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Commentary on Listen Carefully

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1. Introduction and a heartfelt praise

Few if any scholars have done more in recent years to advance the study of auditory or sonic argumentation theory than Kišiček and Groarke (Groarke & Kišiček 2016; *ibid.* 2018; Groarke 2018; Kišiček 2014; *ibid.* 2016; *ibid.* 2018; *ibid.* 2019). Some might even go so far as to observe that it was their work that properly established auditory argumentation studies as an acknowledged subfield. It is only fitting then, that Kišiček now takes the next innovative step and explores the field of auditory argument (AA) fallacies. Her thoughts on AA fallacies have all components that make a paper or presentation worthy of precise scholarly attention: They relate to a highly relevant area of study and are important for the further exploration of a nascent field. They are well considered and thought-provoking. And they are full of inspiring and fascinating examples that invite the reader or listener to confront new problems and to connect existing theories with new challenges.

It is all too easy to trail an innovator and criticize the preciseness of her definitions and to survey potential counterexamples to her argument – yet that is exactly what I am about to do. I feel partially justified in this approach, simply because there is a little else that can be done in response to such a fundamentally (!) sound (!) argument; and partially because this seems to be the traditional role of an OSSA commentator. Given that I believe in the strength of the intellectual fundament Kišiček presents, I will therefore concentrate on asking a series of motivated critical questions about some of the structures she builds on that foundation. “Motivated” because they look at the argument and counterargument in detail before culminating in one summary question. And “critical”, because they indicate that I do not always fully agree with Kišiček. Of course these aren’t technically “Critical Questions” in the argument schemes terminology sense: For once, because I make absolutely no claim at (attempted) completeness of these questions to assess the underlying validity and, secondly, because – contrary to traditional Critical Questions they will be mostly asked in a grammatically open form (but that is a different debate for a different OSSA; Hoppmann 2014)

2. Five motivated critical questions

1. What are fallacies?

In her introduction to AA fallacies (Sec. 2.) Kišiček provides an extensive review of recent developments in fallacy studies and cites or references the definitions of Hansen (2002), Rieke & Sillars (2001), Johnson (1995), Copi (1961), Walton (1995). I think that is evidently a great idea, as an exploration of AA fallacies needs to deal with the status quo in traditional text-based (TT) fallacy studies. Yet I have a couple of concerns about the approach Kišiček takes here:

a) I get that no cursory review of the literature can ever be complete, but why omit some of the most influential recent approaches, namely Hamblin's (1970) transformation of the field and the pragma-dialectical definitions (e.g. van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004; van Eemeren 2018)? I believe that both could contribute significantly to help with some of the questions below.

b) Why include Copi (and a very early edition of Copi at that) without critical commentary in a line of argumentation scholars? The school of thought this definition represents is no doubt historically fascinating and highly relevant, but (thanks to Hamblin's work above all others) it seems that within contemporary argumentation theory the "arguments that seem to be valid but are not" definition of fallacies is so thoroughly rebutted and rejected that it stands side by side with Descartes *more geometrico* approach to reasoning in the museum of "curious things we used to think in the past but long since dropped." I believe this approach has a firm place in the history of argumentation theory, but in a modern review it seems to unduly water down the concept.

c) What is the Kišiček's definition of TT fallacies in general and AA fallacies in particular? Comparing and contrasting rivalling approaches and definitions is important, but for the current work we need a clear definition to work with. Kišiček acknowledges that TT fallacies are different from fallacious auditory argument especially in that "prosodic features are linked to the verbal part of the message" and "one must be aware of the connotations", yet both aspects are well recognized in the contextual and pragmatic component of TT argumentation theory and hardly a *differentia specifica* of AA fallacies. Clearly understanding the concepts an author works with and having clear definitions of the key terms is nearly always a benefit in academic papers. But in the case of this paper I believe it goes beyond that general virtue: I think most of the remaining questions cannot be solved without a clear (working) definition of AA fallacy.

2. *What is an argumentum ad hominem?*

Kišiček moves from her observations about fallacies in general on to a couple of specific *argumentum ad* fallacies. I think both underlying choices are great: to use established TT fallacies as a blueprint or search matrix for identifying functionally equivalent AA fallacies, and to select the set of famous (if theoretically flawed) *ad* fallacies for that purpose. Kišiček in turn explores AA equivalents to the TT *ad hominem*, *ad indignationem*, *ad misericordiam*, as well as straw man fallacies and fallacious moves based on ambiguity. Of these the *ad hominem* is explored in most detail and Kišiček provides some fascinating and though provoking examples and also makes the reader benefit from her vast knowledge in empirical research about perceptions of accent and prosody.

I will try to avoid the commentary pitfalls of requesting a precise definition for each of these fallacies or complaint and nitpick about the ones provided. The TT *ad* fallacies are notorious for the relative simplicity of identifying them, compared to the challenges of providing air-tight definitions. Yet the *argumentum ad hominem* nevertheless stands out for a number of reasons. First, and most obviously, Kišiček pays it the most attention here and readers might desire a proportionally more detailed theoretical foundation. Beyond that, the *ad hominem* is one of the most discussed *ad* fallacies in the literature, exhaustively researched from philosophical, historical and empirical perspectives (e.g. van Eemeren et al 2000, *ibid.* 2009), and it is the only *ad* fallacy with a widely division into the subclasses of abusive *ad hominem*, circumstantial *ad hominem* and *tu quoque ad hominem*.

The closest thing to a working definition of *ad hominem* I encountered in this section was Kišiček's citation of Walton (2004) of *ad hominem* as "[...] basically a use of personal attack [...]". The examples Kišiček provides all fit this general description and their fallaciousness is

immediately intuitively plausible: ridiculing an antagonist's accent for argumentative purposes seems personally infuriating and should somehow be frowned upon my argumentation theory. But accent is hardly special in this regard: repeating and exaggerating any prosodic characteristics (lisps, stutters or other less evident idiosyncrasies) will frequently be (perceived as) offensive, and one of the oldest school yard bullying technique illustrates that even the pure repetition of the antagonists words and phrases without any phonetic alterations can be highly irritating (for a beautiful comedic illustration of this technique, see episode 22 of the first season of the NBC show *Community*, "The Art of Discourse").

Is the intuition that many of us share, that exaggerating accents to denigrate opponents really correctly ascribed to a functional equivalent of *ad hominem*? To find that out we would need a clear definition of TT *ad hominem* and – if possible – its AA *ad hominem* equivalent: "basically a use of personal attack" just doesn't cut it for this purpose. Under that definition: What is a personal attack? Is it always fallacious? Or mostly? Is every criminal accusation a fallacy then? Or every presidential debate exploring the voting record of the opponent? Kišiček claims that "Well, he certainly diminishes the ethos of the French scientist [by hyperbolizing his accent] depicting him as a less serious expert" – but is it, though? And is everything that diminishes the ethos of a speaker an *ad hominem*?

Picture the following examples. I, an English speaker with a heavy German accent, am having a verbal debate with a native English speaker with an extremely charming posh accent in front of an audience that needs to decide a cause of action. After my opponent has spoken, I repeat her central passage to our audience in a respectful and neutral manner (before argumentatively engaging with it). By repeating her words in my own accent, I have just deprived them of their charming posh effect, thereby reducing the ethos of these words – did I commit an *ad hominem*?

To make myself perfectly clear: I think Kišiček's examples are great and she rightfully points to prosodic effects that deserve our attention and should be addressed. But in order to find out whether the *argumentum ad hominem* and its related violations are the right lens to study this effect, we need a clearer definition of *ad hominem* and we should test into which of the subcategories of *ad hominem* her examples might fit.

3. Are accents always bad for public speaking?

Still as part of her discussion of AA equivalents to the *ad hominem* Kišiček extensively discussed the perceived effects of accent on speaker credibility and related qualities. I have absolutely no doubt about Kišiček's expertise in this field and her synopsis of relevant literature is by itself already a worthy read. That said, I am hesitant to accept one central generalization that Kišiček draws from her review of the literature. She acknowledges that some accents can be positively associated (the "sexy French" or – depending on one's aims "scary Russian"), yet she claims that "In every [sic!] language, however, the standard accent is always [sic!] the one which is connected with education, culture, and seriousness, [...]" and follows from that that other language varieties "[...] will be perceived as inappropriate for public speaking, i.e. the speaker will not be perceived as a serious, educated person."

I think these are quite tall claims, not just because of the universal quantifiers ("every language", "always"), but also because the three mentioned qualities (education, culture, and seriousness) can have significantly different rhetorical effects. But most importantly: Do speakers always want to be perceived as serious and educated? And: Does it serve the speaker's aims and ethos to be perceived so? If this is not the case, is amplifying a non-standard accent necessarily something negative, and is that in turn a necessary condition for the presence of a fallacy?

A cursory look through the relevant empirical literature by a confessed non-expert (me), seems to indicate that at least some instances of positive rhetorical effects of the use of non-standard accent by speakers: a) Lalwani et al (2005) report that Singaporean English can be superior to standard English to gain audience attention and interest. B) Armstrong & Min Yee (2001) indicate that a common dialect can be a success factor in negotiations. Vögele & Bachl (2017) show that a Swabian accent can have positive effects on the likeability of politicians for certain audiences (see also Mai & Hoffmann 2010). These studies to me seem to point to the need to clearly define *what* accent is negative for *what* purpose, rather than assuming that non-standard is negative for rhetorical and/or argumentative purposes in general.

4. *When are appeals to emotions fallacious?*

Once more the examples Kišiček provides are illuminating and thought-provoking and both main examples (Trump and Thunberg) seem immediately intuitively plausible. I personally agree that a populist politician tapping into the anger of his audience and trying to amplify it seems vicious and a progressive activist calling for more sustainable policies at a UN summit seem virtuous. The fact that the former is a highly experienced old man, while the latter is a young teenager who might be forgiven for more emotional approaches makes this intuitive reaction even stronger. That said: what exactly makes Trump's appeal to anger fallacious? Is it that he shouldn't be angry? Or that he isn't and shouldn't pretend to be? And on the other side: If Thunberg's appeal only seems fallacious but really isn't ("She explicitly states how sad and angry she is and her prosodic features correspond with this." Section 2.3), is it not a problem that the cited segment is a lead-up to a very thinly veiled threat to her audience ("We will never forgive you. We will not let you get away with this." NPR 2019)? Once more, to make a decision about the fallaciousness of a prosodic move, we would need a clear definition of fallacies, and – ideally – a discussion of the relationships or differences between 1. prosodic fallacies, 2. prosodic lies and 3. prosodic rhetorical effects,

5. *Are there real-life examples?*

My last question might seem to be the most nitpicking, yet it is motivated by genuine curiosity and academic interest. To the best of my understanding all of the myriad of intriguing examples Kišiček gives in section 2.4 and 2.5 (strawman, pauses and ambiguity) are literary or fictitious. They all introduce fascinating theoretical challenges and stimulate the reader to think about prosodic ambiguities, the problem of justified deniability in written culture, (where "words" are primarily the written symbolic form, not the spoken audible form) and the importance of pauses (even though it seems to me that Kišiček's *Ibis redibus* example is the exact opposite of a prosodic fallacy – an ambiguity that is only possible in writing, not speaking). Yet none of these seem to be taken from real-life dialogue. Why is that? I am by no means accusing Kišiček here of taking a shortcut or selecting her examples badly (on the contrary, I think these are excellent examples), but rather I am wondering if these kinds of fallacies are only possible, but hardly exist in real communication? Or are they real, but for some reason extraordinarily hard to capture for academic purposes? I have no idea which is the right answer to these questions, but I would love to know, and I think that the solution might be illuminating for the nature of these fallacies. In the meantime, while all the examples are still fictitious, I would like to donate one additional example that was constructed for our public speaking instruction. The sentence "You should not lie to your friends!" can be emphasized by prosodic means on every single one of its seven words, and with each of these emphases completely changes its meaning. So, when you write "You should not lie to your friends!", are you in danger of committing or setting up a fallacious ambiguity?

3. Conclusion and perspective

Kišiček offers us an insightful and innovative set of arguments, and I think it is very worthwhile to explore this area further. I hope that she will continue her excellent work in this field, and I am looking forward to reading her papers and to listening to her talks to test whether her arguments seem to be stronger in written or in auditory form.

After already extensively employing my commentator's privilege above by asking a set of trailing critical question, I will dare to use it one final time in the conclusion section, by uttering a wish for further research. I believe that in order to tackle some of the hardest questions related to AA fallacies, we need to address the very tough question of felicity conditions for auditory argumentation. Much like the pragma-dialectical rules provided a useful blueprint for the discussion of TT fallacious moves *ex negativo* (van Eemeren et al. 2009, van Eemeren & Snoeck Henkemans 2017, van Eemeren et al. 2014), so identifying the minimum necessary conditions and the optimal environments for prosodic integrity, could give us some vital hints for the understanding of AA fallacies. This is by no means claiming that the pragma-dialectical solution is the final or true answer to the study of TT fallacies, nor am I saying that the AA felicity conditions must be modeled after Pragma-Dialectics. But I do believe that we need to clearly understand what AA virtues are before we can fully explore AA vices.

In order to do that it seems that we need to make a decision about "our" aims. Are we primarily interested in auditory argumentation as a means of effective persuasion, or lasting persuasion or the reasonable solution for a difference of opinion? Whichever is our aim, I do not believe that AA felicity conditions can be boiled down to a simple concept such as "honesty" or "authenticity". We are used to and encourage the use of intentional auditory effects in argumentation – via emphasis, intonation, pauses, employment of accent and many more. Kišiček shows us some deeply fascinating territories and invites us to think about how to judge them. But in order to pass that final judgement about whether some AA moves are acceptable or off limits, I believe we need to decide what are those limits. In other words, we need to decide how we define auditory validity or (my apologies for the predictable pun) the soundness of sound.

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