Fallacies: do we »employ« them or »commit« them? The Case of Discourse-Historical Approach[1]

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In this paper, I am looking at how fallacies are used in Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA from now on), a branch of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA from now on) that uses argumentation as one of its analytical tools. In view of this goal, I propose a rhetorical reading of Austin, an Austinian interpretation of Hamblin, and a hybrid Austino-Hamblinian perspective on fallacies (or what is considered to be fallacies).

I'll be asking three questions: what are fallacies? Are there obvious and unambiguous fallacies in natural languages? Aren't we forced to commit and live (in) fallacies? And, is it methodologically acceptable to use prefabricated lists of fallacies as an analytical tool in such a dynamical enterprise as (critical) discourse analysis?

J. L. Austin as rhetorician

J. L. Austin is usually considered to be the "father" of speech act theory, and the "inventor" of performativity. In a very general framework this is both true, but historically and epistemologically speaking there is a narrow and intricate correlation, as well as a deep rupture between the two theories.

Performativity came about as a result of Austin's deep dissatisfaction with classical philosophical (logical) division between statements that can be (and should be) either true or false (with no gradation in between), and only serve to describe the extra-linguistic reality (a division that implies another opposition between saying and doing *in* language and *with* language).

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Speech acts, on the other hand, came about as a result of Austin's dissatisfaction with his own performative/constative distinction, a distinction that placed on the one side the utterances with which we can do (perform) something (and are neither true nor false), and the utterances with which we can only describe what is already there (and can be either true or false). After a careful consideration of what could be the criteria of performativity in the first part of his lectures (that later became a book), in the second part Austin comes to a conclusion that not only performatives do something (with words), but also every utterance does something (with words). 'Something' implying: not just describing reality. But between the two poles of the lecture, the performative one and the speech acts one, there is an important (I'll call it rhetorical) transitional passage that is usually overlooked. Before I tackle the issue of how fallacies are used in DHA, I would like to start my general examination of fallacies here, with this passage.

> Can we be sure that stating truly is a different class of assessment from arguing soundly, advising well, judging fairly, and blaming justifiably? Do these not have something to do in complicated way with facts? /.../ Facts come in as well as our knowledge or opinion about facts. (Austin, 1980, p. 142)

There are two important epistemological innovations in this paragraph:

1) statements (stating truly) are given the same status as all other utterances we may produce;
2) facts are given the same status as (our, your, their...) knowledge of facts.

And here is Austin's rationale for this:

> Consider also for a moment whether the question of truth or falsity is so very objective. We ask: 'Is it a *fair* statement?', and are the *good reasons and good evidence* for stating and saying so very different from the good reasons and evidence for performative acts like arguing, warning, and judging? Is the constative, then, always true or false? When a constative is confronted with the facts, we in fact appraise it *in ways involving the employment of a vast array of terms*, which overlap with those that we use in the appraisal of performatives. *In real life, as opposed to the simple situations envisaged in logical theory, one cannot always answer in a simple manner whether it is true or false*[2]. (Austin, 1980, pp. 142-143)

2 All emphases throughout the text are mine - IŽŽ.

Truth and falsity therefore don't have objective criteria, but depend on "good reasons and good evidence" we have for stating something. And even then, we assess constatives employing "a vast array of terms", which should be understood as "not just whether they corresponds to facts or not". And Austin's conclusion concurs with Hamblin's (as we will see later): it is easy to say what is true or false in logic, it is much more complicated and less evident in everyday life and everyday language use.

Here are Austin' arguments for this 'relativization':

> Suppose that we confront 'France is hexagonal' with the facts, in this case, I suppose, with France, is it true or false? Well, if you like, *up to a point*; of course I can see what you mean by saying that *it is true for certain intents and purposes*. It is good enough for a top-ranking general, perhaps, but not for a geographer. 'Naturally it is pretty rough', we should say, 'and pretty good as a pretty rough statement'. But then someone says: 'But is it true or is it false? I don't mind whether it is rough or not; of course it's rough, but it has to be true or false, it's a statement, isn't it?' How can one answer this question, whether it is true or false that France is hexagonal? *It is just rough, and that is the right and final answer to the question of the relation of 'France is hexagonal' to France. It is a rough description; it is not a true or a false one.* (Austin, 1980, p. 143)

Statements/utterances can therefore not just be either true or false, there is (or at least should be) a gradation between what is false and what is true, between 0 and 1. What we say can be more or less true, true up to a (certain) point, or more precisely: true for certain intents and purposes. As 'France is hexagonal' is a rough description, so are 'France is a country of good wines', or 'France is a cheese country", for example. But these utterances are not true (or false) in any logical (or absolute) sense of the term: one must have good (specific) reasons and specific (appropriately oriented) intentions for uttering them.

Which brings us to an important part of this discussion, the question of *framing*.

> What is judged true in a schoolbook may not be so judged in a work of historical research. Consider the constative, 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma', remembering that Alma was a soldier's battle if ever there was one, and that Lord Raglan's orders were never transmitted to some of his subordinates. Did Lord Raglan then win the battle of Alma or did he not? Of course *in some contexts*, perhaps in a schoolbook, it is perfectly justifiable to say so--it is something of an exaggeration, maybe, and there would be no question of giving Raglan a medal for it. *As 'France is hexago-*

> *nal' is rough, so 'Lord Raglan won the battle of Alma' is exaggerated and suitable to some contexts and not to others; it would be pointless to insist on its truth or falsity.* (Austin, 1980, pp. 143-144)

What we say can therefore not only be more or less true, true up to a point, or true for certain intents and purposes, it can also be *true only in some contexts*, but not in others. And that is not all, Austin's relativization continues:

> Thirdly, let us consider the question whether it is true that all snow geese migrate to Labrador, given that perhaps one maimed one sometimes fails when migrating to get quite the whole way. Faced with such problems, many have claimed, with much justice, that utterances such as those beginning 'All...' are prescriptive definitions or advice to adopt a rule. But what rule? This idea arises partly through not understanding *the reference of such statements, which is limited to the known*; we cannot quite make the simple statement that the truth of statements depends on facts as distinct from knowledge of facts. Suppose that before Australia is discovered X says 'All swans are white'. If you later find a black swan in Australia, is X refuted? Is his statement false now?
>
> Not necessarily: he will take it back but he could say 'I wasn't talking about swans absolutely everywhere; for example, I was not making a statement about possible swans on Mars'. *Reference depends on knowledge at the time of utterance.* (Austin, 1980, p. 144)

If we sum up all these Austin's hedgings, we get the following:

1) what we say can only be *more or less true* (i.e. true up to a point),
2) it can only be true *for certain intents and purposes*,
3) it can only be true *in some contexts*, and
4) its truth (or falsity) *depends on knowledge at the time of utterance*.

This is a real rhetorical perspective on communication (truth, logic, and philosophy) that was very often overlooked, mostly at the expense of classificatory madness that started with J. R. Searle. What Austin is proposing is that - outside logic, in the real world, in everyday communication, where we don't go around with propositions in our pockets and truth tables in our hands - the truth or falsity of what we say be replaced by *right or proper things to say, in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions*. Such a proposal is very Protagorean in nature and does justice to the first three canons of rhetoric, or more appropriately to the *officia oratoris*, placing emphasis on *inventio* and *elocutio*.

I will claim that Hamblin followed the same enterprise 15 years later with his magnificent work *Fallacies* (2004). These two ground breaking works follow the same pattern, run parallel, and I will (hopefully) show why.

C. L. Hamblin's pragmatic perspective

1) In real life, as opposed to the simple situations envisaged in logical theory, one cannot always answer in a simple manner whether it is true or false.

> Within a *formal language* it is generally clear enough which arguments are formally valid; but an ordinary-language argument cannot be declared 'formally valid' or 'formally fallacious' until the language within which it is expressed is brought into relation with that of some logical system.' (Hamblin, 2004, p. 193)

The message of this passage is very clear: we can speak of formal validity (which includes truth and falsity, and, consequently, fallacies) only in formal systems (but Hamblin relativizes even that by saying "*generally* clear *enough*"), but not in "natural languages". If we want any kind of formal validity in natural languages, which wouldn't involve only *la langue* (language) in de Saussure's conceptualization, but also his *la parole* (speech, (everyday) communication) - we need to bring it into relation with a formal language of a logical system. This "bringing into relation" usually means: translating the very vast vocabulary (lexicon) of ordinary language, with its extremely ramified semantics and pragmatics, into a very limited vocabulary of formal language with its even more limited semantics.

And we can do so, Hamblin (2004, p. 213) argues, "only at the expense of features essential to natural language."

2) Reference depends on knowledge at the time of utterance.

> If the arguments we are discussing are arguments that John Smith produces within his own head and for his own edification, *the appraisal criteria will refer exclusively to what is known to John Smith*, in doubt to John Smith, and so on. However, the paradigm case of an argument is that in which it is produced *by* one person *to convince* another. (Hamblin, 2004, p. 239)

My interpretation of the above passage would be that there is no perennial and universal truth, and consequently, no perennial and universal truth-conditions or criteria. The truth is relative, but we shouldn't understand 'relative' as a trivial stereotype that everything changes and

everything can be different. 'Relative' should be understood more in its etymological sense, as a thing (concept, thought) having a relation to or being in a relation to another thing (concept, thought). In this particular relation (say, X to Y), the truth is seen as such and such; in some other relation (say, X to Z), the truth me be different (i.e. may be seen differently).

3) Right or proper things to say in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions.

> 'What good reasons various people may have for accepting various statements and procedures are, no doubt, themselves sometimes relevant to the worth of argument erected on them; but, if we are to draw the line anywhere, *acceptance by person the argument is aimed at* – the person for whom the argument is an argument – *is the appropriate basis of a set of criteria.*' (Hamblin, 2004, p. 242)

There are no universal arguments or universal criteria for what an argument should look like to be (seen as) an argument. An argument should be adopted and/or constructed *relative to the (particular) circumstances and the (particular) audience*, as well as *to the purposes and intentions we, as arguers, have*. Consequently, there can be no universal fallacies, general fallacies, lists of fallacies, or universal criteria for what is a fallacy in everyday communication (persuasion and argumentation).

4) Argumentation/persuasion has no necessary link with truth or falsity.

> 'We must distinguish the different possible purposes a practical argument may have. Let us suppose, first, that *A* wishes to convince *B* of *T*, and discovers that *B* already accepts *S*: *A* can argue '*S*, therefore *T*' independently of whether *S* and *T* are really true. *Judged by B's standards*, this is a good argument and, *if A is arguing with B and has any notion at all of winning, he will have to start from something B will accept.* The same point applies to the inference-procedure. One of the purposes of argument, whether we like it or not, is to convince, and our criteria would be less than adequate if they had nothing to say about how well an argument may meet this purpose.' (Hamblin, 2004, p. 241)

This is a kind of a corollary to the previous point (point 3): not only do we have to rely on arguments that are acceptable by the person the argument is aimed at, we have to use these arguments (at least as our starting points), even if we are not sure whether they are true or false, good or bad.

This quote also openly exposes and emphasizes one of the facets of arguments that is too often timidly held in the shade by (some) argumentation theorists: one of the purposes of argument *is to convince*, not just

to present a good, solid, valid "evidence". And in his plea for conviction, Hamblin even goes a step further, for some argumentation theorists maybe even over the edge:

> 5) 'Conviction, of course, may be secured by threat, water torture or hypnotism instead of by argument, and it is possible that Logic should have nothing to say about these means; but we can hardly claim that an argument is not an argument because it proceeds *ex concesso*, or that such arguments have no rational criteria of worth.' (Hamblin, 2004, p. 241)

Threat, water torture or hypnotism (we could add more) would be, no doubt, judged as fallacious means of securing conviction by standard, mainstream theories of argumentation (if there is any such thing). But Hamblin's point is worth some consideration: these means of conviction are nevertheless arguments, they may not be rational arguments, but there may be rational criteria for using them (in particular circumstances).

Troubles with fallacies

In this light, Hamblin's claim from the beginning of the book that there has never yet been *a book* on fallacies becomes more understandable: Arthur Schopenhauer's *Art of Controversy* is, in his opinion, too short, Jeremy Bentham's *Book of Fallacies* is too specialized, the medieval treatises are mostly commentaries on Aristotle, and Aristotle's *Sophistical Refutations* are, in Hamblin's view, "just the ninth book of his *Topics*" (Hamblin, 2004, p. 11).

So the state of the art would be that nobody is particularly satisfied with this corner of logic (logic, not language (use)), concludes Hamblin.

And, there may be a (good) reason for that. Even if in almost every account from Aristotle onwards we can read that a fallacious argument is one that *seems to be valid*, but it *is not*, it is rather often argued that it is impossible to classify fallacies at all (and I have just presented Hamblin's own contribution(s) to this impossibility). Hamblin himself quotes De Morgan (1847, cited in Hamblin, 2004, p. 276): "There *is* no such thing as a classification of the ways in which men may arrive at an error: it is much to be doubted whether there ever *can be*." And Joseph (1906, cited in Hamblin, 2004, p. 569): "Truth may have its norms, but error is infinite in its aberrations, and cannot be digested in any classification." And Cohen & Nagel (1934, cited in Hamblin, 2004, p. 382): "It would be impossible to enumerate all the abuses of logical principles occurring in the diverse matters in which men are interested."

On the other hand, it seems that certain fallacies are unavoidable, which raises the question whether they are fallacies at all (and even much

more important ones: how to classify fallacies? Are there any stable criteria for detecting fallacies? All the way to the obvious one: do fallacies exist at all?.

Already Port Royal Logic (Arnauld and Nicole) (1662, cited in Hamblin, 2004, p. 264) warns:

> Finally, we reason sophistically when we draw a general conclusion from an incomplete induction. When from the examination of *many particular* instances we conclude to a general statement, we have made an induction. After the waters of *many seas* have been found salty and the waters of *many rivers* found fresh, we can conclude that sea water is salty but river water is fresh ... It is enough to say here that imperfect inductions - that is *inductions based on examination of fewer than all instances* - often lead us to error.

While David Hume, a century later (1748), is quite unambiguous: *every* argument from particular cases to a general rule must be fallacious.

Hamblin, 200 years after Hume, opens a new perspective on this problem: if some fallacies seem to be omnipresent and unavoidable, maybe we shouldn't treat them as fallacies: "... Fallacy of *Secundum Quid* [hasty generalization] is an ever-present and unavoidable possibility in practical situations, and any formal system that avoids it can do so only at the expense of features essential to natural language." (Hamblin, 2004, p. 213) *Ignoratio Elenchi* [ignoring the issue, irrelevant conclusion] is another fallacy of this kind. Hamblin (2004, p. 31) argues:

> 'This category can be stretched to cover virtually every kind of fallacy. If an arguer argues for a certain conclusion while falsely believing or suggesting that a different conclusion is established, one for which the first conclusion is irrelevant, then the arguer commits the fallacy of irrelevant conclusion. The premises miss the point.'

Secundum Quid, for example, could thus be just an instance of *Ignoratio Elenchi*.

Begging the question [petitio principii, circular reasoning] fits in the same category; already J.S. Mill (in his System of Logic, 1843) claims that all valid reasoning commits this fallacy. While Cohen & Nagel (1934, cited in Hamblin, 2004, p. 35) substantiate (and this passage is crucial for the understanding of fallacies):

> 'There is a sense in which all science is circular, for *all proof rests upon assumptions which are not derived from others but are justified by the set of consequences which are deduced from them*...

> But there is a difference between a circle consisting of a small number of propositions, from which we can escape by denying them all, or setting up their contradictories, and the circle of theoretical science and human observation, which is so wide that we cannot set up any alternative to it.'

A possible conclusion we could draw from Cohen & Nagel: on the micro-level, we can fuss about small things, everyday conversation and practical situations, and pass our time in inventing numerous fallacies, but on the macro-level, when it comes to big things (the big picture), fallacies are not objectionable any more - because there is no alternative. A problem that is very similar to Gödel's (first) incompleteness theorem (Kleene, 1967, p. 250):

> 'Any effectively generated theory capable of expressing elementary arithmetic cannot be both consistent and complete. In particular, for any consistent, effectively generated formal theory that proves certain basic arithmetic truths, there is an arithmetical statement that is true, but not provable in the theory.'

This theorem was designed to prove inherent limitations (incompleteness) for axiomatic systems for mathematics, but what Cohen and Nagel are claiming is, *mutatis mutandis*, an application of Gödel's (first) incompleteness theorem to possible theories of fallacies.

Replacing analysis with lists of fallacies: the case of CDA

All the epistemological and methodological objections, ambiguities and *caveats* on one side, as well as the practical, empirical multiplications of fallacies and their overlapping on the other, make the study of fallacies a thriving enterprise, a field of its own and *in its own right*. But, can we use fallacies, i.e. lists of fallacies, extracted and generalized from one of the theories that (among other things) deal with fallacies, as a ready-made, instant analytical tool in another theoretical enterprise with different epistemological foundations? For instance, can discourse analysis, with its inherently dynamic approach to language use, use fixed lists of fallacies as an analytical tool with any explanatory force at all?

In the second part of this paper, I would like to focus on one of these theories, a Critical Discourse Analysis, more precisely on Ruth Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (the other 'branches' of CDA don't use fallacies as one of their analytical tool).

But first, a (very) short historical background may be in order. CDA is usually associated with names such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, Teun van Dijk, Paul Chilton, Guenther Kress, Michael Billig and Theo van Leuween (to name just a few). Their work is based on 'critical linguis-

tics' that mostly started at the University of East Anglia in the 1970s (and was associated with the names of Robert Hodge, Roger Fowler and Guenther Kress), while the work of these critical linguists was based on the systemic-functional and social-semiotic linguistics of Michael Halliday; Halliday's approach is still crucial to CDA.

In Ruth Wodak's words (1997, p.173) CDA

> studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction, which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed.

Or with the words of Jan Blommaert (2005, p. 25), CDA's sympathizer, but also a harsh critic:

> CDA focuses its critique on the intersection of language/discourse/speech and social structure. It is uncovering ways in which social structure relates to discourse patterns (in the form of power relations, ideological effects, and so forth), and in treating these relations as problematic, that researchers in CDA situate the critical dimension of their work. It is not enough to uncover the social dimension of language use. These dimensions are the object of moral and political evaluation, and analysing them should have effects in society: empowering the powerless, giving voices to the voiceless, exposing power abuse, and mobilising people to remedy social wrong.

DHA and the (mis)use of argumentation

Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl initialized their own 'school' of CDA, called Discourse-Historical Approach, DHA (see Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart, 1999; Wodak and van Dijk, 2000; Wodak and Chilton, 2005; Wodak and Meyer, 2006; Wodak, 2009). Its programmatic view and its shortcomings, especially when using argumentation in their analyses, can be found in my analyses of DHA's (mis)use of topoi (Žagar 2010, 2011), as well as in Fairclough & Fairclough (2011, pp. 243-268). These were, however, not the only criticisms raised against CDA: in the late nineties, Widdowson (1995, 1996, 1998) warned against the conceptual vagueness in CDA approach, as well as against blurring the distinctions between disciplines and methodologies, while Slembrouck (2001) is questioning the explanatory power of CDA's approach. All these reproaches could also be addressed to DHA's unsystematic appropriation of (selected) argumentative features from different (sometimes incompatible) theories and approaches (see Žagar 2010, pp. 13-20).

The work of reference for DHA is the book *Discourse and Discrimination* (*D&D* from now on), authored by Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak in 2001 (Routledge). I say the work of reference, because it is the only book in the DHA tradition that gives any substantial overview of the theoretical approaches and concepts from argumentation theories DHA is using. All the subsequent works would just quote the "theoretical" part of *Discourse and Discrimination*, while these quotes would usually get shorter and shorter (as will become obvious from our analysis) and less and less informative.

Here is the passage that introduces fallacies in *D&D*:

> If one wants to analyse the persuasive, manipulative, discursive legitimation of racist, ethnicist, nationalist, sexist and other forms of discrimination and the pseudo-argumentative backing and strengthening of negative, discriminatory prejudices, one encounters many *violations of these ten rules*. In rhetoric and argumentation theory, *these violations* are called 'fallacies' (among many others see Kienpointner 1996, van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Kruiger 1987: 78- 94, van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992, Lamham 1991: 77ff., Ulrich 1992). (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001, p. 71)

The "violations of these ten rules" refer to pragma-dialectical ten rules for critical discussion that Reisigl and Wodak introduce on the previous page. But "violations of these ten rules" (that should be observed in every form of discussion whose aim is to resolve the difference of opinion in a rational way by means of critical discussion) are called fallacies *only* in pragma-dialectics, not in rhetoric and argumentation theory in general. In rhetoric and argumentation theory there are many different approaches to fallacies that don't even mention those ten rules of critical discussion, even theories that are unfamiliar with those ten rules or refuse to use them.

Another problem for this hasty DHA definition arises if we confront it with a definition from pragma-dialectics itself:

> In the pragma-dialectical approach, a fallacy is defined as *a speech act that counts as a violation of one or more of the rules for critical discussion*, which impedes the resolution of a difference of opinion. *Fallacies are conceived and analyzed from the same view as Aristotle originally approached them: The dialectical perspective* [my emphases]. They are incorrect, unreasonable moves in a debate or in discussion in which (at least) two parties participate.' (van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels, 2009, p. 20)

In pragma-dialectics, fallacies are conceived and analyzed from the dialectical perspective: they are incorrect, unreasonable moves *in a debate*

or in a discussion. In other words, we have to have a close look at a particular debate, and than decide whether any fallacies were committed (or even set up). In DHA, on the contrary, *a list* of 14 fallacies is constructed (at least in *D&D*, pp. 71-74), with short descriptions and even shorter examples (or even without them), while on the following 200 pages occasional references would be made to this list, without any analysis or justification why the analysed examples (mostly taken from the press) represent any of the 14 fallacies listed (on pages 71-74), and the ten rules for critical discussion would never be mentioned again. This is the very same way DHA deals with *topoi* (see Žagar, 2010, pp. 5-13).

Eight years later, in Wodak's *The Discourse of Politics in Action* (2009, pp. 43-45), we get the following definition of fallacies:

> Reisigl and Wodak (2001) also draw on van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) and Kienpointner (1996) when providing *the list of general common fallacies*, which includes the following *very frequently employed argumentative devices*: *argumentum ad baculum*, i.e. 'threatening with the stick', thus trying to intimidate instead of using plausible arguments; the *argumentum ad hominem*, which can be defined as a verbal attack on the antagonist's personality and character ... instead of discussing the content of an argument; *the fallacy of hasty generalization*, when making generalizations about characteristics attributed to a group without any evidence; and finally, the *argumentum ad populum* or *pathetic fallacy*, which consists of appealing to prejudiced emotions, opinions and convictions of a specific social group or to the *vox populi* instead of employing rational arguments.'

An attentive reader has no doubt noticed that the list of references got shorter, that the list of 14 fallacies from *D&D* got a new denomination: "general common fallacies" (without any explanation how "general common" is defined, or what constitutes "general common" fallacies in relation to less "general common" fallacies), and that within these "general common fallacies" an even narrower list of four "very frequently employed" fallacies was constructed. It is just these four fallacies that are used in the analyses that follow, and I would like to point out a few exemplary cases.

Fallacies in the discourse of politics in action

The Discourse of Politics in Action - Politics as Usual is a book about European politics, more precisely, about how politics is done - in all possible details - in the European parliament. In her own words, Wodak (2009, p. xii) wanted to

> find out 'how politics is done', 'what politicians actually do', and 'what the media convey about how politics is done'. Moreover, I also wanted to probe the implications of the public's lack of knowledge about the behind-the scenes reality of 'politics as usual' in an era of politics that many characterize in terms of an increasing and widespread disenchantment with politics, depoliticization and the so-called 'democratic deficit'.

In chapter 4, "On being European", Wodak examines the discursive construction of MEP's identities[3] by analysing the responses of MEPs to questions about whether they see themselves as European or not.

Here is one of her conclusions about these interviews:

> In contrast to the European Commission officials who tended to speak of themselves in terms of 'we', referring to the Commission, and equating this with the European Union, the MEP's constructed and performed numerous identities, both professional and personal (Wodak, 2004b).
>
> [Different identities are enumerated - IŽŽ]
>
> Many of these 'presentations of self' manifest themselves in brief personal anecdotes or longer narratives, *used as argumentum ad exemplum, i.e. one generalizable incident; this could also be analysed as employing the fallacy of hasty generalization*.' (Wodak, 2009, p. 99)

Wodak doesn't present any concrete data, not even an example on which the above claims would be based. But if there is no data, no analysis can be performed. And if data as well as the analysis of these hypothetical data are missing, it is impossible to judge whether we (the readers) are dealing with fallacies or not. In this respect, it is crucial to remember what Hamblin (2004, p. 224) keeps emphasizing:

> *A fallacy is a fallacious argument*. Someone who merely makes false statement, however absurd, is innocent of fallacy unless the statements constitute or express an argument.

What Wodak does offer is a short summary that many of these "'presentations of self' manifest themselves in brief personal anecdotes or longer narratives, *used as argumentum ad exemplum, i.e. one generalizable incident*".

Is there any other way of presenting oneself in an interview than brief personal anecdotes or longer narratives? It is quite a mystery why Wodak labels these presentations of self, be it personal anecdotes or longer narratives, as *argumentum ad exemplum*; a classical definition of *argumen-*

3 MEP is an acronym for a Member of European Parliament.

tum ad exemplum would be "arguing against a particular example cited rather than the question itself", but in this case, we don't have an example and there is certainly no question (except the one Wodak reports asking). She goes on by paraphrasing(?)/explaining(?) *argumentum ad exemplum* as "one generalizable incident". If we set aside that she is using wrong classification (i.e. definition) and that she is obviously not familiar with the standard terminology in rhetoric and argumentation (fallacy research included), one could wonder why a presentation of self would be described as a "generalizable event"? If somebody is presenting herself, why should that personal presentation be generalizable to others? Wodak doesn't say, but she does claim that this *argumentum ad exemplum* (which, as we have seen, is not an *argumentum ad exemplum*), i.e. one generalizable incident (which, again, is not generalizable), "could also be analysed as *employing* the *fallacy of hasty generalization*".

We are encountering two problems here:

1) Wodak claims that this non-existing *argumentum ad exemplum* could be analysed as the *fallacy of hasty generalization*;
2) she further claims that this non-existing *argumentum ad exemplum* could be analysed as *employing* the *fallacy of hasty generalization*.

A few critical remarks are in order here:

Ad 1) Once more, I would like to quote Hamblin (2004, p. 213): "... Fallacy of *Secundum Quid* is an *ever-present and unavoidable possibility in practical situations*, and any formal system that avoids it can do so only at the expense of features essential to natural language."

But let alone Hamblin's *caveat*, Wodak would first have to show that these individual self-presentations were not presented as presentations of self, but as events (she calls them 'incidents') that could be generalized, that usually are generalized, i.e. as instances of a more general pattern. But she doesn't, she doesn't even present the "examples" she is talking about.

Ad 2) Wodak further claims that these un-existing *argumenta ad exempla* could be analysed as *'employing the fallacy of hasty generalization'*. 'Employing' clearly implies that something was done intentionally, with a purpose of achieving a certain goal. In Wodak's case this goal seems to be to deliberately create (later on, Wodak even uses a much stronger term, i.e. 'setting up a fallacy') a fallacy. Which raises an important epistemological as well as methodological question: do we *commit* fallacies (with a technical meaning: producing/coming up with/perpetrating a fallacy *without knowing* that it was a fallacy; I am not claiming here that the English verb 'to commit' is restricted to this meaning, I am just using it in or-

der to point to a dichotomy and construct an opposition), or do we *employ* them, even *set them up*?

The answer is easy with witless examples like: 'Everything that runs has feet; the river runs: therefore, the river has feet'; it is obvious that they were set up with a certain goal or intention (namely, to mislead an opponent). But what about the ever-present 'fallacies' like hasty generalizations? As Hamblin pointed out, they are unavoidable, that is the way we reason all the time because in everyday life we have no alternative: we usually simply can't take into consideration all the instances of a particular case, because it is (and it would be) impossible: the economy of time and space don't allow us such an commodity. In everyday life, we usually make our decisions on a limited number of examples, even on examples or experiences we don't have direct access to (we were just told about them). Does that mean that we are committing(?)/employing(?) fallacies all the time, that we are talking and living (in) fallacies?

Let us proceed with Wodak's reasoning. What follows the above mentioned quote is the analysis of excerpts of different interviews:

> Just before this excerpt begins, MEP 3 and the interviewer have been talking about the kind of contact MEPs have (or believe they should have) with their constituencies. In this context, MEP 3 contrasts her own behaviour with that of what she considers to be typical of (male) politician, *thus providing a stereotypical generalization and setting up a straw-man fallacy.* (Wodak, 2009, p. 105)

Again, there is no example (excerpt), and no analysis that would follow. We are told that MEP 3 contrasts *her own* behaviour with that of what *she considers* to be typical of (male) politician. We don't get to know what and how that is. But, if somebody is comparing her own behaviour with the behaviour of some other group she is witnessing in her professional life, this is her own personal experience, not a "stereotypical generalization". It may sound stereotypical, if there are similar descriptions of a certain professional group circulating in a certain public sphere (though we would first have to answer the question, why do we find them stereotypical, and what we mean by stereotypical). But what MEP 3 might have said could in no way be described as generalization: she was simply comparing her own behaviour with *what she sees* (herself, not 'public opinion' or 'vox populi') to be typical of male politicians. She is therefore expressing her own opinion, not in any way a general one.

But Wodak goes even further: MEP 3 isn't just guilty of 'stereotypical generalization', she is also *'setting up a straw-man fallacy'*. In other words, MEP 3 deliberately, intentionally constructed a fallacy.

Since I've tackled the difference of producing fallacies intentionally and unintentionally in the previous section, a few words about the *Straw Man* fallacy. In my opinion, *Straw Man* could benefit from the same *caveat* Hamblin used for *Secundum Quid*: Straw-man fallacy is an *ever-present and unavoidable possibility in practical situations.* Why? For the sake of the argument, let us have a look at one of the definitions that are available online (Wikipedia, *List of fallacies*, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_fallacies):

> (Wikipedia) The straw man fallacy occurs in the following pattern of argument:
>
> 1. Person A has position X.
> 2. *Person B disregards certain key points of X and instead presents the superficially similar position Y.* Thus, Y is a resulting distorted version of X and can be set up in several ways, including:
>
> 1. Presenting a *misrepresentation* of the opponent's position and then refuting it, thus giving the appearance that the opponent's actual position has been refuted.
> 2. Quoting an opponent's words out of context — i.e. choosing quotations that misrepresent the opponent's actual intentions.
> 3. Presenting someone who defends a position *poorly* as *the* defender, then refuting that person's arguments — *thus giving the appearance* that *every* upholder of that position (and thus the position itself) has been defeated.
> 4. Inventing a fictitious persona with actions or beliefs, which are then criticized, implying that the person represents a group of whom the speaker is critical.
> 5. *Oversimplifying* an opponent's argument, then attacking this oversimplified version.
>
> 3. *Person B attacks position Y, concluding that X is false/incorrect/flawed.*

How are we to understand and interpret all this? That every time we don't take into consideration all the facts, or all the data available on a certain topic, everything a person we are talking about has said (and we hardly ever can, because not only human capabilities are limited, so is the time and space we have at our disposal, as well as our attention and interest we may have for a certain topic or a certain person), we can be accused of committing a Straw Man fallacy? Quoting an opponent's words out of context is a ubiquitous example we can hardly avoid in everyday conversation: we usually concentrate on what seems important *to us* in what our hypothetical opponent has said. And that is, of course, not everything she

has said. Even when writing reviews, for example, concentrating on what seemed important from our point of view, and pointing to possible weak points, our approach can easily (and rather often) be described (by the author under review) as misrepresenting author's views, oversimplifying or even inventing a fictitious persona. Accusations that somebody has committed a Straw Man fallacy can therefore serve a handy rhetorical technique when we don't like someone's arguments (or don't agree with them). And there will always be something that we leave out (that, for different reasons, we have to leave out), and we can never include everything that was written or said.

Let us now turn to more detailed examples of Wodak's analysis (2009, p. 105):

> In lines 1-3 she casts the typical politician as preferring to meet with citizens indirectly, through the media. Alternatively, the typical politician might 'drop in' on his constituency only briefly, in a condescending, patronizing (...) and elitist (...) manner.
>
> [9 lines of summing up the interview dropped-IŽŽ]
>
> Several topoi, strategies and fallacies are *employed* here: the *topos of history*, which refers to her experience as evidence for a more general claim, *combined with the fallacy of hasty generalization*; the *topos of urgency*, which stereotypically characterizes politicians' lives, and the *topos of difference* combined with the discursive strategy of singularization, which serves to construct herself as unique.

And this is the excerpt Wodak's analysis refers to: (Example 4 (Text 3.28)), 9 lines out of 22:

> 1 *I mean I know that* – even on / on a: national level
> 2 *I mean there are very many politicians all sorts in all parties –*
> 3 *that prefer to / to meet the / the – eh / the citizens through – media*
> 4 eh - / so *I know that I'm not that sort.*
> 5 so I prefer to meet the people. –
> 6 it / it could be hard but it's more interesting ..
> 7 and that's the way I learn all the time – a lot.
> 8 ... and a (xx) of - / I met so very many politicians - during my - living 45
> 9 years
> (Wodak, 2009, pp. 104-105)

When comparing the excerpt and the analysis, a few questions come to mind. First, where in the excerpt could all these topoi and fallacies mentioned in the "analysis" be found in the first place? What constitutes

them as topoi and fallacies? How do topoi "combine" with fallacies (or discursive strategies), what exactly is meant by that? Wodak would leave all these crucial questions unanswered.

But if the reader of her book is left without these answers (if it is not clearly showed in the analysis and in the excerpt where the topoi and fallacies are, and what constitutes them as topoi and fallacies), what can we learn from such an "analysis"? What is its added value in terms of cognition and comprehension (of what is going on in the text)? And what is its explanatory force in relation to what is going on in the European Parliament (which is the supposed goal of the book)?

If we try to find answers in the text itself, we can easily see that MEP 3 is saying *I know that ... there are very many politicians ... that prefer to meet the citizens through media* (lines 1- 3), *I prefer to meet people* (line 5). And what I, as a reader, can conclude from this is that MEP 3 is expressing a purely personal experience, with no intention of generalization (she is saying: *I* know - very many politicians (not all). In her own view, *she* knows the situation, and that is all that *she* is saying.) So, where is the fallacy of hasty generalization? The analyst should point to it, show how it is constructed, and explain why it is a fallacy at all (i.e. fallacious argument). Otherwise everything (every single utterance, not just a combination of an argument and a conclusion) could be judged a fallacy.

Here is another analysis, this time from the chapter *One day in a life of a MEP*. Hans, an Austrian MEP, is meeting a Slovenian delegation (at that time Slovenia was an accession country), and Wodak (2009, pp. 141-142) gives the following analysis of the conversation:

> Once again, Hans emphasizes his contrary in a very explicit factual statement: 'enlargement costs a lot of money!' This time the audience for his argument is actually a delegation from an accession country, to whom he conveys in no uncertain terms the dominant – and in his view erroneous – beliefs about enlargement held by many politicians inside the EU. *This topos of the actual costs of enlargement,* and the corresponding representation of the EU as harbouring misguided beliefs on the subject (Hans even characterizes the Eurocrats as 'empty heads' (*Hohlköpfe*), in a colloquialism indicating the informal context and by *employing* the *fallacy of hasty generalization* again) might also serve as a legitimation strategy later on, should enlargement not go according to plan.

And here is the conversation the analysis refers to:

> 31 S1: in other words do you mean that one can now
> 32 that one can assume that the basic decision

33 that one will begin discussion with six countries
34 that any fundamental obstacles could still be in the way?
35 H: uh I would not make any strong predictions uh today
36 S1: yes
37 H: even if the monetary union is over
38 its side effects are not finished yet
39 politics can develop its own dynamics
40 politics develops its own dynamics when money is the issue
41 uh this is not unjustified
42 *but the only thing that makes sense to the hollow European skulls (Hohlköpfe)*
43 is that nothing can cost anything
44 S1: yes
45 H: eastern enlargement costs money
46 S1: yes yes
(Wodak, 2009, pp. 141-142)

Again, it is completely unclear where and what the fallacy of hasty generalization should be. There are (only) two possible candidates, "the only thing (that makes sense)..." or "hollow European skulls". But it is hard to understand why these two should be fallacies: "the only thing (that makes sense...)" is (or at least could be) an amplification or hyperbole, a rather standard(ized) rhetorical device we use for emphasizing. While the "hollow European skulls" is clearly a metaphor (or a metonymy in certain interpretations), serving similar purpose as hyperbole at the beginning of the turn, but hardly a fallacy - unless every trope is a potential fallacy, of course.

We could go on with many more examples from Wodak's book, but they are all repeating the same patterns described. A tentative conclusion may therefore be in order.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude in the same way I started, with Austin and Hamblin. After pointing out that the reference depends on the knowledge at the time of utterance, Austin (1980, pp. 144-145) emphasizes:

> It is essential to realize that 'true' and 'false', like 'free' and 'unfree', do not stand for anything simple at all; but only for *a general dimension of being a right or proper thing to say* as opposed to a wrong thing, *in these circumstances, to this audience, for these purposes and with these intentions.* In general we may say this: with both statements (and, for example, descriptions) and warnings, &c., the question can arise, granting that you had the right to warn and did warn, did state, or did advise, whether you were right to state or

> warn or advise -not in the sense of whether it was opportune or expedient, but whether, *on the facts and your knowledge of the facts and the purposes for which you were speaking, and so on, this was the proper thing to say.*

Whenever we are judging, not only whether something is true or false, free or unfree, but also whether something is a fallacy or not, we have to take into consideration *the circumstances, the audience, the purposes, as well as the intentions of the utterer* (otherwise we may be committing a Straw Man fallacy or a fallacy of Hasty Generalization ourselves) And when we do, we also have to bear in mind the following (Hamblin, 2004, p. 242):

> When there are two or more parties to be considered, an argument may be acceptable in different degrees to different ones or groups, and a dialectical appraisal can be conducted on a different basis according to which party or group one has in mind; but again, *if we try to step outside and adjudicate, we have no basis other than our own on which to do so.* Truth and validity are onlookers' concepts and presuppose a God's-eye-view of the arena.

The choice of arguments, criteria and acceptability of their use is always a matter that *only the parties involved in the argumentative discussion can decide on*. According to their

- *knowledge at the time of the discussion,*
- *the circumstances in which the discussion takes place,*
- *the audiences that are involved in the discussion,*
- *the purposes and intentions the parties in the discussion have.*

And since these discussions take place in natural languages, in particular circumstances and at specific times, artificial system and artificial languages can't really help. Neither can prefabricated lists of hypothetical fallacies.

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