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The functional nature of argument revisited

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Title: FUNCTIONAL NATURE OF ARGUMENT REVISITED
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The conception of argument proposed here is connected with the problem of text comprehension, and in this respect it is functional. Comprehension of a written text no doubt differs from that of an oral text (cf.: Edmondson, 1981:169; Leech, 1983: 63-70). Comprehension of a written monologue text has slightly different procedures than that of a written dialogue. Comprehension of a scientific written monologue also has its peculiarities.

All that means that depending on the function of a linguistic message in communicative environment different methods of analysis must be used, because in different environments discourses are organized differently (cf. reviews, articles, abstracts vs. bargaining, rotary club meetings, and everyday idle talk). If that is true, then the idea of human factor in comprehension (prevalence of inter-personal factors over person-to-object factors) cannot be accepted without reserve.

My view on comprehension of argumentation in a scientific text is therefore inherently functional. The text recipient is a rational subject who regards the scientific text as rationally encoded by its author. It means that encoding is done in the way allowing the scientifically competent recipient to understand the author's reasoning. If the author's and the recipient's backgrounds are enough to ask no definition questions about the notions in the text, the communicants are likely to understand one another. For the recipient to comprehend what the author has written, the recipient must supposedly use the same system of reasoning.

Taking into account the variety of systems of reasoning described in logic, it is very unlikely that only one of them will be conventionally used by the communicants. Moreover, for those untrained in logical reasoning it is still harder to use a logical system. Here at least two problems arise. First, if scholars use different logical systems, then the inferences valid in one of them can be invalid in others (cf. some inferences in predicate logic impossible for syllogistic). Second, if a recipient does not know how to do logical inferences, he/she cannot adequately estimate correctness of the author's reasoning. These questions need answering.

The solution of the first problem is this. With rationalism being our starting point, choice of a logical system for defining if reasoning is correct is not arbitrary, but rational; it is determined by the object of analysis. It means, that a recipient can apply different logical systems to different parts of the text, depending on how big they are (p.ex. clause analysis may differ from paragraph analysis - just like in linguistics where we have different methods of description of sentences and texts). Therefore we can state co-occurrence (but not alternation) of different methods of text analysis, p.ex. an informal

propositional logical system vs. more

strict subject-predicate (syllogistic) or predicate logical systems. Propositional logic is applicable for analysis of text components bigger than a clause (i.e. to argumentative steps and moves - see below), while predicate logic and syllogistic can be used for intra-clause analysis. Choosing of a reasoning system for a sentence analysis must be solved pragmatically: we choose the one which is more

convenient and which can bring better results for a concrete object of analysis.

If the object is an argument in everyday conversation we should probably use propositional logic to define how the sentential structures relate to one another and then we can use a linguistic-semantic version of predicate logic to reflect clause semantics. Within the clause we find a predicate, define its semantic type (p.ex. action, state, process) and a set of arguments (like Agent, Patient, Object, Instrument, etc. - cf.: Fillmore, 1968). If the object is a scientific text, both the semantic type of a predicate and the argument roles are practically of no importance, because their diversity will be very little and be probably confined to Classification and Characterization; what is essential is relevance of the arguments to one another and to its predicate. A good relevant system may be syllogistic supplied with necessary extensions that can account for natural language form of arguments.

The solution of the second question is this. Rules of logical inference can hardly be universally known unless they are explained and taught intentionally: fallacies in *modus ponens*, *modus tollens*, etc. when "everyday logic" is used are well known. The opinion that a recipient does not have to follow some "artificial" (i.e. logical) system might be correct with one little exception - when a reasoning text is in question. A scholar analyzing such a specific object must know the rules of inference, otherwise the results of his analysis of the text will not be meaningful: in science do as scientists do. Now, let us look at the functional aspects of the text in more detail.

In argumentation, there are complexes having semantic coherence and contentive completeness. They are regarded here as *units* of argumentation. A unit is thus a complex capable of independent functioning at the textual argumentative level. A unit is a complex of composites - phrases, clauses or sentences having specific S.Toulmin's (1958) functions within the unit. The composites performing argumentative functions are *elements* of argumentation. Their functions are only established at the level of their unit, i.e. taken in isolation (out of the unit) they cannot be defined as performing functions. Therefore distinction between a unit and an element is functional.

From a textual composition angle, I distinguish between a *Step* and a *Move* of Argumentation. A Step corresponds to a unit. It functions and is easily recognized as an argument at a textual level. A Move is composed of Steps, with the exact number of the latter being indefinite. It has a global Claim so that the Steps function as Grounds at the textual level. In other words, a Move is

also perceived as an argument by a recipient. Most often, a Move coincides with a text paragraph.

The components of an argument should be analyzed from the functional point of view, because an argument is a functional complex (it can not be defined other than on the criterion of what function this or that suprasentential unit performs in the text). This means that S.Toulmin's components of an argument (Claim, Data, Warrant, Backing, Rebuttal, and Qualifier) are purely functional. On the intra-object level the distinction between Data and Warrant as types of Grounds (premises) is based on functional criteria. They can be differentiated by means of the explicitness/implicitness feature, respectively. This means that in rational argumentative discourse the recipient regards an enthymeme as composed of a Claim and Data, the Warrant being easier to restore.

Argumentative functions can be primary and secondary. From the point of view of form, (frequency of occurrence) primary functions are Claim and Data, secondary ones are Warrant, Rebuttal, and Qualifier. From the point of view of content and significance primary functions are Claim, Data, and Warrant, the rest of the functions being secondary. In both cases, Backing, being a premise of another unit, is not regarded as an independent function in the system of the mentioned

ones. From enthymematic point of view, the composition of the unit can be minimal, nominal, and maximal, the terms having to do with the degree of explicitness. The minimal unit only contains a Claim. The nominal unit contains all the contentive primaries. The maximal unit contains all the functions.

The argument functions have specific semiotic status. In semiosis (sign generation) we have significatum as a phenomenon of linguistic sign contentive area. The significatum comprises two fields, the conventional and the individual ones. There are also two spheres - denotative and designative. The conventional field embraces all the denotative and part of the designative field, its remaining part being left for the individual field (Vasilyev, 1991).

The Claim expresses the individual field of the author's significatum. The recipient who considers the Claim, is to doubt if the Claim is correct; therefore, to understand each other the author and the reader must be members of the same [scientific] community so that the conventional fields of their significata were referentially clear. In this respect, it is incorrect to state that the Claim is something

absolutely new for the recipient: the latter's background enables him/her to discuss the Claim and he/she often has an attitude (individual field of the Claim significatum) to the Claim differing from that of the author's.

Therefore it incorrect to think that the Claim renovates recipient's respective significatum. Rather, the Claim 'provokes' recipient's reflexion on the individual field of his/her own significatum. If, in the opposite case, the recipient does not doubt the truth/plausibility of the author's Claim, the inherent features of the

latter vanish. One possibility is that the recipient is of the same opinion as the author, and the Claim loses its argumentative force because it does not represent the i n d i v i d - u a l field of the author's significatum anymore. Another - the *ad verecundiam* - possibility is when the recipient accepts the Claim without doubt (uncritically). In that case (a) there can be no initial referent field (and therefore, significatum) in the recipient's background or (b) the Claim is unimportant for the recipient, and the latter's disagreement with the Claim is inactivated remaining screened by the conventional field of his/her significatum. In these and similar cases we deal with Quasi-Claims, because the argumentative essence of the Claim is functional, i.e. reveals in an argumentative situation. Of course, the argumentative claim character of an utterance is easier to see in a dialogue, than in a monologue where explicit reactions of the recipient are not represented and it is hard to say whether the Claim is doubted by him/her.

The semiotic status of Warrant is this. The Warrant is immediately connected with the Claim and, therefore, with the individual field of the author's significatum. Unlike predominantly referential Data, the Warrant can be both referential (in case of generalization) and designative (if characteristics are explicated). If the significata for a problem discussed have a field structure, then the parts of the individual field and of the Warrant as of the part of the conventional field are closer connected than similar parts of the individual field and other parts of the conventional field. The border between the Claim and the Warrant appears vague, because a part of the Claim rests in the conventional field, correlating with the Warrant. From the point of view of plausibility for the recipient, the Warrant must evidently be more "digestible" than the Claim; therefore their semiotic strata differ.

From the same standpoint, it can be said that the Qualifier for the Claim is more closely connected with the individual field of the significatum than the Qualifier of the Warrant. By the way, linguistically, a Qualifier can be expressed by the interrogative form of an utterance. The question supposedly expresses a degree of plausibility (though rather vague), while propositional content of the utterance is the Claim itself. If that is true, then the exclamatory form of the utterance is a Qualifier, too. The interrogative and the negative forms are different modalities of the Claim proposition. The Qualifier for the Warrant will hardly have interrogative form because hypothetical modality seems to be hardly applicable for the Warrant.

Semiotically, Data, Backing and Rebuttal have conventional status and belong to the referential zone of the significatum. It must be noted that for theoretical texts, referential zone can only be established provisionally because in such texts we operate notions. Therefore Data, Backings and Rebuttals can also have notional status and it becomes difficult to differentiate between Warrants and Data, Warrants and Backings, Backings and Data.

It is also true that sometimes it is theoretically difficult to distinguish between a Qualifier and a Rebuttal. Let the plausibility of a Claim be defined by the

formula *"A + B = 100%"*. If the Qualifier expresses *A* per cent plausibility of its Claim, then the *B* per cent is the environment where that Claim is false. Then *B* is the Rebuttal. Therefore, a Qualifier and a Rebuttal can be regarded as correlative (if not interrelative) functions. They can probably be differentiated semiotically, too: a Rebuttal lies in the author's significatum referential zone, while a Qualifier - in the designative one.

On the level of Argumentative Move functional-semiotic transformation of the Step argumentation elements takes place. Functionally, a global Claim is singled out here, and the Claims from Argumentative Steps are transformed into Data. In this way, a minimally necessary exponent of an argumentative unit is created. From a semiotic angle, the Step Claim becomes non-focused because it is regarded as proved now. It is thus placed into the conventional field of the recipient's significatum. When the former Step Claim is used in the Argumentative Move its recipient comprehends (recognizes and identifies) it as already familiar element from the referent zone of the significatum (see: Vasilyev, 1991). That is why if the Claim is accepted as proven, it is interpreted as Datum but not as Warrant. For the argument author such acceptance is well-grounded, which is not always the case for the recipient. But even if the recipient does not consider the author's Claim to be proved or persuasive, he/she has to obey the functional aspect and regard the Step Claim as the Datum on the Move level.

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