

# ARGUMENTATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PRIMACY AND RECENCY EFFECTS: A RETURN TO CLASSICAL RHETORIC

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## ABSTRACT

The goal of this article is to examine and present the rhetorical applications of two important processes affecting human communication – the primacy effect and the recency effect. They are determined by two major factors, i.e., the time period by which are separated the messages, and the time that has the audience at its disposal to make decision and/or to judge upon the orator’s claim. Different models are proposed for intensification of these effects by expanding or reducing the length of the speech on three main levels, namely (1) the order of delivering the speeches, (2) the order of presenting the information, and (3) the structure of the argument. The first of them has been relatively well studied by Fr. Lund, S. Asch, E. Aronson et al. On the other hand, researchers in the fields of communication and applied psychology have paid but little attention to the importance of the two effects for the effective arrangement of the different ‘pieces’ of information in the speech itself. When we have to lay down the most important data at the beginning and when it is better to put them in the end? Which are the key and the secondary parts of the argument? How they ought to be arranged in accordance with the principles of human cognition? We will try to answer those questions.

**Keywords:** Primacy Effect, Recency Effect, Classical Rhetoric, Argumentation, Style.

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## INTRODUCTION

In this article my purpose is twofold. Firstly, I will trace back to the ancient Greek and Latin treatises on rhetoric the study on the so-called ‘recency’ and ‘primacy’ effects, namely the persuasive power of the first and of the latest information in a given text or a speech; in addition, a brief account will be presented on the results of modern psychological experiments and researches, which concern the factors influencing the two effects. Secondly, I will propose different models for their intensification by expanding or reducing the length of the speech. The two effects will be studied on three main levels of appliance, namely the order of delivering the speeches, the order of presenting the information, and, most importantly, the structure of the argument (the major premise, the minor premise and the conclusion).

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Many ancient rhetoricians have paid attention to the argumentative power of the sequence of the information in the discourse. The higher persuasiveness of those arguments, events and themes, which are being given at the beginning and in the end of the text or the speech has been well established in standard treatises as early as the Hellenistic period. A long chain of ancient rhetoricians theorizes at length about the disposition of the discourse both on the level of the speech as a whole (introduction or exordium, narration, proof, and conclusion or epilogue) and on the level of the structure of the argument (claim and premises) or of the narrative (the sequence of the events). Two main models of presentation of the material have been defined mainly by Fortunatianus and Martianus Capella (Fortunatianus 1863: 120–121; Capella 1868: 471–472; cf. Lausberg: 213). The first one was called *natural order* (*ordo naturalis*); in the *chronological natural order* (*modus per tempora*, cf. Fortunatianus 1863: 121; *naturalis temporum ordo*, cf. Capella 1868: 472) the different events are being laid down beginning with the oldest and ending with the most recent. If an argument is presented, the ancient orator would begin with the premises and finish with the claim (*causal natural order*). By contrast, the second model or *order* is the artificial one (*ordo artificialis* or *ordo utilitatis*, cf. Fortunatianus 1863: 121; Capella 1868: 472; Lausberg 213). Here the chronological or the causal chain could be modified or changed in order to achieve better effect on the audience. For example, when we describe a chain of events, we could begin with something that happened in the distant past and to stress in this manner its importance; afterwards we would proceed to more recent and less important episodes. In the same way, the orator could change the ‘natural’ order in the structure of any given argument and begin with the claim instead of the premises. The grammatical tools of the artificial order are much more intricate than those by which the natural order is produced; they include the whole pattern of complex and compound sentences, conditionals, circumstantial participles and participle constructions (like *genitivus absolutus* in Ancient Greek or *ablativus absolutus* in Latin) etc. The natural order is clearer and more comprehensible, but could become dull and boring<sup>1</sup>. By contrast, the artificial

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<sup>1</sup> For example, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. Hermogenes of Tarsus (Hermogenes 1969: I.2-4.) divides the so-called Clarity (*Σαφήνεια*) to Purity or Concreteness (*Καθαρότης*, Latin. *puritas*) and Limpidity or Perspicuity (*Εὐκρίνεια*). The first of these two subcategories, the Purity, is related to the usage of the terms; they have to be concrete, singular, immediate, and univocal (for instance, ‘This here Spoudias has two brothers’); rhetorical tropes (like metaphor or metonymy) have to be avoided. The second subcategory, which is more important to this research, is related to the text as a whole; its parts (introduction, narration, proof, and epilogue) must be as easily discernible as possible and the hearer/reader must always be able to detect the beginning and the end of each of them. In addition, ‘perspicuous’ could be the argument

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order increases the possibilities for stressing the crucial points in the narrative and in the logical chain, but is much more complex and demands significant intellectual efforts from the audience.

The above-mentioned grammatical tools both of the natural and of the artificial order are well defined by Aristotle himself. He makes distinction between the so-called ‘continuous style’ or ‘parataxis’ (λέξις εἰρομένη) and ‘periodic style’ or ‘hypotaxis’ (λέξις κατεστραμμένη) (Aristotle 1877: 1409a; cf. and Lausberg 1998: 412-423). The main characteristic of the former is the usage of simple sentences, compound sentences, or complex sentences with relative subordinate clauses (dependent adjective clauses). For example:

*And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. 3 And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.* (Genesis 2: 2-3).

This kind of expression is suitable for relatively simple narration and ‘normal’ chronological order; the orator/writer is not able to control or manipulate the sequence of the semantic and syntactic units (cf. Lausberg 1998: 417-420; Petrinski 2014: 252-259). For that reason, according to Aristotle the continuous style could be boring for the audience, which cannot ‘see’ the end of the phrase. By contrast, the periodic style involves the usage of complex sentences with dependent adverb clauses (joined to the independent clause with conjunctions like *when*, *since*, *because* etc.); the subordinate clauses must be inserted parenthetically between the parts of the independent one, sometimes creating in this manner antitheses. For example:

*And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.* (I Corinthians 13).

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as well; the audience must be capable of understanding at once the claim and the premises in the proof. It is obvious that the excessive usage of the ‘natural order’ and of too much Clarity (Concreteness and Perspicuity) leads to creation of monotonous and boring texts; in addition, this type of expression is not suitable for adequate representation of the circumstances and, therefore, for well-developed argumentative apparatus. For that reason, Hermogenes introduces the very opposition of the Clarity, namely the Elated style, which includes many subcategories (Hermogenes 1969: I.6-11); here the orator is free to use abstract notions, to make retrospections and quotations, to present circumstances. On this subject see Petrinski 2014: 269-318.

The most important characteristic of the periodic style is the deliberate usage of ‘artificial order’ with all kinds of retrospections and additional circumstances; the syntax is suspended and the sentence is not completed until the last word. In this way, the good orator could skillfully control the information flow; the audience is always compelled to expect the completion of the unfinished main sentence.<sup>2</sup>

The ancient rhetoricians used to stress the importance of the last presented information, especially of the epilogue of the speech. Since the ‘normal’ orders restrict the orator, who is not able to control the discourse and the narration, the ‘artificial’ models allow him/her to increase the persuasiveness of the speech/text through the power of the recency effect.

Today the recency and the primacy effects are being studied thoroughly, but predominantly in relation with the sequence of particular speeches and not from dispositional point of view. The primacy effect, i.e., the tendency of the human mind to comprehend better the information received in the beginning, was experimentally established firstly by F. Lund in 1925 (Lund 1925: 121-183)<sup>3</sup>. His research was further developed by S. Asch in 1946 and published in his famous article “Forming impressions of personality” (Asch 1946). During his experiment, Asch presented to his target group a list with 6 qualities of a given person; the participants had to form and give an opinion about this person. In the first case the list began with two positive qualities (intelligent, energetic), continued with two neutral ones (impulsive, demanding), and closed with two negative ones (stubborn, jealous). In the second case the qualities were the same, but the order was reversed (the negative ones were in the beginning and the positive were at the end of the list). Asch concluded that the majority of his target groups form their opinion predominantly on the basis of the first items; for the first group the impression was mostly positive and for the second – mostly negative. The primacy effect is in close relation with the first impression and the ‘Halo effect’; it

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<sup>2</sup> The hypotactic style is more persuasive; it is suitable for an audience with higher perceptive capabilities. On the other hand, though, it is more complex and less understandable, especially because of the usage the so-called ‘absolute’ participle constructions (genitivus absolutus in Greek and ablativus absolutus in Latin), which are common in the synthetic languages. Here the vagueness is caused by the fact that these constructions stand for different types of subordinate adverb clauses (temporal, causal, conditional etc.) For example, the sentence ‘Climbing the mountain, I fell over’ could be interpreted both as temporal (‘While I was climbing the mountain, I fell over’) and as causal (‘Because/Since I was climbing a mountain, I fell over’.) According to the ancient rhetoricians, this creates vagueness, which could be overcome to a degree by using intonation (pauses) in oral speech.

<sup>3</sup> Lund gave the participants lists with arguments pro and contra protective tariffs.

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involves both verbal and non-verbal aspects (Zunin & Zunin 1982; Lavington 1996; Rumenchev 2006: 161-180; Bergeron et al. 2008: 20; Egolf & Chester 2013: 211 sq.).

On the other hand, the primacy effect increases the persuasiveness of the information which is presented at the end of the speech/text. Aristotle calls this method *ἐπιχαλκεύειν*, literally *to forge upon the anvil* (Aristotle 1877: 1419b). In contrast to the primacy effect, which is based on the perception (we understand better the first information), the recency effect is a consequence of the natural mechanisms of the retention (we memorize and then recall better the last received information). In 1959 Miller and Campbell published the results of an experiment, which involved a simulation of a court trial; they concluded that the participants tended to recall better the last presented arguments; the effect was increased if they had been separated from the first flow of information by some period of time. For example, if two candidates lay their pre-electoral programs and the second speech follows the first one or two days later, an impartial audience will probably remember better the last statement and will vote for the second candidate (Miller & Campbell 1959).

The results of the researches on the primacy and the recency effect could be employed not only in argumentation in the narrow sense of the term, i.e., when we are trying to persuade somebody else, but also in decision making, in motivation, and in the study of human cognition. For instance, it has been established that the primacy effect, and therefore the first impression, reduces the cognitive capacity of the audience in the middle and at the end of the speech/text. On the other hand, the reduced first impression increases the tendency for logical thinking and critical assessment (Petti et al. 2001: 333).

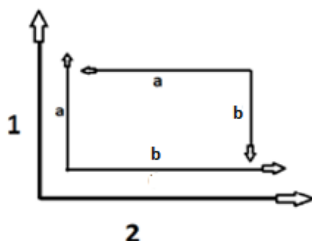
The mere knowledge of the existence of two opposite psychological processes by itself is not very instructive and lacks practical applicability both in communication and in theoretical studies of argumentation. In order to use them to persuade real audiences, we have to determine the factors that influence the primacy and the recency effects. According to the conclusions of Hovland & Mandell (1952: 1-22; cf. also Haugtvedt & Wegener 1994: 206), the main such factor is the level of awareness of the audience. In general, sufficiently informed hearers are not apt to be influenced either by the recency or by the primacy effect; the participants were very slightly affected only by the latter.

Without underestimating the other factors for increasing or reducing the two effects, here I will focus my research on two of them, namely (1) the time between the first and last information and (2) the time, which the audience has at its disposal to decide on the subject (Miller & Campbell 1959; Aronson 1999: 92-94; Stefanova 2016: 118-120). One of the main purposes of this research will be to apply the conclusions of Miller, Campbell and Aronson to the disposition of the speech or of the written discourse, to the chain of the arguments, and to the syntactical structure of the sentences. To this end, I will try to combine classical rhetorical tools and devices with modern methodology and results of scientific experiments, mostly in the field of social psychology.

### **Primacy And Recency Effects: Key Factors and General Applications**

It was already mentioned above that the primacy and the recency effects are both related to two basic cognitive processes. The first of them is the perception, namely the mechanisms of human cognition, processing and comprehension of information; the second one is the retention, i.e., the mechanisms of memorizing and recalling of already received information. Stefanova stresses that ‘the perception of the first information suppresses and impedes the understanding of the ‘pieces’ of information received later’ (Stefanova 2016: 118). In this case, the influence of the primacy effect grows. On the other hand, according to the principles of the retention, the latest received data remain in the memory longer and therefore ‘covers up’ any material given earlier. In this perspective, the most important factor for increasing (or reducing) is time. On the one hand, the time period between the presentation of the first and the last information gives advantage to the retention and therefore strengthens the recency effect; on the other hand, the short period between the two presentations will normally increase the impact of perception and will strengthen the primacy effect. The longer time period, which has the audience at its disposal for taking decision on the matter, will tilt the balance in favor of the retention and will give advantage to the primacy effect. The correlation could be represented in the following diagram:

*Diagram 1*



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Where:

- 1:** Time for taking decision;
- 2:** Time between the first and the last information;
- a:** Primacy effect;
- b:** Recency effect.

On the basis of the above interrelation, the following conclusions could be made:

1. The impact of the recency effect (b) is directly proportional to the time period between the presentation of the first and last information (2) and is inversely proportional to the time given to the audience for making decision (1).
2. The impact of the primacy effect (a) is inversely proportional to the time period between the presentation of the first and last information (2) and is directly proportional to the time given to the audience for making decision (1).
3. The simultaneous shortening or increasing of the two time periods (the two opposite vectors 1 and 2) leads to mutual neutralizing of the two effects (the two opposite vectors a and b.) This would happen, for instance, when the speeches of the proponent and the opponent of a given thesis are delivered immediately one after the other and the voting follows forthwith.

The primacy and the recency effects are employed usually to the sequence two or more complete speeches. In order to be effective, an orator must deliver before his/her opponent, if the two speeches follow immediately one after the other and if the decision (or the voting) is postponed; in this case he/she would take the maximum advantage of the primacy effect. On the contrary, if the time period separating the deliverance of the two speeches is relatively long and if the audience has to decide on the matter immediately after the second one, then the orator is advised to speak last and to activate in this manner the recency effect (Aronson 1999: 93-94). This principle could undoubtedly be very useful. Nevertheless, this is but one of the possible appliances of the two effects, and, I would say, not the most important one. Usually, the orator is completely dependent on the procedures and the rules of the particular communicative situation; she is not capable of controlling neither the time, which separates her speech from the speech of the opponent, nor the

time given to the audience to decide or to vote. The most she could do is to choose to speak first (primacy effect) or last (recency effect). In addition, there are many situations where the very procedure of the debate or the discussion imposes strict and unchangeable order of deliverance and in this case the role of the speaker is completely passive; the only thing she could do is to detect the influence of the two effects and to take them into consideration, hoping that her abilities will overcome possible disadvantages.

Aronson's theory about the correlation between the two effects could be applied not only to the sequence of the speeches, but also to the methods of presentation of the information and to the arrangement of the parts of the argument (premises and claim); in fact, this application is even more useful practically, because the orator is, of course, able to manage the disposition of the material in his/her own speech according to the above-mentioned theoretical principles. Moreover, these principles do not affect only oratory in the narrow sense of the term, namely the officialized and mostly monologic spoken discourse, delivered before a real audience; they can have serious impact on every communicative situation and on every written text, which involves narration and persuasion. Especially the recency effect allows the usage of different manipulative methods, based on the retention, such as the so-called 'Volvo argument' (Nisbett 1985: 112 sq.). Nisbett gives as an example a customer who had decided to buy high quality Swedish automobile (Saab or Volvo.) He consulted with experts and asked the advice of other customers. His thorough research showed indisputably that Volvo was more reliable and for that reason decided in favor of this brand. A few days before the purchase, he went to a cocktail party and shared his intention with a friend. The latter's reaction was absolutely negative. He told him about his brother-in-law, who bought a Volvo and in just three years so many devices broke, that the whole car had to be thrown out. As a consequence, this single insignificant and unproven example, given at the last moment, affected the customer so much, that he changed his mind completely and purchased a Saab (Nisbett 1985: 112 sq.). One mere 'exemplum in contrario', presented in the right manner just before the final decision, could frequently be sufficient for radical change of opinion. In addition, the speaker must be aware of the fact, that the recency and the primacy effects act independently of his/her will and not always in his/her favor. Under the influence of the above-mentioned conditions (length of the speech, time for making decision,) the audience will comprehend or memorize the information, given at the beginning or in the end. If the communicator simply uses the 'natural order' of presenting the data and if the recency and the primacy effects are not taken sufficiently into



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consideration, the audience will still be under their influence; the hearers/readers will just process better the first information and will remember better the last material. Probably every teacher has faced the odd situation, when a student mentions during examination all kinds of insignificant pieces of information, forgetting completely about the key points.

### Dispositional Models Based on The Primacy and Recency Effects

As we already mentioned, in ancient rhetorical treatises the authors make the distinction between *normal* and *artificial* models or *orders*. The argumentativeness of the artificial order is far greater, since there the orator is able to arrange and reshuffle the elements in the narrative (i.e., the events) or the proof (i.e., the claim and the premises). Modern theories on communication reshape these ideas, stressing the impact of the first and the latest information. Three main models are established (Alexandrova 2008: 235):

- **Culmination model:** the most important information and the most persuasive arguments (for the particular audience) are put at the end of the speech or the text. According to Donka Alexandrova, this model is suitable for audiences with friendly attitude towards the speaker, because supposedly such hearer will not tend to become impatient and to lose easily its interest in the subject. The culmination model is based on the recency effect.
- **Anti-culmination model:** the most important information and the most persuasive arguments (for the particular audience) are put at the beginning of the speech. This model is suitable for audiences with neutral or negative attitude towards the speaker; in this case, the authority of the latter and the benevolence towards him/her are low and, therefore, the audience will eventually lose interest, if something intriguing, highly important, and persuasive does not grab its attention at once. The culmination model is based on the primacy effect.
- **Pyramidal model:** the most important information and/or the most persuasive arguments are concealed in the middle of the text; they are surrounded by other, mostly insignificant data. It is obvious that this model has very problematic practical application, since the crucial elements are hidden and eventually remain unnoticed, at least consciously, by the audience; the advantages of the primacy and the recency effects are not employed. At first glance, the orator must avoid this model at all cost, if he/she wants to be effective. In fact,

though, the pyramidal order could be very useful in a wide range of communicative situations, where high level of manipulation is demanded. Imagine for instance a police interrogation; the investigating officer would probably ask firstly a few insignificant questions about the suspect's name, birthplace, and address; the latter would be soothed in this manner and even an atmosphere of mutual confidence could be created; in addition, such a strategy will give the interrogator the opportunity to 'normalize', i.e., to observe the normal nonverbal responses and reactions of the arrested person to questions, which are 'light' and easy for answer. When the tension has been minimalized in this way and since the suspect feels already more or less comfortable, the officer could insert the really important questions on the matter between the unimportant ones, hoping for sudden nonverbal leakage in the form of excessive sweating, blushing, hyperventilation etc. In addition, when such leakage occurs, the interrogator could increase the suspect's emotional tension by remaining silent, giving time to the interrogated to fully understand his/her mistake and thus, inspiring more confusion. This strategy could be used in many other communicative situations, which involve overt or concealed confrontation.

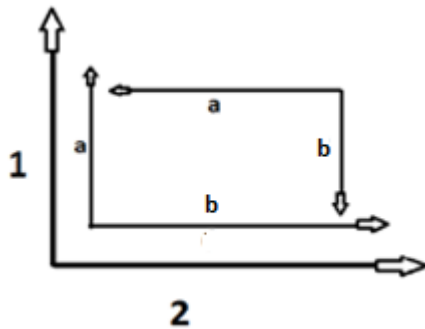
The pyramidal model is applicable also on the level of the sentence. When the communicator wants the audience to take some piece of information for granted or as something obvious, he/she could just insert it as a dependent clause or clauses, enclosed between the parts of the independent one. The same construction could be useful in the so-called 'begging the question' (*petitio principii* – a form of circular reasoning), where the truth of the premises presupposes the truth of the conclusion; here the problematic premises could be inserted as dependent clauses as well and eventually to be accepted by the audience without much consideration.

Diagram 1 describes the primacy and the recency effects in their relationship to the time for taking decision and to the time between the two separated speeches. The same diagram could effectively be applied for a single speech through the chronological, the thematical, and especially the causal models:

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*Diagram 2*



Where:

**1:** Time for taking decision. When the vector 1 is prolonged, the primacy effect will be increased. The orator will be able to control the time for decision-making, at least partially, by lengthening his/her speech.

**2:** Time between the first and the last information: on the level of the particular speech, this is the time period, which separates the different dispositional components in the text (events, themes, causes and claims) according to the model of presentation chosen by the orator (informational, thematic, causal.) For example, when we choose to use the causal model, we have to arrange the main elements of the argument, namely the different types of premises and the claim; since usually the main aim of the orator is to persuade the audience on the validity of the thesis, the latter is the most important part of the argument. When the vector 2 is long, the recency effect will be increased.

**a:** Primacy effect: the most important information is laid down at the beginning. For example, the thesis could be presented before the premises, or the key facts and events could precede the secondary ones, regardless of their real time sequence (anti-culmination model). The independent clause, which usually bears the most important information, could be put at the beginning of the sentence and to take in this manner the advantages of the primacy effect:

*Because they believed that ‘all men are created equal’ (dependent sentence), they started the war (independent sentence) (cf. Ushan 2013: 14).*

**b:** Recency effect: the most important information, for example the thesis or the key events, are located at the end; for instance, the thesis follows the premises etc. In this case, the culmination model is deployed, where the most important and/or persuasive information is left for the end. If the orator wants to take advantage of the recency effect on syntactical level, he/she has to put the independent clause after the dependent ones:

*They started the war because they believed that 'all men are created equal.'*

According to Alexandrova, the two effects depend mostly on the attitude of the audience. In her opinion, if the hearers are well disposed towards the speaker, eventually they will be more patient as well; in this case, the communicator must begin with relatively less important information and gradually lead the speech to a climax at the end. It is also advisable for the speaker to grab the attention of the hearers with some interesting story, a joke or an anecdote. Such a method would not be efficient with neutral or hostile audiences, because supposedly they would not have sufficient patience to hear at the beginning relatively unimportant and less relevant information; the effectiveness of stories, jokes and anecdotes is highly dependent on the authority and the personal charisma of the orator and hence they would also be inadvisable. In this case, says Alexandrova, the speech must begin with the most vital points of the narration or the main part of the argument, namely the thesis (Alexandrova 2008: 242).

I could hardly agree with this hypothesis. Undoubtedly, the attitude of the hearers is of utmost importance for the effectiveness of the speech as a whole; it has significant impact on the recency and primacy effect as well. Nevertheless, it seems that the crucial factor with neutral and hostile audiences is not so much the ability and the will to hear the speech, which could be won without playing the strongest trump cards at the beginning. The main problem in this case would be the cognitional barrier of the hearers towards a thesis, which is straightforwardly expressed in the beginning. This barrier could be effectively overcome by the culmination model, because in this manner the orator will have enough time to win the audience's benevolence through well-built chain of premises, through the above-mentioned jokes and/or stories, or even through emotional appeals; in addition, the recency effect would help the last information, namely the thesis itself, to be better memorized. Optimum efficiency will be achieved, if the audience must take decision immediately after the speech. Such a method could be traced back to Cicero himself; he makes the distinction between two types of *exordia*, namely the *principium* and the *insinuatio*. The latter term

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means literally *wrapping in the folds* (sinus) of someone's toga; by this 'indirect opening' the orator seeks the audience's benevolence in a roundabout way (*circumcione*) instead of presenting his claim immediately (Cicero 1993: 20-26; Lausberg 1998: 132 sq; cf. Cox & Ward 2006: 430 sq).<sup>4</sup> The obvious shortcoming of this strategy is its vagueness because the most important and supposedly new information is left for the end.

Both from dispositional and from argumentative point of view, Plato's dialectical method is based to a degree on this strategy. Socrates allows himself but rarely to refute the opponent's thesis in a direct way, because the very philosophical aim is the refutation of commonly accepted, but false and simplistic ideas (*δόξαι*), and the revealing of the 'real truth' (*ἀλήθεια*). He never expresses an already formed opinion of his own on the discussed topic, but always leaves this to the others; his only role, at least formally, is to disclose the errors and the fallacies in their answers. Of course, this lack of prejudice is in fact manipulative. When Polus challenges Socrates to tell what is in his opinion the rhetoric, the philosopher answers: *In my opinion, nothing, Polus, if I have to be sincere* (Plato 1903: 426b). Afterwards the dialogue continues in the standard dialectical way, as if this flash of frankness never occurred.

The recency effect, employed through the culmination model and especially before hostile and neutral audience, is presented on the following diagram 3:

**Diagram 3**



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<sup>4</sup> Cicero advises the orator to employ the *insinuatio* especially when the case involves some unbelievable or vulgar story.

Where:

- a) Less important, but ‘catching’ information in the beginning
- b) Relatively large amount of unimportant and/or familiar to the audience information in the middle; rheme
- c) Important and/or new for the audience information at the end; theme.

Applicable with:

- ✓ Hostile/neutral audience
- ✓ Immediate decision

In order to increase the persuasiveness of this model and to optimize the influence of the recency effect, the orator is advised to extend the time period between the first and the last information. This time period corresponds to the vector **b** in diagrams 1 and 2. This could be achieved by including clarifying comment (rheme) or additional information which is familiar to the audience, which bears some relevance to the subject, and which could serve as secondary backing to the thesis. Some stylistic devices could also be employed to this end, like, e.g., metaphors, synonymy, periphrasis, usage of definition instead of a single term etc. Nevertheless, inductive argumentation through accumulation of examples is more preferable than purely stylistic tools, which could easily tire and bore the hearers; in addition, they are too overtly manipulative and this could bring about even more undesirable effect.

An interesting and illustrative example of the application of the culmination model and its manipulative power is the scandalous manner of negotiating of Adolf Hitler. In March 1939 the German dictator was on the verge of conquering the remnants of the weakened Czech state. He received the old and already desperate President Dr Hácha in his impressive mountain residence in Obersalzberg. In the beginning of his speech Hitler rehearsed ‘all the alleged wrongs the Czechoslovakia of Masaryk and Beneš had done to Germans and Germany’ and reiterated ‘that unfortunately the Czechs had not changed after Munich<sup>5</sup>,’ only after this lengthy introduction he

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<sup>5</sup> I.e., the Munich conference of September 1938 when the Great Powers granted the Third Reich the annexation of the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia.

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came to the point and laid down in a very rude way his demands. The President had to accept them at once and to formally sign the papers immediately (Shrier 1989: 915).

On the other hand, the primacy effect depends on the perception; the first received information is processed better and afterwards the cognitive abilities of the audience decrease. The persuasiveness of this effect could be increased, if the time period between the first and the last information is relatively short (diagrams 1 and 2). The anti-culmination model, which is based on the recency, is more effective when the decision is delayed. Its appliance is represented in the following Diagram 4:

*Diagram 4*



Where:

- d) Important and/or new for the audience information in the beginning.
- e) Relatively small amount of unimportant and/or familiar information in the middle
- f) Less important, but ‘catching’ information at the end; emotional appeal.

Applicable with:

- ✓ Delayed decision

According to diagrams 1 and 2, the force of the primacy effect is indirectly proportional to the time period between the first and the last information; it is also directly proportional to the time for decision making or for voting. Therefore, the orator is advised to put the key or unfamiliar information in the beginning and to close the speech with less important and relatively familiar, but attractive information; at the very end it is suitable to be applied the old Aristotelian method, namely the emotional appeal or *peroration*. For maximum effect, the time period, which

corresponds to the vector 2 in diagrams 1 and 2, must be relatively short. This shortening could be achieved, for example, by reducing the number of examples.

As I mentioned before, the third model, i.e., the pyramidal one, does not take advantage of any of the two effects; it relies on other means of influencing the audience, which could be highly manipulative.

### **Dispositional models in argumentation**

In the above section I presented the applications of the two effects on two levels, namely in the order of consecutive speeches and in the disposition of a particular speech. The same principles could be employed not only in this general way, but also in the more specific area of the argument and its structure. The classical Ciceronian argument (*ratiocinatio*) includes the following basic elements:

- Proposition (*propositio*) – corresponds to the major premise in logic.
- Approbation (*approbatio*) – the additional backing of the *propositio*. Since the argument, unlike the logical syllogism, depends on the approval and acceptance of the audience, the latter frequently needs additional confirmation of the *propositio*'s validity in order to accept it as a fact (cf. Perelman 1984). As Cicero claims, the approbation is in fact a form of induction, i.e., a chain of particular examples for the soundness of the major premise, which could otherwise be impugned.
- Assumption (*assumptio*) – corresponds to the minor premise in logic.
- Approbation of the assumption (*assumptionis approbatio*) – analogous to the approbation. Just like the major premise (*propositio*), the minor one (*assumptio*) may need additional confirmation through induction (examples).
- Conclusion or claim (*conclusio*).

In his influential book *The Uses of the Argument*, S. Toulmin follows the Ciceronian structure, but includes two important additional elements. The first of them are the so-called 'modal qualifiers' (Toulmin 2003: 87-135)<sup>6</sup>. These are words, especially conjunctions, and phrases like 'maybe', 'probably', 'eventually', 'usually', 'mostly' etc. The qualifiers indicate the degree of

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<sup>6</sup> In Toulmin's terminology, the major premise is called 'warrant', the minor premise 'grounds', and the two approbations 'backing'.



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certainty, with which the proponent performs the logical transition from the premises to the conclusion (Toulmin 2003: 94). This part of the argument is of utmost importance because it reflects the probable character of the claim in the argument, by contrast to the necessarily true conclusion in the logical syllogism. The other additional element in the Toulmin's model is the so-called 'rebuttal'. It indicates the 'circumstances in which the general authority of the warrant would have to be set aside' (Toulmin 2003: loc. cit.) Through the rebuttal the orator could claim impartiality and objectivity, increasing in this way his/her authority in the eyes of the audience. The standard example of this structure is as follows (Toulmin 2003: 97):

Data (minor premise): *Harry was born in Bermuda.*

Warrant (major premise): *A man born in Bermuda will generally be a British subject*

Backing: *on account of the following statutes and other legal provisions: (...)*

Modal qualifier: *So, presumably,*

Conclusion: *Harry is a British subject,*

Rebuttals: *Unless both his parents were aliens/he has become a naturalized American.*

The elements of the argument have no steady disposition. They could be laid down according to the 'natural order' (see above) in clear culminating sequence from the premises to the conclusion. If the orator chooses to do so regardless of the circumstances, he/she risks to be ineffective and to lose his/her audience's interest; in this case, the primacy and the recency effects would influence the hearers independently of his/her will and they will eventually comprehend and retain in their memory unimportant facts and arguments. Fortunately, in order to avoid such unpleasant results, we could use again the forementioned principles of the culmination and anti-culmination model. In doing this, the orator will have to take into careful consideration the time for decision-making or voting after the speech and to shorten or lengthen the presentation of the relatively unimportant (secondary) parts of the argument accordingly.

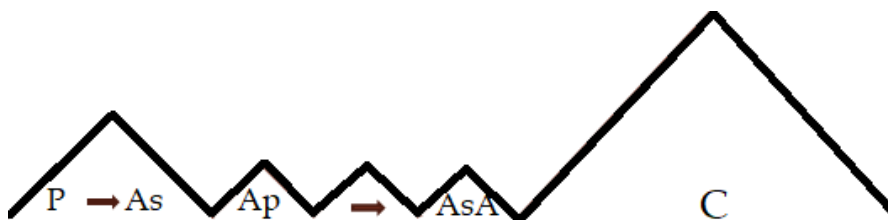
St. Toulmin distinguishes between what he calls the 'skeleton' and the secondary parts of the argument as a system, which involves both induction and deduction (cf. Toulmin 2003: 93). The skeleton elements are obviously identical to the elements of the logical syllogism. These are the thesis/claim and the two premises (proposition/warrant and assumption/data.) (Toulmin 2003:

89-95). Without these seminal elements there could be no logical reasoning at all and, at the same time, they guarantee the sufficient minimal basis for the very existence of the argument (cf. Toulmin 2003: 88). Nevertheless, they are not equally important. The two premises just pave the way to the main aim of the orator, namely the validation and the acceptance of the thesis from the audience; normally, the claim is the most important and crucial element in the reasoning, because the very purpose of argumentation is not just to *say* something for its own sake, but to launch a conclusion and to persuade the audience in its validity.

The secondary elements (Toulmin 2003: 95-100) of the argument are the additional backings of the two premises (the *approbatio propositionis* and the *approbatio assumptionis* in the Ciceronian model.) As I mentioned above, they form the inductive layer of the argument; their purpose is to confirm the ‘major’ and the ‘minor’ through examples. At least formally, the secondary elements are not an obligatory requirement for the reasoning. In the same category Toulmin includes the rebuttal, which is suitable especially for hostile, neutral or well-informed and highly intelligent audiences.

When the audience must take decision or to vote immediately after the speech, according to Diagram 3 the orator is advised to employ the recency effect through the culmination model, i.e., to begin with the major and the minor premise and close the presentation with the conclusion. In order to increase the effectiveness of this strategy, the time period between the primary elements must be extended. This could be achieved by increasing the secondary elements (the backings); for example, the speaker could bring about more examples, relevant interesting stories etc. The structure of the argument in this case is as follows:

*Diagram 5*



Where:

**P:** Propositio (major premise, warrant)

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**As:** Assumptio (minor premise, grounds)

**Ap:** Approbatio (approbation of the major premise through induction/examples)

**AsA:** Assumptionis approbatio (approbation of the minor premise through induction/examples)

**C:** Conclusio (conclusion, claim, thesis).

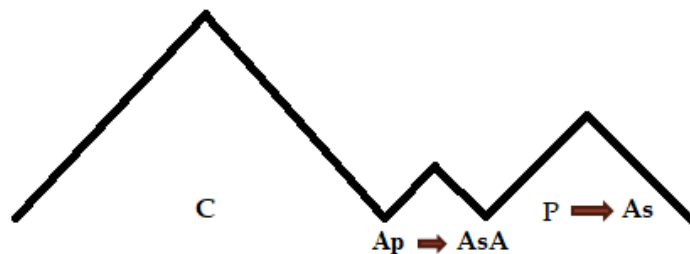
The example given by Toulmin would have in this case the following form:

*A man born in Bermuda will generally be a British subject and Harry was indeed born in Bermuda. He could easily provide his birth certificate as a proof and British citizenship issues are regulated by the following statutes and legal provisions (...). Therefore, presumably, Harry is a British subject.*

In order to enhance the effectiveness of the culmination order, we could fill the parentheses with as much examples of ‘statutes’ and ‘legal provision’ as we can, separating in this manner the first from the last information.

When the decision is delayed, the above structure of the argument must be reversed and the orator is advised to employ the anti-culmination model, based on the primacy effect. In order to increase the effectiveness, he/she has to shorten the time period between the key elements, namely the thesis/claim and the two premises (propositio/warrant and assumption/grounds.) This could be accomplished by reducing the secondary elements, i.e., the induction. This type of disposition is represented in the following diagram:

**Diagram 6**



Where:

**P:** Propositio (major premise, warrant)

**As:** Assumptio (minor premise, grounds)

**Ap:** Approbatio (approbation of the major premise through induction/examples)

**AsA:** Assumptionis approbatio (approbation of the minor premise through induction/examples)

**C:** Conclusio (conclusion, claim, thesis).

In addition, the structure of the premises along with their backings could be shifted as well. For example, the As could be laid down before the P or the Asa could be presented before the Ap.

The example given by Toulmin would have in this case the following form:

*Presumably, Harry is a British subject. He could prove this by his birth certificate. British citizenship issues, related to persons born in Bermuda, are regulated by the following statutes and legal provisions (...). And Harry was indeed born in Bermuda.*

The three models of presentation, along with the two effects they are based on, can be deployed not only for the arrangement of the elements of the orator's own argumentation and thesis, but also when the speaker chooses to manipulate the audience through the last element in Toulmin's model, namely the *rebuttal* (cf. Alexandrova 2013: 242; Rumenchev 2004: 404 sq.). The two-sided argument claims lack of prejudice, impartiality, sincerity, and generous search for truth; formally, the orator does not intent to suggest any particular opinion to his/her hearers, but only to state the facts and their logical consequences. In fact, if handled in the right way, the two-sided model could be a powerful tool for getting over the audience's resistance, because it gives the orator the opportunity to defile the opponent and to present his/her own side in the most favorable light in contrast with the other's 'weak' thesis and proofs.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, this efficient tool must be used very carefully and with full consideration of the recency and primacy effects. The rebuttal is exactly the information which the orator would wish to discredit in the eyes of the audience. This could be

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<sup>7</sup> A good example of this strategy could be found in Plato's dialogue *Theaetetus*. Socrates at first urges his interlocutors to defend the thesis of the sophists, that *Man is the measure of all things*. After their failure to do so conclusively, the philosopher himself advocates this claim by explaining its true meaning and then asks the others, if they accept his interpretation. They all approve and afterwards Socrates lays down his own refutation. In *Phaedrus* Socrates moves along the same lines. He firstly gives a careful listening to Lysias's speech in defend of the suggestion that one should grant his favor to a man who is not in love with him rather than to a lovesick suitor; then he covers his head as if mourning and delivers a better speech of his own in defense of the same claim. The real refutation comes last.

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achieved by concealing this information in those parts of the speech, where the hearers would neither perceive it comprehensively nor keep it fully in their memories. One of the most important factors for creating this effect is exactly the order, in which the two theses will be arranged and laid down. In accordance with diagrams 3 and 4:

- When the time period given to the audience for voting or making a decision is relatively *short*, the communicator is advised to take advantage of the *recency* effect and to use the culmination model; this could be achieved by presenting the opponent's thesis and supposed argumentation first and his/her own thesis and argumentation last; in this case he/she could increase this effect by separating the two flows of information as much as possible; the speaker may, for instance, tell some interesting story or even make a few jokes before laying down his/her own reasoning;
- When the time period given to the audience for voting or making a decision is relatively *long*, the communicator is advised to take advantage of the *primacy* effect and to use the anti-culmination model; this could be achieved by presenting his/her own thesis and argumentation first and the opponent's thesis and supposed argumentation last; in this case he/she could increase this effect by shortening as much as possible the time period between the two flows of information.

### CONCLUSION

In this paper I have focused on the practical implementation of the primacy and recency effects in rhetoric. I have first presented the approach of some classical ancient rhetoricians, e.g., Aristotle, Cicero, Hermogenes, Martianus Capella, Fortunatianus etc. Then I broached the results of modern researches on this subject, which show that the two effects are dependent on two main factors, namely the time period between the two flows of information and the time for decision making and/or voting. In diagrams 1 and 2 I have shown that the impact of the *recency effect* is *directly proportional* to the time period between the presentation of the first and last information and is *inversely proportional* to the time given to the audience for making decision; on the other hand, the impact of the *primacy effect* is *inversely proportional* to the time period between the presentation of the first and last information and is *directly proportional* to the time given to the audience for making decision. The obvious conclusion is that the orator must speak before his/her

opponent, if the decision of the audience is delayed, because in this way the impact of the primacy effect will be increased. On the other hand, if the decision has to be taken urgently, then the orator must speak last and, if possible, immediately after his/her opponent in order to shorten the period between the two information flows and to increase the recency effect. The practical usefulness of this application is limited, since the orator could hardly control the two factors; even the very order of the speeches is often defined by certain procedures (alphabetically, by lot etc.)

Afterwards I have proceeded to an application of the two effects, which (in my opinion) has more practical value, namely the structure of the text itself. I have argued that, since the orator is fully capable of controlling both the disposition and the length of speech as a whole and the structure of the argumentation in particular, he/she could increase its persuasiveness by taking into consideration and by applying the general principles of the primacy and the recency. In this regard, I have reached the following conclusions:

1. In general, when the audience must take decision and/or to vote immediately after the presentation, the speaker is advised to take advantage of the recency effect and to use the culmination model; this strategy could be employed, e.g., in military rhetoric where the army must take action and to risk their lives immediately. In addition, the culmination model reduces the cognition and makes the hearer more susceptible to manipulation, which could be a great advantage in some rhetorical situations (diagrams 3 and 4). The orator can improve the result by increasing the time period between the information given in the beginning and the most important data, which is laid down in the end; this could be achieved, e.g., by telling interesting stories or by giving more examples in the matter.

The anti-culmination model is based on the primacy effect (the first received information is normally better understood than the last.) In this case the most important data are presented in the beginning of the speech. This type of disposition is suitable when the decision is not urgent, for example in academic lectures and in epideictic eloquence. The effectiveness will be improved if the time period between the two flows of information in the beginning and in the end is as short as possible.

2. The two effects could be effectively employed on the level of the argument as well (diagrams 5 and 6.) In this case the orator has to choose the right disposition of the primary and the secondary elements of the argument. The anti-culmination model is suitable for situation, when the

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decision is delayed; in this case the claim must be laid down in the very beginning of the speech and the two premises, if this is logically possible, are left for the end; the information which separates the two flows of information, i.e., the secondary elements of the argument, must be reduced as much as possible. On the other hand, the recency effect and the culmination model are recommendable when the decision must be taken urgently; here the speech must begin with the two premises and to close with the most important element, namely the thesis. This strategy could be strengthened by increasing the time period between the two main flows of information, which usually includes the secondary parts of the argument.

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