

INVESTIGATING ARGUMENT AS PRODUCT IN THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

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Abstract:

Constructing a logical argument is the key to success in verbal communication. Yet, such an academic topic has not been satisfactorily dealt with in details. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to investigate the most prominent components utilized in the determination of an argument as product. This paper shows how the components of an argument can be critically manipulated to convey pragmatic messages. In this study, an extract of three arguments taken from the 2020 American presidential debates are allotted to be investigated in terms of the types of claims, of evidence and of reasoning strategies which are all put together logically to construct a persuasive argument as apparently intended by the debater. It has been shown that argument as product is tied to certain types of components that are advanced through particular strategies of reasoning. Furthermore, all of the arguments under study are put forward to satisfy pragmatic meanings.

Keywords: *argument as product, claim, debate, evidence, reasoning strategies*

تقصي الحجة كمنتج في المناظرات الامريكية الرئاسية

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الملخص:

يعتبر بناء حجة منطقية مفتاح للنجاح في التواصل الكلامي (اللفظي والكتابي). ومع ذلك، لم يتم التعامل مع هكذا موضوع أكاديمي بشكل مرضٍ بالتفصيل. لذلك، فإن الغرض من الدراسة الحالية هو التحقيق في أبرز المكونات المستخدمة في تحديد الحجة كمنتج. حيث توضح هذه الورقة البحثية كيف يمكن استخدام مكونات الحجة بشكل نقدي لنقل رسائل براكماتية (تداولية). في هذه الدراسة، تم تخصيص مقتطف من ثلاث حجج مأخوذة من المناقشات الرئاسية الأمريكية لعام ٢٠٢٠ وذلك للتحقيق في أنواع الادعاءات والأدلة واستراتيجيات التفكير والتي يتم استخدامها معاً بشكل منطقي لبناء حجة مقنعة وكما يلائم نية المناظر. لقد ثبت في هذه الدراسة أن الحجة كمنتج مرتبطة بأنواع معينة من المكونات والتي يتم استخدامها ضمن استراتيجيات معينة للتفكير. علاوة على ذلك، فإن جميع الحجج قيد الدراسة تم استخدامها لأبصال معاني براكماتية (تداولية).

الكلمات المفتاحية: الحجة كمنتج، الادعاء، المناظرة، الدليل، استراتيجيات التفكير.

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



1. Introduction

Although an argument is an accumulation of statements (Simpson, 1999, p. 39), much of the language used in everyday life does not include any arguments in that it aims to describe, report, or tell; to express a personal attitude and so on (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 6). Bahm et al. (2004) state that argument cannot be seen only as “a collection of statements” but more comprehensively as “the use of reason-giving” for convincing the audience of the value or truth of one's perspective (p. 185).

More importantly, to form an argument, a conclusion, and premise(s) are basically required; the premises are utilized to provide support for the truth of the conclusion (Copi et al., 2014, p. 6; Epstein & Kernberger, 2006, p. 413). Hence, the concept of argument is related to logic (Hamblin, 1970, p. 224) in which reasoning takes place (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 217).

All in all, argument as product can be constructed differently depending on the strategies and factors that an arguer tends to utilize as to satisfy certain purposes, such as the components of argument, and the patterns of reasoning.

However, although concentrating on many aspects of argument, studies in this respect have not paid due attention to the study of argument as product in terms of components and strategies of reasoning. And hence, the present study undertakes the commitment of filling a plausible gap found in the area of pragma-dialectal research works.

In relation to the problem intended to be investigated, this study aims at explicating argument as product in which it is hypothesized that argument as product is mainly constructed of a claim and a set of evidences that are advanced either deductively or inductively. Therefore, to achieve such an aim and verify the hypothesis, certain procedures are to be conducted thoroughly: (a) Providing, as concise as possible, a comprehensive theoretical framework for argument as product, components of argument, and reasoning in argument; (b) Developing an eclectic model for analyzing the data under scrutiny; (c) Analyzing some

selected data in order to arrive at results and the discussion; and accordingly (d) Drawing conclusions.

As far as its range of investigation is concerned, the study is going to deal with argument as product found in the 2020 American presidential election campaigns' discourse, be limited to pragma-dialectical perspectives, and to construct an eclectic model based on the theoretical framework for the analysis of the data at hand.

This study is an attempt to offer a model of analysis for argument as product including strategies of reasoning. Besides, it contributes in the literature of argument as product in particular and it seeks to improve readers', linguists', pragmatists' and communication analysts' skills in accordance with how to logically, and pragma-dialectically construct and evaluate arguments as product. Further, it posits some pedagogical implications for enhancing second language learners of English in terms of how to construct their arguments strategically and appropriately.

2.1 Argument as Product: An Overview

Johnson (2012) says that within the context of informal logic, the focus is on argument as product (p. 291) in which an individual constructs it to support its claim (Kuhn & Udell, 2003, p. 1245), making benefit of reasoning to achieve that mission logically. Therefore, argument as product is the output of the activity produced by arguing which people do (Black 1946, p. 177; Fogelin, 2005, p. 5). Hence, it is usually used to refer to a collection of sentences or of propositions that one of which is a conclusion, and the others are the premises.

In order to explore or analyze an argument as product, the data under discussion is no exception, one needs to identify the components of argument (Freeman, 2011, p. 60) which are to be dealt with in the following section.

2.2 Components of Argument as Product

An argument is seen as a tool of persuasion which takes thinking to construct it (Govier, 1989, p. 117). Thus, to construct an argument, there must be some components utilized so that the thinking it takes can be logically built.

Toulmin, a British philosopher, introduces six components of any argument (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 123). However, the study adopts only one major component, the claim.

2.2.1 Claim

Claim is the conclusion sought to be established during the construction of an argument. It is probably the proposition itself (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 153, 163). Relatedly, Broda-Bahm et al. (2004) contend that a claim is the conclusion that an arguer seeks to establish its acceptability by their audience; it is the conclusion or the knowledge that the arguer needs their audience to believe during the stage at which the argument is concluded (p. 190).

2.2.1.1 Types of Claims

2.2.1.1.1 Claim of Fact

Claims of fact are associated with the truth of some relationship or condition (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 120). According to Freeley and Steinberg (2009), they are descriptive types of claims in which the affirmative provides that a certain thing is true, whereas the negative provides that it is false (p. 55).

2.2.1.1.2 Claim of Value

Claims of value are associated with evaluative stances adopted by societies or individuals (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 119). Values, in this respect, are humans' beliefs concerning wrong and right, bad and good. So, claims of value basically make statements about bad or good things, for example, "abortion is immoral" (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 56).

2.2.1.1.3 Claim of Policy

Claims of policy are associated with actions by organizations or governments (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 119). They call for change "so as to affirm the value of future and specific governmental change, and suggesting a broad but predictable array of potential affirmative plans" (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 57). In such a claim, the affirmative is to call for the adaptation of a course of action or policy.

All in all, the three types of claims can be observed as statements of: (a) action, such as what to be done and not; (b) worth, such as good,

or bad; and (c) classification or existence, such as it is or it is not (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 120).

2.2.2 Evidence

Here, it is worth of note that what is evidence for Baird (1950) and Freeley and Steinberg (2009) is grounds for Toulmin et al. (1984). Therefore, this paper is going to adopt the terminology and the types of evidence introduced by Baird (1950) and Freeley and Steinberg (2009) rather than that of Toulmin's for the latter lacks clarification on the types.

Basically, evidence is the additional information advanced to initiate the foundation of a claim so that the claim is reliable and solid (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 190 & Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 153, 163). There are two kinds of evidence: (a) direct evidence, and (b) indirect evidence (Baird, 1950, p. 96; Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 107).

First, evidence is clearly direct when it shows the existence of the fact on demand without the need to demonstrate that fact by another fact. Admittedly, in argument, this type is the most frequently used in establishing supporting contentions instead of proving the proposition itself. Second, evidence is indirect when it shows the existence of the fact on demand through the proof of other related facts that from which the fact in question is probably to be inferred (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 107).

2.2.2.1 Sources of Evidence

There are various sources of evidence from which an argument is constructed: (a) **Judicial notice** is the process depending on which certain evidence can be presented into an argument with no need to introduce any substantiation as to establish the foundation for others, (b) **Public records** include documents issued or compiled with or by the approval of governmental agencies such as birth certificates, state and federal statute books, and reports of congressional hearings, (c) **Public writings** include any written material except that of public records. They

are available to the public such as the Encyclopedia Britannica, a college textbook and the like, (d) **Private writings** involve any written material which are privately kept rather than publicly shown. They may become public writings if they are made available to the general public, such as wills and contracts, (e) **The testimony of witnesses**, whether before a governmental figure or in court, is usually performed under oath and it is subject to punishments for contempt or perjury, (f) **Personal inspection** is something to be introduced for examination to the people rendering the decision. For example, the car sales man may invite his customers to inspect the motor by lifting its hood (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 108-112).

2.3 Reasoning in Argument

Argument is seen as a reasoning process (Black, 1946, p. 379); thus, reasoning needs to be introduced so that an argument occurs (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, pp. 185-186). In this case, reasoning is the process through which one infers conclusions out of premises (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 169). Hence, anyone participates in an argument can manifest their rationality or their lack of it via the manner (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 14) by which people have the ability to criticize, analyze, and to advocate ideas; to reach judgmental or factual conclusions; and to reason deductively or inductively (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 2). Admittedly, an argument can never be effective without advancing good reasons (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 223).

2.3.1 Strategies of Reasoning

Depending on the type of involvement which the arguers are engaged in, reasoning therefore is differently used from situation to another (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 7). However, although there are a number of strategies of reasoning introduced by many philosophers and thinkers in general; to name but a few, abductive, conductive, deductive, disjunctive, inductive and the like, the study is going to concisely

accentuates the most well-known two; namely, deductive and inductive types of reasoning.

2.3.1.1 Deductive Reasoning

Reasoning from general principles towards a certain conclusion is deduction (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 207). In like manner, Freeley and Steinberg (2009) confirm that deductive reasoning is an argument initiated with a broad generalization moving to a more specific conclusion (p. 170). Then, one may be tempted to conclude that the conclusion of a deductive argument is claimed to be followed from its premises along with absolute necessity (Copi et al., 2014, p. 27).

For Aristotle, deductive reasoning is a powerful source of inferences which moves from known information towards a relatively valid and safe conclusion (Krawczyk, 2018, p. 201). There are two forms of deduction, namely: (a) syllogism and (b) enthymeme (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 152).

2.3.1.1.1 Syllogistic Reasoning

Syllogism, to begin with, is an argument that systematically arranged in the structure of a major premise in which a proposition states a generalization, a minor premise in which a proposition states a specific instance associated with the generalization, and of a conclusion that necessarily must be followed from these premises (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 153-154). Syllogism is a logical tool which deals with certainty.

2.3.1.1.2 Enthymematic Reasoning

However, although enthymeme as a term is somehow a source of etymological and historical confusion (Walton, 2001, p. 97), it can now be defined as a truncated syllogism that the conclusion or one of its premises is not declared explicitly (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 153 & Walton, 2013, p. 69). Sometimes, arguers use enthymemes for psychological advantages. For example, they may omit some part of the argument that they feel it has a negative impact or an unpleasant point so

that the audience can reach it themselves (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 160). Therefore, the enthymeme is viewed as a syllogism with a rhetorical function of persuasion based on examples, signs, and probabilities and that it is successfully constructed through the efforts jointly accomplished by speaker and audience (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 159).

Pragmatically, there is an evident connection between enthymematic reasoning and pragmatic phenomena, such as presupposition, implicature and the other types of discursual relations (Breitholtz, 2021, p. 16). Consequently, one may safely maintain that enthymemes are exercised for rhetorical and/or pragmatic purposes.

2.3.1.2 Inductive Reasoning

In terms of structure, inductive reasoning starts with particular known truths and it ends in drawing a general conclusion based upon those truths (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 209); induction argument begins with a certain case moving towards a broader generalization (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 170). The premises of induction argument do not indicate certainty, but only probability to its conclusion, that is to say, the conclusion claimed to be followed from its premises with probability (Copi et al., 2014, p. 27). Therefore, such an argument comes with a tremendous opportunity to make erroneous conclusions (Krawczyk, 2018, p. 201). However, the utility of this type of reasoning is often employed for generating predictions (Sauce & Matzel, 2017, p. 1). Moreover, inductive reasoning includes reasoning by example, analogy, cause and that by sign (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 209).

2.3.1.2.1 Reasoning by Analogy

In reasoning from analogy, there are two things assumed to share enough similarities that what is claimed to be true of one is as the same as that of the other (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 216). Simply put, this process of reasoning consists of comparing two similar things or situations that what can be true in one situation is true for the other in

which they are either a sign or a cause of the conclusion produced (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 178).

2.3.1.2.2 Reasoning by Cause

Reasoning by cause is the process via which one concludes that a certain cause is a force which produces an effect (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 170). To illustrate, a condition or an event may be claimed to be the cause of a condition or an event of another kind because they not only regularly come together, but casually connected (Toulmin et al., 1984, p. 226). Smoking, for instance, damages the lungs, sex results in pregnancy, and so (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 211).

2.3.1.2.3 Reasoning by Example

Reasoning by example involves either sign or cause reasoning. The advocate manipulating this strategy tends to show the cases or examples that are a sign or a cause of their conclusion. Sometimes, a single situation may be utilized to establish the generalization or conclusion (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, p. 175). It presents one or more examples to provide support for the truthfulness of the claim, moving from the truth of a specific example to establish a general conclusion (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, p. 209).

2.3.1.2.4 Reasoning by Sign

Reasoning by sign is the process of having correlations or relationships inferred between two variables. The two variables are closely associated with each other that the absence or presence of any of which may indicate the same for the other. As an example of this, one may claim the coming of winter due to the fact that they notice the falling of the leaves from the trees which they consider a sign of the season (Freeley & Steinberg, 2009, pp. 170, 185).

Noticeably, a cause argument is sometimes confused with a sign argument. Yet, as long as the former indicates a functional relationship

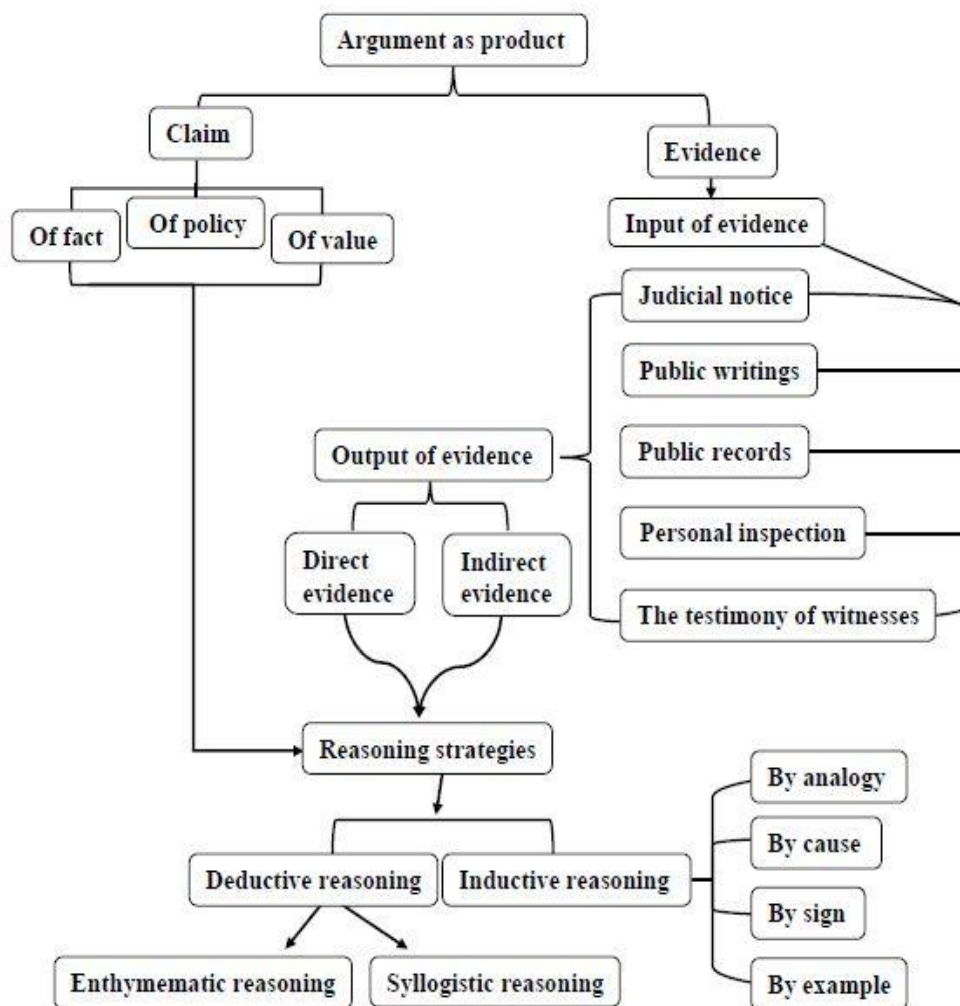
between the signs, the latter simply indicates a correlation between them (Broda-Bahm et al., 2004, pp. 215-216).

3.1 Method

In order to analyze the data at scrutiny in terms of argument as product, it has been established that the components of argument as well as the strategies of reasoning are necessary for the argument of any debate to be successfully put forward. Ideally, the study has come up with its own eclectic model upon which the data under study is deemed to be analyzed. The components of the model are basically designed to what achieves the aim of the study. This eclectic model comprises terms, models, and notions taken eclectically from: (a) Baird (1950), (b) Toulmin (2003), (c) Broda-Bahm et al. (2004), and (d) Freeley and Steinberg (2009).

For briefing, the eclectic model of this study is schematically diagramed in the following figure.

Figure 1 *Argument as product*



The procedure employed for obtaining the data under investigation is through downloading texts from an official website, namely, Transcript Library. Yet, to satisfactorily guarantee and verify the accuracy of the data at hand, the researcher observes the original debate

video and then compares it to the elicited transcriptions deemed to be scrutinized.

The American presidential debate consists of six sections assigned to be debated. They are related to such topics as fighting COVID-19, American families, race in America, climate change, national security, and leadership. It is a 90-minute debate, and is composed of 66 pages (18955 words) with the Times New Roman format, Size 14. This debate is moderated by Kristen Welker of NBC News on October 22, 2020 in Nashville, Tennessee.

It is due to the fact that it is reported as the most watched debate during the election campaigns, the final American presidential debate of Trump and Biden in 2020 is chosen to be investigated. After scrutinizing the whole data, there have been 160 arguments primarily highlighted during that investigation. Accordingly, there are too many utterances to be analyzed and that doing so will occupy too much space in this work. Therefore, it is assigned that the data deemed to be analyzed are a sample of representative arguments.

3.1.2 Procedure

In this study, the researcher tends to employ a qualitative (pragmatics) method so as to identify the types of claims and the types and sources of evidence that the interactants utilize during the construction of their arguments, and to highlight the pragmatic intention that for which the interactants employ such choices.

Procedurally, in order to analyze an argument as product, the process adopted for fulfilling such a task is carried out by: (a) Selecting the claims which have the function of giving inferences; (b) Identifying the types of claims, evidence, and the sources of evidence; and (c)

Examining the reasoning strategy(ies) employed in the production of the given arguments under investigation.

3.2 Data Analysis

In answering a question raised by Kristen Welker, the moderator, Trump builds up his arguments (see Appendix 1) by the use of claims of fact: (1) “And we’re fighting it [the coronavirus crisis] and we’re fighting it hard”, (2) “We have a vaccine that’s coming”, and (3) “We’re rounding the turn. We’re rounding the corner.”

These claims are evidently supported by a set of evidences. Besides, the evidences are of three different sources. To strengthen his first claim, Trump uses evidences of judicial notice. This can be observed by his employment of social markers introducing his judicial notes, such as “as you know”, “you see” and “if you notice” as well as by his repetition of ‘spikes’ and ‘gone’ which refer to common knowledge. Then, to convince the audience of his second claim, Trump directly provides a personal inspection evidence by showing them how healthy he is now in spite of the previous deterioration of his health condition because of the disease. He assures that by saying: “And I got better very fast or I wouldn’t be here tonight.” Finally, Trump finishes his argument with his third claim of fact, indicating his control over the crisis. Moreover, in order to validate this claim, he attaches it with evidence of public record. This evidence is used indirectly to support the claim: “I’ve been congratulated by the heads of many countries on what we’ve been able to do.”

As far as the strategies of reasoning are concerned, it can be seen that these arguments are inductively constructed with more than one type of induction. In terms of reasoning by example, there are many instances given in form of evidence to support the claim, such as “there was a spike

in Florida..., in Texas..., in Arizona..., and they are now gone.” Such a strategy of reasoning is employed in order to implicate that the other spikes found in other places will soon be gone as in the given examples.

By the same token, reasoning by example is used again in the production of the second claim: “I was in the hospital. I had it and I got better” and “I got better very fast or I wouldn’t be here tonight”. Finally, there is an evident use of reasoning by signs which means that the presence of something is the sign of the presence of the other and vice versa. For instance, Trump declares that: “I’ve been congratulated by the heads of many countries on what we’ve been able to do.” In this example, one can surely sense the correlation between the indication that the congratulations Trump received are due to the success he had achieved in handling the coronavirus crisis.

3.3 Discussion of Results

To persuasively approach his audience, Trump tends to exploit claims of fact rather than that of policy or of value. Claims of fact are more effective and, to some extent, more real and tangible than the others. They are either true; so, they are to be accepted unquestionably by the audience, or they are false and therefore rejected directly. Because of this property, debaters have the tendency to manipulate claims of fact more than any of the other types.

Yet, in order to construct a strong and sound argument, Trump utilizes judicial notes as a source of evidence in the construction of his first and third claim. Such type of evidence is much more reliable than the other sources due to the fact that it is publicly recognized, and thus, it is hard to be doubted or rejected. In addition, it can be noticed that Trump also supports his second claim of fact with a personal inspection

evidence. This evidence is used to unveil doubt, to build trust, and to establish the acceptability to the claims presented.

Furthermore, Trump inductively constructs his arguments utilizing such strategies of reasoning as by example and by sign. Generally speaking, inductive reasoning is used to provide particular known truths so as to have a broad generalization drawn. However, such reasoning implicates the debater's probability rather than their certainty. Trump resorts to manipulate reasoning by example and by sign. The former strategy is employed to directly convince the audience by presenting examples, situations, and cases relevant to the claim that the arguer seeks its acceptability. Besides, the latter strategy is also used to correlate or relate similarities exist between two variables that one of which provides support to the main claim.

4. Conclusions

This study has come up with the following concluding remarks:

1. Argument as product is mainly constructed of two basic components; namely, a claim and evidence,
2. Claims of fact are more persuasive and more reliable than claims of policy and claims of value because they can be tested over their truth values. Further, they implicate pragmatic meanings,
3. Direct evidences have the potential to unveil any vague or unwanted interpretation by the audience; they are the strongest types of evidence, and
4. Inductive reasoning is much more relevant for the audience than deductive reasoning. Besides, because it gives reasons that people are familiar with, it can be accepted as such. Thus, debaters are inclined to utilizing such reasoning strategies of induction as much as possible in the construction of their arguments.

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Appendix 1

Donald Trump: “So as you know, 2.2 million people modeled out, were expected to die. We closed up the greatest economy in the world in order to fight this horrible disease that came from China. It’s a worldwide pandemic. It’s all over the world. You see the spikes in Europe and many other places right now. If you notice, the mortality rate is down 85%. The excess mortality rate is way down and much lower than almost any other country. And we’re fighting it and we’re fighting it hard. There is a spike. There was a spike in Florida and it’s now gone. There was a very big spike in Texas. It’s now gone. There was a very big spike in Arizona. It’s now gone. And there was some spikes and surges and other places, they will soon be gone. We have a vaccine that’s coming. It’s ready. It’s going to be announced within weeks. And it’s going to be delivered. We have Operation Warp Speed, which is the military is going to distribute the vaccine. I can tell you from personal experience that I was in the hospital. I had it and I got better. And I will tell you that I had something that they gave me, a therapeutic, I guess they would call it. Some people could say it was a cure, but I was in for a short period of time. And I got better very fast or I wouldn’t be here tonight. And now they say I’m immune. Whether it’s four months or a lifetime, nobody’s been able to say that, but I’m immune. More and more people are getting better. We have a problem that’s a worldwide problem. This is a worldwide problem, but I’ve been congratulated by the heads of many countries on what we’ve been able to do. If you take a look at what we’ve done in terms of goggles and masks and gowns and everything else, and in particular ventilators we’re now making ventilators all over the world, thousands and thousands a month distributing them all over the world. It will go away. And as I say, we’re rounding the turn. We’re rounding the corner. It’s going away.”