Repetition as a component of argumentation in written discourse

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Abstract

This paper defines argumentation as a distinct genre that: (a) generates ideological stance and (b) relates to persuasion. It then suggests that writers rely on the rhetorical scheme of repetition of lexical items and structures to put forth ideology. In the rest of the paper, the role of repetition is examined in the analyses of one argumentative and one narrative text. Repetition is shown to be a textual device that acts as an exponent of textuality as well as discursivity. Therefore, the binary function of this component of argumentation needs to be stressed in textual analysis.

Keywords: argumentation, repetition, stance, textuality, discursivity, written discourse

1. Introduction

In the communicative act of argumentation, a writer could employ several textual elements in getting his/her message across. In what follows, I will discuss how argumentation can spread over various discourse types and how it can capitalise on the rhetorical scheme of repetition of lexical items and structures. I will first provide a working definition of the genre of argumentation, then establish the connection between argumentation and persuasion by demonstrating how repetition functions as an exponent of persuasion in two sample texts, and finally discuss persuasion and repetition not only in connection to textuality but more importantly to discursivity.
2. Towards defining the genre of argumentation

According to Swales (1990: 46), "the principal criterial feature that turns a collection of communicative events into a genre is some shared set of communicative purposes". While borrowing from Swales's definition the notions of communicative event and communicative purpose, I would view genre as a more general category. I would therefore claim that argumentation constitutes a distinct genre that is related to the stance the author adopts towards his/her topic and communicates to an audience through a text, which is a communicative event (cf. de Beaugrande 1997: 10).

I would then introduce the term components of argumentation, which relates to the rhetorical choices writers make when their main purpose is to persuade. My view is consonant with Kitis and Milapides (1997: 585), who point out that argumentation does not need to become evident only through reasoning and logic but also through "mythography", and show that news reporting, which would traditionally be classified as belonging to text types of narration or description, can "construct ideological contexts" under the guise of "reporting mere facts".

Since authorial stance, which Nash (1989: 51) considers a discursive constituent that a speaker must use to move his/her audience, can be conveyed through various ways, my definition of argumentation would include both elements associated with reasoning (inductive-deductive) and those associated with emotions. In this respect, my approach to argumentation would be at odds with those studies in rhetoric that, as we read in Connor (1996: 65), distinguish between argumentation, which is connected with logic, and persuasion, which is related with ethical and emotional considerations. Thus, argumentation will be treated as an all-encompassing term that relates not only to induction and deduction but also to rational, ethical, and emotive appeals, elements that Kinneavy (1980: 211-12) would associate with persuasion. The following figure shows the three components of persuasion according to Kinneavy:

![Figure 1. Appeals in persuasion](image)

After having presented my definition of argumentation, my concern will be with those components that comprise it. A writer's purpose is tied to the tone
of his/her text (sarcastic, amusing, partial/impartial, moralistic, informative, or even a combination of some of these) and is expressed by means of components of argumentation that can be made evident through rational, ethical or emotive appeals; elements of argumentation can spread over several discourse types, as even in informative or narrative discourse, the author's position may be shown through various textual techniques. Thus, we could claim here that, with the exception of certain text types such as manuals or recipes for example, authorial stance is always present in discourse to a greater or lesser extent. As figure 2 below illustrates, argumentation is related to the writer's stance towards his/her topic, and components of argumentation are the tools s/he uses to present his/her viewpoint and create rational, ethical, and emotive appeals. It should be quite evident here that there exists a strong correlation between my view on authorial stance and the interpersonal metafunction of a Hallidayan (1994) framework.

3. The technique of repetition as an exponent of persuasion

An excessively powerful means of persuasion and emotive appeal, reiteration of lexical items and structures can set the tone for discourse and assist writers in the way they handle and present their arguments. The textual techniques of recurrence, partial recurrence and parallelism are, according to de Beaugrande (1997: 258-260), packaging options that aim to maintain the familiar content by presenting it again in some related version. Recurrence is the straightforward repetition of elements or patterns, while partial recurrence is the shifting of already used elements to different classes (e.g. from noun to verb). Parallelism involves repeating a structure but filling it with new elements. Corbett and Connors (1999: 381, 390) list parallelism under what they call schemes of balance. We should also add here that, besides reinforcing the effect the content will have on
the reader, recurrence, partial recurrence and parallelism act as connectivity devices. Two of the ways through which lexical items form links in texts are, as Hoey (1991: 83) maintains, simple lexical repetition and complex lexical repetition. In particular,

simple lexical repetition occurs whenever a lexical item is repeated with no variation other than that allowed by the item's grammatical paradigms; e.g. woman—women. Complex lexical repetition occurs whenever two items share a lexical morpheme but differ with respect to other morpheme(s) or with regard to their grammatical function; e.g. argue—argument (Hoey 1991: 268).

We would then safely posit that the former could be similar to recurrence while the latter could stand for partial recurrence. The following table brings together the two frameworks that demonstrate how lexis is repeated in texts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frameworks</th>
<th>straightforward repetition of elements or patterns</th>
<th>shifting of already used elements to different classes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>De Beaugrande (1997)</td>
<td>recurrence</td>
<td>partial recurrence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoey (1991)</td>
<td>simple lexical repetition</td>
<td>complex lexical repetition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The role of repetition has been examined in various types of discourse. Tannen (1989: 97), who identifies various functions of repetition in conversation, regards it as “a limitless resource for individual creativity and interpersonal involvement”, while Hoey (1991) demonstrates how repetition of lexical items determines connectedness in informative writing with reference to a textbook on political philosophy. Moreover, as regards novels and films, Milapides (1990: 199-204) refers to examples in which repetition creates the following pragmatic effects: (a) it presents the characters’ childlike behaviour and (b) it creates suspense. In their presentation of figures of speech, Corbett and Connors (1999) list anaphora as one of the many instances of schemes of repetition. Regarding anaphora [repetition of the same word or group of words at the beginning of successive clauses], they make the following claim, which is in line with what I have argued thus far on repetition:

Whenever anaphora occurs, we can be sure that the author has used it deliberately. Since the repetition of the words helps to establish a marked rhythm in the sequence of clauses, this scheme
is usually reserved for those passages where the author wants to produce a strong emotional effect (Corbett and Connors 1999: 381, 390).

Corbett and Connors may deal with anaphora in a way that seems to be identical with my treatment of repetition. What distinguishes the two approaches to rhetoric, however, is the fact that, while all their examples exemplifying anaphora appear in political or historical discourse, areas of rhetoric traditionally associated with persuading an audience, my focus is on how repetition evokes strong emotions and becomes an exponent of persuasion in argumentation and narration.

3.1 Lexical repetition in “The Outrage of William Ginsburg” [Argumentative text]

We will first look at repetition as it is manifested in argumentative discourse, more specifically in an article taken from the magazine The Economist. For ease of processing, the text is considerably abridged and, since the identity of the author is unknown, we will assume a male pronoun. The example that will be presented builds upon repetition that puts forth textual content. In this sense, repetition of lexical items results not only in connectedness but acts also as an exponent of an emotive appeal as it evokes the sarcasm and repudiation of the author towards his topic. Tannen (1989: 68) points out that the form of repetition in conversation that is associated with the patterned rhythm of listing intonation generates an intensifying result. As is clear, written discourse would fall short in this respect. Lack of intonation, however, in this case does not steal away the intensity as climactic moves are effected by highly charged lexical items and structures, which, when repeated, intertwine the realm of emotions with that of rational argumentation.

The text under consideration follows the common practice in argumentative writing whereby the opposing side’s argument is presented only to be refuted by the author’s own appraisal of the situation. It deals with the scandal that involved the former President of the United States, Bill Clinton, and Monica Lewinski. Two sides, and thus two voices, are mainly presented: that of Monica Lewinski’s lawyer and that of the author. The third voice is that of Clinton’s supporters whose argument occupies only a small part at the end of the text.

The line of argument evolves around the repetition of two highly attitudinal lexical items, outrage and victim, that create coherence. If we trace the occurrences of the items outrage and victim, we notice that they signal points at which the two opposing sides of the argument (Lewinski’s lawyer and the author of the
text) take turns [see Appendix 1, “The Outrage of William Ginsburg”]. When they first appear in the text, they are related to the lawyer’s claims (title, paragraphs 2 and 3), while further down they are presented along with the author’s response (paragraphs 4, 5, and 6). In paragraph 7 (the conclusion), in addition to the author’s position, Clinton’s supporters’ point of view is first presented and then demolished. Based on Hoey’s (1991) framework, we can further claim that the two lexical items, outrage and victim, highlight the organisation of the text in a particular way, while effecting discursive connectedness, as they form links through repetition or complex repetition. According to Hoey (1991: 161), sentences containing links form bonds; determining which sentences share bonds helps readers interpret the original text’s intention, which, of course, is equivalent to the author’s intention, as readers “unearth intelligibility in bonded pairs”. Consequently, bonding the sentences that contain these two items identifies how sentences are related; in its turn, this interrelation can reflect how the particular text is organised. Furthermore, bonding of sentences indicates the main points that could be included in a summary of the text (cf. Hatzitheodorou 2001).

In addition to its connective role, repetition of lexical items functions as a rhetorical device that encodes the author’s attitude through his pungent remarks. Two techniques mainly operate in the text: recurrence and partial recurrence. The author builds on the word outrage to mock Ginsburg’s [Lewinski’s lawyer] attempt to portray Monica Lewinski as a victim and his belief that it is outrageous that his opponents (Clinton’s side) have more resources than he does [see Appendix 1]. The author then reverses this argument and suggests that the real outrage for him is that people may be convinced by the lawyer’s claim:

Yet, if there is an outrage here, it is not the one that the protagonists are pointing at. The indignant lawyer is William Ginsburg, who represents Monica Lewinski, the president’s alleged lover. Mr. Ginsburg’s complaint is that his opponents ... have vastly more resources than he has ...

Mr. Ginsburg invites public sympathy for his client, as well as for himself. ... He has set up a legal defence fund for her, arguing that she is an impoverished victim. “My little girl”, he says, “can’t go outside...can’t pay her bills.” She is cooped up in a luxury apartment at the Watergate complex, unable to enjoy the simple pleasures that once made her life worthwhile: like having her hair done three times a week, or browsing the boutiques so crucial to
her sense of self. When she eats at a restaurant these days, she is obliged to reserve a private room. It is all so outrageous.

The real outrage is that some people seem to buy this argument. Within three days, the Lewinski defence fund was promised its first $10,000 from the feminist Osias Foundation in New York, which claims to be “dedicated to studying the reality of women in today’s American workplace” (Appendix 1, lines 10-25).

Furthermore, the author relies on the word victim to show that: (a) Monica Lewinski should not be considered a victim, and (b) Clinton is portrayed as such by his supporters because, according to them, he is a handsome man whom every woman wishes to seduce; however, this argument is equally dismissed and characterised as a chutzpah. Chutzpah, a word that refers to the effort to present Clinton as a victim, is highly attitudinal and makes evident the author’s unfavourable positioning towards Clinton’s supporters’ claim.

... Hence her lawyer’s efforts to portray her as an innocent victim. And, although it is appropriate that this attempt should fail, Miss Lewinski has reason to feel cross. For, in a marvellous reversal of gender roles, Mr. Clinton has been doing rather well with the same strategy. It used to be that only women claimed to have been stalked, preyed upon, seduced with empty flattery. Now Mr Clinton’s allies have used this line to defend him. He cannot help being handsome, they explain; it is not his fault that certain women long to seduce the president. Poor Mr. Clinton is pursued, besieged; under this kind of pressure, say Mr Clinton’s friends on TV, any man would crack occasionally. This chutzpah trumps even Mr Ginsburg’s outrageous outrage. But the president seems to get away with it (Appendix 1, lines 41-52).

Thus, the author starts off by rendering the case of Lewinski moot and continues by showing how the media portray Clinton as the victim. While most of the text is devoted to discrediting Lewinski’s claim, the author equally dismisses the argument that Clinton is a victim. We should note here that by presenting the latter argument, the author possibly wishes to project objectivity towards the two interested parties. The tone he adopts is not sympathetic towards either side; yet, Lewinski’s side gets the lion’s share in the discrediting.

The attitudinally loaded nouns that evoke the author’s sarcasm and repudiation are the following:

1. Outrage: it is presented both in recurrence and in partial recurrence
because it appears once in the title and five times in the text, in various forms: as a noun (*outrage*; title and line 10, paragraph 2), with a modifier (*real outrage*; line 22, paragraph 4), as an adjective (*outrageous*; line 9, paragraph 1 and line 21, paragraph 3), and as a combination of adjective and noun (*outrageous outrage*; line 52, paragraph 7). Thus, this is a highly emotive lexical item that is not only used in the title but also repeatedly in the text in order to set the tone. What is significant, however, is the shifting of voices encrypted in the repetition of this lexical item. The first occurrence in the title awaits interpretation after reading the text, but it then acquires a polyphonic meaning as it characterises both Ginsburg’s attitude to the issue discussed, but also voices the author’s criticism of Ginsburg’s attitude. Its second occurrence as an adjective is quoted and thus distanced from the author’s stance (cf. Vološinov 1973: 105) only to be suspended in an if-clause opening the next paragraph and subverted in the following negative cleft-construction (lines 10-11). A similar subversion (line 21) of the application of *outrage* occurs further down, highlighting a shift from the momentarily adopted attitude towards Miss Lewinski’s predicament to the voicing of the author’s own attitude loud and clear (line 22, the real outrage) qualified by the epithet *real*.

2. *Victim*: lines 15-16 (*impoverished victim*), 31 (*victim*), 42 (*innocent victim*). This noun is used once on its own and twice with modifiers and is presented in recurrence. In particular, the nominal phrase *impoverished victim* operates in contrast with the rest of the paragraph (paragraph 3) where the habits of a rich person are described. The message the author wishes to put forth is exceedingly more forceful than if he had included all this information in an assertion. The irony is effected by the combination of lexical cohesion (*impoverished-luxury apartment*, etc.) and the use of background knowledge, that is, the schema (cf. Bartlett 1932) the reader will need to activate in order to see the writer’s effort to demolish the lawyer’s statement. Finally, we should point out that in the sentence “Happily, the Osias Foundation is in a minority: most Americans are not persuaded that Miss Lewinski is a victim” (lines 30-31), the attitudinal disjunct *happily* is a second-order speech act that tweaks the interpretation of the first-order speech act, which is the statement, “the Osias Foundation...Miss Lewinski is a victim”.

3.2 Repetition in an excerpt from the book “Fugitive Pieces” [Narrative Text]

The second example of the role of repetition we will look at appears in a narrative text (Appendix 2). The argument is about the brutality of the Nazis during the Second World War and the sufferings of the Jewish people. What
certainly touches the reader is the contrast drawn between the concurrent sufferings of the Jewish people and the peaceful life of the narrator, a Jewish boy adopted and raised by a Greek man. This powerful contrast, however, is enhanced through an extensive use of recurrence [repetition of lexical items] and parallelism [repeating a structure but filling it with new elements].

Parallelism, lexical cohesion and the repetition of the same structure (while I—thousands, Jews, a Jew, etc.) in effect juxtapose a petty personal experience to a major history-making event. Repetition of this mild juxtaposition (structural parallelism) in a variety of lexical realisations (lexical repetition) actually drives the author's point home much more effectively than if she had stated her thoughts explicitly in a banal propositional form, or in a normative mode ("we shouldn't be indifferent to what is going on in the world when a whole people suffer," etc.). The purpose of the repetition is to evoke repudiation again. Thus, lexical analysis sheds light on textual patterning. Based on the emotive appeal mediated by linguistic means, the author implicitly argues for the enormity of the plight of Jews as she juxtaposes it to an individual's everyday life. If a reader is trained to realise how this powerful rendering of images becomes even more forceful with the use of a parallel construction and the repetition of certain lexical items, then s/he will have faster and better comprehension of the text. Moreover, s/he will realise that an argument, in this case, the repudiation of the Nazi brutality, does not only need to be expressed with assertions but also (and perhaps more convincingly) with other techniques. Had these examples been used in an argumentative essay, all elements included in parallelism would serve as support for the author's aforementioned argument.

The distinction between the narrator I and the other Jewish people is rendered possible at first with lexical cohesion and in particular antonymy (cf. de Beaugrande 1997: 260), which enhances the peaceful life of the narrator: radiant light—darkness (line 1). In addition, there is a pervasive use of parallel structures:

1. While I—thousands (line 1), thousands (line 2), a boy (line 4), a woman (line 5), Jews (line 7), they (line 8).
2. I didn't know that while I—a Jew (line 10), I didn't know that—they (line 12), the sisters of the Vilna convent (line 13), a nurse (line 14).
3. While Athos taught me (line 18)—I didn't know that Jews (lines 19-20), I didn't know that when they (lines 20-21), I didn't know that while I (line 22)—men (line 24).
4. Conclusion

In the two texts we analysed, reiteration of lexical items does not simply function as a cohesive device. In fact, the items that often reappear are not function words like the, a, and or content words that are connected to the topic of the text (de Beaugrande and Dressler 1981: 142-43). More importantly, they constitute highly charged language that is associated with emotive appeals that form part of persuasion. An author’s primary concern is to attempt to make his/her discourse interesting and witty. This effort relates to the principle of interest that would act as a guiding force in written production (Hatzitheodorou, in preparation). Additionally, an author would wish to make his/her readers espouse his/her viewpoint. I hope to have shown that reiteration of highly attitudinal lexical items has an intensifying effect on the message an author tries to get across. In this sense, these items can enhance illocutionary force and effectively engage the reader in the communicative event of argumentation. While there has been research on the connective role of these items, there has been scant work to show that those lexical connective items do a double duty, functioning also as ideological cues for authors in order to index their own argumentative point (which of course is an ideological stance towards their topic).

Argumentation generates ideological complexes by exploiting textuality, i.e. all the linguistic cues that mutate disparate language into text. This has not been stressed in the literature, so what I am proposing here is that, when we capitalise on textness (or texture) in order to create our argumentation (if this is achieved and interpreted as intended), we, in effect, generate discourse (which takes on board the text’s embedding in a certain situational, attitudinal and ideological setting). Figure 3 below demonstrates how text becomes discourse through textuality and argumentation.

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TEXT
  textuality (lexis) + argumentation (ideology)
  discursivity

DISCOURSE
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Figure 3. Text becomes discourse

Thus, textual analysis should be closely related to lexical analysis and further to ideological contexts (be they the author’s stance or other views propagated therein). The cases I analysed are fine examples of how closely connected are
(and should be analysed as such) cohesive strands of texts with ideological strands of discourse. Moreover, it is these ideological strands that ‘emancipate’ textuality into discursivity.

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**References**


Appendix 1

Article from The Economist
"The Outrage of William Ginsburg"

1. It used to be said in Washington that anyone who is anyone is probably a lawyer. The new rule is that anyone who is anyone must hire a lawyer. Bill Clinton, Anyone-in-Chief, has a vast scandal-squashing legal team, which has racked up unpaid bills of more than $3m. Dozens of White House staffers have been caught up in Mr. Clinton's legal fights: though not themselves accused of doing wrong, they need lawyers to advice them how to respond to subpoenas ... Things have gone so out of hand that one prominent lawyer has even turned against his own profession, calling the cost of defending his client's reputation "outrageous."

2. Yet, if there is an outrage here, it is not the one that the protagonists are pointing at. The indignant lawyer is William Ginsburg, who represents Monica Lewinski, the president's alleged lover. Mr. Ginsburg's complaint is that his opponents ... have vastly more resources than he has...

3. Mr. Ginsburg invites public sympathy for his client, as well as for himself. ... He has set up a legal defence fund for her, arguing that she is an impoverished victim. "My little girl", he says, "can't go outside...can't pay her bills." She is cooped up in a luxury apartment at the Watergate complex, unable to enjoy the simple pleasures that once made her life worthwhile: like having her hair done three times a week, or browsing the boutiques so crucial to her sense of self. When she eats at a restaurant these days, she is obliged to reserve a private room. It is all so outrageous.

4. The real outrage is that some people seem to buy this argument. Within three days, the Lewinski defence fund was promised its first $10,000 from the feminist Osias Foundation in New York, which claims to be "dedicated to studying the reality of women in today's American workplace". "Monica Lewinski is every working woman in this nation," the foundation's boss declared, hinting that the president's romantic energy is vaster even than reputed. Miss Lewinski is "the most betrayed individual since Joan of Arc," Rosalie Osias maintains; "she deserves whatever support we can offer."

5. Happily, the Osias Foundation is in a minority: most Americans are not
persuaded that Miss Lewinski is a victim. ... Most offers of support to Miss Lewinski have been less open-handed than the Osias one. Bob Guccione, boss of Penthouse magazine, has offered Miss Lewinski $2m—on the modest condition that she pose immodestly for his publication ... Miss Lewinski may fear for her reputation now; but she should have thought of this when she told friends about her sexploits (imaginary or otherwise) with the president. If she deserves sympathy at all, it is because she picked the wrong time to get caught up in a sex scandal. ...

6. Some still pursue this line [to pose naked for magazines hoping that notoriety would launch showbiz careers] ... But America no longer finds this respectable; and Miss Lewinski wisely hesitates to follow. Hence her lawyer's efforts to portray her as an innocent victim. And, although it is appropriate that this attempt should fail, Miss Lewinski has reason to feel cross. For, in a marvellous reversal of gender roles, Mr. Clinton has been doing rather well with the same strategy.

7. It used to be that only women claimed to have been stalked, preyed upon, seduced with empty flattery. Now Mr Clinton's allies have used this line to defend him. He cannot help being handsome, they explain; it is not his fault that certain women long to seduce the president. Poor Mr. Clinton is pursued, besieged; under this kind of pressure, say Mr Clinton's friends on TV, any man would crack occasionally. This chutzpah trumps even Mr Ginsburg's outrageous outrage. But the president seems to get away with it.

Appendix 2

Excerpt from Fugitive Pieces (45-46)

While I hid in the radiant light of Athos's island, thousands suffocated in darkness. While I hid in the luxury of a room, thousands were stuffed into baking stoves, sewers, garbage bins. In the crawlspaces of double ceilings, in stables, pigsties, chicken coops. A boy my age hid in a crate; after ten months he was blind and mute, his limbs atrophied. A woman stood in a closet for a year and a half, never sitting down, blood bursting her veins. While I was living with Athos on Zakynthos, learning Greek and English, Jews were filling the corners and cracks of Europe, every available space. They buried themselves in strange graves, any space that would fit their bodies, absorbing more room than was
allotted to them in the world. I didn’t know that while I was on Zakynthos, a Jew could be purchased for a quart of brandy, perhaps four pounds of sugar, cigarettes. I didn’t know that in Athens, they were being rounded up in “Freedom Square”. That the sisters of the Vilna convent were dressing men as nuns in order to provide ammunition to the underground. In Warsaw, a nurse hid children under her skirt, passing through the ghetto gates, until one evening—a gentle twilight descending on those typhus-infected, lice-infested streets—the nurse was caught, the child thrown into the air and shot like a tin can, the nurse given the “Nazi pill”: one bullet in the throat. While Athos taught me about anabatic and katabatic winds, Arctic smoke, and the Spectre of the Bröcken, I didn’t know that Jews were being hanged from their thumbs in public squares. I didn’t know that when they were too many for the ovens, corpses were burned in open pits, flames ladled with human fat. I didn’t know that while I listened to the stories of explorers in the clean places of the world (snow-covered, salt-stung) and slept in a clean place, men were untangling limbs, the flesh of friends and neighbours, wives and daughters, coming off in their hands.