

Introduction to the Special Issue: Twenty-five years of *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions*

Introducción al número especial: Veinticinco años de *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions*

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Received: 20-03-2010. **Accepted:** 14-06-2010.

This special issue is to celebrate the twenty-fifth's anniversary of a highlight of modern argumentation theory: *Speech Acts in Argumentative Discussions. A Theoretical Model of the Analysis of Discussions Directed towards Solving Conflicts of Opinion* by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst.¹ *Speech Acts* is a groundbreaking book that can be seen as the kick-off of the development of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation.² It marks the beginning of this development but it is also surprisingly complete. It is remarkable that all major elements of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation can already be found here; sometimes in an embryonic state, but mostly in a more elaborated and worked-out form.

Speech Acts is meant as a contribution to the theoretical analysis of argumentation conducted for the purpose of resolving disputes. With this seminal work Van Eemeren and Grootendorst provide a theoretical foundation for the systematic analysis and evaluation of verbal utterances in argumentative discussions.

¹ *Speech Acts* is a revised translation of Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst's doctoral dissertation in Dutch, which was published in 1982.

² The term 'pragma-dialectics' was introduced much later; it does not appear in *Speech Acts*.

The contribution of *Speech Acts* to the study of argumentation can be summarized in five themes: 1) argumentation as an illocutionary speech act, 2) the perlocutionary effect of argumentation, 3) the analytic model of critical discussion, 4) the explicitization of implicit elements in the argumentation, and 5) the code of conduct for rational discussants. In what follows I will give a short overview of these themes.

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst observe that speech act theory is the best analytical instrument so far developed in descriptive interpretative pragmatics.³ However, analyzing argumentation from a speech act perspective is not something that could be done without further ado. Searle's observation that it is characteristic for speech acts to have a one-to-one relation between sentence and illocutionary act certainly does not count for argumentation. A special analysis of the illocutionary act was necessary. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst have to solve three problems. First, a complete argumentation consists of more than one sentence. Second, sentences uttered in an argumentation have two illocutionary forces simultaneously: they are (to be reconstructed as) assertives which are part of a complex (constellation) of the illocution argumentation. Three, advancing a constellation of statements can only be regarded as a performance of the speech act *argumentation* if the sentences used stand in a particular relationship to *another* sentence, whose utterance counts as the advancing of an *expressed opinion*. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's analysis of argumentation as a *complex speech act* accords with Searle's basic theory of illocutionary acts and with their own definition of argumentation.

Before the publication of Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's book speech act theorists paid little attention to *perlocutionary effects* that are associated with illocutionary acts. How should the relation between the illocution of *arguing* and the perlocution of *convincing* be characterized? The relation between these two aspects of the speech act can be found in the argumentation schemata. The perlocution convincing may be regarded conventional in the sense that in the attempt to achieve the perlocutionary effect of the listener being convinced of the acceptability or unacceptability of an

³ Before introducing the speech act perspective Van Eemeren and Grootendorst explain the general methodological principles for their research: functionalization, externalization, socialization, and dialectification.

expressed opinion in the argumentation certain schemata are employed which meet all three conditions for *conventionality*. A specific *argumentation schema* represents a regularity in the usage of the members of the community of language users, the occurrence of the argumentation schema is expected by the members of the community of language users, and the members of the community prefer to use this particular argumentation schema in cases in which it will resolve a particular interactional problem.

The next question is what theoretical conception of a rational discussion can supply a theoretical model which enables an analysis of argumentative discussions. For a complete discussion model a typology of disputes had to be developed, an outline of the discussion in discussion stages needed to be given, a distribution of speech acts over these stages needed to be introduced, and several types of relations between the arguments making up the argumentation structure needed to be distinguished.

A discussion may centre on a dispute of greater or lesser complexity. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst make a systematic distinction between, on the one hand, *simple* and *compound disputes* and, on the other hand, *single* and *multiple disputes*. In simple disputes only one (positive or negative) standpoint is advanced in respect of an expressed opinion and in compound disputes two different standpoints (one positive and one negative) are propounded in respect of one and the same expressed opinion. Single disputes have to do with one and no more than one expressed opinion, while multiple disputes have to do with more than one expressed opinion.

The process of resolving a difference of opinion involves a number of discussion stages: the *confrontation stage* (where standpoints and doubt are put forward), the *opening stage* (where discussion roles and starting points for the discussion are established) the *argumentation stage* (where argumentation is put forward and criticism is vented), and the *concluding stage* (where the outcome of the discussion is established). The argumentation stage is sometimes regarded as 'the discussion proper'. The complexity of this stage depends on the structure of the argumentation. For the analysis it is necessary to establish what arguments are advanced at this stage and how these are related. For analyzing this relationship Van Eemeren and Grootendorst introduce the notions of single argumentation, multiple argumentation, co-ordinative compound argumentation and subordinative compound argumentation.

In order to be able to carry out a proper analysis of argumentative discussions one has to have an insight into the moves that have to be made for the resolution of disputes and into the nature of the speech acts that may play a part in this endeavour. The propositional content of an assertive in which a point of view is propounded always consists of the expressed opinion to which an argumentation refers. Expressed opinions need not necessarily be exclusively statements of a factual nature but may also be ethical, esthetical or other normative statements to which the true/false criterion does not easily apply. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst provide an overview of the *distribution of speech acts* in rational discussions.

Another problem is that the contributions to the resolution of a dispute that are made in discussions in colloquial speech are not always explicit. The theoretical necessity and practical usefulness of the speech act perspective also transpires in Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's treatment of unexpressed premises (or standpoints) in discussions. They augment Grice's general inference plan for conversational implicatures. Leaving an element in the argumentation unexpressed is in Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's view a form of indirect language use which can be analyzed using the Gricean maxims of relation and quantity.

Since not all speech acts performed in a discussion conducted in colloquial speech contribute to the resolution of the dispute, it is necessary to establish rules for the way in which language users must behave in discussions. The rules that are formulated for this purpose are designed to further the resolution of disputes about expressed opinions by means of argumentative discussions. They are directly linked to the distribution of speech acts over the stages of critical discussion and specify for each of the four dialectical stages the way in which the speech acts that are allowed should be performed. Furthermore, Van Eemeren and Grootendorst show that the traditional fallacies can be regarded as violations of the rules constituting a code of conduct for critical discussion.

This is not the place for a complete historical overview, but from the list of monographs that followed *Speech Acts* it becomes clear how important this work has been for the development of pragma-dialectics.⁴ In *Argu-*

⁴ The influence of *Speech Acts* is also visible in the notable list of doctoral dissertation about pragma-dialectics that have been published in the last three decades: Verbiest (1987),

mentation, Communication and Fallacies (1993) the code of conduct is simplified in 'ten commandments' and a specification of the discussion rules by way of a comprehensive overview of fallacies that can be seen as rule violations is provided. *Reconstructing Argumentative Discourse* (1993), co-authored with Sally Jackson and Scott Jacobs provides an elaboration of the analysis of argumentative discourse. In *A systematic Theory of Argumentation. The pragma-dialectical Approach* (2004) Van Eemeren and Grootendorst fine-tune the code of conduct and introduce also their view on relevance in argumentative discussions. In *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse. A Pragma-Dialectical Study* (2007) Van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck Henkemans, provide (starting from Van Eemeren and Houtlosser's 'dialectical profiles') linguistic insights into the characteristics of argumentative discourse which enable a better analysis of argumentative discourse. In *Fallacies and Judgments of Reasonableness. Empirical Research Concerning the Pragma-Dialectical Discussion Rules* (2009) Van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels present empirical research concerning the conventional validity of the pragma-dialectical discussion rules. Finally, in *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse. Extending the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation* (2010) Van Eemeren presents the extended pragma-dialectical approach in which the dialectical and the rhetorical dimensions of argumentation of reasonableness and effectiveness are brought together by introducing the concept of strategic maneuvering.

All papers in this special issue are written by scholars who approach argumentation from a pragma-dialectical perspective. Their contributions cover a wide array of subjects, ranging from philosophical considerations regarding dialectics to linguistic devices in argumentation. In all cases, however, it is clear that the authors are directly influenced by *Speech Acts*.

In 'Dialectics and Pragmatics' Jean Wagemans aims to make the dialectical dimension of pragma-dialectics more explicit by giving a philosophical analysis of the 'standard version' of the theory as it has been developed since the publication of *Speech Acts*. The analysis of the theoretical notion 'criti-

Feteris (1989), Pröpper (1989), Edwards (1990), Jungslager (1991), Oostdam (1991), Snoeck Henkemans (1992), Koetsenruijter (1993), Slot (1993), Viskil (1994), Houtlosser (1995), Garssen (1997), Gerritsen (1999), Plug (2000), Kloosterhuis (2002), van Laar (2003), Jansen (2003), Wagemans (2009), Tseronis (2009), Mohammed (2009), and Lewinski (2010).

cal discussion' has shown that, viewed more precisely, three dialectical starting points of pragma-dialectics are to be distinguished. These starting points pertain to: (I) the aim; (II) the structure; and (III) the regulation of a critical discussion respectively.

In 'Strategic maneuvering by retracting a standpoint in response to an accusation of inconsistency', Corina Andone explains the strategic function of a protagonist's confrontational move of retracting an earlier standpoint when he is confronted with an accusation of inconsistency. First, she characterizes the retraction of an earlier standpoint pragmatically as an illocutionary act that creates a number of commitments both for the protagonist and the antagonist. Second, she describes how the protagonist exploits the incurred commitments to his advantage in order to achieve an opportunistic outcome of the discussion. As an illustration, Andone analyzes an argumentative exchange taken from a political interview in which a politician strategically retracts an earlier standpoint that the interviewer had declared inconsistent with another standpoint of the politician on the same issue.

In 'The allocation of the burden of proof in mixed disputes in legal and non-legal contexts' Eveline Feteris addresses problems pertaining to the allocation of the burden of proof in mixed disputes in legal and non-legal contexts. She starts with a discussion of the traditional view on the allocation of the burden of proof based on Whately's legal conception of 'presumption'. Whately's proposal, she explains, is not adequate for the solution of problems related to the allocation of the burden of proof in everyday mixed disputes where there is no presumption of *status quo*. Using the pragma-dialectical perspective, Feteris explains how practical questions regarding the division of the burden of proof are solved in a legal context. She shows that for argumentation theory, the combination of material and procedural rules for the allocation of the burden of proof offers an instrument for the allocation of the burden of proof in both legal and non-legal discussions.

In "'Anyway' and 'even' as indicators of complex argumentation' Francisca Snoeck Henkemans establishes a connection between the semantic descriptions of 'anyway' and 'even' given by linguists such as Ducrot and Anscombre, Bennett, and Kay and Van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1984) pragma-dialectical characterization of independent and interdependent arguments. She argues that by combining linguistic insights with in-

sights from pragma-dialectics a more systematic explanation of the indicative function of ‘anyway’ and ‘even’ can be given.

Finally, in ‘Ruling out a standpoint by means of an accusation of inconsistency’ Dima Mohammed examines the argumentative move in which a discussant responds to a standpoint by accusing the protagonist of that standpoint of being inconsistent in an attempt to exclude the standpoint from the discussion. In analyzing this type of move she connects the pragmatic characteristics of the move to its dialectical function. Dialectically, the move counts as an expression of critical doubt aimed at eliminating an initial disagreement. Pragmatically, the response is an instance of doubt that is expressed indirectly by means of the speech act of accusation of inconsistency. The characterisation is intended to show how the accusation attempts to bring about the retraction of the standpoint doubted as a particular perlocutionary effect of the speech act, namely repairing the alleged inconsistency by retracting one of the mutually inconsistent commitments.

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