

CLAIMS OF FACT IN THE ARGUMENTATION ON ISSUES OF ISLAMIC COUNTRIES IN NEWSWEEK INTERNATIONAL MAGAZINE

Rohmani Nur Indah

English Department, FKIP-UIN Malang

Email:

ABSTRACT

Argumentation is basically the art of influencing others through the medium of reasoned discourse. This research deals with how rhetorical strategies are employed in reasoned discourses especially those written in mass media read by international readers. The reasoning must be based on the principles of claim presentation. The evidences used to support the claim become significant as they portray issues in Islamic countries. Employing descriptive qualitative design, this research examines the writer's opinion column and world view section in Newsweek International Magazine published currently. The analysis is made on the claim, method of defense as well as the rhetorical strategies employed in organizing the ideas of the argument.

Key word: *Claims of Fact, Issues of Islamic Countries*

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Context

“O ye who believe! Fear God, and (always) say a word directed to the Right!” (Q.S. al-Ahzab: 70)

Saying something right is not a simple thing both in oral and written forms, particularly when it deals with Islamic discussion. In international media, the discussion of Islam among non-Moslem can be trapped into two choices, between objectivity and subjectivity. Indeed, Islamic discussion has been one of the prominent issues explored in many discourses. Both in oral and written discourses, this discussion varies in its aspects related to different perspectives viewed by Moslem or non-Moslem society. In written discourses the discussion becomes more interesting as argumentation is involved.

It is not much to say that argument is a civilizing influence, the very basis of democratic order. In repressive regimes, coercion, which may express itself in a number of reprehensible forms, is a favored means of removing opposition to establishment ‘truth’. In free societies, argument and debate remain the pre-eminent means of arriving at concession (Rottenberg, 1997:9).

One of the objectives of argumentation is to show the addressee that the speaker or writer has certain perspective in viewing a particular topic. This is in line with Campsall (2006:13) that a speaker or writer might not agree with another's view but that does not make the opinion wrong to whole, it just proves itself to be different. Further, he also explains that what differentiates an argumentation from persuasion is on its objective. The former puts

forward a convincing point of view and supports for it. While the later tries to win the argument by having single-minded goal and involving emotional conviction that the viewpoint is the right choice.

There has been a different description of argumentative writing. Kies (2006:7) assumes that an argumentative writer is the only one who has permission to speak. What counts then is his ability to create a sense of interior debate, of allowing other voices and maintaining equilibrium among those voices. Further, he believes that argumentative writing is a matter of fairness and reasonableness.

The relevant studies used as starting points of this research are Rhetorical Analysis on Jakarta Post Headlines (Suryanto, 1997) and Intertextual Analysis of English Textbook (Sukarsono, 2002). Research on argumentative writing, which specifically focuses on claim of fact, has not been explored in depth. Therefore, the claim of fact in the articles on issues of Islamic countries becomes significant to be analyzed. The data are taken from Newsweek international magazine, which uses English and has larger coverage of readers as well as writers.

1.2 Research Focus

1. How do the writers of the articles on issues of Islamic countries in Newsweek introduce their claims of fact?
2. How do they defend their claims of fact?

1.3 Research Objective

1. To identify the method used by the writers of the Islamic articles on issues of Islamic countries in Newsweek in introducing their claims of fact
2. To present description of the ways the writers defend their claims of fact

1.4 Research Significance

This research is expected to give valuable contribution theoretically to the field of argumentative writing and discourse analysis. Whereas,

as practical contribution, the finding of the research will be a helpful reference for those who need to sharpen their argumentative writing skill as well as written rhetorical strategies. In addition, it can be used as worthy reference for future researchers of similar areas.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Argumentative Writing

The art of argumentation is not an easy skill to acquire. Many people might think that if one simply has an opinion, one can argue it effectively, and these folks are always surprised when others do not agree with them because their logic seems so correct. Additionally, writers of argumentation often forget that their primary purpose in an argument is to “win” it — to sway the reader to accept their point of view. It is easy to name, easy to ignore the point of view or research of others, and extremely easy to accept one’s own opinion as gospel, even if the writer has not checked his or her premise in a couple of years (Craswell, 2005:6).

Argument is a type of academic writing thought of as an appeal to reason in which a writer develops a position, sometimes called a point of view or thesis, on a topic or question. Taking a position means the exploration of issue (Craswell, 2005:6). According to Kaufer et.al., issue means a topic that sparks controversy within a community of speakers, readers and writers. It creates a tension in the community, a discontent or dissatisfaction with the status quo (in Craswell, 2005:12).

In argumentative writing, the writer’s ability to create a sense of interior debate, of allowing other voices their say and maintaining equilibrium among those voices has become the major point. It is a matter of fairness and reasonableness (Kies, 2006:8).

Another foremost rule of argumentative is stated by Irvine (1997:8). *First*, the writer should write to be read, not to “express oneself”. *Second*, he should meet the reader’s/ audience’s expectations for the genre he is

writing. *Third*, he should develop his “voice” as reliable and authoritative.

2.2 Claims

In an argumentative writing, the claim is the thesis statement that answers the question of what the writer is trying to prove. There are three principal kinds of claim, namely: claims of fact, of value and of policy. Claims of fact assert that a condition has existed, exist, or will exist and are based on facts or data that the audience will accept as being objectively verifiable. For example: *Horse racing is the most dangerous sport*. Claim of value attempt to prove that some things are more or less desirable than others. They express approval or disapproval of standards of taste and morality. For example: *Ending a patient's life intentionally is absolutely forbidden on moral grounds*. Claim of policy assert that specific policies should be instituted as solutions to the problems. The expression *should, must* or *ought to*, usually appears in the statement. For example: *Prisons should be abolished because they are crime manufacturing concerns*.

As Kies (2006:14) notes, what differentiates argument and opinion is the presence of claim. At first glance, it may seem that argumentative essays are merely asking the writer to write his/her opinion, since there may be no single “correct” way to answer the crucial questions raised by controversial subjects. The crucial difference is that an argument should present a claim (an opinion) supported by reasoning and evidence, which persuades the reader that the thesis is a valid one. An opinion is an assertion that is not supported by logic or evidence

3. Research Method

The design employed is descriptive qualitative analyzing the type of introductory paragraph and method of claim defense. It describes the claims of fact presented by the writer of articles on issues in Islamic countries in Newsweek International magazine published

in January to August 2006 in the section of World View and Opinion. The data of the claim are analyzed within rich description on the bases the researcher's interpretation on the data.

4. Discussion

In all the data analyzed, the thesis statements or the claims do attempt to prove that some things are more or less desirable than others, nor express approval or disapproval of standards of taste and morality. They do not assert either that specific policies should be instituted as solutions to the problems. Therefore, the claims are considered asserting that a condition has existed, exists, or will exist and are based on facts or data that the audience will accept as being objectively verifiable.

Dealing with the presentation of the claim, there are three main points, namely the claim, type of introduction and method of development. The claim is the main idea the writers want to bring forward to develop in the discussion. In the data, the claims of fact presented relate with the issue in Islamic countries, such as Palestinian democratic process (data 1); Iran's nuclear program (data 2); Iraq's violence and political change (data 3, 4, 6, and 7); Sudan's conflict (data 5); Iran's democratic (data 8); Arab world, Israel and Iran's conflicts (data 9); Middle East war (data 10); and Lebanon government (data 11).

The claims present the writer's argument as an appeal to reason in which a writer develops a position, sometimes called a point of view or thesis, on a topic or question. Taking a position means the exploration of issue. The analysis found that the types of introduction used are turn about (data 1 and 3); background information (data 2, 4, 5 and 10); dramatic entrance (data 6 and 11); comparison (data 8); and analogy (data 9). In turn about, concession on the acknowledgement of opponent's argument is used. In the background information, the writers use relevant informa-

tion to the topic to introduce the claim. In using the dramatic entrance, the writers use narration by having personal story to visualize the topic. Comparison is employed when the writer presents another condition to be contrasted. Meanwhile, analogy is used to draw comparison to something when the writer wants the readers to have better comprehension.

The introductory paragraph of the data has the following characteristics: introducing topic, moving the reader to the middle paragraph and gaining the readers' interest. In this case, the writer of the whole text do not present any information on how the topic will be discussed by indicating whether the essay will discuss causes, effects, reasons, or examples or whether the essay will classify, describe, narrate or explain a process. Therefore, the readers must make inference from the next paragraph.

The method of development employed by the writers of argumentative articles in the magazine is mostly on description of example (data 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, and 11). Description of reason is used in data 2, 6, and 8.

The arrangement of the argumentative articles is in general use the order consisting of several paragraphs as the following:

- 1) Paragraph 1: General introduction of the problem. It covers the thesis statement, which states the writer's opinion.
- 2) Paragraph 2-3: History of the problem (including, perhaps, past attempts at a solution). In this paragraph, source is needed
- 3) Paragraph 4-6: Extent of the problem (who is affected; how bad is it, etc.) in which sources are needed
- 4) Paragraphs 7-8: Repercussion of the problem if not solved, which needs sources.
- 5) Paragraphs 9-10: Conclusion stating that the argument is sound.

The writers pull it all together by connecting the argument with the facts. In addition,

the writers anticipate objections and make background information.

Based on the analysis, the explicitness of the claim as the first criteria of defending the claim is not always shown. Less than half of the data shows what the writer is trying to prove that clearly stated, preferably at the beginning of the essay or article (data 3, 4, 5, 7, and 11). The other 6 data ask the readers to make inference from their reading.

As the second criteria on whether or not any terms that may be controversial or ambiguous are defined, similar phenomenon occurs, Not more than half of the data define the terms which might be ambiguous (data 1 on *national resistance*, data 2 on *threats sobering up neighborhood*, data 4 on *Iraqification*, data 5 on *Kafka-esque case*, and data 7 on *De-Baathification*). Among them there are articles which mention ambiguous terms that still need to be defined, but the writers expect that the reader has already known about them for instance the terms *De-Baathification*, *SCRI*, and *Iraqi Mandela* in data 3; the term *regime change* in data 8 and the term *buffer zone* in data 11.

Concerning the third criteria that, the writer must make sure that his evidence either in the form of facts or interpretations of the facts, fulfill the appropriate criteria. The evidences are made to be sufficient, accurate, recent, typical, and the authorities should be reliable. Based on the data, the evidences used fulfill the above criteria.

There are some remarks on the evidences used in all of the data. Facts as the evidence to convince the reader in defending claims are found in all of the data. Only some of the data use three types of evidences namely facts, interpretation and opinion (data 1, 4, and 7). More articles use two types of evidences namely facts and interpretation (data 2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11) without mentioning one's opinion. Besides, only one datum uses facts and opinion without showing any interpretation (data 5). More than half

of the data show larger number of facts than other types of evidence (data 1, 3, 5, 7, 8, and 11). In addition, less than half of the data show larger proportion of interpretation than other types of evidences employed (data 2, 4, 6, 9, and 10). There is none of the data that uses opinion as the main evidence employed.

Dealing with the next criteria, the writer has to make clear when conclusions about the data are inferences or interpretations, not facts. The conclusions of all the data still refer to the claim. In addition the writers also mention final comment related to the inference made based on the facts, but not the fact itself.

The last criterion is that the writer ought to arrange the evidence in order to emphasize what is the most important. The evidence is placed at the beginning or the end, the most emphatic position in an essay, and given more space to it. In an effective writing, the logical order of the evidence can be done in different methods as the following:

- 1) Chronological order or time order. In this order items, events, or given ideas are arranged in the order in which they occur. This method is employed by data 1, 4, 5, and 6, which present the evidences from past to current. Whereas, the evidences presented from current to past only occur in data 3.
- 2) Spatial order. In this pattern, items are arranged according to their physical position of relationships that can be applied to examples, to some comparisons or some classification. This method is not found in the data.
- 3) Climatic order. In this order of importance, items are arranged from the least important to the most important. A variation in this pattern is called psychological order by deciding what is the most important to be put in the beginning, the less powerful items in the middle as the readers usually give most attention to what comes at the beginning and the end and

less attention to what is in the middle. The data show another variation that the evidences are arranged from the most important to the least important, for instance in data 2 and 7.

- 4) Topical order. In this pattern, the organization emerges from the topic itself arising from the nature of the topic. The order stating the evidences from general to particular items is employed in data 8, 9, 10, and 11.

Therefore, it can be concluded that there are similar tendency of the data that employ the pattern of chronological order and topical order.

From the opinion section, in the data entitled "Hizbullah's Identity Crisis", Young as the writer mentions the inference made on the basis of the issue on Hizbullah's not being moderate by the democratic process. This is found in the seventh paragraph which says the following.

As for religion, is Hizbullah working toward Islamic state or not? Nasrallah's decision to contest the elections showed the party had accepted a non-political system. Listening to Hizbullah's officials these days, one hears blessed little about God, and very much about the ways of men.

The above quotation which becomes important to note is as a critic given the writer toward the Islamic party. It also establishes the writer's position against the issue on the decreasing Islamic identity of an Islamic party. This opinion brings the readers to arrive at the conclusion on how worse the identity crisis happens to Hizbullah. This statement also approves the heading which says "*The party hoped to become the region's standard-bearer in the struggle against Israel. Instead, that role falls to Palestinian groups like Hamas.*" The heading is taken from the sixth paragraph which functions as the elaboration on the extent of the problem raised by the issue on Islamic militarist and political party.

Similar finding also occurs in another data from the opinion section namely "Cutting a Deal with Tehran". The strong point of this article deals with the conclusion made in the last paragraph, paragraph eight which says as the following.

This does not mean that George W. Bush should rush to Tehran. To the contrary, it suggests only that Washington leave its ambitions for regime change to developments within Iran itself – namely the prosperity and sense of internal security that, in itself; with eventually lead to a new generation of leadership.

The critic to Washington as the representation of United States becomes the important point to note. It establishes that the writer's taking a stand on the way Washington's policy has worsened the issue. This opinion made by Sarioghalam brings the readers to arrive at the comprehension on the heading which says "Washington should leave its ambitions for regime change to developments within Iran itself – namely the prosperity and sense of internal security." Such critic also can be found in the section of World View. For instance those made by Zakaria in the conclusion paragraph of the second data entitled "Time to Face Reality on Iran" and the fourth data entitled "Separating Fact from Fantasy". This World View columnist also criticizes U.S. interference on the political issue of the country.

The above finding concerning the rhetorical strategy employed by the writers is also relevant to those in the section of World View. In the second data entitled "Time to Face Reality on Iran", Zakaria as the writer shows how to be serious in planning for controlling the regime change in Iran. At the same time he criticizes United States, he mentions the extent of the issue by describing the root of the problem. It is shown by the heading which says "At best, a military strike would set back Iran's program a few tears, inflame public opinion there and unify the nation in its bid to go nuclear." It is taken from the fourth paragraph following the general

introduction as the history of the problem.

The tendency of Zakaria to relate the issue with Washington also occurs in the third data on "How to Exploit the Opening". This is shown by the following sentences.

The contrast is obvious. The United States disbanded the Iraqi Army and fired 40,000 bureaucrats after taking over Iraq, on the urging of some – though not all – Shia political leaders. We see the results. For two years now we have been attempting to reverse course.

It relates the phenomenon with the heading which says "More troops in Baghdad is a good idea, but true security will need more than firepower". This heading is taken from the seventh paragraph as the elaboration on the extent of the problem.

Zakaria, in the fourth data entitled "Separating Fact from Fantasy" criticizes Washington more intensely. This is as shown in the second paragraph which says "The administration's first, massive misstep was to occupy a country of 25 people with only 140,000 troops." Besides he also adds in the third paragraph "The second mistake has been a broader one. Washington tended to see Iraq through a prism of fantasy rather than reality. It imagined Iraq as a secular, educated society rather than one composed of three distinct communities."

More intensely, the critic goes to U.S. is presented in the fourth paragraph which states as the following.

When the insurgency began, most administration officials saw it as representing a small band of dead-enders, supported by vast numbers of foreigners, rather than what it was, a movement largely based in Iraq's Sunni population (though of course representing a minority within it). When the U.S. disbanded the Army and de-Baathified the government, Washington believed that it was dismantling the apparatus of totalitarianism.

Again, Zakaria tries to put forward the role of U.S. in worsening the problem which is shown by the following statement taken from the fifth paragraph.

Having decided to create a new Iraqi Army and police – and fast – the U.S. military took what volunteers it could. In a few months, Washington forced the rapid acceleration of the training schedule, which meant putting badly trained forces in the field and, more significantly, recruiting members of the existing Shia and Kurdish militias.

From the above statements which criticize Washington, it can be inferred that it enables the readers to comprehend the heading which says *“It’s the president who needs to learn from his mistakes. Hindsight may not be the only wisdom, but it’s better than operating in the dark.”* This opinion is taken from the writer’s final comment put in the concluding paragraph.

In another article entitled “How to Stop Genocide”, Zakaria does not show similar tendency of criticizing U.S. He puts some elaboration on the fact around the Sudan’s conflict. As seen from the heading saying *“Khartoum will try corruption, coercion, force, anything to derail genuine peace talks on the killing in Darfur, a Sudanese activist warns”*, Zakaria does not show his own opinion on the issue. The heading is chosen from the fifth paragraph as the elaboration on the extent of the problem.

Zakaria’s rhetorical strategy is shown in the sixth data entitled “Appealing but not Hopeful” shows different way. Using the dramatic entrance, he introduces his argument which also relates with the heading saying *“You see lots of rough politics and joykeying for power in Baghdad. But when facing the abyss, you also see glimpses of leadership.”* This heading is taken from the seventh paragraph as the elaboration on the extent of the problem. He does not make a criticism to an administration, but he repeats the suggestion to negotiate the three communities in Iraq to stress the significance of

having peace talks. This sounds similar to what he has suggested in data five.

The seventh article written by Zakaria entitled “What We Need to Get Right”, covers his view that the Iraq’s problem is basically not military but more political. The heading says that *“If the new prime minister fails, Moqtada al-Sadr will become the most powerful man in Iraq”*. It actually does not closely relate to the claim that states the problem in Iraq is fundamentally political. This information taken from the conclusion is basically as the repercussion on the issue if the problem is not solved.

In the ninth data, which is entitled “Chickens Coming Home to Roost”; Khouri employs a similar strategy to Zakaria by closing his argument with the suggestion to have diplomatic negotiation as the solution of the problem. The heading which says *“Israel is like an aging boxer who packs a mighty punch that is no longer effective because its intended victims know how to absorb it”* is taken from the third paragraph as the elaboration on the extent of the problem. His conclusion on the solution is mentioned as the following.

Instead of a widening regional war, perhaps someone more sensible than the current Arab, Israeli and American leadership would step forward and propose a regional conference peace conference? If it is based on the equal rights of all parties, it will succeed; if it is based on Israel having greater rights to security than everyone else in the region, it will only give us more chicken to count.

Kepel, the writer of the tenth data uses his criticism to U.S. in his article entitled “A Mission Accomplished”. The criticism is put in the heading which says *“Washington has become partisan, deaf to Arab views. It has much (if not most) of its leverage in alienated Arab capitals.”* It is taken from the

fourth paragraph as the elaboration on the extent of the problem.

In the last data, Baer as the writer of the article entitled "Appointment in Damascus" does not employ a similar strategy with Kepel. Using the heading which says "*In March I asked an old friend what he thought would happen in Lebanon. 'It's not Syria problem anymore', he told me. 'We gave Lebanon to Iran'*" he tends to employ a narrative opening to attract readers' curiosity.

From the above rhetorical analysis, it can be concluded that the main premise stated in the heading is not always closely related to the claim proposed. Most of the heading relates with the conclusion which enables the readers to arrive at the most important rhetoric as the basis of the writer's argument reflecting the implication of the claim proposed.

5. Conclusion

There are two substantial conclusions of this research which are made on the basis of the formulated problem proposed in this research as the following

1. The method used by the writers of the argumentative articles on issues in Islamic countries in the *Newsweek* international magazine in introducing their claims of facts are funnel, dramatic entrance, turn about, analogy and comparison. The first type of introductory is mostly found, meanwhile the other two, dramatic entrance and turn about are used in some of the articles. The comparison and analogy are rarely used. None of the articles uses the method of quotation, question, paradox, definition and humor in introducing the claims of fact
2. The way the writers defend their claim of facts are as the following:
 - a. The writers of less than half of the data do not state explicitly what the writer is trying to prove which weakens the claim defended
 - b. Most of the writers define the terms

which might be ambiguous although there are some articles which mention ambiguous terms that still need to be defined.

- c. All the writers use sufficient, accurate, recent, and typical evidences in the form of facts, interpretation, and opinion. All the articles use facts. Only some use facts, interpretation and opinion at once. More than half of data show the tendency of using facts than other types of evidence. More articles do not mention one's opinion. Only one article does not use interpretation while half of the articles show larger proportion on the use of interpretation. There is none of the article that uses opinion as the main evidence employed.
- d. The writers have made clear when conclusions about the data are inferences or interpretations, not facts
- e. The writers show similar tendency of using the pattern of chronological order and topical order. Some use climatic order, and none uses spatial order.

As the formal conclusion, it can be inferred from the research that a good argumentation on issues in Islamic countries or in any other discourses should have at least the following criteria

- a. Stating the claim explicitly to emphasize what the writer is trying to prove which can also be stated in the heading. It is preferably at the beginning of the essay or article.
- b. Defining any terms that may be controversial or ambiguous. This is done to enable the readers understand exactly what the writer means
- c. Making sure that the evidence employed either in the form of facts, opinions, or interpretations of the facts, fulfills the appropriate criteria. The data should be sufficient, accurate, recent, typical, and the authorities should be reliable.

- d. Making clear when conclusions about the data are inferences or interpretations, not facts. The inference based on the proof must be a fact that is valid not based on subjective measurement.
- e. Arranging the evidence in order to emphasize what is most important. The evidence is placed at the beginning or the end, the most emphatic position in an essay, and give more space to it.

REFERENCES

- Blanchard, K & Root, C. 2004. *Ready to Write*. New York: Longman
- Craswell, G. 2005. *Writing for Academic Success*. London: Sage Publication Ltd.
- Davis, B. C. 1999. *Journeys Writing 2*. Hong Kong: Longman Asia
- Indah, R.N. 2005. Claims of Fact, Value and Policy. Unpublished Compilation. Malang: The State Islamic University of Malang
- Inman, B. A. & Gardner, R. 1989. *Aspects of Composition: second edition*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich
- Irvine, Martin. 1997. irvinemj@gusun.georgetown.edu
- Kies, D. 2006. <http://papyr.com/hypertextbooks/compl>
- McGillick, P., Riley, P. & Swan, J. 1987. *Ways of Writing*. Melbourne: Thomas Nelson
- Mundhenk, R.T. & Siebenschuh, W.R. 1978. *Contact: A Guide to Writing Skills*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
- Oshima, A. & Hogue, A. 1999. *Writing Academic English: a writing and sentence structure workbook for international students*. Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley
- Rottenberg, A.T. 1997. *Elements of Argument: A Text and Reader*. Boston: Bedford Books
- Sadtono, E. 1996. *Academic Essay Writing: Guidelines*. Unpublished modul. Malang: PPS UM
- Smalley, R.L. and Ruetten, M.K. 1986. *Refining Composition Skill*. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company
- Smalzer, William R. 1998. *Write to Be Read: Reading Reflection and Writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Susilowati, M & Zuhairi, A. 2002. *Sharing Experience in Teaching Argumentative Writing*. Paper presented at one-day seminar on Practical Technique of Teaching Four Type of Discourse. Malang: The State Islamic University of Malang.
- White, R. & Arndt, V. 1988. *Process Writing*. London: Longman