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When Friends Become Foes: Strategies and Features of Arguing

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ABSTRACT

This article will show that there are strategies and features present in arguing. This paper explores these aspects applying discourse analysis to the isolated data. The data are in the form of transcripts of arguing taken from the American TV Show *Euphoria* involving teenage characters with the exception of one adult character. They are then examined using conversational analysis and ethnographical analysis to explore that in addition to the intentions of arguing, background attributes of the conversation such as the participants' age, region, and relationship with each other can affect the word choice, sentence content, and sentence structure that are utilised in arguing.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Discourse analysis is a term that describes numerous approaches to analysing language with the purpose of uncovering information about the language use that would otherwise be invisible or overlooked (Debbagh, 2012; Urquiaga & Cruz, 2015), and one of the ways discourse analysis can be done is by using the conversational analysis approach. Conversational analysis studies patterns, procedures, and information from the act of talking (Goldkuhl, 2003; Speier, 1973). Conversational analysis is done with the assumption that every conversation is somewhat bound by talking patterns and procedures according to situational aspects such as culture, language, and psychology. Conversational analysis can also be applied to all types of conversations including arguing. Arguing is a conversational act involving

producing, rejecting, and countering arguments (Muntigl & Turnbull, 1998). This paper aims to explore the patterns that are present and normally adhered to in arguing. Face implications, language devices, and language choice are analysed to uncover these patterns. In addition, socio-cultural aspects will also be examined to conduct a more thorough analysis.

II. METHODS

Conversational analysis is done to examine the features of arguing. Excerpts of arguing are selected as the material for examination. The excerpts are taken from all of the acts of arguing that occurred in the first and second episode of the first season of the TV Show *Euphoria*, which is a show about how teenagers navigate through their high school life while struggling with the enticement of drugs

and relationships. The conversations are transcribed by the Euphoria Wiki and retrieved from the Euphoria Wiki. After the transcripts are isolated, the researcher conducts a micro-analysis by searching for clues that could reveal common strategies, features, or patterns used in arguing. These clues are obtained from both explicit and implicit language, or lack thereof. Following the micro-analytical approach, the researcher then conducts a macro-analysis by examining the socio-cultural context behind each conversation since culture, language, relationship status, and situation likely affects the course of each act of arguing. This is often also called an ethnographic analysis. Lastly, summaries are drawn to reiterate the findings of the analyses conducted.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Micro-Analytical Approach

The Use of Rhetorical Questions

Language devices are often used to support a point in a conversation even though its usage often makes sentences less direct or obvious. A language device that is very often used in arguing is rhetorical questions. Rhetorical questions are often asked as a way to stun or invalidate an opponent and reinforce the speaker's standpoint at the same time. People who are arguing also turn a real question into a rhetorical one by avoiding answering the question. A few examples can be seen in the following data:

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 1)

RUE: Dad's so fucking proud, Mom.

LESLIE: Oh, really?

RUE: Dad's so fucking proud.

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 2)

RUE: I don't want-I don't want you to fucking check on me, whether I'm fine or I'm not fine. What difference are you going to make? Are you going to give me a life advice? You gonna fucking help me?

LEXI: Well, you're one of my best friends.

RUE: Give me a fucking break. 'Cause we went to fucking pre-school together? That does not make us best fucking friends.

In the first excerpt, Leslie (turn 2) asks a rhetorical question which in turn has an invalidating effect toward Rue's previous statement.

In the second excerpt, Rue (turn 1 and 2) also asks rhetorical questions to both invalidate Lexi's standpoint in thinking they were friends, and to reinforce Rue's standpoint that they should no longer communicate with each other or become friends.

The Debate Between Arguments

The act of arguing will undoubtedly be filled with opposing arguments, since if there were no opposition, there would be no need for a debate of any kind. Regardless of whose argument is more correct, people who are arguing will try to make arguments that can reinforce their standpoints. A few examples can be seen in the following data:

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 1)

NATE: Well, no, you're not. Nobody that looks like you is minding their own fuckin' business. I know what you are. Yeah. Yeah, I see you. So what do you want? You want some, some fucking attention? 'Cause I'll give you some fucking attention. Yo, is anybody here friends with Jules? Anyone? Does anybody know who the fuck this bitch is? Somebody better speak up, or this bitch is gonna get fucked up. [Jules then wields a knife from nearby.]

NATE: Shit!

JULES: You wanna fucking hurt me?

NATE: No, I was fucking kidding!

JULES: Back the fuck up! What the fuck is your problem?

NATE: Put the fucking knife down, okay. It was a joke. It was a-

JULES: You wanna fucking hurt me?

NATE: No, no, no...

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 2)

LESLIE: You don't understand. This [referring to Rue's overdose] was the most frightening moment a mother could witness. And Gia...

Gia, who absolutely idolizes you...

RUE: I know, Mom.

LESLIE: To have her find you unconscious...

In the first excerpt, Nate tries to reason with Jules who was intent on threatening and possibly hurting him (turn 4 and 6). Nate argues that Jules should put down the knife in her hand because he did not mean to insult her or hurt her in the first place even though his previous statements and questions toward Jules prove the opposite. In the second excerpt, Leslie (turn 1 and 3) reasons to Rue that her overdose was a frightening thing for both her

and Gia, Rue's sister. This communicates to Rue that she should no longer argue with Leslie since her past experience is already a clear reason not to.

If You Still Can't Win, Make Them Lose

Instead

When a person fails to construct a valid or acceptable argument, or if their argument had somehow failed to accomplish the intended reaction, using insults, hurtful statements, or swear words is also a commonly used strategy to stun or hurt the opponent, or further emphasise and reinforce the speaker's standpoint.

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 1)

JULES: You have no fucking idea. See?

NATE: You're psycho!

(Euphoria Season 1 Episode 2)

RUE: You are so fucking stupid, Lexi.

LEXI: Why?

RUE: 'Cause I already flushed everything down the fucking toilet.

Before the lines in the first excerpt were said, Nate had failed to reason with Jules after speaking to her in a harsh and disrespectful way, prompting Jules to wield a knife and cut herself to show Nate that she was not afraid of hurting people, including herself. In the excerpt, realising that the fight between him and Jules had only gotten worse, Nate resorts to calling Jules a "psycho" (turn 2). Even though that did not help him gain face or strengthen his standpoint in any way, he had at least caused Jules to lose face (Irvine, 2017). Same with Rue in the second excerpt. Rue insults Lexi (turn 1) which merely causes Lexi to lose face and then uses the interjection "fucking" in turn 3 to merely create some form of emphasis on her statement.

Macro-Analytical/Ethnographic Approach

Other than analysing the speakers' words, analysing the aspects that exist between the lines can also provide useful information in understanding how conversations, including arguing, are constructed. Other than patterns in syntax and semantics, examining social conditions, culture, and relationship statuses can also help in uncovering details in regard to why speaker(s) choose to communicate the way they do (Altheide, 1987; Saville-Troike, 1997), even when the conversations are in the form of arguing.

The conversations that were selected and transcribed for the purpose of analysis all took place in a middle-class American society featuring mostly teenage characters, with the exception of Leslie, who is the mother of a teenage girl named Rue. This detail explains why most of the acts of arguing are packed with insults and swear words as interjections, since younger people tend to use slang expressions and slurs more often, especially when they are arguing (Aitchison, 2006; Stenström et al., 2002; Friedman, 2016). In addition, because the conversations occur in an American society, slangs and slurs such as "fuck" and "shit" are commonly used as interjections and emphasising devices, whereas if compared to the slangs and slurs of the language or culture of a different region such as Indonesian, different slang words with different meanings would be used instead. For example, "*babi*" meaning "pig" or "*anjing*" meaning "dog" would be used in place of "fuck" and "shit" in Indonesian arguments.

Additionally, in the TV show, Rue, Nate, Lexi, and Jules struggle, who are high-school students, against the lure of unhealthy relationships and drug use, which can be seen by how Leslie, and Lexi, a teen who is not an addict, are usually arguing with her daughter Rue about Rue's past overdose and drug-using tendencies. Almost all of Leslie and Lexi's acts of arguing against Rue are about Rue's addiction. Leslie, who is Rue's mother, and Lexi, who is Rue's childhood friend, have been in Rue's life for a long time, thus establishing their rapport and personal relationships. Thus, Leslie and Lexi constantly try to show their worry and anger toward Rue's drug use as an act of love by arguing (Dunn, 2006). On the other hand, Leslie and Lexi's disapproval toward Rue's addiction also explains why their conversations with Rue usually take on the form of confrontations or quarrels. Rue, on the other hand, often tries to defend herself by either making her opponent(s) lose face or invalidating their previous statements in a harsh way (Irvine, 2017)

IV. CONCLUSION

In the transcripts that have been examined, people who are arguing often display the use of some arguing strategies or features. The defence mechanism of leaving non-rhetorical questions unanswered, thus turning it into a rhetorical question, has been

observed in all of the excerpts of arguing used as material for analysis in this paper. Moreover, people will undoubtedly try to make valid arguments to either stun the opponent or reinforce the speaker's standpoint and gain face regardless of whether their argument is more factual. In addition, people will often make use of insults or words and phrases that can have a degrading effect in arguing since it can help the speaker reinforce their standpoint while causing their opponent to lose face. Lastly, by examining the selected conversation transcripts in relation to the socio-cultural background in which the conversations occurred, it can be concluded that discourse analysis can return more detailed and thorough results when text, in this case conversation transcripts, are examined between the lines. For example, by applying an ethnographic approach to the transcripts, it can be concluded that the word choices and sentence structures used in acts of arguing are influenced by the participants' relationship with each other and also the participants' age.

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