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Résumé de l'article

Cet article traite des arguments "auditifs": des arguments dans lesquels des sons non verbaux jouent un rôle central. Il fournit des exemples et explore l'utilisation des sons dans les arguments et l'argumentation. Il soutient que les arguments auditifs ne sont pas réductibles à des arguments verbaux, mais ont une structure similaire et peuvent être évalués en étendant l'application des normes de la logique non formelle d'un bon argument. Je conclus que la compréhension des éléments auditifs d'un argument peut étendre utilement la portée de la logique non formelle et de la théorie de l'argumentation.

Where Do Sounds Fit Within Informal Logic?

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Abstract: In response to commentaries by Eckstein and Kišiček, I argue that the study of auditory arguments is very much in keeping with the critical thinking (and epistemological) ideals that motivate informal logic. In the process I support further research on sound figures and the meaning of sound (and a possible "auditory dictionary") that would enhance our ability to analyze auditory arguments.

Résumé: En réponse aux commentaires d'Eckstein et de Kišiček, je soutiens que l'étude des arguments auditifs se conforment très biens aux idéaux de la pensée critique (et de l'épistémologie) qui sous-tendent la logique non formelle. Dans ma réplique, j'appuie des recherches plus poussées sur les figures sonores et la signification du son (et un possible «dictionnaire auditif») qui amélioreraient notre capacité d'analyser les arguments auditifs.

Keywords: auditory argument, informal logic, prosody, multimodal argument, visual argument

1. Introduction

In a number of ways, Justin Eckstein and Gabrijela Kišiček have important things to say about the study of auditory argument. In this response to their remarks, I want to begin by noting the approach that informal logic assumes in its account of argumentation: an approach which understands arguing as an exercise in reasoning. According to this account, an argument provides reasons (evidence, premises) in support of a conclusion. Auditory arguments employ non-verbal sounds in doing so—using them to express a standpoint or as evidence in support of one. As Eckstein and Kišiček both have things to say about the meaning of sounds in such contexts, I will begin my own ruminations with some remarks in this regard.

2. What do sounds mean?

Eckstein notes that sounds are often understood "*as an effect of something else*" [his emphasis]. Many of my sample arguments feature sounds that are interpreted in this way. In most cases, they cite such sounds as evidence of what causes them (of an unhealthy heart, an animal in the bush, emotional distress, a properly functioning spark plug, and so on). In our day to day lives, we constantly rely on reasoning of this sort. Though this makes it a form of argument that merits our attention, it would, as Eckstein points out, be a mistake to conclude that the non-verbal sounds used in auditory arguments should, in every case, be understood in this narrow causal (causist) way.

Eckstein provides a broader account of auditory meaning by noting that many sounds function as "sound figures" designed to represent something other than their specific cause. Consider the following examples:

a) in a movie, thunder and lightning are used to announce the arrival of an anti-hero;
b) the melody of a national anthem or a popular national song is played in a documentary that chronicles its social issues;
c) in a radio advertisement for collision repair, a screech of tires followed by a loud crash refers to automobile accidents in a general way;
d) a bugle plays the last post.

Recognizing sound figures is a useful way to broaden our account of sounds and their meaning within argument. An exhaustive list of the diverse ways in which such figures may be used (and the different 'sound-games' in which they occur) is a worthy project that would allow an expanded account of auditory arguments.

In this note it must suffice to say that the task of unpacking the meaning of sounds and sound figures used in auditory arguments is an important part of argument analysis. In many, perhaps most, circumstances, the meaning of sounds is (like the meaning of words) straightforward. In cases in which it is not, verbal discussion (or, as Kišiček points out, visual depiction) may help elucidate its content.

In the case of the human voice, Kišiček's commentary highlights

empirical research which shows that its auditory characteristics (whether it is nasal, throaty, flat, characterized by a low or high pitch, or by fast or slow enunciation, etc.) carry well-established meanings independently of words. In listening to someone's voice, this invites similar conclusions across different cultures. The meanings in question could be turned into entries in a rough "auditory dictionary" which connects particular traits to the ways in which they are typically interpreted. A real dictionary that made these connections clear and accessible would serve as a valuable tool in the analysis of oral argument.

Those professional practitioners who design oral arguments (marketing professionals, advertisers, political campaigners, etc.) consciously compose their messages to take advantage of the kind of meaning Kišiček notes. This does not mean that they present vocal characteristics as explicit argument components. More commonly, a voice with particular traits is used as an (in many cases, covert) inference activator which prompts audiences to reflexively draw conclusions from the sounds they hear. A deep ("orotund") male voice and the exciting music that characterizes a Jaguar automobile ad is not presented in the form of an explicit argument but as an entertaining story—though a story which is designed to prompt the conclusion that a Jaguar is (like the voice and the music) something exclusive and exciting. From the point of rational evidence, this is a very weak (arguably fallacious) argument, but it is one that is emotionally and psychologically compelling, especially when it is combined with the images in the ad. Many successful advertising campaigns are based on auditory arguments of this sort.

The ways in which extra-lingual sounds can have meaning convinces Kišiček that they play a role in (oral) argument which is "equal" to that of words. While it is difficult to precisely compare the extent to which we rely on words or non-verbal sounds, it can certainly be said that such sounds play an essential role in many instances of argument, and that there are many cases in which their role is more important than that of words. How often the latter is true is difficult to say because the significance of non-verbal sounds, like that of words, images and other carriers of meaning, varies enormously from argument to argument. In some cases (as in my *Example 19*), the sound of a voice (in this case, one that is young, female,

crying and sobbing) may be the essential evidence provided for some conclusion (that child abuse is a tragedy we must try to prevent). In other cases, the auditory characteristics of a voice may have little relevance, as when a scientist presents a proof which succeeds or fails on mathematical grounds.

3. How should we assess auditory arguments?

In his remarks on sound figures, Eckstein writes that they "become relevant to the study of argumentation when intentionally designed to modify the conditions for an arguer to accept or reject a standpoint." I take this to mean that argumentation theory should pay attention to sound figures (and sounds in general) when they are designed to make it more (or less) likely that someone will accept or reject a standpoint.

From the point of view of informal logic, the right way to respond to sounds is by asking whether they present (or activate) an auditory argument which makes it more reasonable to accept a conclusion—something which requires rational evidence in its favour. In my essay, I argued that we could judge the extent to which this is so in a particular case in roughly the same way that we judge a verbal argument by asking: (i) whether the premises of the auditory argument (auditory and non-auditory) are acceptable and (ii) whether the conclusion which is proposed follows deductively, inductively, or in some other way. One might compare the first criterion to Eckstein's suggestion that sounds in an auditory argument should *resonate* in the right way. This is an interesting proposal that has obvious applicability to sounds, though it is not clear how much it adds to standard accounts of premise *acceptability*, for acceptability can be interpreted in a way that includes proper resonance when judging auditory premises (and is a criterion which already straddles the logic and emotion divide).

One important way to extend the proposed account of auditory arguments is by considering the extent to which they can be classified as instances of different schemes of argument. The now standard approach to schemes pairs each scheme with a set of critical questions that raises the key issues raised by instances of the scheme. I have already noted that many auditory arguments can be interpreted

as instances of the scheme argument by sign. An example is implied by the sentence: "Listen carefully, and you will hear a scratching sound behind the floorboards—I told you there were mice in the house." As with any argument by sign, auditory examples raise standard critical questions: (i) whether there is a strong correlation between the (auditory) sign (in this example, the scratching heard behind the floorboard) and what it is said to be a sign of (mice), and (ii) whether there might be other ways to account for the sign (settling floorboards, teenagers up to something, furnace reverberations, etc.).

In developing a more comprehensive account of auditory arguments, it will be helpful to distinguish different variants of argument by sign which correspond to different kinds of auditory argument. In her commentary, Kišiček offers a preliminary account of a min keeping with analogous visual schemes, "Fit by Voice"—see Dove 2016). It can be schematized as follows:

Basic Premise: Person X's voice is heard to have qualities x_1, x_2, x_3…

Matching Premise: Voice α is heard to have qualities x_1, x_2, x_3…

Conclusion: Voice α is person X's voice.

It goes without saying that one might establish the same conclusion using arguments that are not auditory arguments by, for example, citing the testimony of a set of reliable witnesses. In contrast, argument by voice is an auditory scheme because the proposed conclusion is inferred from what we *hear* when we *listen* to the voices in question. To complete the scheme, we only need to add a set of critical questions which should include the questions: (i) whether the acts of hearing in question are credible (and not in some way unreliable) and (ii) whether x_1, x_2, x_3…are characteristics that can be reliably used to identify a voice.

Other auditory schemes might be identified. One could, for example, codify a scheme and develop critical questions that could be used to judge common auditory arguments that draw conclusions about someone's mental state (that they are sad, upset, angry, repentant, etc.) by listening to the sound of their voice. In this case, critical

questions would need to distinguish cases in which such sounds are and are not reliable indicators of someone's mental state. In the case of sound figures, we might identify other schemes, but also fallacies that occur when sound figures are used, as they often are, to convey (and generate) moods and emotions in ways that can be classified as fallacious appeals to emotion. Much more research will be needed before we are ready to give a comprehensive account of auditory arguments and their relationship to argument schemes.

4. Why does it matter?

In part, the attempt to understand, analyze and assess auditory arguments matters because it is an attempt to extend the ideals of critical thinking that motivate informal logic. In the course of our lives, we continually create and encounter auditory arguments, and a critical scrutiny of them needs to be one facet of a broad commitment to critical thinking.

This is especially true when sounds and sound figures are purposely designed as inference activators. When we watch and listen to an advertisement, it may be difficult to find an explicit argument to analyze. In cases in which the sounds we hear promote conclusions (that what is said is authoritative, sexy, exciting, fun, etc.), it would be a mistake to decide that nothing needs to be analyzed from the point of view of logic. Having recognized auditory arguments, we can render such arguments explicit and subject them to critical scrutiny. In many cases, it is important to see that they are examples of poor arguments, something that can serve as one antidote to the powerful impact they may otherwise have.

More deeply, an account of arguing that makes room for non-verbal elements of argument (so-called "multimodal" argument) can help us develop a more encompassing epistemology that accounts for justified belief in a way that does not define beliefs in terms of sentences, or propositions to which they correspond. In the case of visual arguments, it is increasingly clear that we can analyze and assess the reasoning and argument they contain by applying principles which extend the principles that informal logic has developed in the

study of verbal arguments (see, e.g., Groarke 2017). Something similar seems possible in the case of auditory arguments.

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