When and how do we deal with straw men? A normative and cognitive pragmatic account

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Abstract

We propose to treat informal fallacies in a comprehensive pragmatic account which investigates both their invalidity and misleading – sometimes deceptive – character. We do so by drawing on the integrated pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation (van Eemeren, 2010) and on cognitive pragmatics (Sperber and Wilson, 1995). As a case in point, we present a contextually and cognitively grounded account of the straw man fallacy by addressing two interrelated questions: (1) when can we justifiably say that the straw man occurred? and (2) how can we explain its remaining covert, its persuasiveness and its deceptiveness?

In the normative pragma-dialectical sense, fallacies are unreasonable strategic manoeuvres aimed at persuading, i.e., violations of the rules of a reasonable critical discussion that may have rhetorical allure. Determining when straw men occur is a matter of drawing the line between representation and misrepresentation in argumentation, and this can be investigated by taking into account the contextual specificities of activity types. This will answer question (1).

From a cognitive pragmatic perspective, fallacies can moreover be viewed as an arguer's attempt at contextually constraining addressees' interpretations; their deceptive "success" characteristically requires information about the fallacious nature of the argument to be absent. We formulate our answer to question (2) in terms of such a constraint on information-processing mechanisms at play in the meaning derivation procedure.
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1. Introduction

The notion of a *fallacy* is notoriously polysemic. Standard dictionaries (such as the *Oxford English Dictionary*) record the varied meanings of a fallacy as a "mistaken belief," "invalid argument," or "faulty reasoning," and trace its etymology to the deceptive character (Latin *fallere* = 'to deceive'). These meanings are noticeably related (according to *OED*, a "mistaken belief" is fallacious "especially [when] based on unsound arguments"), yet also potentially confusingly different. This becomes clear in the ways the varied meanings of a fallacy are taken up by different disciplines: epistemologists focus on mistaken, unjustified beliefs; logicians on formally invalid arguments; cognitivists on faulty, biased reasoning; social psychologists and communication scholars on the deceptive, persuasive nature of fallacious discourse. Speaking of fallacies is thus itself inherently prone to being affected by a fallacy (that of equivocation).

In this paper, focusing on the straw man fallacy, we adopt a pragmatic account of fallacies that, we think, is fairly comprehensive in that it consistently combines the most relevant meanings of the notion of a *fallacy*, while keeping them clearly defined and distinct. We do so by grounding our investigations in two complementary streaks of pragmatics – a

normative pragmatic theory of argumentation (Pragma-Dialectics, henceforth PD) and a *cognitive pragmatic* theory of communication (Relevance Theory, henceforth RT). Following pragma-dialecticians, we understand fallacies as ''derailments of strategic manoeuvring'', that is, speech acts that violate the rules of a rational argumentative discussion for assumed persuasive gains. From a relevance-theoretic perspective, we seek to characterise the fallacies' misleading and deceptive character in terms of manipulations of the mechanisms of pragmatic inference. As a case in point, we analyse the straw man fallacy: a fallacy of argumentative discussion in which an arguer misrepresents her adversary's standpoint or arguments in such a way that they become easier to refute, and then attacks the misrepresented position as if it were the one actually defended by the adversary.

In his influential treatise on fallacies, Hamblin (1970) identified the main weaknesses of the ''standard treatment'' of fallacies since Aristotle in contemporary textbooks. According to him, the problems start with the very definition of a fallacy as an argument ''that *seems to be valid* but *is not* so'' (Hamblin, 1970: 12; italics original). Hamblin (1970: Chs. 7–8) has set out to remedy the definition by giving the concepts of ''valid arguments'' and of ''seeming validity'' a formal dialectical reading (thus avoiding the limitations of both strictly deductive ''validity'' and relativistic, psychological notion of ''seeming''). However, the confusions of the standard treatment of fallacies run deeper than that – while the above definition seems to suggest two ''easy courses'' of systematically treating fallacies, these have not been followed by analysts:

> Two different ways of classifying fallacies immediately present themselves. First, taking for granted that we have arguments that seem to be valid, we can classify them according to what it is that makes them not so; or secondly, taking for granted that they are not valid, we can classify them according to what it is that makes them seem to be valid. Most accounts take neither of these easy courses. (Hamblin, 1970:12)

With characteristic irony, Hamblin thus scolds the extant accounts (whether historical or contemporary) of fallacies for neglecting the rather obvious consequences of the definition they adopt: a satisfactory account of fallacies requires a consistent theoretical treatment of both argumentative validity and argumentative treacherousness. Such an account can then serve as a basis for classifying fallacies. But before an exhaustive classification is proposed, two main questions need to be addressed regarding every fallacy: (1) Why is it an ''invalid'' or unreasonable piece of argumentation? (2) Why is it a ''seemingly valid'' and thus potentially deceptive argumentation? (see van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003; Jackson, 1996). Quite undeniably, both are interrelated: the difficulty in assessing a given move as reasonable or fallacious makes us prone to being fooled by it. And the other way round: the perceived persuasiveness of an argumentative move can confusingly be mistaken for reasonableness in our attempts to examine the move as a good argument (Jackson, 1996).

While crucial and interconnected, we argue, these two questions have not yet been inclusively addressed in a coherent pragmatic framework aimed at comprehensively grasping fallacies, including the straw man fallacy. To be sure, there have been continuous attempts to address them in a more or less consistent fashion from the two directions distinguished by Hamblin. One possibility is to treat fallacies in terms of *cognitive heuristics* as defined by Tversky and Kahneman (1974), that is, in terms of simplified and efficient forms of reasoning which are cognitively appealing, for in many routine cases they work, while failing deliberators in some complex situations; hence their status of ''seemingly valid'' reasoning (see Jackson, 1996; Cummings, 2002, 2012; Walton, 2010). Another is to propose textual explanations of the deceptiveness (''seeming validity'') of fallacies, as is done in dialectical approaches to argumentation where the source of confusion is claimed to lie in the fact that many forms of argumentative moves have both valid and invalid instances, depending largely on external, contextual factors. For Hamblin (1970) this happens when arguments are valid on logical grounds but remain fallacious as moves in a given *dialectical system* or when they are used in different dialectical systems – one which defines them as valid, another as invalid. Walton and Krabbe (1995) follow up on this idea to claim that the same form of argument may be reasonable when used in the context of one ideal *dialogue type* and deceptively fallacious after a (covert) shift to another dialogue type with different standards occurs. Finally, the extended pragma-dialectical theory (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003; van Eemeren, 2010) similarly argues that fallacies and their reasonable counterparts are very much alike when they occur in actual discussions. Arguers constantly manoeuvre between validity and efficacy (persuasiveness) of argumentation by managing the topical potential and stylistic devices to appeal to the audience. Depending chiefly on contextual conditions of given *activity types*, arguers' strategic manoeuvres may be dialectically correct and thus reasonable, or tainted with unreasonable rhetorical appeals and thus fallacious. As we argue below in section 2, and more extensively in Oswald and Lewiński (forthcoming), these approaches have much to recommend, but they do not aim at explaining in a consistent way both the normative and cognitive *pragmatic* mechanisms that underwrite the fallacies' – paradoxical – status as fallacious and appealing at the same time.[1]

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[1] This paradox has puzzled researchers for a long time: How come ordinary arguers so often accept fallacious argumentation while skilfully adhering to the principle that unreasonable argumentation should not be accepted? (See e.g. van Eemeren et al., 2009.) This paper can be seen as our contribution to the on-going discussion regarding this very paradox.

Unsurprisingly, then, the two above-mentioned questions remain underexplored in the vast literature on the straw man fallacy (Aikin and Casey, 2011; Lewiński, 2011; Bizer et al., 2009; van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992: Ch. 11; van Laar, 2008; Talisse and Aikin, 2006; Walton, 1996; Walton and Macagno, 2010). Hence, to bridge the gap, we set off to investigate (i) *when* we can justifiably say that the straw man occurred and (ii) *how* we can explain its remaining covert and thus its persuasive or even deceptive potential. Answering question (i) boils down to specifying the criteria meant to identify the straw man fallacy as an unreasonable argumentative move. In order to address this issue, we will propose to characterise it from the normative perspective of the extended pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation focused on the concept of *strategic manoeuvring* (van Eemeren, 2010). We will then attempt to provide an answer to question (ii) by developing a cognitively grounded account of the effectiveness of the fallacy attentive to the mechanisms governing the interpretation of communicative stimuli, as described in RT (Sperber and Wilson, 1995[1986]). In our analysis of the straw man we will thus draw on two pragmatic theories which, if taken together, have the potential of providing an exhaustive and consistent answer to these questions. The rationale for this is developed in section 2.

More in particular, since the very core of any straw man attack lies in an opponent's *mis*representation of a proponent's position, an analyst of argumentation needs to be able to draw the line between representation and misrepresentation. We will argue in section 3 that, on the level of argumentative analysis, passing such a judgement on fallaciousness requires pragmatic criteria for *normative interpretation* and that such criteria can be found in the pragma-dialectical model, which caters for context-dependent parameters in the evaluation of argumentation.

In order to start answering the second question, we will need to look at how ordinary addressees, in the process of pre-theoretical, natural comprehension (or *naïve interpretation*) are misled into interpreting argumentative discourse in a way that will leave the straw man unidentified. In section 4, we will accordingly describe the straw man as a speaker's attempt at constraining the set of contextual information selected by addressees as they interpret the speaker's standpoint or argument; the account outlined here will build on a cognitive pragmatic model of the fallible information-processing mechanisms governing natural meaning comprehension. Section 5 will illustrate this analysis with an example from political discourse.

We will conclude the paper by venturing that a fuller account of the working of the straw man fallacy, in terms of both its dialectical incorrectness and rhetorical treacherousness, is one in which an answer to question (ii) can specify the (cognitive) grounds of naïve interpretation on which what we normatively described in our answer to question (i) occurs.

2. Accounting for the straw man: a pragmatic task

Hamblin (1970) recognised that in dealing with fallacies one can foreground either the normative examination of unreasonableness in argumentation (the question of validity; see van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992; van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003) or the study of treacherousness (the question of perceived or ''seeming validity''; see Jackson, 1996). Our task in this paper is to take these two paths simultaneously to arrive at a comprehensive pragmatic account of the straw man fallacy. We motivate our theoretical choices (PD and RT) by discussing their common pragmatic ground and their useful complementarities.

First, we believe a comprehensive account of the straw man fallacy – and fallacies in general – needs to draw on a thorough account of *meaning*. The first step involved in setting up a straw man (see examples in section 3) is attempting to attribute to an opponent a position (standpoint or argument) that s/he did not actually endorse; this also means that the straw man must act upon the addressee's comprehension of its content, so that whatever is manifested as being reported is at the same time manifested as faithfully representing the target's actual position.[2] Accordingly, the more the straw man's content can plausibly be taken for what we believe its victim had previously uttered (and thus endorsed), the more it will be effective. In a nutshell, the straw man fallacy is an issue of commitment, and more specifically an issue of commitment attribution – a central concern for both cognitive pragmatists (Morency et al., 2008; Saussure and Oswald, 2008, 2009) and pragmatic argumentation theorists (van Eemeren, 2010; Lewiński, 2011, 2012; Walton and Krabbe, 1995). To the extent that we go by the assumption that commitment attribution comes alongside the derivation of meaning, this makes the straw man fallacy a pragmatically significant phenomenon, i.e., a phenomenon to be assessed in terms of a pragmatic theory of meaning. We assess the difficulties involved in accounting for speaker commitment below in section 3.

Another crucial commonality between the theories we draw on is their attention to contextual information in the pragmatic analysis of fallacies, including the straw man fallacy. Even though the notions of context proposed in them are notably different, we postulate that they can complement each other depending on the level of analysis we are concerned with. Following a distinction introduced by pragma-dialecticians (van Eemeren et al., 1993:92–94) we consider the

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[2] Note the following distinctions: ''the speaker'' (''the antagonist'') is the potential villain who allegedly erects a straw man against ''the protagonist'' (thus a potential ''target'' or ''victim'' of the straw man). These two are opponents in an argumentative discussion. ''The addressee'' in our account is a third party (or the protagonist herself) who – while judging the merits of the antagonist's move – might, or might not, take the straw man for an accurate rendition of the protagonist's original position.

identification of the straw man as part of the process of *normative interpretation* and evaluation of argumentative discourse. By contrast, we elucidate the mechanisms responsible for its effectiveness as a fallacious move as playing out in the process of *naïve interpretation*.

Since normative interpretation is undertaken by an analyst aiming at a theoretically-grounded assessment of argumentation, the notion of context necessary in this task needs to serve clearly defined normative functions (van Eemeren et al., 2010). PD, drawing on concepts developed within pragmatics, ethnography of communication and rhetoric, distinguishes three relevant aspects of this notion of context (van Eemeren, 2010): (1) the co-text or *micro-context*, i.e., what has been said before and after the considered argumentative move; (2) the argumentative situation or *meso-context*, comprising the dialectical situation, determined by the arguers' sets of commitments explicitly incurred so far during interaction, and the rhetorical situation, built up of rhetorically relevant circumstances (such as historical events) surrounding interaction; (3) the argumentative activity type or *macro-context* (e.g., cross examination, negotiation, lecture, casual conversation, etc.), which amounts to certain fixed and conventionally recognisable constraints regarding argumentative exchanges in a given setting; these constraints capture the typical initial situation of a dispute, the outcome to be reached, participants' roles, basic starting points, types of allowed and disallowed argumentative moves, and so on (van Eemeren, 2010: Ch. 5). Thus PD offers an externalised account of context defined in terms of pre-existing textual and factual data, as well as institutional or conventional constraints that influence argumentative interaction.

At the same time, naïve interpretation understood as a pre-theoretical process of actual arguers can best be described in terms of cognitive mechanisms responsible for the selection of contextual information available to interpreters (see Maillat and Oswald, 2009, 2011). These cognitively defined mechanisms can be couched in RT terms where context refers to a mental construction, as it designates the "set of premises used in interpreting an utterance" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:15). More specifically, the context of a given interaction is defined as a subset of an individual's *cognitive environment*, which is itself defined as a "set of facts that are manifest to him" (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:39). For that reason, contexts are emergent and ever-changing entities, to the extent that they are constituted by information that is selected by an individual interpreter as relevant in the interpretation of communicative stimuli.

Our proposal is thus to expound on the normative issue of invalidity of fallacies as well as the descriptive and explanatory issue of their misleading and deceptive character through a theoretical synergy. We are employing two well-developed theories originating in the same pragmatic tradition in the philosophy of language, yet characterised by a rather neat division of labour. While PD focuses on normative claims regarding argumentative discourse and proposes an account of deceptiveness of fallacies through the notion of strategic manoeuvring, it does not aim to examine the cognitive interpretive mechanisms that account for the "seeming validity" of fallacies. RT has, so to speak, converse goals and competences: it offers a descriptively and explanatorily plausible account of the cognitive mechanisms of utterance interpretation that can be used to explain why fallacies end up accepted (see Oswald, 2011), but it does not comprehensively theorise the normative notion of a fallacy. In sum, each of these two streaks of pragmatics closely investigates what the other is merely assuming. Therefore, we can hardly think of a better way to gain a complete and coherent picture of fallacies as both *normatively unacceptable* and *descriptively acceptable* moves than to draw on PD and RT in a way that capitalises on their common pragmatic core and complementarities, while avoiding possible incompatibilities.

3. Contextual unreasonableness of straw man attacks

In terms of the integrated pragma-dialectical theory, a straw man, similarly to any other fallacious argumentative move, is conceptualised as a "derailment of strategic manoeuvring" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003). *Strategic manoeuvring* is defined as a continuous balancing between two competing yet reconcilable goals in argumentation. On the one hand, in order to resolve a difference of opinion in the process of genuine critical testing of their positions, arguers should meet the dialectical requirements of reasonableness embodied in the rules of the PD model of a *critical discussion* (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004: Chs. 6 and 8). The rules are defined in terms of speech acts that ordinary arguers are allowed, required, or forbidden to perform in their disputes. On the other hand, in attempts to have their position accepted by the antagonist, arguers may take advantage of numerous rhetorical techniques. While manoeuvring aimed at reconciling the reasonable with the opportune in argumentation is perfectly possible, the strife for persuasive success may also lead to the abandonment of standards of reasonableness. Whenever the latter happens, pragma-dialecticians speak of a derailment of strategic manoeuvring that by definition amounts to committing a fallacy, because a rule for a reasonable critical discussion is violated. Practically speaking, owing to illicit rhetorical appeals an otherwise sound form of argumentation (e.g. a critical reaction to an opponent's position) crosses the line between the reasonable and unreasonable and takes a fallacious form (e.g. a straw man attack). The apparent identity between the sound and fallacious use of a given argument form leads to a confusion that accounts for a seeming validity of a fallacious argument. As we elaborate further, PD research focuses on providing clear criteria for deciding *when* the line is crossed, but leaves aside the detailed explanation of *how* common arguers remain unaware of this transgression and accept a fake for the real

thing. We will further outline such an explanation on the grounds of RT. As we will argue, it should still rely on the normative pragmatic analysis of contextualised argumentative discourse. Yet, it should also go beyond it to give a detailed exposition of the cognitive mechanisms which account for the deceptive potential of the textual confusions described by pragma-dialecticians and other argumentation scholars mentioned above in section 1.

The basic PD understanding of the straw man fallacy is that of a violation of rule 3 for a critical discussion: *A party's attack on a standpoint must relate to the standpoint that has indeed been advanced by the other party* (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992:125). Contravening this rule and hence attacking a straw man seriously hinders critical testing. The antagonist who surreptitiously misrepresents the protagonist's opinions seems to be involved in genuine critical testing of these opinions, but in fact attempts no more than a made-up falsification aimed at rhetorical victory (traditionally termed a 'sophistical refutation'). As a result, the possibility of reaching a reasonable resolution of the entire dispute on the merits of the better argument is seriously undermined.

The possible rhetorical advantage of setting up a straw man is to be gained by misrepresenting the original position in a way that is confusingly similar to the original and is more difficult to defend and thus easier to refute than the original. The latter can be achieved by (mis)attributing to the original arguer a standpoint that is stronger (more extreme) than the original, arguments (supporting the standpoint) that are weaker than the original ones, or any claims that are known to be implausible, unjustified or plainly absurd:

(1)   P: Many right-wing politicians are devout believers. That is because...
      A: I am not so sure that all right-wing politicians are devout believers.
(2)   P: Social policies of the government are plainly inefficient: a number of scientific studies, including one recently published in *Sociology*, expose major faults of the policies.
      A: It's funny to say that the government's social policies are inefficient based on just one scientific study.
(3)   P: In fact, majority voted in favour, but the motion was not accepted since there was no quorum needed for the occasion.
      A: I'm sad to hear the majority rule does not apply to our parliament anymore!

These are all 'easy' examples of the straw man fallacy that require no more than a simple application of basic conventions of ordinary interpretation to expose a straightforward violation of the third PD rule. Notably, they do not meet the first condition of being rhetorically appealing in that they are *not* (or not enough) confusingly similar to the original. Therefore, this is not the way we can expect a straw man to pass unnoticed: an obvious fallacy can hardly be persuasive (similarly, a blatant foul can hardly trick the referee). Arguers may thus try to resort to more finesse by clever manipulation of textual and contextual factors (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992:127–128; Walton, 1996:125). As a result, the line between what can be considered a plausible representation and a fallacious *mis*representation of the original position can easily be blurred to the confusion of the arguers and analysts alike.[3] What can be of help in the process of PD's normative interpretation – apart from a careful textual and contextual analysis of a given piece of discourse – are "specific and workable criteria that make it possible to decide in specific instances whether a certain norm has been violated or not" (van Eemeren and Houtlosser, 2003:289). Such "specific and workable criteria" are crucial to filling the gap between a basic normative principle (do not attack misrepresented standpoints and arguments) and particular cases in which the straw man fallacy is suspected. Without the guidance provided by such criteria for applying the general rule, an analyst would in each case have to resort to an *ad hoc* and perhaps commonsensical assessment to decide if the position is misrepresented or not.

Critical to formulating the criteria for the straw man identification is the attentiveness of the PD normative interpretation not only to semantic, but also to pragmatic aspects of argumentative language-in-use. These aspects are grasped in the concept of a *disagreement space*, that is, "a structured set of opportunities for argumentation" (van Eemeren et al., 1993:95; Jackson, 1992). The disagreement space refers to all the commitments an arguer may be held accountable for on the basis of a pragmatic interpretation of what she said in a given context. These commitments include such pragmatic phenomena of language use as implicatures, presuppositions, felicity conditions of particular speech acts, indirect speech acts, and so on (see Grice, 1975; Searle, 1969, 1975). The key point here is that, as we argue below, the disagreement space of any position (standpoint, argument) delineates a space of justifiable attacks on that position.

While significantly extending the scope of the analysis of the straw man, the notion of a disagreement space generates its own difficulties. Consider the following exchange as a telling illustration of these[4]:

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[3] A critical response containing a literal quotation of the original position can still misrepresent the protagonist's commitments, for example by taking the utterance out of context or addressing just a (weak) part of the position. Conversely, a response to a non-literal phrasing of the position may correctly capture the original commitments, for instance by resorting to contextually accurate paraphrases or synonyms.
[4] Taken and adapted from Morency et al. (2008:211).

(4) i.   Lucinda: "The garbage bin is full again."
     ii. Laszlo: "I'm busy; I cannot take it out now."
     iii. Lucinda: "I was actually pointing out that we should simply change this goddamn bin for a bigger one, it's just too small!"

Besides this snippet of a family conversation, imagine that Laszlo is a messy and rather wasteful husband who has a peculiar custom of throwing out fresh groceries and other useful items. This is reflected in Lucinda's repeated attempts to get a bigger bin. Moreover, let us assume it is Laszlo's duty to throw out the garbage. Taking such (*meso-*)contextual data into account, Lucinda's factual statement in (4i), can be understood as conveying one of these messages:

(5) a.   Why don't you listen when I say we should change the tiny garbage bin for a bigger one?
     b.   Could you please take the garbage out?
     c.   You should be more careful with everything you throw away!

We thus face what seem to be three pragmatically plausible options for interpreting Lucinda's utterance. It is this optionality that is captured by the notion of disagreement space and that may cause problems in the straw man evaluation. The crucial question is this: at the time of Laszlo's response, is Lucinda committed to all three options (5a–c) or just to (5a) by virtue of her subsequent clarification in (4iii)? If she is only committed to (5a), Laszlo's response in (4ii) that addresses option (5b) is a form of a straw man, since he objects to a position that Lucinda did not actually endorse. However, if she can be held committed, at least immediately after her utterance in (4i), to all options (5a-c), then Laszlo in (4ii) simply addresses one of the pragmatically plausible interpretations of Lucinda's utterance (4i) in the context described above, and thus does not violate any pragmatic rules of argumentation.

To solve this problem, we start from the basic idea behind the notion of disagreement space that speaker meaning is included in the set of things a speaker might be taken to be committed to. Yet, we acknowledge that this is not as transparent as it may seem, as speaker meaning captures both explicit and implicit contents, and quite some room for discussion is left when it comes to establishing whether commitment to explicit and implicit contents is identical (see Morency et al., 2008). Explicit meanings – or explicatures according to the relevance-theoretic terminology – are contents derived from the linguistic form chosen by the speaker and which correspond to the literal meaning encoded in the utterance. Because they prompt for an interpretation which is directly linked to the linguistic form of the utterance they are attached to, they automatically carry the assumption that the speaker is committed to them. In our example (4i), Lucinda is thus explicitly committed to the veracity of the observation that the garbage bin is full and that it is not the first time it happened. Tellingly, we characteristically do not stop here with our process of interpretation and commitment attribution. Following Grice's (1957, 1975) idea of semantic underdetermination, we accept the idea that the semantic meaning of the linguistic form a speaker uses does not exhaust its communicative, pragmatic meaning. We often mean more than what we merely say or literally encode, and so our interlocutors are licensed, indeed expected, to go beyond literal meaning in their responses. In an argumentative situation, they are thus licensed to pick any element of the implicit disagreement space (implicit speaker meaning) and explicitly address it, as long as the element in question is plausibly reconstructed in a given context.

For such reasons, we do not identify Laszlo's response (4ii) as a case of the straw man. At this stage of the exchange, Lucinda's utterance (4i) can plausibly be taken to mean three different things (5a–c) and Laszlo, by addressing one of them, stays within the bounds of a relevant disagreement space. Indeed, it seems to be Lucinda's responsibility in the first place to formulate an utterance that will be (pragmatically) unambiguous enough to allow Laszlo to correctly attribute the intended commitment.[5] Of course, after Lucinda's subsequent clarification (in 4iii) of her intended meaning (5a), both interlocutors should organise their discussion around this explicit meaning. Yet, at (4ii) no abuse of reasonable discussion seems to be committed.

Taking the pragmatic aspect of argumentation into account, we can formulate the first basic criterion for the straw man fallacy identification that we call the criterion of *pragmatic plausibility*: as long as the antagonist follows contextually relevant procedures in deriving speaker meaning (e.g. those postulated by Grice, 1975) and thus stays within the bounds of a disagreement space of a given utterance she cannot be seen as committing a straw man.

In the process of normative interpretation, the criterion of pragmatic plausibility is contextual in the sense of PD argumentative activity types (see section 2 above). Various forms of institutionalised activities offer precise rules of interpretation of discourse. For example, the rules of (American) legal trial require that only the explicitly stated commitments count as legitimate elements of the disagreement space that can be critically tested by adversaries. Therefore, elements of speaker meaning such as conversational implicatures, even if derived in accordance with general pragmatic principles, cannot be directly attacked by the parties to a legal dispute (see Jacobs and Jackson, 2006). The straw man evaluation

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[5] Cf. PD rule 10 for a critical discussion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1992:196): "A party must not use formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous and must interpret the other party's formulations as carefully and accurately as possible."

should take into account such contextual rules of interpretation and commitment attribution. In some contexts an analyst should, in accordance with activity-type-specific rules, limit her/his normative interpretation to the strict literal meaning of the protagonist's expressions. In contrast, in many informal types of activity, such as our family discussion between Lucinda and Laszlo in (4), a certain laxity in both formulations and interpretations is condoned and even expected, since much of what is communicated remains implicit. In such cases arguers continuously need to resort to the interpretation of full-fledged speaker meaning (that is, including implicit meaning). That gives them more freedom of interpretation (within the bounds of what is contextually plausible). An analyst's normative interpretation should be attentive to such contextual differences.

Next to pragmatic plausibility, the second crucial criterion for normative interpretation is *interpretative charity*. In argumentation literature, charity of interpretation – understood as a choice of the interpretation that is most beneficial to the arguer – is typically advised to arguers and analysts alike in cases of interpretative doubt (see Lewiński, 2011, 2012). However, rather than perceiving it as a rule of reasonable argumentation, we take charity between arguers to be a rhetorical choice which can be made one way or another. The antagonist who is capable of producing compelling criticisms against the protagonist's position *may* opt for a very charitable interpretation of the protagonist's argumentation. Yet, she can also opt for an uncharitable interpretation – and in principle there is nothing wrong with such an interpretation as long as it is pragmatically plausible.[6] All the same, we contend that similarly to pragmatic plausibility the criterion of interpretative charity between arguers is inherently contextual. Depending on the argumentative activity type in which arguers participate, they are subject to varying expectations regarding the level of competitiveness (low charity)/ cooperativeness (high charity) in their interpretations.

On the one hand, in contexts such as legal trials or blind academic reviews, the protagonist (prosecutor, the author of an academic article) is expected to face tough criticisms which are meant to expose weaknesses of her/his argumentation, including weaknesses in formulation. Correspondingly, the critical antagonist (judge, peer reviewer) is expected to meticulously point out these weaknesses. That means that the antagonist is expected to be highly critical and thus uncharitable, because charity (or giving the benefit of the doubt) may amount to accepting unwarranted claims. And this is typically not allowed in activity types such as legal adjudication or academic review. On the other hand, many ordinary discussions tend to be conventionally polite and consensual, as discussants are expected to comply with the rules of ordinary communication, such as preference for agreement and general cooperative principles (Jackson and Jacobs, 1980). In activity types such as a classroom discussion or small friendly talk participants do not usually get fiercely adversarial, but instead tend to be charitable with one another: the protagonist is credited with the benefit of the doubt in making her case. The antagonists who are persistently pushing for plausible, yet uncharitable interpretations are viewed as being nit-picking or even malicious. In agreement with such communicative conventions, in case of interpretative doubts, an argumentation analyst should apply the principle of charity that benefits the protagonist. As a result, the attacks on interpretations which are plausible, but less than charitable, can be seen as attacks on straw men.

In brief, one can speak of two basic contextual criteria for the straw man fallacy judgment: pragmatic plausibility and charity of interpretation. Depending on the context of the activity type, these criteria apply differently to generate different fallacy judgements: in some contexts, pragmatic plausibility is both a necessary and sufficient criterion, in others just a necessary criterion with charity being the sufficient one (see Table 1).

Table 1
Contextual soundness criteria for the straw man fallacy assessment.

	Precise interpretation (narrow plausibility)	**Loose** interpretation (broad plausibility)
Highly **critical** (uncharitable)	Criminal trial, blind academic review	Much of political discussion
Constructive (charitable)	Doctor–patient consultation, conference presentation, classroom discussion	Small friendly talk, Family dinner table

4. Persuasiveness and deceptiveness of the straw man

This section is devoted to the treacherousness of the straw man fallacy and provides a cognitively grounded pragmatic account of its persuasiveness and its deceptiveness. As exposed in the previous section, we contend that the straw man is a fallacious argumentative move meant to make misattributions of meaning and commitment pass for legitimate and relevant ones. From the general perspective of the effects of the straw man, in terms of the addressee's management of information, a

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[6] See Lewiński (2011, 2012) for a further justification of this position and for a clarification of different meanings of ''plausibility'' in argumentation analysis (esp. 2012:413–414).

straw man is ''successful'' – that is, it passes unnoticed – if[7]: (i) the interpretation it is intended to trigger fits the general direction of the exchange, i.e., it is contextually relevant and (ii) it ensures that additional critical information, which would be detrimental to its success if known, ends up being left out of the interpretative procedure – or altogether unprocessed.[8]

Successful fallacies are those that go unnoticed, that is, they remain perceived as valid while they are not (Hamblin, 1970). Thus, the challenge an explanatory account has to meet is to explain why and how fallaciousness passes for validity. This characterisation of argumentative fallacies theoretically corresponds to two possible states of affairs: either the addressee fails to mobilise critical information that would expose the fallaciousness of the argument in question, or such information is (erroneously) dismissed as weak in the evaluation, leaving the fallacy victorious. Accounting for these possibilities in cognitive terms requires some kind of pragmatic model equipped to explain how and why sets of information are selected, weighed and kept or disposed of as individuals engage in interpretative tasks.

Such a characterisation of the persuasive success of fallacies fits the general characterisation of manipulative discourse provided by the Contextual Selection Constraint model (CSC) (see Maillat and Oswald, 2009, 2011; Oswald, 2010a,b; Oswald, 2011; Maillat, in this issue), according to which:

> manipulative discourse [. . .] puts a strong constraint on the selection of contextual assumptions which are accessed to interpret a target utterance U. This first constraining element ensures that the target utterance is interpreted within a limited context, C, and – most importantly – it ensures that any alternative set of contextual assumptions, C′, is not accessed. (Maillat and Oswald, 2009:363)

Within this framework, the straw man in particular can be deemed to be effective when its addressee is not aware that s/he is dealing with a straw man, i.e., when the misattribution of commitment is not identified as such. Given the definition above, a first step in a cognitive account is to postulate that such unawareness is the case because the stimulus does not appear to generate any particular processing problems, and this can be taken to mean that the stimulus achieves contextual relevance in an optimal and standard way *for the misled addressee*.

The comprehension of communicative stimuli is an inferential process targeted at identifying speaker (intentional) meaning that requires, in addition to decoding the linguistic form of the stimulus in the case of verbal communication, the mobilisation of contextual assumptions about the conversational situation, relevant background knowledge, etc. RT holds that comprehension will be achieved the moment this combination yields an assumption about its own relevance, that is, interpretation will be secured once context and stimulus are mutually relevant. This process is obviously time- and resource-consuming, but it also yields cognitive benefits, which, chiefly, involve figuring out speaker meaning (which furthers additional goals such as increasing one's knowledge of the world or making it more reliable). RT assumes that the outputs generated by information-processing devices satisfy an effort/effect ratio, and therefore that the most relevant information (i.e., the one assumed to correspond to speaker meaning) is the one that optimally satisfies this ratio. Under this view, relevant information is information that both requires little effort to be processed and yields cognitively significant outcomes.[9]

This search for relevance not only affects the way the material contained in the communicative stimulus will be processed, but also the set of assumptions that will be selected in the actual context of interpretation. Contexts are thus also selected according to their relevance. Hence, comprehension is in terms of information management a selective process because not all pieces of information are equally relevant at all times and the ones that will actually make it into the context of interpretation are the ones that will be deemed more relevant given the stimulus and immediately accessible information. With respect to the conception of fallacious effectiveness we have adopted here, it means that successful fallacies will prompt for the selection of a limited context (C) that will be devoid of counterexamples and incriminating critical information, leaving the latter for an unrepresented context (C′) which crucially needs to stay concealed or disposed of in the course of interpretation.

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[7] The misleading nature of the straw man fallacy should not be automatically envisaged in terms of deceptiveness. Following Galasiński (2000), Oswald (2010a) and Maillat and Oswald (2009, 2011), we construe deception as an intentional phenomenon; yet, we do not claim that all straw men are necessarily deceptive, to the extent that they can also be unintentionally misleading moves. As a consequence, when we speak of deception we refer to those cases where the straw man is intentional, while acknowledging that the latter might have the same misleading effects on the addressee as far as information processing, on his behalf, is concerned. In short, straw men are misleading and intentional ones are deceptive.

[8] By 'critical information' we denote any derivable assumption (or set of assumptions) that would eventually lead the addressee to question the speaker's cooperativeness and reasonableness in the exchange (her motives, trustworthiness, honesty, reliability, etc.); it could range from contradictions and (semantic but also pragmatic) inconsistencies displayed in the message to behavioural cues relative to the speaker's intention and interests.

[9] These conditions are captured in the two extent conditions of relevance (Sperber and Wilson, 1995:125):

1. ''[A]n assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that its contextual effects in this context are large''
2. ''[A]n assumption is relevant in a context to the extent that the effort required to process it in this context is small''

Combining these insights with our definition of the persuasive effectiveness of fallacious arguments, we argue that the effectiveness of the straw man fallacy precisely rests on its ability to coerce cognitive processing, on behalf of the addressee, into only selecting in context (C) information that does not jeopardise the misattributed commitment's apparent legitimacy. Successful straw men therefore are those that prompt their addressees to mistakenly consider their content to correspond to speaker meaning, and they achieve this by boosting the contextual relevance of said content. The key to this account is the hypothesis that variations in the perceived relevance of assumptions can be brought about by tweaking the accessibility and the epistemic strength of contextual assumptions.

We therefore expect to find in natural occurrences of the straw man fallacy evidence of strategies meant to modify the relevance of contextual assumptions. This means that fallacious arguments are expected to display, in discourse, both strengthening and weakening strategies which affect the relevance of information. Strengthening strategies will increase the salience of information in terms of accessibility and epistemic strength, in order to boost its relevance and consequently its chances of being kept in the preferred and limited context (C), while weakening strategies will attempt to make information belonging to the (C′) context less relevant by decreasing its accessibility and weakening its epistemic strength. In the next section we illustrate this claim with an example taken from political discourse.

5. A full account of the straw man: the Kaczyński vs. Komorowski case

On April 10, 2010 a plane carrying the president of Poland – Lech Kaczyński – and 95 other high officials and crew members crashed near the airport of Smolensk, Russia, killing all on board. The causes of the crash were immediately made the object of an official investigation, as much as much unofficial speculation. The official reports of the Russian Interstate Aviation Committee and the Polish Committee for Investigation of National Aviation Accidents published in 2011 identify as the main causes of the crash: thick fog over Smolensk, outdated equipment of the old military airport there, bad organisation of the flight by the Polish side (including the choice of inexperienced pilots and delays), lack of proper communication between Polish pilots and Russian air traffic control and, finally, severe breaches of landing procedures by the presidential plane's pilots.[10] Despite such official findings of two independent inquiries, Polish right-wing press and the supporters of L. Kaczyński's conservative, catholic Law and Justice party (PiS) kept suggesting that the Polish Prime Minister and his ruling Civic Platform party were complicit in a successful assassination plot constructed together with the Russians (see, e.g., Fotyga, 2011).

Because of the president's death, new elections were held in Poland in June 2010 (originally, the presidential elections were to be held in autumn 2010, when L. Kaczyński's 5-year term was about to finish). In the elections Zbigniew Komorowski (Civic Platform), the speaker of the lower house of parliament (Sejm), defeated Jarosław Kaczyński (Law and Justice), the late president's identical twin brother, by a difference of around 1 million votes. J. Kaczyński questioned the legitimacy of Komorowski's election and his role in the plane crash. For instance, as pointed out by J. Kaczyński, back in 2009 Komorowski had said the following referring to the late L. Kaczyński: ''The president will fly somewhere and perhaps it'll all be over.''[11] This utterance, J. Kaczyński claimed, ''should be an object of investigation'', since it possibly reveals the thread of a long-planned conspiracy to assassinate his twin-brother in a plane crash. In other words, according to J. Kaczyński the Civic Platform's position – something along the lines of 'we are certainly not responsible for the crash and are doing our best to reveal its causes' – is unsustainable, as such past statements clearly demonstrate.

In order to assess whether in his attack J. Kaczyński misattributes commitment to Komorowski and thus erects a straw man, we need to refer back to what Komorowski precisely said in May 2009, which is slightly different: ''The presidential elections will come or the president [L. Kaczyński] will be flying somewhere and all this will change''.[12] Because of obvious differences in expression, some journalists immediately accused J. Kaczyński of misquotation. But the crucial difference seems to lie elsewhere, namely in the context in which this was uttered. Komorowski's speculation in 2009 was part of an interview regarding the tensions in foreign policy between the Civic Platform's government and the president L. Kaczyński. Back in 2008, because of these tensions many Polish embassies had no ambassadors (who are nominated by the government but formally approved by the president). Among them was the embassy in Slovakia. Therefore, L. Kaczyński's state visit to Slovakia in September 2008 was managed by a *chargé d'affaires* rather than a proper

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[10] See http://www.mak.ru/english/info/tu-154m_101.html and http://komisja.smolensk.gov.pl/portal/ken/663/9286/The_findings_of_the_Committee_for_Investigation_of_National_Aviation_Accidents.html, last accessed 24 January 2013.

[11] In Polish: ''*Prezydent gdzieś poleci i może będzie po wszystkim*'' (Szacki, 2010: online). Other sources cite ''Perhaps the president will fly somewhere and it'll all be over'' (''*Kaczyński: Co Komorowski. . .*'', 2010: online). These differences do not affect our analysis. Note that in Polish the slightly colloquial expression ''*(jest) po wszystkim*'' (literally, ''(it is) after all'' or ''after everything'') is equivalent in its pragmatic import to English ''(it's) over'' in that it primarily refers to finality. Yet, it also contains the semantic element of totality (''*wszystko*'' = ''all'' or ''everything''). Hence, we chose to translate it as ''it'll *all* be over'' to render the parallelism between Polish ''*będzie po wszystkim*'' (''it'll *all* be over'') and ''*to się wszystko zmieni*'' (''*all* this will change.''). This parallelism is aptly exploited by J. Kaczyński and thus important in our analysis.

[12] In Polish: ''*Przyjdą wybory prezydenckie albo prezydent będzie gdzieś leciał i to się wszystko zmieni*'' (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86GcCrR4R_s; the phrase is at 1m44s–1m48s).

ambassador whose formal nomination was withheld by the president himself. However, soon after the visit L. Kaczyński signed the nomination. Members of the opposition to L. Kaczyński, including Komorowski, speculated that the president had done so as a result of the diplomatic embarrassment caused by a lack of an accompanying diplomat in the range of full ambassador during an important foreign visit.

In this historical context, and about one year before the scheduled presidential elections in Poland, a journalist asks Komorowski – then a speaker of parliament – what a possible solution to the stalemate regarding other vacant ambassadors' positions is. Komorowski answers: ''The presidential elections will come or the president [L. Kaczyński] will be flying somewhere and all this will change.'' With this utterance, Komorowski expresses the hope that the voters will elect a new president that is more cooperative regarding foreign policies and ambassador nominations, and alternatively envisages that the current president will be pressured to successively sign pending nominations while flying to foreign countries on official visits, just as he had done in the case of Slovakia.

To evaluate this case, one has first to admit that in the activity type of political debate, J. Kaczyński is licenced to ''read between lines,'' as there are no special rules of interpretation other than ordinary plausibility bearing on the speakers' political credibility. Moreover, being the leader of the opposition, J. Kaczyński can hardly be expected to treat the utterances of his governmental adversaries' with benevolent charity. So the problem is not that J. Kaczyński does not quote Komorowski word-for-word, goes beyond the literal meaning, and is highly confrontational. He is fallacious in that he attacks Komorowski by placing (a certain rendering of) his words in an entirely different historical (*meso*-) context, thus significantly changing their meaning. Komorowski's speculation regarding possible democratic solutions (elections or diplomatic pressure) to minor internal political tensions is clearly different from conspiring to assassinate the head of state. Quite patently, J. Kaczyński abandons the contextually plausible disagreement space. Therefore, we consider his attack to be a clear – even if rather complex – instance of the straw man fallacy. Precisely, it counts as the taking out of context variant of the straw man.

The reasons why J. Kaczyński's straw man has some prospect of succeeding are linguistic and contextual; some of the linguistic material is vague enough to afford a range of differing interpretations, and at the same time said vagueness allows the utterance to be compatible with different informational contexts so that different interpretations may be (plausibly) generated, among which the one corresponding to the straw man. Let us take a closer look at Komorowski's original formulation (6) and at Kaczyński's rendition of the latter (7):

(6)   Komorowski: ''The presidential elections will come or the president will be flying somewhere and all this will change.''

(7)   J. Kaczyński: ''The president will fly somewhere and it'll all be over.''

The two utterances are similar in content: both propositional contents mention the (former) president, communicate that he would be flying somewhere in the future and that after that some sort of change would come about. While it is clear from the original circumstances in which Komorowski's utterance was formulated that its meaning had to be calculated against a context which contains information about Polish ambassadors, it is crucial to the success of (7) that such information remain obscured. We thus take as the first step in de-contextualising the utterance the deletion of the original disjunction: elections *or* flights. The fact that the disjunction is present in (6) but absent in (7) constrains the interpretation of the latter by obscuring that the original wording was directly relevant to the situation under discussion (tensions between L. Kaczyński and the government regarding ambassadors). As a result, critical information is left out of the context of interpretation, leaving the associations that will be triggered by (7) with less chances of resembling the ones intended by Komorowski in (6). In addition to this first alteration, a few properties of the linguistic packaging of (7) can contribute to explaining why an addressee might fail to mobilise such contextual information.

First, J. Kaczyński takes advantage of the referentially ambiguous demonstrative pronoun contained in the original anaphoric wording ''all this'' (''*to wszystko*''). What J. Kaczyński's report of (6) does is maximise the ambiguity of the anaphora by dropping the demonstrative ''this'' – which functions in the original utterance as an indexical explicitly pointing to the contextually relevant referent, i.e., the crisis with Polish ambassadors. He replaces it with a much vaguer wording, ''it'll all be over'' (''*będzie po wszystkim*''), whose referential saturation is not manifestly limited to one contextually salient item. Hence, (7) prompts the addressees to identify the ''it all'' (''*wszystko*'') in ''it'll all be over'' in relation to L. Kaczyński's life, which allows moving one step forward in the direction of the possibility of an assassination. The cognitive operations prompted by an alternative choice of words in (7) can therefore be seen as the consequences of an attempt to weaken the contextual relevance of the ambassador crisis.

Second, J. Kaczyński associates to whatever element the addressee chooses to fill this referentially ambiguous position with the predicate ''will be over,'' instead of the original ''will change.'' While in Komorowski's original utterance the point was to express that it was either through an election or through case-by-case nominations, depending on L. Kaczyński's official travels, that this situation would change, in (7) the choice of the expression ''will be over'' affords more possibilities in interpretation; in particular, death could indeed be envisaged as one way of making sure that things are ''over.'' The latter choice makes this interpretation more relevant than it would have been with the original predicate ''change.''

Third, the deliberate referential ambiguity pointed out above, together with the disappearance of the original disjunction in (7) might be exploited to strengthen a univocal causal and temporal relationship between the two conjuncts of the clause. A first typical implicature derivable from the conjunction 'and' is temporal ordering of the conjuncts (see Wilson and Sperber, 1993; Saussure and Sthioul, 2002). For instance, in (8) we are led to infer that the first conjunct happened *before* the second:

(8)   Laszlo parked his car and entered the building.

Moreover, sometimes an additional causal relationship between the conjuncts may be inferred on the grounds of the previously inferred temporal ordering of the events represented, as in (9), where we not only infer that the first conjunct happened before the second, but also that the second happened *because* of the first:

(9)   Laszlo bumped into the table and the vase fell on the floor.

Now, (6) and (7) both implicitly trigger a temporal and a causal reading; however, in J. Kaczyński's report in (7), this reading is strengthened and made more relevant by the lack of disjunction. In (6), the syntactic and semantic structure of the disjunctive utterance establishes that from any of the two options presented (namely, the election of a new president or L. Kaczyński's additional official trips) will lead to a ''change'' in the situation (namely, a resolution of the diplomatic crisis). In (7), the structure being amputated from the disjunction presents us with only one option and conveys the idea that *only* the former president's trips will make things change. The absence of the alternative, in this case, renders the first conjunct salient as the only contextually accessible event that could cause the second conjunct to emerge, granted we preserve the sequential and causative implicit readings associated to the conjunction 'and'. In other words, in (7) the speaker is not only disposing of the originally uttered alternative that would rule out the conspiratorial reading (thereby relegating it to C′), but he is also securing that the only readily accessible piece of information required to make sense of the utterance is consistent with the conclusion he wants to defend (thereby making it a relevant candidate for inclusion in the context C).[13]

Fourth, and finally, it should be noted that Komorowski's (as it turns out, quite unfortunate) choice of the verb ''fly'' in the original utterance in (6) becomes even more relevant in (7) to the extent that L. Kaczyński died from an airplane crash. Indeed, there seems to be a lexical difference between what Komorowski originally intended and what J. Kaczyński takes him to mean by uttering ''fly somewhere.'' In (6), it is used to denote a (foreign) trip in its entirety including the destination reached, since the whole question is to make sure that there will be an ambassador to welcome the president there. In (7), the destination is not as relevant as the fact that the expression denotes the act of moving from one place to another *in an airplane* (which builds a potential association with airplane crashes). In other words, J. Kaczyński is rhetorically exploiting to his own advantage the extension of the term ''fly'' by trying to get his addressees to narrow it to one of the crucially relevant aspects of the meaning of ''to fly,'' i.e., the fact that people usually fly in airplanes.[14]

Summing up the analysis, we have demonstrated two important points in this example. First, we have argued that J. Kaczyński's criticism constitutes a fallacious straw man attack by virtue of violating the basic criterion of pragmatic plausibility. Using the pragma-dialectical terminology, we can conclude that his strategic manoeuvring derails, as he employs presentational, linguistic devices that breach some basic requirements of dialectical reasonableness. We can further assume that these devices are used to bring about persuasive, rhetorical effects – but PD would not advise us on how exactly this happens in terms of interpretive operations of their addressees. Therefore, second, we have carefully analysed these linguistic devices from the perspective of their misleading (and in this case deceptive) potential. We have come to a conclusion that there are grounds to construe J. Kaczyński's report of Komorowski's words as an attempt to both strengthen a context C in which Komorowski's words are relevant with respect to a conspiratorial plot and weaken a context C′ (containing information relevant to ambassadors' nominations) that would make the misattribution of commitment far too obvious. These strategies constrain the contextual selection of relevant assumptions which are triggered by the linguistic wording of the report, as predicted by the CSC model. Consequently, our example quite vividly illustrates how linguistic material may orient interpretation, and particularly how an account of contextual constraining might explain how the straw man operates.

6. Conclusion

We have set out to show that the identification of a straw man in an argumentative corpus should rely on *normative pragmatic* criteria. To address dilemmas of commitment attribution in argumentative analysis on pragma-dialectical

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[13] Recall here that C is the context supposed to focus the addressee's attention on 'favourable' information and that C′ is the context containing critical information which would be detrimental to the fallacy's success.

[14] Incidentally, it should be noted that the use of so-called *ad hoc concepts* (Carston, 2002) has been shown to play a role in manipulative discourse (Allot, 2005). The example we are considering now arguably builds on a similar mechanism as far as the extension of the predicate ''to fly'' is concerned.

grounds, we accordingly identified two context-dependent criteria ensuring a theoretically justified reconstruction of commitments, namely pragmatic plausibility and charity of interpretation. The discussion of the political example furthermore showed that despite the activity type's inherent proclivity to allow loose, adversarial and uncharitable interpretations, politicians still fail to remain within the bounds of the contextually plausible disagreement space, thereby committing the straw man fallacy. Let us also note that an extension of the process of argumentation into the realm of implicitness and indirectness carries the risk of a subtle misattribution just as much as it allows for a fine and complex attribution of commitment. That is, it allows covering up sophisticated forms of straw man under the guise of ordinary "logic of conversation" as described by Grice (compare Kaczyński's 'reading behind the lines' in (7) to Lucinda's utterance in (4)).

The second step in our account was to outline a *cognitive pragmatic* explanation of why the straw man may have some prospect of being rhetorically effective. Our pragma-linguistic analysis confirmed our predictions regarding the presence of weakening and strengthening strategies affecting the salience of contextual information available to the addressees. Still, while we provided an explanation of how the straw man operates with an illustration stemming from naturally occurring discourse, we do not claim that in this particular instance it was successful. We limit ourselves to laying out the conditions which, if obtained, would make it rhetorically successful, but out of caution we deliberately refrain from qualifying it as such. Assessing whether the fallacy was successful, i.e., persuasive, will ultimately depend on a number of additional factors such as, among others, each addressee's: (i) level of involvement in the issue, (ii) amount of relevant background information (iii) willingness to incur cognitive efforts regarding the issue, (iv) own political orientation, etc.

As it provides guidelines for detailed analysis as well as instruments to capture argumentative effectiveness, we suggest that the pragmatic interface proposed here to deal with the straw man is conducive to a thorough treatment of the two fundamental questions investigated in argumentation theory. In its normative streak, pragmatic theory is in a position to methodically ground our judgments of fallaciousness of natural discourse. In its cognitive approach, pragmatics provides an explanatory account of fallacies' persuasive potential. The promising synergy between two branches of pragmatics we explored here merits further theoretical examination accompanied by careful analysis of natural discourse. In particular, we expect research of this kind, namely research with a strong cognitive component, to enrich and complement available accounts of other identified fallacies. It is our conviction that an insight into cognitive models of information-processing – and in particular research on cognitive biases and heuristics[15] – is much needed to confer psychological plausibility, and consequently explanatory power, to existing accounts of rhetorical persuasiveness.

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[15] See also Maillat and Oswald (2009, 2011), Maillat (in this issue), Jackson (1996), Cummings (2002, 2012) and Correia (2011).

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