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Arguing by apostrophizing

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ABSTRACT: I submit that arguers may use apostrophe (direct address to someone present or absent) to pressure reluctant auditors to adhere to norms of argumentation, and illustrate with the exemplary case of Abraham Lincoln's 1860 speech at Cooper Union. Lincoln uses apostrophe to manifest the norm of tentatively considering a reasonable case and to discharge his obligation to adhere to the norm; and in doing so pressures auditors to adhere to it.

KEY WORDS: apostrophe, normative pragmatics, Abraham Lincoln, Cooper Union Address

1. INTRODUCTION

I submit that arguers may use apostrophe (direct address to someone present or absent) to pressure reluctant auditors to adhere to norms of argumentation, and illustrate with the exemplary case of Lincoln's 1860 speech at Cooper Union. Researchers have noted functions that apostrophe may perform such as creating a sense of immediacy but, with one exception, its properly argumentative design features have not been analyzed.

A normative pragmatic theory (e.g., Kauffeld 1998; Goodwin 2001; Innocenti 2005) best explains how apostrophe is designed to work for a situated audience because it encompasses the range of purposes that arguing may be designed to achieve. No purpose is inherent to its analytical methods; instead analysis involves looking at the activity itself and the situation to identify purposes. This enables researchers to provide accurate, detailed accounts of message design because messages are analyzed on their own terms rather than reduced to or subsumed beneath a more general purpose, such as persuasion, that may not fit the case.

To generate a normative pragmatic theory of apostrophe, I analyze a well-known example from United States civic discourse: Abraham Lincoln's 1860 Cooper Union Address. The speech is part of Lincoln's political campaign to secure the Republican nomination for United States President. Lincoln is unknown compared to other candidates, so one main purpose is compelling auditors to seriously consider his merits as a candidate. Lincoln's use of apostrophe in the second of the three major sections of the speech—a direct address to the people of the southern United States “if they would listen—as I suppose they will not” (Holzer 2004: 267)—makes manifest the norm of tentatively considering a reasonable case and discharges Lincoln's own obligation to adhere to the norm; and in doing so pressures auditors to adhere to it. I make a case for this claim by first outlining a normative pragmatic theory of apostrophe and then explaining how apostrophizing works in Lincoln's Cooper Union Address.

2. A NORMATIVE PRAGMATIC THEORY OF APOSTROPHE

A normative pragmatic theory of apostrophe explains why a speaker may reasonably expect apostrophizing to achieve some specific purpose. The theory comprises interlocking, practical reasoning by speaker and auditors that explains or accounts for the force or pressure that compels auditors to act on a speaker's words (Goodwin 2001; Innocenti 2005). The theory is based on what speakers say they are doing and why, as well as on tacit, pragmatic knowledge about what makes sense in a particular situation (Goodwin 2001: 40). The intellectual scaffolding for normative pragmatic theories has been constructed by Kauffeld's scholarship on philosophy of language and in particular his work on Grice's analysis of utterance meaning (Kauffeld 2009). In broad outline, by apostrophizing, a speaker manifestly undertakes risks which, in turn, creates a reason for auditors to act on the speaker's words; and at the same time creates risks for auditors if they do not act on them and thus another reason for acting.

Normative pragmatic theories are distinct from other leading theories of argumentation in that no single purpose is inherent to its analytical methods. Normative pragmatic theories assume that arguing and the range of message design features that arguers deploy may be used not only or primarily to, say, resolve a difference of opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004) or induce justified belief, action, or persuasion (Johnson and Blair 2006). Researchers building normative pragmatic theories identify purposes based on the situation and on what actors involved in the situation say—perhaps openly, perhaps implicitly. Analyzing discourse as a critical discussion or in premise-conclusion form is appropriate for explaining how discourse is designed to resolve a difference of opinion or justify belief or action; but these analytical methods are not well-suited to explaining how speakers design discourse to pressure even reluctant auditors to act in other ways. For example, speakers may design messages to pressure auditors to tentatively consider a proposal (Kauffeld 1998), defer to an authority (Goodwin 2001), re-open discussion of an issue that auditors presume has been decided (Jacobs 2000), and more.

Researchers have claimed that apostrophe performs various functions. For example, one researcher lists “rhetorical functions” performed by apostrophe in a particular “intellectual milieu” (Short 2002: 770) including giving imaginative presence, communicating heightened emotion, humanizing nature, creating temporal immediacy, breaking down barriers between public and private by creating ostensibly intimate communication intended to be overheard, implying a motive or context, and anticipating and thus shaping reader response (Short 2002: 770f.). Another identifies what may be described as an aesthetic function: it “gives life and immediacy to language, but is also subject to abuse and open to parody” (Perrine 1986: 14). Others write about apostrophe in somewhat psychological terms: since apostrophe is a turning away, it “arouses the incidental, the other” (Sutton and Mifsud 2002: 30); it “invites us to encounter the other not by way of conclusion but by way of introduction” and “the tone is celebratory” due to “recognition of the other as an object of love and the self as distinct from the unary subject” (Sutton and Mifsud 2002: 43). One properly argumentative function that it may serve is managing probative obligations, and in particular evading obligations to answer objections and respond to demands for conclusive proof (Kauffeld 2009: 252).

It is not possible to specify in advance all uses to which arguers may put apostrophe; but by examining noteworthy cases it is possible to see a range of uses of apostrophe and, more generally, a range of strategies arguers may bring to bear in situations

and a range of reasons why they may do so--why they may reasonably expect them to work. In the following analysis I explain why arguers may use apostrophe to pressure auditors to tentatively consider a reasonable case.

3. ARGUING BY APOSTROPHIZING

One well-known instance of apostrophizing in United States civic discourse is the second section of Abraham Lincoln's 1860 Cooper Union Address in New York City. Lincoln was seeking the Republican nomination for President of the United States but was not well known in the eastern United States and did not look the presidential part. This remark about Lincoln's appearance by one of his contemporaries is typical: "Old fellow, you won't do; it's all very well for the Wild West, but this will never go down in New York!" (Holzer 2004: 109). The leading contender for the nomination was William Seward. However, some Republicans did not think Seward would be able to win key conservative, northern states that bordered southern slave states, because remarks in speeches such as a statement that there was an "irrepressible conflict" between free and slave labor systems lead some to believe he was too radical. In fact, Southern politicians and Democrats in the North blamed Seward's speech for inciting John Brown's raid at Harper's Ferry (D. Goodwin 2005: 227-239). Thus Lincoln would need to not only voice moderate Republican principles but also do so in a way that avoided charges of aggravating partisan rancor or inciting violence or disunion; such charges would give border states reason to vote against him in a presidential election.

Historians and critics have described Lincoln's apostrophe to the people of the South as performing a variety of functions. For example, one historian has described it as a conciliatory move—an attempt by Lincoln

to cut through the rancor of the embattled factions by speaking directly to the Southern people. ... [H]e hoped the fear and animosity of slaveholders might be assuaged if they understood that the Republicans desired only a return to the 'old policy of the fathers,' so 'the peace of the old times' could once more be established. (Goodwin 2005: 231).

I think the weight of evidence is on the side of scholars who hold that Lincoln's apostrophe addresses Republicans—that Lincoln is not disingenuous when he says he supposes the people of the South will not listen to him even if directly addressed. One proponent of this position asserts that the apostrophe "is an elaborate attempt to ingratiate himself with his Northern audiences by rallying them around rational, unifying sentiments that the South *should* entertain if only they were only reasonable on the issue of slavery, and believed what the 'fathers' really intended" (Holzer 2004: 132), and that this section of the speech "can only be meant to inspire, perhaps even incite, Republicans in the North" (Holzer 2004: 136). Other critics describe apostrophe as a strategy for creating identification with his Republican audience; Lincoln enacts "a mock debate between Republicans and the South, a debate in which he becomes spokesman for the party. In this role, Lincoln can strengthen the identification between himself and the available Republican audience" (Leff and Mohrmann 1974: 353; see also Briggs 2005: 254).

In the analysis that follows I focus on the argumentative task of pressuring even reluctant auditors to tentatively consider Lincoln's potential candidacy for U.S. President. Lincoln apostrophizes to manifest the norm of tentatively considering a reasonable case

and in doing so pressures auditors to adhere to it—to seriously consider his merits as a candidate. In what follows I first explain how Lincoln uses apostrophe to manifest responsible advocacy in three respects: meeting probative obligations, adhering to accepted procedures, and sounding appropriate emotions and tones. Making manifest that his own serious consideration of opponents’ charges against Republicans—even if those charges at first glance sound irresponsible—is reasonable creates reasons for auditors to seriously consider Lincoln’s candidacy.

3.1 Manifesting responsible advocacy

Consider how Lincoln designs the first point of the apostrophe section. This passage is representative of Lincoln’s strategy of manifesting and discharging various kinds of obligations throughout the speech. I quote it at length to show how Lincoln manifests responsible advocacy. Lincoln begins:

You consider yourselves a reasonable and a just people; and I consider that in the general qualities of reason and justice you are not inferior to any other people. Still, when you speak of us Republicans, you do so only to denounce us as reptiles, or, at the best, as no better than outlaws. You will grant a hearing to pirates or murderers, but nothing like it to ‘Black Republicans.’ (Holzer 2004: 267)

One transcriber reports that laughter followed. Lincoln continues with another line about the South calling Republicans “Black Republicans,” and a transcriber reports that this also inspires laughter. Lincoln then continues:

Indeed, such condemnation of us seems to be an indispensable prerequisite—license, so to speak—among you to be admitted or permitted to speak at all. Now, can you, or not, be prevailed upon to pause and to consider whether this is quite just to us, or even to yourselves? Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient long enough to hear us deny or justify. (Holzer 2004: 267)

Following this first point, Lincoln takes up other charges leveled against Republicans, including claims that Republicans are sectional, revolutionary, make the slavery question prominent, and cause insurrections. The strategies that I will now analyze in this passage are ones Lincoln uses to address the other points as well.

First, Lincoln undertakes and discharges probative obligations. He considers the position that the people of the South consider themselves “a reasonable and a just people” and then provides reasons for believing that they are not reasonable by asserting that when they speak of Republicans, they do so only to denounce Republicans as reptiles or outlaws. In doing so, and second, Lincoln undertakes and discharges a procedural obligation to argue rather than denounce. Rather than denounce the people of the South, he asserts that he considers “in the general qualities of reason and justice you are not inferior to any other people.” Lincoln closes the passage with a call to “Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient long enough to hear us deny or justify,” and thus makes manifest a procedural obligation which he discharges as the apostrophe continues.

Third, Lincoln undertakes and discharges an obligation to advocate with appropriate emotions and tones. Lincoln does not address the people of the South in an angry or self-righteous manner. Instead, he puts himself on a level with the people of the South.

Consider Lincoln's line that the people of the South "will grant a hearing to pirates or murderers, but nothing like it to 'Black Republicans.'" Addressees who "get" the humor share the assumption that name-calling is inappropriate in civic discourse and see that Lincoln plays with their expectations for responsible advocacy by asserting with exaggeration that the people of the South will grant a hearing to pirates and murderers. Lincoln thus puts himself on a level with the people of the South; the humor comes at both their and his expense. It is not designed for the people of the South; "getting" the humor also depends on the assumption that Republicans do not deserve the name "Black Republicanism," and this is almost certainly not shared by the people of the South who Lincoln purports to address. It is designed for Republicans to see that he sees that they see his capacity to argue for principles while avoiding charges of fanaticism, inciting violence, and exacerbating conflict.

Undertaking and discharging various kinds of obligations pressures auditors to give tentative, serious consideration to Lincoln's candidacy. By making various kinds of obligations manifest, Lincoln makes both himself and auditors accountable for understanding and adhering to them. By stating them, Lincoln constrains auditors' ability to say they did not know such obligations existed or were applicable in the situation; other things being equal, doing so would be a fallible sign that they were not following the speech or line of thought and therefore open them to criticism for poor citizenship. The risk is serious in the case of the Cooper Union Address given that responsible advocacy is a live issue in the political campaign and culture more broadly. The risk of criticism created by Lincoln making obligations manifest is a reason for even reluctant auditors to give his candidacy serious consideration, because giving it serious consideration enables them to avoid the risk. At the same time, by making these obligations manifest, Lincoln undertakes a risk of criticism for his own performance; if he fails to discharge the obligations he undertakes, then he is subject to criticism for irresponsible advocacy. Auditors see Lincoln undertaking this risk, and Lincoln makes it known to auditors that he sees them see him undertaking this risk, and this in turn creates an additional reason for auditors to give Lincoln's merits as a candidate serious consideration.

So far I have made a case that Lincoln makes manifest a range of obligations that ought to be undertaken and discharged by responsible advocates and explained how this strategy is designed to work to pressure even reluctant auditors to give tentative, serious consideration to a reasonable case. Now I explain apostrophizing.

3.2 Apostrophizing

There is any number of ways that speakers may undertake and discharge various kinds of obligations, but one conspicuous design strategy that Lincoln uses is apostrophe. I hold that Lincoln does so for strategic reasons based on the facts that he uses it to present a significant portion of the Cooper Union Address and that Lincoln was foremost a politician aiming for victory—not a prose stylist interested in stylistic flourishes for their own sake. How is apostrophe designed to pressure even reluctant auditors to tentatively consider his potential to serve as the Republican candidate for U.S. President?

At the core of Lincoln's case for candidacy is how he would make a case for Republican principles in a manner that would be acceptable to border state voters—that would make it difficult for opponents to charge him with exacerbating conflict and inciting violence and disunion. Lincoln states moderate Republican principles when he as-

serts, for example, that "Wrong as we think slavery is, we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, because that much is due to the necessity arising from its actual presence in the nation" (Holzer 2004: 283). But there are two reasons why it would not be enough to state that he would advocate in a reasonable manner such that he could not be charged with exacerbating conflict and inciting violence and disunion. First, Lincoln is a relative unknown, so his talk is relatively cheap. Second, what counts as rancor or inciting may be ambiguous. Like other norms of argumentation, these are to some degree context-dependent. Lincoln addresses these circumstances by apostrophizing.

By apostrophizing—by displaying how he would address people of the South—Lincoln undertakes an obligation to do just that in the future. Simply asserting that he pledges to address them appropriately—take their charges seriously, provide evidence, avoid self-righteousness, and so on—would not constrain reluctant auditors from saying they are not convinced that he would do so; Lincoln is relatively unknown, and it is not unreasonable to display skepticism about an unknown person's words, particularly a politician's. Apostrophizing shows that Lincoln can in fact take charges seriously, provide evidence, avoid self-righteousness, and so on, and thus creates a reason to attend to his candidacy. Reluctant auditors cannot easily dismiss his candidacy on the grounds that he does not have appropriate positions or campaign skills without risking criticism to themselves for failing to see the propriety of his positions and skills.

Again, though, since Lincoln is a relative unknown, it would still be possible for reluctant auditors to say that Lincoln may be able to deliver an appropriate speech to the party faithful; but in a high-stakes political campaign to a broader, adversarial public he may change his tone. Apostrophe is a way that Lincoln can provide a guarantee to reluctant auditors that he would handle opponents appropriately—just as he does in the Cooper Union Address. Apostrophizing the South constrains Lincoln's ability to depart from the style and substance without risking criticism for changing his tone. Lincoln thus explicitly undertakes a risk of criticism, and thus creates an additional reason for even reluctant auditors to attend to his candidacy.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Rather than use apostrophe to evade probative obligations, Lincoln uses apostrophe to undertake and discharge a variety of obligations. This creates reasons for auditors to give serious consideration to his candidacy for the Republican nominee for United States President, because it generates risks of criticism to auditors for not giving serious consideration to what is manifestly responsible advocacy; and it generates risks of criticism to Lincoln for irresponsible advocacy or for changing his tone in the campaign that follows.

In addition to explaining how apostrophizing works in Lincoln's Cooper Union Address, the analysis points to benefits of attending to specific purposes arguers may have in particular situations. Normative pragmatic theories provide rationales for why arguers who may not aim to resolve a difference of opinion or induce justified belief, for example, may reasonably expect their words to accomplish other properly argumentative purposes even with reluctant auditors.

ARGUING BY APOSTROPHIZING

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Commentary on “ARGUING BY APOSTROPHIZING” by Beth Innocenti

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1. INTRODUCTION

Professor Innocenti’s paper offers a splendid case study on the use of apostrophe in a famous text from American civic oratory. She very convincingly shows how Abraham Lincoln strategically employs a seemingly merely rhetorical device in his Cooper Union Address in order to achieve a very special aim.

I have only three brief remarks, the first of which will concern the concept of normative pragmatics, the second will be on the figure of apostrophe and its functions, and the third will address Lincoln’s strategy in that passage of the Cooper Union Address.

2. WHAT DOES NORMATIVE PRAGMATICS MEAN?

At the outset of her paper, Professor Innocenti explicitly declares (p. 1) that she will use “normative pragmatic theory” for her analysis of Lincoln’s speech. Yet “normative pragmatics” is a rather ill-defined term that is not necessarily comprehensible without precise definition. As far as I know, the term was first introduced in argument studies by Frans van Eemeren in an attempt to bring together the normative and the descriptive aspect in speech act theory as a basis for the concept of Pragma-Dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 18)—“pragmatics” representing the descriptive part—, or to describe the “convergence of normative idealization and empirical description” in argument studies (van Eemeren 1990: 38), in other words, the linking of “the normative and the descriptive dimensions” (38). It has also been used by the same author in later publications (e.g. van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 9-11), invariably in a sense that would suggest that it referred to a more generic theory, of which Pragma-Dialectics was a species.

But the label “normative pragmatics” has also been appropriated by other people for different purposes. As J.A. Blair has pointed out earlier (2006: 12), the analytical philosopher Robert Brandom, in *Making It Explicit*, also identifies his subject as normative pragmatics, intending to bring together the normative aspect of philosophy and the descriptive aspect of linguistics (1994: 3-66; 132-134; see Giovagnoli 2001). As Blair notes, van Eemeren’s and Brandom’s accounts are still compatible. In addition, any cursory web search yields that the label of normative pragmatics is a popular one in communication studies in general (see e.g. Agerri und Alonso 2005).

Yet Professor Innocenti uses the term in still another sense, which she adopts from earlier studies conducted by Fred Kauffeld (1998), Scott Jacobs (1998; 2000), and Jean Goodwin (2000; 2001), and which she has further developed herself in a series of

earlier papers (Manolescu 2004; 2005; 2006). As Blair notes, it seems that this theory of normative pragmatics is rather presented as an account of argumentation alternative to Pragma-Dialectics (2006: 12). Since Innocenti explains that the theory comprises “practical reasoning by speaker and auditors that explains or accounts for the force or pressure that compels auditors to act on a speaker’s words” (p. 2), it would seem to aim to bring in rhetorical features in addition to the dialectical elements in argumentation, that is, something quite similar to what the Pragma-Dialecticians themselves call strategic maneuvering (van Eemeren and Houtlosser 1999; 2002; 2006).

It may thus be somewhat hazardous to use the term “normative pragmatics” without explicit discussion of its various meanings and uses. One would have liked to hear more on the exact meaning of the concept as it is used or not used here, and how it relates to or is different from the pragma-dialectical concept of strategic maneuvering. In that respect, I guess I should have attended Beth Innocenti’s and Jean Goodwin’s joint pre-conference workshop on “why the force is with us”. Had I done so, maybe the insight would be with me.

3. APOSTROPHE

In rhetorical handbooks, apostrophe is usually categorized as a *figura sententiae*. In Heinrich Lausberg’s *Handbook* it is defined as a “‘turning away’ from the normal audience [...] and the addressing of another, second audience, surprisingly chosen by the speaker” (1998: 338). So far the definition is completely applicable to the Cooper Union apostrophe. Yet the definition in Lausberg continues: “This practice has an emotive [...] effect on the normal audience, since it is an expression, on the part of the speaker, of a pathos [...] which cannot be kept within the normal channels between speaker and audience; apostrophe is, so to speak, an emotional move of despair on the part of the speaker.” (1998: 338). This pathetic element, however, may seem doubtful in the case of the Cooper Union apostrophe. For in order to produce a pathetic effect, an apostrophe would normally have to be short and pungent (note that all the examples in Lausberg are short one-or-two-sentence apostrophes). In an apostrophe of that length, however, the pathetic effect will likely fizzle out. And it will be hard to see much of an “emotional move of despair” on Lincoln’s part.

In that respect, it may be disputable if that lengthy passage in the speech is really correctly described as an apostrophe. Leff and Mohrmann, in their analysis, call it a prosopoeia (1974: 352-353), surprisingly so at first sight, but not without reason. It should rather be called an auto-prosopoeia, though, or, even more precisely, an auto-ethopoeia (since the speaker is a living person, not an inanimate object). For what Lincoln actually does give is an imitation of the speech he himself *would* give if he were in that situation, a rehearsal of a real speech, as it were. Its truly intended audience, of course, are not the “Southern people” (who he supposes will not listen), but New York Republicans, whom he wants to learn how he *would* address the Southern people.

It may be asked if it would in any way impair Professor Innocenti’s argument if the passage were read as an ethopoeia. Ethopoeia is as good a figure of sentence as is apostrophe. The speech is pathetic, no doubt. But the pathos does not so much result from the apostrophe to the “Southern people” (who are never directly so addressed, but invariably just with a simple “you”) as it does from other rhetorical features such as repetitions,

humor etc. There can be no doubt, though, that the interpretation as an apostrophe would have better prospects to offer, given that it can really be extended to that length.

4. LINCOLN'S STRATEGY

Professor Innocenti has identified Lincoln's strategy in that speech as the undertaking and discharging of probative obligations, of the "procedural obligation to argue rather than denounce," and of the "obligation to advocate with appropriate emotions and tones" (p. 4), giving his argument greater persuasive force by undertaking certain risks that would make him lose face in the case of non-fulfillment, thus offering his own reputation as a bond for his statements. Lincoln's central concern, however, as Leff and Mohrmann observe, is "ingratiating" (1974: 348). What he needs to do is convince New Yorkers and Republicans that he is the best candidate to run for presidency, and that he can win.

One of the means he employs to that end is that lengthy address purportedly spoken to the "Southern people". That Lincoln had prepared this rhetorical tour de force very deliberately can be seen from the fact that he had practically rehearsed the trick five months earlier, in a speech he gave at Cincinnati, Ohio, on September 17, 1859, in the course of the so-called Lincoln-Douglas debates (see Leff and Mohrmann 1974: 352, note 33). Standing on the borderline to the slave state of Kentucky, he addressed a lengthy part of his speech to the Kentuckians, using partly the same arguments he was to use later at Cooper Union. This apostrophe even went on for so long that the audience got impatient and a voice was heard shouting: "Speak to Ohio men, and not to Kentuckians!", on which Lincoln retorted: "I beg permission to speak as I please." (Lincoln 1953: 445)

But what is the big difference between the Cincinnati speech and the Cooper Union Address? In Cincinnati, near the border to the South, he could at least uphold the fiction of really speaking to Kentuckians: "I should not wonder if there are some Kentuckians about this audience—we are close to Kentucky; and whether that be so or not, we are on elevated ground, and, by speaking distinctly, I should not wonder if some of the Kentuckians would hear me on the other side of the river." (Lincoln 1953: 440). But now in New York he is far from the Southern states. He cannot possibly make himself heard down there. Hence it is absolutely clear that the apostrophe cannot be addressed *but* to New Yorkers and Republicans. And this time, there are no reports of audience heckling, only of occasional laughter—and at passages where he himself wanted it to happen in support of his task. What had not worked overly well there, worked perfectly here.

5. CONCLUSION

These brief remarks were in no way meant to detract anything from Professor Innocenti's absolutely convincing arguments. They only try to make some minor additions or suggestions that might be considered so as to make the argument even more convincing, even though in this case it cannot be done by apostrophizing.

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