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Pragmatics for argumentation

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between argumentation and language has recently attracted a great deal of attention through various publications in the field of argumentation studies (see e.g., Boogaart et al., 2021; Hinton, 2021; Oswald et al., 2018; Oswald et al., 2020). In this paper I propose a historical overview of this relationship by narrowing the scope of my inquiry onto the various ways in which argumentation studies, over the last 50 years, have drawn on research in the field of linguistic pragmatics, which I will limit here to its speech act-theoretic and inferential traditions, respectively based on the seminal groundwork of Austin and Grice (Austin, 1962; Grice, 1989).

I first discuss various points of contact between the two disciplines, as they have been put forth by researchers in argumentation over time. I then articulate this overview around three types of contributions pragmatics has been able to offer argumentation scholarship: descriptive, normative and explanatory contributions. These correspond to the main research questions investigated within argumentation theory. The paper thus examines current work at the interface of argumentation and pragmatics that illustrates how argumentative research that seeks to answer these three research questions has been pragmatically infused over the last 50 years. I conclude with some thoughts on promising directions of research which demonstrate that the research potential of this interface is far from being exhausted.

1. Introduction

Argumentation theory and pragmatic scholarship have regularly met over the last 50 years, sometimes in very explicit ways.[1] This disciplinary interface has many times privileged the input of one discipline to feed research in the other, with pragmatics usually acting as a resource for research on argumentative practices – with some exceptions.[2] Yet, there is, to this day, no systematic overview of the numerous ways in which argumentation theory and pragmatics have been brought to bear on each other over that period of time. In this paper, I offer part of such an overview, structured in terms of the way argumentation scholars have integrated pragmatic insights in their research agenda.[3] In so doing, I will be covering the

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[1] This is for instance the case for pragma-dialectics, an influential contemporary theory of argumentation whose very name reveals that it heavily draws on pragmatic theories – in this case, classical Austinian and Searlean speech act theory infused with Gricean insights.

[2] See for instance Macagno and Walton's (2013) argument scheme-based account of implicature or Ilie's (2018) rhetorically-inspired pragmatic analysis of political discourse.

[3] I also wish to state that this overview is, for obvious reasons of space, necessarily partial, as an exhaustive account of the pragmatics and argumentation interface would be a book-length project. I hope readers will be forgiving enough to accommodate my omission of many studies and approaches which have contributed to work at this interface.

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theoretical, methodological, and conceptual benefits argumentation theory has gained from the incorporation of various pragmatic strands of research in the pursuit of its traditional research questions.[4] This contribution is to be taken, in the first place, as a review and discussion of extant connections between pragmatics and argumentation in argumentation scholarship.

Traditionally, at least in the Western Aristotelian tradition, argumentation theorists have sought to address three main research questions (RQs).

- RQ1: what is argumentation?
- RQ2: when is argumentation 'good' (valid, sound, cogent, reasonable)?
- RQ3: why is argumentation effective?

RQ1 tackles *descriptive* issues and addresses them through the study of the nature and scope of argumentative phenomena; answering RQ1 involves the generation of definitions, structural models, typologies, inventories of argumentative resources, etc. RQ2 deals with *normative* issues meant to illuminate the criteria under which the quality of argumentation can be objectively assessed; answering RQ2 has largely consisted, for logical and dialectical approaches to argumentation, in the identification of justified evaluative standards meant to demarcate sound from fallacious argumentation. RQ3 engages with *explanatory* issues related to the effects of arguments on audiences; providing answers to RQ3 has traditionally been part of the agenda of rhetoricians, who seek to identify the best available means of persuasion in any rhetorical situation – a prevalent strategy they have adopted to answer RQ3 has been to theorise the effect of specific linguistic and discursive resources used in argumentation (with a focus on rhetorical figures). The chief purpose of this contribution is to describe and assess how pragmatic insights from different theoretical strands have been so far solicited to help investigate these three research questions. I shall also argue that, unlike RQ1 and RQ2, for which fundamental accounts of the role of pragmatics in argumentation research have already been supplied, RQ3 still stands to gain from investigations at the pragmatics and argumentation interface.

In the next section, I discuss the reasons behind the historical development of the pragmatics/argumentation interface and account for the various contact points between both disciplines to better understand why argumentation scholars have found pragmatic research so appealing. Section 3, which covers a significant part of this contribution, focuses on RQ1's descriptive agenda and RQ2's normative agenda by offering an account of how different pragmatic models (speech act theory, Gricean pragmatics, conversational analysis, and relevance theory) have been used to better understand the nature of argumentative practices. In Section 4, I argue that RQ3's *explanatory* agenda has comparatively drawn less on pragmatic models, but that it has much to gain from the insights of contemporary experimental and cognitive pragmatic research, if we are to consider rhetorical effects from a more psychologically-oriented perspective. The conclusion of this paper considers future research directions.

2. Pragmatic insights for argumentation theory: contact points

The numerous bridges between pragmatics and argumentation are here described in terms of both disciplines' interest in communicative exchanges of meaning (2.1), inference (2.2), and perlocution (2.3).

2.1. Communicative exchanges of meaning

Trivially, argumentation is a communicative activity taking place between at least two parties, meaning that an argumentative discussion, by definition, qualifies as an instance of communicative behaviour. All features of communicative activities are therefore also found in argumentative activities. Among them, the production and identification of speaker meaning is of particular interest to us: just like they do in any communicative event, in argumentative discussions speakers exchange meanings.

One of the first reasons that explains the propensity of argumentation theorists to draw on pragmatic research is thus that the object of study of argumentation is, simply put, a subset of the object of study of linguistic pragmatics, the discipline traditionally devoted to the study of meaning in use. The consequences of this proximity are straightforward: chiefly, pragmatic principles of communication should also apply to argumentative interactions – and should be considered in their analysis. In the words of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, p. 2): "In our view it is first necessary to develop a theoretical conception of the use of language in discussions, such that it becomes possible to establish what are the principal problems that are likely to present themselves in resolving disputes and how they may be solved." The underlying idea here is that an understanding of human communicative practices is a precondition for the analysis of the specificities of argumentative encounters.

A strong indication of the fundamental importance of pragmatic insights in the study of argumentation is to be found, for instance, in the way the Gricean cooperative principle (Grice, 1975) has been adopted by many argumentation theorists, from

[4] For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I will not consider how argumentation scholarship has contributed to pragmatic research.

pragma-dialecticians, who use it to account for some normative aspects of argumentative discussions (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 75–80 and Section 3.2 below), to informal logicians (see e.g., Govier, 2018; Walton, 1998) who, in their focus on the pioneering pragmatic work of Grice, singled out and developed the idea that principles of interaction at play in communicative exchanges can be further specified to reflect the uniqueness of argumentative exchanges. Mention of research in *normative pragmatics*, which has been developed in the US for a few decades now (Goodwin, 2001a, 2001b; Jacobs et al., 2022; Jacobs and Jackson, 1982, 1992; Kauffeld, 2001, 2003, 2009; Kauffeld and Goodwin, 2022; van Eemeren et al., 1993), is highly relevant here for its extensive use of the Gricean framework: in particular (more on this in Sections 3.1 and 3.2 below).

2.2. Inference

The concept of *inference*, which lies at the core of many philosophical and psychological approaches to the human mind, is also prominently featured in both pragmatic and argumentation research. It can thus be argued that the two disciplines are concerned with very similar cognitive phenomena, with the proviso that there is a crucial difference between them, to be found in the different types of inference they study: pragmatics is concerned with *meaning* inferences (which I discuss below in terms of pragmatic inference), while argumentation is concerned with *argumentative* inferences (see also Oswald, 2018; Oswald et al., 2020).

Under Donald G. Brown's account, “to say ‘I infer’ or ‘He infers’ is to expound one's views, together with an indication of why one holds them, or to ascribe views to someone else, together with an indication of why he holds them. (…) [I]nferring is a matter of holding views and having reasons for them.” (Brown, 1955, p. 354). From this quote, it appears that the use of the term ‘inference’ encompasses both a *referential* dimension and a *justificatory* dimension: saying that we infer something from something else is thus not only making a reference to the views that we hold (namely, our representations), but also providing reasons for justifying them.[5] Moreover, because it is primarily concerned with propositional relationships, inference can be about different types of contents, covering the whole range of possible linguistic modalities (necessity, possibility, deontic, epistemic, etc.) when it comes to its verbal manifestations. For these reasons, inference is likely to be considered as the notion that lies at the crossroads of pragmatics and argumentation. In this paper I will construe inference, quite minimally and loosely, as the cognitive process by which one piece (or set) of information is combined with another piece (or set) of information in order to derive a third piece (or set) of information. That is, inference is, at its core, a *procedural* notion which, as it were, mechanistically articulates different sets of information. So defined, inference can then be further described by specifying three of its aspects: (i) the goal (or purpose) of the inference, (ii) both the input and the output of the inference, and (iii) the nature of the combination/relationship involved. These will allow us to distinguish pragmatic inference from argumentative inference.

To characterise argumentative inference I draw, for the most part, on Mercier and Sperber's account (Mercier and Sperber, 2009, 2011). In terms of its goal, argumentative inference is predominantly *evaluative*, as it is meant to assess the acceptability of a premise-standpoint relationship. This definition covers both the production and the reception side of argumentation: speakers perform argumentative inferences to come up and formulate arguments supporting their claims, and addressees perform argumentative inferences to evaluate incoming arguments. In the latter dimension, i.e., reception, with which this paper is concerned, argumentative inference is said to operate on a representation of speaker meaning and contextual information in terms of its input, while its output is a representation of a judgement of acceptability related to the quality of the premise-standpoint relationship. Regarding the nature of the relationship involved in argumentative inference, a range of possibilities emerge, encompassing for instance deductive, inductive, or abductive inferences (among others). From the perspective of argument reception, argumentative inference is thus at play when the addressee is prompted to work out whether the reasons offered by the speaker in support of their standpoint are normatively acceptable.

Pragmatic inference, at least in the relevance-theoretic tradition (e.g., Carston, 2002; Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995; Wilson and Sperber, 2012), is defined as an inference whose goal is fundamentally *interpretative*; pragmatic inference is triggered to identify speaker meaning. It takes as input a speaker's ostensive communicative behaviour (an utterance most of the time, but also gestures, eye gaze, or bodily postures in the case of non-verbal communication) together with contextual assumptions to yield, as its output, a representation of speaker meaning. Its nature, under this account, is non-demonstrative – meaning that the ‘engine’ can be deductive in format but that it can also operate on uncertain or tentative inputs (as opposed to formal deduction). Implicatures, moreover, are routinely taken to correspond to inferences to the best explanation (see e.g., Allott, 2010, p. 94; Bach and Harnish, 1979, pp. 92–93; Geurts, 2010). Pragmatic inference can thus be said to be at play when the addressee is prompted to work out an explanation of the speaker's ostensive

[5] Let us note that, so defined, inference is common to both argumentative and explanatory processes. Of course, at the production end of a given argumentative encounter, argumentative inference is solicited to deliver reasons that a speaker is likely to publicly endorse (as opposed to their actual, private, motivations for holding a certain view or behaving in such a way, which might not act as adequate justifications). In other words, the justificatory purpose of argumentative inference, in the production of arguments, amounts to generating reasons meant to foster the acceptance of the standpoint by the speaker's audience.

communicative behaviour. This, in a relevance-theoretic framework, amounts to identifying the contextual relevance of a given utterance.

From these characterisations, it is worth highlighting that under this perspective: (i) the output of pragmatic inference (a representation of speaker meaning) is also part of the input of argumentative inference, which suggests that the former can influence or constrain the latter,[6] and (ii) the procedural nature of inference shows an alignment in the research interests of both disciplines (i.e., pragmatics and argumentation). In this way, the objects of study of both disciplines can be said to partially overlap, which is one of the key motives for argumentation scholars to develop an interest in pragmatics.

2.3. Perlocution

Pragmatics and argumentation share an interest in perlocutionary acts. Austin, in his William James lectures, gives the example of persuasion and conviction when first introducing perlocutionary acts, that is, speech acts which "produce certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts, or actions of the audience, or of the speaker, or of other persons" (Austin, 1962, p. 101). Interestingly, persuasion and conviction are also the outcomes arguers want to achieve through their argumentative discussions. Even if there is room to argue that not all argumentation is driven by persuasive intent (see e.g., Aikin and Talisse, 2018; Micheli, 2011), much of our argumentative encounters are driven by an intention to get others to accept what we tell them – the resolution of a difference opinion, reached by one party surrendering its doubts as to the other party's standpoint, is embedded in the pragma-dialectical model of argumentation (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004) as the purpose and ideal outcome of any argumentative discussion. It therefore seems that the connection between traditional pragmatic accounts, such as speech act theory, and argumentation theory is only natural, as the former instantiates a formal apparatus meant to capture one of the *raisons d'être* of the latter's object of study.

As he comments on the scope of his account of successful conversational exchanges, Grice also leaves room for perlocutionary concerns in his characterisation of the Cooperative Principle. In Grice's own words: "I have stated my maxims as if this purpose were a maximally effective exchange of information; this specification is, of course, too narrow, and the scheme needs to be generalized to allow for such general purposes as *influencing of directing the actions of others*" (Grice, 1975, p. 47 emphasis mine). It becomes apparent, with this, that pragmatic research had already made room, in the set of phenomena that should fall under its radar, for the study of argumentation and its effects. This invitation, as it were, did not go unnoticed for long, and argumentation scholars accepted it as early as in the 1970s and 1980s (see Section 3 below).

In more contemporary research, the relationship between (verbal) understanding and accepting is at the centre of work on epistemic vigilance (Sperber et al., 2010), i.e., the suite of cognitive mechanisms humans have presumably evolved to protect themselves against misinformation. In this framework, which incorporates the main assumptions of relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1995), verbal understanding is construed as a cognitive mechanism by which an individual's cognitive environment gets updated, either through the addition of new information or through the strengthening or deletion of old information. Moreover, as the framework is also Gricean in spirit, this process is assumed to be guided by mechanisms of intention recognition: any communicative stimulus comes with an informative intention (the intention to inform an addressee of *P*) and a communicative intention (the intention to have the informative intention recognised) (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, pp. 54–64). In other words, part of the reason we understand what others tell us is that recognising that others have an informative intention is itself a reason to work it out and try to understand it[7]: recognition of the communicative intention thus acts as a reason to warrant pragmatic inferences which yield an interpretation of speaker meaning. Now, if we compare this process to argumentative inference (see 2.2. above), we cannot but note that argumentative evaluation, if successful, leads to similar results: through argumentative inference, we end up accepting a representation conveyed by the speaker, the difference being that in argumentative inference a reason is explicitly offered by a speaker to accept the claim. What this picture leaves us with is the idea that understanding an utterance and accepting a standpoint based on its premises are different inferential processes that (i) yield similar results and (ii) both rely on some warranting mechanism. This, therefore, leaves room to assess whether these two types of inference interact, and if so, how, which constitutes another fruitful contact point between both disciplines.

With such bridges between both disciplines, I hope to have shown that drawing on pragmatic insights to account for argumentative phenomena is a somewhat natural move. In what follows, I describe the descriptive (RQ1) and normative (RQ2) projects that, in argumentation theory, have instantiated this interface.

[6] An anonymous reviewer pointed out that argumentative inference could, in fact, also feed pragmatic inference. While I recognise that this is an important issue (also in connection to the work conducted by Macagno and Walton (2013)), the debate on the directionality of this relationship falls beyond the scope of the present paper. I refer the reader to other publications which touch upon the issue (Oswald, 2018; Oswald et al., 2020) for a few pointers in this direction. Thus, in this paper I opt for deliberately leaving aside the question of how the relationship between argumentative inference and pragmatic inference *should* be envisaged to find suitable answers to RQ1 and RQ2.

[7] See also Grice's (1957) notion of non-natural meaning (meaning$_{NN}$).

3. Extant instantiations of the pragmatics–argumentation interface

3.1. RQ1: the description of argumentative practices

3.1.1. Argumentation as a speech-act

Argumentation theorists have resorted to different pragmatic approaches in seeking to explore RQ1. Among several, perhaps the clearest domain of argumentation theory in which pragmatic influence can be witnessed is the work conducted around the definition of argumentation itself, with the following two theoretical frameworks as cases in point.

The first of these, pragma-dialectics, makes transparent use of speech act-theoretic constructs (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969) in its definition of argumentation as an *illocutionary act* made of several speech acts: "(…) argumentation can be treated as an illocutionary act complex. This act complex is composed of elementary illocutions which belong to the category of the assertives (…). The total constellation of the elementary illocutions constitutes the illocutionary act complex of argumentation (…)." (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984, p. 34). Its features set it apart from other, perhaps simpler, illocutionary acts, because (i) argumentation always involves at least two statements (which can be taken to correspond to Toulmin's *datum* and *warrant* (Toulmin, 1958)), (ii) argumentation realises two simultaneous illocutionary forces, namely *asserting* and *arguing*, and (iii) the speech act of argumentation cannot stand on its own and has to be functionally related to another utterance, through a relationship of justification connecting it to another assertion. Beyond their role in definitional tasks, speech act-theoretic insights have been incorporated in pragma-dialectics as ways of accounting for types of admissible argumentative moves at different stages of argumentation. In the standard pragma-dialectical account (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, pp. 57–62), argumentation starts with a confrontation stage, in which parties establish their difference of opinion, which is followed by an opening stage, in which parties establish starting points and common ground to determine whether a fruitful discussion can be conducted. Parties then enter the argumentation stage, specifically devoted to argumentation, and finalise the argumentative exchange in the concluding stage, which is meant to determine whether the difference of opinion has been resolved or not. Crucially, each stage affords particular types of speech acts: while assertives can be used in the confrontation stage to express a standpoint or in the concluding stage to establish the result of the discussion, they do not seem admissible in the opening stage, which is mostly realised by directives (challenging to defend a standpoint) or commissives (accepting a challenge or agreeing on starting points). Such a speech-act theoretic characterisation of argumentative moves maps pragmatic categories onto argumentative categories, and in so doing refines the description of argumentative practices.

Lilian Bermejo Luque's linguistic normative model of argumentation (Bermejo Luque, 2011) is another model which defines argumentation in speech act-theoretic terms, with some notable differences with respect to the pragma-dialectical model: for instance, unlike pragma-dialecticians, Bermejo Luque considers that an attempt to convince is not a necessary condition of acts of arguing, that both *adducing* and *concluding* should be the two constitutive speech acts of the speech act complex of arguing, and that, crucially, the act of concluding is paramount in defining argumentation as a speech act, as this allows to specify correctness conditions for the speech act of arguing (see Bermejo Luque (2011 chapter 3) for a rationale). Still, Bermejo Luque also recruits normative aspects of speech act theory to describe argumentation as a practice governed by normative standards which amount to constitutive correctness conditions: in her words, "the constitutive correctness conditions of arguing come from the fact that whatever counts as argumentation counts as an attempt at justifying a claim" (Bermejo-Luque, 2016, p. 7). I take these two examples as strong evidence that traditional speech act theory has supplied a robust conceptual and theoretical apparatus to theorise the nature of argumentation.

Further push towards conceptualizing argumentation in terms of speech acts comes from scholars who investigate the complexities of argumentation in non-ideal, real-life communicative situations. Jacobs (1989) challenges models such as pragma-dialectics by turning attention to non-standard forms of argumentation, such as devil's advocacy, third-party arguments, or negotiations. Many of the ordinary felicity conditions for argumentation would not apply in such situations, and yet the activities in question are undeniably argumentative. In a similar vein, Lewiński (2021a,b) analyzes the workings of argumentation in multi-party, or *polylogical*, discussions. Resorting to the concept of *illocutionary pluralism*, he argues that in polylogues an arguer can perform a plurality of argumentative speech acts – e.g., support one speaker, challenge another, and concede a point to yet another one – with one and the same argumentative utterance. This, again, is a complication that standard approaches cannot easily grasp. The overall rationale of such work is to employ a speech-act theoretic framework to illuminate the complexities of actual uses of language for argumentative purposes – a task in which pragmatic and argumentative approaches neatly converge.

3.1.2. Argumentation as a cooperative endeavour

Grice's pragmatic model has also constituted a great source of inspiration for argumentation scholars who defend an understanding of argumentation as a purpose-driven communicative event. This naturally follows from Grice's vague formulation of the cooperative principle, which is ideally phrased to invite such undertakings: "Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by *the accepted purpose or direction* of the talk exchange in which you are engaged" (Grice, 1975, p. 45 emphasis mine). One could indeed observe that engaging in an argumentative exchange can very well constitute such an accepted purpose or direction, and, therefore, that all conversational principles that are at play in cooperative communication also apply to argumentative exchanges – albeit with some tweaks dictated by the specificities of argumentative practices. Although there is much room to discuss what Gricean cooperation exactly amounts to (see e.g., Attardo, 1997; Chilton, 1987; Lumsden, 2008; Oswald, 2010 for an overview), one can safely assume that a minimal degree of *interpretative* cooperation, i.e., cooperation in securing that interlocutors understand each other's utterances, is presupposed in all of Grice's work – the problem of behavioural cooperation, which denotes states of affairs like behaving in a helpful, polite, complying, etc. way, is yet a different question. Coming back to the cooperative principle, the vagueness of its formulation is precisely what allowed pragmaticians to explore specific types of communication in more detail; I'm thinking, for instance, of Leech's rendition of cooperation in his *politeness principle* (Leech, 1983, 2014) or of Raskin & Attardo's account of a cooperative mode of *non bona fide* communication in humour, through what they call the *cooperative principle for joke telling* (Raskin and Attardo, 1994). Over the years, argumentation theorists have also drawn on Grice's cooperative model of conversation in their investigation of RQ1 (see Goodwin, 2001b), building on the latter's pioneering model of goal-oriented joint conversational endeavours.

Among them, Govier (2018 chapter 7) has taken on board Grice's CP in her construal of argumentation as “a social practice of presenting and mutually evaluating evidence and reasons for our claims and beliefs” (Govier, 2018, p. 228), by noting that the description of argumentative practices could incorporate a principle of charity that audiences ought to follow in argumentative exchanges. This principle would mirror, as it were, the cooperative principle and the conversational maxims, which stipulate what speakers should do to behave as rational agents in conversations. Since the principle of charity is meant to “direct the audience to interpret an arguer's discourse in a way that will conform to the purpose of arguing and considering arguments” (Govier, 2018, p. 229), it allows the analyst to make sense of both the production and reception of argumentative encounters in a principled way, thereby increasing the descriptive adequacy of our accounts. The pragma-dialectical framework has also integrated Gricean insights for descriptive purposes (and for normative ones, see 3.2 below) by specifying the purpose of argumentative directions as the resolution of a difference of opinion and by articulating its theoretical apparatus as a description of the principles and structural patterns critical discussions should exhibit. A similar argument can be made regarding Walton's (1998) dialectical framework for dialogue types, which postulates a typology of dialogues defined by the different purposes argumentation can fulfil. All these approaches can be said to instantiate some form of cooperation in their construal of argumentation as a joint activity in which participants share a goal – hence the development of a cooperative view on argumentation.

3.1.3. Argumentation through commitments and presumptions

Pragmatics and argumentation theory not only overlap in their objects of study; they also make use of common concepts, among which are the pragmatic concepts of commitment and presumption, standardly used to describe how arguers handle each other's contributions in an argumentative exchange. The utility of these pragmatic concepts is that they allow argumentation theorists to precisely describe the management of justificatory argumentative moves in contexts of uncertainty and situations in which formal inference types, like deductions, simply do not apply. As a consequence, it can be argued that the tools of pragmatics are here privileged for their ability to adequately illuminate facts of naturally-occurring argumentation.

Commitment is a notion that originally emerged in the fields of pragmatics and the philosophy of language, but that has also had its own trajectory in argumentation studies. In both disciplines, the notion is related to that of responsibility and endorsement, as commitment is generally taken to refer to “what the speaker can be said to have ‘taken for granted’ in making his or her utterance” (Katriel and Dascal, 1989, p. 286). In pragmatics, commitment is often defined as a propositional attitude that is central in the recognition of communicative intentions– and specifically in comprehension (Morency et al., 2008; Oswald, 2016a). It has been used as a pivotal notion to assess the semantics/pragmatics divide (Meibauer, 2014; Moeschler, 2013), to characterise a variety of speech acts (assertions, promises, etc., see Kissine (2008)), or to navigate the range of phenomena related to lying and deception (see e.g., Marsili, 2020). In argumentation theory, the notion of commitment has mainly been exploited for its dialectical potential: because commitments are publicly expressed, they are traceable in argumentative exchanges and thus can be used to keep tabs on the dialectical obligations and moves of arguers (see e.g., Hamblin, 1970; Walton and Krabbe, 1995).

Looking at commitment in terms of Brandom's (1994) model furthermore allows us to understand why the concept of assertoric commitment, in particular, is equally appealing to both disciplines. The undertaking of a Brandomian assertoric commitment is said to come with the willingness to justify one's commitment:

> (…) the sort of commitment involved in linguistic asserting involves the undertaking of a specifically *justificatory* responsibility for what is claimed. In asserting a sentence, one not only licenses further assertions (for others and for oneself) but commits oneself to justifying the original claim. (Brandom, 1994, p. 172 emphasis mine)

In other words, assertoric commitment involves a willingness to engage in argumentation and thus comes with a *burden of proof*, namely an obligation to defend a claim one makes in case it is challenged. Interestingly, this makes commitment have as much to do with truth conditions as with behaviour in interaction, thereby revealing it as a fundamental theoretical notion to discuss argumentative practices, in which arguers incur an obligation to defend a standpoint once they assert it.[8] This testifies,

[8] See also rule 2 of the pragma-dialectical ideal model of the critical discussion: “Discussants who advance a standpoint may not refuse to defend this standpoint when requested to do so” (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 191).

once more, to the relevance of pragmatic notions for argumentation theory, when it comes to better describe the types of obligations speakers incur in argumentative exchanges.

The notion of *presumption*, which is common in pragmatic literature (Levinson, 2000), has also been discussed in argumentation theory (Godden, 2022; Kauffeld, 2001, 2003, 2009; Kauffeld and Goodwin, 2022; Macagno, 2012; Moldovan, 2016), notably in the context of possible developments of Grice's inferential model of communication (Goodwin, 2001b). Typically defined as context-dependent expectations about an agent's behaviour in a communicative exchange, presumptions are related to commitments in the way dialectical encounters are conducted.[9] Lewiński (2017) and Witek (2021) expose deep theoretical ties between the concept of presumption as used in argumentation theory and in pragmatics. Both of them undertake to elucidate the former in terms of the latter, arguing that Gricean maxims, felicity conditions for various speech acts, and rules of presupposition accommodation (see Lewis, 1979) can fully account for the functioning of presumptions in argumentative discussions. This moreover goes to show that without classical Gricean and speech act-theoretic pragmatic apparatuses, no illuminating discussion of the relationship between propositional contents exchanged in argumentative dialogues and the commitments and presumptions they index can take place.

3.1.4. Rhetorical aspects of argumentation

Within argumentation theory, rhetoricians have also identified the relevance of Grice's model to describe traditional issues pertaining to the rhetorical effects of argumentation on audiences. Dascal & Gross, in their (1999) work on rhetorical transactions, provide a cognitive reading of Aristotelian rhetoric. They amend Grice's framework to describe persuasive interactions, building on the idea of communicative causality that stems from Grice's characterisation of non-natural meaning as involving the recognition of communicative intentions – and their causal role in comprehension (see 2.3 above). Through this work, the traditional categories of *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, are reinterpreted as “products of inference” (Dascal and Gross, 1999, p. 117) to account for audience reactions to persuasion. In a recent paper, Herman (2022) pursues this direction by providing a novel inferential account of *ethos* which describes the latter as the result of pragmatic inferences (many times weak implicatures) drawn in the course of argumentative encounters. Interestingly, Herman is led to postulate that the study of *ethos*, as a rhetorical notion, should be integrated in pragmatic research, thereby illustrating the proximity between both disciplines, and specifically how pragmatic concepts can illuminate rhetorical notions.

A similar line of inquiry can be found in Tindale's work on relevance and audience reception (Tindale, 1992, 2015, 2022). While Tindale here builds on the relevance-theoretic notion of cognitive environment,[10] the general Gricean spirit of his description of rhetorical situations is palatable in that intention-recognition processes are central in his model. Tindale thus tackles the notion of relevance, which is already present in many normative models of argumentation, but instead examines how it can be operationalised to account for the *effect* of argumentative discourse on addressees. He is thus led to discuss how the relevance of premises may vary from one audience to the next, how irrelevance can accordingly be turned into relevance, and, eventually how the degree-sensitive nature of relevance (or perceived relevance) can be harnessed to better guide the reconstruction of argumentative discourse (see also Section 3.1.5 below). Here, too, the power of pragmatic models can be appreciated in the way argumentation theorists have recruited pragmatic insights for the description of argumentative (rhetorical) phenomena.

3.1.5. Implicit premises and standpoints

Just like standard non-argumentative exchanges, argumentative discussions carry their fair share of implicit meaning. Naturally occurring arguments are notoriously messy, in that (i) they do not naturally exhibit clear-cut structures and (ii) they contain implicit material. Incidentally, it should be noted that this is one of the important facts about argumentation that prompted for the need to develop informal models that would allow analysts to go beyond the limits of formal models of inference for the description of real-life argumentation: natural language is vague, ambiguous, imprecise, and in many cases formal models are just too rigid to hope to capture everything that is going on at the discursive level. Analysts (and addressees as well, for that matter), must put in significant amounts of interpretative work to figure out speaker meaning and its argumentative articulations: when the argumentative message lacks argumentative indicators, it is indeed up to the addressee's inferential competence to identify the premise-standpoint relationships implicitly put forward by the speaker. In the process, misunderstandings may occur, and the analysis might yield a representation that does not correspond to speaker meaning. Accordingly, argumentation theorists have turned to pragmatic insights on speaker meaning in order to ground their analyses (see Oswald, 2016a for an overview).

Pragma-dialectics, for instance, follows deductivistic patterns of reconstruction that are infused with pragmatic considerations about speaker meaning, by working out the logical minimum and the pragmatic optimum of any argumentation so as to plausibly reconstruct it (see also Gerritsen, 2001). Becker (2012) conducts a thorough discussion of commitment to highlight the need for pragmatic input in argument analysis. Oswald (2016a) proposes a relevance-theoretic procedure for the identification of implicit premises and/or standpoints as a plausible criterion in the reconstruction of implicit argumentative

[9] I will not elaborate more on the notion of presumption but refer the reader to Kauffeld and Goodwin's (2022) piece on the topic, which provides an important overview of the role of presumptions in argumentation and how to account for them.

[10] Sperber & Wilson define a cognitive environment as the set of assumptions that are manifest to an individual (Sperber and Wilson, 1995, p. 39).

discourse. Beyond their specificities, all these accounts are animated by the same concern: we need pragmatic theories to better describe what is going on in real-life argumentation.

3.1.6. Conversational emergence of argumentative structures

Some approaches to argumentation have drawn on yet other areas of pragmatic research to investigate issues related to RQ1, notably in terms of the conversational dynamics of argumentative exchanges. Jacobs and Jackson (1982, 1992), for instance, develop a procedural view of argumentation construed as a public practice meant to manage disagreement, based on principles rooted in conversational analysis (henceforth CA, e.g., Sacks et al., 1974). Owing to its sociological underpinnings, CA research focuses on how conversational participants behave in interaction through a rigorous and objective description of stable interactional practices (i.e., routines) that make a normative account of interactions possible. In doing that, CA coined several notions, such as *turn-taking*, *repair*, *action formation ascription*, *adjacency pairs* and *action sequencing*, which, over the years, have become crucial to describe conversational dynamics. Drawing on this framework, Jackson & Jacobs have come to functionally define arguments as “interactionally emergent structures organised around the function of managing disagreement” (Jacobs and Jackson, 1992, p. 161). Argumentative sequences are accordingly structurally described as “disagreement relevant expansion[s]” (Jacobs and Jackson, 1982, p. 224) which function as resources for speakers who disagree and want to do something about it. In so doing, these authors highlight the “communicative and interactional foundations” (Jacobs et al., 2022, p. 19) of argumentation, which can only be approached through a pragmatic framework. It is thus easy to see how a pragmatic framework meant to describe conversational dynamics can be summoned to analyse the specificities of argumentative discourse and better understand how argumentative moves relate to one another within the same discussion, based on their ability to fulfil goals and sub-goals in the discursive management of disagreement.

CA insights have also been used to shed light on developmental aspects of argumentative skills, as they allow for careful analysis of argumentative interactions involving children. In a recent study of the way children between 2 and 6 manage adversative constructions with argumentative connectives, Rocci et al. (2020) have been able to show that young children do exploit adversative argumentative structures and that they can even use them to manage implicit meanings in argumentation. In another study on primary school children interactions, Mundwiler and Kreuz (2018) have been able to show how argumentation can be cooperatively managed in small groups in quite complex ways, and for different purposes, such as handling disagreement or securing agreement. All in all, these studies, once again, testify to the advantages pragmatic insights have to offer when it comes to describing the reality of argumentative practices.

This partial overview of the pragmatics–argumentation interface has allowed us to appreciate the extent to which pragmatics has informed many descriptive tasks involved in the *description* of argumentative facts. In what follows, I move on to assessing how pragmatic input has informed research questions related to *normative* aspects of argumentation.

3.2. RQ2: the evaluation of argumentative practices

As noted above, the pragma-dialectical framework has largely drawn on speech act theory and on the Gricean conversational model to cater for descriptive issues related to RQ1. Yet, this is not the only way in which pragma-dialectics has integrated these frameworks: the latter have also been used to fulfil normative functions.

The cooperative principle has for instance been integrated into a *communicative principle* that arguers should observe, and which reframes Grice's conversational maxims as felicity conditions for the successful performance of speech acts of argumentation. In a nutshell, this principle adapts the maxims to enjoin arguers not to perform incomprehensible, insincere, redundant, meaningless or irrelevant speech acts (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 77). Rule number 10 of the critical discussion, moreover, straightforwardly echoes Grice's maxim of Manner (and its submaxims): “Discussants may not use any formulations that are insufficiently clear or confusingly ambiguous, and they may not deliberately misinterpret the other party's formulations” (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 2004, p. 195). The originality of this account lies in the fact that an argument that is deemed to violate this particular rule is considered to be fallacious – in other words, a violation of the communicative principle, which is an issue of verbal formulation, represents a fallacious move in a critical discussion meant to resolve a difference of opinion, precisely because it is detrimental to the fulfilment of this goal. Interestingly, thus, pragmatic principles related to how speaker meaning is conveyed have become normative standards allowing to identify a class of fallacious arguments. Lewiński and Oswald (2013; Oswald and Lewiński, 2014) have further shown how the Gricean and relevance-theoretic principles for reconstructing the commitments of speakers, via various forms of pragmatic inference, serve normative functions in argumentative contexts. All plausibly reconstructible commitments can be legitimate targets of argumentative critique and attack. Yet, precisely due to their sophisticated pragmatic status, such implicit commitments can also deceptively cover up their own fallaciousness. In their study of the straw man fallacy, Lewiński and Oswald thus show how an integration of pragmatic and argumentative frameworks is necessary in the task of grasping both the normative ‘wrongness’ of fallacious moves (RQ2) and their contextual deceptiveness (RQ3).

Similarly, speech act-theoretic felicity conditions have also been used to model norms of argumentation. Both the pragma-dialectical framework (van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984) and the linguistic normative model of argumentation (Bermejo Luque, 2011) specify identity and correctness conditions for the speech act complex of arguing. In turn, this allows the analyst to distinguish good from bad argumentation on a pragmatic basis. New developments in speech act theory (see in particular the contributions contained in Fogal et al., 2018; and Sbisà, 2019) are increasingly concerned with norms of conversation, be they of an argumentative nature or not, and have been able to show how various types of speech acts – covert or backdoor speech act in particular (Langton, 2018) – may have concrete consequences on interaction (see McGowan, 2018a, and 2018b on permissibility norms; and Mendelberg, 2017 on norms of equality).

Another pragmatically-inspired discussion of normative questions in argumentation theory is found in Walton's (1995) pragmatic theory of fallacy, which builds on Grice's idea of cooperativeness, the importance of context and presumptions about conversational behaviour (see also 3.1.3 above). In Walton's account, fallacies are defined as conversational arguments which are presented as contributing to the purpose of the conversation, but which instead interfere with it. Fallacies are thus defined as uncooperative dialogue moves, and their fallaciousness is contextually bound, given that what is admissible in a particular dialogue type drives is what drives these evaluative judgements.

Despite being grounded in philosophy, logic and epistemology, from which it has drawn most of its normative criteria, it therefore appears, as we have seen, that argumentation theory has also explored pragmatic scholarship in depth to extract normative standards from the study of meaning. The question that remains to be treated is thus the explanatory question RQ3.

4. RQ3: the explanation of facts of argumentation

It should now be quite apparent that today's argumentative landscape is heavily infused with pragmatic research, both at the theoretical and methodological levels, and specifically in what regards the development of descriptive and normative issues within the discipline. I hope to have shown that there are serious grounds to consider that pragmatics plays more than an ancillary role in the study of argumentation. In fact, pragmatics has allowed argumentation theory to develop models that are both *descriptively* adequate and *normatively* adequate – meaning that their descriptive and their normative accounts are adequate enough to reflect actual argumentative practices. Yet, I would argue that current models of argumentation are not necessarily explanatorily adequate enough when it comes to explain *why* argumentation can be effective in securing persuasive, or more generally rhetorical, effects. By analogy to Chomsky's construal of *explanatory adequacy* (Chomsky, 1964; Rizzi, 2016), which characterises any grammatical model that achieves descriptive adequacy while at the same time providing general principled reasons for choosing it over alternative models, the type of explanatory adequacy referred to here is meant to denote any account of argumentation that is able to tell you *why* things happen as they do in argumentative reality. And specifically, I am interested here in questions of rhetorical effectiveness of argumentation.

Understanding why any given argumentative device is rhetorically effective amounts to much more than identifying that the use of said argumentative device correlates with a particular type of rhetorical effect. Ideally, we would want an account that gives justified reasons, in the form of cause-to-effect relationships, telling us why, when, and under which conditions that happens. With this, I want to argue that the question of persuasiveness (taken very broadly as the typical range of perlocutionary effects of argumentation, for lack of a better terminological alternative), in argumentation theory, is ultimately a psychological – or cognitive – one. Understanding why an argument is persuasive requires an understanding of how it is processed by our minds.[11] In turn, it follows that explanatory adequacy, for questions of persuasiveness, can only be reached once we are able to account for the cognitive processing of argumentative discourse.

Moreover, and keeping in mind the dynamics of real-life argumentation as it unfolds between actual conversational participants, the kind of cognitive account that is needed to explain rhetorical effects is one that is attuned to the specificities of communicative practices. This is because rhetorical effectiveness can denote a range of responses to argumentation, from straightforward epistemic effects on the beliefs of the addressee, to conversational effects such as derailing the course of the conversation or favouring one kind of response (say, an attack or a defence), and attitudinal or affective effects that are likely to influence decision making processes in addressees (this list is of course not exhaustive, see De Oliveira Fernandes and Oswald (forth.) for an extensive discussion of rhetorical effectiveness). In other words, we need an account of how argumentative utterances are likely to be processed and of which responses they are likely to trigger in their addressees – that is, a cognitive pragmatic account of meaning in communication. I have argued elsewhere (Oswald, 2010, 2016b, 2018, 2020) that relevance theory (Sperber and Wilson, 1986, 1995; Wilson and Sperber, 2012) can be such a model, because it offers exactly the kind of cognitive architecture needed to account for the way verbal input is processed and for the kind of reactions/responses that are likely to be deemed contextually relevant by their addressees.[12] Moreover, there are grounds to consider that its account of verbal comprehension can be extended to cover perlocutionary phenomena such as persuasive outcomes of argumentative discourse as well. From a theoretical perspective, therefore, the rationale for using a pragmatic framework to tackle *explanatory* questions is already laid out.

There are also empirical justifications to support the use of a cognitive pragmatic framework to investigate rhetorical effectiveness, as recent experimental studies have tried to illuminate perlocutionary issues at the interface of pragmatics and argumentation. The field of *experimental pragmatics* (Noveck, 2018; Noveck and Sperber, 2004) has steadily grown over the years into a full-fledged research programme on communicative meaning, with a clear opening towards perlocutionary concerns. Mazzarella et al.'s (2018) study, for instance, has convincingly shown, through controlled experiments, that

[11] Let me add here that this by no means necessitates that we abstract from social and cultural processes, which are part and parcel of persuasion. However, one could argue that they can be brought to bear as constraints on cognitive processing, and, as such, that they are part of the cognitive modelling envisaged here.

[12] For a sample analysis of rhetorical effectiveness in terms of conversational dynamics, see Oswald's (2014) analysis of an excerpt of the Hollande-Sarkozy debate for the French presidential election in 2012, which shows how constraints on meaning impact the rhetorical level.

implying a message that turns out to be false is more advantageous for speakers, in terms of perceived trustworthiness and likelihood to face sanctions, than asserting the same message. The gist of the explanation has to do with how differently committing implicit and asserted meanings are. Bonalumi et al.'s (2019) study is another example of an experimental pragmatic approach to perlocutionary questions (in this case, the committing nature of promises and the extent to which speakers are blameworthy when promising implicitly or explicitly and not delivering on the promise) which shows that what seems to matter, more than the explicit vs. implicit nature of the message, is how contextually relevant it was perceived to be by participants. Again, the link between what speakers *mean* and perlocutionary effects triggered by the processing of speaker meaning is at the forefront of this type of approach, thereby illustrating the potential of experimental pragmatic research for the investigation of perlocutionary effects of argumentative discourse (and rhetorical effects in particular).

Experimental pragmatic investigations of argumentative phenomena are moreover starting to develop in the field. Let me mention two examples. Schumann et al. (2019, 2020), for instance, have shown how the use of connectives, the exploitation of informational structure and types of reported speech are likely to impact the persuasiveness of the straw man fallacy. In other words, these experimental studies have allowed to connect the linguistic dimension of meaning resources to the argumentative dimension of fallacious inference, thus exhibiting an interaction between linguistic tweaks and rhetorical effects. A related research project, on the rhetorical aspects of rephrase, has recently gathered experimental evidence for the persuasive power of rephrase; Koszowy et al. (2022) indeed showed that rephrasing a speech segment, either by specifying or by generalising it, increases its persuasiveness, as opposed to not rephrasing it. Interestingly, these results suggest that rephrasing strategies have a similar effect to that of full-fledged arguments (like arguments from consequences, which the authors included for comparison in their study). Younis et al. (under revision, this volume) further develop this line of investigation by zooming into types of rephrase and by experimentally confirming that participants find it persuasive without being aware of its argumentative nature.

All in all, these experiments represent promising new avenues of research for RQ3: not only do they frontally tackle the relationship between pragmatic inference and argumentative inference by showing how constraints on the former may affect the quality of the latter, but they also do justice to the idea that persuasion can be characterised as a cognitive state resulting from specific constraints on the management of information as inferences are performed. In addition, they provide an ideal framework to investigate the way linguistic resources are likely to impact the persuasiveness of messages: because of this, experimental pragmatics is likely to be able to ground the assumptions rhetoricians have been putting forward for centuries into plausible explanatory models of the human mind, and thus to enrich current rhetorical scholarship.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to articulate a principled overview of the argumentation and pragmatics interface, by assessing how (mostly) inferential approaches to pragmatics have been used by argumentation scholars to deal with (i) descriptive, (ii) normative and (iii) explanatory questions. In line with Goodwin (2001b), who defends that there has been a *pragmatic turn* in argumentation studies over the years, I have argued that pragmatics (mainly speech act theory and Gricean pragmatics) has played a fundamental role in the development of argumentation scholarship, as evidenced by its prominence in scholarly discussions about the nature, structure, resources, norms and effects of argumentation. I have also argued that research opportunities at this interface are still numerous, notably in what regards explanations of rhetorical effectiveness.[13]

This overview, as noted earlier, is of course not exhaustive, and could (or rather should) be expanded in at least three ways: the first would be to explore how all strands of pragmatic research (and not just inferential approaches) have informed the study of argumentative practices. The second would be to investigate the counterpart relationship of the one that was under consideration here, namely how argumentation theory has informed pragmatic research. Initial observations would indicate that argumentation theory has less to offer to pragmatics than the other way around, but they seem justified. First, verbal argumentation is a subtype of conversational communication, meaning that findings about the nature, principles and dynamics of communicative practices are likely to be more relevant for a better understanding of argumentative practices than the nature, principles and dynamics of argumentation would be for a better understanding of communicative practices in general. Second, only a portion of our knowledge of argumentative practices is likely to be relevant to better understand communicative practices at large: I am specifically referring here to work on different types of inferences, which can be exploited in the communication of speaker meaning (see e.g., Macagno, 2012; Macagno and Walton, 2013; Walton et al., 2008 for attempts to explore this particular portion of the pragmatics–argumentation interface). Let me however note that research on verbal disputes and the metalinguistic negotiation (see e.g., Chalmers, 2011; Mankowitz, 2021; Plunkett, 2015, 2016) represent a valuable resource to investigate this issue, in the sense that they are about conversations in which participants argue in favour of, or against, interpretations of their utterances. Finally, the third direction to explore would be to investigate to what extent experimental methods can provide evidence for the RQ1 and RQ2 issues pertaining to the descriptive and normative adequacy of existing accounts of argumentation, in the same way experimental work can provide evidence to support or reject pragmatic accounts of communication – see for instance Weissman and Terkourafi's (2019)

[13] See also the various contributions to a recent special issue on pragmatics and argumentation, which all instantiate research at the interface between both disciplines in different ways (Oswald, 2022).

study of false implicatures, which allows to support the view that not all false implicatures are lies, and which yields result that are additionally highly consequential for pragmatic models of meanings such as Levinson's (Levinson, 2000).

What can safely be said, however, is that pragmatic research has been part of argumentation studies for a while now, in many ways, and that it is (presumably) here to stay.

Declaration of competing interest

There is no conflict of interest to report regarding this research.

Data availability

No data was used for the research described in the article.

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