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Indicators of Complex Argumentation

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Title: Indicators of Complex Argumentation
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1. Complex argumentation and criticism

The complexity of an argument depends to a large extent on the reactions that arguers receive on their argumentation or that they expect to receive. When the protagonist of a particular standpoint anticipates or receives criticism on one or more parts of his argumentation, he will be obliged to advance more arguments to deal with the criticism. As I have shown in my dissertation, *Analysing Complex Argumentation* (1992), it depends on the nature of the criticism and on the way in which the protagonist attempts to defend himself against this criticism which of the various argumentation structures will emerge.

In implicit discussions, the expressions an arguer uses to introduce the arguments can give an indication of the type of criticism that he or she will have to deal with, and thereby also an indication of the structure of the argument. In explicit discussions, the antagonist's criticisms of arguments that have already been advanced can serve as a clue. By starting from the assumption that the arguments that are advanced in response to these criticisms are aimed at overcoming the objections, it becomes possible to analyze the structure of the protagonist's argument in a well-founded way.

In this paper I shall pay attention to two types of clues for the various forms of complex argumentation: 1) clues in the verbal presentation of the arguments that give an indication of the anticipated dialogical situation, and 2) clues in the explicit criticism that has been directed at the arguer's arguments.

2. Clues in the presentation of subordinative argumentation

In example (1), Paula tries to defend herself against Anton's criticism of the acceptability of the propositional content of the argument she has advanced in her first move. The argument 'There are no charter flights to Sevilla' is intended to support the argument that flying to Sevilla is expensive, and is therefore an example of subordinative argumentation:

- (1) Paula: I don't think we should go and visit him in Sevilla, because it will be much too expensive.
Anton: That's nonsense. You can fly to Spain for almost nothing.
Paula: Not to Sevilla: there are no charter flights to Sevilla.

That the argumentation is subordinative can become clear from the use of general indicators of argumentation, such as *because, since, for, after all, therefore, so, thus*, etcetera. But these indicators can also be indicative of a single argument, so how can we distinguish the use of these indicators in subordinative versus single argumentation? When specific combinations of these expressions are used in the presentation of the argument, this is a stronger indication that the argumentation is subordinative than when no combinations appear. With

multiple indicators, it then becomes clear that the protagonist thinks that he cannot just present a single argument and leave it at that, but that this argument itself may also be subjected to criticism and is therefore in need of further support. Take for example the following constructions:

- Main argument, *because* Subargument and *therefore* Standpoint
- *Because* Subargument, Main argument. *So* Standpoint
- Standpoint, *since* Main argument. *For* Subargument.

The indicators of argumentation may be spread over different clauses, as in the constructions just mentioned, but they can also occur in the same clause. If the latter is the case, the argumentation will as a rule be subordinative. The cluster of juxtaposed argumentative indicators is then a sign that an argument will be given that is embedded in another argument. Examples of such clusters of argumentative indicators are:

Since because
For because
After all because
Because in view of the fact that
Namely because

In the following examples we find such juxtaposed indicators of subordinative argumentation:

- (2) There is a growing and alarming trend in Africa of women trying to bleach their skin white to appear "European." As usual, it is the poorer ones who suffer most, *since because* they cannot afford the more expensive cosmetic products, more dangerous creams are used, some of which greatly increase the risk of cancer (*On-line Pravda*, March 18, 2002).
- (3) It's quite challenging to produce quality poems. *After all, because* of its brevity, a poem's every word holds that much more weight, and must be chosen with great care (www.love-poem.net/www/Poetrywritingtips.htm).
- (4) After the elections, they all returned to their old frequencies, in the first place because of lack of financial means, and also because of the enormous effort that those small editorials had during that period. *Namely, because* of lack of financial means, editorials tried to provide larger volume and circulation (archiv.medienhilfe.ch/Projekte/SER/LocalPress/2001).

When *namely* or *after all* take second place in such a sequence of expressions, the combination of expressions is not indicative of subordinative argumentation. This has to do with the fact that *namely* and *after all*, even though they can be used as an indicator of argumentation, do not always function as such. *Namely* is most commonly used to introduce a more precise description or an explanation of something mentioned before, or to introduce an enumeration. One of the uses of *after all* is to remind the listener of something. According to Elizabeth Closs Traugott's (1997: 3) analysis, *after all* is then used as an "as we know" connective, by means of which "appeal is made to obvious, inter-personally recoverable, largely societal norms."

When *namely* or *after all* is preceded by *because*, it is already clear that a reason will be given from the presence of *because*. For that reason, *namely* and *after all* seem to lose their argument indicating function and are now only used in their other function, that is to indicate that a more precise explanation will be given or that the reason given concerns something that is

already known to the listener. In examples (5) and (6), the combination of indicators is therefore not a sign that the argumentation is subordinative:

- (5) It's ok to pay teachers peanuts and the heads of tobacco companies millions *because after all*, the economy is more important than children (www.maceanruig.homestead.com/files/H_Republican.html).
- (6) The Ministry of State Property must state its point of view here *because namely* this Ministry bears the responsibility for the outcome of privatisation, as well as for who will own privatised enterprises (www.open.by/belarus-now/cont/1998/0526/finance).

3. Clues in the presentation of multiple argumentation

In example (7), Paula (implicitly) withdraws her first argument when it proves not to be able to stand up to Anton's criticism. Paula then tries another tack by advancing a new argument:

- (7) Paula: I think you should stop taking these herbal pills. They don't work anyway.
Anton: That's not true, I already lost a couple of pounds.
Paula: But it's dangerous to take something without having any idea about the side-effects.

The argumentation in this example is multiple in the sense that Paula undertakes more than one attempt to defend her standpoint. In implicit discussions, where the antagonist cannot respond directly, the protagonist can play it safe by undertaking more than one alternative attempt at defending the standpoint. From the protagonist's own perspective, one or more of these defenses are superfluous, or at least they are presented as such, but at the same time, the protagonist allows for the antagonist viewing this differently.

Taking this characterization of multiple argumentation as a starting-point makes it possible to distinguish between a number of different types of expressions that can be indicative of multiple argumentation because they make it clear that the protagonist is anticipating the dialogical situation that typically gives rise to multiple argumentation.

1. *Expressions by means of which it is made clear that one of the reasons that is introduced by means of the indicator is by itself sufficient to render the standpoint acceptable.*

Examples of such expressions are:

- If only because
- X is an argument by itself

Generally, it is the first argument of a multiple argumentation that is thus introduced. If the arguer subsequently comes with further reasons, this is a sign that the argumentation is intended as multiple. The protagonist then makes it clear that he has already undertaken a complete defense of the standpoint and continues the defense nonetheless by presenting another reason.

2. *Expressions by means of which it is made clear that even if the reason that has been given earlier should prove to be not convincing to the antagonist, the new reason that is being introduced by means of the indicator can provide sufficient support to the standpoint by itself.*

- Anyway
- Anyhow
- Even if this were not true (not the case), then
- Whatever the case may be
- In any case

By using one of these expressions in their argumentation, protagonists can make it clear that they anticipate the discussion to proceed in a way that typically produces multiple argumentation: a first line of defense that was intended to be sufficient to support the standpoint has failed and the protagonist believes that it is nonetheless possible to maintain the standpoint by undertaking a new attempt at defending it.

3. *Expressions that can be used for introducing one of the reasons and indicating at the same time that this reason is, strictly speaking, superfluous.*

- Leaving aside that
- And then I won't even mention
- Not to mention the fact that
- Needless to say

Expressions such as these are an indication that the argumentation must be multiple because by using them, protagonists make it clear that they are willing to give up one of their arguments, since it is not absolutely necessary for a sufficient defense in their eyes.

4. *Expressions by means of which it is indicated that there is more than one reason to consider the standpoint acceptable.*

- But that is not the only reason
- But there is another reason
- Just as important
- At least as important

That the arguer is advancing more than one independent argument can also become clear by the presence of expressions indicating an enumeration:

- Firstly (because), secondly (because)
- To begin with
- Next
- Lastly
- Finally
- Another argument (advantage, benefit, etc) is
- Further(more)

With all these expressions, the protagonist makes it clear that more than one attempt at defending the standpoint is being undertaken.

4. Clues in the presentation of cumulative coordinative argumentation

In example (8), Paula tries to defend herself against Anton's criticism that the fact that a movie is playing at Cinecenter does not guarantee that the movie will be good. She does this by advancing a supplementary argument: Theo was also enthusiastic about it. With this cumulative coordinative argumentation she hopes to convince Anton of her standpoint.

- (8) Paula: It must be a good movie, because it is playing in Cinecenter.
Anton: It's not as if I never saw a bad movie in Cinecenter.
Paula: Yes, but Theo was also very enthusiastic about it.

Cumulative coordinative argumentation consists of a number of reasons that each by themselves give some support to the standpoint and that should be sufficient when taken together to convince the antagonist of the acceptability of the standpoint. The force of the individual reasons may vary. One of the reasons may be the most important in the eyes of the protagonist, but he or she may think it wise to add one or more reasons nonetheless in order to ensure that the argumentation is as strong as possible. It may also be that the argumentation consists of a number of reasons of more or less equal weight, of which the protagonist assumes that they each separately are not convincing enough, while they may be sufficient when taken together. Starting from this characterization, the following types of expressions may serve as an indicator of cumulative coordinative argumentation.

1. *Expressions that can be used to indicate that a reason that is given in addition to other reasons that have been advanced earlier is of less importance than those other reasons according to the protagonist.*

- A secondary reason is
- An additional reason is
- Is an added reason
- Less importantly

2. *Expressions that indicate that a reason that is given in addition to other reasons that have been advanced earlier is the most important reason according to the protagonist.*

- And all the more since/because
- The more so since
- Especially/particularly (too) because
- More importantly
- To top that off
- Even¹

What the expressions under 1 and 2 have in common is that they both make it clear that a reason is added to what had already been advanced and indicate that this addition is of less, or on the contrary, more weight than the other reasons.

3. *Expressions that are used to make clear only that another reason will be added to the reasons already given by the protagonist.*

- (But) this is only part of the reason
- On top of that
- (And) also
- Besides
- In addition to this
- Together with
- Plus
- Moreover
- And what is more
- As well as

The expressions under 3 indicate that another argument is being added to a previous argument, but they give no indication of the relative weight of this addition.

5. Clues in the presentation of complementary coordinative argumentation

In the dialogue presented in (9) complementary coordinative argumentation is advanced. Anton regards Paula's argument that the last bus had already left an insufficient reason to stay the night at Eric's. She could also have asked Anton to come and pick her up. Paula refutes this criticism by arguing that she did not want to wake him up.

- (9) Paula: I had no choice but to stay the night at Eric's because the last bus had already left.
Anton: But you could have asked me to come and pick you up.
Paula: But I didn't want to wake you up.

In an implicit discussion, complementary coordinative argumentation is put forward by the protagonist if he or she anticipates that an objection against one of his or her reasons may be advanced by means of which the justificatory potential of this reason may be attacked. In anticipation of this criticism, the protagonist adds another argument by means of which he or she parries the criticism. In combination, the argument directly supporting the standpoint and the refutation of a possible objection to this argument form a complementary coordinative argumentation.

There are a number of expressions by means of which an arguer can indicate that a possible objection against a previously given argument will be refuted. Some examples of such expressions are listed under 1:

1. *Expressions that can be an indication that the arguer is attempting to refute a possible objection against one of his arguments.*

- While
- Whereas
- Whereas normally/otherwise
- Not even
- And yet

Expressions such as *whereas* or *while* and *and yet* can be used by the protagonist to signal a contrast between the expectations or criticisms of a potential opponent and the way things are in reality, according to the protagonist. The following argument is an example of this use of *whereas*:

- (10) I wrote a letter to the administrative council, saying I can't tell you how much I appreciate the stipend. It has allowed me to dedicate so much of my time to SG, *whereas otherwise* I would have worked a campus job to pay the bills (www.studentleader.com/sal_r.htm).

In the example, a student defends the standpoint that the stipend has been a great help because it has allowed the student to dedicate a lot of time to student government. A critical opponent might wonder: but couldn't you have devoted that time to student government even without the stipend? The arguer makes clear that this criticism does not hold, since otherwise he or she would have had to take a campus job to pay the bills and that would have interfered with his or her involvement in extracurricular activities.

Just like in the student example, it is often the case that *whereas* or *while* are combined with expressions such as *otherwise* or *normally*. Especially in cases where the arguer is defending a certain positive or negative judgment or qualification and needs to take into account that the opponent might come up with criticisms such as: 'But does your argument really justify that judgment?', 'Is the situation or event that you mention in your argument not something that is always the case or normal, so that the judgment that there is something special about the case (i.e. something negative or positive) cannot be justified?' By indicating that otherwise things would have gone differently, or that normally something would not have been the case, the arguer can make it clear that these potential objections against the first argument do not hold and that therefore the positive or negative judgment is indeed justified.

In example (11) *and yet* is used to make it clear that a possible objection doesn't hold:

- (11) We, at Breton Bikes, are based in Brittany. This is the Celtic homeland of France, and having cycle toured all over France we can say that this is the best bit. Why? Because here the countryside is small scale, perfect for cycling, *and yet* within easy reach of us you will find beautiful unspoiled countryside, two different and quite stunning coasts and a heartland of forests and lakes, canals and chateaux (www.bicycletouring.biz).

The protagonist first claims that Brittany is the best part of France for cycling, because the countryside there is small scale, and then anticipates the objection that if the countryside is small scale, it will probably not be very interesting. This anticipated objection is signalled by *and yet*. The protagonist counters the objection by mentioning examples of interesting nature and culture in Brittany.

6. Criticisms on the arguments as a clue for the argumentation structure

In explicit discussions, the dialectical proceedings can be followed step by step. If the dialogical characterizations of the various forms of complex argumentation are taken as a starting-point in the analysis of such discussions, it can be determined which structure can best be ascribed to the argumentation of the protagonist of a standpoint. Both expressions by means of which the antagonist introduces his or her criticisms, and expressions used by the protagonist in response to the criticisms, can serve as clues for the organization of the protagonist's argument. I shall discuss one example to make this clear.

In example (12), the dog Ebby tries to convince his owner of the fact that he has reason to believe that he was adopted. He first advances the argument that it is otherwise not understandable that he is a dog, whereas the owner is a human. The dog then adds another reason to the one he has already given: "And then there's" the fact that his sister Cheyenne has a different colour fur than he has. This is not sufficient evidence for the owner ("So what"). The

dog does not retract his argument, but continues to put forward more evidence: "I'm also a lot bigger than she is." The owner then objects that the dog is also four years older than his sister, in other words that the fact that he is bigger is not a good reason for thinking Cheyenne couldn't be his sister. Nonetheless, the dog counters the objection by replying: "but we're both full grown."

- (12) [Ebby, a dog]: Dave?"
 "What's up, buddy?"
 "Am I adopted?"
 "What would ever make you think that?"
 "Well, you're a human, right?"
 "Of course."
 "And I'm a dog. [...] *And then* there's Cheyenne...."
 "What's wrong with Cheyenne?"
 "Well, you tell me that she's my sister, but my fur is black and dark brown with white spots, and hers is solid tan."
 "So what?"
 "I'm *also* a lot bigger than she is."
 "You're also four years older than she is."
 "I know, *but* we're both full grown" (sipleynet/dave/essays/conversation.htm).

From the way in which the dialogue proceeds, it can be inferred that the dog's argumentation must be coordinative. When confronted with criticism, the dog does not seem to be prepared to retract any of his arguments, but keeps on adding more evidence for the fact that he does not seem to have a lot in common with his supposed family. The indicators used by the dog further support this analysis: he uses indicators of cumulative coordinative argumentation such as *and then* and *also* for the introduction of his arguments, and the indicator *but* as a marker of non-acceptance of the other party's criticism. In this case, the criticism is considered to be irrelevant by the dog.

The structure of the dog's argument can be schematised as follows:

Structure of example 12:

- 1. I must be adopted,
because
- 1.1.a My father is human and I am a dog
and
- 1.1.b My fur is a different colour than that of my sister's
and
- 1.1.c I am much bigger than my sister
whereas
- 1.1.d We are both full grown

The reasons 1.1.a to 1.1.c taken together form a cumulative coordinative argumentation, and 1.1.c together with 1.1.d constitutes a complementary coordinative argumentation.

7. Conclusion

In this paper, I have discussed a number of indicators of the various forms of complex argumentation. These indicators, of course, do not provide absolute certainty about the structure

of the argumentation. A first complication is that some expressions have more than one meaning, one of which seems to point to a coordinative reading of the argument and another to a multiple reading. A good example is *besides*, which, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, is similar in meaning to 'in addition' and 'as well' and therefore seems to be most suitable to indicate a coordinative argument. But, the dictionary also says that it can be used to introduce a further consideration 'as an additional or further matter.' In the case of a further matter, a multiple reading of the argument introduced by this indicator seems to be more appropriate.

In the second place, the indicators that are used to introduce the reasons can in some cases be overruled by indicators found in the standpoint. If the standpoint is such that it requires more than one argument in order to be adequately defended, as in example (13), then the reasons advanced by the arguer should be analysed as coordinative, despite the presence of indicators of multiple argumentation in the argument:

- (13) Many persons wonder at my devoting so much time and labor to completing a Burdick Genealogy. However, I see many important objects to be gained by this publication for the benefit of the public. *In the first place*, it enables many thousand persons to trace their ancestors back for three centuries, and to many, this is a source of rational satisfaction. *In the second place*, it enables many persons from the older states to receive information respecting relatives who long ago wandered off to the Far West, and had been sought in vain. *In the third place*, it is probable that cases arise hereafter in which this book may prove to be worth a thousand times more than its cost, from the assistance it will render in tracing relationship which may secure the inheritance of estates (www.burdickfamily.org/book.html).

That there are many important objects to be gained for the benefit of the public by the publication of the Burdick Genealogy cannot be made clear by mentioning just one such object. Therefore, despite the indicators of multiple argumentation *In the first place*, *In the second place* and *In the third place*, the argumentation must be analyzed as coordinative.

As I already pointed out in *Analysing Complex Argumentation* (1992), when analyzing the argumentation structure, attention should also be paid to the clues in the propositional content of the standpoint, such as the quantifying expressions that can be found in it.

Notes

¹ In Snoeck Henkemans (1996) a justification is given of why *even* can be seen as an indicator of coordinative argumentation and *anyway* of multiple argumentation.

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