LANGUAGE AND ARGUMENT: A REVIEW OF THE FIELD

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Abstract
This paper has a dual purpose: it both seeks to introduce the other works in this issue by illustrating how they are related to the field of argumentation as a whole, and to make clear the tremendous range of research currently being carried out by argumentation theorists which is concerned with the interaction and inter-reliance of language and argument. After a brief introduction to the development of the field of argumentation, as many as eight language-based approaches to the study of argument are identified, taking as their perspective: rhetoric, argument structure, argument as act, discourse analysis, corpus methods, emotive argument, and narrative argument. The conclusion makes it clear that these branches of study are all themselves interconnected and that it is the fusion of methodologies and theory from linguistics and the philosophical study of argument which lends this area of research its dynamism.

Keywords: Corpus linguistics, argumentation, informal logic, discourse, rhetoric, fallacy.

1. Introduction

It should be clear at once that arguments are generally expressed in language, and that, therefore, it is both difficult to fully separate them and natural to study them together: both their influence upon one another and the degree to which they get in one another's way. Argument, here, is to be understood in the philosophical sense: arguments are not disputes. Rather they are what rational agents use to try to resolve disputes, to reach the truth and to achieve a consensus. This is what makes argumentation such a special field: the use of arguments, the employment of reasoning within a community, is part of what it means to be human. Arguments are the communication of reason, and it is our ability to communicate and share our reasoning that makes our species so successful, so powerful and, sadly, so dangerous. There can be no study more fundamental to the understanding of the human mind than the study of the arguments with which we attempt to persuade each other, the reasons we give to ourselves and to those with whom we must cooperate if we are to survive and thrive. It should come as no surprise, then, to find that argumentation is a truly cross-disciplinary field of research. As well as philosophers and linguists, lawyers, psychologists and computer scientists all follow and contribute to the development of argumentation theory.

In this paper, as in this issue as a whole, the aim is to present a snapshot of current research at the intersection of linguistics and argumentation. In the paragraphs below, I give a brief introduction to the field, and then in the succeeding sections, address the wide range of contact points where the study of language meets the study of reasoning. This list is not exhaustive, as new developments are appearing all the time, and these points of contact are not fully distinct with many researchers combining elements of the different perspectives in their work; but for simplicity here they are set out individually as having a primary focus on: Rhetoric, Argument structure, Arguing as act, Discourse analysis, and Corpus methods; all of which are represented by articles in this issue; as well as Fallacies of language, Emotive language in persuasion, and Narrative argument, which are only touched upon in the present collection, but have seen interesting recent developments worth taking note of.

Argumentation study as a distinct field, rather than simply a variety of discourse analysis, or an off-shoot of logic, has a relatively short history. It was helped into existence by the publication of two seminal texts which opened up the intellectual space into which it would develop: Stephen Toulmin's *The Uses of Argument*, and *The New Rhetoric*, by Chaïm Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca. Both works were originally published in 1958, although the latter was not translated from the French until 1969. Toulmin's book suggests that the traditional layout of arguments in logic textbooks is unhelpful, and he makes it clear how much is lost in the translation of the natural language items that people actually use into logical standards, such as 'All A's are B's', which rarely feature in real world discourse. This work had a gradual influence and towards the end of the 1970s in North America, the Informal Logic movement began to form. The motivation for these scholars was to go beyond the logical structures of their critical thinking textbooks, which they and their students increasingly found to be inadequate, and actually deal with real arguments in real language.

The New Rhetoric took a wide-ranging approach to argumentational discourse, and looked at the use of persuasion in a variety of areas, including advertising and political debate. The authors also identified certain common patterns of argument, fore-runners of the now common argument schemes which have been most developed by Douglas Walton along with a number of associate authors (see Walton et. al, 2008). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, then, reinvigorated the study of rhetoric and pulled it towards an approach taking more note of reasoning patterns, not only language devices; while Toulmin, followed by early informal logicians such as Anthony Blair, Ralph Johnson, and John Woods (see Blair and Johnson, 2000), pushed the philosophical study of reasoning through formal logic towards greater consideration of the language used in expressing arguments.

In spite of this greater focus on genuine examples of argumentation, the tendency of the informal logicians was still to focus largely on the soundness of the arguments themselves, which often meant an emphasis on the study of fallacies; this field being given great impetus by the publication of Charles

Hamblin's *Fallacies* (1970). It also meant that real examples of public argumentation needed to undergo a good deal of rephrasing before the inference structure lying behind the words could be discovered, leading back to the simplification of discourse which Toulmin had warned against.

European scholars were more inclined to study arguments as part of linguistic discourse, taking into account the interaction between participants, their goals and motivations, and the whole process of argumentation dialogues. This interest led to the development of the Pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation by Franz van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, at the University of Amsterdam. Their approach is summarised in a work completed by van Eemeren after his colleague's death (2004). The pragma-dialectical approach builds on Austinian (1962) speech act theory and thus reconstructs argument dialogues as a series of commitments made by each statement of the participants. These participants put forward and defend standpoints which are theirs, rather than conclusions of impersonalised arguments. Although the authors provide an extensive list of rules by which reasonable arguers should be expected to abide, ultimately, the acceptability of moves in the dialogue is dependent on inter-subjective agreement, rather than externally imposed standards, placing greater importance on the interaction between the two sides in their attempts to reach agreement than more logic-based accounts have done. The theory divides argumentational discourse, what it calls a Critical Discussion, into four stages, only one of which actually involves the exchange of arguments, making it clear that a far more holistic approach to the nature of the activity of rational discussion is taken than an examination of argument structures alone could provide.

Although there was much to divide the philosophers studying critical thinking and the communication scholars looking at argument discourse, once Douglas Walton and others had embraced the importance of pragma-dialectics, the division between the North American and European approaches rapidly lost significance. The two principal journals are named *Informal Logic*, edited from Windsor, Canada; and *Argumentation*, from Amsterdam; but the same topics and authors regularly feature in the pages of both.

The recent upturn in interest in how language and argument affect one another has led to the organisation of a number of conferences, including the series ARGAGE, in Switzerland, and WILL (Workshop on Informal Logic and Linguistics) in Łódź, Poland; as well as the publication of the collection *Argumentation and Language – Linguistic, Cognitive and Discursive Explorations* (Oswald et al. 2018).

2. The importance of language to argument

While there were always scholars looking at the language of arguments, recent years have seen a growing interest in the intersection of argumentation and linguistics, of which the papers in this issue are a product. Many researchers in

the field come from a background in linguistics or communication studies, as well as computer science. Although not touched upon any further here, the development of artificial intelligence and the necessity for software to understand human speech has led to the strong engagement of programmers with the analysis of natural language arguments. The combination of theories and techniques from linguistics with the tradition of fallacy theory and philosophical approaches to inference has created a tremendous number of opportunities for scholars with an interest in reasoning, persuasion and debate in all their manifestations.

2.1. Rhetoric

In spite of its venerable history and association with Aristotle, there is an awkward relationship between rhetoric and philosophy, nicely summed up by Michael Gilbert:

> The rhetorical, on the traditional model, concerns the ways in which something is expressed that make it more or less persuasive, and relies on the convince/persuade dichotomy. […] Clearly, for most philosophers there is no contest. Persuasion and its handmaiden--emotion-are bad, and convincing with its valet, reason, are good. (Gilbert, 2004: 260-261)

Argumentation scholars have therefore been somewhat reticent to engage with forms of persuasion not considered to be based on the offering of sound, reasoned arguments. That distinction is difficult to maintain, however, and it is clear that any investigation into how language is used to put across arguments cannot remain aloof from considerations of rhetorical impact.

Interest in the area of political rhetoric, in particular, has been boosted by recent events and concerns over the use of methods of persuasion considered populist and the phenomenon of 'fake news'. *Informal Logic* recently published a special issue on *Reason and Rhetoric in the Time of Alternative Facts*, edited by Katharina Stevens and Michael Baumtrog (2018).

The collaboration between Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca and Martin Hinton in this issue describes and discusses the use of rhetorical and argumentational devices and strategies in the speeches made by politicians seeking election to high office in the United States and in Poland. The traditional division into ethos, logos and pathos is maintained, allowing both the emotional elements of persuasion and appeals to reason to be highlighted and compared. The types of arguments employed are recorded and discussed, alongside stylistic and strategic differences between individual politicians. The study reveals that the overall structure of election debate discourse is similar in the two countries, but also brings to light the clear differences in rhetorical approach found between Poland's major political parties.

2.2. Argument structure

The role of Stephen Toulmin in the development of the field of argumentation was mentioned in the introduction. Toulmin was concerned that the way in which arguments were set out on paper by logicians meant that some features of the argument, in particular subtle differences in types of premises, were being lost. His division of premises into data, warrants, backing, and rebuttals was not based entirely on linguistic features, but those features were taken into account. Specifically he points out the difference between claiming that 'All A's are B's' based on research into actually existing A's and doing so because B-ness is somehow inherent in the concept of A-ness. The first case would qualify as a warrant, the second as a backing, in his system, but the logician cannot see the difference in meaning if he uses the ambiguous, simplified 'All A's are B's' form. Toulmin, then, suggested that clues found in the actual language in which arguments are made are vital to properly understanding their structure.

Looking to the language of arguments to reveal their deeper structure has also lead to one of the most exciting developments in recent years in the field of argumentation: the construction of the Periodic Table of Arguments by Jean Wagemans. In the past, arguments have generally been grouped together in a fairly *ad hoc* way as representing similar forms of reasoning: that is, employing recognisable patterns of inference. While fallacious arguments were frequently grouped into different categories, such as formal fallacies, fallacies of relevance, and so on, there was little agreement over the categorisation and no place for the non-fallacious. The genius of the system devised by Wagemans consists in his taking an element of the linguistic structure of the argument premises as the fundamental difference between argument forms; thus dividing them as a first step into subject and predicate arguments, then into first and second order, depending on their structure. Although the table itself has been available for some time, in his article in this issue, Wagemans details the rationale for his division into the four basic types of argument: first-order predicate, first-order subject, second-order predicate, and second-order subject. By concentrating on linguistic and pragmatic elements of arguments, Wagemans has created a neater and more elegant categorisation of argument forms than has previously been available, providing a tool of great value to scholars across the field of argumentation.

2.3. Argument as act

Acceptance that arguments may have other impacts and even other motivations than simply to show another by means of reason that a certain proposition is true, has been slow, but a wider view of the purposes and effects of engaging in argumentation is emerging. Some work has been done on the act of arguing as an expression of identity (Hample and Irions 2015, Hinton 2016), and, given the importance attached to issues of identities in modern political debate, this is an area of research which seems ripe for further development.

In such studies, acts of argumentation are fully contextualised and arguing is treated as a practical activity in which people engage. A 2016 paper by Jean Goodwin and Beth Innocenti raised the idea that the act of making certain claims may in itself stand as support for the truth of those claims. They studied the example of women's suffrage campaigners who demonstrated the ability of women to take a full part in public life through the act of arguing that they were able to do so, and this is the starting point for Cristina Corredor's contribution to this issue. Corredor considers advocacy as a rhetorical form in enactment and describes such advocacy in terms of speech act theory, where it becomes an exercitive act, in order to distinguish its perluctionary and illuctionary effects.

2.4. Discourse analysis

The potential for the study of argumentation as part of the wider discipline of discourse analysis is obvious. This ranges from theoretical assessments looking at argumentation as a whole, such as Ruth Amossy's paper which had as its aim 'establishing a dialogue between disciplines like argumentation theories, rhetorical criticism and discourse analysis' (2009: 252), to detailed analyses of specific forms of argumentative discourse in particular communities, such as Zhang and Xu (2018) on television advertisements and Wu (2019) on the pronouncements of the Chinese government foreign ministry.

Samira Allani, in this issue, uses the Pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation in order to carry out an analysis of the discourse of foreign-policy experts in the American media. She analyses newspaper articles published on the subject of the US military policy known as the 'Surge' in Iraq from the perspective of strategic manoeuvring theory, and reveals that the strategy of the polarization of views is employed most frequently, along with topic shifting and the reformulation of disputes.

2.5. Corpus methods

The advent of searchable corpora containing vast amounts of linguistic data has had an enormous impact on linguistics and is increasingly beginning to influence the study of argument too. The majority of this work has, so far, gone into developing software applications for what is called 'argument mining'. These programs are supposed to be able to recognise argument structures automatically from authentic texts, but are still in need of considerable development before they can be of significant use to argument theorists (see Walton and Gordon 2018). A small amount of work, however, has been done using the simpler search techniques of corpus linguistics. Jean Goodwin and Viviana Cortes (2010), for example, looked at the use of spatial metaphor in the description of argumentational discourse, and a recent conference held by the ArgDiaP (Argument, Dialogue, Persuasion) organisation in Warsaw (Budzyńska et al.

2018) was dedicated to the possibilities of using corpus linguistics techniques in research in the field and will soon be followed by a special issue of *Argumentation* on the same theme.

In this issue, Stanisław Goźdź-Roszkowski describes his research into legal argumentation on the basis of the analysis of a corpus of judicial opinions, written both in support of and against the majority decision of the court, on two landmark civil rights case involving same-sex marriage. This analysis allows the identification of the most featured keywords in those judgements and an assessment can then be made as to their emotive quality. Identifying commonly used words in this way also helps to illustrate which topics are of most importance to the two sides in the dispute and on what ground the most significant conflict takes place. This work is an example of just one of the ways in which corpora can be used to study argument: opportunities only now beginning to be understood and explored.

2.6. Fallacies of language

The remaining three areas of research are not directly represented in the papers in this issue, although they are closely related to much of what has already been described. They are worth noting here because all three have attracted the interest of scholars who are more associated with philosophy than linguistics, and, therefore, demonstrate the degree to which the activities of linguists have changed the shape of the field of argumentation study.

Fallacy theory is, and has always been, a major part of that study. The original list of fallacies, Aristotle's Sophisms, was divided into those he considered to be connected with language and those which he did not. Later philosophers were rather less inclined to give language such a central place in their considerations and generally limited the category of linguistic fallacies to cases involving some variety of ambiguity or vagueness. More recently, however, the role of language in other previously identified patterns of reasoning, such as Straw man arguments (Visser et al. 2018, de Saussure 2018), has received more attention. In his book on fallacies, Christopher Tindale (2007) listed both Loaded Questions and Begging the Question as fallacies of language; and a whole range of linguistic abuses, many of them related to the concept of Persuasive Definition (Stevenson 1944), are listed by Andrew Aberdein (2006). Indeed, the translation and publication of Leonard Nelson's *A Theory of Philosophical Fallacies* (2016) has again re-emphasised the degree to which philosophers are often victims of the nature of language, particularly in their attempts at the re-definition of familiar words and concepts.

2.7. Emotive argument

The acceptance of the study of arguments employing emotive and evaluative language in mainstream argumentation has been largely due to the work of

Michael Gilbert, mentioned above, and Fabrizio Macagno. Gilbert argues, quite reasonably, that: 'Emotion, in all its forms, is an integral part of human communication, and, consequently, of human argumentation' (2004: 248) and warns against what he calls the 'idealization' of argumentation as a by-product of the desire of the logician to consider each claim in a neutral, unemotional way. Part of what Gilbert has been encouraging other scholars to consider is the argumentative content which emotions can have and, given that humans cannot communicate without showing them to some degree, he urges acceptance of the fact that emotions themselves are rational.

Macagno has put forward the interesting idea that emotional and evaluative language can contain condensed arguments. He points out that while they may have a purely persuasive, rhetorical effect, that doesn't mean they convey no logical content. He says of emotive words: 'In order to analyze their effects, it is necessary to take into consideration their two distinct and connected dimensions: their logical function as implicit and condensed arguments, and their rhetorical effect consisting in arousing emotions' (Macagno 2014:107). In another paper co-authored with Douglas Walton, Macagno looks at the relationship between emotive words and persuasive definitions, employing the ideas of conceptual framing and argumentativity, among others, in an investigation of what emotive language keeps hidden. Their approach 'treats the persuasiveness of emotive words and persuasive definitions as due to implicit arguments that an uncritical interlocutor may not question, or even be aware of' (Macagno and Walton 2014: 2012). This lack of awareness in the audience makes the study of such implicit arguments of great importance as their effects may be stronger than is immediately apparent. The contribution of linguistic theory to this assessment of argument cannot be overstated and it provides an excellent example of how research can benefit from an interdisciplinary approach.

2.8. Narrative argument

Unlike much of the work described in this brief review, the driving force behind the recent surge in work examining narratives as a form of argument has come from North America. Christopher Tindale has been a leading advocate for the acceptance of narrative as argument, a position which has not met with a universally warm response, given that narratives do not obviously contain anything which might be called a premise, or an explicit conclusion.

The recent collection *Narration as Argument*, edited by Paula Olmos (2017), contains discussions of how arguments can be made with stories and the relationship between narratives and arguments from analogy, as well as studies of particular narrative texts and their argumentational content. In his contribution to that volume, Tindale speaks of how narratives reflect the 'dynamic nature of argument […] insofar as they are alive with meaning and movement, and should only be judged "good" or "bad" in light of consideration of the entire

argumentative situation' (2017: 28). With this statement he illustrates how far the study of the many varieties of persuasive discourse has taken the analysis of arguments from the logic textbooks of the past.

3. Conclusion

The division into as many as eight different areas in which linguistics and the study of reasoning come into contact within the field of argumentation does reveal the multiplicity of approaches being taken by scholars interested in both language and argument, but, at the same time, it hides the important commonalities shared by these methodologies. For example, while the papers by Samira Allani and Stanisław Goźdź-Roszkowski, are placed in different categories, in fact Allani's paper also employs a corpus in its discourse analysis, and, of course, Goźdź-Roszkowski, is analysing legal discourse with his corpus study. The same can be said of the work by Agnieszka Budzyńska-Daca and Martin Hinton, and one might also argue that rhetoric cannot be sensibly separated from discourse analysis anyway, nor from the study of emotive language, and other links can easily be found amongst the papers in this issue.

The important point, and the one which this paper and the collection of articles it appears alongside has sought to make, is that the combination of techniques and theory from linguistics and philosophical approaches to argumentation is proving fruitful within the rapidly developing field of argumentation, and new applications and research directions are continually being uncovered. The intersection of research studies into language and argument is a crowded place with an awful lot to say for itself.

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