

## **STRATEGIC MANEUVERING IN HEALTHCARE DISCOURSE: A PRAGMATIC STUDY**

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### **Abstract:**

Persuading individuals to adopt or refrain from certain practices is not an easy task especially if some wrong beliefs are found in advance. To achieve such a goal the persuade needs to be as effective as possible. The present study manifests itself to investigate the strategic maneuvering pragmatically in COVID-19 health infographics. In light of the aim mentioned above, the following hypotheses are set: (1) speech act of advising is highly employed in the data under study; (2) the arguments advanced are clearly conveyed in the selected data. To achieve the goal of the study and to prove the hypotheses set the following procedures are taken into account; (1) developing an eclectic model to analyze the health infographics under study; (2) applying qualitative and quantitative methods to verify the hypotheses. The findings have demonstrated the second hypothesis, whereas the first one is rejected.

### **1. Introduction:**

Argumentation theory, according to Eemeren et al. (2018, p.13), has been founded in classical dialectic by Aristotle. Argumentation arose to reconcile differing ideas regarding specific perspectives when an arguer provides arguments in support of the viewpoint in question in order to persuade the addressees of its acceptability by taking into consideration their reservations or criticisms. Eemeren (2010, p. 29) defines argumentation as a complicated act of speaking with communicative and interactional components, consists of a series of linked assertions aimed at convincing a reasonable judge of the acceptability of a disputed viewpoint. In this regard, argumentation can

be exploited in various discourse including healthcare communication as Schivavo (2007, p.7) states that health communication is a multidisciplinary method designed to exchange health information with individuals, communities, policy makers, and public with the purpose of influencing the intended addressees to gain in or refrain from certain practice in order to achieve better health results.

## **2. Pragma-dialectical Argumentation Theory:**

As its name suggests, pragma-dialectical integrates two dimensions: dialectical as the critical discussion, whether in dialogue or monologue, plays a fundamental role in argumentation where the participants are engaged to resolve different opinions and pragmatic as the participants' moves to overcome the addressees' doubts towards the standpoint expressed in such a verbal exchange are described as speech acts that take place in spoken or written speech events within a specific context (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 52-9). To this avail, Eemeren and Grootendorst (ibid.: 59-61) develop a model for a critical discussion consisting of four stages known as "discussion stages". They highlight the distribution of speech acts and their role in the resolving process of critical exchange which should go through these four stages as: a confrontation stage, opening stage, argumentation stage, and concluding stage.

### **2.1 Strategic Maneuvering (SM):**

The concept of SM is at the heart of pragma-dialectical theory as the development of the former by van Eemeren and Houtlosser (2002) is counted as an extended version to the later so as to fill the gap between reasonableness (dialectic) and effectiveness (rhetoric) within the meant theory (Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2014, p. 39). In this respect, Eemeren (2010, p. 40) defines strategic maneuvering as "the continual efforts made in all moves that are carried out in argumentative discourse to keep the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness". Hence, to be reasonably effective, arguers tend to be strategically maneuvering at any of the four stages of a critical discussion in order to resolve a controversial opinion with their favor (ibid.: 46). Consequently, and to accomplish its rhetorical goal, three inseparable aspects of the discussion should be taken into account:

- topical potential where a choice of the most potential topic could be made out of all the available topics to serve an arguer's best interest (ibid.: 101),
- audience demand which has to do with the audience-orientation through the moves of the discussion. That is, the moves should go in accordance with the audience's preference (ibid.: 108), and
- presentational devices which are related to the stylistics or rhetorical techniques an arguer adopts to achieve rhetorical advantage in his or her moves (ibid.: 119).

## **3. The Analytical Model:**

The present section is intended to build an eclectic model which represents the pragmatic tool for analyzing the data under scrutiny.

### **3.1 Speech Acts**

According to Searle (1969, p. 16) “speaking language is performing speech acts”.Accordingly, Searle (1976, pp. 10-13) has put the types of speech acts within five macro-classes:

- **Representatives:** which represent the speaker’s belief in a certain state of affairs (e.g., explaining, asserting, denying, etc.)

- **Directives:** are intended to direct the hearer’s action towards or against a certain behaviour (advising, warning, requesting, etc.).

-**Commissives:** by means of which a speaker’s commits himself to accomplish a certain act in the future (e.g., promising, offering, inviting, etc.).

-**Expressives:** are utilized to denote the speaker’s attitude towards certain situation (e.g., gratitude, thankful, sorrow, etc.).

-**Declaratives:** whose uttering results in changing the present situation(e.g., naming, sentencing, firing, etc.).

### 3.2 Politeness Principle

Politeness is defined “as the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face” (Yule,1996, p. 60).Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 61) have first conceptualized the concept of positive and negative face as the public or the social self-image that every individual has and wants others to recognize.Brown and Levinson (ibid.: 69), politeness is a set of strategies used for managing threats to face. These strategies are illustrated in the following sequence:

**Bald on record:**According to this strategy, the face is threatened without redress(e.g., Give me a lift).

**Positive Politeness:** This strategy is essentially employed to minimize threats to the hearer’s positive (e.g., How about giving me a lift?).

**Negative Politeness:**This strategy is mainly directed to soften threats to the addressee’s negative face (e.g., Would you give me a lift?).

**Off record:**This strategy is achieved indirectly by hinting at face threatening action via using such techniques as metaphors, rhetorical questions, irony and so on, allowing the addressee to deduce the intended meaning by making inferences (Uh, I forget my key car) (ibid.: 69-72).

From negative politeness strategies, the following are the most related ones:

**Be conventionally indirect:** isa sub-class of ‘be direct’ strategy. Be indirect strategy is often employed to solve the clash between the speaker’s desire to be direct and his or her desire to avoid impinging the hearer’s freedom in doing the action involved in the face-threatening act(Brown & Levinson,1987, pp. 130-2).

**Impersonalize speaker and hearer:** is a sub-class of ‘communicatespeaker’s want to not impose on hearer’ class. This strategy can be achieved by several ways, like using passive voice or generalizing rule to avoid a direct reference to the participants who are involved in the face-threatening act( ibid.:190-4).

### 3.3 Argumentation Schemes

Argumentation schemes refer to the internal structure of a single argument towards the acceptability of a certain position (Eemeren, 2001, p. 19). Argument from consequences is expected to be the principle which underlines the arguments utilized in the selected data. Walton (1996b, p. 75) mentions that argument from consequences is a common kind of argument which is used in political debates and public policy-related issues where a certain practice is encouraged or discouraged by showing its positive or negative outcomes respectively (ibid.:76).

Argument from consequences is referred to as pragmatic argumentation by Eemeren et al. (2002, p.101), and is regarded as a subtype of argumentation based on causal relation. In line with Walton, for Eemeren et al. (ibid). Walton (2006, p. 104) mentions that pragmatic argumentation is mainly used to advise for or against a certain practice. In this regard, the positive and negative forms of argument from consequences have the following structures:

"Argument from positive consequences:

Premise: If A is brought about, good consequences will plausibly occur.

Conclusion: A should be brought about".

"Argument from negative consequence:

Premise: If A is brought about, bad consequences will occur.

Conclusion: A should not be brought about".

Accordingly, argument from consequences is highly exploited in healthcare domain.

In relation to argumentation from consequences, Feteris (2002 as cited in Poppel, 2013, pp. 67-8) refers to four types of pragmatic variants associated with this schemetype:

- "Variant I  
Standpoint: Action X should be performed  
Because: Action X leads to desirable consequence Y.  
(And:) (If an action leads to a desirable consequence, then that action should be performed)".
- "Variant II  
Standpoint: Action X should not be performed  
Because: Action X leads to undesirable consequence Y.  
(And:) (If an action leads to an undesirable consequence, then that action should not be performed)".
- "Variant III  
Standpoint: Action X should be performed  
Because: Action X does not lead to undesirable consequence Y.  
(And:) (If an action does not lead to an Undesirable consequence, then that action should not be performed)".
- "Variant IV  
Standpoint: Action X should not be performed

Because: Action X does not lead to desirable  
 consequence Y  
 (And:) (If an action does not lead to a”  
 “desirable consequence, then that  
 action should not be performed”).

### 3.4 Cooperative Principle

Grice has described the process that individuals use in their interactions, claiming that people desire to collaborate while exchanging meaning in order to avoid misunderstandings. As a result, Grice introduces the Cooperative Principle (CP) which carries the following idea: “Make your contribution such as it is required at the stage in which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of talk exchange in which you are engaged” (Thomas, 2013, p. 56-62). Moreover, the CP has been supported with four maxims. These maxims include:

**Quality:** Speakers must be genuine in their statements.

**Quantity:** The information given should be no more or no less than what is necessary.

**Relevance:** Speakers must be to the point.

**Manner:** Speakers’ contribution must be clear, brief, and unambiguous (Cruse, 2000, p. 355-7).

### 3.5 Argumentation Stages

Eemeren and Grootendorest (2004) develop a model for a critical discussion consisting of four stages known as ‘discussion stages’, namely: confrontation stage, opening stage, argumentation stage, and concluding stage, asserting that argumentation might not explicitly complete all these stages (Eemeren & Grootendorest, 2004, pp. 59-60). Consequently, only the first two stages will be adopted from this model as the two basic ones. Hence, the process of analysis will take the following sequence:

**The confrontation stage:** includes two sub-stages: topical potential (TP) and audience demand (AD). The TP includes the pragmatic component of speech acts, whereas the AD manifests itself through the pragmatic element of politeness principle.

**The argumentation stage:** It is also divided into TP and AD sub-stages with certain pragmatic elements for each. The TP comprises speech acts strategies and the pragmatic variants of argument from consequences scheme. The AD on the other hand, constitutes the conversational maxims. These stages with their pragmatic components are illustrated in Figure (1) below:

<b>CS</b>		
<b>TP</b>		<b>AD</b>
<b>SAs</b>		<b>PSs</b>
<b>AS</b>		
<b>TP</b>		<b>AD</b>
<b>SAs</b>	<b>PV</b>	<b>GMs</b>

Key: CS=Confrontation Stage, AS= Argumentation Stage, TP= Topical Potential, AD= Audience Demand, SAs= Speech Act, PS= Politeness Strategies, PV= Pragmatic Variant, GMs= Grice's Maxims

#### **4. Data Collection:**

The collecting data represent five health infographics designed by World Health Organization (WHO) against certain myths which spread through COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The data are collected from WHO (n.d.).

#### **5. Analysis of Data:**

The present study adopts the mixed-method approaches to analyze the selected data. By this means, the qualitative method comes first, then the findings of the qualitative analysis is enhanced quantitatively via applying the percentages equation.

#### **5.1 Pragmatic Analysis**

##### **Situation 1: "UV lamps and COVID-19"**

"FACT: Ultra-violet (UV) lamps should not be used to disinfect hands or other areas of your skin.

UV radiation can cause skin irritation and damage your eyes. Cleaning your hands with alcohol-based hand rub or washing your hands with soap and water are the most effective ways to remove the virus".

In this situation, the CS includes the two sub-stages of TP and AD. The TP is triggered by the statement, "FACT: Ultra-violet (UV) lamps should not be used to disinfect hands or other areas of your skin" which is intended to advise the public indirectly to avoid using UV lamps for disinfecting hands. Concerning AD, the writer exploits passive voice form to avoid personalizing the addressee directly.

As for AS, it is also divided into TP and AD. The TP is activated by the assertion, "UV radiation can cause skin irritation and damage your eyes", to warn people of using UV lamps by showing their bad consequences on human beings. Accordingly, the pragmatic variant IV is employed to show the falsity of such practice in COVID-19 crisis:

UV lamps should not be used

Because: it will not remove coronavirus from hands.

And: If using UV lamps does not remove the virus from hands, it should not be act on.

Regarding AD, the writer adapts to the readers' preference by being kept to GMs as the message is conveyed in an informative, true, clear, and relevant manner.

##### **Situation2: Masks, exercise and COVID-19**

"FACT: People should NOT wear masks when exercising. As mask may reduce the ability to breath comfortably. Sweat can make the mask become wet more quickly which makes it difficult to breathe and promotes the growth of microorganism. The important preventive measureduring exercise is to maintain physical distance of at least one meter from others".

The CS is sub-structured into TP and AD with certain pragmatic strategies for each. The TP is issued by the statement, “People should NOT wear masks when exercising” to advise people not wearing masks during the exercise. Whereas, the AD is achieved by avoiding the direct reference to the addressee (you) by using the term (people) as a general rule, instead.

Accomplishing the first stage paves the way to the second (AS) which is in turn subdivided into TP and AD. The first is triggered by speech acts of warning as the writer makes clear that wearing masks while doing exercises can cause health problems “As mask may reduce the ability to breath comfortably...”. Pragmatic variant II is exploited in this situation to demonstrate the truthfulness of the stated claim and the falsity of the opposed one in the following way:

Standpoint: You should not wear a mask while doing sports.

Because: Wearing mask can reduce the breathability and increase the chance the growth of germs on the mask.

And: If wearing mask leads to health problems when doing sports, then it should be avoided.

As far as the AD is concerned, the writer cooperates when delivering the information desired as he or she is qualitatively and quantitatively informative, explicit and to the point.

### **Situation3: “A communal bottle of alcohol-based sanitizer and COVID-19”**

“FACT:Touching a communal bottle of alcohol- based sanitizer will not infect you.Once you’ve”“sanitized your hands. You have disinfected them from any germs that may have been on the bottle. If everyone uses sanitizer in a public place such as a supermarket entrance, the risk of germs on communal items will be lower and will help keep everyone safe”.

Regarding this argumentative situation, the CS is accomplished through two sub-stages: TP and AD.

The TP is raised by the assertion, “Touching a communal bottle of alcohol- based sanitizer will not infect you” with a communicative function of speech act of advising to correct peoples’ attitude avoidingtouching a shared bottle of alcohol- based sanitizer to avoid COVID-19 infection. The AD on the other hand, is fulfilled by being indirect as the advised act is expressed indirectly.

The AS includes the TP and AD sub-stages. The TP constitutes the pragmatic component of speech acts, whereas the politeness strategies and pragmatic variant go under the umbrella of the AD concept. The TP is triggered by the speech act of explaining as the writer clarifiesthatafter touching a communal bottle of alcohol-based sanitizer, cleaning hands will ensure that the coronavirus is removed“Once you’ve sanitized your hands. You have disinfected them from any germs that may have been on the bottle”.In this regard, the writer makes use variant VI in the following way:

Standpoint: You should not avoid touching a shared-bottle of alcohol- based sanitizer.

Because:touching a shared-bottle of alcohol- based sanitizer does not cause infection with COVID-19.

And: If touching a shared-bottle of alcohol-based sanitizer does not cause infection with COVID-19, then it should not be avoided.

Cooperatively, the contribution made by the writer is informative enough, explicit, true, and relevant. Hence, the adaptation to the audience is achieved through this strategy.

#### **Situation 4: Bleach and COVID-19**

“FACT: Spraying or introducing bleach or another disinfectant into your body WILL NOT protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous. These substances can be poisonous if ingested and cause irritation and damage to your skin and eyes. Bleach and disinfectant should be used carefully to disinfect surfaces only”.

In the CS stage the potential topic starts with the utterance, “Spraying or introducing bleach or another disinfectant into your body WILL NOT protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous” which is communicatively intended to advise people not introducing disinfectants to their bodies to avoid the infection with the novel coronavirus disease, warning people of such a practice as it can put one’s life in danger. The adaptation to the readers is activated by the negative politeness strategy of being indirect to lessen threat to the addressee’s face if the act desired is performed directly.

Regarding the AS, the argument put forward is activated by speech act of warning as a potential choice to make people refrain from such a risky behaviour by showing its bad consequences on human’s life “These substances can be poisonous if ingested and cause irritation and damage to your skin and eyes”. According to the pragmatic variant, the inference made goes in the direction of variant IV:

Standpoint: You should not spray or introduce bleach or any other disinfectants into your body.

Because: This practice will not protect you against COVID-19.

And: If spraying or introducing bleach or any other disinfectants into your body will not protect you against COVID-19, then this act should be avoided.

The contribution made in this stage goes according to the audience’s desire as no breaching to Grice’s maxims is observed.

#### **Situation 5: Drinking alcohol and COVID-19**

“FACT: Drinking alcohol does not protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous. The harmful use of alcohol increases your risk of health problems”.

Regarding this argumentative situation, the CS is sub-divided into two sub-stages: TP and AD. The TP begins with the assertion, “Drinking alcohol does not protect you against COVID-19 and can be dangerous” with a communicative function of speech acts of advising and warning to correct peoples’ ideas of consuming alcohol to protect themselves from getting infected with the new coronavirus. The AD on the other hand, is fulfilled by being indirect as the advised and warned act is expressed indirectly to lower the face-threatening act.

In the CS stage the potential topic starts with the utterance, “The harmful use of alcohol increases your risk of health problems”, which is mainly intended to warn



people of drinking alcohol in an attempt to prevent infection with the new coronavirus because consuming a lot of alcohol can affect their health very badly. By this means, the intended meaning has the form of pragmatic variant IV:

Standpoint: You should not drink a lot of alcohol to protect yourself from coronavirus disease.

Because: Drinking alcohol will not prevent the infection with coronavirus.

And: If Drinking alcohol does not prevent the infection with coronavirus, then it should not be brought about.

As for AD, the appeal to the addressees' interest is fulfilled by breaching none of conversational maxims. The message wanted is expressed in an explicit, true, informative and relevant manner.

## 5.2 Statistical Analysis and Discussion

This section is devoted to support the findings of the qualitative analysis quantitatively.

The results in Table (1) below show that the writer strategically maneuvers through the directive speech act of advising as it has the high percentage in comparison with speech act of warning. Concerning the DA, the writer exploits the strategy of being indirect to solve the clash between the writer desire to be direct and his or her desire to appeal to the readers' interest by lessening the imposition on the addressees' freedom in doing the act in advice.

**Table 1** The Pragmatic Strategies of the CS

TP			AD	
SAs			PSs	
D		R	NP	
Advising	Warning	-	Be indirect	Impersonalizing
71.42%	28.57%	0%	60%	40%

Key: D=Directives, R= Representatives, NP=Negative Politeness.

As for the AS, the results listed in Table (2) demonstrates that in the AS the arguments advanced are highly triggered by the directive speech act of warning as it has the highest percentage in comparison with the other types utilized in the same stage. Accordingly, this finding together with that of the CS concerning speech act of warning rejects the first hypothesis "speech act of advising is highly employed in the data under study" Regarding AD, the high percentage of observing GMs indicates the writer's appeal to readers' preference; thereby, the second hypothesis is verified "the arguments advanced are clearly conveyed in the selected data".

**Table 2** The Pragmatic Strategies of AS

TP		AD
SAs	PV	GMs

D		R				
Advising	Warning	Explaining	II	IV	Observing	Breaching
0%	80%	20%	20%	80%	100%	0%

Key: PV=Pragmatic Variant

## 6. Conclusion:

Based on the preceding analysis the conclusion arrived at is that:

1. The topical choice of the writer is that of speech act of advising in the CS to make people refrain from adopting certain wrong behaviours in the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the choice made by the writer in the AS when providing arguments is that of speech act of warning to show readers the bad consequences of adopting such misguided beliefs in COVID-19 crisis. Additionally, this is supported by employing pragmatic variant IV to prove the falsity of such wrong practices.
2. Since the situation is formal, the adaptation to the addressees' interest is accomplished through exploiting negative politeness strategies of different sub-categories to avoid any damage to the recipients involved in the face-threatening act.
3. Writers are highly adhere to GMs in the health infographics under study to prevent any misunderstanding which may occur in case of breaching one or more of these maxims.

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