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#### **Authors**

Feucht, Sheridan

Hemmatian, Babak

Avram, Rachel

et al.

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# The Anatomy of Discourse: Linguistic Predictors of Narrative and Argument Quality

**Sheridan Feucht**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Babak Hemmatian**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Rachel Avram**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Alex Wey**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Kate Spitalnic**

University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton, United Kingdom

**Muskaan Garg**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Carsten Eickhoff**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Ellie Pavlick**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Björn Sandstede**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

**Steven Sloman**

Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island, United States

## Abstract

Narratives (sequences of purposively related concrete situations) and arguments (reasoning and conclusions in an attempt to persuade) are distinct cornerstones of human discourse. While theories of their linguistic structures exist, it is unclear which theorized features influence perception of narrative and argument quality. Furthermore, differences in their usage over time and across formal versus informal mediums remain unexplored. Thus, we use an original dataset of news and Reddit discourse (consisted of >10,000 clauses), annotated for clause-level discourse elements (e.g., generic statements vs. events; Smith, 2003), and their coherence relations (e.g., cause/effect; Wolf & Gibson, 2005). We identify the features that correspond to differing perceptions of narrative and argument quality across multiple dimensions. Since the documents cover marijuana legalization discourse during a period of massive attitude shift in the U.S. (2008-2019), we also examine changes over time in discourse structure within this rapidly evolving sociopolitical context.