

Narrative as argument? On the argumentative function of (re)telling.

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This talk will focus on the argumentative function of narrative with a special focus on the practice of retelling, using criminal casework as an example. Jurisprudence has since the beginnings of rhetoric been a blueprint for rhetorical situations. At the same time, in argumentation studies the move away from logical conceptions of argumentation to more dialectical and rhetorical notions has been modelled after argumentation in the forensic realm. Traditionally narration and argumentation have been viewed as two distinct text forms. However, especially in classical rhetoric and contemporary rhetorical theory, this distinction has never been so clear cut. Since the 1980ies, among others with Fishers (1987) focus on narration as basis for human communication, the interest in the persuasive function of narrative has grown. More recently, also scholars in conversation analysis have focused on the argumentative function of narrative (see e.g. Lucius-Hoene/ Deppermann 2003, Hannken-Illjes 2011)

After introducing the relationship between argumentation and narration in rhetorical and argumentation theory, I shall outline the role of narrating in (German) criminal law. The focus will then be on a specific form of narrating: retelling. Retelling as a communicative practice has attracted some interest especially among interactional linguists. Retelling refers to the repeated narrating of a story by the same storyteller, oftentimes to the same recipients. The retelling of already told stories can serve different functions, depending on the field of study. In criminal cases, retelling is not only an ubiquitous practice but also one with clear argumentative function. Relying on examples from ethnographic fieldwork, I will argue that retelling in criminal cases is often marked by distributed agency and functions to establish and test premises as well as credibility.

References

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