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# Introduction

Democratic deliberation and debate depend on how the commitments of the opposing candidates are communicated and how each party represents and addresses the opinion of the other party in a fair way. It was precisely the lack of serious criteria for distinguishing when a party's position or commitments are correctly interpreted and presented, and when they are distorted and manipulated, that led voters to taking the US presidential debates of 2016 less seriously. Misquotations, attacks based on incorrect quotations, and accusations of misquotations characterized the debates and the discussions of the candidates. The question that this book addresses is how to analyze misquotation and related tactics based on altered quotations. In particular, we will focus our attention on the strategy that best illustrates the power of altering one's words or communicative intentions, commonly referred to in the literature as the "straw man fallacy." The straw man is the attack on (or refutation of) a view that the speaker attributes to his adversary, but that does not correspond to the adversary's actual position, but rather to a distorted (misrepresented) version of it. A clear description of this fallacy can be found in the account given in the *Port-Royal Logic* of the Aristotelian fallacy of *ignoratio elenchi*, namely, the fallacy of providing only an apparent refutation of the issue under discussion (namely, the interlocutor's position, conclusion, or argument) (Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations*, ch. 6; Krabbe, 2012). As the authors of the *Port-Royal Logic*, Arnauld and Nicole put it (Arnauld & Nicole, *Logic, or the art of thinking*, Chapter 19):

*Proving something other than what is at issue*

Aristotle calls this sophism *ignoratio elenchi*, that is, ignorance of what must be proved against one's adversary. This is a very common mistake in our disputes. We argue heatedly, and often we do not listen to each other. Passion or bad faith causes us to attribute to our adversaries something remote from their views to gain an advantage over them, or to impute to them consequences we imagine can be drawn from their doctrines, although they disavow and deny them. All this can be classified under this first kind of sophism, which good and sincere people should avoid above all.

Ignoring what must be proved and attacking a view that only resembles the one advocated by the adversary presuppose several strategies of distortion and misrepresentation (Walton, 2003, pp. 42–44), either directly focused on the adversary's

utterances or on the interpretation thereof and the inferences that can be drawn from them. For this reason, this fallacy involves various types of manipulations (according to some theories, all the Aristotelian fallacies could be reduced to *ignoratio elenchi*; see Petrus Hispanus, *Summulae Logicales*, Chapter III, 179–190), which need to be investigated both from a linguistic point of view and an argumentative point of view.

For this reason, the first crucial goal is to provide instruments from pragmatics and argumentation theory that can be used for assessing whether a quotation is correct and whether the original speaker has been correctly interpreted. Our second aim is to investigate how quotations can be distorted and used for manipulating the original speaker's commitments. Our third objective is to describe the dialectical and rhetorical strategies based on misquotations and show how they can be analyzed and diagnosed, providing the misquoted party with instruments for countering and rebutting the quoter's move.

The crucial problem which needs to be faced is that the line between interpreting and purposely altering a commitment is often blurred. Ambiguity characterizes natural communication, at all levels. Semantic ambiguity is only one of the problems of interpretation. Most of what we say can be understood only based on what was left implicit or rather what was taken for granted. Let us consider, for example, one of the most recent controversies concerning an alleged misquotation of Donald Trump's words during the presidential election campaign. In the excerpt below, the CNN anchor Carol Costello refers to a previous statement by Trump and, after reporting how it was reported, provides her own interpretation<sup>1</sup>:

### Case 1: Trump's Racial Profiling

**Costello:** And it's hard to not notice, Jeff, that Donald Trump again brought up the idea of profiling immigrants. I mean, yesterday he was upset that news people used the term "racial profiling" but he was on "The O'Reilly Factor" last night and Donald Trump clearly meant racial profiling when he said profiling.

The problem with these claims was that they referred to the following excerpts from an interview in which Trump addressed a recent alleged terrorist attack<sup>2</sup>:

Our police are amazing. Our local police, they know who a lot of these people are. They're afraid to do anything about it because they don't want to be accused of profiling and they don't want to be accused of all sorts of things. [...] If somebody looks like he's got a massive bomb on his back we won't go up to that person and say, 'I'm sorry,' because if he looks like he comes from that part of the world we're not allowed to profile. [...] In Israel they profile [...] They've done an unbelievable job, as good as you can do. [...] They see somebody that's suspicious, they will profile. They will take that person and they'll check out.

<sup>1</sup>CNN Transcripts. *CNN.com*. (20 September 2016). Retrieved from <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1609/20/cnr.02.html> (Accessed on 4 January 2016). See for comments CNN claims Trump called for 'racial' profiling (he didn't). *Foxnews*. (20 September 2016). Retrieved from <http://www.foxnews.com/politics/2016/09/20/cnn-claims-trump-called-for-racial-profiling-didnt.html> (Accessed on 4 January 2016).

<sup>2</sup>Jacobs, J. (2016, September 19). Trump Laments 'We're Not Allowed to Profile' in Terror Fight. *Bloomberg.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.bloomberg.com/politics/articles/2016-09-19/trump-says-fear-of-profiling-inhibits-u-s-terrorism-prevention> (Accessed on 4 January 2016).

Trump never used the word “racial profiling;” the adjective “racial” was added by the media (and by the CNN journalist in her interpretation), leading to the conclusion that Trump intended to promote a policy that equated terrorism with race and even race with religion. This case suggests the problems and effects of quoting or misquoting. Trump’s words were clearly misquoted by the media, but the CNN journalist’s move (who claimed that Trump “clearly meant racial profiling”) is much subtler and harder to assess. The journalist was providing an interpretation, but without giving any reasons to support it. She justified the distortion of Trump’s words by claiming that the quotation represented what Trump meant.

The *Trump’s racial profiling* case illustrates the close relationship between quotation and interpretation, the complexity of meaning reconstruction, and the dangers of an incorrect quotation. Trump’s words were altered, triggering a conclusion that can be hardly drawn from his original statements. This alteration, however, was justified by resorting to a possible interpretation, grounded on the common opinion on profiling in the USA and the complaints raised by various minorities in the USA about this practice. The possible ambiguity of the original quotation leaves room for interpretations that can be used for attacking the original speaker, shifting the burden onto him of proving that his communicative intention was different. The problem is to determine whether, considering the context, the utterance can be considered ambiguous and what kind of interpretations can be supported by the evidence available.

We will show that the reconstruction of what Trump actually meant involves the analysis of various components of communication and requires the integration of tools of linguistic pragmatics with the instruments of argumentation theory and discourse analysis. In order to retrieve what our interlocutor meant, we need to take into account the tacit dimension of communication, which includes the purpose of the discourse or dialogue, the context and co-text, the shared or presumably shared meaning of the words used and the stereotypes associated thereto, and encyclopedic facts and habits. While we usually process this information automatically, or almost automatically, when doubts arise concerning the meaning of an utterance, understanding becomes what we will refer to as interpretation, a critical process in which the interpreter needs to find the meaning that is grounded on the most acceptable reasons. This critical process needs to be represented in terms of arguments, evidence, and presumptions, supporting an interpretive conclusion that can be compared with the alternative ones. On this perspective, the various components of communication and utterance processing become part of an argumentative process of supporting the best interpretation.

The Trump case above shows how quotation, ambiguity, and interpretation matter in various fields of study. The most evident areas in which quotations are crucial are communication, rhetoric, and public discourse. Trump was quoted by the media, which distorted his words, for eliciting a reaction (e.g., impressing, shocking, scandalizing, or puzzling the audience). This misquotation could have been also used for attacking the Republican candidate by showing that he was committed to a racist position. A fourth important field of dialectics is argumentation theory as when the CNN journalist provided her interpretation within a dialectical debate with other

experts (a historian and a senior journalist) on the problem of Syrian refugees, in which opinions and arguments are carefully considered and evaluated. Another area of interest is defamation law. Misquotations are a serious cause of action when a reputation is damaged and can result in lawsuits for defamation (libel or slander). The boundaries of interpretation become of fundamental importance in these cases in order to distinguish between an acceptable report and a willful or a negligent misquotation. In this book, we use examples from famous political speeches (including speeches by Nixon, Obama, Bush, Clinton, and Trump), dialectical debates, defamation cases, and legal discussions. We show how quotation and misquotation can be crucial instruments not only for attacking the opposing candidates but also for winning a legal case. We describe how the media can distort a politician's words and affect their reputation and how politicians can belittle an opponent with little or no reason.

This is the first book to provide a systematic and extensive study of strategic uses of ambiguity and misquotations based on analyses of various types of discussions from the different fields mentioned above. We examine 63 examples of uses of quotes and misquotes, and cite 20 legal cases, which illustrate both reasonable argumentative uses of quotations and mischievous tactics based on deceitful quotes and reports. We not only provide an analytical and normative framework but also practical methods to apply it to real-life arguments. We diagnose the faults of strategic uses of ambiguity and misquotations to bring to light their rhetorical effectiveness. We outline procedural steps to detect such manipulative tactics, assess them, and find countermeasures.

The theoretical framework used combines the advances of linguistic pragmatics with the developments of argumentation theory. Argumentation is a field of studies aimed at identifying, analyzing, and evaluating arguments and studying different ways of responding to different arguments and criticizing them. This area of research, at the crossroads between linguistic pragmatics, discourse analysis, logic, and communication, is well established and increasingly popular with scholars in linguistics, discourse analysis, legal reasoning, computer science, and education. As this book intends to show, the connection and dialogue between these fields of study result not only in theoretical and analytical proposals but more importantly in the development of instruments that can be used and implemented for practical purposes. This book shows how research in linguistic pragmatics, philosophy of language, and rhetoric can be combined through argumentation to analyze many interesting examples in political discourse, everyday conversation, and several leading cases of defamation law. All the examples are about attacking an opponent's argument by distorting it, often by misquoting it, or quoting it out of context, or even by failing to do the work of quoting it at all.

Pragmatics constitutes the linguistic and analytical framework that we rely on for investigating ambiguity, commitments, and the implicit dimensions of communication. We use legal decisions and legal standards applied in defamation cases to develop normative criteria that we apply to the various examples from political or everyday discourses. We combine analytical tools and normative criteria in an argumentative approach that describes some instruments that can be used for bringing to



light the implicit aspects of an utterance, its possible tacit conclusions, and its presuppositions and for assessing when an interpretation can be considered as acceptable. We take into account insights from rhetoric for describing how a quotation or a misquotation can be persuasive or used to damage one's reputation and for pointing out the strategies for countering such attacks. We analyze the literature in dialectics for showing how a (correct or distorted) quotation affects the interlocutors' commitments and shifts the burden of proof, modifying the dialogical game.

Chapter 1 shows how the distortion of a viewpoint or opinion needs to be addressed by taking into account how an utterance can be manipulated. In this chapter, different types of ambiguity of an utterance and the problem of establishing its relevance in an argument are studied. In particular, different kinds of pragmatic ambiguity are analyzed by considering the relevance of a discourse move within a dialogue. In order to investigate how problems arising from these types of ambiguity can be solved, we lay out a procedure for establishing which interpretation of several is the strongest (or the "best") one. This problem is linked to the problem of relevance from an argumentative perspective taken up in Chap. 5.

Chapter 2 is focused on the problem of reporting (directly and indirectly) a point of view. We show that a direct or indirect report cannot be analyzed independently of the context in which it appears and the intentions of the speaker. More specifically, reports will be shown to be strictly related to the relevance of the quotation or the report to the purpose the speaker is pursuing in the discourse or dialogue. Since this relation can be investigated in terms of argumentative relations, quotations and reports can be described according to their function in supporting or rebutting a point of view, an argument, or the backing thereof. They are pieces of evidence that can be used as arguments from authority or from testimony or as proof of commitments held by the interlocutor or third parties that can be advanced showing their consistency or inconsistency.

The argumentative and dialectical effects of quotation and misquotation are explained in Chap. 3 by examining them from an argumentation perspective that takes the context of unattributed quotation into account by clarifying the relationship between quotations and commitments. As the reader can well imagine, such cases can be exquisitely tricky, especially if the consequences of one interpretation or the other can be costly. Clear examples are the perjury case of then-President Bill Clinton (when he stated that Monica Lewinsky had told the truth when she said that they had no sexual relationships, Case 3.1) and the leading case of *Masson v. New Yorker Magazine, Inc.* (Case 3.13), which concerned the problem of how to determine when a quotation misrepresented the original speaker's commitments as communicated through what he said.

In this chapter it is shown how there are different kinds of ambiguity and how ambiguity can create presumptions that can only be identified and sorted out using inference to the best explanation based on Gricean-style implicature. According to this approach, quotation along with other ways of describing an arguer's position depends on the ability to give an account of previous commitments held by the quoted party. The examples in this chapter show, however, that finding the right evidential link between commitments supposedly held and what was actually said

could be tricky. The reason is that a quotation can function as a strategic representation of an utterance involving the interpretation of a communicative intention. However, as is shown by examples, such an interpretation needs to be supported or attacked by selection of the linguistic evidence available in the case. What can happen then is that a potential ambiguity can be used as a strategy for manipulating commitments for holding the quoted party responsible for positions that he never advocated. It is shown that the different forces of commitments can have dialectical and rhetorical effects on manipulations of commitments. Two problems are addressed. The first is the problem of personal attacks based on a party's commitments. The second is the related problem of figuring out how different strategies of attack increase the burden of defense of the attacked party.

Chapter 4 investigates the argumentative mechanism that can be used for interpreting ambiguous or potentially ambiguous utterances. It is shown why the relationship between an utterance or an expression and its meaning is best analyzed in terms of presumptions that are subject to default. Interpretation in this sense is framed within the theory of argumentation schemes and regarded as the conclusion of an argument from the best explanation, in which conflicting presumptions resulting from the linguistic, contextual, and contextual evidence are evaluated. On this perspective, the interpretation of an utterance is regarded as the outcome of a process aimed at weighing and assessing the defeasibility of various presumptions. This argumentative account of interpretation can be used as an instrument for providing reasons in support of or against an interpretation of a quotation and shifting the burden of proof.

The interrelation between the various aspects of the fallacy of straw man is clarified in Chap. 5, drawing on implications of the analyses of examples presented in the previous four chapters. In Chap. 5, we focus on indirect reports, namely, interpretations of the original speaker's words, and the use thereof for attacking the reported party or the interlocutor. In this chapter, we evaluate whether some crucial political examples (drawn from famous and recent speeches) can be considered as instances of the straw man fallacy. It is shown how this approach combines advances in pragmatics and linguistics on the topics of reports, interpretation, and ambiguity with argumentation methods. A theoretically important and wide-ranging hypothesis proved in this chapter is that the straw man fallacy, at its central core, is a failure of relevance. This proof is supported by a new definition of relevance appropriate for argumentation. In particular, we describe how relevance, defined in argumentative terms as inferential distance of a statement to a possible conclusion (interpretation) that can be drawn from it, can be used as a criterion for assessing the reasonableness of an interpretation or report. Nevertheless, this chapter is not all about theory. It provides analytical tools, namely, dialogue systems and profiles of dialogue, which can be used for reconstructing, evaluating, and establishing an interpretation and defusing manipulative tactics associated with straw man arguments.