Examples as crucial arguments in discourse on ‘others’

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Abstract

In this article we take the classic meaning of exemplum as a point of departure to show how examples are marked and used in oral discourse on ‘others’. The empirical material is a transcribed focus group interview with Swedish students talking about a trip to Warsaw.

Examples may be marked in explicit ways but also in implicit ways. Some examples seem recognizable by their adhusive nature, others by animated talk or quotations.

Examples have various functions. They specify things but restrict them at the same time. They may serve as objectifications of an argument, they may mobilize associations, display attitudes, or indicate ‘types’ of persons or items. Some examples are virtual; they exemplify what could happen, or what never happened. Speakers may question another’s argument by referring to counterexamples, or request examples and thereby ‘disarm’ an opponent. Examples are also a target for protests. A dissatisfied listener may consider others’ examples as misleading, badly chosen, or too few.

In general, examples serve as shortened induction. They are articulated in relation to something general, vague, or abstract. Typically, a speaker confirms, challenges, or in other ways elaborates an argument with the aid of examples, in order to convince and please the audience.

Keywords: example; rhetoric; argument; induction; focus group; ‘others’.

1. Introduction

People’s use of examples is at least as old as rhetoric itself. To refer to a specific event or character in order to give a concrete form to something abstract, or to support one’s argument with evidence, is a firmly established convention. Our everyday habit of ‘giving an example’ is, however,
rarely accompanied by any serious interest in what is going on when we do it. This article deals with this matter. How do people recognize examples, and how do they proceed when using them? What is at stake when something is to be exemplified?

1.1. Examples in rhetoric

An important theoretical clue may be found in classic rhetoric. As Johannesson (1991: 94) points out, 'example' originates from the Latin exemplum, meaning 'sample'. In a figurative sense exemplum could also mean 'copy', 'pattern', or 'model'; the same is true for the Greek equivalent paradeigma (paradigm). The original rhetorical principle of an exemplum assumed that a certain event or a certain person through his or her acts and utterances could be conceived as giving a 'sample' of certain moral characteristics, certain virtues. They could be turned into 'models' for other people, in a positive or negative way. Such a use of exempla has permeated public debate since ancient times—as political and pedagogical arguments, as icons of saints or portraits of ancestors, even in the form of architecture (Johannesson 1991: 94). Recurrent 'examples' in this classic sense, Johannesson argues, may be seen as constituting a rhetorical stock for a whole culture's never-ending interpretations and reinterpretations, providing that culture with something to argue about: Socrates and Jesus, Athens and Rome, Machiavelli and Stalin (1991: 97). When a speaker today uses an example, he or she may still bring these functions into play—constructing a 'sample', 'copy', 'pattern', or 'model'; introducing 'evidence'; giving something abstract a concrete form.

Rhetorical analysts have tried to give a more precise picture of example, often in terms of induction. As Billig (1987: 131–132) points out, Aristotle (in Rhetoric) suggested that the basic unit of a rhetorical argument does not rest on induction but on the opposite, deduction. Rhetorical arguments resemble deduction. The difference is, Aristotle claimed, that instead of using complete syllogisms (two premises, from which a conclusion is deduced), rhetoric uses incomplete or shortened syllogisms, 'enthememes'. Here, one of the premises is omitted for the sake of persuasiveness and brevity, which means that an enthymeme is a conclusion supported by a single premise or justification. Thus, the logic in rhetoric is hidden or assumed rather than spelled out, and its aim is not an indisputable truth but probabilities (cf. Grimaldi 1972: 97). The justification of a conclusion may easily be criticized, Billig continues, 'and it in turn will need an enthymemetic support, which in its turn will be open to criticism, and so on ad infinitum' (Billig 1987: 132).

A similar open-ended dispute may however also take place in another way. Even though enthymes are considered to be the basic unit of a rhetorical argument, the use of examples or 'paradigma' represents another, alternative unit. Here, the speaker seems to be engaged in induction rather than deduction, and that may sometimes, as Grimaldi (1972: 83) argues, turn out to be more persuasive and clear. Although syllogistic (or enthymemetic) reasoning is considered more forcible and effective, Grimaldi claims, the use of examples is experientially more known.

The power of deductive reasoning relies on the fact that a conclusion must be accepted if the premises are accepted. The relative weakness of inductive reasoning depends on the fact that it is still possible to question the conclusion, even if the premises are accepted. No matter how many examples a speaker presents to support a specific conclusion, a critic can always say that these examples are not the only ones, that there are others proving something different. In rhetoric, however, presenting many similar examples may not be necessary. By analogy with enthymes, which rely on incomplete or shortened deduction, examples rely on incomplete or shortened induction. Induction in rhetoric is assumed or hidden rather than spelled out, making it possible for a speaker, with the help of an example, to only indicate that 'by mentioning this example, I sketch an inductive argument.'

In rhetoric, thus, a complex relation between 'paradigma' (example) and 'enthyme' may be identified. On the one hand, example is defined in contrast to enthyme, since its underlying logic is induction rather than deduction. On the other hand, example is also defined as similar to enthyme, since the logic of both these techniques is incomplete or shortened. They are both rhetorical ways of demonstration and proving, not necessarily logical. As Grimaldi (1972: 104) argues, an example may even be a source of an enthymeme insofar as it appears to give you a probable universal principle or truth. From this you may then go on reason, by the use of enthyme, to a particular conclusion.

Thus, a given debate about examples may actually also be a debate about potential enthymes, or potential deductive reasoning, albeit not in an explicit way. As will be shown in our data, a speaker's potential deductive reasoning, implied in an example, may be directly challenged with another speaker's example, implying something different, without having the speakers explicitly state any general arguments. To use the words of Grimaldi: when a speaker tries to picture a probable universal principle or truth from which you can draw a conclusion, you may reply with another picture of another probably universal principle.
or truth in order to defend another conclusion, and all this can go on implicitly.

This means that in rhetoric, inductive and deductive reasoning may be intertwined with the use of *exemplum*, even though this rhetorical device is formally associated only with induction. One could say that examples have a function similar to that of a 'representative anecdote', a term coined by Burke (1969 [1945]). Such a suggestion also points out the vulnerability of examples, from the user's point of view. When using pieces of reality to figure out guiding principles of this reality, Burke claims, people may easily end up misrepresenting reality:

Mens seek for vocabularies that will be faithful *reflections* of reality. To this end, they must develop vocabularies that are *selections* of reality. And any selection of reality must, in certain circumstances, function as a *deflection* of reality. (Burke 1969 [1945]: 59)

On the other hand, Burke emphasizes, this is not to say that such a search must be futile. The inserted words 'in certain cases' in the quotation above imply that in other cases the selected vocabulary may not deflect reality, according to Burke. A 'proper' example, a representative anecdote, should be 'suited to the subject matter which it is designed to calculate', Burke says (Burke 1969 [1945]: 59). Thereby he is pointing out precisely what arguments based on examples are about. Is this example a proper one? Is it suited to the subject under discussion, or not?

Consequently, the rhetorical figure of example is not only defined in relation to inductive and deductive reasoning, it is also defined in relation to *disputes* on inductive and deductive reasoning. The possibility of an example being a 'deflection', as Burke puts it, constitutes a motivation for rhetorical quarrels. Although clearly a synecdoche (taking the part as the whole, *pars pro toto*), an example is supposed to reflect rather than defect. In Potter's terms, examples are supposed to appear independent of the speaker in question, providing 'out-there-ness' (Potter 1997: 150).

Finally, example and enthymeme are sometimes defined in terms of speaker's characters, especially when it comes to rhetorical recommendations. According to Aristotle, examples should be used 'for those less skilled in reasoning but syllogism for the more dialectically skilled' (Grimaldi 1972: 84). 'Induction is clearly more appropriate for the ordinary person since it permits more ready comprehension and understanding' (1972: 84). Our article does not deal with such recommendations; it reflects on a specific kind of discourse rather than specific speakers. In a discursive respect, though, Aristotle's remark may be taken into account. Speakers' use of examples may render their discourse everyday or ordinary.

### 1.2. Examples in discourse on 'others'

This article explores a specific type of argument in which examples proved to be prevalent and significant: oral arguments about 'others'.

More specifically, it explores arguments about another nationality, ethnicity, or nation. There are several reasons for choosing such a field of study. As a political and cultural idea, a 'nation' represents something abstract that is given a concrete form. As an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991), it depends heavily on memories and monuments, maps and flags, boundaries and personifications. A 'nation' is also likely to be argued about. Its presumed 'essence' or meaning is often disputable and the disputes as such may be valuable settings for research on how such essences or meanings are constructed.

In addition to this, a discourse on 'others' is characterized by a particular delicacy that may be worth studying in itself. Alongside a concern about their *national* identities (defined in relation to 'others'), speakers may be concerned about their *moral* identities, their 'ethos' (defined in relation to other speakers). One reason may be found in the discourse itself. In order to define what another nation or nationality is or should be, speakers may find it hard not to use some kind of exemplification: a typical character, a characteristic way of acting, a person or figure taken as an embodiment. However, they may also find it hard to choose the 'proper' example in order to convince and please their audience. An argument deemed tactless may easily end up portraying the speaker as prejudiced and narrow-minded, even racist. If the speaker is not careful or diplomatic, an argument about 'others' may turn socially or politically risky. Face-saving strategies may therefore be useful, strategies that allow speakers to articulate in indirect ways what they seldom articulate in direct ways (Holsanova 1998a, b). Using 'good' examples may sometimes in itself be such a face-saving strategy. As we will demonstrate later on, it allows speakers to dwell on seemingly innocent details instead of broad, conspicuous generalizations.

There is a voluminous and interdisciplinary literature addressing the issue of 'the other', from philosophical works by Emmanuel Levinas and Martin Buber to empirical studies of intercultural or cross-cultural communication. In this article, we use the term in a specific and yet general way: to summarize the symbolic significance of those who are not present when a given interaction takes place, but who nevertheless are indicated in that interaction. This interest in 'others' is ultimately grounded in Mead's social-psychological paradigm, in which 'the generalized other' plays an important role (Mead 1967 [1934]: 89–90, 154). Mead argues that meaning arises when individuals take the attitude of the other in his
or her reaction to an object. Meaning presupposes a social process, through which individuals carry on constituting such meaning by symbolic role-taking. Particular attitudes crystallize into a single attitude or standpoint, the attitude of ‘the generalized other’ (1967 [1934]: 90). According to Mead, the generalized other is present in all social action, since it is only by generalizing others’ attitudes that actions can be carried out. Acting individuals need an image of society as a whole, without reference to its expression in any particular other individual (1967 [1934]: 154–156).

Even though Mead’s conception of the significance of others is broader than our focus, it is nonetheless relevant. When deliberating on people they have met and observed in another country, the participants in our study may be seen as engaged in defining ‘others’ in order to equip themselves with a societal image. Of course, symbolic role-takings are prevalent also in the very discussion; according to Mead, a speaker must take the attitude of others in order to indicate a specific meaning, regardless of what they are talking about. At the same time, the very content of the discourse that is being developed in our material also circulates around others, in this case generalizations about others. In order to achieve such generalizations, and thereby constitute the meaning of another nation or ethnicity, actors can use examples to generalize from. One could say that in this context, the meaning of ‘others’ is not yet fully crystallized. Collaboratively, a generalization is being carried out.

Pertinent examples may also challenge and change generalizations, which constitutes the rhetorical power of exemplifications. In his lectures (published in 1998 [1992]), Sacks argues that a large amount of what people know about society is ‘protected against induction’ (vol. 1, 1998 [1992]: 196–198). When people change their view on something, or alter their knowledge, they do not necessarily do so ‘step by step’. They have not been storing exceptions, and when they have a large amount of them they feel forced to change their knowledge. Rather, shifts in knowledge and perspective take place because of ‘exemplary occurrences’, Sacks claims, which may be made up of a single but striking occurrence.

As noted above, the rhetoric of examples relies on incomplete or shortened induction. Thus, the fact that a speaker tries to make his or her audience focus on such a single occurrence need not be an attempt to slightly modify what they know but rather an attempt to radically shift what they know. If that change occurs, the new knowledge may very well also be ‘protected from induction’. As Sacks points out: ‘You don’t get a step-by-step modification of something. It’s frozen, it shifts, and it’s frozen again’ (Sacks 1998 [1992]: 196–198).

This is not to say that Sacks’s model must be the only one to explain change in people’s knowledge about ‘others’. Of course, a traditional ‘book-keeping’ model of stereotype change is also a candidate, focusing on repetitious exceptions rather than striking ones. Instead, Sacks’s argument can be taken as a reminder of the rhetorical attraction of examples. With the aid of this argument, we might get a glimpse of people’s culturally shared motivation for using and challenging them. This motivation could, tentatively, be summarized in this way: As speakers, people might suspect that ‘proper’ induction is not the only way to successful persuasion either of others or of themselves. You do not need a thousand cases; a single case may be sufficient, as long as it is a good one. If it is deemed ‘good’, it may not only shift others’ knowledge but also shift it into the same form as previously, namely a form that is protected from induction. A critic must, following Sacks’s argument, try to find another ‘exemplary occurrence’.

Taken altogether, Mead’s and Sacks’s perspectives draw attention to the dynamics of people’s stereotype use. Generalizations about ‘others’ can be firm and fixed, but also questioned, protested against, and dissolved. As Billig (1987: 156–157) claims, to only keep track of categorization processes tends to give a one-sided image of cognition, ‘at the expense of the two-sided argumentative aspects of thought’. An analysis of rhetorical examples may very well do the opposite: capturing some of these argumentative aspects.

This theoretical framework makes up the background to this article. Our purpose is twofold: to show how the classic rhetorical concept of examples contributes to an understanding of how people argue about ‘others’, and, conversely, to show how people’s arguments about ‘others’ contribute to an understanding of rhetorical examples. It should be made clear, though, that the emphasis is on the study of examples. The discourse on ‘others’ is in this article primarily treated as a field for such a study.

Rather than taking an essentialist approach, we take a functionalist approach, drawing on Wittgenstein’s (1992 [1953]: 31) maxim that the meaning of a word equals its use in language. Therefore, we try to identify examples as they are presented and treated as such by the speakers. Since the use of ‘example’ has a long history in rhetoric, though, we combine this approach with a theoretical framework (outlined above) that in a broad sense directs us toward particular and prefabricated meanings, rooted in classic rhetoric. Our perspective is in other words both dependent on participants’ presented interaction and on our rhetorically shaped interest.

The data for the article—our overall example—may be considered as tailored for this purpose. During the work with a focus-group interview within the project ‘Diplomatic and Journalistic Voices’, in which we
interviewed a variety of cultural ambassadors active in relations between Sweden and Central Europe, we were struck by the interviewees' frequent and varied use of examples. The participants were Swedish students who had just come back from a trip to Warsaw, organized by a university association for those interested in foreign relations. In Warsaw, the students had been on a 'tour', meeting representatives of the Swedish and Russian embassies, the Department of Foreign Affairs, and Solidarity. They had visited two museums and a market, an editorial office of a newspaper, a school, a couple of restaurants and pubs, etc. As we asked some of these students to discuss their recent impressions with each other in front of us and our tape recorder, they soon started to exemplify their impressions with their common pool of experiences as a point of departure. Rhetorically, this could be compared to genus demonstrativum (Bergh 1990: 10); a genre that involves creating and reinforcing a shared frame of reference. Various topics succeeded each other, creating themes or topoi (places) where the talk stayed for a while (Korolija 1997: 62).

The general topic at issue—'Poland' and 'Warsaw'—proved to be ambiguous from the students' perspective. Each exemplification turned into a potentially disputable one. Is Poland 'East' or 'West', 'modern' or 'outdated', 'Americanized' or 'Polish', 'dangerous' or 'safe'? Similarly, their definitions of their impressions also proved problematic. What is a proper exemplification of 'Poland' and what is an improper one? What is a defendable generalization? Engaged in these kinds of questions, the participants may be said to discursively join their senior colleagues—Swedish diplomats, businessmen, entrepreneurs, and journalists—who work on both sides of the Baltic Sea and consequently are supposed to come to grips with and communicate the novelty or otherwise that the particular 'others' are considered to represent (cf. Wästerfors 2001). From a particular point of view, either Swedish or Western, Poland as well as Central Europe in general may be treated as a discursively tricky case (cf. Wästerfors 2000): a former Communist country already a member of NATO and, soon after the interview, a member of the European Union. The implicit questions for Swedish students coming back from a trip to Warsaw might be: 'What kind of "others" did we actually meet?', 'Are they really different, and if so, in what sense?'

1.3. On examples in academic discourse: A methodological reflection

There is yet another angle from which this article might be read, namely, an academic one. The rhetoric of examples is essential not only in everyday talk but also in the humanities and social sciences. In the book What is a Case?, edited by Ragin and Becker (2000 [1992]), contributors from various areas argue that the idea of having 'cases' belongs to the basic 'precepts' of social science methodology, although rarely reflected upon or questioned. Use of evidence that is more or less repetitious and extensive in form has proved to be 'a dependable way for social scientists to substantiate their arguments' (2000 [1992]: 2).

Whether cases are to be considered as 'found' (as specific empirical units) or as 'objects' for social science (as general empirical units), whether they are 'made' by the scientists (as specific theoretical constructs) or belong to their 'conventions' (as general empirical constructs)—these questions are mostly implicit and their answers seldom spelled out. Ragin and Becker's book contains a conceptual spectrum that highlights the lack of consensus on what a case really is. Additionally, each 'case study' or study of 'N cases' faces the unavoidable question 'what is this a case of?', a question that Becker recommends his colleagues to keep on asking themselves. What a study is intended to be a 'case of' may even be abandoned by readers later on. As Platt points out (2000 [1992]: 41), an author's initial intention may be replaced by others' intentions, turning a study of a case of a slum into an exemplary case of participant observation (W. F. Whyte's sociological classic Street Corner Society, 1943).

Although a case is not entirely equivalent to an example, it does not seem difficult to regard this debate as an academic and methodological version of the phenomenon we study in this article. Social scientists are likewise engaged in identifying their convincing examples—in order to 'sample' reality, make a 'copy' of it or a 'pattern' for it, creating an analytic model or sketching inductive reasoning—as we do in this article. And they are engaged in questioning others' examples, finding them false or misleading. In this sense, science is intrinsically rhetorical.

2. Method

Our empirical material is a 71-minute-long transcribed and translated focus-group interview with Swedish students. Using a focus group as a method means that a group of individuals (seven in the current case) gathers in order to discuss a given question under the guidance of a moderator for approximately one or one and a half hours. We chose a so-called 'unstructured focus-group interview' (Myers 1998; Myers and Macnaghten 1999; Wibbeck 2000, 2002) where the influence of the moderator is minimal and the participants are free to pick up whatever topic they consider to be relevant, even though the very interview format and the introductory question of course restricted that choice in a general sense. The advantage of an unstructured focus-group interview is that
the moderator's understanding of the topic does not govern the topic choice, nor does it govern the development of the conversation as a whole.

How did we get in contact with the interviewees in the first place? We found a poster about a planned trip to Warsaw organized by a Swedish university association for those interested in foreign relations. We contacted the guide (also a student), conducted an interview with him in order to find out more details about the trip, and presented our project at a meeting with the travelers before their departure. We suggested to the group that those who were interested could meet us after they had come home, announcing when and where to meet. Seven out of 16 showed up. The meeting took place one evening a couple of days after their trip and was informal in character. The seven students (five men and two women, here called A, B, C, D, E, F, and G) mingled first, helping themselves to some refreshments. Then they gathered around a table, together with the moderator (one of the authors, D.W.). The project leader and an assistant, who was in charge of transcribing the talks afterwards, were also present but kept in the background.

The moderator initiated the discussion by asking whether there was anything in Warsaw that surprised them, or anything that did not surprise them. After that, a spontaneous discussion developed and the students deliberated their experiences of the trip. The discussion lasted for more than one hour, with almost no interference from or verbal communication with the moderator (an exception, though, is analyzed later on). It was recorded on a minidisc. The participants themselves were responsible for initiating and establishing topics, for changing topics and closing them. Some of the topics would serve as 'landmarks' as the participants came back to them on several occasions (cf. Wibeck 2002: 273).

In order to catch the subtle nuances of talk, we used a detailed way of transcribing that, apart from verbal interaction, included measured pauses, hesitations, prosody, and other nonverbal comments or utterances (Silverman 1997: 116–120). For the purpose of this article, though, we use a simplified transcription. Following Silverman’s (1997: 149) recommendation, our aim was to arrive at a transcript that is adequate for the task at hand. Since we did not know exactly what task we would give ourselves from the very beginning, we started with a transcription that would provide us with as many analytical opportunities as possible. Subsequently, when our interest in examples took shape, we modified the transcript and cleansed it from at least some symbols not referred to analytically, in order to avoid distracting the reader from our focus.

Although the interview style was chosen in order to minimize influence from the moderator, some influence must certainly be taken into account.

Our introductory questions on surprises in Warsaw may have directed the discussants in a particular way, probably toward more or less dramatic experiences. Such a direction is recurrent in many sorts of rhetorical production. As narrative analysts have pointed out, a thing is seldom considered worth telling unless the narrator finds a drama in what is to be told: a ‘trouble’ disturbing the ‘Edenic symmetry’ (Burke 1969 [1945]: 19), or a deviation from the ‘canonical’ (Bruner 1998 [1990]: 50; cf. Asplund 1980: 150–155). In this case, this tendency might have been reinforced by the fact that the participants talked about shared experiences, or at least experiences they supposed were shared, which might have directed them toward dramatizing these experiences.

Thus, other Swedish students who have not been to a trip to Poland probably would talk differently and use different examples. It must also be pointed out, however, that our primary ambition is not to identify common examples in this particular context (Swedes on Poland or Warsaw), but rather to identify common ways of using examples in talk about ‘others’ in general. In addition, the moderator also presented an option to talk about nondramatic things in the introductory question by asking the discussants if there was something that did not surprise them.

With the help of a translator, we have translated the original transcript into English. For easier reading and orientation, we have added comments in the left-hand margin of the analyzed excerpts.

In the following, we will first look at different ways in which examples can be delimited and recognized in talk. Then, we will focus on functions of examples: how speakers use and treat them interactively. Finally, we will summarize our findings and conclude.

3. Marking examples

3.1. Relative specificity

As it is formulated in talk, an example might be characterized as relatively specific. It is specific since it is distinguished in relation to something that is general, vague, or abstract. Typically, it confirms, challenges, or in other ways elaborates an argument, statement, or feeling, spoken or yet unspoken. Further, it is relatively specific since its specificity is defined not through the character or content of the example as such but through the very relation to something general, vague, or abstract in the surrounding talk, that is, the statement, argument, or feeling at issue.

Thus, an example may be looked upon as relationally constituted. The extract below may serve as an illustration.
Obviously to be treated as relatively specific. A speaker who gives an explicit example is, on the other hand, in various ways accentuating that relation, or creating it from the very beginning.

Brief exemplifications often belong to the explicit ones. They are framed by linguistic cues that give the listener hints about what is going to be said and how to understand it.

(2) the EU for example put some pressure on them ... for instance when we were at a café ... compared to Denmark, for example ... they tried to do something against for example corruption ... for example car traffic ... but if you compare it with the Russian Embassy for instance ...

This kind of ‘minimalistic’ examples, where one piece of information is chosen from an implicit set of such pieces, can often be found in the middle of an utterance. The ‘sample’ that the speaker presents seems to illustrate not only the world ‘out there’ (Potter 1997: 150) but also, and simultaneously, the argument that is about to unfold.

3.3. Markers for implicit examples

Linguistic cues for implicit examples may have much the same function as ‘for example’ and ‘for instance’. The difference is that they are less intuitive or less obvious. In our material there are several variations. First, speakers may indicate their examples by treating them as ‘similar’, saying as, like this, like when. The link between previous utterances and future ones is thereby clarified; what comes next is to be understood as exemplifying.

(3) Like this one with the recession you know ... Like when I was in Hungary ... Like this minister of foreign affairs ...

The complementary version of this way of indicating an example is to emphasize the opposite, that which is now going to be said is contrary to the statement at issue.

(4) But in a café, the Café Europa where we were ...

Secondly, speakers may also frame their examples by means of invitations or exhortations, using verbs like see, look at, take. Such metaphorical expressions convey a feeling of observing and picking.

(5) Look at Japan, one of the richest countries in the world ... Just have a look at the export figures for Poland ...
Take Japan...  
Can you take something concrete?  
Look at the statistics...  

Thirdly, speakers can indicate their examples through certain phrases. Typically this seems to be the case when illustrating a vague impression or explaining a feeling supposedly unknown to the other conversationalists. Although these markers may appear imprecise (they can of course also mark a presentation of an experience in general and not only an example), they still may create rhetorical boundaries for examples.

(6)  I thought that...  
I had a certain feeling...  
I got the impression that...  

The above markers can function as frames of examples. Moreover, they function as ‘flags’ attracting attention from other speakers and inviting them to share a package of supposed evidence or facts, as if saying ‘what I am about to say is an example’.

3.4. Allusions  

Although many examples are presented in terms of the speaker’s specific experience or knowledge, they may also be presented in terms of an allusion. The speaker may presuppose that certain facts are known, or appeal to ‘what everybody knows’, and then elaborate. This kind of example seems to be signaled by demonstrative pronouns—this, that, this kind of—together with the topic that is going to be specified. The speaker is relying on the principle of ‘the tip of the iceberg’ (or pars pro toto).

(7) this kind of treatment, this service feeling, that you have in a Western country...  
this security that you mentioned...  
this political life they have...  
this car traffic...  
these old prejudices that exist that... that... that...  
it was like this scandal that he told us about, you know eh with bribes and everything...  

This allusive way of presenting an example is similar to the way speakers may talk about a category (Sacks 1972). A brief reminder of associated attributes or associated behavior is sufficient in order to indicate what is being said.

In our material, this rhetoric seems particularly accentuated since the interviewees actually share a common experience—their trip to Warsaw. They are allowed to, and even expected to, make use of a common ‘pool’ of impressions (this car traffic..., this scandal that he told us about...). They may be contrasted with other utterances in this interview that explicitly draw on a single person’s experience, which subsequently has to be explained in detail.

(8) just as an example: I was in Estonia two years ago...

3.5. Quotations  

Yet another way to implicitly introduce and demarcate examples is to use ‘reported speech’ or ‘virtual talk’. Quotations are a very concise way to imply somebody’s attitudes or properties without long verbal descriptions. By constructing a quotation a speaker may present a ‘sample’ of a stated trend or tendency of acting, as if attaching a sort of intensified authenticity. This signifies that what is being animated is to be understood as an exemplification of something general.

(9)  F: Argument They [the Poles] themselves didn’t do anything [to comply with EU directives]  
Example They only like ‘oh no that won’t work, how much penalty do we have to pay’  
Evaluation They have kind of given up  

Quotations may also help speakers animate a ‘typical’ and therefore expected scenario. Below, a ‘normal’, consumer-oriented, and polite way of behaving is contrasted with behavior experienced in Poland.

(10)  E: Argument There is not the same kind of service in Poland as in a Western country  
Example When you come into a bar and want to order something then ‘Hi what would you like’ or something but they only look up and then it is you who is expected to say something... not even a ‘hi’, not even a smile, nothing

3.6. Combining markers  

Theoretically it might seem easy to separate the above ways of introducing and framing examples. In practice, however, speakers often combine...
these ways as they go along arguing or describing things. Thus, a given example may be marked in several ways at the same time. Explicit markers ('for instance') may be combined with implicit ones ('like that'), as well as quotations.

(11) Like that old Jewish ghetto for instance. If you saw a balcony, then you thought like 'how can they ever dare to stand there they have to like. it looks like it's going to tumble down any second'

Below is another instance of combined markers: a recurrent phrase ('I thought that ...') and a quotation.

(12) No but in general I thought that they - didn't try like 'Oh now somebody's speaking English then I'll have to talk a little like extra' or something like that

3.7. Examples and topics

Speakers may use examples to pick up a new topic, or to make explicit or implicit connections to a topic already under discussion. They may let the listeners discern the relation between the general and the specific in such a way that their utterances are treated as an example, and not, for instance, another topic.

In our focus interview this was quite common. A topic introduced by some of the conversationalists (for instance 'prejudices that got confirmed') could be followed by lengthy discussions on things taken as exemplifying this topic ('bad service, bad food, not that bad food, extremely bad food, lack of knowledge of English, people were hesitating in front of strangers, etc.'). A series of topics can be pre-announced and framed as 'positive experiences' or as 'negative experiences'. Here, it may seem narrow to merely point at linguistic cues or markers as frames for examples. An example needs to be contextualized. Therefore, a 'bird's-eye view' (Norrby 1996: 140) could be taken into account, that is to say, an overall picture of the conversation. Even a long time after a topic was introduced, the speakers could in one way or another be occupied with 'samples' of that topic.

However, as we pointed out above, what is general and what is specific is mutually defined. That means that a certain topic ('prejudices that got confirmed') may be looked upon as a single example, or as an example of a more general topic ('something that surprised you'). Similarly, if we replace a 'bird's-eye view' with a closer look at our data, we may discern several 'subtopics' within a given topic ('food in prejudices that got confirmed'). These subtopics may in themselves be further exemplified (bad

food, not that bad food, extremely bad food). Thus, depending on how closely you are analytically zooming in, a topic may seem like an example and an example like a topic. Also the speakers could practice such a shifting point of view. When a topic was followed by another, the latter was often originally initiated as an exemplification of the first.

Several researchers have aimed at analyzing topical coherence and topic boundaries. Sacks (1992) speaks about stepwise or bounded topic shifts. Wibeck (2002), who studies topical trajectories, focuses on how the topical aspects follow after each other (by shifting or gliding) and which of the aspects can serve as landmarks for the participants. Korolija and Linell (1996) analyze episode boundaries in multiparty conversation. But the analysis of 'big themes' can also become a starting point and a tool for a new detailed type of analysis, as in our case. Our point of departure was to draw a map of all topics and their exemplifications, in order to contextualize the analyzed examples and visualize the dynamics of the discussion.

After realizing that each topic, at least in principle, could be looked upon as an example of some other, more general topic, and, conversely, that each example could be looked upon as yet another topic, we started to consider an example as relatively specific, rather than specific in an absolute sense. Exemplification is better understood, we argue, as a rhetorical direction rather than a rhetorical destination. It 'heads' something specific.

The participants themselves may be said to sometimes use an equivalent, implicit 'map' as an orientation. Once in a while the map even turns explicit. Speakers can pre-announce their arguments in ways that indicate that they belong to the same location.

(13) something that I was impressed by was the opera... something that I was impressed by was that they were extremely good at English...

In other parts of the interview, when the participants introduce other topics (crime, prostitution, and service) they still seem to recognize sequences that belong to these topics as exemplifications, but the very belonging is marked in more implicit ways. As a given topic is being 'sampled', it may be said to generate chains of specifications (Poland, positive impressions, cultural life, opera, opera performance translated into English). In such chains, one might expect speakers to formulate their examples subsequent to a general statement, in order to confirm, challenge, or elaborate what others have said. However, if that is the principle of exemplification it is not necessarily its actual order. Examples do not always follow a statement. They can also
be embedded between two statements, the second being a variation of the first.

(14)

B: Argument

Poland has made a serious impression in many areas

Examples

For example the one with the police that was mentioned... as a model... when the Swedish police said that the Polish police is a model for them

Argument

So there they seem to be very serious

There are also cases where examples come first, followed by general statements, or when the example is embedded between a statement and an evaluation.

4. Examples at work

Although there are many ways in which speakers may use examples, we may nevertheless outline some particularly recurrent ways or functions. As will become apparent, their more or less distinctive characters do not prevent them from being empirically overlapping. It is not our purpose to only itemize these functions but, in addition, use them as points of departure for analyzing examples in general.

As Katz (1999: 76) recommends, for each piece of data we try to draw attention to ‘a novel wrinkle of the explanation being advanced’. This is done by starting with the perhaps most accessible function and then, step by step, complicating the analysis by introducing probably less obvious functions. Thus, rather than providing a list of similar cases, we try to analytically introduce a new quality for every case, thereby highlighting a different aspect that, in relation to previously analyzed aspects, prevents the case from looking (only) similar (Katz 1999: 76). Altogether, this may provide us with a complex hypothesis of how examples are rhetorically used.

4.1. Specifying and restricting

A fundamental function of examples is, as we have argued above, to specify an argument. A speaker may talk as if he or she is simply unfolding the argument at issue, thereby making it sound more vivid and solid.

(15)

D: Argument

But weren’t you also quite surprised over how many prejudices were confirmed verified after all while we were there

Examples as crucial arguments

1st specification

you know... as you can joke about Polish service and... eh... and like that you know so that’s quite a lot

G: 2nd specification

Yeah it was very bad when you... you know if we are to start talking about this thing... you went out to a bar for example... then they put you know... if the whole group ordered thirteen beers then there were always twenty on the bill... at least (LAUGH) and that the service was like completely... eh... disastrous at restaurants and the like that eh... it must have been almost like eh... the old Soviet time

In order to specify poor ‘Polish service’, speaker G draws on long waiting time at restaurants and inattentive service at bars. Doing this, he is simultaneously operating within a previous specification, namely speaker D’s specification of ‘confirmed prejudices’ as poor ‘Polish service’. The argument is thereby exemplified in two steps. ‘Many prejudices were confirmed’ is specified in terms of (i) ‘Polish service’ that proved to be as bad as one could expect, and that in turn is specified in terms of (ii) long waiting time and inattentive service. Only after speaker D’s initial specification does another speaker, G, take up the statement and elaborate it with another specification, as if D pursued a response by exemplifying his statement.

In this way speakers may elaborate an argument, as well as respond to it, by means of examples that specify it. At the same time, however, the very argument is restricted. ‘Confirmed prejudices’ is now defined as ‘confirmed poor service’, and ‘poor service’ is defined as long waiting time or sloppy service. Even if such examples may allude to a wide range of similar examples, and even if they may be countered by others later on, they still, for the time being, limit the very arguments to certain circumstances. As examples specify things, they also narrow them down.

4.2. Objectivizing

Another function of examples is to make an argument factual. Examples typically draw attention away from the speaker to focus on the world ‘out there’. They are in Potter’s words (1997: 150) designed to provide a quality of ‘out-there-ness’. By mentioning examples, a speaker may construct a description as independent of himself or herself. Picking a successful example may in this respect be considered as picking ‘evidence’ or ‘data’ to support an argument.
Examples as crucial arguments

4.4. Making lists

Examples are often designed to convey the impression that they are picked from a quantity. Even if only one is mentioned, they are easily understood as ‘plural’. This character can also be made explicit, as when speakers support their arguments with the aid of lists of examples (Spain or the US or anywhere). Three-part lists seem common (Atkinson 1984; Jefferson 1990; Drew 1990). Below, speaker G backs up an evaluative characteristic with such a list.

(19)
G: Argument ... it was very Americanized, very much ... they even had more American restaurants than here.
Examples they had KFC Pizza Hut: McDonald’s I could see everything apart from Burger King

Apart from items and attributes, a list of examples can also consist of various places, sometimes put together in order to contrast a certain statement.

(20)
B: Argument Corruption is nothing specifically Polish, it is not a specific Eastern European problem. You find corruption in some of the richest countries in the world
Examples Japan, Italy, Belgium

Lists like these can be completed interactively, by contributions from several speakers. In the next excerpt, examples implicitly taken from the set ‘other European countries’ are picked up by several speakers. In the end, speaker A returns to the situation in Warsaw and gives a similar kind of ‘evidence’.

(21)
F: Argument Prostitution is very widespread even in other European cities.
G: Examples Yes in Germany for example.
A: Yes, there are special streets you know in for example Hamburg there is a street which is like ... and there is ... and there is such a street in Warsaw too so to say
G: There is in Malmö [in Sweden] as well ...
4.6. Displaying attitudes to ‘others’

Picking an example may also be a matter of displaying one’s attitude to a topic under discussion. The character of an example and the way the speaker presents it may signify a certain stance or a certain opinion without spelling it out that stance or opinion explicitly. Holsanova and Nekvapil (1995), as well as Holmqvist and Holsanova (1996), show similar findings: explicit evaluations of ‘others’ are rare, they are instead characterized indirectly, via evaluations of particularities, such as towns, town districts, villages, roads, houses, clothes, local products, and language (cf. also Francescini 1995). As the speakers in our focus group are discussing their impressions of a certain subject of which they sometimes have different opinions (Poland and Warsaw) such implications are prevalent, although often quite subtle. Below, the speakers are engaged in evaluating Poland as a whole by means of details in their impressions:

(23) B: Argument ... the tap water is drinkable in Hungary (F: Mm). Here you couldn’t drink it, there was a lot of little things like that (F: Mm) where Poland was like a bit poorer and sure there is probably a reason the whole city was bombed during the war (F: Mm) and so on. But I hadn’t expected that, I thought it would be about the same standard in the whole of Eastern Europe.

F: Example But – but I thought that for example the car traffic, even if they were driving – eh – didn’t show much consideration for other drivers, but in relation to pedestrians they were (C: Yes’) very nice.

G: Yeah I thought that it was very – kind to – that they always stopped at –

F: – yeah that they always stopped at – yeah pedestrian crossings and things like that. That I would never have expected.

Whereas B demonstrates a critical attitude to Poland by referring to undrinkable tap water and ‘such small things’, speaker F demonstrates the opposite by highlighting another detail: Polish drivers’ habit of stopping for pedestrians at crossings. In this manner, F not only succeeds in refuting B since others support his observation of Polish drivers. He also succeeds in displaying a relatively positive attitude to Poland, or at least an attitude that is not completely negative, and doing this without having to elaborate and defend this attitude more generally. Contesting a negative
example (the tap water) with a positive one (Polish drivers) may signify such dissent in itself. Thus, a speaker can present his attitude through an example.

4.7. Questioning

A related way to use examples is to question or cast doubt on another’s argument by referring to a seemingly apparent fact that is hard or even impossible to dismiss. Such a practice is dependent on objectivizing as well as attitudinal qualities but combines them with a destructive purpose. To question with the help of examples is to use them in an aggressive manner.

(24)

G: Argument ... they: [the Poles] ... didn’t see this cooperation with the neighboring countries as the most important thing, but eh and there I think that the m ... probably can lose perhaps a couple of years. on 

(E) Break

E: There I don’t agree with you at all (GENERAL GIGGLE)...

Example just look at the statistics for export for Poland,

F: No no ( )

G: – No, but it was precisely that, that half of the investments came from Germany’ –

F: – from Germany and ( ) –

G: and overwhelmingly (F: Mm) the biggest invest – (F: Mm) – ment country' we ourselves were on sixth –

E: – Yeah' seventy-five percent of Poland’s export, goes t. to EU countries (G: Mm) of which (G and F: Mm mm) half of that export goes to the Germans alone

E’s implicit example (just look at the statistics for export ...) serves as a refutation of G’s opinion (that Poland would ignore its neighboring countries). As a counterexample, ‘the statistics’ represent something that a rhetorically successful opponent would have to explain away (to restore the argument), or something to take seriously (thereby abandoning one’s argument, or at least modifying it).

This tension constitutes the rhetorical power of the counterexample. Simply mentioning it may push the other to surrender or fight back. Countereexamples can therefore stir up quite hard debates. In our material they often constitute a new topic that is yet to be exemplified.

4.8. Demanding examples: Disarming another

Yet another way of questioning or casting doubt on another’s argument is to demand an example. A speaker may indicate that the argument at stake needs specification or restriction since i. is considered too abstract and diffuse in its present form, or even sweeping and therefore unreliable. To highlight a lack of examples may in this sense serve as an efficient way of disarming another speaker.

(25)

B: Argument Yeah but on the other hand I think I have to say that. Eh (LAUGHS A LITTLE) that I still thought that – (RESIGNED TONE) uch. there were things in Warsaw that maybe are / if you compare with Prague and Budapest then I should think that Warsaw comes out worst on pretty well most areas. actually – (SILENTLY) like that you know it was –

G: Request Can you take something concrete –

B: – Well it was a little shabbier it seemed a little more dangerous. and eh also Poland seemed a little more dangerous a little more ... a little . it was an honor for them to fool you and eh eh you know –

C: Request But what’...

G’s question (Can you take something concrete) makes B’s argument seem abstract and vague. To ask for ‘something concrete’ indicates that the previous speaker failed to be concrete, at least so far. This represents an indirect way of questioning another’s argument since the questioner does not have to come up with something on his or her own; he or she simply asks for precision. If the opponent still finds it hard to articulate such precision, as seems to be the case in the excerpt above (since he gets another request for an example), the questioner may have won a minor victory. A failure to produce an example seems to undermine one’s argument.

A request of examples may also be stated in terms of asking when, where, or who.

(26)

G: Argument ... they seem to not bother about [the treaty of] Schengen and stuff like that you know - so I think that they –

E: Request who is it who doesn’t bother about Schengen?

G: Well you know that they – I got that impression that they sort of ...
Highlighting another's lack of examples also involves a risk. If the opponent actually happens to find what is lacking, the attacker may find himself arming the opponent rather than disarming him. Below, B has argued that corruption is not a specific Polish or Eastern European phenomenon since it also exists in 'some of the world's richest nations'. Speaker G demonstrates skepticism:

(27) G: Argument Ah I think it's more in Poland – so –  
B: Protest (B LAUGHS SCORNFULLY) – Yeah but God you're just sitting there and – you just imagine  
G: Example No eh but you know they [Poland] are number forty – on this corruption list –  
B: Modified argument – Yeah, anyway I was pointing out that the problem exists ... ehm all over ...  

Speaker B laughs scornfully and accuses G of 'sitting there ... and just imagine', implying that G is only fantasizing or speculating. Speaker G would consequently lack any evidence. When G actually provides B with such 'evidence' (that Poland occupies the fortieth place on a 'corruption list'), B retreats into an 'anyway' and a modification of his argument. Even if he is using 'anyway' to bypass the previous example and move on in the conversation, his rhetorical position is slightly weakened.

4.9. Protesting against another's exemplifications

Although a speaker who exemplifies his or her argument may be taken as only illustrating it, he or she may also be taken as using examples in the classic rhetorical sense: as sketching induction. If so, the speaker's critics may not only aim at questioning these cases one by one; they can also aim at questioning the very induction as such. The speaker may be said to use misleading examples, or examples that exemplify something else, or simply too few examples. After a series of arguments on prostitution, one of the speakers in our focus group goes for a combination:

(28) B: Argument Well there is a tendency – to draw somewhat far-reaching conclusions from very little you know –, you know, that they have a super recession because of one year's decline and that the cultural life is superb because of one opera performance or that there aren't any prostitutes because you can't see them –
that 'we're not going to draw such conclusions.' Later on, speaker G, one of the most active participants, seems to present an excuse for having 'blurted out' too much:

(29) That's why you can blurt out a couple of generalizations (B: Yeah, yeah) (E: LAUGHS) eh like if you are a person [like myself] who is quick to blurt out (B: Yeah) opinions

Thus, the interview as a whole can be talked about as an arena for generalizations, which makes B's protest relevant for us as researchers as well (following this argument, we reflected on the use of examples in social science in the introduction). The speakers may ask themselves if we are picking examples in a proper way or not.

Later on, speaker F responds to G's humility marker by pointing out that they as qualified visitors got a useful insight into situations in Poland. The fact that the students met 'people at the top' in Warsaw (embassy staff, an ex-minister of defense, etc.) gave them the opportunity to get 'an image that you'd perhaps have to live a lifetime [in Warsaw] to get', he says. Consequently, a protest on exemplifications can be met by arguments saying 'our examples are not that bad after all.'

To protest against another's exemplification may, in Billig's (1987: 170) words, be seen as arguing about 'particulars' and their role in supporting various categories. Since language permits us to express contrary forms of thought, Billig maintains, we not only apply categories to arguments and experiences, saying 'x is an instance of Y.' We also argue or deliberate on these categories: 'is x really an instance of Y?' Analysis that brings out this method of argument makes it possible to portray speakers as reflexive rhetorical beings, rather than as automatons simply applying categories. 'Thinking', Billig writes, 'starts when we argue or deliberate about which categorization to particularize, or how to categorize a particularization' (1987: 170).

4.10. Widening descriptions: Virtual examples

Examples may not only be used in order to show what is the case but also to show what is not the case. To exemplify what never happens may in an inverted way illuminate what really happens, without having explicitly to clarify the latter.

(30) you were not followed by alcoholics ...
you were not warned not to go to the railway station ...

In a similar way, speakers may also exemplify what could happen, leaving it at least a little unclear whether it did happen or not.

(31) if you saw a black person then you got really surprised ...

These two 'virtual qualities' (exemplifications of what never happens and what hypothetically could happen) may be combined. Below, G talks about cabs in Warsaw:

(32) Otherwise sometimes if you go abroad then you've had to like/you've had to pay masses [to go by cab] and then found out that you could have just walked two blocks - it took a turn around half of the city [GIGGLES] for example - ... but you know I don't think it was like that at all in Warsaw

G's implicit statement (that the cab drivers in Warsaw do not fool foreigners) gets color and precision by contrasting it with what could have been the case (if you go abroad... then...). By doing so, G also widens his description. Regarding Warsaw, the example of being fooled by cab drivers remains unreal; still, this example contributes to a description of Warsaw. Whether G actually has been fooled by cab drivers abroad or simply is depicting such a scenario is in other words irrelevant. The relevant thing is whether he is right or wrong about Warsaw.

Sacks (in his lectures published in 1998 [1992], vol. I, p. 196), argues that it is not always necessary to decide whether a given example (or 'exemplary occurrence') is 'really' hypothetical or not. Even if a speaker is using the 'if' form for an actual occurrence (if you saw a black person...), that may simply be a way to show that he or she is going to develop an argument from it, relying on the logic 'if... then' (... then you got really surprised). Whether the speaker considers the example to be real or hypothetical is more or less irrelevant for listeners; the relevant thing is whether the argument he or she is making out of it is solid or not. This is perhaps the clearest illustration of how deductive reasoning may be rhetorically intertwined in exemplifications, even though exemplum (or 'paradigm') is formally associated with induction.

4.11. Visualizing

As we have already mentioned, not only factual statements are exemplified but also more abstract things, like thoughts, attitudes, ideas, behavior, feelings, and associations. The more vague and imprecise the topic, the more efficient may an exemplification of that topic turn out to be. In our data, this is evident when speakers try to specify one of the most vague or general elements in the discussion—'Poland' or 'Warsaw' on
the whole. In the extract below, speaker D is visualizing a prototypical picture.

(33)

D:

**Visualization**

We were standing and waiting for the tram. and there was a sort of market full of people selling things for almost nothing. and in the background, there was a huge tall skyscraper, super modern

**Evaluation**

I have not seen anything cooler,

**Statement**

this is Warsaw, this is a city of contrasts

Is D's description of the market and the skyscraper, what we here call a 'visualization', also treated as an example? On the one hand, such a label does not seem accurate. He does not use the word example, nor any of the implicit markers we have mentioned. He does not even, at least not in a straightforward way, present anything relatively specific since his visualization needs an evaluation and a statement to clarify it. On the other hand, one could argue that D is engaged in exemplifying, since he gives a sample of what he thinks is 'a city of contrasts'. He is trying to illustrate and give taste and color to his 'picture of Warsaw'. One might even say that he is engaged in the spirit of exemplifications, as it is construed in classic rhetoric. Whether Warsaw really is 'a city of contrasts' may be arguable, as may the fact that other descriptions might suit better. What is difficult to disagree with, however, is speaker D's visualization as such, and therefore also his conclusion from it. His visualization sustains his argument, as rhetorical examples are supposed to.

Similar episodes take place when the participants are talking about crimes. Referring to 'typical' scenarios, situations, and behaviors connected to crime, they do not, however, restrict themselves to visualizations of experiences. Visualizations of hypothetical experiences, or things that did not happen but could have happened, turn out to be useful. The extract below belongs to a moment when the speakers' visit to Warsaw is being described in positive undertones:

(34)

C: **Idea**

I went there with the idea that there would be more crime and that it would be more dangerous.

**Visualization**

That one would have to hold on to one's bug more than necessary, that they would try to pinch your wallet, or steal your luggage, that they would sort of. seem to be more threatening

Here too one might ask: does speaker D's hypothetical visualization (or imagination) serve as an example? In one way, it specifies something relatively vague or general. The word 'dangerous' is given substance and D's initial 'idea' of Warsaw is given quite a detailed content. Her idea is to some extent cast in the form of an example. Even so, she does not use any explicit marker, and is surely not presenting any 'evidence' since her visualization is hypothetical. Taken as a whole, though, it would be hard to argue that D's rhetoric is unrelated to the spirit of exemplification. She cannot be accused of not having specified what she means by 'dangerous'.

4.12. Embedding a deviant case

Discourse on 'others' is, as we wrote in the introduction, characterized by a certain delicacy. It may make speakers especially concerned about their moral identities (or, to use classic rhetoric, their 'ethos'). When discussing a delicate topic, speakers use positive embedding of their statements. They legitimize them by mentioning reliable information sources, or using quotations and second-hand stories to gain distance. Apart from that, objectifications, modifications, and retreats are quite frequent. Another successful strategy is to act like an expert or to use humor when characterizing 'the others' (Holmqvist and Holsanova 1996: 7–13). In our data, topics like 'crime' and 'being fooled by taxi drivers' proved to be illustrative in this respect since they happened to be brought into play when the group was engaged in positive descriptions of Warsaw and Poland. Here, speakers mentioned single cases that confirmed their prejudices, but the very way in which they mentioned these cases deprived them of significance. They are presented as occasional and solitary events, as if saying that this particular experience does not count as a proof of anything negative. Rather, they are exceptions that prove the rule.

(35) **I felt rather safe**

**Negation of initial idea**

there were no criminals roaming around in tram stations

In other moments during the talk, 'only one' example was sufficient to sustain an argument (they were talking extremely good English you know ... as for example that minister of foreign affairs). Here, however, this solitary character is underlined so that particular argument cannot be
sustained, or even articulated. Thus, the rhetorical potential of particularly sensitive or deviant examples may be collaboratively downplayed.

5. Conclusion

To conclude this article, we would like to discuss our theoretical framework a little further with our empirical findings in the foreground. In the title of this article we call examples ‘crucial’ arguments in discourse on ‘others’. One might of course ask oneself: what, more specifically, would make them crucial?

As we hope has become clear, examples serve as tests of a speaker’s argument. A good example may save it, a bad one ruin it. The example as such may be trivial; nonetheless it may tell us more about what somebody is actually arguing than the argument as such, in its (relatively) general form. A speaker’s example is in this sense the weakest element in his or her argument, although it also can turn out to be the strongest. As we emphasized in the Introduction, the rhetorical figure of example is not only defined in relation to inductive and deductive reasoning in a straightforward way but also in relation to disputes on such reasoning. The risk of being perceived as a ‘deflection’, to use Burke’s [1969 [1945]: 59] word, constitutes a motivation for rhetorical quarrels on examples, a struggle that in itself may be fought with the aid of examples. The possibility of being perceived as adequate and persuasive, on the other hand, constitutes a motivation for using examples.

The functions we distinguished in this article may in this respect be looked upon as variants of a general and inclusive function. Examples are used to develop vocabularies aimed at reflecting reality, albeit in terms that must, in Burke’s words, rely on nothing but selections of reality. As long as the discourse in question involves an appeal to such a reality, as long as it is implying that ultimately, all that is said could be compared with or illustrated by facts or evidence, this function seems ubiquitous. The reality at issue can be virtual or fictional; nonetheless it is being rhetorically pictured and argued about. Consequently, an effort to identify a general function of examples in verbal communication should be coupled with an effort to capture a dynamic and argumentative dimension, intrinsic in this function. A manifest or potential controversy on what to be seen as proper ‘selections’ of reality is intimately connected to the very use of such selections, motivating the speakers and their audience to critical listening and rhetorical work.

Grimaldi (1972: 151) contends in his studies of Aristotle that rhetoric is the use of language in an artistic way, a way that brings together ‘reason and apperition’. In this respect, the crucial quality of examples is linked to speaker’s risk of being seen as not only imprecise but also inelegant. Rhetoric is supposed to please the audience (delectare). Rhetoric should not only build up but also attract one’s understanding (Grimaldi 1972: 151).

When engaged in discussing ‘another nation’ or ‘another nationality’, speakers may find their examples crucial also in other respects. Each ‘sample’ of ‘the others’ (or their country, their city, their food, their behavior, etc.) that is brought into a conversation seems loaded with a particular diplomacy, generated by the principle of identity constructions. Are ‘we’ like ‘them’, or are they different? Are ‘they’ like the other ‘they’, or are they particularly odd? As speakers know they may actively display their attitudes (and thereby, in a way, their identities) through exemplifications, they also know that their attitudes can be, accidentally, displayed in the same way. One may be framed as naive or prejudiced, too tolerant or too intolerant.

Thus, while engaged in exemplifying ‘others’, speakers are also engaged in disclosing others’ attitudes, supporting or questioning them, and guarding their own. As identities are negotiated in talk on ‘others’, those who talk may simultaneously negotiate on how they should negotiate, which imparts a particular delicacy to such discussion. As we argued in the introduction (referring to Sack’s lectures [1992], vol. I: 196–198), shifts in perspectives and views do not necessarily take place step by step. Shifts in knowledge and perspective may take place because of ‘exemplary occurrences’, made up of a single but significant example. In our material, the rhetorical tensions between the participants are closely connected with the struggle over what they are willing to accept as such significant examples, the ‘instances’ or ‘models’ to which they are ready to assign the power that (possibly) can change the perspective or knowledge at stake. Basically, that is also a struggle over the potential change of the ‘generalized other’, in Mead’s sense.

Considering our study as a case, one might of course also ask what it says about Swedes’ discourse on Poland and Poles, and perhaps Eastern Central Europe in general. Some of the topics we have been illuminating—spontaneously generated in the interview—are recurrent: inferior service, low expectations, ‘Americanization’, corruption, prostitution, crime, and danger. Even when the typical image of ‘East’ is under attack, which happens often in our material, it is still taken as a self-evident point of departure, a ‘gray starting point’ (Wäterfors 2000).

When, one may wonder, will the discourse, and its rhetorical stock of examples, change? When will a trip to Warsaw generate other things to talk about, and refute?
Notes

1. The research has been funded by the Centre for European Studies at Lund University in Sweden. We have gratefully benefited from the discussion during our presentation at the text seminar on 12 March 2003 at the Centre for European Studies, Lund University. We also want to thank our colleagues Malin Akerström, Göran Hacohen, Camilla Thörn, and Filippa Söve for their comments on the first version of this article. Three anonymous reviewers helped improve the quality of this article. We would like to thank the participants in the interview.

2. Potential questioning on the basis of example may indeed build up a worry in the very research practice. "In qualitative research [in sociology] what one worries about is not how high the pile of confirming evidence can be mounted but that one will have missed a way of life, an interaction strategy, or a kind of event that the reader knows intimately, and that in consequence the reader will come up with a counterexample which demonstrates the inadequacy of the explanation" (Katz 1997: 76).


4. Quotations may be used in two different functions. On the one hand, they are introduced in order to increase dramatic intensity and the feeling of immediacy and engagement. On the other hand, they increase the distance between the speaker and the described characters (cf. Holsanova forthcoming). Clark and Gerrig (1990: 792) observe that "with quotations speakers can partly or wholly detach themselves from what they depict."

5. There seems to be a certain culturally shared repertoire of topics that are expected to be picked up when we talk about our experiences from other countries. Some of these topics are found in our data: travel, adventure, food, security, service, material standard, cultural differences (compared to the home country).

6. Thinkable and unthinkable behavior can also be exemplified and demonstrated with the help of quotations (cf. Holsanova forthcoming).

References


Examples as crucial arguments


Mouton Textbook

Politeness in Language

Studies in History, Theory and Practice

Edited by Richard J. Watts, Sachiko Ide, and Konrad Ehlich

2nd rev. and exp. ed. 2005. xii, 430 pages. Cloth. Approx. € 98.00 / sFr 157.00 / *US$ 137.20 ISBN 3-11-018549-0

The second edition of this collection of 13 original papers contains an updated introductory section detailing the significance that the original articles published in 1992 have for the further development of research into linguistic politeness into the 21st century.

The original articles focus on the phenomenon of politeness in language. They present the most important problems in developing a theory of linguistic politeness, which must deal with the crucial differences between lay notions of politeness in different cultures and the term 'politeness' as a concept within a theory of linguistic politeness. The universal validity of the term itself is called into question, as are models such as those developed by Brown and Levinson, Lakoff, and Leech. New approaches are suggested.

In addition to this theoretical discussion, an empirical section presents a number of case studies and research projects in linguistic politeness. These show what has been achieved within current models and what still remains to be done, in particular with reference to cross-cultural studies in politeness and differences between a Western and a non-Western approach to the subject.

The publication of this second edition demonstrates that the significance of the collection is just as salient in the first decade of the new millennium as it was at the beginning of the 1990s.

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