

Could You Be More Specific?

Examples as Crucial Arguments in Discourse on “Others”

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Abstract

In everyday conversations, we frequently “give an example”. Yet this is seldom accompanied by any reflection on what is going on when we do so. This report tries to contribute such a reflection. It shows how examples may be marked and used in a particular discourse: oral discourse on “others”. The empirical material is a transcribed focus group interview with a group of Swedish students, engaged in discussing a recent trip to Warsaw.

Examples may be looked upon as relatively specific. They are sometimes marked in explicit ways (“for example”, “for instance”), sometimes in implicit ways (“like this...”; “look at...”, “take...”). Their functions are numerous. They may specify or objectify an argument, as well as mobilise associations, display attitudes, or indicate “types” of persons or items. Some examples are “virtual”; they exemplify what could happen, or what never happened. Typically, examples confirm, challenge or in other ways elaborate an argument.

In this context, the speakers’ national identities are under debate, but also – because of the delicacy of the discourse – their moral identities. As arguments aimed at saving one’s face or shifting another’s perspective, examples are crucial. In our data, this is noticeable in speakers’ requests for examples as well as protests against them; others’ examples can easily be considered as misleading, badly chosen or too few.

1 Introduction

People's use of examples is as old as rhetoric itself. To refer to a specific event or character in order to give a concrete form to something abstract, or to support one's argument with evidence, is a widespread and firmly established convention. Our everyday habit of "giving an example" is, however, rarely accompanied by any serious interest in what is going on when we do it. This report deals with this matter. How do people recognize "examples", and how do they proceed when using them? What is at stake when something is to be "exemplified"?

An important clue may be found in classic rhetoric. As Kurt Johannesson (1990, pp. 94) points out, "example" originates from the Latin *exemplum*, meaning "sample". In a figurative sense *exemplum* could also mean "copy", "pattern", or "model", the same is true for the Greek equivalent *paradeigma* (paradigm). The original rhetorical principle of an *exemplum* assumed that a certain event or a certain person through his or her acts and utterances could be conceived as giving a "sample" of certain moral characteristics, certain virtues. They could be turned into "models" for other people, in a positive or negative way. Such a use of *exempla* has permeated public debate since ancient times – as political and pedagogical arguments, as icons of saints or portrayals of ancestors, even in the form of architecture (Ibid.). Recurrent "examples" in this classic sense, Johannesson argues, may be seen as constituting a rhetorical stock for a whole culture's never-ending interpretations and reinterpretations, providing that culture with something to argue about: Socrates and Jesus, Athens and Rome, Machiavelli and Stalin (p. 97). When a speaker today uses an "example", he or she may still bring these functions into play – constructing a "sample", "copy", "pattern", or "model"; introducing "evidence"; giving something abstract a concrete form.

This report explores a particular type of arguments in which examples proved to be prevalent and significant: oral arguments on "others".¹ More specifically, it explores arguments on "another nationality" or "another nation". There are several reasons for choosing such a field of study. As a political and cultural idea, a "nation" represents something abstract that often is given a concrete form. As an "imagined community" (Anderson 1991), it depends heavily on memories and monuments, maps and flags,

boundaries and personifications. A “nation” also represents something that is likely to be argued about. Its presumed “essence” or “meaning” is often disputable. The disputes as such may be valuable settings for research on how such “essences” or “meanings” are constructed.

In addition to this, a discourse on “others” is characterized by a particular delicacy that may be worth studying in itself. Alongside a concern about their *national* identities (defined in relation to “others”), speakers may be concerned about their *moral* identities, their “ethos” (defined in relation to other speakers). One reason may be found in the discourse itself. In order to define what another nation or nationality “is” or “should be”, speakers may find it hard not to use some kind of symbol – a typical character, a characteristic way of acting, a person or figure taken as an embodiment. They may in other words find it hard not to search for something that in their view exemplifies it. However, they may also find it hard to choose the “proper” example in order to convince and please their audience. An argument deemed tactless may easily end up portraying the speaker as prejudiced and narrow-minded, or even racist. If the speaker is not careful or diplomatic, an argument on “others” may turn socially risky. Face-saving strategies may therefore be useful, strategies that allow speakers to articulate in indirect ways what they seldom articulate in direct ways (Holsanova 1998). Using “good” examples may sometimes in itself be such a face-saving strategy. As we will demonstrate later on, it allows speakers to dwell on seemingly innocent details instead of broad, conspicuous generalizations.

Pertinent examples may also *challenge* and *change* generalizations, which constitutes the rhetorical power of exemplifications. In his lectures (published in 1992/1998) Harvey Sacks argues that a large amount of what people know about society is “protected against induction” (vol. I, pp. 196-198). When people change their view on something, or alter their knowledge, they do not necessarily do so “step by step”. They have not been storing exceptions, and when they have a whole bunch of them they feel forced to change their knowledge. Rather, shifts in knowledge and perspective take place because of “exemplary occurrences”, which may be made up of a single but striking occurrence. Thus, the fact that others try to make you focus on such a single occurrence need not to be an attempt to *slightly* modify what you know but rather an attempt to *radically* shift what you know. And if that change occurs, the new knowledge may very

well also be “protected from induction”. Sacks again: “You don’t get a step-by-step modification of something. It’s frozen, it shifts, and it’s frozen again.” (Ibid.).

Here we might get a glimpse of people’s culturally shared motivation for using and challenging examples. As speakers, people know that induction is not the path way to successful persuasion either of others, or of themselves. You do not need a thousand cases, a single case may be sufficient. The trick is that it has to be a good one. If it is deemed “good”, it may not only shift others’ knowledge but also shift it into the same form as previously, namely a form that is protected from induction. A critic, then, must try to find *another* “exemplary occurrence”.

This theoretical framework makes up the background to this report. Our purpose is twofold: to show how the classic rhetorical concept of “examples” may contribute to an understanding of how people argue about “others”, and, conversely, to show how people’s arguments on “others” may contribute to an understanding of rhetorical “examples”.

The data of the report – *our* overall example – may be considered as tailored for this purpose. During the work with a focus group interview within the project “Diplomatic and Journalistic Voices”, in which we interviewed a variety of “cultural ambassadors” active in the relations between Sweden and Central Europe, we were struck by the interviewees’ frequent and varied use of examples.² The participants were Swedish students and had just come back from a trip to Warsaw, organized by a university association for those interested in foreign relations. In Warsaw, the students had been on a “tour”, meeting representatives of the Swedish and Russian Embassies, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Solidarity. They had visited two museums and a market, an editorial office of a newspaper, a school etc. As we asked some of these students to discuss their recent impressions with each other in front of us and our tape recorder, they soon started to exemplify their impressions with their common “pool” of experiences as a point of departure. What they had seen and heard in Warsaw, what they had been doing and what they had previously known, the people they met and the places they went to – such “instances” were drawn upon and argued about in the debates and discussions that followed.

The general topic at issue – “Poland” and “Warsaw” – proved to be ambiguous from the students’ perspective. Each exemplification turned into a potentially disputable one. To define a category to put others into (and,

implicitly, a category for themselves to be put into) was not a simple task. Is Poland “East” or “West”, “modern” or “outdated”, “Americanised” or “Polish”, “dangerous” or “safe”? Similarly, their definitions of their impressions also proved problematic. What is a proper exemplification of “Poland” and what is an improper one? What is a defensible generalization? Engaged in these kind of questions, the participants may be said to discursively join their senior colleagues – Swedish diplomats, businessmen, entrepreneurs and journalists – who work on both sides of the Baltic Sea and consequently are supposed to come to grips with and communicate the novelty or otherness that the particular “others” are considered to represent (cf. Wästerfors 2001). From a particular point of view, either Swedish or Western, Poland as well as Central Europe in general may be treated as a discursively tricky case (cf. Wästerfors 2000): a former Communist country already a member of NATO and soon to become a member of the European Union. The implicit questions for Swedish students coming back from a trip to Warsaw might be: “What kind of “others” did we actually meet?”, “Are they really different, and if so, in what sense?”.

2 Method

Our empirical material is a transcribed focus group interview with Swedish students. To use a focus group as a method implies that a smaller group of participants (seven in the current case) gathers in order to discuss a given question under the guidance of a moderator for approximately one hour. We chose an unstructured focus group interview (Wibeck 2000, Wibeck 2002:266) where the influence of the moderator is minimal and the participants are free to pick up whatever topic they consider to be relevant, even though the very interview format and the introductory question of course restricted that choice in a general sense. The advantage with a unstructured focus group interview is that the moderator's understanding of the topic does not govern the topic choice, nor the development of the conversation as a whole.

How did we get in contact with the interviewees in the first place? We found a poster about a planned trip to Warsaw organised by a university association for those interested in foreign relations. We contacted the guide (also a student) and presented our project before their departure at a meeting. We suggested to the group of 16 participants that those who were interested could meet us after they had come home. We announced when and where we would meet. Seven out of 16 showed up. The meeting took place one evening a couple of days after their trip and was very informal in its character. The seven speakers (five men and two women), here called A, B, C, D, E, F and G, mingled first, helping themselves to some refreshments available. Then they gathered around a table, together with the moderator (D.W.). The project leader and an assistant, who was in charge of transcribing the talks afterwards, were also present but kept in the background.

The moderator initiated the discussion by asking whether there was anything in Warsaw that surprised them, or anything that did not surprise them. After that, a spontaneous discussion developed and the students discussed their fresh experiences from the trip. The discussion lasted for more than one hour, almost with no interference from or verbal communication with the moderator (an exception, though, is analysed at page 32). It was recorded on a minidisc. The participants themselves were responsible for initiating and establishing topics, for changing topics and closing them.

Some of the topics served as landmarks and the participants came back to them on several occasions (cf. Wibeck 2002:273).

In order to catch the subtle ways of announcing or marking examples we used a very detailed way of transcribing that apart from the verbal interaction included measured pauses, hesitations, prosody, and non-verbal comments. For the purpose of this report, though, we use a simplified transcription. For easier reading and orientation, we add comments in the left margin of the analysed examples.

In the following, we will first look at different ways in which examples can be delimited and recognised in talk (part 3). Then, we will show how examples are embedded and contextualised in talk (part 4). Next, we will focus on functions of examples: how speakers use and treat them interactively (part 5). Finally, we will summarise our findings and conclude.

3 Marking examples

Relative Specificity

As it is formulated in talk, an “example” might be characterized as “relatively specific”. It is *specific* since it is distinguished in relation to something that is general, vague or abstract. Typically, it confirms, challenges or in other ways elaborates an argument, statement or feeling, spoken or yet unspoken. Further, it is *relatively* specific since its specificity is defined not through the character or content of the example as such but through the very relation to something general, vague or abstract, that is the statement, argument or feeling at issue.

Thus, an example may be looked upon as relationally constituted. The extract below may serve as an illustration.

F:	Statement	Nobody speaks German in Poland
E:	Example against the statement	But in a café . the Café Europa . where we were . the young bartender spoke German instead of English

Speaker E tries to show that in at least one sense, F’s general statement is not a valid one. What E says can be interpreted as his substantial challenge of F’s statement, a challenge that is based on “evidence”: a personal experience of a concrete person at a concrete place. In isolation, speaker E’s utterance would not necessarily be construed as exemplifying. If its relation to speaker F were subtracted (together with its introducing “but”), it could as well be construed as merely a statement in its own right, which in turn could be responded to by exemplifications. (Such continuous argument-exemplification sequences are, as we shall see, common in our material.) It is only in relation to speaker F that speaker E’s utterance is understood as an example, in this case a negative example.

If, on the other hand, speaker F’s statement were to be shorn of its relation to speaker E, it would not necessarily be construed as general or abstract. It might also be construed as “specific”, and consequently also work as an example, if a previous speaker had come up with an even more

general argument, for instance “everybody speaks German in Eastern Europe”. Thus, what is general and what is specific, what is argument and what is example – these rhetorical qualities are defined in relation to each other.

It is questionable, however, whether all instances like the one above would be equally easy to interpret as exemplifications. A sceptic might even ask if there really is something in the above extract that qualifies for the label “example” since speaker E does not use that word. One solution would be to show how the participants interactively define it as an example in collaboration with each other. Before we discuss this, however, we will take a look at a partly different solution, that is to distinguish between explicit and implicit examples.

Explicit and Implicit Examples

Examples that are recognised on the basis of more or less recurrent introductory means and pre-announcements – such as “for example”, “for instance” – may be called explicit. Others, that can only be interpreted as examples on the basis of context, may be called implicit. A speaker who gives an implicit example seems to take the relation to the surrounding talk for granted, as if implying that what he or she is about to say is obviously to be treated as relatively specific. A speaker who gives an explicit example is, on the other hand, in various ways accentuating that relation, or creating it from the very beginning.

Brief exemplifications often belong to the explicit ones. They are framed by linguistic cues that give the listener hints about what is going to be said and how to understand it.

*The EU for example put some pressure on them...
for instance when we were at a café ...
compared to Denmark, for example...
they tried to do something against for example corruption...
for example car traffic...
but if you compare it with the Russian Embassy for instance...*

This kind of “minimalistic” examples, where one piece of information is chosen from an implicit set of such pieces, can often be found in the mid-

dle of an utterance. The “sample” that the speaker presents seems to illustrate not only the world “out there” (Potter 1997, p. 150) but also, and simultaneously, the argument that is about to unfold. Later on, we will return to this kind of example in order to take a closer look on how they may be used.

Markers for Implicit Examples: Three Variants

Linguistic cues for implicit examples may have much the same function as “for example” and “for instance”. The difference is that they are less intuitive or less obvious. In our material there are several variations. First, speakers may indicate their examples by treating them as “similes” (Latin *similitudo*), saying *as*, *like this*, *like when*. The link between previous utterances and future ones is thereby clarified; what comes next is to be understood as exemplifying.

Like this one with the recession you know...

Like when I was in Hungary...

Like this minister of foreign affairs...

The complementary version of this way of indicating an example is to emphasize the opposite, that what is now going to be said is contrary to the statement at issue.

But in a café, the Café Europa where we were...

Secondly, speakers may also frame their examples by means of invitations or exhortations, using verbs like *see*, *look at*, *take*. Such metaphorical expressions convey a feeling of observing and picking.

Look at Japan, one of the richest countries in the world...

Just have a look at the export figures for Poland...

Take Japan...

Look at the statistics...

Thirdly, speakers can indicate their examples through certain phrases. Typically this seems to be the case when illustrating a vague impression or ex-

plaining a feeling supposedly unknown to the other conversationalists. Although these markers may appear imprecise – they can of course also mark a presentation of an experience in general and not only an “example” – they still may create rhetorical boundaries for examples.

I thought that...
I had a certain feeling...
I got the impression that...

The above markers can function as frames of examples. Moreover, they function as “flags” attracting attention from other speakers and inviting them to share a package of supposed “evidence” or “facts”, as if saying “what I am about to say is an example”.

Apart from the above mentioned implicit markers, we would like to draw attention to two more general characteristics that also seem to help speakers recognize examples: allusions and quotations.

Allusions

Although many examples are presented in terms of the speaker’s specific experience or knowledge, they may also be presented in terms of an allusion. The speaker may presuppose that certain facts are known, or appeal to “what everybody knows”, and then elaborate. This kind of example can be signalled by demonstrative pronouns – *this, that, this kind of* – together with the topic that is going to be specified. The speaker seems rhetorically to rely on the principle of “the tip of the iceberg”.

this kind of treatment, this service feeling, that you have in a Western country...
this security that you mentioned...
this political life they have...
this car traffic...
these old prejudices that exist that..., that..., that...
it was like this scandal that he told us about, you know eh with bribes and everything...

This allusive way of presenting an example is similar to the way speakers may talk about a category (Sacks 1972). A brief reminder of associated attributes or associated behaviour is sufficient in order to indicate what is being said.

In our material, this rhetoric seems particularly accentuated since the interviewees actually share a common experience – their trip to Warsaw. They are allowed to, and even expected to, make use of a common “pool” of impressions (*this car traffic... , this scandal that he told us about...*). They may be contrasted with others that explicitly draw on a single person’s experience, which has to be explained in detail.

just as an example: I was in Estonia two years ago...

Quotations

Yet another way to implicitly introduce and demarcate examples is to use “reported speech” or “virtual talk”.³ Quotations are a very concise way to imply somebody’s attitudes or properties without long verbal descriptions. By constructing a quotation a speaker may present a “sample” of a stated trend or tendency of acting, as if attaching a sort of intensified authenticity.⁴ This signifies that what is being animated is to be understood as an exemplification of something general.

F: Statement	They themselves didn’t do anything [to comply with EU directives]
Example	They only like “oh no that won’t work . how much penalty do we have to pay”
Evaluation	They have kind of given up

Quotations may also help speakers animate a “typical” and therefore expected scenario. Below, a “normal”, consumer-oriented and polite way of behaving is contrasted with behaviour experienced in Poland.

E: Statement	There is not the same kind of service in Poland as in a Western country
Example	When you come into a bar and want to order something then “Hi what would you like” or something but they only look up and then it is you who is expected to say something ... not even a “hi”, not even a smile, nothing

Combining Markers

Theoretically it may seem easy to separate the above ways of introducing and framing examples. In practice, however, speakers often combine these ways as they go along arguing or describing things. Thus, a given example may be marked in several ways at the same time. Explicit markers (“for instance”) may be combined with implicit ones (“like that”), as well as quotations.

*Like that old Jewish ghetto for instance . if you saw a balcony . then you thought like
“how can they ever dare to stand there they have to like . it looks like it’s going to
tumble down any second”*

Below is another instance of combined markers: a recurrent phrase (“I thought that...”) and a quotation.

*No but in general I thought that they- didn’t try like “Oh now somebody’s speaking
English then I’ll have to talk a little like extra” or something like that*

4 Embedding Examples: Topical Trajectories

Not only the linguistic surface may tell us that a piece of talk serves as an example. Its location in the talk as a whole may also tell us that. Speakers may use examples to pick up a new topic, or to make explicit or implicit connections to a topic already under discussion. They may let the listeners discern the relation between the general and the specific in such a way that their utterances are treated as an example, and not, for instance, another topic.

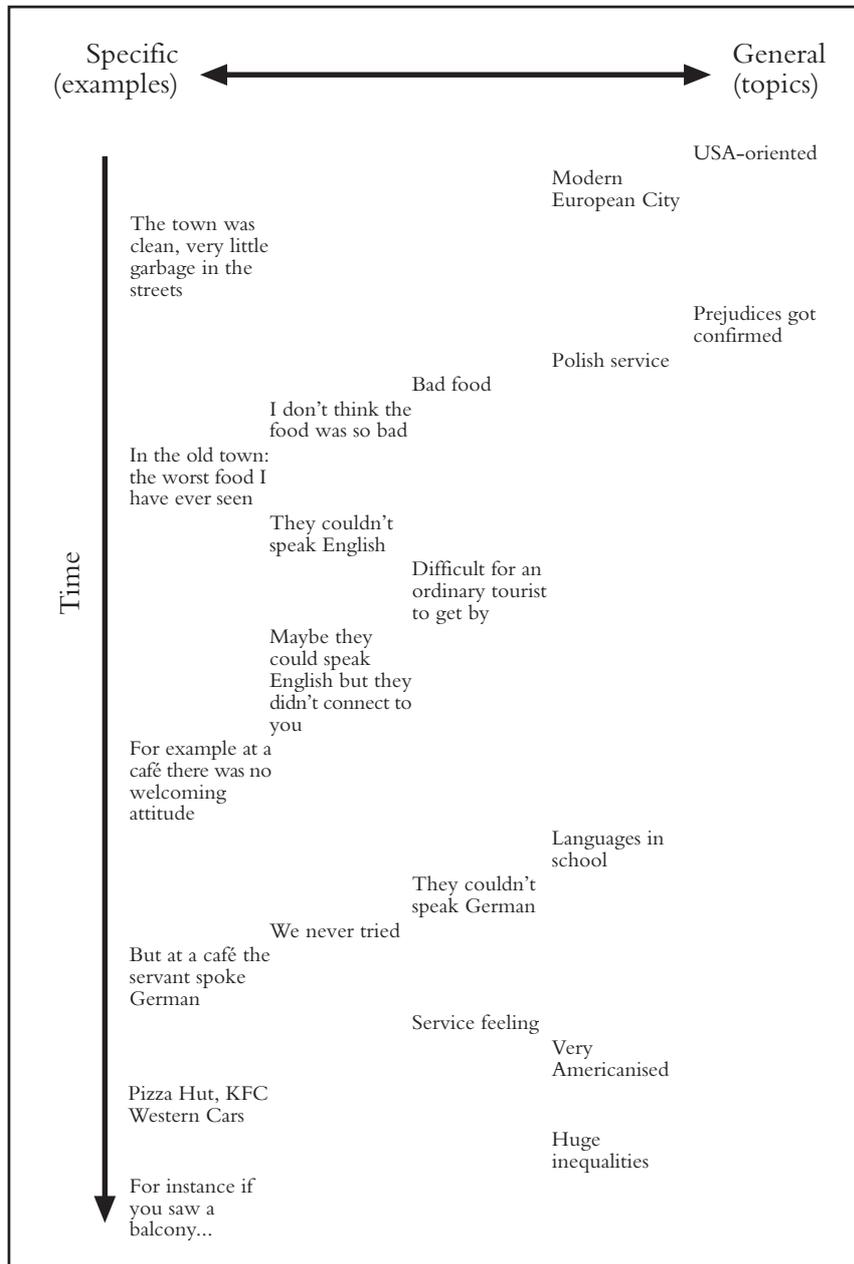
In our focus interview this was quite common. A topic introduced by some of the conversationalists (for instance *prejudices that got confirmed*) could be followed by lengthy discussions on things taken as exemplifying this topic (*bad service, bad food, not that bad food, extremely bad food, lack of knowledge of English, people were hesitating in front of strangers* etc). A series of topics can be pre-announced and framed as ‘positive experiences’ or as ‘negative experiences’. Here, it may seem narrow to merely point at linguistic cues or markers as frames for examples. An example needs to be contextualised. Therefore, a “bird’s-eye view” (Norrby, 1996, p. 140) must be taken into account, that is to say an overall picture of the conversation. Even a long time after a topic was introduced, the speakers could in one way or another be occupied with “samples” of that topic.

However, as we pointed out above, what is general and what is specific is mutually defined. That means that a certain topic (*prejudices that got confirmed*) very well may be looked upon as a single example, an example of a more general topic (*something that surprised you*). Similarly, if exchanging a “bird’s-eye view” with a closer look at our data, we may discern several “subtopics” within a given topic (*food in prejudices that got confirmed*). These subtopics may in themselves be further exemplified (*bad food, not that bad food, extremely bad food*). Thus, depending on how closely you are analytically “zooming in”, a topic may seem like an example and an example like a topic. Also the speakers could practise such a shifting point of view. When a topic was followed by another, the latter was often originally initiated as an exemplification of the first.

Several researchers have aimed at analysing topical coherence and topic boundaries. Harvey Sacks (1992) speaks about stepwise or boundaried topic shifts. Wibeck (2002) who studied topical trajectories focuses on how the topical aspects follow after each other (by shifting or gliding) and which of the aspects can serve as landmarks for the participants. Korolija and Linell (1996) analyse episode boundaries in multiparty conversation. But the analysis of 'big themes' can also become a starting point and a tool for new detailed type of analysis, as in our case.

Our point of departure was to draw a map of all topics and their exemplifications. We have used this topical map in order to (a) orient in the lengthy data, (b) contextualise the analysed examples, (c) enrich the content analysis (since the map of topics also includes attitudes, perspectives and opinions), and finally (d) visualise the dynamics of the discussion.

Below is an excerpt from this map, equivalent to 8 minutes of talk. On the left we have placed concrete or specific instances that seemed to be examples or "candidate" examples. On the extreme right we have placed general, abstract items, instances that seemed to be topics or "candidate" topics. Time is represented as the vertical dimension (from top to bottom).



After realising that each topic, at least in principle, could be looked upon as an example of some other, more general topic, and, conversely, that each example could be looked upon as yet another topic, we started to consider an “example” as *relatively* specific, rather than specific in an absolute sense. Thus, an exemplification may be better understood, we argue, as a rhetorical *direction* than a rhetorical *destination*. It “heads” something specific. Nonetheless, it is quite easy to define certain topics as more specific than others. The talk about “Western cars”, “Pizza” and “KFC”, for instance, seemed clearly more specific than talk about Poland as “very Americanised” (see the map above). Still these “clear” spots were hard to compare with each other. Is “very Americanised” more or less specific than, for instance, “huge inequalities” or “Polish service”? Since we did not elaborate on the topical map in detail, the above excerpt should therefore be taken as a sketch. We have primarily used it in order to orient ourselves in the conversation.

The participants themselves may be said to use sometimes an equivalent, implicit “map” as an orientation. Once in a while the map may even turn explicit. Speakers can pre-announce their arguments in ways that indicate that they belong to the same location and contribute topics and examples that have the same (positive or negative) framing.

something that I was impressed by was the opera...

something that I was impressed by was that they were extremely good at English...

In other parts of the interview, when the participants introduce other topics – *crime*, *prostitution* and *service* – they still seem to recognize sequences that belong to these topics as exemplifications, but the very belonging is marked in more implicit ways.⁵

As has already been made clear, examples can be presented as based on a variety of things:

unique personal experience (*for example when we went to a café*)

knowledge and facts (*take Japan*)

thoughts and impressions unknown to others

second-hand experiences (*but a friend of mine was there and he told me*)

typical scenarios and series of events (*service feeling*)

activities connected to a category (*crime and prostitution*)

As a given topic is being “sampled”, it may be said to generate chains of specifications (*Poland - positive impressions - cultural life - opera - opera performance translated to English*). In such chains, one might expect speakers to formulate their examples subsequent to a general statement, in order to confirm, challenge or elaborate what others have said. However, if that is the principle of exemplification it is not necessarily its actual order. Examples do not always follow a statement. They can also be embedded between two statements, the second being a variation of the first.

B:	Statement	Poland has made a serious impression in many areas
	Examples	For example the one with the police that was mentioned . as a model . when the Swedish police said that the Polish police is a model for them
	Statement	So there they seem to be very serious

There are also cases where examples come first, followed by general statements, or when the example is embedded between a statement and an evaluation.

The maps reveal the dynamics of the discussion and could serve as a basis for a more detailed analysis of the topical trajectories and thematic transition points. It would also be interesting to study what type of example is the rhetorically most powerful one. Speakers delivering examples at a high level of concretion may for instance sometimes get the last word, which in turn leads to a topic shift. Yet another possible angle would be to analyse the individual participant’s contributions and rhetorical profiles.

5 Using Examples

Although there are innumerable ways in which speakers may use examples, we may nevertheless outline some particularly recurrent ways or functions. As will become apparent, their distinctive characters do not prevent them from being empirically overlapping.

Specifying and Restricting

A fundamental function of examples is, as we have argued above, to specify an argument. A speaker may talk as if he or she simply unfolds the argument at issue, thereby making it sound more vivid and solid.

D:	Topic	But weren't you also quite surprised over how many prejudices that were confirmed verified after all while we were there
	1 st specification	you know . eh ... as you can joke about Polish service and -. eh . and like that you know so that's quite a lot
G:	2 nd specification	Yeah it was very bad when you- . you know if we are to start talking about this thing . you went out to a bar for example . then they put you know . if the whole group ordered thirteen beers then there were always twenty on the bill . at least (LAUGH) and that the service was like completely . eh . disastrous on restaurants and the like that eh . it must have been almost as eh . the old Soviet time . you know that eh . people had eaten their main course (LAUGH) before . that came and you never got right food so you should be happy you got anything at all- . and eh . there was a lot (LAUGH) a lot of that sort of thing there
	Evaluation	

In order to specify poor "Polish service", speaker G draws on long waiting time at restaurants and inattentive service at bars. Doing this, he is simultaneously operating within a *previous* specification, namely speaker D's specification of "confirmed prejudices" as poor "Polish service". The argument is thereby exemplified in two steps. "Many prejudices were confirmed" is

specified in terms of (1) “Polish service” that proved to be as bad as one could expect, and that in turn is specified in terms of (2) long waiting time and inattentive service. Only after speaker D’s initial specification does another speaker – G – take up the statement and elaborate it with another specification, as if D pursued a response by exemplifying his statement.

In this way speakers may elaborate an argument, as well as respond to it, by means of examples that specify it. At the same time, however, the very argument is restricted. “Confirmed prejudices” is now *defined* as “confirmed poor service”, and “poor service” is *defined* as long waiting time or sloppy service. Even if such examples may allude to a wide range of similar examples, and even if they may be countered by others later on, they still, for the time being, limit the very arguments to certain circumstances. As examples specify things they also narrow them down.

Objectivizing

Another fundamental function of examples is to make an argument factual. Examples typically draw attention away from the speaker to focus on the world “out there”. They are in Jonathan Potter’s words (1997, p. 150) designed to provide a quality of “out-there-ness”. By mentioning examples a speaker may construct a description as independent of himself or herself. Picking a successful example may in this respect be considered as picking “evidence” or “data” to support an argument.

G:	Statement	...they were talking extremely good English you know. I lived there in- in the U.S. a year and there you have (TURNS TO F)
F:		Mm.
G:	Examples	very, very good English that you like- as for example that minister of foreign affairs who eh . quite likely cannot have- studied any English you know- like eh because he was been tau- taught within the old system so like he talked so well and that the guys at the ministry of foreign affairs talked such incredibly good eh . English

Examples that support an argument by rendering it “out-there-ness” may also be used in a collaborative way. Often that reinforces the very argument

in much the same way. Below, speaker G tries to counter the common Swedish view that prices are lower in Poland than in Sweden, an argument that speaker A confirms:

- | | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| G: | Statement | ...when it comes to prices I don't think it differs that much from Sweden |
| A: | Example | Eh eh jeans for example in Warsaw, I looked at Levis jeans . they were more expensive than the ones you buy here in Sweden |

Typifying

Many implicit examples, introduced by *like those*, *the kind*, are typifying. By pointing out a detail or a set of details a speaker may imply a “type” of persons or things without having to explain at length what this type is considered to include. Such examples may add a descriptive element to an argument (*that kind of police, foreigners from like the Middle East and Africa*) as well as to an expectation (*I had thought that there would be like prostitutes in every corner*). In addition, it is not unusual that types are exemplified not to underline their relevance but to dismiss it.

- | | | |
|----|-----------|--|
| G: | Statement | It [Warsaw] was more Western than I thought |
| | Example | I thought that it would be more kind of . you know like those old . Fiats from the eighties . those that were made on licence and things like that |
| | Statement | But they had more Western cars |

What is *not* a “Western character” is here typified as “you know like those old Fiats from the eighties”, and that type is rhetorically detached from Warsaw.

Making lists

Examples are often designed to convey the impression that they are picked from a particular quantity. Even if only one is mentioned, they are easily understood as “plural”. This character can also be made explicit, as when speakers support their arguments with the aid of lists of examples (*Spain or the U.S. or anywhere*). Three-part lists seem common (Atkinson 1984,

Jefferson 1990, Drew 1990). Below, speaker G backs up an evaluative characteristic with such a list.

G:	Statement	But . it was very Americanised, very much . they even had more American restaurants than here'
	Examples	they had KFC Pizza Hut McDonald's I could see everything apart from Burger King

Apart from items and attributes, a list of examples can also consist of various places, sometimes put together in order to contrast a certain statement.

B:	Statement	Corruption is nothing specifically Polish, it is not a specific Eastern European problem. You find corruption in some of the richest countries in the world
	Examples	Japan . Italy . Belgium

Lists like these can be completed interactively, by contributions from several speakers. In the next extract, examples implicitly taken from the set "other European countries" are picked up by several speakers. In the end, speaker A returns to the situation in Warsaw and gives a similar kind of "evidence".

F:	Statement	Prostitution is very widespread even in other European cities.
G:	Examples	Yes in Germany for example,
A:		Yes, there are special streets you know in for example Hamburg there is a street which is like . and there is . and there is such a street in Warsaw too so to say
G:		There is in Malmö as well ... but
F:		One has heard about Czech Republic for example when talking about this motorway the whole way to Prague
A:		But it's the same in Warsaw If you drive into Warsaw on the big motorways ... there are girls standing in a row, you know and they are called tirofki, you see . every fifty or hundred metres they stand there, lightly dressed even if it's snowing and everything

Mobilizing Associations

To mention an example tends to mobilise a certain set of associations that the speaker and his or her listeners take for granted. A specific case that is pointed out or a situation that is portrayed may, no matter how sketchy the description, evoke culturally established connotations with moral significance. Below, speaker A tries to convince the others that prostitutes are relatively common in Warsaw even if you do not see them in the streets.

...cause I have been living eh in hotels in Warsaw too (G: O:kay) and like . you go down for example to use a telephone card . and call from the usual . you are immediately connected to one of the prostitutes (G LAUGHS) . you never get through to the person you want to ring (G LAUGHING: Okay) . you can get a bit cross about it (G: Okay) . and they're always sitting down in . in the bar you know (G: Mm) it- ... but it's usually there because I mean . why should they sit and wait for you in a youth hostel for example (GENERAL LAUGH)

To get in contact with prostitutes simply by going down to the lobby “to use a telephone card’ and call from the usual [telephone]” serves as the speaker’s way of emphasizing that he is not to blame for that contact. He was not doing anything wrong or odd, or doing it in a wrong or odd place; he was on the contrary doing something very ordinary in an ordinary place, and still he ended up in contact with prostitutes. This example thus serves as mobilizing innocence and normality on behalf of the speaker. The subsequent example mobilizes something different, although relying on the same rhetorical principle. In an inverted way it is pointing out that the hotel bar is an appropriate place for prostitutes whereas “a youth hostel” is not. A youth hostel has different connotations, perhaps even opposite ones in relation to hotels; it stands for simple accommodation for budget travellers. Metaphorically placing the prostitutes from the hotel bar at a youth hostel provides such an evident contrast for the audience that it motivates a laugh.

Displaying Attitudes

Picking an example may also be a matter of displaying one's attitude to a topic under discussion. The character of an example and the way the speaker presents it may signify a certain stance or a certain opinion without spelling out that stance or opinion explicitly. Holsanova & Nekvapil (1995) and Holmqvist & Holsanova (1996) show similar findings: explicit evaluations of 'the others' are rare, 'the others' are instead characterised indirectly, via evaluations of particularities, such as towns, town districts, villages, roads, houses, clothes, products, and language (cf. also Francescini 1995). As the speakers in our focus group are discussing their impressions of a certain subject of which they sometimes have different opinions – Poland and Warsaw – such implications are prevalent, although often quite subtle. Below, the speakers are engaged in evaluating Poland as a whole by means of details in their impressions:

- B: Statement ...the tap water is drinkable in Hungary (F: Mm) .
here you couldn't drink it, there was a lot of little
things like that (F: Mm) where Poland was like a bit
poorer and sure there is probably a reason the whole
city was bombed . during the war (F: Mm) and so
on . but I hadn't expected that, I thought it would be
about the same standard in the whole of Eastern
Europe
- F: Example But- but I thought that for example the car traffic,
even if they were driving- . eh- didn't show much
consideration for other drivers, but in relation to pe-
destrians they were (C: Yes') very nice
- G: Yeah I thought that it was very- kind to – that they
always stopped at –
- F: – yeah that they always stopped at- yeah pedestrian
crossings and things like that . that I would never
G: have expected

Whereas B demonstrates a critical attitude to Poland, by referring to un-drinkable tap water and “such small things”, speaker F demonstrates the opposite by highlighting another detail: Polish drivers' habit of stopping for pedestrians at crossings. In this manner, F not only succeeds in refuting

B since others support his observation of Polish drivers. He also succeeds in displaying a relatively positive attitude to “Poland”, or at least an attitude which is not completely negative, and doing this without having to elaborate and defend his attitude more generally. Contesting a negative example (the tap water) with a positive one (Polish drivers) may signify such dissent in itself. Thus, a speaker can present his attitude *through* an example.

Questioning

A related way to use examples is to question or cast doubt on another’s argument by referring to a seemingly apparent fact that is hard or even impossible to dismiss. Such a practice is dependent on objectivizing as well as attitudinal qualities but combines them with a destructive purpose. To question with the help of examples is to use them in an aggressive manner.

- G: Statement ...they: [the Poles] ... didn’t see this cooperation with the neighbouring countries . as the most important thing . but eh and there I think that the m ... probably can lose perhaps a couple of years . on (BREAK)
- E: There I don’t agree with you at all (GENERAL GIGGLE) ...
- Example just look at the statistics for export for Poland,
- F: No no ()-
- G: -No, but it was precisely that, that half of the investments came from Germany’-
- F: -from Germany and ()-
- G: and overwhelmingly (F: Mm) the biggest investment (F: Mm)-ment country’ we ourselves were on sixth-
- E: -Yeah’ seventy-five percent of Poland’s export, goes t . to EU countries (G: Mm) of which (G and F: Mm mm) half of that export goes to the Germans alone

E’s implicit example (*just look at the statistics for export...*) efficiently serves as a refutation of G’s opinion (that Poland would ignore its neighbouring countries). As a counterexample, “the statistics” represents something that a rhetorically successful opponent would have to explain away (to restore his argument), or something he has to take seriously (thereby abandoning his argument, or at least modifying it). This tension constitutes the rhetori-

cal power of the counterexample. Simply mentioning it may push the other to surrender or fight back. Counterexamples can therefore stir up quite hard debates. In our material they often constitute a new topic, which is yet to be exemplified.

Demanding Examples: Disarming Another

Yet another way of questioning or casting doubt on another's argument is to demand an example when it is absent. A speaker may indicate that the argument at stake needs specification or restriction since it is considered as too abstract and diffuse in its present form, or even sweeping and therefore completely unreliable. To highlight a lack of examples may in this sense serve as an efficient way of disarming another speaker.

- B: Statement Yeah but on the other hand I think I have to say that . eh (LAUGHS A LITTLE) that I still thought that - ... (RESIGNED TONE) uach . there were things in Warsaw that maybe are / if you compare with Prague and Budapest then I should think that Warsaw comes out worst on pretty well most areas . actually - (SILENTLY) like that you know it was-
- G: Request Can you take something concrete-
- B: -Well it was a little shabbier it seemed a little more dangerous, . and eh also Poland seemed a little more dangerous a little more ... a little . it was an honour for them to fool you and . eh you know-
- C: Request But what'...

G's question (*Can you take something concrete*) makes B's argument seem abstract and vague. To ask for "something concrete" indicates that the previous speaker failed to be concrete, at least so far. He or she preferred to talk at a general level. This represents an indirect way of questioning another's argument since the questioner does not have to come up with something on his or her own; he or she simply asks for concretion. If the opponent still finds it hard to articulate such concretion, as seems to be the case in the excerpt above (since he gets another request for an example), the questioner may have won a minor victory. A failure to produce an example seems to undermine one's argument.

A request of examples may also be stated in terms of asking when, where or who.

- G: Statement ...they seem to not bother about [the treaty of] Schengen and stuff like that you know- so I think that they-
- E: Request who is it who doesn't bother about Schengen?
- G: Well you know that they- I got that impression that they sort of...

To highlight another's lack of examples also involves a risk. If the opponent actually happens to *find* what is lacking the attacker may find himself *arming* the opponent rather than disarming him. Below, B has argued that corruption is not a specific Polish or Eastern European phenomenon since it also exists in "some of the world's richest nations". Speaker G demonstrates scepticism:

- G: Statement Ah I think it's more in Poland – so–
- B: Protest (B LAUGHS SCORNFULLY) –Yeah but God you're just sitting there and – you just imagine
- G: Example No eh but you know they [Poland] are number forty- on this corruption list–
- B: Modified statement –Yeah . anyway I was pointing out that the problem exists ... ehm all over ...

Speaker B laughs scornfully and accuses G of "sitting there... and just imagine", implying that G is only fantasizing or speculating. Speaker G would consequently lack any evidence. When G actually provides B which such an "evidence" (that Poland occupies the fortieth place on a "corruption list") B retreats into an "anyway" and a modification of his argument. Even if he is using "anyway" to bypass the previous example and move on in the conversation, his rhetorical position seems to be slightly weakened.

Protesting Against Another's Exemplifications

A speaker who exemplifies his or her argument may sometimes be taken as engaged in induction. He or she may seem to use examples as a logical foundation rather than illustration. If that is the case, the speaker's critics may not only aim at questioning these cases one by one; they can also aim

life is super good because of one opera performance...”. Thus, to back up a thesis (or “tendency”) on others’ bad selection and treatment of examples, one may need to list a set of examples of how badly others select and treat examples. If a speaker like B did *not* do so, he may appear to be using the same rhetoric as the one he is accusing the others of: generalizing without sufficient examples.

In the end of the interview, a similar “protest” is directed at the moderator. Speaker B asks how we as researchers are able to “distinguish like what people says as- general differences or just differences on the whole and what are differences in this particular East-, like this Eastern European dimension”. He continues: “How can you say anything on that, because many things are just random impressions you get, might as well got in Spain or the U.S. or anywhere”. The moderator than assures that “we’re not going to draw such conclusions”. Later on speaker G, one of the most active participants, seems to present an excuse for having “blurted out” too much:

That’s why you can blurt out a couple of generalizations (B: Yeah, yeah)
 (E: LAUGHS) . eh like if you are a person [like myself] who is quick to blurt out (B: Yeah) opinions

Thus, the interview as a whole can be talked about as an arena for “generalizations”, which makes B’s protest relevant for us as researchers as well (following this argument, we will reflect on the use of examples in social science in the conclusion). The speakers may ask themselves if we are picking examples in a proper way or not. Later on, speaker F tries to respond to G’s sudden humility by pointing out that they as qualified visitors got a useful insight into situations in Poland. The fact that the students met “people at the top” in Warsaw (Embassy staff, an ex-minister of defence etc.) gave them the opportunity to get “an image that you’d perhaps have to live a lifetime [in Warsaw] to get”, he says. Consequently, each protest on exemplifications can be met by arguments saying “our examples are not that bad after all”.

To protest against another’s exemplification may, in Michael Billig’s (1987, p. 170) words, be seen as arguing about “particulars” and their role in supporting various “categories”. Since language permits us to express contrary forms of thought, Billig maintains, we not only apply categories

to arguments and experiences, saying “x is an instance of Y”. We also argue or deliberate on these categories: “is x really an instance of Y?” Analysis which brings out this method of argument makes it possible to portray speakers as reflexive rhetorical beings, rather than as automats simply applying categories. “Thinking”, Billig writes, “starts when we argue or deliberate about which categorization to particularize, or how to categorize a particularization” (Ibid.).

Widening Descriptions: Virtual Examples

Examples may not only be used in order to show what is the case but also to show what is not the case.⁶ To exemplify what never happens may in an inverted way illuminate what really happens, without having explicitly to clarify the latter.

you were not followed by alcoholics...
you were not warned not to go to the railway station...

In a similar way, speakers may also exemplify what could happen, leaving it at least a little unclear whether it did happen or not.

if you saw a black person then you got really surprised...

These two “virtual qualities” (exemplifications of what never happens and what hypothetically could happen) may be combined. Below, G talks about cabs in Warsaw:

Otherwise sometimes if you go abroad then . you’ve had to like/you’ve had to pay masses [to go by cab] and then found out that you could have just walked two blocks- it took a turn around half of the city [GIGGLES] for example- ... but you know I don’t think it was like that at all in Warsaw

G’s implicit statement (that the cab drivers in Warsaw do not fool foreigners) gets colour and concretion by contrasting it with what could have been the case (*if you go abroad... then...*). By doing so, G also widens his description. Regarding Warsaw, the example of being fooled by cab drivers remains unreal. Still it contributes to a description of Warsaw. Whether

G actually has been fooled by cab drivers abroad or simply is depicting such a scenario is in other words irrelevant. The relevant thing is rather whether he is right or wrong about Warsaw.

Harvey Sacks (in his lectures published in 1992/1998, vol. I, p. 196), argues that it is not always necessary to decide whether a given example (or “exemplary occurrence”) is “really” hypothetical or not. Even if a speaker is using the “if” form for an actual occurrence (*if you saw a black person...*) that may simply be a way to show that he or she is going to develop an argument from it, relying on the logic “if... then” (*...then you got really surprised*). Whether the speaker considers the example to be real or hypothetical is more or less irrelevant for listeners; the relevant thing is whether the argument he or she is making out of it is solid or not. One of the examples we cited in the beginning may be cited again.

If you saw a balcony . then you thought like “how can they ever dare to stand there they have to like . it looks like it’s going to tumble down any second”

Visualizing

As we have already mentioned, not only factual statements are exemplified but also more abstract things, like thoughts, attitudes, ideas, behaviour, feelings and associations. The more vague and imprecise the topic, the more efficient may an exemplification of that topic turn out to be. In our data, this is evident when speakers try to specify one of the most vague or general elements in the discussion – “Poland” or “Warsaw” in general. In the extract below, speaker D is visualizing a prototypical picture.

D: Introduction	that is something that stuck in my mind and is my picture of Warsaw
Visualization	We were standing and waiting for the tram . and there was a sort of market full of people selling things for almost nothing . and in the background, there was a huge tall skyscraper, super modern
Evaluation Statement	I have not seen anything cooler, this is Warsaw, this is a city of contrasts

Is D's description of the market and the skyscraper, what we here call a "visualization", also an "example"? On the one hand, such a label does not seem accurate. He does not use the word "example", nor any of the implicit markers we have mentioned. He does not even, at least not in a straightforward way, present anything "relatively specific" since his visualization needs an evaluation and a statement to clarify it. On the other hand, one could argue that D is engaged in *exemplifying*, since he gives a "sample" of what he thinks is "a city of contrasts". He is trying to illustrate and give taste and colour to his "picture of Warsaw". One might even say that even if he does not use the label "example", he is engaged in the spirit of exemplifications, as it is construed in classic rhetoric. Whether Warsaw really is "a city of contrasts" may be arguable, as may the fact that other descriptions might suit better. What is difficult to disagree with, however, is speaker D's visualization as such, and therefore also his conclusion from it. His visualization sustains his argument, as good rhetorical examples are supposed to.

Similar episodes take place when the participants are talking about crimes. Referring to "typical" scenarios, situations and behaviours connected to crime, they do not, however, restrict themselves to visualizations of experiences. Visualizations of hypothetical experiences, or things that did not happen but could have happened, turn out to be useful. The extract below belongs to a moment when the speakers' visit to Warsaw is being described in positive undertones:

C:	Idea	I went there with the idea that there would be more crime and that it would be more dangerous
	Visualization	That one would have to hold on to one's bag more than necessary, that they would try to pinch your wallet, or steal your luggage, that they would sort of . seem to be more threatening
	Statement	I felt rather safe
	Negation of initial idea	there were no criminals roaming around in tram stations

Here too one might ask: is speaker D's hypothetical visualisation (or imagination) an example? In one way, it specifies something relatively vague or general. The word "dangerous" is given substance and D's initial "idea" of Warsaw is given quite a detailed content. Her idea is to some extent cast in

the form of an example. Even so, she does not use any explicit marker, and is surely not presenting any “evidence” since her visualization is hypothetical. Taken as a whole, though, it would be hard to argue that D’s rhetoric is unrelated to the spirit of exemplification. She cannot be accused of not having specified what she means by “dangerous”.

Embedding a Deviant Case

Discourse on “others” is, as we wrote in the introduction, characterised by a certain delicacy. It may make speakers especially concerned about their moral identities (or, to use classic rhetoric, their “ethos”). When discussing a delicate topic, speakers use positive embedding of their statements. They legitimise them by mentioning reliable information sources, or using quotations and second-hand stories to gain distance. Apart from that, objectifications, modifications and retreats are quite frequent. Another successful strategy is to act like an expert and to use humour when characterising ‘the others’ (Holmqvist & Holsanova 1996:7–13). In our data, topics like “crime” and “being fooled by taxi drivers” proved to be illustrative in this respect since they happened to be brought into play when the group is engaged in positive descriptions of Warsaw and Poland. Here, speakers mention single cases which confirmed their prejudices, but the very way in which they mention these cases deprived them of significance. They are presented as occasional and solitary events, as if saying that this particular experience does not count as a proof of something negative. Rather, they are exceptions that prove the rule.

*There was only one who had his pocket picked but did not lose anything...
there maybe was one who had to pay double price on one occasion so to say but...*

In other moments during the talk, “only one” example was sufficient to sustain an argument (*they were talking extremely good English you know... as for example that minister of foreign affairs*). Here, however, this solitary character is underlined so that particular argument cannot be sustained, or even articulated. Thus, the rhetorical potential of particularly sensitive or deviant examples may be collaboratively downplayed.

6 Conclusions

Summary

Taking the classic meaning of *exemplum* as a point of departure (Latin for “sample”, “copy”, “pattern”, or “model”), we have tried to show how examples may be marked and used in oral discourse on “others”.

The empirical material is a transcribed focus group interview with Swedish students. During the interview the students discuss a recent trip to Warsaw organized by a university association for those interested in foreign relations. One of us initiated the discussion by asking whether there had been anything in Warsaw that surprised them, or anything that did not surprise them.

As we conducted the interview and studied the transcript, we were struck by the participants’ frequent and varied use of examples. Impressions, activities, people and places – such “instances” were drawn upon and argued about in the debates and discussions that took place. To define “Poland” and “Warsaw” proved to be a complicated task. Various exemplifications were used by the speakers to back up their arguments, or question those of others.

Examples, we argue, may be looked upon as “relatively specific”. They are articulated in relation to something general, vague or abstract. Typically, they confirm, challenge or in other ways elaborate an argument, statement or feeling, spoken or yet unspoken. If that is the principle of exemplification, it is not necessarily its order. Examples may not only be placed after a statement but also before, or between two statements.

Examples may be marked in an explicit way (by “flags” like “for example”, “for instance”) but also in various implicit ways (“like this...”, “like that...”; “look at...”, “take...”; “I thought that...”). Some examples seem recognizable by their allusive nature (“this kind of...”, “that...”), others by animated talk or quotations. Various markers may also be combined.

Analysis in a more overall perspective may also uncover exemplifying characteristics. The introduction of a topic by some of the interviewees (for instance *prejudices that got confirmed*) could be followed by lengthy dis-

cussions on things exemplifying this topic (*bad service, bad food, not that bad food, extremely bad food, lack of knowledge of English, people were hesitating in front of strangers* etc). Even a long time after a topic was introduced, speakers could in one way or another be occupied with “samples” of that topic.

Depending on how closely one is analytically “zooming in”, however, a topic may seem like an example and an example like a topic. Also the participants in the interview could practise such a shifting point of view. When one topic was followed by another, the latter had often been initiated as an exemplification of the first.

The functions of examples are numerous. They specify things but restrict them at the same time. They may serve as objectifications of an argument, providing a rhetorically powerful quality of “out-there-ness”. They may also be used to mobilize associations, display attitudes, or indicate “types” of persons or items. Some examples are “virtual”; they exemplify what could happen, or what never happened.

Speakers may question another’s argument by referring to counterexamples, or request examples and thereby “disarm” an opponent or, if he or she then finds an example, “arm” the opponent. In our data examples are also a target for protests. A dissatisfied listener may consider others’ examples as misleading, badly chosen or too few. Apart from these rhetorical functions, we have also paid attention to a phenomenon that seems close to examples: “visualizations” (for instance detailed images of “my picture of Warsaw” or the meaning of “dangerous”).

From a classic rhetorical perspective, the participants were involved both in *genus iudiciale*, trying to convince the partners about what was good and what was bad, and *genus demonstrativum*, enforcing the opinions and evaluations that the whole group agreed on (cf. Bergh 1990:10).

The Crucial Quality in Examples

In the subtitle of this report we call examples “crucial” arguments in discourse on “others”. One might of course ask oneself: what, more specifically, would make them “crucial”?

As we hope has become clear, examples are in a mundane sense always crucial; they often serve as “tests” of a speaker’s argument. A good example may save it, a bad ruin it. The example as such may be trivial, nonetheless it may tell us more about what somebody is actually arguing than the argu-

ment as such, in its (relatively) general form. When engaged in discussing “another nation” or “another nationality”, speakers may find their examples crucial also in other respects. Each “sample” of “the others” (or their country, their city, their food, their behaviour etc.) that is brought into a conversation seems loaded with a particular diplomacy, generated by the principle of identity constructions. Are “we” like “them”, or are they different? Are “they” like other “they”, or are they particularly odd? As speakers know they may actively display their attitudes (and thereby, in a way, their identities) through exemplifications, they also know that their attitudes can be, accidentally, displayed in the same way. One may be framed as naïve or prejudiced, too tolerant or too intolerant.

Thus, while engaged in exemplifying “others”, speakers are also engaged in disclosing others speakers’ attitudes, supporting or questioning them, and guarding their own. As identities are negotiated in talk on “others”, those who talk may simultaneously negotiate on *how* they should negotiate, which imparts a particular delicacy to such discussion. As we argued in the introduction (referring to Sacks’ lectures, vol. I, pp. 196–198), shifts in perspectives and views do not necessarily take place “step by step”; people do not store exceptions, and when they acquire a whole bunch of them they feel forced to change their knowledge. Rather, shifts in knowledge and perspective take place because of “exemplary occurrences”, which may be made up of a single but significant example. In our material, the rhetorical tensions between the participants are intimately connected with the struggle over what they are *willing to accept* as such significant examples, to what “instances” or “models” they are ready to assign the power that (possibly) can change the “perspective” or “knowledge” at stake.

Considering our study as a case, one might of course also ask what it says about Swedes’ discourse on Poland and Poles, and perhaps Eastern Central Europe in general. Some of the topics we have been illuminating – spontaneously generated in the interview – are recurrent: inferior service, low expectations, “Americanisation”, corruption, prostitution, crime and danger. Even when the typical image of “East” is under attack, which happens often in our material, it is still taken as a self-evident point of departure, a “grey starting point” (Wästerfors 2000; cf. also Holsanova & Nekvapil 1995, Holmqvist & Holsanova 1996).

When, one may wonder, will the discourse, and its rhetorical stock of

examples, change? When will a trip to Warsaw generate other things to talk about, *and* refute?

On Examples in Academic Discourse

There is yet another angle from which this report might be read, namely an academic one. The rhetoric of “examples” is not only an essential part of everyday talk but also occurs in the humanities and social science. In the book “What is a case?”, edited by Charles C. Ragin and Howard Becker (1992/2000), contributors from various areas show that the idea of having “cases” belongs to the basic “precepts” of social science methodology, although rarely reflected upon or questioned. Use of evidence that is more or less repetitious and extensive in form has proved to be “a dependable way for social scientists to substantiate their arguments” (p. 2).

Whether cases are to be considered as “found” (as specific empirical units) or as “objects” for social science (as general empirical units), whether they are “made” by the scientists (as specific theoretical constructs) or belong to their “conventions” (as general empirical constructs) – these questions are mostly implicit and their answers seldom spelled out. Ragin’s and Becker’s book contains a conceptual spectrum that highlights the lack of consensus of what a case really is. Additionally, each “case study” or study of “*N* cases” faces the unavoidable question “what is this a case of?”, a question that Howard S. Becker recommends his colleagues to keep on asking themselves. What a study is intended to be “a case of” may even be abandoned by readers later on. As Jennifer Platt points out (p. 41), an author’s initial intention may be replaced by others’ intentions, turning a study of a case of a slum to an exemplary case of participant observation (William Foote Whyte’s “Street Corner Society”, 1943).

Although a “case” is not entirely equivalent to an “example”, it does not seem difficult to regard this debate as an academic and methodological version of the phenomena we study in this report. Social scientists are likewise engaged in identifying their convincing “examples” – in order to “sample” reality, make a “copy” of it or a “pattern” for it, creating an analytic “model” or collecting “evidence” – as we have done in this report. And they are engaged in questioning others’ “examples”, examples they find false or misleading. In that sense, science is intrinsically rhetorical.

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- 1 In connection with sensitive topics such as immigration, crime, cultural differences, discrimination and socio-economic problems, van Dijk et al. (1997) refers to this type of talk as 'ingroup discourse about them'. Similar kind of talk has been analysed by Holsanova & Nekvapil (1995), Holmqvist & Holsanova (1996) and Holsanova (1998a,b).
- 2 Apart from the students in the focus group and their guide, we also interviewed a Swedish diplomat working in Poland, a couple of Swedish entrepreneurs established in Poland, and a leader of a project in the shipping business who organises trips to Poland for Swedish journalists.
- 3 See Adelswärd et al. 2002, Holsanova 1998a and b, Holsanova forthc., Jacobsson 2000, p. 93–98, 144–155, Sacks 1992, vol. II, p. 303–317; Potter 1997, p. 142–149, 160–162.
- 4 Quotations may be used in two different functions. On the one hand, they are introduced in order to increase dramatic intensity and the feeling of immediacy and engagement. On the other hand, they increase the distance between the speaker and the described characters (cf. Holsanova forthc.). Clark & Gerrig (1990:792) observe that “with quotations speakers can partly or wholly detach themselves from what they depict”.
- 5 There seems to be a certain culturally shared repertoire of topics that are expected to be picked up when we tell about our experiences from trips to other countries. Some of these topics are found in our data: travel, adventure, food, security, service, material standard, cultural differences (compared to the home country).
- 6 Thinkable and unthinkable behaviour can also be exemplified and demonstrated with the help of quotations (cf. Holsanova forthc.).

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