Annotated Bibliography: Style in
Argumentative Texts

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Introduction

Articles specific to style and argumentation were not as easy to come by as anticipated. The articles included in this bibliography cover a variety of style concerns. I included Edward Corbett’s *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* for its foundational material on style in relation to rhetoric. Articles from communication journals show that much of the research on style is done from that perspective. Yet the articles from argumentation journals indicate a strong interest in the style aspects of argumentative texts.

I would agree with your expectations – we spent a lot of the semester looking at structure and procedure, but all arguments have to take some kind of linguistic form, and style is central to that mission. I think this is fruitful ground.

As per my comment, I think you need to spend more time in the introduction setting the stage. For example, you might say that the literature takes two broad approaches to style, or that the literature is of one mind on this issue, or whatever. This assignment is not just a report of your research, but it’s also your chance to point to patterns in the literature and to help the reader understand why this issue is worth investigating.


This overview of studies done on language variables produces 2 generalizations about the effect of these variables on audience perceptions of the speaker/writer and the amount of attitude change audiences experience. The variables are intensity (the speaker’s distance from a neutral attitude toward a subject), immediacy (how closely a speaker associates himself with a topic), and lexical diversity (the range of a speaker’s vocabulary). The studies indicate that these variables have an impact on the acceptability of an argument because they affect the audience’s judgment of the speaker’s credibility. Further research should include the effect of content variables compared to these language variables.


Lists, copia, were an important aspect of rhetoric as evidence of the writer/speaker’s eloquence. Conley argues that copia has been incorrectly maligned by the modern scholar...
of rhetoric. Although often confused with verbosity, copia is a rhetorical tool which can be used effectively to enhance an argumentative text. Using examples from Philo, Rabelais, and Joyce, Conley illustrates the impact lists have on readers’ perception and understanding of the texts in which the lists appear. As an argumentation tool, lists produce pathos by directing the readers to take a positive or negative view of the subject, call for value judgments about the subject, reinforce a point through repetition, lead readers to expect consistency and direction, emphasize the profoundness or frequency of something, and provide a means for writers to clarify “ambiguous and shifty” (102) things.


Corbett provides a detailed look at the elements of style in classical rhetoric. Beginning with words and ending with tropes, the discussion illustrates the many style decisions writers have to make in composing an argument. Sentences mean something because of the lexical content (the words) and the grammatical forms those words are placed in. Further meaning is added with schemes, the rhetorical forms of sentences. The descriptions and examples of the schemes and tropes, from the familiar parallelism to the less familiar anadiplosis, provide readers with names for features that are common in all types of writing. Exercises and example style analysis sheets round out the chapter and give practical application to the content.


Metadiscourse, “discourse about the discourse” (40), refers to the linguistic material (words, phrases, clauses, punctuation) that writers use to help the readers interpret and evaluate the text. Metadiscourse also allows writers to express their attitudes toward the subject. Cross-cultural studies of the metadiscourse are useful for three reasons: 1) to help reveal the nature of metadiscourse itself, 2) to point out linguistic elements that might be overlooked in single-culture studies, 3) to further understanding of metadiscourse as a rhetorical device. The cross-cultural study reported in this article was conducted with university students from the United States and Finland, who wrote argumentative essays in response to a prompt and then answered a questionnaire about their writing. The researchers classified metadiscourse into two broad categories: interpersonal metadiscourse (e.g., hedges, emphatics, attributors, attitude markers, commentaries) and textual metadiscourse (e.g., connectives, code glosses, illocution markers). Analysis of the essays revealed that students used more than one item of metadiscourse in each line of text and that interpersonal metadiscourse was used more often than textual metadiscourse. The analysis was broken down in a number of ways, including by gender. Results of the analysis suggest that the use of metadiscourse is universal since all the students used metadiscourse from the different two categories and their subcategories. Results also suggest that cultural differences, writing experience, students’ attitudes
toward their own writing competence, and previous instruction in writing may account for the different uses of metadiscourse. The researchers drew several pedagogical implications from this study: 1) reading about metadiscourse may help students write more persuasively, 2) foreign language acquisition may be facilitated by specific instruction on metadiscourse, 3) metadiscourse should be taught as a rhetorical device, 4) teachers and researchers should consider gender and culture when evaluating/teaching metadiscourse. Future research on metadiscourse could develop measurement methodologies; look at different types of text, writers, and audiences; employ more cross-cultural studies; and determine the impact of current teaching practices on the use of metadiscourse.


Gilbert discusses the logocentric fallacy and cautions against relying totally on discursive features for interpreting or understanding an argument. Other features of the argument can play the primary role in giving meaning. Context, history, and background knowledge, for example, can enable the participants to derive the intended meaning of the actual words expressed. Complex communication—communication about complex issues and communication involving a disagreement—often requires a variety of cues for the participants to successfully interpret the message. Messages can be clarified by logical (mostly verbal), visceral, and kisceral modes of communication. Sometimes the visceral (physical action, body language) or kisceral (intuition, hunches) modes can supersede the logical mode in clarifying a message. Gilbert concludes that analysts must “beware the logocentric fallacy” and seriously consider non-discursive information in argumentation.


A study in advertising claims measured the effect of conditional indicatives on readers’ ability to comprehend the claims. Connectives are used for linking clauses and sentences and signal the relationship between those clauses or sentences. The relationship, therefore, does not have to be explicitly stated. Relationships may be causal, signaled by *because, therefore, as a result*, contrary, signaled by *yet, but, although*, or neutral, signaled by *and, in addition*. Causal indicatives imply a positive relationship between two clauses and signal readers to use their background knowledge to identify inferences. Contrary indicatives imply a negative relationship between clauses and signal contrasting actions in a text, a semantic opposition, a denial of expectation, or a concession. Thus, contrary indicatives reduce counter-arguments by acknowledging the negative relationship between two propositions.

Heller and Areni hypothesized that conditional indicatives enhance comprehension when they are consistent with recipients prior beliefs and are confusing when they are
inconsistent with prior beliefs. Marketing students responded to questions about advertising claims which used conditional indicatives. Results did not support the hypotheses; however, the study yielded interesting data about neutral connectives. These connectives produced the same level of comprehension as causal and contrary indicatives, indicating that readers may understand the relationship of the clauses without a specific relationship indicator.


A study conducted with 180 upper division accounting majors sought to determine if a writer can manipulate message variables, particularly style, in a persuasive text (an advertisement) to create a “writer/reader perceptual match” (256). Researchers began with established definitions of prose styles developed by Fielden. The styles are personal (personal pronouns and names, conversational quality), forceful (imperatives and s-v-o sentences, qualifying elements subordinate), colorful (figures of speech, modifiers), colorless (few figures of speech and modifiers). One advertisement was altered to fit these definitions of personal and forceful, to provide gradations for the colorful style (colorful-plus, colorful-minus, colorless), and to add organization as a factor, yielding five advertisements of different characteristics: 1) personal/forceful/colorful-plus/direct, 2) personal/forceful/colorful-plus/circuitous, 3) personal/forceful/colorful-minus/direct, 4) personal/forceful/colorless/direct, 5) personal/forceful/colorful/circuitous. Results of the study showed that subjects did perceive the advertisement as the writers intended in style and organization. Hilton, Motes, and Fielden suggest that their research has implications for three groups: theorists, in that the research adds to the research on “message function as a persuasion variable” (268); practitioners (ad copywriters), in that the research indicates that style and organization affect readers’ perception of ads; business communicators, in that the research is a starting point for a “program of persuasion analysis” (268) and provides a methodology for the analysis of style as a variable in persuasive text. The study reported here also strongly suggests further research in 1) how background knowledge and pre-conceived notions affect reader perception, 2) the synergistic characteristics of organization and style, and 3) the precise style and organization copywriters should use to form readers’ responses and behavior in a particular way.

**Did they distinguish between persuasion and argumentation in this article? Or suggest that "perception" on the readers' parts was equivalent to being persuaded or convinced?**


That Martin Luther was interested in rhetoric is clear from his own comments on the speech of biblical characters which show use of rhetorical devices and from his citations of Cicero. Working from foundations laid by Burke and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, Leroux analyzes Martin Luther’s postil on the New Year’s Day liturgical text to
determine how style elements advance Luther’s argument. Burke contributes the notion of form as a means for the audience to participate in the discourse. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca offer the concept of argumentation as an attempt to gain the audience’s adherence to a thesis and the style elements figures and tropes as one means of doing so. Leroux’s perspective is that of the rhetorical critic, and he states that the critic should not only identify the style of a particular discourse but also investigate how that style advances the thesis of the discourse. The analysis of Luther’s text reveals a number of style elements which help sustain and advance Luther’s argument. Questions which mystify the topic and answers which clarify the mystery invite the audience to follow Luther’s course. Other style elements include sequence markers which build the individual points of the argument, shifts in pronouns which move the audience nearer or farther from the speaker, antithesis and chiasm which show relationships, amplification through repetition and synonyms which reinforce, and assonance and consonance (in German) which drive the content forward. Leroux concludes that this analysis of style elements shows how the argument works.

I’m curious if this observation could be translated into whether the argument is convincing or not – this is a problem with rhetorical analysis of all sorts: it tends to focus on the artifact outside of its intended context.


Leroux offers a method for analyzing style. As a subject of study, style has been neglected by rhetorical criticism scholars and researchers. Though an “elusive and amorphous creature” (29), style is an important topic of study because it is through the style of a text that the reader begins to determine the author’s meaning. Style, then, is a functional element of discourse, not merely decoration. The work of Kenneth Burke and Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca informs Leroux’s approach to style and his methodology. Burke’s concept that form sets up and then meets expectations allows the audience to participate in the discourse. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca view style in argumentation, particularly rhetorical figures, as a means toward achieving audience adherence to theses presented in the discourse. From these foundations, Leroux developed three categories of “intended effects” of the style elements: 1) focus—directing the audience’s attention to the subject, 2) presence—making the subject more real to the audience, 3) communion—creating a bond between reader and writer. These categories allow analysis of the style of a text according the function of the style element. An analysis of a sermon by Martin Luther illustrates how the categories can be applied. The theoretical concepts of Burke and Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, as presented through Leroux’s categories of intended effects should allow scholars to raise new questions about how style elements (language structures) work in gaining approval for the ideas in a discourse.

Condensed arguments, arguments in single sentences, key words, phrases, tropes, can provide a “pre-argument, whose task is to get the audience ready for processing whatever is going to be explicitly presented as the argument proper.” Condensation, according to Liu, is the packing of “essential structural components of an argument into a linguistic unit so small that we do not usually think of it as capable of ‘containing’ them all.” Although verbal constructs in argumentation have been studied, most attention has been paid to the functional role of these constructs. Liu advocates for a study of “small-unit verbal constructs” as part of the argument itself because arguers readily adapt their argument structure to the particular context or situation. A condensed argument, where a claim and its justification are both present, is often found in complex sentences which contain a premise marker (e.g., because) or a conclusion marker (e.g., therefore) or in advertising slogans. Condensed arguments are created through style techniques such as double entendre, polysemy, ellipsis, ambiguity, and zeugma. The characteristics of a condensed argument are 1) consists of a small, stand alone linguistic unit in which we do not expect an argument, 2) the presence of a controversial thesis and its justification in the same lexical or syntactic unit, 3) the linguistic unit has the functional roles of claim and justification, 4) the audience tends to process the argument at a subliminal or not fully conscious level.

This sounds really interesting – I wonder how #4 is established – how do we test this, if it’s operating at the subliminal level?


Presentational devices such as word choice, syntax, analogy, figures, direct quotation, repetition, and allusion function as compellers in an argument. As such they provide some of the force of the argument in convincing readers to accept a premise, burden of proof, or conclusion or to act. Theorists have categorized force into 3 categories, intellectual, social, and pragmatic. The pragmatic explanation is most useful since it is broad in coverage, often incorporating the intellectual, social, and other aspects of the argument. A normative pragmatic approach to force shares several assumptions with pragma-dialectics: 1) force is derived from what arguers do, their “discourse strategies,” 2) these strategies serve as reasons or help establish reasons, 3) force is not compulsion (arguers can evade the force), 4) analysts evaluate force “based on its reasonableness under the circumstances.”

An analysis of Susan B. Anthony’s speech “Is it a Crime for a U.S. Citizen to Vote?” shows that the following presentational devices create force in the argument by creating reasons:

- Direct quotations from legal documents, the U.S. Constitution, and authorities on the subject are a “sign that the position is well thought out” and compel listeners to pay attention because to “ignore a well-thought-out position is uncharacteristic of a
A prudent person” and “under the circumstances, uncharacteristic of a responsible citizen.”

- **Contrasting past and present** “create tentative grounds for believing that potential adversaries’ positions have been taken into account and…considered carefully and fairly.”
- **Repetition** of “the principle of settled issues” acknowledges the opponents position and offers the listeners a chance to make a judgment on the ‘unsettled issue.’
- **Allusion** to the U.S. Constitution and Declaration of Independence to foster a sense of citizenship.
- **Epithets** stir emotions.
- **Parallel constructions** indicate relationships between what should be rejected and the present topic.
- **Vivid description** provides details listeners should not ignore.

The normative pragmatic approach, then, illustrates how the presentational force of the discourse itself, rather than the argument in the discourse, creates reasons for readers to accept or reject the argument.


Manolescu focuses on political discourse and the audience’s role of participation in this analysis of Fisher Ames’s speech before Congress on April 28, 1796, regarding the Jay Treaty. Active citizenship requires that citizens participate in the political discourse. That participation takes the form of “spectator judgment,” the citizen’s judgment of a political discourse spectacle (e.g., a speech). To be suitable for judgment, the spectacle must seek a reasoned rather than affective response from the audience and encourage the audience to be active rather than passive, which allows the audience to be inside rather than outside politics. While other studies have approached judgment from the speaker’s perspective, Manolescu “attempts to identify qualities of style which may enable an audience to engage in reflective spectator judgment” (63). The discussion of stylistic features begins with a recounting of Burke’s five aspects of form: syllogistic, qualitative, repetitive, conventional, and minor. Audience participation is enabled in each of these forms by when the form “invite[s] expectation and recognition of fulfillment” (65). Participation occurs, then, when an audience expects a certain result, or end, based on the form and then receives that result. Stylistic features in any given discourse may stem from particular rhetorical precepts, philosophical position, or cultural context. Ames’s style attempts to cross the divide between the grand style and vulgar style tension of this era. Manolescu’s analysis of the speech shows that it follows the traditional form of exordium, partition, proof, peroration, yet instead of ending after the peroration, continues with ‘auxiliary arguments’ (71). The style at this point shifts from the “genteel style of reason” to the “vulgar” style. Apostrophe, dialogismus, allusion, hyperbole, irony, humor, epistrophe, syntax, if...then structures, and isocolon are style features in Ames’s speech which provide strong inducement in the audience to participate in the discourse. Style features build intensity, set up and meet expectations, and invite audiences to make reflective judgments on the discourse.
Another really interesting abstract, Cynthia. I wonder how, outside of actual listeners, we determine if we're "inducing the audience to participate in discourse."


This re-examination of Aristotle’s concept of metaphor (“bringing-before-the-eyes”) shows that many studies have oversimplified metaphor as either ornamental or substitutive. Aristotle identifies metaphor as a way to put ideas before an audience and so bring insight to the audience. Because metaphor brings ideas before the audience’s eyes, it allows them to “participate in the persuasive process” (5). Newman’s examination of “bringing-before-the-eyes” in the *Rhetoric, De Anima*, and *Poetics* leads her to conclude that Aristotle “characterizes ‘bringing-before-the-eyes’ as a perceptive capacity” (5) and in that sense anticipates recent approaches to language. This review shows that Aristotle understood metaphor to be a lexical species of *energeia* (actuality or activity), and, therefore, an element of style and a suitable means of persuasion. Style, then, becomes a significant part of argumentation.

Nicely done, Cynthia – it’s an interesting mix of approaches, probably necessary given the nature of the topic. My note at the top still applies, and I would add the following: for maximum understanding, you’d want to include a table of terms like chiasmus, etc and discuss in your introduction the various ways style in argumentation has been approached (linguistic, metaphor, presence, etc).

My notes about various pieces not actually taking into consideration how the theory works INSIDE an audience are not criticism of the annotated bib, but rather an opportunity for you to clarify for your reader what you see as the trends, strengths, weaknesses, etc of these approaches.

Research and abstracts are A, lack of enveloping context makes this a B+.