and uneducated. The argumentative move, in this example, is based on the employment of argumentation from a verbal classification based on the redefinition of 'culture'. The term 'culture' is, by means of its redefinition, applied to a reality that formerly could not be classified as such. We can represent the persuasive definition argumentation in the diagram in Fig. 5 below. We have drawn a black double arrow, indicating the conflict of endoxical propositions about the definition of culture. In contrast, the agreement based on values is shown by the yellow-shaded line linking B's argument from values to A's endoxical propositions (Fig. 6).

In this analysis, we should observe how the modus operandi of the persuasive definition is the argument from verbal classification, while the endoxic premises of the argument from values remain unaltered. These two cases are the most representative and helpful to bring out the difference between these two argumentative strategies. Obviously there can be more complex cases, in which the argumentation is directed both against the argument from classification and the argument from values. We concede that more work needs to be done to analyze more deeply how the possible different types of conflict of values and of definition are built on the conditions of acceptability for persuasive definitions.

5 Conclusions

Emotive words play a crucial role in argumentation, both in the rhetorical the rhetorical study of persuasive effects on an audience and in the dialectical study of fallacies, including argumentation schemes and argument criticism. By means of using persuasive terms in the ways indicated in this paper it has been shown how it is possible to lead an interlocutor to a

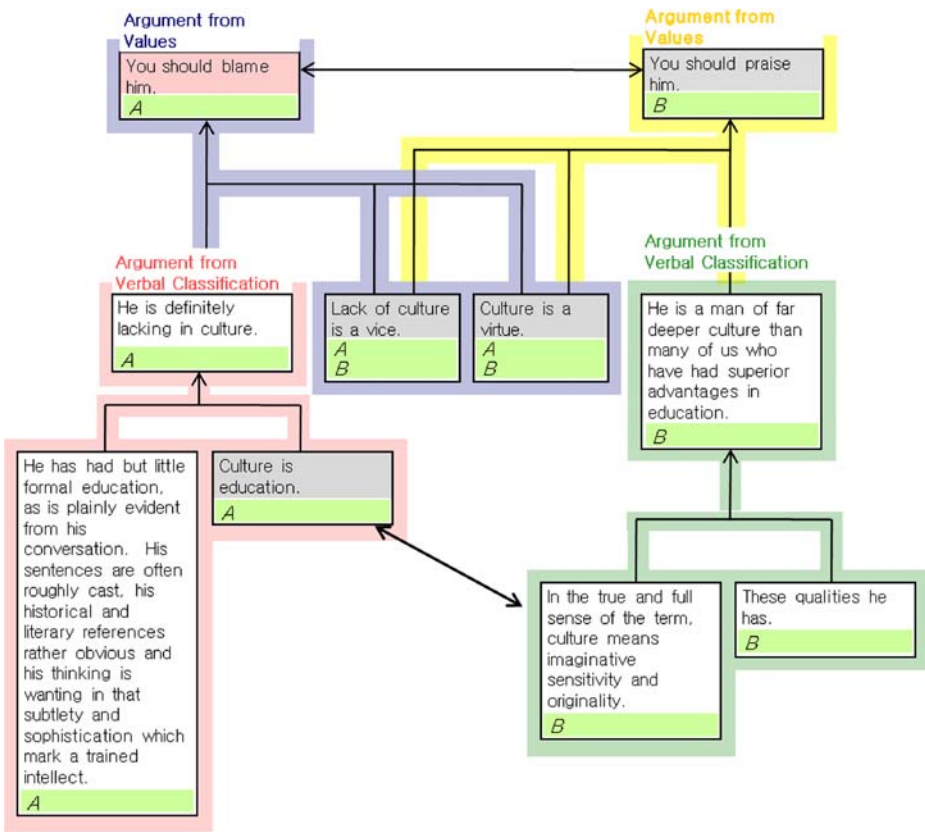


Fig. 6 Argument diagram of the persuasive definition in the culture example

desired conclusion or action by means of argumentation that can be powerfully effective, yet where the interlocutor may not be aware that the argument is based on values. It is reasonable to these arguments on values, but as shown in this paper the problem is that an interlocutor confronted with one of these kinds of arguments may not realize it is based on the speakers values, and therefore may not be aware that critical questions need to be asked.

Several studies have tackled the controversial problem of connotation, inquiring into its relation with denotative or essential meaning (see for instance Rigotti and Rocci 2006; Eco 1975). However, before the analysis presented in this paper it was not made sufficiently clear why these words are persuasive, and how a word can lead the interlocutor to accept a certain conclusion or choose a specific course of action based on values that can be concealed in a persuasive definition. The purpose of this paper is to analyze emotive words from an argumentative perspective that brings out features of how they are used as implicit arguments in persuasion dialogue. We revealed the complex argumentative structure underlying the use of persuasive terms as arguments based on values. Our analysis was shown to be fundamental to the task of explaining the strategy used in persuasive definitions, and the types of problems and conflicts that can arise from their use.

The theoretical approach we developed is grounded on argumentation schemes representing common patterns of reasoning used in everyday conversation. Persuasion was defined as a process of rational commitment to a thesis gained by a proponent in a

dialogue when he puts forward arguments based on commitments accepted by an interlocutor, by means of argumentation schemes that can make types of grounds of rational support of a conclusion explicit. However, how can an analyst reveal the structure of reasoning consisting of premises leading to a conclusion based on concealed values implicit in the use of a word? How can the emotional value of a word be explained as a component of argumentation that can be analyzed by the object of methods so that a critic can identify the value and question its applicability in the argument he is confronted with? In order to answer to these questions we applied the linguistic theory of congruence and examined its roots in ancient studies on dialectics.

Emotive words, in our perspective, can be considered forms of implicit arguments. However, what kind of arguments do they represent? Or, better, what patterns of reasoning do they instantiate? Emotive words seem to owe their argumentative effect to the fact that they are used to classify something as “good”, “bad”, “positive”... This type of reasoning can be explained by means of argumentation from classification, but it cannot give reasons grounding the link between an evaluation and an action. In a nutshell, it cannot tell us how we conform our actions to the evaluation of their objects. Argumentation from values expresses the relation between a judgment and an action, stemming from the Aristotelian principles of action and desirability, as we showed.

This theoretical background was applied to the analysis of persuasive definitions. PD's are seen as redefinitions of terms in order to support a conclusion by means of an inference that is often concealed. The *modus operandi* of their implicit argumentation is constituted both by argument from classification and from values. Depending on which scheme is the target of the re-definer, redefinitions can be considered quasi-definitions or persuasive-definitions. This approach allows us to individuate the origin of a possible conflict of opinion. The interlocutors can disagree on a classificatory *endoxon*, on values, or on the superiority of a value over another.

References

- Aberdein, A (2000) Persuasive definition. In Tindale CW, Hansen HV, Sveda E (eds) *Argumentation at the century's turn*, OSSA (Ontario Society for the Study of Argumentation) Proceedings. CD ROM
- Aristotle (1851) *On rhetoric*. Translated by T. Buckley. Henry G. Bohn, London (UK)
- Aristotle (1939) *Topica*. Translated by E. S. Forster, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Aristotle (1985) *Nicomachean ethics*. Translated by Terence Irwin. Hackett, Indianapolis, Ind.
- Baier K (1965) *The moral point of view*. abridged and rev. ed. Random House, New York
- Bench-Capon T (2003a) Persuasion in practical argument using value-based argumentation frameworks. *J Log Comput* 13:429–448
- Bench-Capon T (2003b) Agreeing to differ: modelling persuasive dialogue between parties without a consensus about values. *Informal Logic* 22:231–245
- Bigi S (2006) Keywords in argumentative texts and their persuasive power. Paper for the ISSA conference
- Brown DG (1955) Evaluative inference. *Philosophy* 30(114):214–228
- Burgess-Jackson K (1995) Rape and persuasive definition. *Can J Philos* 25:415–454
- Cigada S (2006) Connectif et relation entre locuteurs. In: Gobber G, Gatti MC, Cigada S (eds) *Syndesmoi. Vita e Pensiero*, Milano
- Damasio A (1994) *L'errore di Cartesio*. Aldelphi, Milano
- Damasio A (2000) *The feeling of what happens*. Vintage, London
- Ducrot O (1983) *L'Argumentation dans la langue*. Mardaga, Bruxelles
- Ducrot O (1993) *Dire et ne pas Dire*. Minuit, Paris
- Ducrot O, Anscombe J-C (1986) Argumentativité et informativité. In: Meyer M (ed) *De la métaphysique à la rhétorique*. Bruxelles, Editions de L'Université de Bruxelles
- Eco U (1975) *Trattato di semiotica generale*. Bompiani, Milano

- Green-Pedersen NJ (1984) *The tradition of topics in the Middle Age*. Philosophia, Munich, Germany
- Hallden S (1960) *True love, true humour and true religion: a semantic study*. Gleerlup, Lund
- Hare R (1952) *The language of morals*. Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Manicas P, Kruger A (1968) *Essentials of logic*. American Book, New York
- Plantin C (2004) On the inseparability of reason and emotion in argumentation. In: Bollowe J, Weigand E (eds) *Emotions in dialogic interaction*. Benjamins, Amsterdam, pp 265–276
- Quintilian MF (1996) *Institutio oratoria*. Translated by H. E. Butler. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press
- Rigotti E (2005a) Towards a typology of manipulative processes. In: de Saussure L, Schulz P (eds) *New perspectives on manipulation and ideologies: theoretical aspects*. Benjamins, Amsterdam
- Rigotti E (2005b) Congruity theory and argumentation. *Stud Commun Sci* 75–96
- Rigotti E, Rocci A (2006) Denotation vs. connotation. In *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics second edition* (pp. 1–9). Elsevier
- Rocci A (2005) Connective predicated in dialogic and monologic argumentation. *Stud Commun Sci* 97–118
- Schiappa E (2003) *Defining reality: definitions and the politics of meaning*. Carbondale, Southern Illinois University Press
- Solomon R (2003) *Not passion's slave*. Oxford University Press, New York
- Stevenson CL (1937) The emotive meaning of ethical terms. *Mind* 46:14–31
- Stevenson CL (1938) Persuasive definitions. *Mind* 47:331–350
- Stevenson CL (1944) *Ethics and language*. Yale University Press, New Haven
- Stump E (1989) *Dialectic and its place in the development of medieval logic*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, N.Y
- Toulmin SE (1958) *The uses of argument*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK
- Vendler Z (1964) The grammar of goodness. *Philos Rev* 72(4):446–465
- Walton D (2003) *Ethical argumentation*. Lexington, Lanham, Maryland
- Walton D (2005) Deceptive arguments containing persuasive language and persuasive definitions. *Argumentation* 19:159–186
- Walton D (2006) *Fundamentals of critical argumentation*. Cambridge University Press, New York
- Walton D, Macagno F (2008). *Rhetorical argumentation using emotive words*, in press
- Walton D, Reed C, Macagno F (2008) *Argumentation schemes*. Cambridge University Press, New York
- Welsh P (1957) On the nature of inference. *Philos Rev* 66(4):509–524