

Investigating the Argumentative Deceptive Strategies in The Simpsons Series: A Pragma-dialectical Study

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Received Date: 21/5/2023,

Accepted Date: 4/2/2025,

Published Date: 1/6/2025

Abstract:

The present work investigates the pragma-dialectical aspects of fallacies and explores the way manipulation is utilized in one of the longest television shows: *The Simpsons*. Hence, it aims to identify the argumentative deceptive strategies of The Simpsons series, including the fallacies, breaching the Grice's conversational maxims, using the argumentative appeals, and to analyze them correspondingly. As a result, it has adopted an eclectic model to cope with targeted data and research aims; a model that consists of Van Eemeren's (2018) and van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1987) models for fallacies, Walton's (2004), Kennedy's (2007), and Ramage et al's (2010) models for the argumentative appeals, and finally Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle for breaching conversational maxims. The findings of the present work display that the characters in *The Simpsons* employed argumentative deceptive strategies to manipulate the opponents. The arguers employ these strategies to either strengthen their point of view or to put their opponents in awkward difficult positions in order to accept such viewpoint.

Keywords: argumentative appeals, fallacies, Grice's conversational maxims, manipulation, pragma-dialectics

بحث وسائل الخداع الجدلية في مسلسل سيمبسون: دراسة تداولية جدلية

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تاريخ النشر: ٢٠٢٥/٦/١

تاريخ القبول: ٢٠٢٥/٢/٤

تاريخ الاستلام: ٢٠٢٣/٥/٢١

المخلص:

يستكشف العمل الحالي الجوانب الجدلية التداولية للمغالطات، ويستكشف طريقة التلاعب في واحد من أطول عروض التلفزيون: آل سيمبسون. ومن ثم، فإنه يهدف إلى تحديد التصريحات الخادعة الجدلية لسلسلة آل سيمبسون، بما في ذلك المغالطات، وخرق قواعد جرایس التبادلية، باستخدام الحجج، وتحليلها بشكل متوافق. ونتيجة لذلك، اعتمد نموذج انتقائي للتعامل مع البيانات المستهدفة وأهداف البحث؛ نموذج يتكون من فان إيميرين (٢٠١٨) وفان إيميرين وجروتندورست (١٩٨٧) لتحليل المغالطات المنطقية، ووالتون (٢٠٠٤) وكيندي (٢٠٠٧) وراماج وآخرون (٢٠١٠) لتحليل المناشدات الجدلية، وأخيرًا مبدأ جرایس (١٩٧٥) لتحليل خرق قواعد المحادثة. ولقد أظهرت نتائج هذا العمل أن الشخصيات في مسلسل السيمبسون تستخدم وسائل الخداع الجدلي للتلاعب من أجل غرضين اثنين إما لتعزيز وجهة نظرهم أو لوضع خصومهم في مواقف حرجية وصعبة من أجل قبول وجهات النظر تلك.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تداولية جدلية، مغالطات، مناشدات جدلية، مبادئ جرایس في الكلام، التلاعب

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.36317/kja/2025/v1.i65.12126>

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مجلة آداب الكوفة - جامعة الكوفة مرخصة بموجب ترخيص المشاع الإبداعي ٤.٠ الدولي.



1. Introduction

According to Henry (2012, pp. 4-5), *The Simpsons* is considered as the longest TV series that have ever been produced. It has attracted adult viewers due to its "sophisticated satire and cultural asides only adults would dig". Yet, as Abspoel and Huohvanainen (1999, p.6) state, kids are entirely welcoming to watch this series, but it is not designed for them because such a series is not appropriate for the kid's medium. Furthermore, Cantor (1999, p.735) assures that *The Simpsons* has virulent messages related to society and human problems . Accordingly, it is essential to explore the manipulative and the argumentative strategies that implied behind its comedy.

To achieve the manipulative aim of *The Simpsons* requires adopting a particular argumentative deceptive strategies, including the employment of fallacies, breaching the Grice's conversational maxims, and making use of the argumentative appeals. Correspondingly, detecting the argumentative deceptive strategies are of a great importance to educate people to be aware of the virulent messages which are taught by series.

To the researchers' best knowledge, the argumentative deceptive strategies of *The Simpsons* are not investigated. Hence, the present study aims to fill this gap by answering the following questions:

1. How are the fallacies in *The Simpsons* logically and persuasively built up and manipulated?
2. How do the argumentative appeals achieve the producer's purposes and intensions in manipulating the viewers of *The Simpsons*?
3. How is deception in the series expressed by using the breaching of the conversational maxims?

Argumentative Deceptive Strategies

Pragma-dialectics, as Bonevac (2003, p. 451) states, is "dynamic, context-sensitive, and multi-agent; it promises theories of fallacy and argumentative structure". It is both *dynamic* in the sense that it deals with the pragmatic element and the rules for a reasonable conversation, and *context-sensitive* in the sense that it recognizes the context as a

crucial factor in the discussion. Besides, it is multi-agent as a reasonable discussion must involve at least two participants or more than two participants. correspondingly, the concept of argumentative discourse was created by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004, p. 53) with the purpose of resolving the disagreement of opinions in line with the critical standards and norms of reasonableness in pragmadialectics.

In order to strengthen or weaken the acceptability of their controversial standpoint within the scope of the argumentative discourse, speakers may employ several techniques, including fallacies, violating Grice's maxims, and making use of the three argumentative appeals of logos, ethos, and pathos. The key distinction among these techniques is that their primary objective is to persuade or convince the listener to agree with the speaker's reasoning. Such techniques allow the speaker to perform a variety of speech acts, including arguing, persuading, convincing, requesting, appealing, etc. Additionally, each technique can be thought of as a speech act from its own standpoint in one sense or another.

Taken into consideration, a fallacy can be defined as a speech act that "counts as a violation of one or more of the rules for a critical discussion, which impedes the resolution of a difference of opinion"(Eemeren, 2009, p.20). Besides, the violation of Grice's maxims has deceptive outcomes and effects within the scope of the argumentation (Carson, 2010, p.25). Logos, ethos, and pathos are three argumentative appeals which are described as a type of speech act category and are used as strategies of persuasion in argumentation. However, employing these appeals have some deceptive effect (Brinker,1997, pp.105-21).

The Simpsons Series

The Simpsons has referred to as "the most realistically surreal cartoon series ever" because it continuously succeeds in realizing historical and contemporary events, as well as different forms of entertainment and arts and incorporating them further into storylines of The Simpsons' lives (Tucker, 1993, p.48). The series conveys important and very

serious messages about issues that are relevant to real-world issues including the family live, society, and even the environment in addition to its humorous quips and silly antics. Without undermining their significance for humor's sake, such issues are handled in a sarcastic and hilarious manner. This feature, as combined with the great production quality, has enhanced the show's ability to appeal to adults rather than kids, increasing its financial potential to an unheard-of level for television cartoons. Kids are entirely welcoming to watch this series, but it is not designed for them because such a series is not appropriate for the kid's medium. For example, this show is intended for viewers who watch the Friend series and Cheers and Taxi series as instance (Abspoel & Huohvanainen,1999, p.6).

Because The Simpsons are just cartoon, their creators are free to subject them to humiliations and anguish without having viewers feel sorry for the characters (Mittell ,2007, p. 284). Its satiric genre may be made more enjoyable for viewers by the animated version due to this tendency. The Simpsons' realism arises not from its commitment to live-action broadcasting rules but from its satirical deconstruction of unreal live-action comedy tropes (Mittell, 2007, p. 285). The characters of this series act with compassion and joy when they challenge societal norms, injustice in society, and even democracy, emphasizing the possible connection between what is serious and what is fun (Thompson, 2009, p.2).

Data Collection

The Simpsons animated television series, as a source for the data in the current study, is consisting of 34 seasons, 740 episodes. That is, each season consists of 13 to 22 episodes. The running time for each episode is about 21 to 24 minutes. That is, more than 300 hours are needed to watch the entire series of The Simpsons. Hence, data reduction is required to choose representative samples out of the series of videos published by a YouTube channel named “Colburn Classroom”.

The Model of Analysis

The eclectic model is developed to cope with the research aims and the nature of the targeted data. Hence, its components are designed to answer the research questions and to verify/reject the hypothesis. Based on the pertinent literature of theoretical background, the eclectic model is designed to approach and tackle the target argumentative discourse.

The model for the analysis of the logical fallacies is different. In this work, the researcher designs a three-stage eclectic model for the analysis of the data under scrutiny: logical fallacies in the violation of the rules of critical discussion based on Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1987) and van Eemeren (2018), violation of Grice's maxims based on Grice's (1975), and the argumentative appeals: pathos, ethos and logos based on Walton's (2004), Kennedy's (2007), and Ramage et al's (2010) argumentative appeals.



The eclectic model can be schematically presented as follows:

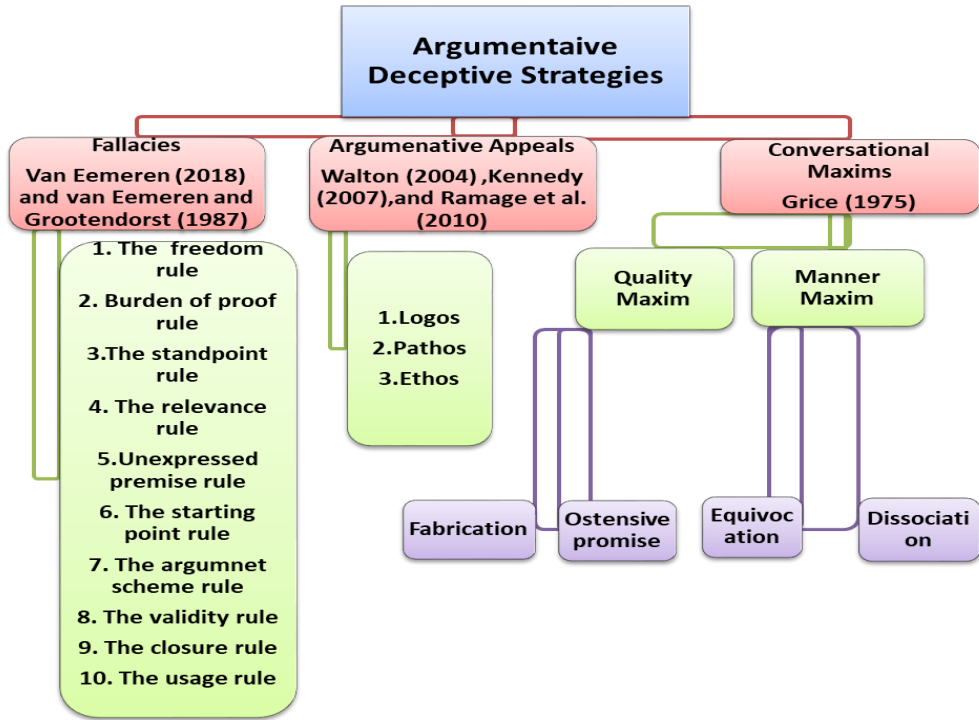


Figure 1. The Eclectic Model of Analysis

Results and Discussion

This section represents the results of the data and their discussion by presenting the statistical analysis of the findings.

Fallacies

The arguers in the representative samples violate rule 3, 4, and 8 more than any other rules. The comparatively high frequency of rule 8, rule 4, and rule 3 presents the violation of these rules. The frequencies of violation of rules 8, 4, and 3 are counted as (10), (8), and (6) instances

that equal the mean of (31.25%), (٢٥.00%), and (١٨.٧٥%) respectively for the fifteen extracts under scrutiny. However, rule 6 and rule 9 have the second rate in frequencies and percentages. Each one of these rules is violated (2) times systematically to constitute the percentage of (6.25%). Yet, rules 1, 2, 7, and 10 share the exact number of violation, i.e., each one of them is violated one time with a percentage of (3.١٢%). This is represented in Figure 2. below:

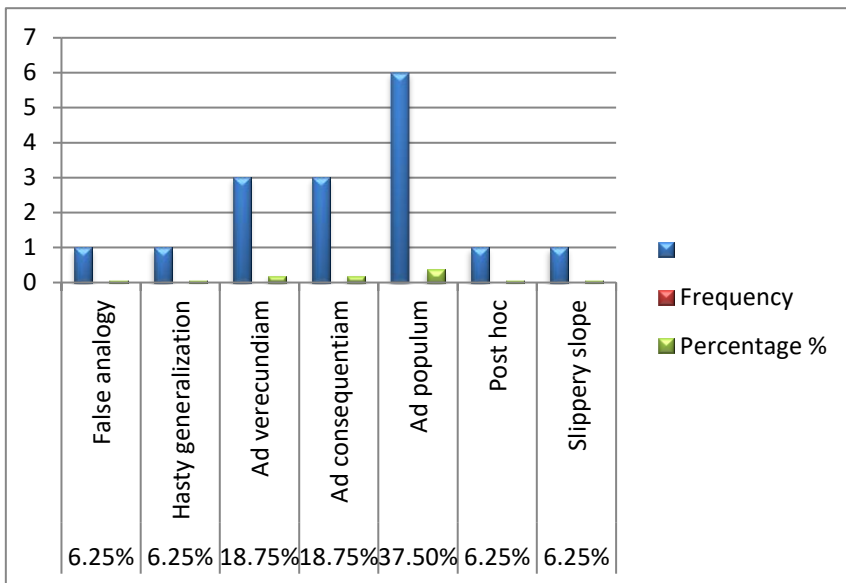


Figure 2. Fallacies

Argumentative Appeals

The argumentative appeals contain three techniques of persuasion: logos, pathos and ethos. The quantitative analysis of the argumentative appeals show that pathos occupies the highest frequency counting as (9) and constitutes the mean of (52.94%). So, the data under scrutiny are basically pathos-based. The second techniques, logos, occupies the second rate with (7) instances that equal to the mean of (41.17%).

Eventually, ethos occupies the last rate with (1) instance that equals the mean of (5.88%). It can be clarified in Figure 3. below:

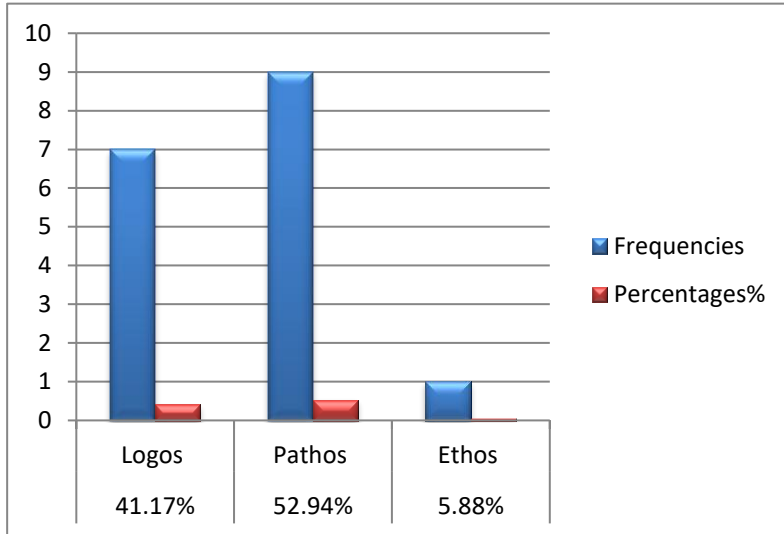


Figure 3. The Argumentative Appeals

Conversational Maxims

In this study, two conversational maxims are taken into the consideration: those of quality and manner; each contains two techniques. The quantitative analysis of these maxims in the data under scrutiny shows that the former occupies the highest rate while the latter occupies the lowest. The quality maxim statistically shows a fabrication technique with the highest frequency of (13) instances that equal the mean of (72.22%) while the ostensive promise technique has only (3) instances that equal the mean of (16.66%). However, the statistics show the two techniques of the manner maxim, namely equivocation and dissociation, to share the same frequency with (1) instance that equals (5.55%). It can be clarified in figure 4. Below:

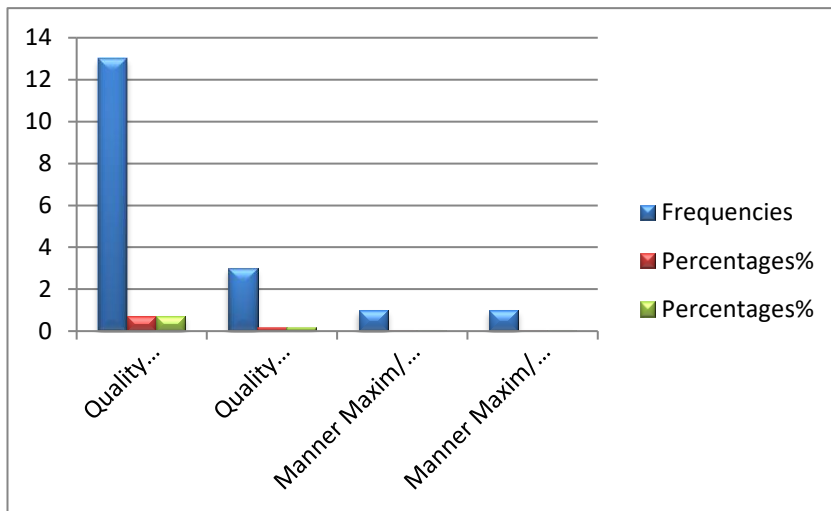


Figure 4. Conversational Maxims

Conclusions

Based on the qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data, the current study has drawn the following conclusions:

1. The argumentative deceptive strategies in The Simpsons are employed by the characters as strategies of manipulation and persuasion. Hence, these strategies are used at any time the characters want their opponents to do what they desire simply because these strategies can strengthen their viewpoints and increase the acceptability of their controversial standpoints by putting their opponents in difficult unresistable situations.
2. The fallacies, argumentative appeals, and breaching of Grice's maxims which comprise the argumentative deceptive strategies of The Simpsons are interrelated to some extent.

3. Employing an inappropriate scheme of argumentation by resorting to authority provides the arguers with more space and choices to be manipulative and, hence, persuasive.
4. Pathos is the most prominent argumentative appeal used by the characters to affect the acceptability of their standpoints. However, it cannot rule out the argumentative appeals of logos and ethos since each one of them has its own function in the argumentation.
5. Fabrication is the most prominent strategy utilized by the arguers; it has an effective role in deceiving and manipulating the opponents.

- 1- Data Availability Statement: (The manuscript includes all the data used in the study.)
- 2- Conflict of Interest Statement: (The authors confirm that there are no conflicts of interest that could affect the content of this research.)
- 3- Funding Statement: This research was fully funded by the authors without any financial support from other entities.

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