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Justifying a recommendation: tell a story or present an argument?

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Narracja czy argumentacja: o uzasadnieniu zalecenia

Abstract

In the deliberative genre there is a complex ‘playground’ of choices to present a recommendation; a rhetorician has to determine his or her position. Relevant dimensions are the coerciveness of the recommendation and the strength of its justification, but also the presentation format, varying from prototypical narrative to prototypical argumentative. In different contexts this playground seems to be exploited in different ways and employed with different intensity. It is argued that this can best be understood in terms of different ideas about the management of the audience’s face and in terms of different concepts of rationality that prevail in specific socio-cultural contexts.

Formułując zalecenie, retor określa swoje położenie na „polu” (ang. *playground*) wielu możliwości, z których może skorzystać w ramach gatunku deliberatywnego. Koncepcję pola opisują następujące wymiary: przymus zalecenia i siła jego uzasadnienia, ale także forma przedstawienia – od prototypowej narracji po prototypową argumentację. W różnych kontekstach to pole wydaje się być wykorzystywane na różne sposoby i z różną intensywnością, co omówiono w niniejszym artykule. W zrozumieniu pomóc mogą koncepcje: zarządzania twarzą audytorium oraz różne koncepcje racjonalności, które dominują w określonych socjokulturowych kontekstach.

Key words

deliberative genre, narrative, argumentation, face keeping
rodzaj deliberatywny, narracja, argumentacja, zachowanie twarzy

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Introduction

The following four examples show different ways to present a recommendation, but there are several parallels between pairs of them.

Example 1

“Remember, only two years ago we all had the feeling we were doing fine, producing a great product, working as a team, in a great atmosphere, and we all earned a decent income. Then came this enormous boom in demand, and look where we are now. Yes, we produce eight times more, and yes we have a great high tech production system, modern hop boilers with sufficient capacity, we hire professional marketing. Yes, we own a company that on paper is worth a lot of money. But, the fun has gone, two of the original team are at home with a burnout. This is not the way, we have to take things in our own hands again, as it used to be. It is great to grow, but we need to get back this feeling of real ownership and real control. Why don’t we try to develop a two year plan in which we explore whether we can reduce marketing again to smart word-on-mouth, as in the old day. Quality sells. We cut on costs to pay back the top of the loans and regain independency again.”

Example 2

“We should return to a word-on-mouth marketing model and we should pay off the top of our loans. High loan and expensive outsourcing of vital processes causes that the initial founders of a company lose control. So, if we do this, we have a real chance to regain control over our own company, and that is what we want.”

Example 3

On one occasion an expert in the law stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” “What is written in the Law?” he replied. “How do you read it?” He answered, “‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’; and, ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’” “You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. “Do this and you will live.” But he wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. He went to him and bandaged his wounds,

pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii[c] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.” Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.” (Luke 10: 25-37)

Example 4

In my opinion you should indeed consider to support even these people, because a good Christian should support anyone in need, regardless of race, religion, nationality or any other artificial distinction.

The first example tells a story, the second one presents a pragmatic argument, the third one employs a parable to recommend following the norm, and the fourth one presents an argument based on a norm. The narrative formats of the first and the third example and the argumentative formats in the second and the fourth resemble each other. The recommendation in the first and the fourth example is formulated rather modestly, while in the second and third the formulation is more coercive. The topical content of the first example relates to that of the second, the topical content of the third relates to that of the fourth. This paper elaborates on these relations. It will be shown how a rhetorician by positioning a discourse on this ‘playground’ of possible formats constructs a specific relation with an audience.

*Mutatis mutandis*¹, a narrative format indicates an intention of the rhetorician to explain his or her recommendation, creating empathy with the audience, building a rich socio-cultural context in which the recommendation is presented as a solution to an audience’s problem. As a result of this symbolic involvement, advanced face management² is required to maintain relational coherence. The coerciveness of the recommendation as well as the strength of its justification need to be carefully designed to protect positive face (showing sympathy) as well as negative face (respecting autonomy) of the audience.

By contrast, the argumentative format predominantly indicates a rhetorician’s intention to demonstrate validity, presenting the recommendation as the logical consequence of the application of an abstract norm or regularity.³ The enthymeme

1. *Mutatis mutandis* is used here to indicate a situation as I tried to construct between the first two examples. The topical content of the recommendation as well as its justification are more or less similar.

2. I use the concept of face as defined by Brown and Levinson (1987). Face is the public self-image that every person tries to protect. Positive face is “the want of every member that his wants be desirable to at least some others executors”. Negative face is “the want of every ‘competent adult member’ that his actions be unimpeded by others”. Managing negative face is relevant in the deliberative genre because a recommendation can be perceived as an attempt to intervene in someone’s freedom of action. However, as a recommendation will often be presented in a situation in which the audience may be assumed to encounter some problem, managing positive face, in the form of showing empathy, is also relevant.

3. Argument based on a norm, obviously, employs a general norm that evaluates a type of action as just or unjust. Pragmatic argumentation combines a regularity (A always/often/under specific conditions goes along with/leads to B) with an evaluation. If a pragmatic argument centers uniquely around the evaluation, it resembles very much the argument based on a norm, though this norm evaluates the result of the action as desirable or undesirable.

can be deeply rooted in the socio-cultural context, but it is by definition abstract in its relation to the specifics of the situation. The rhetorician is first of all the interpreter of the norm or regularity and associates with its validity. The abstract norm or regulation defines relevant characteristics of the situation. Managing the audience's face – if any – will be restricted to negative face management because the rhetorician stands aloof of the audience's situation.

These differences in the rhetorical characteristics of the formats to present a recommendation may help to explain why in some institutional contexts the narrative format seems preferred, while in others the argumentative dominates. A relation will be explored between such preferences and dominating conceptions of rationality.

First two dimensions of variation in the presentation of a recommendation will be elaborated. In section 2, the variation in the coerciveness of the directive speech act and its justification is analyzed and its relation to face keeping. In section 3, the discourse format of the justification is analyzed, varying on a range from prototypical narrative on the one extreme to prototypical argumentative on the other. Section 4 discusses the rhetorical dynamics of the narrative versus the argumentative format and their relation to concepts of rationality.

The presentation of a recommendation

“The end of the deliberative speaker is the expedient or harmful; for he who exhorts recommends a course of action as better, and he who dissuades advises against it as worse; all other considerations, such as justice and injustice, honor and disgrace, are included as accessory in reference to this.” (*Art of Rhetoric*, book 1.3:5). This is how Aristotle characterizes the genus *deliberativum*.

The Latin verb *deliberare*, as well as the Greek verb *συμβουλεύω* used by Aristotle, mean *taking counsel* as well as *advising*. Both have a connotation of *weighing well, considering maturely*. Deliberative discourse, therefore, requires a directive as well as a form of justification. So, when contemplating the genus *deliberativum* in its relation to all discursive ways to exert influence, it is clear that commands and orders, bluntly issued or backed up with mere threats, are beyond the range of this genre because mature consideration is denied. It also implies that discourse in which options for action are merely suggested, without any commitment to its advisability and without explicit deliberation, demarcates the genre at the other extreme. Still, numerous presentational options lay between the blunt order and the noncommittal suggestion.

Because a rhetorician always accounts for his or her recommendation, the strength of the recommendation as well as the pretenses of its justification can vary. The

recommendation can be positioned on a scale from absolutely coercive to merely suggestive. The justification can be positioned on a scale from ‘objectively’ valid to grounded on specific, ‘subjective’ preferences.

In the deliberative genre the recommendation is the core (implicit or explicit) speech act. A recommendation is always a directive speech act, defined as “an attempt of varying degree by the speaker to get the hearer to do something” (Searle 1976, 13). A directive is an intrinsically face-threatening act because it always shows the rhetorician’s intention to intervene in the audience’s decision making (Brown and Levinson 1987, 65-66; Burlinson and MacGeorge 2002, 397). The presentation of this intervention can be absolute and coercive, but can also be a suggestion and even reflect hesitations about its validity. In that case, more of the actual decision making is left to the audience.

Recommendations may be formulated as suggestions in an attempt to minimize negative face damage. Curtailing the audience’s autonomy can be minimized by employing certain linguistic means to present a piece of advice in a way that seems not to restrict the audience’s freedom to act (Brown and Levinson 1987, 129). Even when the rhetorician is in an institutional position to issue strong directives, or when circumstances render the directive almost ineluctable for the audience, the rhetorician can opt to present the recommendation as a suggestion or an informal advice.

To veil or soften the directive intention, the core speech act can even be left implicit. Van Poppel (2013) argues that this way to convey a recommendation appears quite frequently in health communication. This way, the recommendation can be disguised as merely information (Van Poppel 2013, 32). The rhetorician claims that an action will have an effect that is desirable, or undesirable, and leaves it to the audience to draw the conclusion. Topical content and institutional context may nevertheless reveal the coerciveness of the recommendation.

The pretenses of the *justification of the validity of the recommendation* can also vary. On a range with many nuances one could distinguish between: claiming to support absolute validity, claiming to support validity under certain conditions, claiming to support validity with a certain probability, or justifying the recommendation as one’s personal preference.

- *Claiming to support absolute validity*: the rhetorician claims that the recommendation follows inevitably from starting points that the audience already accepted and should therefore be accepted as a valid recommendation by this audience (and perhaps even by all possible audiences).⁴

4. Besides following from starting points that the audience has actually accepted in the conversation, absolute validity is often also claimed because the recommendation follows from concessions that the rhetorician puts the audience is socially or institutionally obliged to accept. Such situations are obviously a very strong infringement of negative face.

- *Claiming to support validity under certain conditions*: the rhetorician claims that the recommendation is valid on condition that the audience endorses a set of starting points.
- *Claiming to support validity with a certain probability*: the rhetorician claims that generally accepted knowledge characterizes the effects of a recommended action as probable but not certain, implying that the audience should itself assess which risks it wants to take.
- *Personal preference*: the rhetorician does not claim to have sufficient objective evidence for a regularity but relies on some personal experiences, or admits that his or her evaluation of its effects is grounded on personal values.

Discursive indicators can make the rhetorician's position explicit, although it is not mandatory to specify these choices. In the absence of indications, the topical content and institutional context can indicate the determinateness.

- *Topical content*: it can be clear that the recommendation is meant to be coercive when the rhetorician presents consequences of not endorsing the action as inevitable and detrimental.
- *Institutional context*: obviously, in many contexts the social-institutional (authoritative) relations between rhetorician and audience determine the coerciveness of a recommendation, irrespective of its formulation.

If the rhetorician's choices are articulated by indicators or if they are clear from context, the audience may observe a discrepancy between the coerciveness of the recommendation as indicated by the rhetorician and the pretenses of the justification as indicated. A coercive recommendation does not tally with a highly subjective justification, because such justification cannot carry the certitude. It is also marked to present a modest suggestion supported by a very strong justification that renders it obviously irrational to disregard the recommendation.

As a rule, the strength of the recommendation as indicated should tally with the pretenses of the justification as indicated. If the relation between the recommendation and its justification shows a discrepancy, this signals a violation of the sincerity condition (Searle 1969); the audience understands that the rhetorician does not straightforwardly express what he or she actually means. Such discrepancy between what the rhetorician externalizes and what the audience tends to attribute to the rhetorician is not necessarily a threat for a cooperative relation between rhetorician and audience. Fine-drawn discrepancies can serve face keeping intentions. If the justification is slightly stronger than the recommendation, this serves minimizing negative face damage, being understood by the audience as an attempt

to show that the rhetorician wishes to respect the audience's autonomy. If the recommendation is somewhat stronger than the justification, making the discourse more an emphatic plea than an advice, this serves positive face keeping, showing the rhetorician's deep commitment to the audience's situation. Because face management is conventionalized, an audience recognizes the interactional meaning of these discrepancies.

But a discrepancy can also be understood and actually be meant to invite a rhetorically more articulated interpretation than mere face keeping. Three examples:

- If someone in a dominant position towards the audience formulates a coercive recommendation with a justification that is explicitly indicated weak, for example based on mere personal preference, this may be perceived as misplaced enjoyment of power instead of positive face keeping. In fact, what is almost an order is disguised as a recommendation. The limit is: "You better do this because I say so".
- If a peer justifies a very strong recommendation with a very weak justification, this can easily be perceived as somewhat pathetic instead of expressing positive face management. "John once had the same problems that you have, and [x] really helped him, so you must try [x] too".
- If someone in a dominant position towards the audience presents a weak recommendation, for example a mere suggestion, with a very strong justification, this may be perceived as irony or even as sarcasm. "If you continue like this you will be expelled, so I suggest you take my advice into consideration". Institutionally dominant professionals such as medics, lawyers, counselors may sometimes unwillingly evoke this interpretation. With sincere intentions they may attempt to protect negative face; they carefully formulate a recommendation that clearly follows from a conclusive analysis as a mere suggestion; the client feels abused.⁵

In Figure 1 the playground is visualized. On this playground, one has to draw two positions: the position indicated explicitly by the rhetorician, and the rhetorician's position as believed by the audience. Positions on or close to the diagonal show a fit between coerciveness of the recommendation and strength of the justification; if the position as indicated is close to or even overlaps with or the position as believed, there is an agreement about the recommendation.

5. An empirical basis for these nuances should result from extensive corpus linguistic research based on spontaneous speech and writing. As far as I know this has not been undertaken. Most (politeness) research on directives focuses on requests, and makes use of elicited discourse completion tasks. Compare Flöck and Geluykens 2015.

Figure 2 shows examples of rhetorically marked situations. When the indicated position is not on the diagonal, while the position as believed is on the diagonal, this is understood as face keeping strategy or as other intended rhetorical effects. Above the diagonal we find negative face keeping and the more extreme rhetorical effects, such as irony or sarcasm. Under the diagonal we find positive face keeping and the more extreme rhetorical effects, such as acting pathetic and expressing arrogance.

The range from narrative to argumentation

A second dimension of presentation regards the format of the justification. A justification can predominantly follow the prototypical format of an explicit argumentative move in a discussion, approaching the audience as an antagonist, or it can take the form of an explanatory narrative. I will briefly characterize these two ‘corners of a rhetorical playground’ and map the one on the other.⁶

Dominant argument schemes to support a recommendation are *argument based on a norm* and *pragmatic argument*. With the argument based on a norm, the rhetorician straightforwardly evaluates the recommended action, referring to an (absolute or defeasible) general norm. The pragmatic argument, also named means-end argument or argument from consequences (Walton et al. 2008, 100-102), is characterized by a general regularity (absolute or probabilistic) that predicts that the recommended action will have specific (desirable or unwanted) effects. When a rhetorician judges that characteristics of the situation meet the requirements, the general principle can be applied to justify the recommendation. So, the rhetorician reasons from general principle to specific situation. We typically see verbal propositional phrases, related to each other with argumentative indicators, symbolizing quasi-deduction.⁷ The coerciveness of the recommendation depends on the strength of the enthymeme.

Supporting positive action, the general scheme looks as:

standpoint	Action a is desirable.
data	<i>Why do you think so?</i> (1) Action a leads to b and (2) b is a desired situation.
inference rule	<i>What has a got to do with b?</i> If an action leads to a desired situation, that action is desirable.

6. These characteristics have been presented before in Van den Hoven 2017.

7. In subordinate arguments that justify disputed elements of the scheme, one may find different argument schemes, for example argument based on authority to ground a norm, or argument based on induction or example to ground a regularity. Also, one may find elaborations such as emphasizing justice and injustice, honor and disgrace, or explanations, but according to Aristotle these are accessory. When such explanatory elaborations start to dominate the discourse, the argumentative format develops into a narrative format. This is why I model argumentation and narrative as extreme corners of a playground.

This general scheme indicates the complexity of the pragmatic argument. No audience will accept the pragmatic principle unconditionally.⁸ Gains and losses, benefits and costs, always go together. So in important pragmatic argumentations, often complicated comparative assessments of pros and cons need to be made. Also the claimed regularity may require further support. If that support is not purely statistical, but takes the form of a theory that addresses what causes the need to alter the status quo, the elements of the pragmatic argument overlap more and more with the elements of a narrative.

In modern society, argumentative reasonableness is highly regarded. Members of a modern community expect in many institutionalized contexts rhetoricians to ground recommendations on cognizable sources of generalized knowledge, norms, as well as empirically founded regularities. This institutional rationality is preconceived as objective, independent of its messenger. Argumentation as a discourse format perfectly symbolizes this ideal of a depersonalized, objective rationality (Van den Hoven 2011). This is an important characteristic when trying to capture the differences between argumentation and narrative in the deliberative genre.

A justification can also take the form of an explanatory narrative. An explanatory narrative develops a scenario in which the recommended action fits, predominantly because it addresses the dynamics that caused the situation that requires a response. A narrative typically addresses deliberations of a main character (in deliberative speech, often the audience), sees upon contingencies of the specific situation, and tends to address motives even more than effects. In the typical storytelling format “How did we come to this point?” is an essential part in determining “Who should take up which assignment”. In other words, the recommended action is justified first of all because it is an appropriate response to what caused the need to act, and this appropriateness is often the first reason to expect the action to be effective. Old Testament (*Numbers 25*) is a clear example.

While the Israelites were camped at Acacia, some of the men had sex with Moabite women. These women then invited the men to ceremonies where sacrifices were offered to their gods. [...] The Lord was angry with Israel because they had worshiped the god Baal Peor. So he said to Moses, “Take the Israelite leaders who are responsible for this and have them killed in front of my sacred tent where everyone can see. Maybe then I will stop being angry with the Israelites.” Moses told Israel’s officials, “Each of you must put to death any of your men who worshiped Baal.”

Not an abstract generalized rule that attaches an effect to an act dominates the discourse, but the dynamics that caused the problem that requires a response.

Evolutionary anthropologists explain the importance of storytelling from the human need to culturally adapt to new situations, and literary scholars consider

8. Compare Van den Hoven 2015: 244-254 for a detailed discussion of argument based on a normative rule and pragmatic argument, including the critical questions that are relevant to evaluate these argument types.

storytelling to be central to the development of human culture (Black and Bower 1980; Sugiyama 2001; Boyd 2009; Gottschall 2013). Stories have a format that summarizes the interpretation and evaluation of goal-directed actions in response to situations that require adaptations (Van den Hoven 2015, 118-169). The cognitive narrative scheme that underlies a story entails the human disposition to interpret the act of an intelligent being as caused by something that precedes the act and as directed towards a goal. Its effectiveness is evaluated in terms of the coherency in a causal chain that starts with what caused the situation that requires a response and ends with reflection on the (potential) result of the action. If the action is successful, this is because it adequately addresses the factors that caused the initial situation, with the right motives and the right means. If an action fails, it is because it neglects the causes, departing from wrong motives or selecting wrong means.

Kafalenos adopts a general scheme of the narrative that assumes five stages (2006, 1-26). The significance of this scheme is that it shows that in a narrative two causal sequences are meaningfully connected. An intelligent being starts to act when an event changes its environment in such a way that a response is required. This is the first causality. The central action intends to change this situation again. That is the second causality. The action is an attempt to redress the disturbance caused by the initial event.

- 1) There is a certain state of relative rest, balance, equilibrium at the outset (*preparation*).
- 2) Subsequently there is a disruption of this equilibrium by some event (*complication*).
- 3) The recognition that there has been a disruption leads to a “task” for a protagonist to try to reinstall a new equilibrium (*transference*).
- 4) There will be attempts to respond adequately to the disruption and to install a new equilibrium, often opposed by antagonistic forces (*struggle*).
- 5) results in failure or in a resolution – a new equilibrium – and in an evaluation (*recognition*).

The scheme seems part of a universal cognitive apparatus (Mancuso 1986; Sutton-Smith 1986; Brown and Hurtig 1983). Labov (1981) observed that besides the elements of this narrative syntagm, two more elements appear time and again in storytelling, indicating its specific explanatory function. Firstly, an audience expects the storyteller to make clear why a story is told: the motive to tell. Closely related to this motive to tell is the lesson that a story conveys, a message that transcends the story as such. Labov calls this the epilogue because when made explicit, it often takes the form of an epilogue. Both elements indicate that the narrative not only temporally connects two causalities, but explores the connections in a meaningful way (Kafalenos 2006, 62-103).

Because stories center around agents and acts in a specific situation the rhetorician develops a discourse world populated with rich characters (amongst whom often the audience) who have motives, desires, experience challenges, may suffer, in sum, they invite empathy. The interpretation and evaluation may of course be guided by general principles, but the reasoning departs from the situation.

When we map the pragmatic argument onto the narrative scheme (Figure 3), we see that the scheme of the pragmatic argument overlaps with the taking up of the assignment in the transference stage, or with one of the core actions in the struggle, connecting it with an expected effect and evaluation this effect as is done in the recognition stage of the narrative. The argument based on a norm states that an accepted norm attaches an evaluation to an action that we meet as a core action in the narrative. Important is that both argumentation schemes neglect the first causal sequence of the two sequences connected in the narrative. The evaluation of the action comes from the abstract principle, not from the dynamics of the situation as such.

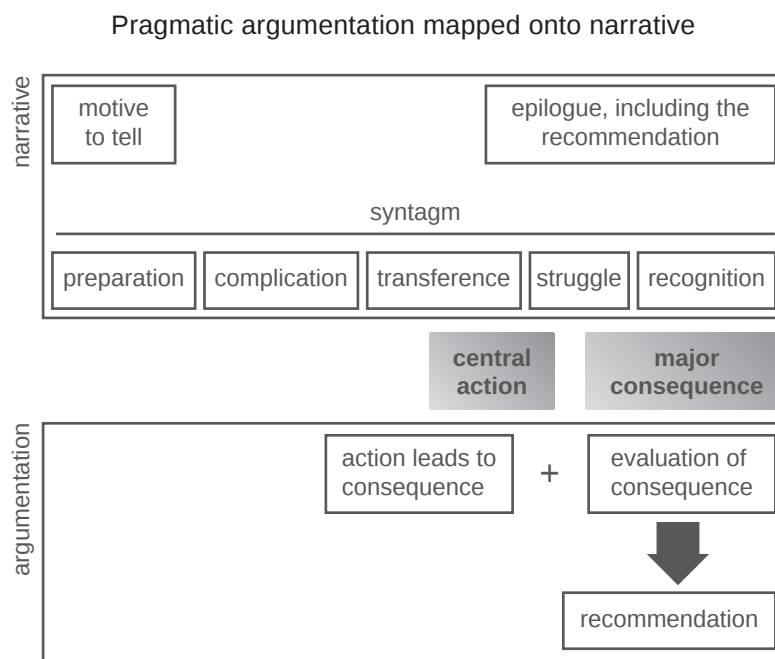
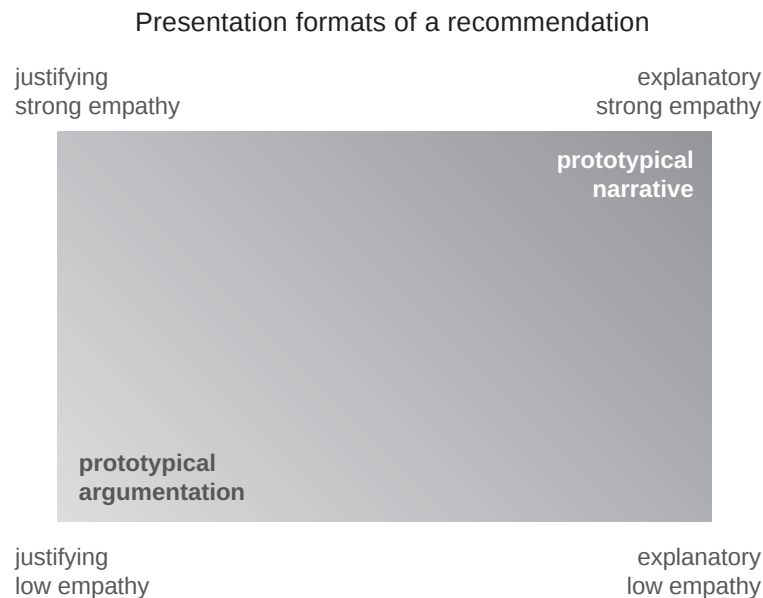


Figure 3: argumentation mapped onto narrative

Even though the argumentative format and the narrative format as justifications of a recommendation differ in many respects, we can consider them as gradually related. It is possible to construct a playground in which on the one corner we position the prototypical narrative, and on the other corner we position the prototypical pragmatic argumentation (Figure 4). On the axis we project two scales. One scale runs from a strong to a minor emphasis on an elaboration of the audience's situation. The other scale runs from predominately explaining the recommendation to merely justifying the recommendation.

The metaphor of a playground symbolizes that as a discourse format the border between argumentation and narrative is fluid. The abstract general norm or regularity, typical for argumentation, can become step by step more contingent on the situation. Its effectiveness can be elaborated in increasing detail by seeing on the causes that the action attempts to neutralize. Human acts and motives can be attributes to specific persons with a biography. This all makes that the argumentation transforms step by step into a story.



The rhetorical dynamics of narrative and argumentative formats

The analysis of the playground on which a rhetorician in the deliberative genre has to choose position reveals that indeed a wide range of presentational options is available. Reflecting on the way this space is actually employed, we lack large scale empirical data. Nevertheless, we can share some observations, partly from projects carried out with students.

- In modern written professional reports that include recommendations, one will not find a narrative structure to justify the recommendation. On the contrary, emphasis will be given to the generalized principle that are applied to come to the recommendation.
- In many Western societies, in written discourse meant to guide an audience in its decisions, one frequently observes a very modest formulation of the recommendation, a suggestion, or the actual recommendation remains unformulated. In terms of our analysis: the standpoint of a pragmatic argument scheme remains implicit; the discourse focuses entirely on the underlying

regularity. This we see for example in health brochures where the actual recommendation is implicit, not only as a result of negative face keeping, but also because of the ideal of informed consent. In written information the professional medic should leave it to the audience to draw the conclusion. (Van Poppel 2013)

- Analyzing Dutch health campaigns in the late sixties and early seventies this is different. Recommendations are explicit and coercive. Interesting is that in many leaflets we find stories about individuals (never from individuals), meant to be projected by the audience on its own situation. Modern campaigns by groups against smoking as well as a recent campaign at a Chinese university to recommend regular swimming showed a remarkable similarity.
- In face to face communication between medics and clients the narrative device is often used, discussing with the client the personal case-history to work towards the recommendation. In a project *Digital Do's and Don'ts: Potential and Pitfalls of the Patient Portal* (translated from Dutch/pvdh), this is identified as a problem when replacing face to face interaction by asynchronous E-consult (email). It was felt that email is not suitable to employ this device. Clients report the tone of voice of emails as showing a lack of empathy.
- In informal contexts in which personal relations dominate, research indicates that employing the argumentative format is marked. Research in argumentation within marriage shows the risks of employing this format (Weger 2013).
- In courtrooms, location of many recommendations, one frequently encounters the narrative format, in a similar use as in medical face to face conversations. In a mediating role, coherency is constructed between what led to the problem and what might be a way out. In written judicial decisions, however, the ‘story’ – accounting for the facts – is always separated from the application of the law and the decision (strictly speaking no recommendation), this latter part following the argumentative device (van den Hoven 2011).
- In the context of the Bible we may observe that the Ten Commandments and the Book of Proverbs, strongly coercive and formatted to function in argumentation, precede the parables of the New testament, narrative examples. But the Church soon favored strong commands, and in scholastic periods an argumentative format dominates. Looking at long timelines, this example illustrates, the picture seems complicated.

Far from being thorough and systematic, these observations show that one does not encounter a simple and straightforward picture. When we look at variation between socio-cultural contexts, patterns are complicated. In professional contexts

we see both formats employed, though in different situation. In modern liberal societies we tend to see that formal recommendations are formulated less coercive. However, looking at longer timelines preferences vary.

The observations, however, also suggest a hypothesis that in a specific context preferences on the two dimensions discussed can be partially explained with reference to two factors: (1) the conception of rationality that dominates in the context (which determines the esteem of argumentation compared to narrative when justifying a recommendation), and (2) the way one tends to model mutual responsibilities (which determines on the amount and the type of face keeping required when formulating a recommendation). The second factor seems to dominate the first; if positive face management in particular gains importance, one tends to see a preference for the narrative.

The argumentative format is in our era associated with modernist Enlightenment rationality, in former eras with philosophical ideals, idealist as well as empiricist, that assume the possibility of explicit, general knowledge. Indeed, within these contexts, certainty or a calculated probability, grounded on systematic knowledge is considered possible and desirable, and one tends to think about knowledge in terms of general principles. Reasoning from general abstract principles coincides with a desire for emotional detachment to symbolize that the recommendation is independent from the one who recommends. This explains why in formal professional relations the argumentative format dominates. The characteristic that this format hardly allows the rhetorician to show positive face is in this respect an advantage.

The characteristic that the argumentative format allows very well for negative face protection, simply by presenting the recommendation as a mere suggestion or even leave it implicit, may explain its being preferred in modern professional contexts. In the liberal political and cultural context of many Western societies, the argumentative format is associated with respecting the individual in his or her choices. In the modern Chinese educational context, in the context of professional relation in Western society of the late sixties, and as soon as for example the topic justifies (anti-smoke for youth), we observe high coerciveness together with an additional format that allows for positive face management, expressing directly empathy, employing the narrative format.

The explanatory narrative format is associated with culturally intuitive forms of rationality, sometimes called ‘natural or associated with the “first culture” in a system that distinguishes several layers (Boyd 2009). The recommendation is grounded on the best explanation of what caused the situation that requires action or is grounded on analogy (in case of a parable). The justification may often be not rigid, but if the explanation fits well in the context and if authority supports

empathy, freedom to act can be very limited. But the narrative format allows for positive as well as negative face management.

Indeed, we see this format employed when empathy become more important, not only to maintain relations but also to enlarge the chance that the recommendation will be accepted. In professional face to face contexts this format is frequent where in the asynchronic written communications it is absent.

In sum: the playground of formats seems to be employed in different contexts with different intensity. This can best be understood in terms of different concepts of rationality that prevail in specific socio-cultural contexts and in terms of different ideas about the management of the audience's face, as well in terms of other rhetorically articulated ways to model the relation between rhetorician and audience such as misplaced enjoyment of power, irony, submission.

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