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Rhetorical Topos Analysis

Considerations for a systematic method of argumentation analysis

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ABSTRACT: Aristotle's conception of *topoi* makes them a suitable access point for rhetorical analyses that ask about argumentative strategies with respect to their socially anchored persuasive potentials. *Topoi*, understood as elements of argumentations with endoxal character, allow to reconstruct *inventive*, *probative*, *elocutionary*, and *dispositional* production decisions. Our paper brings together and further extends more recent developments towards rhetorical discourse analyses and thus makes a proposal for a systematic rhetorical topos analysis.

KEYWORDS: argumentation analysis, discourse analysis, parliamentary debates, rhetoric, topos analysis

1. INTRODUCTION: RHETORICAL TOPOS ANALYSIS

When people discuss in parliamentary debates or other public settings they use arguments to justify their positions and to persuade others – either their opposite or the public (or both). Arguments used in these discussions are not always – and maybe not even mainly – logically valid. However, the arguments' validity is not the only factor that influences its persuasive potential. Other strategic elements of argumentation, like norms, ideas and concepts arguments draw on, accepted opinions they are based on, and their linguistic realisation contribute to the possible impact as well. These are in the focus of our approach. As rhetorical scholars, we are interested in persuasion processes and the persuasive strategies underlying them. This implies a strong notion of agency. Joachim Knape, for example, makes the orator concept the “Archimedean point”¹ (Knape, 2000a, p. 33) of his rhetoric theory. For him, the concept of strategy thus denotes a “calculation of success and effectiveness [...] at the centre of which is the analysis of the relevant goal-resistance-means relations.” (Knape, 2009, col. 153) While we do follow Knape's production-theoretical position expressed in this, its application within the realm of discourse analytical research proves to be challenging. Rhetorical discourse research must face the problem that discourse research initially assumes subjects as products of social practice (e.g. Angermüller, 2014, p. 19) and thus represents a weak concept of agency. Naturally, we cannot elucidate the extent to which the argumentations under investigation directly manifest the speakers' intention in respect to their anticipated audience (see also Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1958). But we can productively interpret this field of tension by seeing the discursive embedding of the persuasion process and the preforming of the agents'

¹ All translations are ours.

topical inventory and therein contained conceptions as a possibility to explain the persuasive potential that is called upon.

As we suggest, *topoi* are a suitable object of analysis for such a ‘discursively embedded’ and in that sense socially anchored notion of strategic communication. We assume that speakers strategically choose specifically those *topoi* that they deem accepted among their audiences and thus persuasive. In recent years, scholars of the Seminar for General Rhetoric in Tübingen (Krautter, 2019; Laubinger, 2020; Dorn, 2022) used rhetorical models of *topos* analyses to investigate argumentation in discourses from a rhetorical perspective. Integrating and extending these approaches contributes to a research program that is interested in strategic aspects of the use of *topoi*, which expresses itself in questions like: How do speakers (or writers) justify their positions to persuade the audience in a specific part of a specific discourse? Which *topoi* do they use? Which ideas, values and norms lie behind them and thus strengthen the position? For what purposes do the speakers use them? How do they formulate them stylistically? And how do they arrange and combine them? Though the existing works each make valuable contributions for that cause, a comprehensive analytical approach is still missing.

We thus propose a *topos*-analytical method with a rhetoric-systematic background that is interested in the speakers’ *inventive*, *probative*, *elocutionary*, and *dispositional* decisions made by the speaker in the process of producing a speech or text.² We thus aim to present the persuasive potential of argumentations in a comprehensive way. While we suggest that all four dimensions come into play in practical communication at all times, we want them to be understood as modular categories of analysis. We consider the *inventive* dimension a suitable and necessary starting point, since here the *topoi* become evident as distinct categories. Nonetheless, even the *inventive* dimension offers much flexibility and allows for a proper adaptation to the research question at hand. We then consider the *probative*, *elocutionary*, and *dispositional* dimension to be facultative. They can be examined, related to all other dimensions, or omitted – again depending on the research projects specific needs.

2. OUR CONCEPT OF TOPOS

The *topos* category offers a valuable way to implement this understanding, because arguably it provides the link between discursive embedding and pre-forming on the one hand and intentional application on the other.

We thereby mainly follow Aristotle's concept of *topoi*, especially in two respects: First, we follow his, albeit much-discussed (e.g. Rapp, 2000, p. 32), conception of *topoi* as *elements* of arguments, which expresses itself in his partly synonymous use of the terms *stoicheïon*, *tópos* and *protaseis* (Bornscheuer, 1976, p. 30). We determine for our analytical

² We are aware that the term ‘*elocutionary*’ suggests proximity to Great Britain’s eighteenth-century *elocutionary movement*, which put a strong emphasis on delivery (e.g. Goring, 2014). Divertingly, we based the naming of the analytical categories as far as possible on the *officia oratoris* in order to make it clear that we are concerned with the reconstruction of potential production decisions of the speakers (‘*probative*’/‘*probare*’ though eludes this idea, since it is not considered an *officium* in its own right). In that sense, the ‘*elocutionary*’ dimension here refers to the *officium* ‘*elocutio*’ and is concerned with the reconstruction of stylistic production decisions that are necessarily part of the *topoi*’s realisation by the speakers.

approach that the topos category in this sense denotes a “semantically significant text component” (Knape, 2000b, p. 748) in a context of reasoning, thus making topoi the guarantors for the arguments’ persuasive power (Sprute, 1975, pp. 79-81). This could be represented in different ways; Tim Wagner and Josef Kopperschmidt suggest taking Stephen Toulmin’s *layout* (Toulmin, 1958) and interpreting topoi as its *warrant* (Wagner, 2009, col. 623; Kopperschmidt, 1989, p. 142). This emphasises the category’s relation to agent-specific intentions and argumentative goals and distinguishes it from a purely literary interpretation.

Second, in his ‘Topics’ Aristotle describes its purpose as “to find a method with which we shall be able to construct deductions from acceptable premises (*endoxa*) concerning any problem that is proposed” (Arist. Top. 100a19–20). Aristotle’s topoi thus rest on the idea of *endoxa*. Topoi are not persuasive due to certain knowledge but due to probable knowledge, i.e. premises about what is correct in most of the cases or believed by most people or by the wisest people.

Upon this supposition Lothar Bornscheuer develops a meta-scientific understanding of the concept of topos. Based on Aristotle’s and Cicero’s conception of the topic he identifies the topic as “the toolkit of an argumentation habitus that is creative in thought and language, but at the same time based on the common societal norms of opinion, language and behaviour” (Bornscheuer, 1976, p. 94). In his attempt to systemize the concept of topos he delineates various dimensions within which each topos can be situated and introduces four inherent structural features. Besides contributing to the topic’s theory, the structural features can help describe the research potential of a topos analysis going beyond that of a formal logical analysis.

The structural features can be translated into English as *habituality*, *potentiality*, *intentionality* and *symbolicity*. The first structural feature, *habituality*, aligns with Aristotle’s portrayal of topoi as being based on *endoxa*. Following Bornscheuer, collective- habitual preconceptions underlie every topos. These may encompass moral-social standards of value, convictions shaping world views, and knowledge content. Thus, topoi reflect “a society’s internalized language and behaviour habitus” (Bornscheuer, 1976, p. 96). As we conclude, this expresses the preforming of the agents’ topical inventory and the contained conceptions. Analysing topoi can, therefore, offer insights into the underlying concepts and values of arguments.

The second structural feature, *potentiality*, refers to Aristotle’s postulate that topoi can be applied to any given problem. The “unlimited capacity for argumentation requires an unlimited productive argumentation reservoir” (Bornscheuer, 1976, p. 97), which topoi provide both due to the wide variety of different topoi and due to the inherent flexibility of every topos. *Potentiality* implies that every topos must be applicable for different contexts, diverging conclusions and even opposing goals. A topos analysis can thus investigate whether the same topoi are used to achieve different argumentative objectives.

Intentionality as the topoi’s third structural feature emphasizes that use of topoi always aims at the topoi’s rhetorical impact. The choice and concrete application of an indefinite and rather abstract topos in a specific situation is left to the individual user. The habitual and adaptable nature of topoi is employed strategically to persuade. As a result, a topos as an argument is not a randomly usable aspect but rather a concrete and individual variation of a more abstract element. Analysing topoi, therefore, necessitates and enables examining their situational impact intentions.

The fourth and final structural feature, *symbolicity*, addresses the diverse modalities through which topoi find application within a textual composition. These manifestations can materialize through compound expressions, proverbs, phrases, succinct sentences, and keywords but also in lengthier segments of text. The same topos may assume varying degrees of verbal and semantic concentration. Thus, there are no rules on how to apply and formulate topoi, only a general framework within which each individual or group makes an own choice and specification. A topos analysis can thus reconstruct recurring linguistic realisations and formations.

3. ADAPTATION FOR AN INTEGRATIVE ANALYTICAL APPROACH

In discourse linguistics, a more or less systematic approach for a topos-analysis has been developed. Very interesting for our approach are Martin Wengeler's works. He uses topos analyses to analyse newspaper articles regarding migration in Germany in the 1960s, -70s and -80s. His goal is a "discourse- or rather mentality-historically interested language historiography." (Wengeler, 2003, p. 175) His method, based on Aristotle's conception of topoi and interested in argument patterns, is a solid starting point for our aim to study.

However, Wengeler's approach restricts itself to the reconstruction of a thinking habitus in the tradition of the *histoire des mentalités* and is not primarily interested in the strategic-argumentative implications of topoi. Hence, we follow Wengeler in his general procedure but suggest different or rather further going analytical dimensions. Especially Bornscheuer's structural feature of *intentionality* is worth more attention. For looking at strategic aspects and persuasive intentions the method needs to be supplemented. There have been some approaches in Tübingen going in this direction, like that of Jutta Krautter, analysing topoi in the discourse on neuro-enhancement, Severina Laubinger, investigating the crisis topos in German party programs, and Nicolas Dorn, examining neo-atheistic and Christian apologetic argumentation. We aim to integrate parts of these approaches and supplement them to a comprehensive approach. Drawing on Wagner (2009), we propose four basic analytical dimensions of possible persuasion decisions that build on both Aristotle's and Bornscheuer's groundworks: An *inventive*, *probative*, *elocutionary*, and *dispositional* dimension (see table 1).

Table 1: Overview: Four analytical dimensions of rhetorical topoi analyses

dimension	question	output	examples for categories
inventive dimension (obligatory)	Which topoi are chosen in the respective discourse?	catalogue of topoi found in the corpus (degree of abstractness and further differentiation according to research interest)	authority topos legal authority topos religious authority topos epistemic authority topos ...
			topos of more or less ...
			burdening topos ...
			humanity topos ...
			...
probative dimension (facultative)	Which communicative goals are these topoi used for in the specific case?	general stances	pro con
		specific conclusions	praising/blaming evoking/mitigating fear strengthening/reconfiguring societal values ...
		functions in topical patterns	data topoi valuation topoi principle topoi goal topoi
	
elocutionary dimension (facultative)	How are these topoi realised and formulated linguistically?	lexical phenomena	recurrence of catchwords ('burden', ...) nouns verbs adjectives ...
		grammatical phenomena	sentence complexity (parataxis, coordination, subordination, ...) sentence types (question, exclamation, ...) ...
		tropes, figures	amplifications ('many – almost all') generalisations ('almost all') ...
	
	
dispositional dimension (facultative)	How are these topoi constellated in single texts or the discourse?	relative positions	order of topoi (1st argument, 2nd argument, 3rd argument, ...)
		relations of topoi	combination of topoi (topos 1 + topos 2, ...)
	

3.1 *The inventive dimension of topos analyses*

First, and as a basis for all facultative further steps, we propose an *inventive* dimension of selecting, accessing and connecting, but also a preformation of speakers and their available topical inventory, in which the conception of topoi as based on endoxa and characterised by the structural moments of *habituality* and *potentiality* becomes evident. An analysis of the topoi in their *inventive* dimension can provide insight into what decisions are made regarding topoi and endoxa they rest on. This choice provides information about the habitus of thought, norms, values, and principles that lie behind the arguments – both due to the speakers' preformation by socialization and their anticipated audience they want to persuade.

We suggest inductively developing a topos catalogue on sub-corpora which can then be applied to the whole corpus. To develop the catalogue, we propose to build categories on one sub-corpus and to examine and modify them on a second sub-corpus. The first step is to go through a first sub-corpus and identify and extract all argumentative text segments. As a second step we paraphrase all the argumentations in the linguistic form of a warrant. We then sort them regarding their inference patterns and provide them with a definition and a title.

The definitions need to be abstract enough to be applicable for different argumentation goals and expressions and material enough to be traceable to concepts and perceptions forming their basis and to allow a distinction between multiple topoi. Depending on the research interest the degree of abstractness and differentiation can vary from rather formal (example (1)) to rather material (example (2)). We propose to formulate them as a warrant like these examples of Wengeler's topoi show.

- (1) Authority topos:
Because a person or institution acknowledged as an expert or authority approves/disapproves a certain action/holds a certain attitude, this action should/should not be carried out/this attitude should be adopted. (Wengeler, 2003, p. 322)
- (2) Burdening topos:
Because a person/institution/country is heavily burdened or overburdened with certain problems – or because such a burden is imminent, actions should be carried out that reduce or prevent this burden. (Wengeler, 2003, p. 303)

After sorting and defining the topoi the next step is to examine and modify them on a second sub-corpus by applying them on this sub-corpus and adjust any inadequacies.

Subsequently, categories attain their ultimate form and can be applied to the whole corpus.

The topos catalogue can contain common topoi that have been described before and that are typical for many discourses like the authority topos and more special topoi typical for the chosen discourse and corpus like the burdening topos which is, for example, frequently used in the migration discourse.

The level of abstraction of the topoi depends on the research question at hand. Works that are interested in the strategic use of specific topoi might want to make further distinctions on either formal or material, context-specific, level. For instance, more fine-

grained differentiations of authority topoi according to the authority's source (legal, administrative, religious, deontic, epistemic, etc.; e.g. Walton, 1997, pp. 89-90; Bocheński, 1983, pp. 141-142) or consequences of following or dismissing such authorities (accepting certain paradigms, inclusion, exclusion, punishment; e.g. Goodwin, 1998, p. 273) can bring valuable insight in implications made by the strategic use of these topoi.

This analytical dimension makes it possible to identify which topoi are used frequently in the corpus and thus which norms, values and principles are important to the speakers in the discourse. This is the basis and foundation of our model of a rhetorical topos analysis of discourses. All further steps are facultative and can follow, depending on the question of interest. Moreover, the *inventive* dimension can be broken down further – in the case of a comparative study, for example, we can examine which topoi were particularly important in specific time periods or in different countries. Thus, we can find out what principles were prevalent at certain times and how that changed or how certain groups differ in the values that are important to them. Another intriguing research question is for which purposes certain topoi are employed, such as arguing for or against particular political measures. This leads us to the next dimension.

3.2 The probative dimension of topos analyses

The *probative* dimension marks the use of topoi for specific contexts of reasoning and individual communicative goals. Here, on the one hand, the conception of topoi as semantically significant textual components becomes most evident, as they prompt case-oriented conclusions. On the other hand, the topoi's general potentiality becomes traceable in the topoi's various actual implementations: The same topoi are put forward with different manifestations, allowing different conclusions for different communicative goals. When topoi are applied and textually realised in discourse, the probative dimension marks the resolution of the topoi's generic potentiality in a case-oriented intentionality.

In principle, the analytical design of the probative dimension strongly depends on the research interest and may vary between inductive or deductive approaches. In Wengeler's work, the dimension is already laid out in its basic features, though it does not interest him as much regarding strategic decisions: He distinguishes between topoi put forward either for or against a cause in a global sense (for or against migration) which acts as a subsumption principle for all stances that occur in the discourse but is not further differentiated (Wengeler, 2003, pp. 301-302; see also the examples given there and the general structure of the interpretation).

Applying this distinction on German parliamentary debates can, for example, yield insights into which topoi are used in support of or in opposition to specific legislative measures by different political parties. Furthermore, it allows for an exploration of topoi which are employed both in favour of and against particular measures. The following examples from members of the Bundestag Stephan Mayer (3) of the governing Christian Social Union supporting stricter asylum policy and Dietmar Bartsch (4) of the opposition party The Left rejecting stricter measures show that the burdening topos can be used for both argumentation goals:

- (3) One thing must be clear: If the numbers continue at this high level, sooner or later Germany will be overburdened. In terms of registration, application, and

application processing, this is a huge challenge, and accommodation as well as integration into our society and into the labour market cannot be achieved in the long run, even for a strong and prosperous country like Germany, even with the greatest effort, if the numbers remain at this high level. (Mayer, 2015, p. 12283)

- (4) Your petition is: tightening, tightening, tightening. That cannot be. [...] The result will be that we will produce countless legal disputes, that authorities and courts will be additionally burdened – not to mention the burden on the people affected. (Bartsch, 2016, p. 15346)

A further step can be the reconstruction of the argumentative goals and respective conclusions. For a thorough inductive approach, we suggest reconstructing the arguments at hand according to Toulmin's layout, thus making the different conclusions *as such* and regardless of their illocutive character accessible (Kopperschmidt, 1989, p. 142) for further clustering. Moreover, the reconstruction according to the layout can further strengthen the traceability of the analysis. Laubinger, for example, inductively (though while waiving the resource-consuming reconstruction via the layout) identifies six recurring types of conclusions or functions of crisis-topoi which German parties operate with when applying the topoi in their party programs: praising or blaming, evoking or mitigating fear, strengthening or reconfiguring societal values, gaining insight on the character of crises, avoiding future crises, and applying criticism of the political system (Laubinger, 2020, pp. 258-260).

Linguist Josef Klein found recurring functions of topoi in plenary debates which can be clustered to a basic topical pattern that follows the stages of John Austin's model of action: *data topoi* allow to establish a description of a situation, *valuation topoi* allow to assess the established situation, *principle topoi* allow to introduce maxims of action, and *goal topoi*³ allow to recommend concrete actions or goals (Klein, 2019, p. 130; with slight deviations see also 2000; 2003). The topical pattern then serves as a deductively introduced cluster for following topoi analyses (e.g. Römer & Wengeler, 2013; Römer, 2017).

The application on examples from German parliamentary debates in the climate discourse shows that authority topoi with scientific authorities are implemented on all stages of the topical pattern found by Klein. In example (5), Michael Thews of the governing Social Democrats draws on experts commissioned by the federal government, who assess the sustainability strategy launched by the governing coalition positively – thus functionalizing the authority topos as a *valuation topos*. Oliver Krischer from the opposing Green Party on the other hand uses an authority topos to formulate actions and goals, functionalizing it as a *goal topos* (example (6)).

- (5) Now, however, the German government voluntarily had the sustainability strategy reviewed by experts last year. Let me quote from the resulting report, the Peer Review 2018: [Germany's] sustainability institutions are well designed, the necessary technologies are available, the stakeholders are engaged and the financial resources to support the measures are also in place. In this report, the independent

³ In German Klein uses the term "Finaltopos" (e.g. Klein, 2019, p. 77). To avoid the interpretation as being the *final* topos in the sense of *last* topos we chose to translate it as *goal topos* which leaves open the position within the argumentation and stresses its goal-orientation.

experts certify that Germany is making good progress at the national level. (Thews, 2019, p. 14161)

- (6) The Coal Commission said by consensus and across all boundaries – to my knowledge there was also no dispute at all – that renewables should be a central component of structural change. (Krischer, 2019, p. 13981)

A comparable differentiation on the *probative* level can also be made with the burdening topos presented above as an example. The selected example (7) shows a burdening topos from the German migration discourse being functionalized as a *goal topos*, with which an acceleration of asylum procedures is justified:

- (7) Speeding up procedures and the processing of unresolved cases are really central if the hardship in the municipalities is to be alleviated. (Göring-Eckardt, 2015, 12274)

The *probative* dimension offers much flexibility regarding its inductive, deductive or combinatory configuration and thus needs adaptation to the respective research goal. It can offer insight into the concrete application of topoi and recurring patterns that are informative of strategic decisions made by the speakers on a probative level.

3.3 The elocutionary dimension of topos analyses

Following the *symbolicity* and tendency towards “formulaic fixation” (Bornscheuer, 1976, p. 103) of topoi, we propose an *elocutionary* dimension of linguistic realisation and configuration. Literary topos analyses, often stemming from Ernst Robert Curtius’ famous conception of topoi (Curtius, 1993), regularly build on the assumption of topoi as socio-culturally embossed expressions of both a way of thinking *and writing or saying* (“clichés that are generally usable in literature”, Curtius, 1993, pp. 92-93; similarly, Bornscheuer, 1976, pp. 103-106). Literary analyses thus tend to interpret topoi primarily as stylistic phenomena, putting them in proximity to catchword analyses. While stylistic phenomena such as catchwords are a starting point (though not sufficient) for identifying topoi (Knape, 2000b, p. 759), rhetorical topos analysis is also concerned with considering style as an expression of strategic choices and an important contribution to the arguments’ impact. Bornscheuer’s structural feature of *intentionality* entails that topoi are not necessarily visible on the textual surface as catchwords, but that *elocutionary* choices can point to the topoi and, more interestingly for our cause, at the same time do that in a specific manner which supports or even evokes the topoi’s specific principle or idea (e.g. contradiction or parallelism).

Example (8) and (9) (and similarly example (6)) can demonstrate the potential of the *elocutionary* dimension: On a stylistic level, an amplification (“many scientists – almost all of them” [“viele Wissenschaftler – fast alle”]; “enormous challenge, perhaps even *the* challenge of the next decades” [“enorme, vielleicht sogar die Herausforderung der nächsten Jahre”]) and a generalisation (“almost all” [“fast alle”]) are employed to further strengthen the respective topos on a stylistic level:

- (8) But it is also the case that many scientists – almost all of them [*viele Wissenschaftler – fast alle*] whose statements I have read since Friday – say: so far, the measures you have listed and undertaken in the package are just not enough. (Verlinden, 2019, p. 13974)
- (9) Since the beginning of the year, we have had uninterruptedly high numbers of refugees, numbers that are now increasing – I chose this word very deliberately – exponentially. Until recently, we could not even slightly imagine the arrival of people in the scale of the last weeks. Refugee policy in Germany is thus becoming an enormous challenge, perhaps even *the* challenge of the next decades [*eine enorme, vielleicht sogar die Herausforderung der nächsten Jahrzehnte*]. (Pistorius, 2015, p. 12280)

In principle, all stylistic categories come into question here as differentiations of the *elocutionary* dimension, such as lexical phenomena (recurring words, verbs, adjectives etc.), grammatical phenomena (sentence types, sentence complexity etc.) and tropes and figures. Classical rhetoric provides a comprehensive catalogue for this. Though not primarily topos analytical, some pragmadialectical analyses proceed similarly and integrate linguistic-stylistic analyses into the analytical framework, proposing the use of checklists, as one of its cornerstones (e.g. van Haaften, 2019; van Haaften & van Leeuwen, 2021; 2018). This deductive approach seems useful to us to keep track of the possible range of phenomena, but overall, the formation and selection of categories is also based on the material and the guiding research question. As for the other dimensions, the *elocutionary* dimensions' full potential lies in the interrelation and conflating interpretation with the other analytical dimensions (e.g. the applied concept of authority being strengthened on a linguistic level and so on).

3.4 The dispositional dimension of topos analyses

Further, we propose a *dispositional* dimension that describes the sequence and linking of the individual topos into a more general concept. In it, the facultativity of the topos category is expressed on the one hand, and habitualised genre practices and deviations from them on the other. This dimension can provide insights into topos constellations and patterns in structure. It can be combined with all other dimensions. This is possible by analysing the position of either the topoi themselves or their probative purposes or their stylistic shapings. It is for example interesting to look at in which order topoi are often used or if there is a recurring structure of first *valuation topoi*, then *goal topoi* or if specific stylistic realisations of topoi occur more often in the beginning of a speech and so forth. A very basic distinction would be the distinction between “beginning, middle, end” or “first argument, second argument, third argument and so forth”.

Another interesting area of investigation would be the question of which topoi are commonly combined. The authority topos and the burdening topos can, for example, be combined like example (10) shows:

- (10) Yes, the Chancellor is right: the factual limit will probably be difficult to quantify. But the situation in the municipalities is dramatic: In Bavaria, there are

municipalities that are at the burden limit. Therefore, there can be no ‘going on as before’. This was also impressively confirmed by the municipal central associations at the hearing on Monday. We must take this development into account. (Lindholz, 2015, p. 12589)

Andrea Lindholz of the ruling Christian Social Union in Germany demands stricter asylum laws backing this up with both burdens and authorities. Combining two or more topoi can amplify the argument and thus the persuasive potential and is therefore an intriguing object of investigation.

With the *dispositional* dimension it is thus possible to investigate how the topoi are constellated in single texts or the discourse. On the one hand, this dimension achieves to trace specific arrangement orders and patterns of topoi as well as probative functions as well as *elocutionary* choices. On the other hand, it achieves insights into combinations of topoi.

4. CONCLUSION AND FINAL REMARKS

The four analytical dimensions we propose result from an integral understanding of the topos category that attempts to depict the comprehensive potential regarding possible production decisions and thus persuasive factors. The first and basic analytical dimension, the *inventive* dimension, provides information about the speakers’ and/or the anticipated audience’s habitus of thought, norms and values lying behind the arguments. Different speakers, time periods, countries or settings can be compared to find argument patterns typical for the respective discourse. The further three dimensions are facultative and always related to the first dimension but can furthermore be related to each other. With the *probative* dimension one can achieve insights into which topoi are used for which argumentative goals or specific conclusions. The *elocutionary* dimension concerns the linguistic realisation and formulation of topoi, considering lexical, grammatical, or figural phenomena that, for example, amplify the argument’s persuasive potential. The *dispositional* dimension examines topoi in their relative position in texts, constellations and relations to each other to find recurring patterns in structure and combination.

The method can be used for critical analyses as well, outgoing from the different dimensions. Possible starting points here can be the logical validity of arguments on the one hand and on the other hand, contrary to this, criticism of the use of accepted concepts to promote questionable moral purposes.

It is important to us that the four dimensions are understood as an analytical framework. Of course, their suitability and concrete layout depends on the respective question. We specifically want to maintain a certain flexibility of the method, which on the one hand does justice to the different question interests and on the other hand to the systematic, but productive vagueness of the topos category itself. In doing so, we hope to bring together some of the work that has been done in general rhetoric and to provide a foundation for future work that ventures into the field of rhetorical discourse analysis.

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