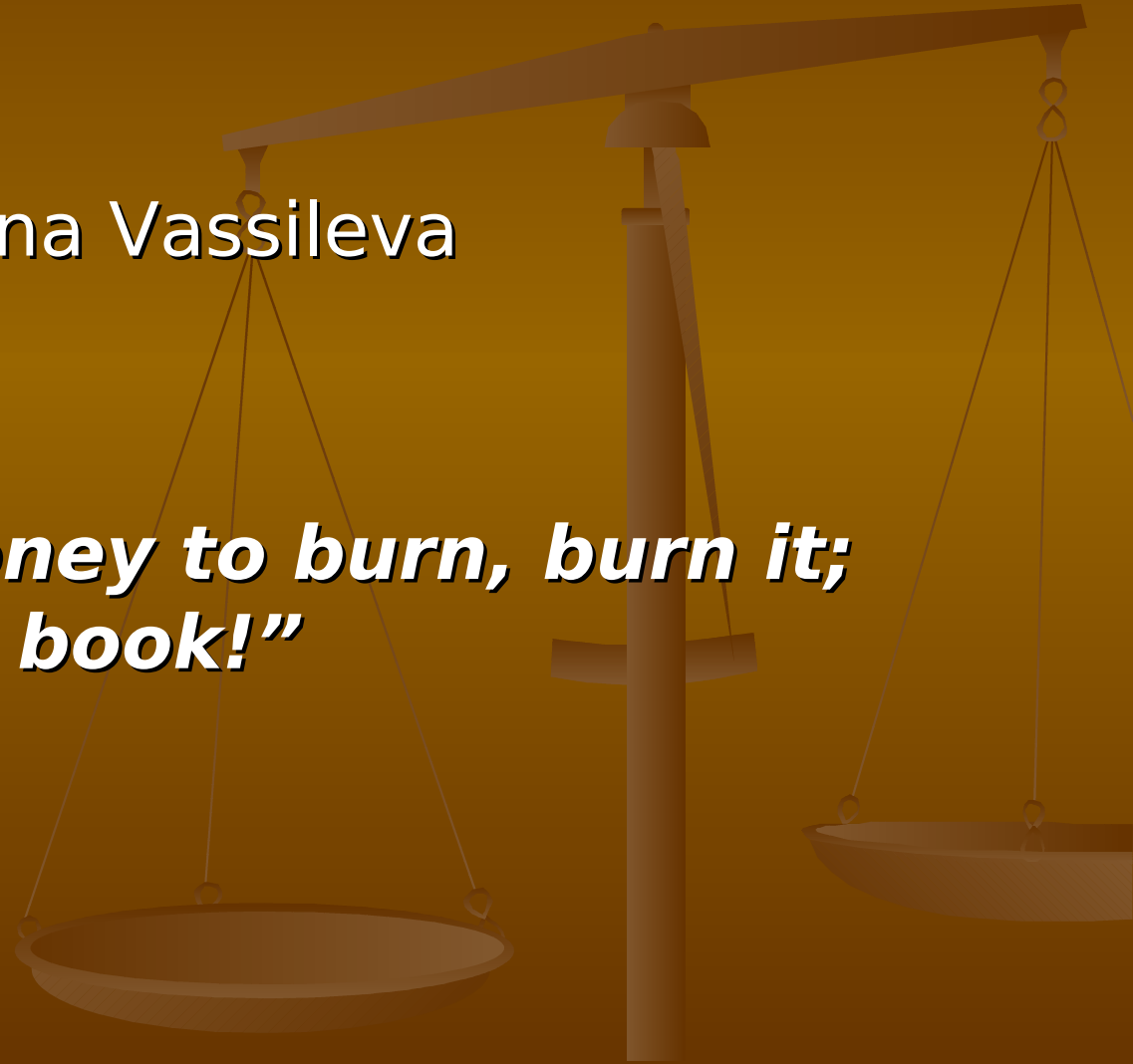


“Don’t buy this book!”

Critical Book Reviews in German

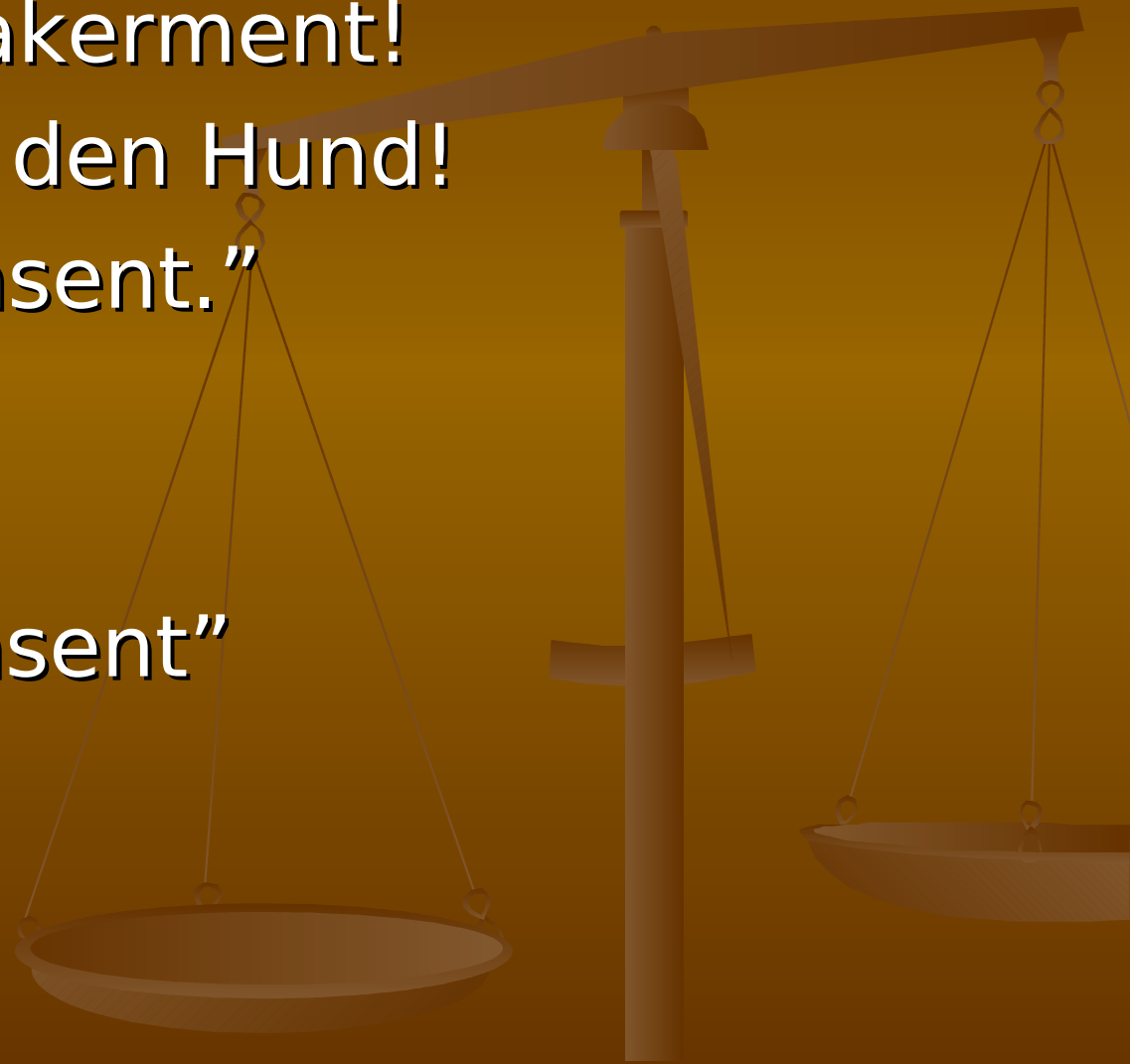
Irena Vassileva

***“If you have money to burn, burn it;
don’t buy this book!”***



“Der Tausendsakerment!
Schlagt ihn tot, den Hund!
Es ist ein Rezensent.”

Goethe, “Rezensent”

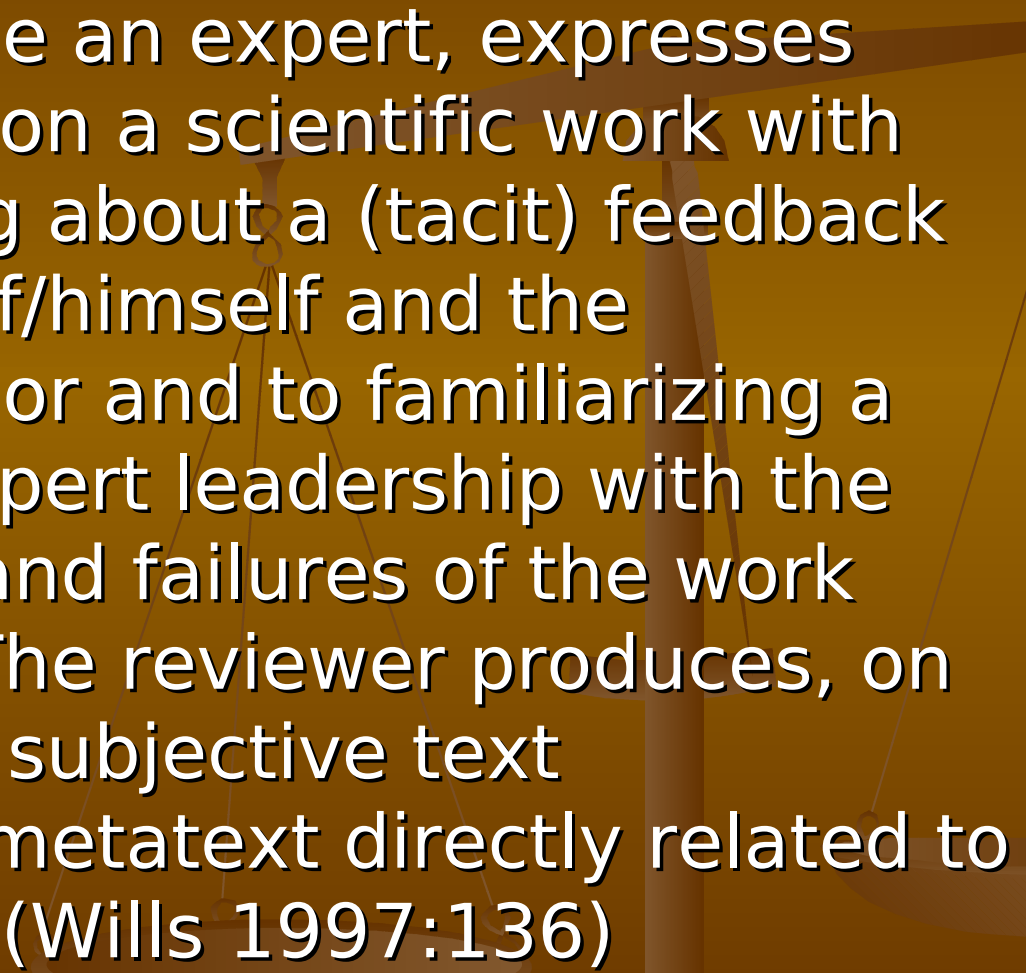


Aim and data of the study

- The pilot study is based on a sample corpus of 10 book reviews in German applied linguistics which have a definitely negative character.
- It aims at uncovering the argumentation strategies used by review writers in terms of the classical Aristotelian theory.
- The analysis leads to conclusions concerning the realisation of the argumentation strategies used by writers, the degree to which criticism is based on logic (objective) and on personal evaluation (subjective), the preference for and/or avoidance of certain topoi.

The scientific book review

A person, as a rule an expert, expresses her/his opinion on a scientific work with view to bringing about a (tacit) feedback between herself/himself and the respective author and to familiarizing a more or less expert leadership with the achievements and failures of the work under review. The reviewer produces, on the basis of his subjective text assessment, a metatext directly related to a primary text. (Wills 1997:136)



What follows from this definition are the two basic features of the review, namely:

- (1) The discourse of the review is not independent and self-sufficient, but is closely related ideationally to preceding texts and/or practices, thus forming a wide and complicated network of intertextual links.
- (2) The two basic communicative functions of the review are the informative and the evaluative.

Methodology

Argumentation takes place when there is *disagreement* (or lack of agreement) as to a certain state of affairs, or as to what should be done, or as to whether something is good or bad; a speaker or writer intends to bring about consensus on the subject, i.e. transform disagreement into agreement, by persuading his or her audience of the correctness of the point of view put forward by him or her by advancing an *argument* which appeals to certain *commonly held beliefs or opinions*, i.e. beliefs or opinions shared by his or her audience. (McElholm 2002:67-68)

Problem: T or not T?

For T to assert
 to appreciate

to advise in favour of to

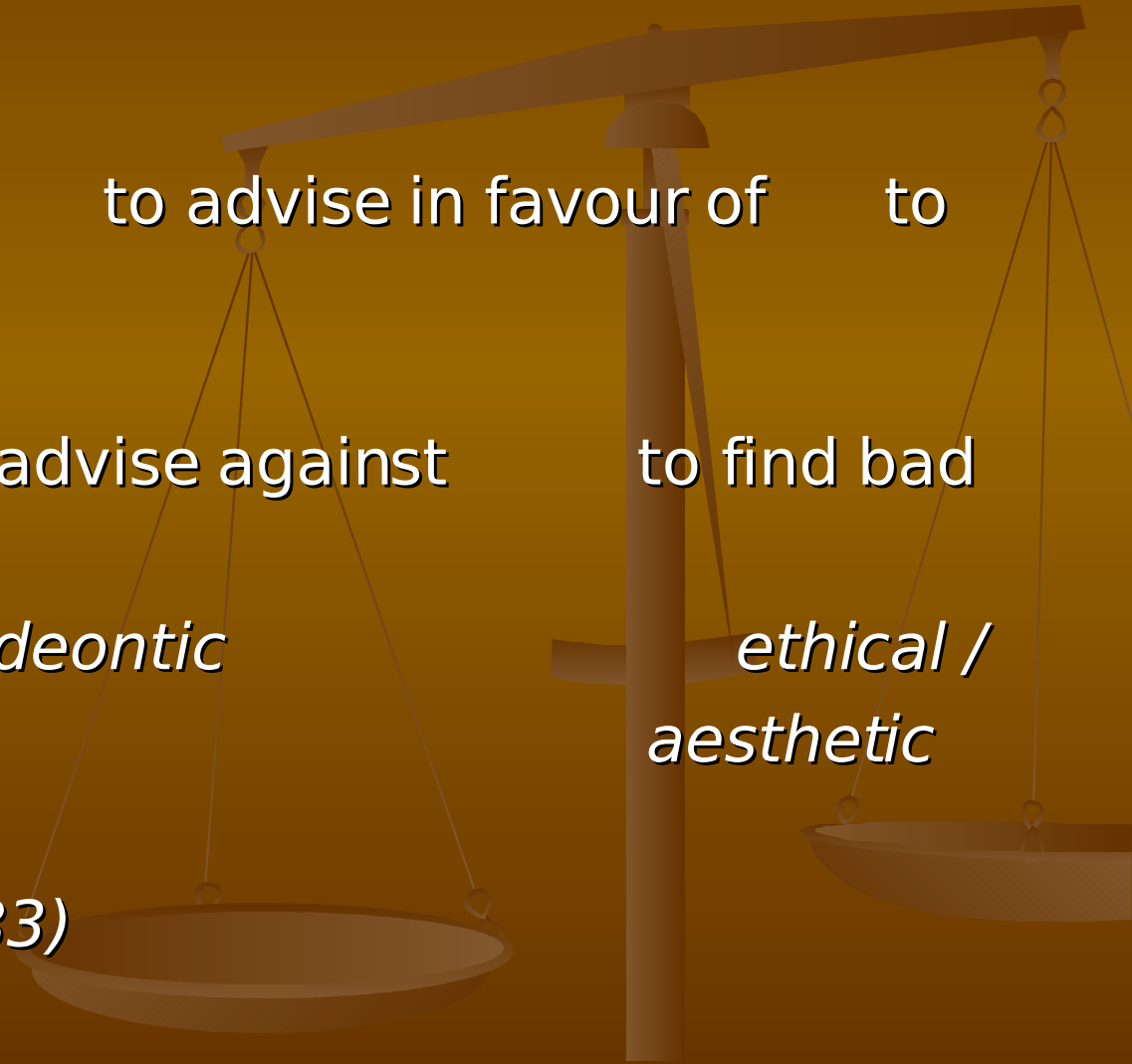
Against T to deny to advise against

to find bad

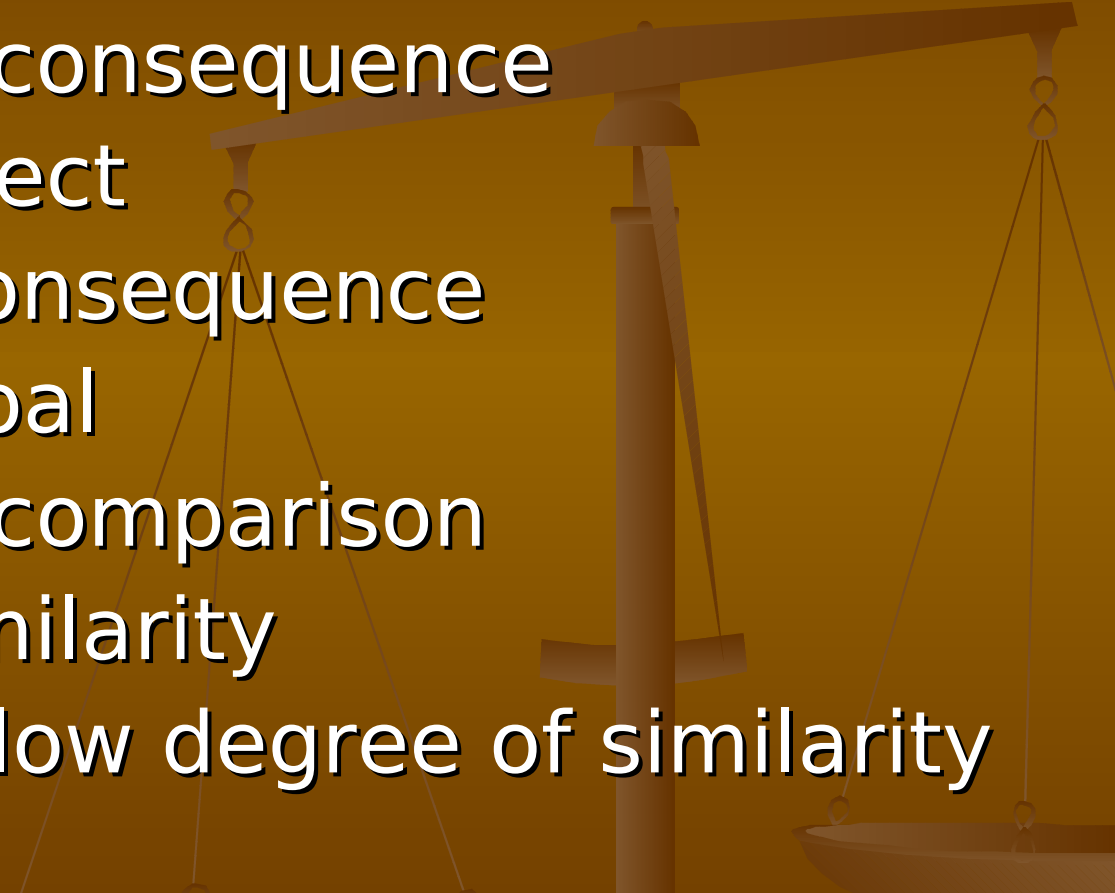
Argumen- epistemic deontic
tation

*ethical /
aesthetic*

(Egg 1994:16ff, 1996:183)



Topoi

- I. Topoi based on everyday-logic generic premises:
 1. Topoi from the consequence
cause and effect
reason and consequence
means and goal
 2. Topoi from the comparison
identity or similarity
difference or low degree of similarity
'more or less'
- 

Topoi

3. Topoi from the contrast

absolute contrast

relative contrast

alternative contrast

semantically incompatible opposites

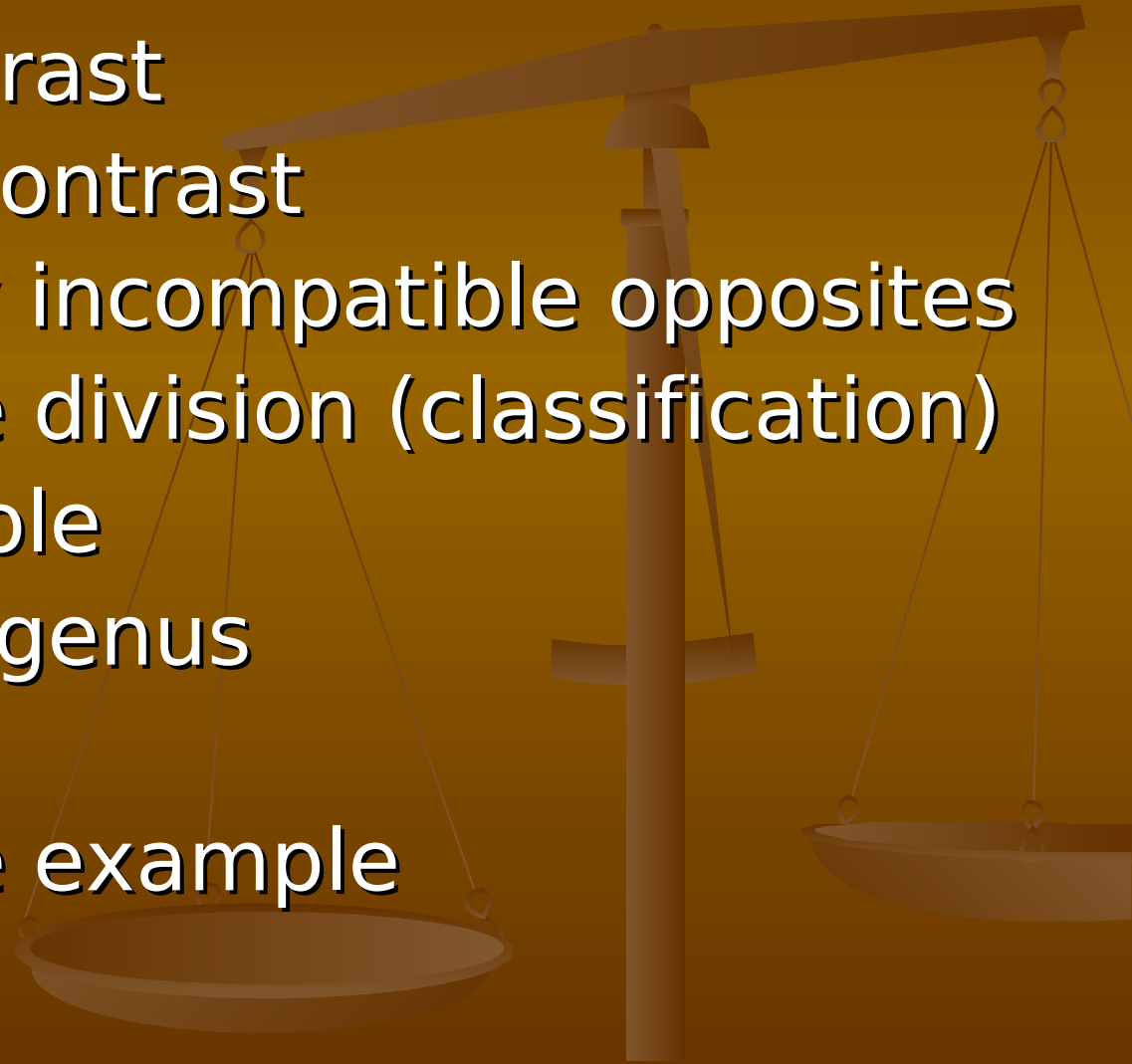
4. Topoi from the division (classification)

part and whole

species and genus

definition

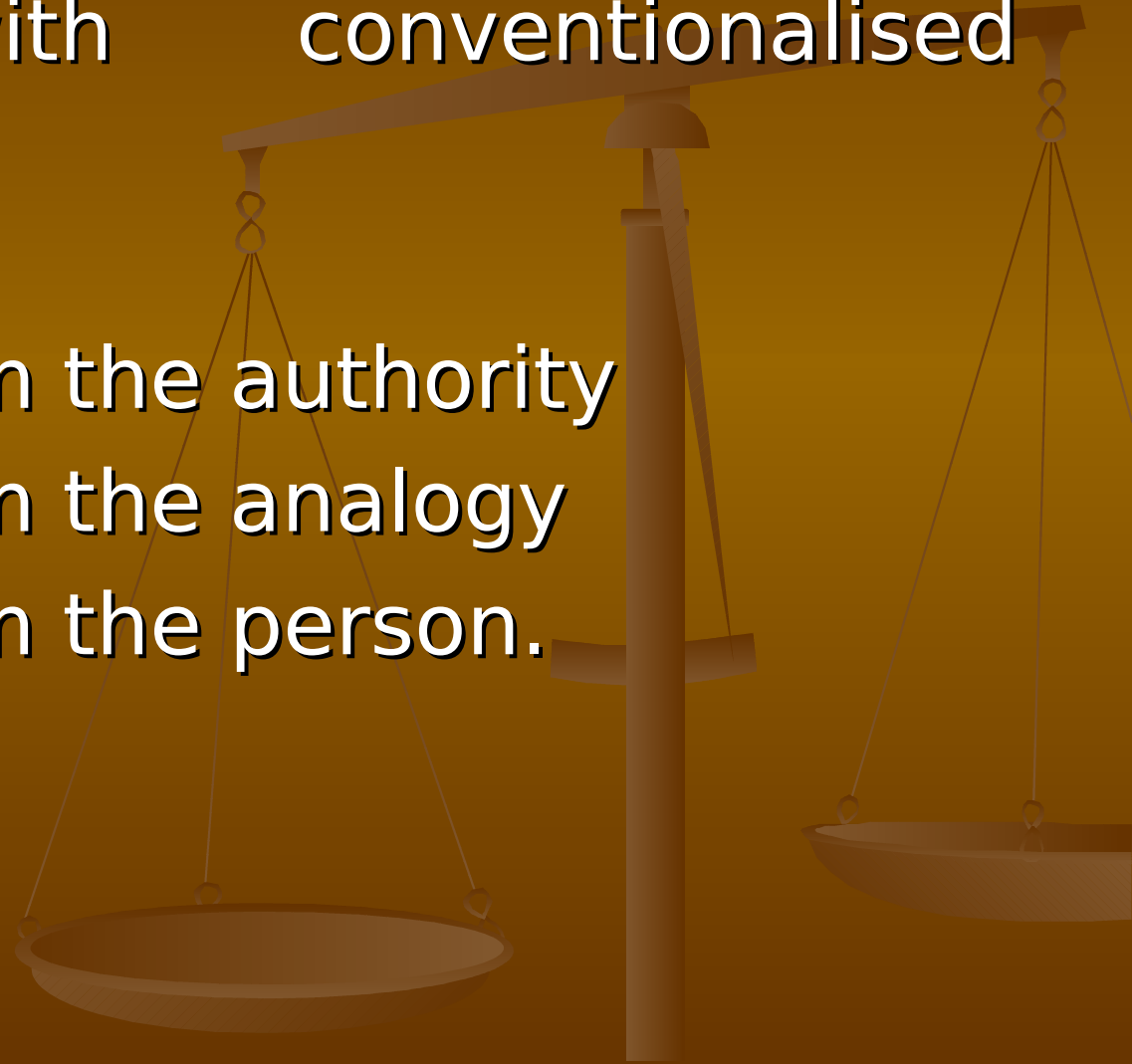
5. Topoi from the example



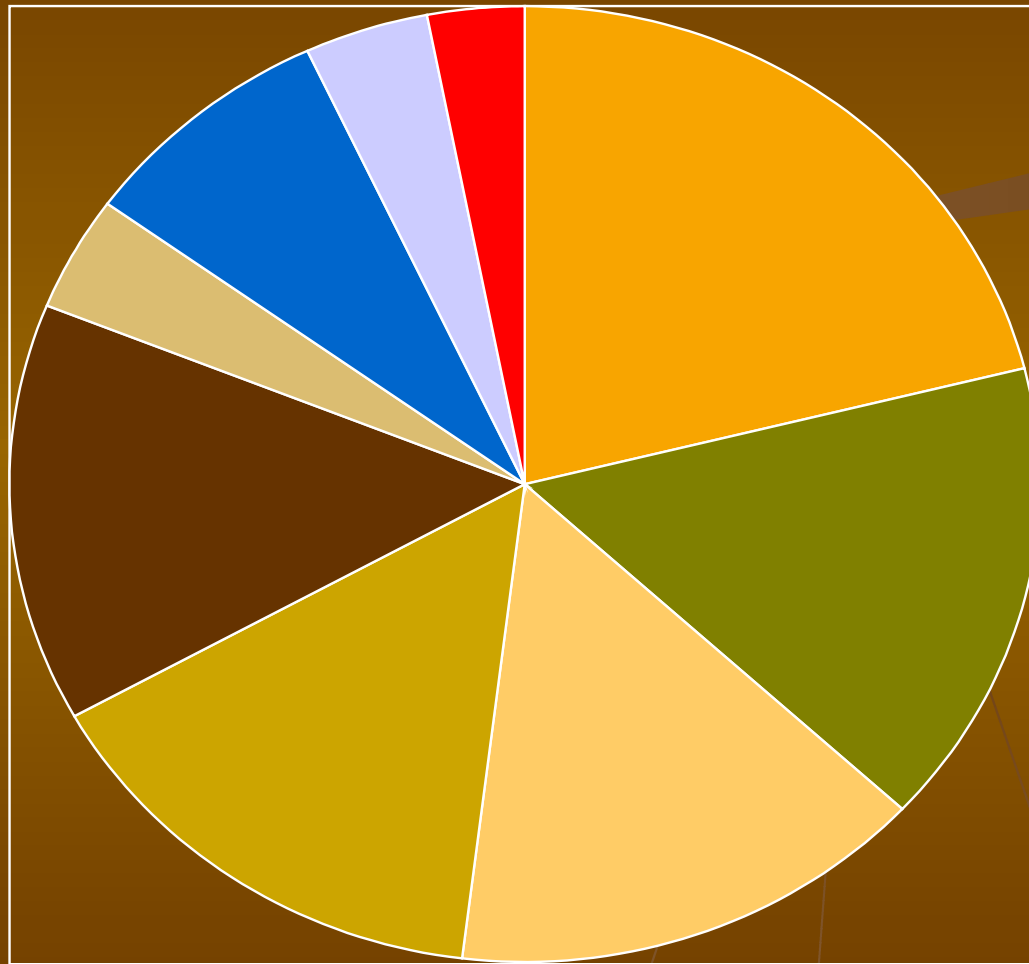
Topoi

II. Topoi with conventionalised conclusions

1. Topos from the authority
2. Topos from the analogy
3. Topos from the person.

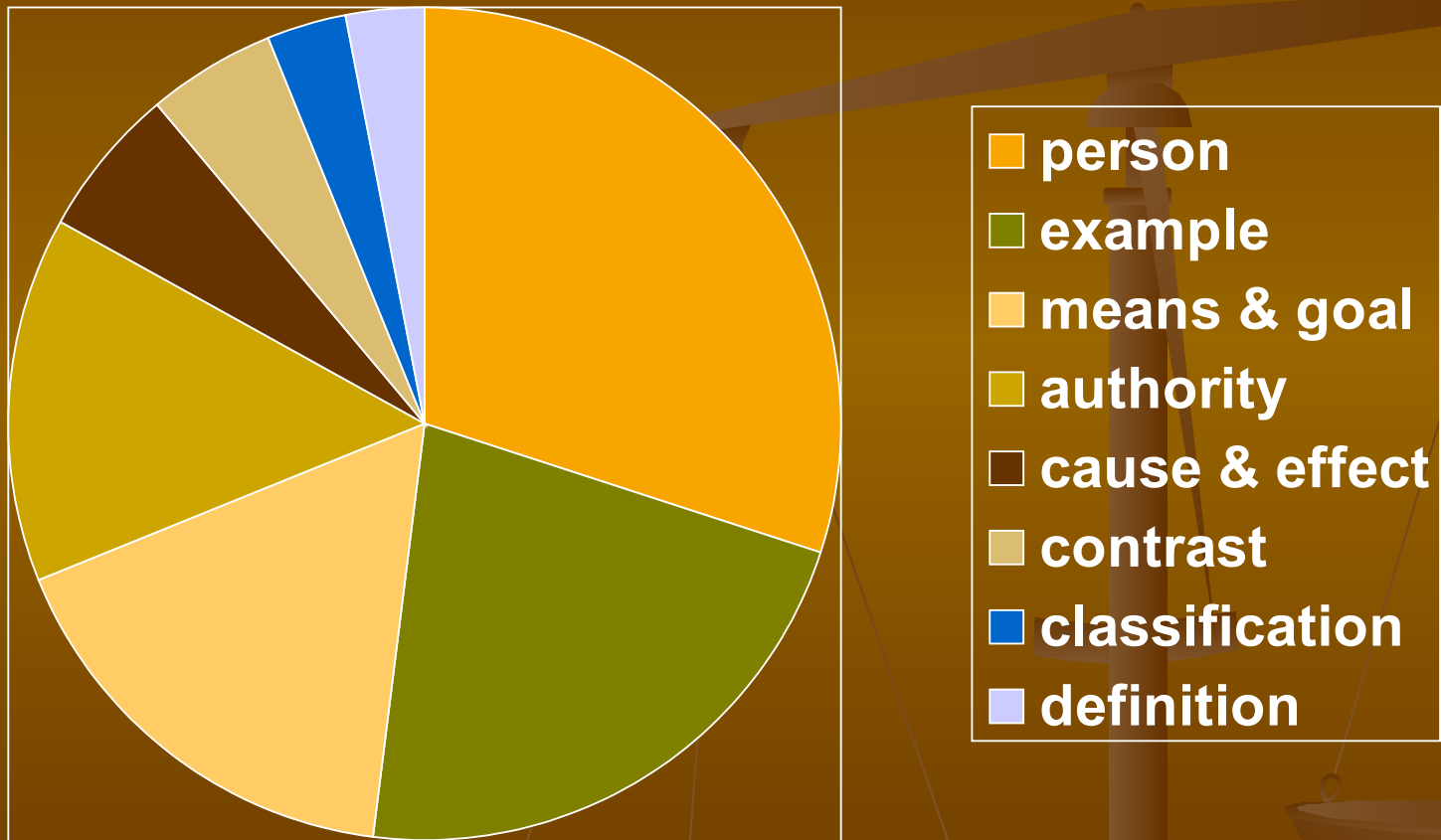


Content- and form-based premises



- theory**
- aim/realization**
- method./analysis**
- recommendation**
- terminology**
- title/content**
- typogr./layout**
- expression**
- structure**

Topoi



Topos from the person

- (1) Wünschenswert wäre in diesem Punkt allerdings eine ausführlichere Erläuterung dessen, was in nicht mehr als drei Absätzen als “Charisma” eingeführt [...] wird.
- (2) Bayers Einführung bietet einen linguistischen Zugang zur logischen Analyse, aber leider auch in eingeschränkter Weise.

Topos from the authority

- (3) Es kann jedoch vermutet werden, dass eine derartig vereinfachende Konzeption von Medienwirkungen kaum jemals so einflussreich war, dass sie diese ausführliche Beachtung verdient hätte (z.B. Brosius/Esser 1998).
- (4) Hingewiesen sei in diesem Zusammenhang auf die hervorragende Arbeit von Dieling (1992), in der...

Topos from the example

- (5) Neben diesem elementaren Mangel sind die oftmals holzschnittartigen und pauschalen Argumentationen sowie die polemischen bis disqualifizierenden Kommentare der Autoren höchst ärgerlich. Zu den harmloseren Beispielen zählt die Schilderung eines Fußballspiels,...
- (6) Über diese zentralen Kritikpunkte hinaus finden sich zahlreiche ärgerliche Ungenauigkeiten oder einfach Fehler, wenn die Autoren beispielsweise von “Emanuel [sic!] Kant“ (5.85) sprechen...

- (7) Einige Beispiele zur Illustration. In der Lehrerinformation zur erwähnten Lektion 1 („Das unbetonte `e`“) wird ausgeführt, dass dieser Laut in den Vorsilben `be-`, `ge-`, und `ent-` vorkommt. Die Platzierung der Vorsilbe `ent-` in dieser Reihe ist falsch.

Means and goal

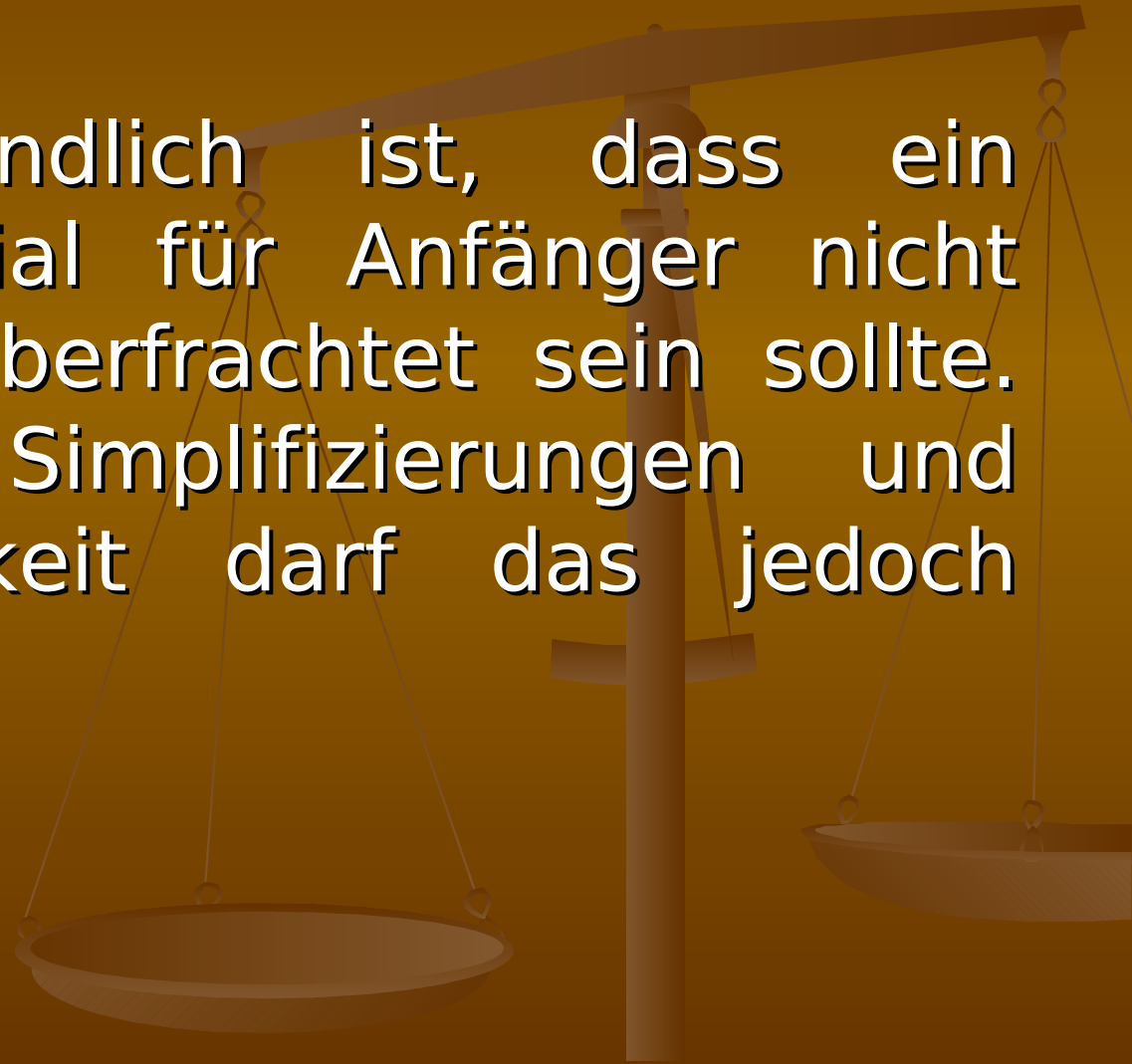
- (8) Das vorliegende Buch versteht sich als Einführung [...]. Für diese Zielgruppe konstatiert L. A. „eine Lücke im deutschen Lehrbuch-angebot“ (3). Es sei vorweg genommen, dass dieses Buch diese Lücke nicht zu schließen vermag.
- (9) Es stellt sich die Frage, was die vorgelegte Arbeit für den Fremdsprachenunterricht bringt.
- (10) Wer nicht bereits ausgiebig text-linguistische Arbeiten studiert hat, wird kaum aus diesen vagen Angaben

Cause & effect; consequence

- (11) Die ungeklärten theoretischen Grundlagen haben ihre Konsequenzen für den praktisch-didaktischen Teil der Arbeit (72-144).
- (12) Probleme in den Übungen resultieren zunächst aus den erwähnten Ungenauigkeiten und Fehlern in den Lehrerinformationen.

Topoi from the contrast

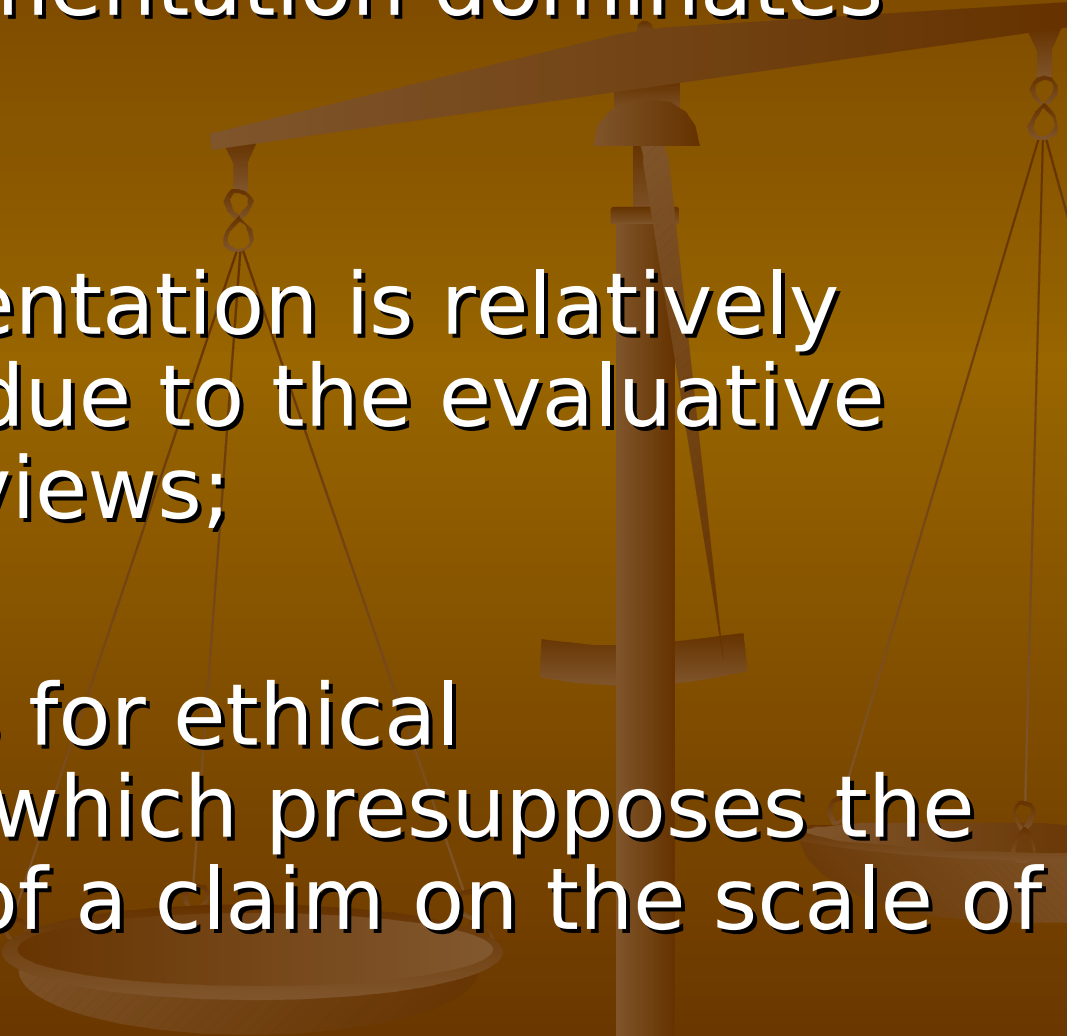
- (13) Verständlich ist, dass ein Übungsmaterial für Anfänger nicht theoretisch überfrachtet sein sollte. Grund für Simplifizierungen und Oberflächlichkeit darf das jedoch nicht sein.

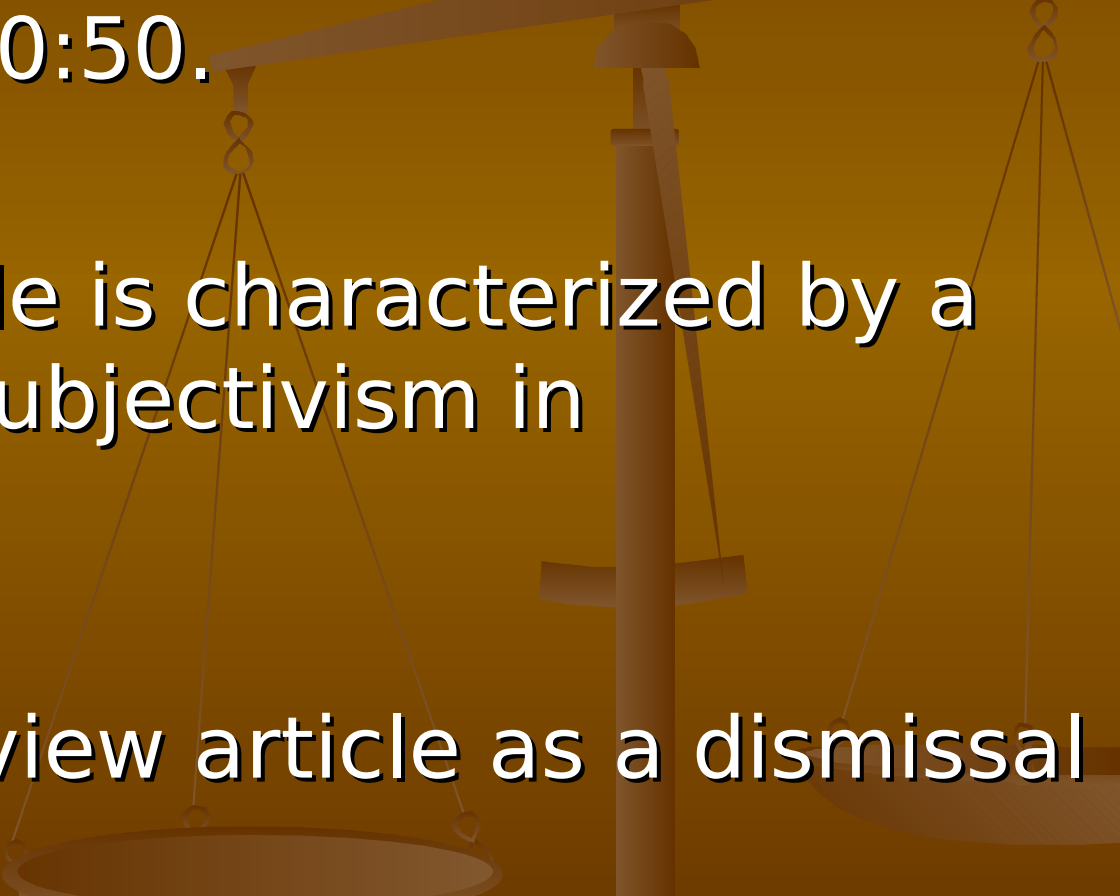


Topoi from the division and definition

- (14) Ein zentrales Manko des Buches liegt aber vor allem darin, dass die Autoren keine einleuchtende Definition dessen herleiten, was überhaupt unter 'Suggestion' zu verstehen sei.
- (15) Im Zusammenhang mit der vom Autor gestifteten Kategorie der „Adversivität“ erscheint es weiterhin als problematisch, dass unter diese nicht nur *Äußerungshandlungen* (nämlich „Drohung“ und „Diffamierung“) zusammen-gefasst werden, sondern zugleich auch Äußerungsmodi (nämlich

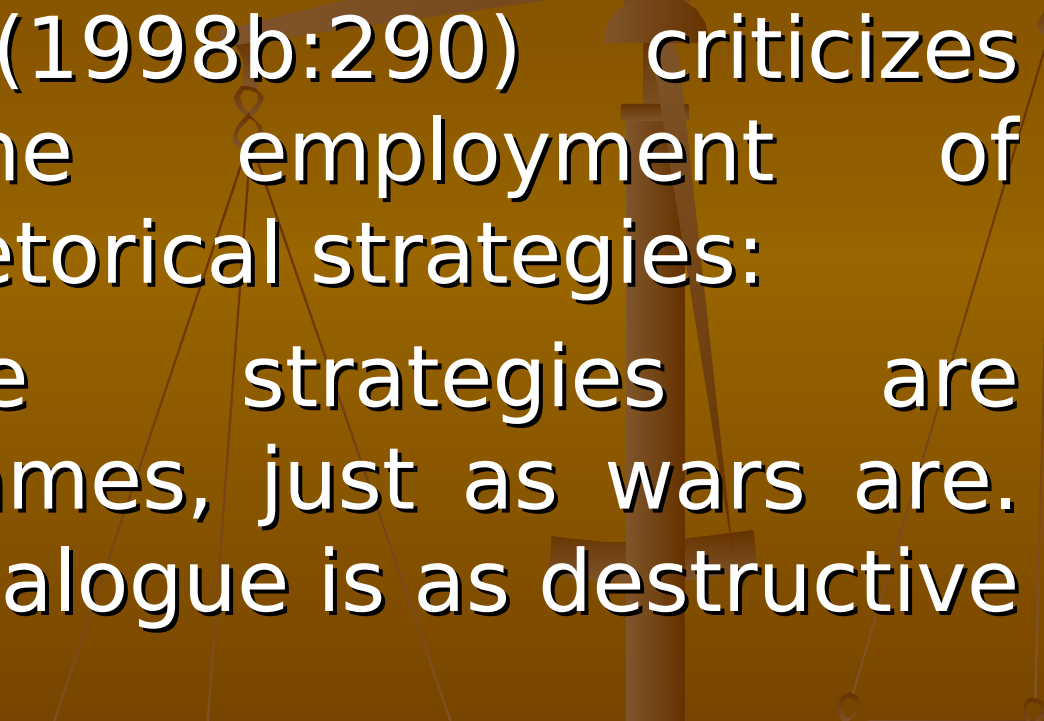
Conclusions

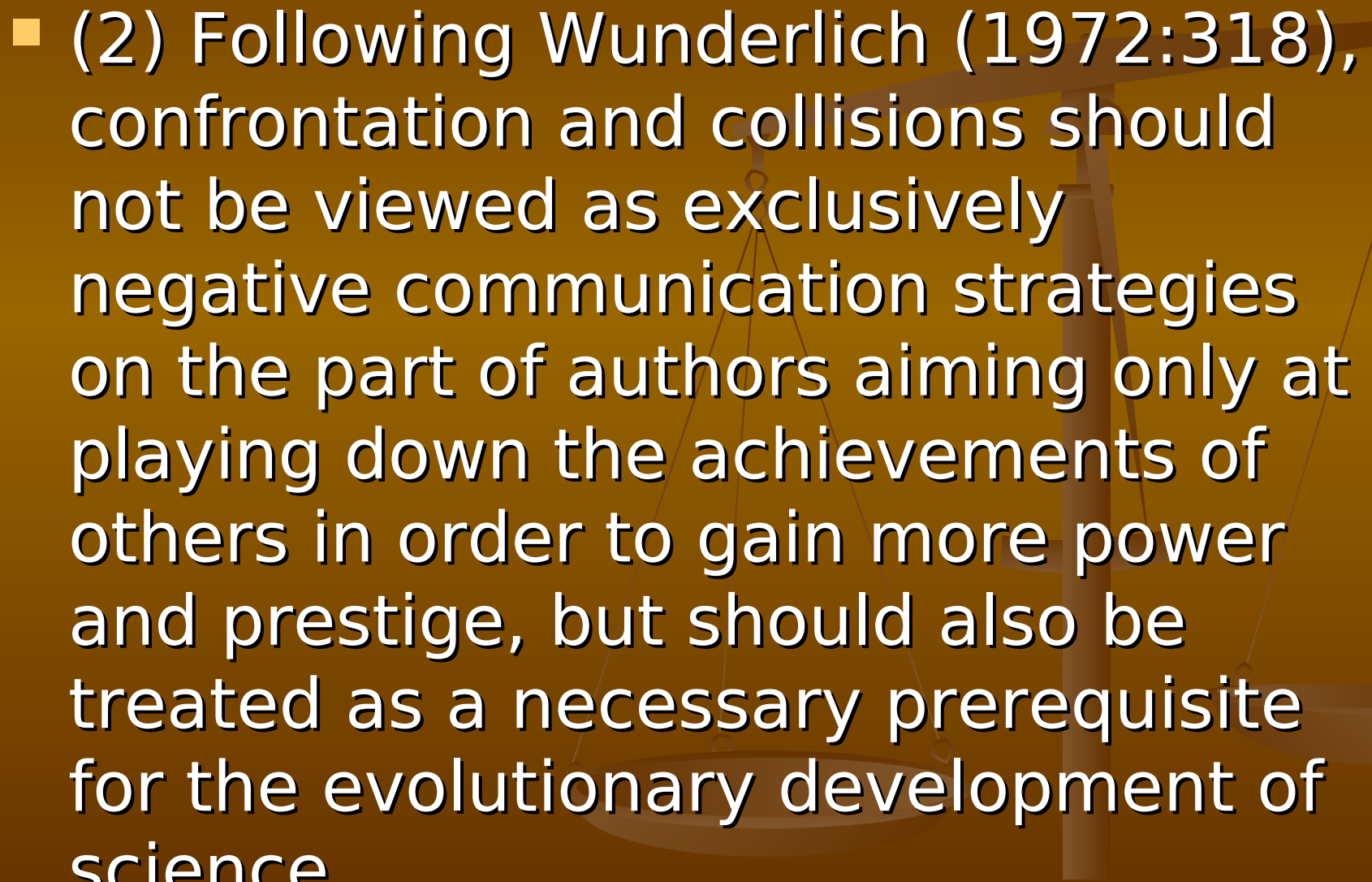
- Epistemic argumentation dominates review articles;
 - Deontic argumentation is relatively more frequent due to the evaluative character of reviews;
 - The same holds for ethical argumentation which presupposes the categorization of a claim on the scale of 'good – bad'.
- 

- 
- The correlation between the topoi based on logical generic premises and those based on conventionalized conclusions is approximately 50:50.
 - The review article is characterized by a high degree of subjectivism in argumentation.
 - The negative review article as a dismissal genre.

- Knapp-Potthoff (1992:203) points out that in international scientific communication

“more so than in other types of communication, face-threatening acts and their redress do not operate on the inter-individual level alone, but – by process of attribution and stereotyping – tend to have consequences for higher levels of social organization as well.”

- 
- (1) Ventola (1998b:290) criticizes viciously the employment of dismissive rhetorical strategies:
“Confrontative strategies are dangerous games, just as wars are. This kind of dialogue is as destructive as bombs.”

- 
- (2) Following Wunderlich (1972:318), confrontation and collisions should not be viewed as exclusively negative communication strategies on the part of authors aiming only at playing down the achievements of others in order to gain more power and prestige, but should also be treated as a necessary prerequisite for the evolutionary development of science

Ten commandments for reviewers and people who would

like to become such

- I. There also exists ethics of reviewing.
- II. Science, whom alone you should serve, is an object and not a person. Therefore, release yourself from everything personal.
- III. If you write a review, lock all exclamation marks in your desk.
- IV. Thou shall not destroy your opponent. 'Thou shall not kill' applies also to reviewers.
- V. You should not adulate your friend and you should not try to make a career with your flattery. (Cited after Wiesend