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Argumentative indicators in German interviews and discussions

Summary

Subject of the work

Argumentation is a linguistic act, which is performed by an interlocutor in order to confirm or deny an opinion by means of evidence (Georges 1998: 564). The ability to formulate conclusive arguments is a key competence in various interpersonal interactions, which we have to face everyday. In this sense, it can be stated that every human being puts forward arguments, even if not always consciously. For example, young people appreciate the role of convincing arguments in persuasion of their parents. They are namely aware of the fact that only a constructive and argumentative conversation with the parent will guarantee permission for a later return from a party.

The art of argumentation is also important from the perspective of politicians, journalists and representatives of other professions, where discussions are a crucial part of their daily routines. For example, political debates often decide about the future of a politician and his party. Factual arguments also play an important role in interviews and can determine the success or failure of the interviewee or the interviewer.

Argumentation is also at the centre of interest of many linguists who try to decipher how people argue. This tendency can be observed for several centuries already because it were ancient philosophers who first carried out research into this area. Nowadays, one can find numerous works on this subject. What is more, there are now lots of argumentation theories that describe the art of argumentation from different perspectives. This objective also followed the Dutch linguists, Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst (died 2000) as well as their successors, including Peter Houtlooser and A. Francisca Snoeck Henkemans, who have set themselves the target of their scientific work to list and describe words and expressions that are crucial to the identification of argumentation processes in a text or in a conversation. The mentioned words and expressions have been termed as *argumentative*

indicators. Their presence in a text plays a key role in the analysis of argumentation processes because it helps to recognize places where an argument is being advanced. However, before van Eemeren and Grootendorst were ready to transfer their knowledge to the empirical level, they had researched argumentation processes since the late 1970s. Their achievements in this area are known nowadays as *pragma-dialectical argumentation theory*. In this sense, the pragma-dialectics constitutes a branch of pragmalinguistics as well as the philosophical dialectic.

The findings of the fathers of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation and their empirically based work *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse* (Van Eemeren et al. 2007) have inspired me as the author of this thesis to expand the work of the Dutch linguists on the German language. Therefore, my intention is to review the theoretical and practical assumptions of pragma-dialectics in German empirically. One must mention at this point that the first attempts at cataloguing argumentative indicators were based on Dutch and then transferred on the English press texts. However, the aim of this research is to carry out linguistic studies using examples of spoken language, namely passages from interviews and discussions.

As already mentioned above, indicators play a key role in the evaluation of argumentation processes. However, before it is possible to examine a discussion or a text in terms of its argumentative function, it is necessary first to study the whole context in which a single statement occurs in order to interpret the whole argumentation process properly and also to determine the role and the type of the argumentative indicator. Not without significance here is the starting point that should be understood as a criterion of contextual analysis. In the present work, the pragma-dialectical *model of a critical discussion* makes this frame of reference.

Structure of the work

This work consists of six chapters, which, although relatively independent, refer to each other, so every following section results from the previous one. The introductory chapter 1 focuses on the objective and the starting point of the research, and describes the structure of the work, too. Together with the final chapter 6, it makes up the framework of the thesis.

Chapter 2 aims at bringing the history of argumentation theories closer describing ancient approaches to argumentation. The section is also divided into two parts, so that it presents works of both Greek and Roman philosophers.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the current state of research on the argument. The section has been divided into two categories. In the first part, there are presented argumentation models which focus on the structure of the argumentation process. In the other part, there have been described argumentation theories highlighting the reason oriented approaches to argumentation analysis. This group also includes the pragma-dialectics, which constitutes the framework of this thesis. Therefore, the description of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation by van Eemeren and Grootendorst occupies a substantial part of this chapter. A significant section also makes up here a summary including critical comments on the presented approaches, which are placed at the end of this chapter.

Chapter 4 is written with regard to the text corpus, and so it is about interviews and discussions. Besides the presentation of discussion forms as sources of argumentative disputes, it also offers an overview of techniques, which can be applied by participants in order to achieve the intended rhetorical objective.

Taking into account the assumptions made in the previous chapters, there is described a methodological model of the study of argumentative indicators at the beginning of chapter 5. The following linguistic analysis of text passages from discussions and interviews is introduced by the theory-based analysis criteria. Moreover, the chapter is divided according to the three argumentation schemes of pragma-dialectics, i.e. indicators of causal argumentation, indicators of analogy argumentation and indicators of symptomatic argumentation. At this point, it is also possible to note that chapter 5 is of crucial importance for the entire thesis creating a tool for analysing the argumentation process.

The final chapter 6 summarizes the results of the linguistic research and interprets them. Moreover, it aims also at concluding the work and provides perspectives for further usage possibilities of the catalogue of argumentative indicators.