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Understanding Strategic Manoeuvring through the Lens of Perspective-Taking

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This article examines the cognitive foundations of strategic manoeuvring (SM) within the pragma-dialectical (PD) framework. Although PD is grounded in the principle of externalisation, which prioritises publicly attributable commitments over private mental states, the strategic character of SM implies goal-directed planning and anticipatory orientation towards interlocutors' likely responses. Building on Kraus's (2025) analysis of what the term strategic designates, the paper argues that this orientation presupposes a specific socio-cognitive capacity: perspective-taking (PT), understood here as the ability to model another agent's epistemic, evaluative-affective, and inferential stance. Three analytically relevant modes of PT — epistemic, evaluative-affective, and inferential — are distinguished and mapped onto the three aspects of the SM triangle: choices from topical potential, audience adaptation, and presentational devices. This mapping shows that SM may be understood as the discourse-level realisation of perspective-sensitive cognitive operations: selecting arguments from topical potential requires managing common ground and tracking the interlocutor's epistemic landscape; audience adaptation depends on modelling the addressee's values and affective orientation; and presentational devices involve anticipating inferential uptake and processing effort. The paper further argues that integrating PT into a PD account need not violate the principle of externalisation, because the two operate at different explanatory levels: externalisation governs what may be reconstructed and normatively evaluated, whereas PT provides a psychologically realistic account of how arguers navigate the argumentative predicament. The framework is illustrated through a brief constructed example. The paper concludes that PT supplies the cognitive infrastructure for strategic calibration, while SM constitutes its argumentative implementation in discourse.

Keywords: *pragma-dialectics, strategic manoeuvring, perspective-taking, externalisation, argumentation*

1 Introduction

1.1 *Perspective-taking as a cognitive point of departure*

In developmental and social cognition research, *perspective-taking* (PT) is treated as a behavioural manifestation of theory of mind: the capacity to reason about others' intentions, beliefs, knowledge, and desires, recruited across virtually every domain of social interaction (Bezuidenhout 2013; Davis 1983). PT will accordingly be understood here as a core socio-cognitive capacity that enables individuals to construct, maintain, and update representations of other agents' mental states.

For the purposes of the present account, it is useful to distinguish three analytically relevant modes of PT:

1) Epistemic PT: the modelling of what the interlocutor knows, believes, or accepts as common ground, which allows a speaker to assess which premises are likely to be treated as acceptable starting points and which require explicit support (Clark & Brennan 1991; Clark 1996).
2) Evaluative-affective PT: the modelling of what the interlocutor values, feels, or is likely to find desirable, threatening, or objectionable in a given situation, enabling the speaker to attune the move to the addressee's evaluative and emotional orientation (Healey & Grossman 2018; Bacha-Trams et al. 2020).
3) Inferential PT: the anticipation of how a particular formulation will be interpreted, what inferences it is likely to generate, and how much processing effort it will require. This mode is operationalised in audience design, where speakers tailor utterances by modelling the interlocutor's knowledge, goals, and attentional focus (Ferreira 2019), and is captured in relevance theory by the notion of *optimal relevance*, which presupposes expectations about the addressee's inferential resources and likely cognitive effects (Sperber & Wilson 1995). Brandom's inferentialist pragmatics makes a parallel claim at the level of semantic theory: the content of an utterance is to be understood in terms of its *inferential role,* that is, in terms of the commitments and entitlements that articulate what follows from saying it (Brandom 1994). From a more explicitly social-cognitive perspective, Forgács (2024) likewise treats mentalisation as central to utterance interpretation.

These distinctions are introduced here as analytically useful rather than as fully discrete categories. In actual discourse, epistemic, evaluative-affective, and inferential orientations frequently overlap and interact. They are differentiated here only in order to provide a more systematic basis for the later argumentative analysis.

If these three modes of PT are operative in ordinary communication, they can be expected to play a comparable role in argumentative discourse, where speakers continuously anticipate and manage addressees' responses. The following section introduces the pragma-dialectical framework within which this expectation will be developed.

1.2 *Pragma-dialectics and strategic manoeuvring*

The pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (PD), developed by van Eemeren & Grootendorst (2004: 1–5), conceptualises argumentative discourse as a regulated form of social interaction aimed at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. It combines pragmatic insights into language use with dialectical norms of critical discussion, evaluating argumentative moves in terms of their contribution to the resolution process. For the purposes of the present paper, the most central of these meta-theoretical commitments is the principle of externalisation. It postulates that analysts should set aside arguers' private mental states and reconstruct argumentative discourse in terms of the commitments and obligations publicly attributable to the participants, whether explicit or implicit, insofar as the latter are reconstructible from what has been said and from the roles and starting points the participants have adopted.

Argumentation unfolds through a sequence of stages — confrontation, opening, argumentation, and concluding — governed by the ten rules of critical discussion, which together form the ideal model of a critical discussion. Violations of these rules constitute fallacies in pragma-dialectical terms: moves that hinder or obstruct the resolution process rather

than advance it (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004; van Eemeren 2010). This is because arguers are not always disposed to comply fully with dialectical rules, often pursuing rhetorical objectives as well, namely, to make their standpoint as acceptable and persuasive as possible. The resulting need to balance reasonableness with effectiveness is what PD addresses through the concept of *strategic manoeuvring* (SM) and, more specifically, through what van Eemeren (2010) and van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2002) term the "argumentative predicament". This balancing act is executed across three interconnected aspects:

1. Topical potential: the strategic selection of arguments and premises from the available argumentative stock relevant to the current stage of the discussion — that is, the set of possible standpoints, starting points, lines of argument, and argument schemes. SM from topical potential concerns how arguers choose among these alternatives to remain reasonable while achieving rhetorical effect (van Eemeren 2010).

2. Audience adaptation: the attuning of argumentative moves to the commitments, expectations, and values of the addressee. Adaptation aims at establishing resonance or "communion" with the audience, often through audience-directed framing or the strategic use of persuasive definitions that align a concept with the audience's existing commitments (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, 2006; van Eemeren 2015; Zarefsky 2008).

3. Presentational devices: the strategic deployment of stylistic and linguistic resources in shaping the argumentative move (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002). These may include rhetorical figures, deliberate choices in discourse arrangement, and the selection of lexical items or specialised terminology — for instance hyperbole, metaphor, rhetorical questions, or standalone expressions (Snoeck Henkemans 2009, 2013; Zhang & Xu 2018; Pilgram & van Poppel 2021; Jansen & Henkemans 2021; van Haaften 2019).

When coordinated across a succession of moves, these three aspects constitute what van Eemeren (2019: 165) describes as an arguer's "argumentative style". The defining constraint on all three, however, is accountability to dialectical norms: where the pursuit of rhetorical effectiveness overrides commitment to critical standards, SM crosses into fallacious derailment (van Eemeren & Garssen 2023). This refinement allows fallacies to be understood not merely as logical errors but as identifiable strategic derailments within argumentative practice. While this completes the brief outline of SM as theorised within PD, it leaves open what the term strategic itself implies about the capacities required to perform such manoeuvring — an issue brought more sharply into focus in the following subsection.

2 What *strategic* means in strategic manoeuvring

Kraus (2025) reflects on what the term *strategic* in *SM* actually designates, dissecting the martial metaphor from both semantic and historical perspectives. Drawing on work in military history and strategic studies, he traces how *strategy* originally referred to the art of the general and was sharply distinguished from *tactics*: strategy concerned long-term goals, the overall conduct of a conflict, and the direction of resources, whereas tactics dealt with local moves on the battlefield. As Kraus shows, this distinction gradually evolved, and the term "strategy" has since been extended far beyond warfare, yet certain core elements remain remarkably stable: orientation towards a goal, the constrained use of limited means, and, crucially, premeditation and anticipation of other agents' actions.

In his discussion of modern strategic theory, Kraus (2025) highlights definitions that explicitly foreground thinking ahead and anticipating the opponent's moves as central to what counts as *strategic* action. For instance, he cites work in strategic studies where strategy is described as maintaining a balance between ends, ways, and means, and as necessarily involving a "dialectic of wills" in which at least two parties are engaged in potentially conflicting projects. On this view, strategy is not a mere label for any planned activity, but a mode of conduct that presupposes agents who are able to form long-term objectives, mentally rehearse possible courses of action, and adjust those courses in light of expected counter-moves. The strategic agent, in other words, is not simply acting, but acting with an internal model of other actors' likely responses.

The implication is direct. If manoeuvring in argumentation is described as strategic, then the relevant moves cannot be characterised merely as patterns of discourse choices identifiable after the fact; they also presuppose an anticipatory orientation, on the part of the arguer, towards the interlocutor's likely responses. A move becomes strategic not simply because it is rhetorically effective, but because it is selected under conditions of projected uptake: from the available topical potential, with regard to what the audience is likely to accept, and by means of formulations whose interpretation and impact are in some measure foreseen.

The audience-oriented dimension of SM has a deep affinity with the classical rhetorical tradition. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* already treats attention to the audience's beliefs, emotional dispositions, and probable reactions as constitutive of persuasion rather than incidental to it (Rhetoric, I.2, 1356a), and this insight remained central to rhetorical theory in its modern revival, most notably in Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca's *The New Rhetoric* (1969), where the projected model of the addressee grounds the entire theory of argumentative effectiveness.

Kraus's (2025) reconstruction brings into focus a question of direct relevance to pragma-dialectics: what conceptual implications follow from describing argumentative manoeuvres as *strategic*? Is *strategic* here merely a softened metaphor — a way of labelling the integration of rhetorical considerations into a dialectical framework; or does it also carry some of the connotations that *strategy* has acquired in military and strategic studies, such as goal orientation, planning, and the anticipation of another party's moves? Put differently: when we describe arguers as engaging in SM, are we not implicitly treating them as agents who (a) pursue argumentative goals, (b) allocate their discursive resources accordingly, and (c) anticipate the interlocutor's interpretive and evaluative reactions? If so, the martial metaphor does more than provide a convenient label; it suggests a particular picture of what arguers are capable of doing when they argue.

This suggestion finds support, at least indirectly, in how SM is described elsewhere in the pragma-dialectical literature. Van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2002) characterise discussion moves as being oriented not only toward the dialectical aim of resolving a difference of opinion, but also toward the rhetorical aim related to making one's standpoint acceptable and persuasive within the discussion. At a minimum, this idea presupposes that arguers treat their contributions as means to an end and therefore as subject to choice rather than as mechanically determined responses. More explicitly audience-oriented considerations enter the picture in the notion of *audience demand*, where SM is linked to assumptions about what the audience is likely to accept, reject, or find persuasive at a given stage of the discussion (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002: 156).

Zarefsky's (2014: 142) analysis of SM through persuasive definitions makes a similar assumption: persuasive definitions work only if the arguer can anticipate how a redefinition

will appeal to, or clash with, the audience's existing commitments. Greco et al. (2022) argue that the explicit naming of emotions can fulfil constructive functions within mediation, such as clarifying the core of the conflict, supporting the parties' participation as co-arguers, and facilitating progress in the interaction. Crucially, however, emotion naming is treated as a delicate and potentially risky presentational choice: the authors note that bringing emotions to the surface may also fuel escalation if handled inappropriately. For this reason, mediators do not introduce emotional formulations indiscriminately; rather, they attribute emotions tentatively and routinely invite confirmation from the parties themselves. This practice presupposes an ability to recognise emotionally salient aspects of the interaction and to assess whether their explicit formulation is interactionally warranted at a given moment, even if the cognitive processes underlying such assessments are not themselves theorised. Haaften's (2019) treatment of argumentative strategies and stylistic devices likewise situates presentational choices within the aspect of *audience demand*. He argues that rhetorical figures and stylistic means are analytically relevant because they realise an argumentative strategy aimed at making a discussion move acceptable to a particular audience in a given communicative context, rather than serving as mere stylistic embellishments.

Across these cases, the label *strategic* appears to rely on an understanding of arguers as, in some sense, looking ahead: they choose, formulate, and time their contributions with regard to projected audience uptake. Without making any explicit psychological commitments, we can at least observe that the strategic vocabulary used in pragma-dialectical scholarship presupposes certain abilities: to identify goals, to weigh alternative options, and to judge how a particular move is likely to be interpreted within a given interactional context.

The ability to weigh different options from the topical potential, to estimate which formulations will resonate with a particular audience, or to foresee where a line of argument might be vulnerable in cross-examination seems to require more than mechanical rule-following. It appears to presuppose the capacity to form second-order representations of the interlocutor's beliefs, expectations, and possible reactions — in short, some form of PT or theory of mind. This resonates with cognitive-pragmatic approaches, such as relevance theory that is explicitly presented as "a framework for the study of cognition, proposed primarily in order to provide a psychologically realistic account of communication" (Allott 2013: 57). On Sperber & Wilson's account (1995), verbal communication is *ostensive–inferential*: a communicator produces an ostensive stimulus which raises precise expectations of relevance, and the addressee recovers the intended meaning by a process of inference guided by those expectations. Central to this model is the notion of a *cognitive environment* and a *mutual cognitive environment,* i.e. the set of assumptions that are manifest to an individual or shared between interlocutors. For an utterance to be optimally relevant, the communicator must design it against a representation of the addressee's cognitive environment: what the addressee is likely to know, believe, or be able to infer. And the addressee must integrate the decoded linguistic material with those background assumptions to derive the intended conclusions. In this sense, successful communication in relevance-theoretic terms does indeed depend on the capacity to model the addressee's informational state and to anticipate which inferences will naturally follow from a given stimulus in that state, a point further emphasised in subsequent relevance-theoretic work on humour, where interlocutors' "collective representations" are explicitly foregrounded (Yus 2016).

Against this background, the pragma-dialectical talk of SM can be read in at least two ways. On a minimalist reading, *strategic* functions as a purely discursive notion: it refers to

patterns of choices in argument selection, audience adaptation, and presentational form, reconstructed at the level of externalised commitments, without any claim about the psychological processes that give rise to them. On a richer reading, however, Kraus's analysis invites us to ask whether the very choice of this term does not already lean towards a more mentalistic picture of the arguer, as someone who plans ahead, simulates possible developments of the discussion, and continuously adjusts their moves in light of projected responses. Although the pragma-dialectical framework does not reconstruct arguers' actual private mental states since they are not directly accessible, its strategic vocabulary already presupposes capacities that invite cognitive clarification.

In what follows, I adopt this second, richer reading as a heuristic. I suggest that the *strategic* in SM can be illuminated by asking what kind of cognitive architecture would be required to perform the kind of balancing act that the theory describes. If strategy, in Kraus's historically informed sense, involves premeditation, anticipation of other agents' moves, and the coordination of means to ends in a context of potentially conflicting wills, then it seems natural to hypothesise that *SM* in argumentation presupposes a faculty of PT — an ability to represent and reason about the interlocutor's epistemic and affective stance.

This brings into focus two questions that the remainder of the paper seeks to address:

(1) what kinds of capacities must arguers possess in order to engage in SM at all;
(2) and second, how can PT be theorised as the cognitive infrastructure that enables SM.

If *strategic* in SM implies anticipatory modelling of other agents' responses, the question that follows is whether existing cognitive approaches to argumentation have already supplied the conceptual tools to account for this modelling. The following section argues that they have not — or not fully or explicitly: while the relevant intuition is widely present across the literature, PT as a named and theorised capacity tends to be presupposed rather than thematised in its own right.

3 Cognitive approaches to argumentation

Across cognitive approaches to argumentation, scholars routinely employ an explicitly mentalistic vocabulary, appealing to notions such as *mental models* and *conceptual frameworks* to explain how arguers organise, retrieve, and structure knowledge in discourse (Popova & Pushkarsky 2023). Others introduce multidimensional thought spaces as the internal architecture within which argumentative positions are organised and compared (Akramova 2024). Cognitive pragmatics contributes the notion of *cognitive environments* — the sets of manifest assumptions that interlocutors are presumed to navigate during inferential communication (Sperber & Wilson 1995). Recent work at the interface of pragmatics and argumentation makes this connection more explicit. Oswald's cognitive-pragmatic approach shows that argumentative interpretation is shaped not only by normative commitments but also by processing constraints and contextual selection, especially in cases involving manipulation, strategic framing, and fallacious argumentation (Maillat & Oswald 2011; Oswald 2023). In a related vein, Zufferey's work on discourse connectives and pragmatic processing, together with the study by Schumann, Zufferey, and Oswald, shows that linguistic formulation affects how argumentative relations are processed and evaluated, including in the case of straw man fallacies (Schumann et al. 2021; Zufferey & Degand 2024). Taken together, these studies

suggest that argumentative moves are constrained not only by dialectical norms, but also by the cognitive-pragmatic conditions under which they are interpreted. What these approaches still leave relatively unnoticed, to my view, is a more explicit account of PT as the mechanism through which arguers anticipate uptake and coordinate strategic choices in real-time argumentative interaction.

In epistemic argumentation, researchers appeal to *cognitive diversity*, *epistemic perspectives*, and *distributed cognition* to account for variation in how groups generate and evaluate reasons (Pesonen 2022). Further contributions emphasise *mental models* of arguments (Johnson-Laird & Byrne 1991), argument schemes as cognitive templates (Walton et al. 2008), and conceptual metaphors as cognitively grounded schemata shaping argumentative framing (van Poppel 2020). Yet, for all this proliferation of cognitive constructs, the specific mechanism that would allow arguers to coordinate these structures in real-time interaction, namely PT, is barely mentioned explicitly and remains partially theorised, especially in regards to argumentation discourse. A closer look at Akramova (2024) makes this point explicit. The author provides an overview in which argument is presented as a text that changes the addressee's model of the world and treats communication as creating in the addressee's cognitive system new conceptual constructions and "models of the world", structured by frames and mental "thought spaces" whose contents and salience are carefully selected with an eye to the addressee's cognitive base and national-linguo-cultural knowledge. Her article underlines that effective argumentation presupposes accessing and exploiting the opponent's structured knowledge, value orientations, and discourse frames, but the required ability to simulate that opponent's perspective, or PT, remains implicit, described only as drawing on the addressee's cognitive base rather than as a distinct capacity with its own typology or constraints. Baranov's (1990) seminal cognitive approach to argumentation is repeatedly cited as grounding this view, insisting that cognitive processes not only precede argumentation but are constituted as socially acceptable arguments. However, what is foregrounded is the internal organisation of knowledge and frames in the speaker's mind, not the systematic modelling of interlocutors' minds as such. Lisanyuk's (2015) logical-cognitive approach deepens the picture by explicitly assuming that agents engaged in argumentation are cognitively diverse and by distinguishing justification, conviction, and persuasion according to how positions are coordinated and assessed before a "rational judge" using a "light" version of abstract argumentation frameworks. This already presupposes that arguers have some representation of the other's epistemic profile, otherwise cognitive diversity would have no sense. However, the approach did not aim to specify the micro-level operations involved in tracking interlocutors' commitments and reactions. Mercier & Sperber's (2011) argumentative theory of reasoning famously recasts reasoning as an evolved, meta-representational module whose function is to "devise and evaluate arguments intended to persuade" (Oaksford 2011: 84), regulating information flow through the interplay of a biased but productive speaker-side search for supporting arguments and an audience-side "epistemic vigilance" that filters them. Here again, much of what they describe: meta-representing others' beliefs, anticipating objections, and selecting arguments they expect to be persuasive to a critically evaluating audience looks, from a linguistic-pragmatic perspective, very much like a cluster of PT operations. Nonetheless, the theory is framed at the level of generic cognitive functions (persuasion, vigilance), without a fine-grained account of how arguers actually construct and update models of their interlocutors' perspectives in discourse. Mitrofanova & Gong's (2025) cross-cultural study of the concept of argumentation in Russian and Chinese linguistic cultures reinforces the

centrality of audience-related cognition by showing how historically grounded value systems, communicative traditions and culturally specific discourse models shape what counts as persuasive. Their focus, however, remains on macro-patterns (argumentation strategies, ways of expressing disagreement, culturally typical evidence structures) rather than on the cognitive mechanism that would allow a concrete speaker to inhabit, even temporarily, a Chinese or Russian addressee's vantage point.

Finally, Tindale's (2015) audience-centred philosophy of argument develops a strongly social and "cognitive environment"-oriented model: arguers and audiences are described as co-constructors of discourse, with audiences providing much of the content and "common places" that make enthymematic arguments work, and argumentation is treated as a dynamic practice embedded in shared, historically layered cognitive environments. Yet, the audience is characterised in terms of its role in shaping constraints and warrants, not in terms of the arguer's active, step-by-step simulation of what that audience knows, expects, feels or is likely to infer at each move.

Across these traditions, then, we see a converging intuition: argumentation manipulates mental models, exploits cognitive diversity, and is constrained by shared cognitive environments and culturally specific discourse schemas; but the mechanism that would naturally unify these insights, PT as the ability to construct and use a model of another's epistemic and affective stance, tends to be presupposed, hinted at through notions like "cognitive base," "epistemic vigilance," "universal audience," or "cognitively diverse agents," rather than named and theorised in its own right.

Within this landscape, Bryushinkin's (2009) cognitive approach is arguably the closest to the perspective-sensitive view of argumentation, precisely because it draws a sharp line between internal argumentation and its external expression. In his view, argumentation is defined as a form of mental activity of the persuader, where a "system of arguments" (*sistema argumentov*, Russian: *система аргументов*) is first generated as a product of the subject's "mental activity" (*umstvennaja dejatel'nost' sub"ekta ubeždenija*, Russian: *умственная деятельность субъекта убеждения*) and encoded in a "language of internal representations" (*jazyk vnutrennikh reprezentacij*, Russian: *язык внутренних репрезентаций*); and only in a second step is this system expressed in overt speech, which belongs to the wider domain of "persuasive communication" (*ubeždajushchee obshchenie*, Russian: *убеждающее общение*) rather than to argumentation per se. On this view, the decisive factor for generating a system of arguments is the "representation of the addressee in the mind of the subject" (*predstavlenie adresata v ume sub"ekta*, Russian: *представление адресата в уме субъекта*): cognitive modelling of argumentation must take into account the content and structure of the subject's and addressee's representations, and this internal representation is explicitly singled out as the key determinant of argumentative success or failure. The well-known example of the daughter twice asking her father for money makes this particularly vivid: the unsuccessful request is made without a worked-out internal model of the father's evaluative landscape, whereas the successful version carefully mobilises his values, interests, and psychological dispositions — what Bryushinkin calls the "supports of conviction" (*opory ubeždenij*, Russian: *опоры убеждений*), comprising values, interests and psychological attitudes — as elements of the internal addressee-representation that guide argument generation. Khizanishvili (2014, 2025) shows how this conception can be formalised via "cognitive maps" (*kognitivnye karty*, Russian: *когнитивные карты*): nodes encode the subject's hypothesis about the network of representations in the addressee's mind, links encode causal or support relations, and

argumentation is modelled as the construction and selection of "situation models" (*modeli situacii*, Russian: *модели ситуации*) that will, if things go well, shift the balance between competing beliefs or decisions in the addressee's cognitive system. In this sense, Bryushinkin's "cognitive model of argumentation" (*kognitivnaja model' argumentacii*, Russian: *когнитивная модель аргументации*) already presupposes something very close to PT: the subject must form and continually refine a structured hypothesis about how the addressee's beliefs, values, and dispositions hang together, and about how a given set of arguments will reverberate through that structure. Khizanishvili's reconstruction makes this background even more explicit by characterising argumentation as a first-order reflexive activity that is "usually described as mind-reading," whose "structure and content" fall within the domain of folk psychology (*refleksivnaja dejatel'nost' pervogo ranga, kotoraja obychno kharakterizuetsja kak chtenie myslej ... struktura i soderzhanie takoj dejatel'nosti javljaetsja ob"ektom folk-psikhologii, ili psikhologii zdravogo smysla*, Russian: *рефлексивная деятельность первого ранга, которая обычно характеризуется как чтение мыслей ... структура и содержание такой деятельности является объектом фолк-психологии, или психологии здравого смысла*).In doing so, he clarifies that argumentation presupposes an ability to operate with commonsense psychological concepts: belief, desire, intention, — as the medium through which arguers represent both their own reasoning and the cognitive states they attribute to their addressees (Khizanishvili 2014, 2025). While Khizanishvili occasionally invokes contemporary research on reasoning and attribution to motivate the mentalistic orientation of the model, this engagement remains at a relatively general, meta-theoretical level. It situates argumentation within the space of reflexive cognition but does not yet articulate the specific cognitive mechanisms through which such mind-reading is realised in concrete communicative practice.

As a result, the emphasis in the Russian cognitive tradition continues to fall on the *formal* or *modelling* aspects of argumentation: internal representations, logical competence, cognitive capacities of the arguing subject, and the construction of cognitive maps or situation models that encode the persuader's hypotheses about the addressee's mental states (Bryushinkin 2009, 2011; Khizanishvili 2014, 2025). These constructs offer a valuable conceptual architecture, but they develop largely in parallel to, rather than in explicit dialogue with, the extensive body of work in (mainly Western) psycholinguistics and pragmatics that investigates similar phenomena under headings such as PT, theory of mind, audience design, accommodation, and common-ground management.

For present purposes, Bryushinkin's framework, as interpreted by Khizanishvili, remains an especially congenial precursor. Although recent work by Oswald, Zufferey, and others has brought argumentation theory closer to contemporary cognitive-pragmatic concerns, Bryushinkin's model speaks more directly to the present argument, since it relocates argumentation into the inner space of modelling another's mind and explicitly links this to folk-psychological mind-reading; at the same time, it leaves open, and thus invites, the more fine-grained, PT account of the cognitive infrastructure that I propose to bring into contact with pragma-dialectical SM.

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4 Mapping the strategic manoeuvring triangle onto perspective-taking

The SM triangle — choices from *topical potential*, *adaptation to audience demand*, and the *use of presentational devices* — captures, in pragma-dialectical terms, the three principal ways in which arguers attempt to reconcile dialectical reasonableness with rhetorical effectiveness in real argumentative practice (van Eemeren 2010: 93-122). In making "an expedient choice from the options constituting the topical potential," "a responsive adaptation to audience demand", and an "appropriate" use of presentational devices (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002: 139), arguers are portrayed as selecting arguments, framings, and linguistic formulations they expect to work best for a particular audience at a particular stage of the discussion. Such expectation-driven decision-making already presumes that arguers work with some representation, however externalised, of what their interlocutors will regard as acceptable, relevant, persuasive, or stylistically felicitous. This brings the manoeuvring triangle into contact with cognitive-pragmatic accounts of PT.

This implicit cognitive orientation also resonates with broader pragmatic theories. In audience design, speakers systematically adjust their utterances to what they know or assume about their audience's knowledge, preferences, and inferential dispositions (Clark & Murphy 1982; Bell 1984). Similarly, communication accommodation theory (Giles & Powesland 1975; Giles et al. 1991) shows that speakers actively converge toward, or diverge from, their interlocutors' linguistic style to manage social alignment, rapport, or distance — an interpersonal calibration that is fundamentally anticipatory. Common ground[1] theory likewise holds that speakers design their utterances against a model of what they take their addressees to know or be able to infer; however, in Clark's account, such assumptions are not static, but are continuously tested, updated, and grounded through interaction (Clark, 1996). Research on expectation-based processing in psycholinguistics (Levy 2008; Jaeger & Ferreira 2013) further demonstrates that speakers routinely choose grammatical structures and formulations based on predictions about how difficult or easy they will be for the addressee to process.

When viewed against this combined pragmatic and psycholinguistic backdrop, each corner of the SM triangle can be interpreted as a discursive manifestation of perspective-sensitive behaviour. Exploiting topical potential requires anticipating which arguments an audience will treat as acceptable starting points. Adapting to audience demand requires attuning one's moves to the commitments, values, and emotional orientations attributed to the addressee. And selecting presentational devices requires predicting how a given formulation will be cognitively processed, pragmatically enriched, or stylistically evaluated. Although PD

[1] It is important to distinguish between the cognitive status of common ground and its dialectical status in the opening stage of a critical discussion. From a cognitive perspective, PT allows an arguer to form a provisional hypothesis about what starting points the interlocutor is likely to accept. Such hypotheses, however, may be inaccurate: research on PT has shown that perspective estimates are often biased towards one's own viewpoint, may worsen under time pressure, and are not always corrected simply by trying to take the other's perspective; in some cases, more accurate understanding requires information obtained directly through interaction (Damen et al. 2019; Epley et al. 2004; Eyal et al. 2018). In pragma-dialectical terms, therefore, such assumptions count as starting points only once they are externalised and mutually accepted as commitments. PT may thus guide the arguer's anticipation of which material and procedural starting points can plausibly be advanced, but it does not determine their dialectical status by itself. When PT leads an arguer to assume common ground that is not in fact shared, the resulting strategic move may become publicly visible as a contested premise or an unsuccessful manoeuvre, and in some cases may contribute to strategic derailment. In this sense, the interaction itself functions as a site in which the arguer's PT-based assumptions are tested against the interlocutor's actual commitments.

does not reconstruct arguers' actual private mental states, it does, however, allow the reconstruction of implicit premises and other commitments insofar as these are licensed by the discourse and publicly attributable to the speaker. Against this background, the functional logic of the manoeuvring triangle aligns closely with cognitive models in which communicators anticipate, simulate, and adjust to the interlocutor's perspective. In this sense, SM can be seen as the *externalised, discourse-level reflection of cognitive mechanisms of PT.*

In their account of audience adaptation within SM, van Eemeren & Houtlosser (2002: 140–149) introduce the notion of "communion" to characterise attempts to align argumentative moves with the audience, thereby presupposing an orientation toward how such moves are likely to be received, even though this orientation is not elaborated in cognitive terms. *Audience adaptation*, perhaps, is most directly connected to PT, insofar as it requires the arguer to operate with expectations about how the addressee is likely to think and respond.

With respect to *topical potential*, the arguer must manage common ground, which involves tracking shared assumptions and drawing inferences about the audience's epistemic landscape in order to ensure that selected premises are relevant and acceptable to them. This requirement closely parallels pragmatic and psycholinguistic accounts in which speakers design contributions relative to attributed shared knowledge and presuppositions (Clark & Brennan 1991; Clark 1996; Bell 1984; Brown-Schmidt 2016).

Finally, the *use of presentational devices* engages a linguistically mediated form of cognitive PT: arguers must anticipate how particular formulations will be interpreted, processed, or pragmatically enriched by the addressee. Psycholinguistic research demonstrates that speakers routinely choose forms that facilitate the addressee's processing effort or guide their inferential trajectory (Levy 2008; Jaeger & Ferreira 2013), and rhetorical-pragmatic analyses of hyperbole, rhetorical questions, and related stylistic devices treat such choices as strategic precisely because their expected uptake has been forecasted (Snoeck Henkemans 2009, 2013). In this sense, all three dimensions of SM reflect the very kinds of perspective-dependent operations that cognitive-pragmatic accounts regard as central to successful communication. Recent work explicitly linking argumentation and PT argues that argumentative discourse requires the use of PT from disputants and that this ability underpins the design, targeting, and interpretation of argumentative moves (Shuvalov & Németh T. 2023).

Taken together, these considerations suggest that, even though PD remains methodologically committed to analysing only publicly externalised moves, the operational logic of the manoeuvring triangle nevertheless presupposes the very inferential simulations, both cognitive and affective, that enable arguers to calibrate their contributions to the perspective they attribute to their interlocutors. In this light, PT emerges not as an optional psychological add-on but as the underlying cognitive capacity that makes SM possible in the first place. Conversely, SM can be viewed as the discursive and observable manifestation of these internal simulations, the point at which perspective-sensitive reasoning becomes externalised in argumentative practice. Consequently, *PT constitutes the cognitive precondition for SM, whereas SM represents the external, interactional realisation of PT in argumentation.*[2]

[2] At this point, however, one clarification is necessary. While PT naturally facilitates rhetorical effectiveness by allowing arguers to tailor their moves to an audience's preferences, it is also implicated in the arguer's orientation

5 Externalisation as a methodological condition on perspective-taking analysis

PT, as a cognitive and psychological capacity, poses a specific methodological challenge when brought into contact with PD analysis. To explain how arguers anticipate their interlocutors' epistemic and affective responses is, potentially, to make claims about private mental states — precisely the kind of move that a pragma-dialectical framework seeks to avoid in reconstruction and evaluation. Without explicit methodological constraints, a PT-based account of SM risks collapsing into psychological speculation. The present section therefore specifies the conditions under which PT-based explanation is and is not warranted within a pragma-dialectical framework. The principle of *externalisation*, as the central meta-theoretical safeguard for present purposes, provides exactly these conditions.

As it has been mentioned earlier the theoretical coherence of PD rests on several meta-theoretical principles, namely, *functionalisation*, *socialisation*, *dialectification*, and, most crucially for present purposes to answer aforementioned questions, *externalisation*. In order to integrate the pragmatic and dialectical dimensions, PD treats argumentation as a complex speech-act activity and "achieves" *externalisation* by capturing the propositional and interactional commitments created by the speech acts performed (van Eemeren et al. 2014: 38). On this view, the obligations created by performing certain speech acts in argumentative discourse e.g., accepting a starting point, advancing a standpoint, casting doubt, retracting a claim and etc., are understood as public commitments that can be attributed to the speaker, rather than as private psychological states such as belief or intention (van Eemeren 2015: 112, 155). As Drid (2016: 22) formulates it, pragma-dialecticians are "concerned with what is said actually by a speaker in terms of implicit or explicit speech acts": the verbally expressed difference of opinion and "the commitments undertaken when performing argumentative speech acts in a given context and the resulting consequences form a focal object of study". In other words, the speaker is only held responsible for a position when it is "publicly projected in discourse". *Externalisation* thus "shifts the investigation of argumentation from the philosophical sphere to a more objective sphere" by tying analysis to observable utterances rather than "speculations, intentions or other non-empirical constructs". Crucially, the principle underpins the reconstruction of implicit elements: even unexpressed premises or commitments are only attributed to a speaker when they are licensed by what has been actually said and can be treated as part of the speaker's public responsibility (van Eemeren et al. 2002: 49–60).

To bring PT into explicit relation with strategic manoeuvring, however, methodological clarity is required. The principle of externalisation excludes appeals to arguers' actual private mental states as objects of reconstruction and evaluation. It does not, however, exclude all reference to perspective-sensitive processes. What remains admissible are claims about the perspective-sensitive inferential logic embedded in the observable text itself — that is, claims

towards dialectical reasonableness. Because SM involves a continuous effort to balance rhetorical goals with dialectical constraints, an arguer must be able to anticipate how an interlocutor may critically evaluate a given move. By simulating the addressee's epistemic stance, the arguer models not only what the audience will find persuasive, but also what is likely to withstand critical scrutiny within the discussion. In this sense, PT allows the arguer to anticipate potential objections or charges of unreasonableness before a move is externalised. If the pursuit of rhetorical advantage risks crossing into fallacious derailment, the capacity for PT may enable the arguer to anticipate the interlocutor's likely rejection and adjust the choice of topical potential or presentational devices accordingly. Thus, PT does not replace external dialectical norms but provides part of the cognitive infrastructure through which arguers may navigate them during interaction.

about how a move is textually and argumentatively configured in ways that become intelligible only in light of an anticipated addressee response. In this sense, externalisation does not rule out PT; it specifies what kind of PT claim is methodologically warranted.

This yields a positive rule of inference. A PT-based explanation is warranted when the textual evidence supports a contrastive account of strategic choice — that is, when the analyst can ask why this premise, framing, or formulation was selected rather than another available one, and when the answer is traceable in the structure of the move itself. The operative question is therefore not what the speaker actually had in mind, but why the observable configuration of choices is non-arbitrary. If a speaker could have selected a different premise, a different alignment, or a different presentational device, yet instead chose one that is particularly well calibrated to a projected audience response, then the analyst may hypothesise a perspective-sensitive calibration without stepping beyond the bounds of externalisation. PT thus serves not as evidence about an inner state, but as a constrained explanatory lens for understanding the production of externally reconstructible strategic choices.

The theoretical mapping established in the preceding sections is therefore directly operationalisable within a pragma-dialectical framework, provided that PT claims remain anchored in publicly observable argumentative and linguistic choices. What *externalisation* provides are the methodological conditions under which this operationalisation can proceed without psychologisation. The analysis that follows does not seek to adjudicate between PT and strategic manoeuvring, but to demonstrate what a PT-based reading of manoeuvring looks like when conducted under these conditions, using the contrastive question of why one available option was selected over another as its primary analytical question, while remaining appropriately tentative about anything that lies beyond the discourse itself.

6 Methodological application: a brief illustrative example

To make the proposed mapping more concrete, consider the following brief constructed example:

Director (A): To foster a stronger culture of collaboration and innovation, we are mandating a full return to the office starting next month.

Employee (B): Given that our division has just achieved record-breaking Q3 profits under the current remote model, a mandated return might inadvertently disrupt the very workflows that are driving our shared success.

The purpose of this constructed example is not to provide a full pragma-dialectical reconstruction of the exchange, but to illustrate, in a deliberately selective way, how PT may be brought into relation with the three dimensions of the SM triangle. Accordingly, the exchange is analysed in terms of those three dimensions, while using PT in a limited and carefully delimited sense: not as a means of establishing the speakers' actual inner states, but as a heuristic for showing why the externally observable configuration of choices is unlikely to be arbitrary.

From the perspective of *topical potential*, A does not justify the mandate by appealing to managerial authority, contractual obligation, or operational logistics. Instead, A selects a premise grounded in organisational culture, namely the promotion of collaboration and innovation. This choice is itself strategic: other topical options were available but were not selected. In pragma-dialectical terms, what is reconstructible is the externally observable fact

that the directive is anchored in an aspirational premise rather than a formal one. At the same time, this choice becomes more intelligible if one assumes that A is orienting to what the addressees are likely to regard as legitimate and difficult to reject openly. The point is not that the analyst can know this with certainty, but that the selection of this premise over available alternatives invites explanation in terms of anticipated uptake. Furthermore, A's formulation *to foster a stronger culture* carries the presupposition that the existing remote arrangement already produces a weaker one. This premise is never stated explicitly and therefore never formally opened to contestation; any challenge to the mandate must begin from a wording that has already installed the relevant default. This illustrates how topical selection and presentational design may work together to narrow the space for critical discussion rather than open it up, which is precisely the kind of interdependence the PT-SM framework is intended to capture.

B, by contrast, does not appeal to employee comfort, commuting time, or personal preference, but selects an argument grounded in institutional performance: the record-breaking Q3 results achieved under the remote model. This move instantiates what van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) describe as a pragmatic argument from consequences, that is, a scheme in which a course of action is evaluated in terms of its likely effects on outcomes already treated as desirable. The selection of this scheme, rather than one oriented towards individual welfare or procedural fairness, is consistent with a PT-based account in which B is orienting to what A is most likely to regard as weighty, acceptable, or relevant. Yet the reconstruction itself remains grounded in the observable fact that the defence of the standpoint is built around financial success rather than personal welfare.

From the perspective of *audience adaptation*, A frames the mandate not as an imposition, but as a means of fostering collaboration and innovation. This purpose-oriented formulation presents the directive as serving values likely to be regarded as legitimate and desirable within an institutional setting. It thus functions as a communion-seeking move in van Eemeren and Houtlosser's sense: A aligns the standpoint with a value orientation the addressees may be less inclined to contest openly. Again, the analyst need not claim privileged access to A's actual assumptions. What matters is that the move is publicly framed in a way that narrows the space for resistance by appealing to apparently shared institutional commitments.

B, in turn, frames the remote model not as a private benefit, but as the source of *our shared success*. The inclusive possessive *our* performs a comparable communion-seeking function from the opposite dialectical position. It recasts B's standpoint as an expression of shared institutional interest rather than self-interest, thereby aligning it, at least lexically, with the value horizon already invoked by A. B could have adopted a more oppositional alignment — for instance, by contrasting employee interests with management interests — yet the actual formulation does neither. The observed choice therefore lends itself to a PT-based explanation in which the move is calibrated to what the addressee is likely to regard as institutionally legitimate.

The heuristic role of PT becomes especially clear in relation to *presentational devices*. Consider first A's choice of the word *mandating*. The term is unhedged and performatively authoritative, leaving little room for negotiation. This presentational choice signals that the directive is issued from a position whose institutional asymmetry is taken for granted and need not be argued for explicitly. That effect is reconstructible from the lexical register of the utterance itself.

B's presentational strategy operates quite differently, and it is here that the explanatory value of PT becomes most visible. Several choices deserve attention. First, B opens with *Given that*, a formulation that presents the Q3 profit premise not as a claim requiring defence, but as presupposed — that is, as shared background rather than as a proposition in need of support. In this way, the formulation reduces the immediate contestability of the premise without explicitly arguing for it. B could instead have used a more openly adversarial framing, or a more cautious evidential introduction, but opts for neither. Second, B employs the phrase *the very workflows* in the clause *the very workflows that are driving our shared success*. This does more than add emphasis: it binds B's criticism closely to A's own value orientation by implying that the proposed intervention may undermine the precise outcomes A claims to be pursuing. The move is effective precisely because it reuses the addressee's projected priorities rather than replacing them with an unrelated standard.

Third, and most directly illustrative, B formulates the standpoint through the mitigated construction *might inadvertently disrupt*, rather than through a more direct and confrontational alternative such as *will damage productivity*, *will undermine our performance*, or *will harm the company*. These unrealised alternatives matter analytically because they show that the observed wording is not simply dictated by the standpoint itself. Two distinct functions are performed by the formulation actually chosen. The modal *might* renders the prediction tentative, allowing B to advance criticism without committing to an overly categorical forecast. The adverb *inadvertently* performs a further function: it attributes any projected harm to unintended consequences rather than to incompetence or bad faith, thereby criticising the likely effects of the policy without directly attacking A's intentions or judgement. This is a face-protecting device, and its strategic logic is reconstructible from the lexical choice itself. From a PT perspective, the choice of this mitigated formulation over sharper available alternatives may be treated as consistent with an anticipatory calibration to how the move is likely to be received. It does not prove what B in fact thought, but it does render the observed configuration of choices analytically non-arbitrary.

This brief example illustrates how the PT-SM framework may be applied without abandoning the pragma-dialectical commitment to externalisation. PD provides the means for reconstructing the externally observable move in terms of standpoint, argument, audience adaptation, and presentational design. PT, by contrast, is not invoked here as a method for establishing the speakers' actual inner states or exact intentions. Rather, it functions as a theoretical lens through which the analyst may ask why one available argumentative or stylistic option was selected over another. Since the speaker could have chosen different premises, different alignments, or different formulations, the fact that these particular options were selected invites the hypothesis that the move was calibrated, at least in part, to the perspective attributed to the interlocutor. Such an account remains necessarily tentative and does not license strong claims about what the arguer in fact thought. What it does support, however, is the broader claim developed earlier: *SM presupposes a cognitive infrastructure through which arguers orient their moves towards anticipated uptake, even though the object of reconstruction remains the publicly externalised, textually observable form of the strategic move itself.*

7 Future research

The framework developed here lends itself to further empirical investigation. Rather than remaining at the level of conceptual mapping, future work may combine PD reconstruction of SM with experimental and neurocognitive methods capable of operationalising perspective modelling during the production and interpretation of argumentative moves. For instance, researchers could design tasks that instantiate specific stages of a critical discussion and specific manoeuvres (choices from topical potential, audience adaptation, and presentational devices) and examine when and how participants recruit mentalising resources while anticipating objections, estimating acceptability, or calibrating framing. Such work would connect the discourse-analytic level with measurable processing profiles, drawing on established findings on mentalising networks in language comprehension and pragmatic inference, as well as emerging neurocognitive research on persuasion and message effectiveness (Enrici et al. 2019; Lamm et al. 2007; Mercier & Sperber 2011; Scholz et al. 2025; Tokimoto & Tokimoto 2023).

A more specific empirical question concerns whether variation in PT accuracy affects the persuasive uptake, strategic calibration, or interactional effectiveness of argumentative moves under different discourse conditions. Addressing this question would require treating PT not as a normative criterion but as an experimentally tractable variable, thereby opening a productive interface between argumentation theory and psycholinguistic research.

8 Conclusion

SM, as theorised within pragma-dialectics, presupposes a set of cognitive capacities that allow the arguer to anticipate the interlocutor's interpretive and evaluative responses. In this respect, the process of PT provides the *mental architecture* for manoeuvring: by simulating the addressee's epistemic and emotional stance, the speaker can select arguments (topical potential), calibrate tone and modality (audience adaptation), and frame propositions linguistically (presentational devices) in a way that maximises both reasonableness and persuasive force. More specifically, the analysis has argued that these operations can be differentiated into three analytically relevant modes of PT — epistemic, evaluative-affective, and inferential — corresponding, respectively, to the management of common ground, the attunement to the addressee's value orientation, and the anticipation of how particular formulations will be interpreted and processed. Conversely, each instance of SM observed in discourse constitutes empirical evidence of PT at work — it is the *externalised* or *linguistically instantiated* form of this cognitive faculty.

The relationship between SM and PT is best described as reciprocal dependency. While the pragma-dialectical model conceptualises manoeuvring as a discursive strategy that balances dialectical reasonableness with rhetorical effectiveness, cognitive-pragmatic approaches reveal the mental operations that make such balancing possible. PT supplies the cognitive infrastructure that allows arguers to infer, simulate, and align with the interlocutor's epistemic and affective states. Through these inferential simulations, arguers can foresee the acceptability of potential standpoints and adjust their presentational forms accordingly. It should be emphasised that the accuracy of PT does not in itself determine whether an argumentative move is dialectically sound or unsound. In pragma-dialectical terms, that judgement depends

exclusively on whether the move conforms to the rules of a critical discussion. What PT may help to explain, by contrast, is how arguers calibrate their manoeuvring to the interlocutor's anticipated uptake and thereby increase, in some cases, the persuasive force of a move. Whether such calibration results in a reasonable contribution or in a fallacious derailment, however, remains a matter for pragma-dialectical evaluation rather than for cognitive explanation. Hence, PT may be viewed as the enabling condition of SM, whereas SM represents the linguistic realisation of PT in argumentative discourse. The two processes are therefore *mutually constitutive* dimensions of the same cognitive-communicative phenomenon: *SM is the argumentative implementation of PT, and PT is the cognitive prerequisite for SM.* This also clarifies the paper's broader position within cognitive approaches to argumentation: while such approaches frequently presuppose audience-sensitive modelling, they rarely theorise PT itself explicitly as the mechanism through which strategic calibration is achieved in argumentative interaction.

The plausibility of this mapping was also tested through the brief illustrative analysis, in which a managerial directive and an employee's counter-argument were examined in terms of all three aspects of the SM triangle. That example showed that a PT-based explanation can be operationalised by means of a contrastive question: why was this particular argumentative or stylistic option selected over other hypothetical available alternatives? When the observable configuration of choices is non-arbitrary — when a selected premise, framing, or formulation appears calibrated to the interlocutor's likely epistemic and evaluative stance — the analyst may hypothesise perspective-sensitive calibration without invoking the speaker's private mental states. In this way, the analysis remains anchored in the publicly reconstructible discourse, while PT functions as a constrained explanatory lens rather than as a source of psychologising claims.

Moreover, there is no contradiction between incorporating PT and maintaining the pragma-dialectical principle of *externalisation* because the two operate at different explanatory levels. *Externalisation* governs *what* argumentative behaviour can be analysed: publicly attributed commitments and discourse moves. PT concerns *how* arguers mentally simulate the interlocutor's perspective in order to select those moves. SM is the point where the internal PT process is transformed into externalised argumentative choices.

Thus, PD remains non-psychological in its evaluation, while PT provides the cognitive explanation for the very possibility of SM. Or in other words, in the present framework, PT serves as a psychologically realistic explanation of how arguers may navigate the argumentative predicament and anticipate the uptake of their strategic choices, whereas the normative evaluation of argumentation, including the identification of fallacious derailments, remains strictly tied to externalised moves and the rules of critical discussion.

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