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Introduction to the Special Issue on Speech Acts and Argumentation

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Speech Acts and Argumentation

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1. Introduction

Argumentation theory and philosophy of language share many topics of study, and sometimes also theoretical goals and methods. Moreover, as it is well known, certain approaches to the study of argumentation have deep seated roots in the philosophical study of natural language. One famous example is Stephen Toulmin's theory of argument, which grows out of the ordinary language philosophy developed in Cambridge in those times. However, work at the intersection between argumentation theory and philosophy of language—in particular, pragmatics—has become mainstream only about a decade ago. The interest in this kind of interdisciplinary approach is on the rise now, as shown by the increasing number of articles and books published in this area. The Introduction to Oswald, Herman and Jacquin (2018), as well as Hinton's (2019) overview article, offer a state-of-the-art review of the research done on this kind of interdisciplinary approach.

Pragmatics, as a branch of philosophy of language, focuses on the study of the use of natural language. Its relevance to the study

of argumentation in natural language, shown by the variety of theories of argumentation or fallacy that include the word "pragmatic" in their name, is due to the need to bridge the gap between the interpretation and logical appraisal of natural language argumentation. Pragmatic theory offers a wide range of resources that are indispensable to a careful interpretation and reconstruction of argumentative discourse.

Pragmatics, and speech act theory in particular, was a fundamental building block of the pragma-dialectical approach to the study of argumentation from the very beginning, as developed in van Eemeren and Grootendorst's (1984) seminal work *Speech acts in argumentative discussions*. Argumentation theorists find it natural to distinguish between the *content* of an argument and the *speech-act* of arguing. An account of argumentation as a speech-act is meant to be of help, if not fundamental, for the analysis and appraisal of argumentative discourse and dialogue, which is argumentation theory's main goal. Besides, as van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) pointed out, characterizing argumentation as a speech-act enables us to make sense of it as conducive to certain perlocutionary effects, such as persuading an addressee or audience or resolving a difference of opinion. More recent work, such as Bermejo-Luque (2011), has shown that the speech act perspective on argumentation does not only play an essential role at the level of interpretation or reconstruction, but at that of analysis and appraisal as well. Speech act theory offers resources to model the kinds of commitments, obligations and entitlements that speakers incur when advancing argumentation in favor of a particular claim, and so the normativity inherent to speech acts builds into the normativity that is specific of argument evaluation.

However, that argumentation is a type of illocution is far from mainstream and linguistic pragmatics has not devoted much effort to this question. The present issue of *Informal Logic* aims to bridge the gap between linguistic pragmatics and argumentation theory in order to highlight questions such as the following:

- What types of speech-acts are characteristic of argumentative discourse and dialogue?

- Is the activity of providing or using arguments a type of illocution?
- Is there anything like a speech-act of arguing? Which are its features, if any at all?
- What type of speech-acts are acts of adducing and acts of concluding, if any at all?
- What is the pragmatics of epistemic modals? Do they mark acts of concluding?
- How do acts of adducing and concluding embed into argumentative texts?
- What features determine that a piece of text is argumentative or narrative or something else?
- What is the role of non-literal uses of language in argumentation?
- Can narratives and fiction contain proper argumentation?
- Are there non-verbal acts of arguing? How should we deal with their interpretation and evaluation?
- How does non-verbal communication interact with verbal acts of arguing?

In what follows, we provide a very brief summary of the articles in this volume that is meant to increase your appetite for the valuable material the authors have provided.

José Gascón's contribution extends Harry Frankfurt's well-known conception of bullshit from the case of assertions to the case of speech acts of arguing. Gascón uses real-life examples of argumentative bullshit and distinguishes them from mere cases of bad argumentation. He suggests that the latter are characterized by being arguments that are not used to argue in a serious and responsible manner. Drawing on Bermejo-Luque's account of the speech act of arguing, Gascón formulates a commitment-based version of the essential condition of the speech act of arguing. Argumentative bullshit is instantiated by speech acts of arguing in which the essential condition is not fulfilled, as the speaker cannot reasonably be held to be committed to the claim that the reasons adduced support the conclusion. Instead, the speaker shows a lack of concern for the supporting relation in the argument she has put for-

ward. Gascón considers a variety of cases in which, for various reasons, we cannot hold the speaker committed to the argument she has formulated. Finally, he formulates advice about how audiences might react to argumentative bullshit while avoiding appearing too scholarly, lacking a sense of humor, or being incapable of capturing the speaker's intentions.

In "Argumentation and fiction: Types of overlaps and their functions," Guillermo Sierra considers a topic that has received little attention in the field of argumentation studies. He looks at the interaction between the two phenomena, offering criteria to distinguish between cases in which fiction serves argumentative purposes and cases in which arguments are embedded in works of fiction. Sierra appeals to resources from speech act theory in order to distinguish three cases: situations in which the author of the text presents an argumentation performed by some character, argumentative speech-acts performed by the narrator of the story, and cases in which the whole fictional narrative text may be part of an argumentation, such as in classical fables. By using a plethora of examples, Sierra shows that authors of fiction produce argumentations in order to fictionalize, and they also—sometimes in the same text—produce fictional narratives in order to argue for a particular claim, in which case the argument could be analyzed as an indirect speech act.

John Butterworth's contribution is a detailed analysis of the various uses of the word "argument." He reviews an extensive bibliography on the topic, pertaining to argumentation theory, philosophy of language and philosophy of logic, and shows that different theoretical approaches (such as formal logic, informal logic, pragma-dialectics, speech act theory etc.) employ different but complementary notions of argument, depending on their theoretical and explanatory purposes. He concludes his careful analysis with the tentative claim that a theory of argument as an act is compatible with a theory of argument as an object. The paper ends with an invitation to consider what the theoretical advantages that Robert Brandom's inferentialist concept of assertion might bring to the study of the speech act sense of argument, a conception that bears resemblance to Robert Pinto's approach to argument.

In his tightly argued paper, Matthew McKeon makes the case that if a speaker argues for a conclusion by stating an argument, then they thereby *assert* the corresponding inference claim as opposed to merely implying, or conversationally or conventionally implicating it. The paper engages with a vast range of literature both in argumentation theory and philosophy of language, especially concerning speech act theory. McKeon considers *arguing for a conclusion* in its core sense, involves advancing what he calls an *a persona* argument, i.e., an argument put forward as the author's own for the conclusion. McKeon shows that, of all the alternatives mentioned, only assertion satisfies the following three conditions on the manner an inference claim is expressed: (1) that the arguer believes the inference claim; (2) that, if the statement of an argument made in arguing for its conclusion is true or acceptable, then so too is the inference claim it conveys; (3) that expressing the inference claim is a primary point made by the statement of an argument in arguing for its conclusion. None of the three alternatives to assertion mentioned above satisfies all the three conditions, and some of them, such as conventional implicature, do not satisfy any of them. Accordingly, McKeon concludes that when stating an argument in order to argue for its conclusion one asserts the corresponding inference claim, and does not merely imply or implicate it.

Romero and Soria's paper deals with the significant phenomenon of argumentation using novel metaphors as reasons, conclusions, or even warrants. This type of argumentative discourse is especially challenging for current normative models of argumentation, since the meaning of metaphorical utterances is particularly elusive and no appraisal of argumentation can be made before the exact meaning of the arguer's utterances is established. Having an adequate theory of metaphorical meaning is therefore paramount for argumentation theory. What Romero and Soria's paper shows at the same time is that analysing the phenomenon of metaphorical argumentation is also paramount in order to get an adequate theory of metaphorical meaning. Their suggestion that there is good argumentation that is indispensably metaphorical is both important and valuable for argumentation theory, and their thesis that only a

cognitive account of metaphors can accommodate this fact is in turn a key contribution to the theory of metaphor.

Thus, Romero and Soria's paper illustrates the interest of analysing argumentative communication in order to refine our knowledge of more general linguistic phenomena such as novel metaphors. Much the same happens with Lewinski's paper: by considering the way in which argumentative communication is usually conducted, Lewinski challenges two key assumptions of speech act theory, namely, that each utterance has one and only one primary illocutionary force (*illocutionary monism*) and that communication involves two and only two agents – a speaker and a hearer (*dyadic reduction*). Lewinski shows that these assumptions are far from warranted and, in fact, he argues for illocutionary pluralism as necessary to adequately deal with the analysis of argumentative polylogues. The examples that Lewinski provides show that, from an interactional perspective, the same utterance may be said to have several illocutionary forces, depending on the conventional role that it plays regarding the previous points made by one or another interlocutor, and it is only by taking into account this plurality of jobs that an utterance can play that we can make sense of some important rhetorical phenomena.

Cristina Corredor's paper has a different aim from those above. Like Lewinski, she also adopts an interactionist perspective in order to characterize the speech act of arguing, but her important goal is to also provide criteria to appraise argumentation. In this way, she illustrates the relevance of adopting a linguistic-pragmatic perspective in order to accomplish one of the key tasks of argumentation theory, which is to provide models to tell good argumentation from bad argumentation. As she points out, a speech-act account can do so on two grounds: on the one hand, by inviting us to consider the pragmatic conditions that determine whether a performance counts as argumentation or not, and on the other hand, by taking into account that among the felicity conditions for bringing about acts of arguing there are objective requirements related to the pretension of 'correspondence to the facts' that the illocutions involved in arguing amount to. Specifically, Corredor argues that these objective requirements are indispensable for understanding the role of warrants in acts of arguing.

Finally, in "The hermeneutic priority of *which* question? A speech act clarification of interlocutionary acts," Nathan Dickman adopts a hermeneutic perspective for which interpretation and appraisal go hand in hand in order to analyse the roles that different types of questions can play in dialogues. As he observes, there is one type of questions, that Dickman names *suspensives*, whose felicity conditions make it hard to think of them as directives, which is how the Searlean tradition thinks of questions in general. Dickman contends that suspensives are questions that genuinely open up dialogue and enable the fusion of horizons among discussants, showing this way their special interest for argumentative communication.

We think that this collection of papers illustrates the relevance and fruitfulness of a pragmatic-linguistic approach to the normative study of argumentation. As scholars working on such an approach, we can only thank the editors of *Informal Logic* for their enthusiastic reception of our proposal to produce this special volume. Finally, we also wish to thank the rigorous and inspiring work of not only the authors but also the generous reviewers of these papers, who have decisively contributed to increasing the interest of this promising line of research.

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