

Ethos and Inference Insights from a Multimodal Perspective

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While the inferential dimension of ethos has been studied extensively, its relationship with multimodality, i.e. the fact that linguistic devices used in verbal interaction combine with other semiotic resources such as gestures or shifts in gaze direction, remains largely unknown. Stepping from a language-oriented approach to argumentation, the paper describes a theoretical framework for the multimodal analysis of ethos in argumentative talk-in-interaction. An example taken from a video-recorded corpus of French public debates is provided.

KEYWORDS: ethos, gaze direction, gesture, index, inference, multimodality, Peirce, talk-in-interaction.

1. INTRODUCTION

While addressing the well-known relationship between ethos and inference, this short paper takes a fresh stance, that of multimodality, i.e. the fact that communication is most of the time multimodal, creating meaning by the combination of various semiotic resources. This paper thus examines ethos and the opposition between *showing* and *telling* from a linguistic, semiotic and multimodal perspective on argumentative talk-in-interaction (Doury, 1997; Jacquin, 2014; Plantin, 1996). How do verbal and non-verbal indexes combine in a way to be inferentially interpreted as one ethos? In order to answer this question, this paper uses extracts taken from French video-recorded public debates.

Section 2 gives background information about ethos as an inferential phenomenon and Section 3 integrates multimodality in this

framework. Section 4 provides an example of where multimodal indexes converge in elaborating an ethos of knowledgeability. Section 5 discusses the results and further lines of research.

2. ETHOS AS INFERENCE

2.1 From a rhetorical perspective

Together with logos and pathos, ethos is part of what Aristotle calls the "proofs". Ethos consists of the use of the character or image of the orator in order to "inspire confidence":

There are three things which inspire confidence in the orator's own character -- the three, namely, that induce us to believe a thing apart from any proof of it: good sense, good moral character, and goodwill. (Aristotle, 1954 II-1, 1378a)

Moreover, from an Aristotelian perspective, ethos and the aforementioned qualities "should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak" (Aristotle, 1954 I-2, 1356a). In other words, ethos is a *verbal achievement* or performance and it should be distinguished from reputation – i.e. what other scholars call "prediscursive ethos" – and explicit self-attribution. *Manifesting* "good sense, good moral character, and goodwill" is a way for the orator to increase the persuasion factor of their discourse.

2.2 From a semiotic perspective

Being the more or less intentional "construction of an image of the self in discourse" (Amossy, 2014, p. 303), ethos is a complex inference that recipients derive from "indexes" (Peirce, 1932), "symptoms" (Berrendonner, 1981; Ducrot, 1984) or "contextualization cues" (Gumperz, 1992). For example, speakers must not say "I am competent in international finance", but should instead *display* such competence, by quoting statistics or using specific lexicon as indexes of their knowledge and abilities. As has been frequently noted, ethotic indexes operate at different levels of analysis, ranging from prosody and lexical choices to grammatical structures and speech acts (e.g. Bonnafous, 2002; Doury & Lefebure, 2006).

Recent studies state the importance of going beyond the classical, logocentric perspective on ethos: as an inference drawn from

the rhetorical performance, ethos is not only verbally anchored but it is also *embodied*, i.e. indexed by body postures, gestures, clothing, ... (e.g. Constantin de Chanay & Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 2007; Poggi & Vincze, 2009; Streeck, 2008; Turbide, 2009). However, no theoretical nor analytical link between ethos and inference has been explicitly drawn from such a multimodal perspective. The next section, inspired by studies previously published in French by Jacquin & Micheli (2013) and Jacquin (2014, Chapter 9), addresses the challenge of tackling the semiotic diversity of the indexes participating in the construction of ethos.

3. MULTIMODAL ETHOS: A FRAMEWORK

Starting from the opposition between *show* and *tell*, one could intuitively think that body shows and speech tells. It is, however, a shortcut and linguists, even while disagreeing on how and where to draw the dividing line (see Jacquin & Micheli, 2013), have demonstrated that there is *speech that tells* and *speech that shows* (Berrendonner, 1981; Ducrot, 1984; Nølke, 2001; Recanati, 1979).

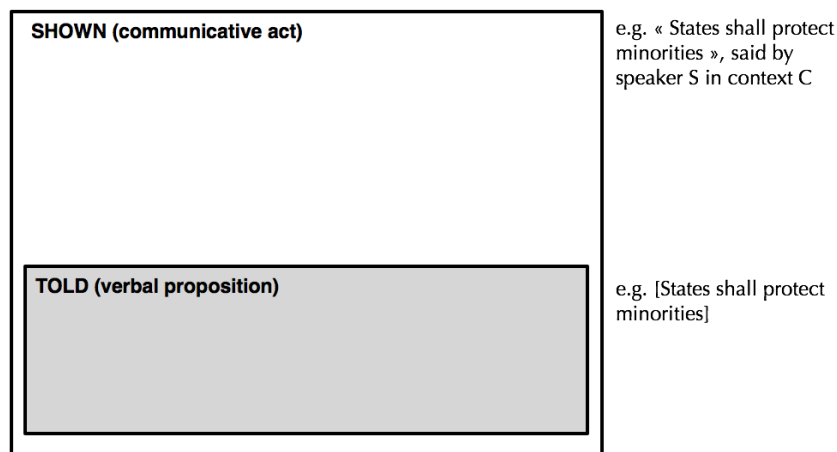


Figure 1 – What is told as part of what is shown

Based on Berrendonner's pragmatic insights (Berrendonner, 1981), Figure 1 suggests that what is *told* is part of what is *shown*. When considering the utterance "States shall protect minorities" said by speaker S in context C, what is *shown*, or what is immediately perceptible, is the communicative act. What is actually *told* in this communicative act is the verbal proposition, or verbal content that is

uttered, i.e. that states shall protect minorities. That is consistent with the use of negation as a criterion for distinguishing between *show* and *tell* (Ducrot, 1984; Nølke, 2001): only the content uttered/told can be denied (i.e. [states shall not protect minorities]), not the communicative act consisting of uttering it.

As suggested in Figure 2, that implies that there is a first distinction to draw between *show* and *tell*, which is based on the semiotic support that is used.

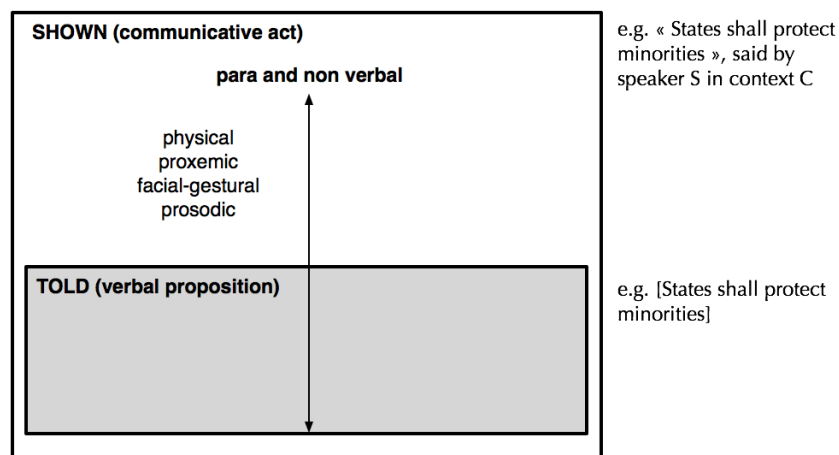


Figure 2 – Show vs. Tell based on semiotic support

In other words, and when considering verbal interaction, there is a distinction between the content being *shown* by embodied resources attached to the communicative act, such as gestures and facial expressions, and the content being specifically *told* by the verbal proposition. While the orator's clothes are part of what is shown through the communicative act, the verbal content [states shall protect minorities] is what is told.

But since what is told (i.e. the verbal proposition) is part of what is shown (i.e. the communicative act), what is *told* can also *show* something, i.e. it also works in an inferential way, as an index for something else, for example a property of the speaker. As outlined in Figure 3, there is thus a second level where the distinction between show and tell operates.

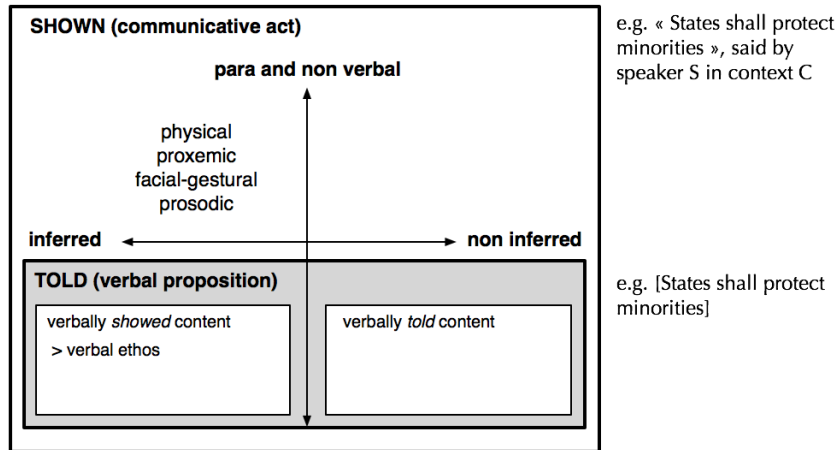


Figure 3 – Show vs. Tell based on the type of interpretation

Applied to the example, that means that what is told, i.e. [states shall protect minorities], can be inferentially interpreted as a way of constructing and showing an ethos of empathy. Multimodal ethos in verbal interaction thus consists of the combination of what is bodily and verbally shown through the communicative act, as illustrated by Figure 4.

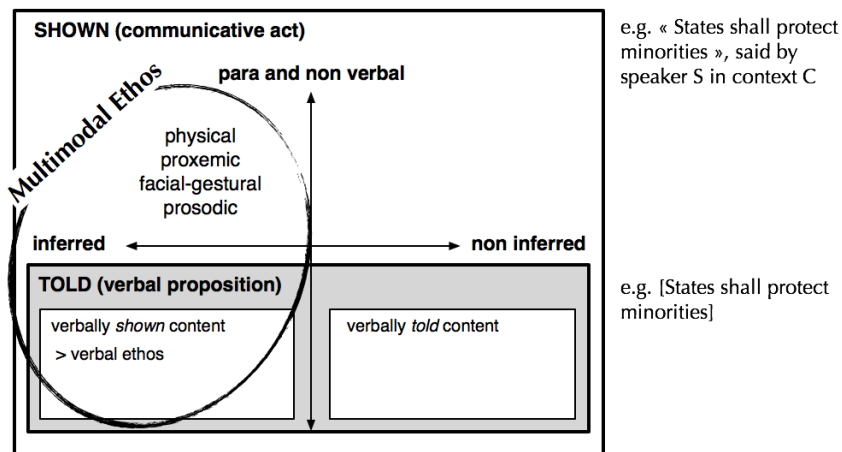


Figure 4 – Multimodally-shown ethos

4. MULTIMODAL ETHOS: AN EXAMPLE

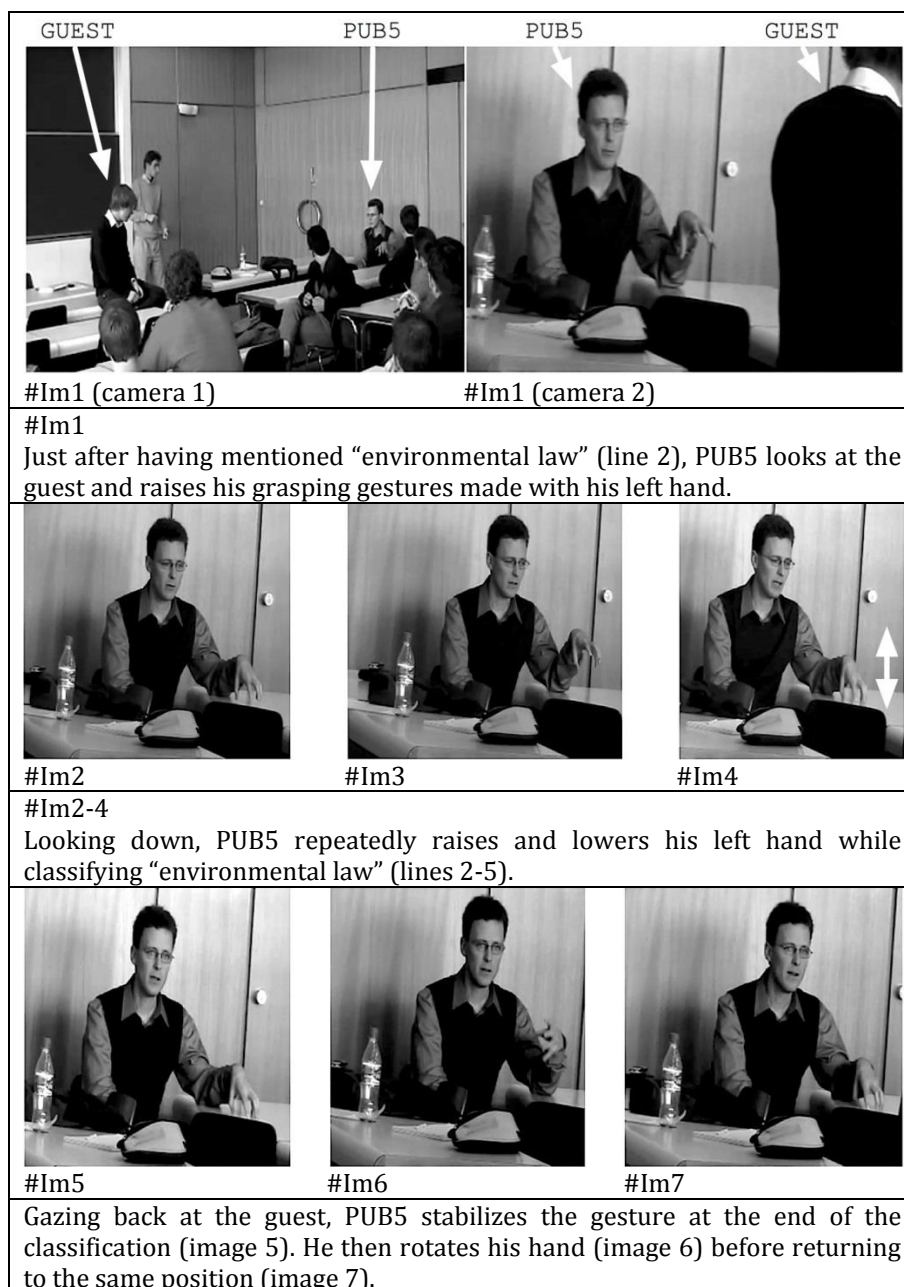
The example analysed hereafter is taken from a video-recorded corpus of eight public debates held in the French-speaking part of Switzerland

and, more precisely, from a debate about the legal power of ecological associations.¹ In the extract, a member of the public (PUB5) takes the floor to give a general overview on environmental law.

Extract / REC-ECO / 00:36:21.000

1 PUB5 oui\ (.) y a peut-être juste une chose qu'il faut
 yes\ (.) there's maybe just one thing that I need to
 2 préciser par rapport au droit de l'environnement#1 qui
 clarify regarding the environmental #1 law which is a
 3 est un peu particulier#2 c'est que c'est un #3 un (.)
 little bit special #2 it is it is a #3 a (.) law
 4 droit qui fait appel à ce qu'on appelle #4 les concepts
 which is based on what one calls #4 the undefined
 5 juridiques indéterminés\ #5 (.) tu as parlé: #6
 legal concepts\ #5 (.) you talked #6 about balance
 6 d'équilibre (.) de la beauté du paysage des trucs comme
 (.) about the beauty of the landscape things like that\
 7 ça\ #7 (..) et ça donne
 #7 (..) and it gives

¹ More information about this corpus can be found in Jacquin (2017).



At line 1, PUB5 starts by categorizing his turn as a “clarification” (“*préciser*”) about environmental law, which is defined as relying on “undefined legal concepts” (“*concepts juridiques indéterminés*”). As

shown by images 2-4, this “argument from verbal classification” (Walton, 2008, p. 129) is accompanied by a shift in gaze direction from the guest to the table and by a metaphoric grasping gesture that PUB5 repeatedly raises and lowers, as if the speaker has grasped the environmental law itself (see the ‘bowl’ configuration in Calbris, 2011).² Moving from the argument from verbal classification about the specificity of environmental law to the examples previously given by the interlocutor (see the reported speech “*tu as parlé de*”, “you talked about”, at line 5), PUB5 repeats the grasping gesture from line 5 to line 7. The stabilization of the gesture at line 7 is intertwined with the end of a three-part list (“about balance”, “about beauty of the landscape”, “things like that”), which is a classical rhetorical device to project the discursive completion of an argumentation (e.g. Atkinson, 1984; Heritage & Greatbatch, 1986; Hutchby, 1997).

Multimodal indexes converge in constructing an ethos of knowledgeability: the explanation consisting of a definition and examples is combined with a grasping gesture that highlights the image of a speaker who knows what he is talking about.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this short paper was to tackle the relationship between ethos, inference, and multimodality. Starting from an analytical framework initially published in French, (i) I discussed the fact that even if ethos is shown and not told, what is told can show something, including participating in the discursive and interactional construction of an ethos, and (ii) I identified the different kind of indexes involved in a multimodally-elaborated ethos.

A situation of converging indexes has been exemplified by an extract of public debate where a speaker combines different semiotic resources to display an ethos of knowledgeability. The framework and the analysis suggest that divergence between indexes is also theoretically possible, even if this situation is more complex, less intuitive and also less studied than convergence. There is clearly work to be done at this level.

² “The [facing downwards] spread-out fingers of one hand encircle [an] abstract entity” (Calbris, 2011, p. 313). Discussing metaphorical grasping gestures from a cognitive perspective, Gibbs (2008, p. 294) states: “Thus, gesturing a grasping motion with one hand may both reflect some natural conceptualization of the idea of a concept, but may also help a speaker verbally articulate the idea of ‘grasping a concept’ as in ‘I just couldn’t grasp that concept’.”

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APPENDIX

Transcript conventions³

/ \	Rising and falling intonations
:	Prolongation of a sound
-	Abrupt interruption in utterance
(.) (..) (...) (n)	Pauses (1/4, 1/2, 3/4 second; n = seconds)
MAIS	Emphasis
[YY YYYY]	Overlapping speech
&	Extension of the turn after an overlap
=	Latching
(it; eat)	Speech which is in doubt in the transcript
XX XXX	Speech which is unclear in the transcript
((laughs))	Annotation of non-verbal activity
#1 #im1	Picture 1

³ Adapted from ICOR, v. 2013 (http://icar.univ-lyon2.fr/projets/corinte/bandeau_droit/convention_icor.htm; last accessed on July 2016), and Mondada (2007).