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Making messages memorable: the influence of rhetorical techniques on information retention

Wackers, M.J.Y.

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Making messages memorable

The influence of rhetorical techniques on information retention

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Aan Jolijn

Aan Joep, Guus en Sil

Preface and acknowledgements

In a travel guide for PhD students, this dissertation would probably feature in the chapter *Off the beaten track*. After graduating in Rhetoric and Argumentation (the specialisation Taalbeheersing of the Dutch language and Culture study programme) from Leiden University by the end of 2008, I found a job as a communication skills lecturer at Delft University of Technology. Teaching presentation, (academic) writing and debating skills formed the main focus of my work; officially, research tasks were not part of the position. Still, rhetorical research was never far away. In hindsight, that is perhaps no surprise: Bas Andeweg—copromotor of this thesis—was my colleague at the TU Delft's Centre for Languages and Academic Skills (ITAV: Instituut voor Talen en Academische Vaardigheden) and promotor Jaap de Jong worked there for quite some time. Jaap and Bas, who wrote their dissertation together, slowly lit my PhD fire: next to my teaching activities, I was continuously involved in some of their research projects.

In 2012, I decided to embark on my own PhD project. While keeping my teaching position at TU Delft, I took what turned out to be a long and winding road and started my research project as an external PhD student at Leiden University. In busy semesters, I was happy when I could spend one day a week on the research. Still, I enjoyed diving into the topic and soon I had reached the point of no return. Finally, by the end of 2020, there came the sun. I had reached the finish line in a year that would prove to be challenging for everyone, and would pose many people with challenges that make the task of writing a PhD thesis grow pale. Although I had thought of a clear step-by-step approach, with various teaching projects, articles and not to mention the arrival of three wonderful children my PhD journey regularly veered 'off the beaten track'. It is a journey I am proud of.

Of course, I could not have reached the finish line without support. First and foremost, Jaap and Bas deserve my gratitude. You have encouraged me to take this step, always gave constructive feedback and held faith in a positive wrap-up of the project. Thank you for countless inspiring meetings in which we discussed both the bigger picture and the "sterretjes" I needed to take care of. We were ahead of time in some respect, with our hybrid meetings from Jaap's (home) office and Bas zooming from Zelhem. It is an honour to have written a dissertation in the tradition of *De eerste minuten.*

Next, I would like to thank the bachelor and master students of the Dutch Language and Culture programme (specialisation Taalbeheersing) who have made an important contribution to this dissertation, Nanouk Bel, Bert Besterveld, Shari Helderman, Anna Hoogesteger, Sebastiaan van Loosbroek, Ave Luth, Lisanne Mijnders, Anne van Winkelhof and Carli van Winsen for their efforts and useful results. The experiments could not have been possible without guest speakers Tommy Hopstaken and Bob van der Laaken displaying their rhetorical skills.

This thesis could not have been written without the invaluable support from my colleagues at the Centre for Languages and Academic Skills (ITAV) at Delft University of Technology. Thank you for spending some of your precious lecture time

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Leiden, April 2021

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