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Argument schemes: Extending the pragma-dialectical approach

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ABSTRACT: In the pragma-dialectical approach to argument schemes, each argument scheme represents a particular justificatory relationship that is supposed to legitimize a transfer of acceptability between a reason (or coordinative set of reasons) advanced in defence of a standpoint and the standpoint that is defended. The various argument schemes that can be used in an argumentative exchange and the way in which their use is to be evaluated are in principle considered to be part of the joint starting points that are by intersubjective agreement established at the opening stage of a critical discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. This contribution recapitulates and extends the rationale and general outlines of the pragma-dialectical approach. It is the first instalment of more encompassing series of studies that is to result in a monograph offering a complete overview of the treatment and categorization of argument schemes.

KEYWORDS: analogy argumentation, argument scheme, causal argumentation, Pragma-dialectics, symptomatic argumentation

1. THE NOTION OF ARGUMENT SCHEME

In the last two decades various theoretically-oriented publications have appeared about argument schemes.¹ Not much exposure however has been given lately to the pragma-dialectical perspective on argument schemes and the way in which it has developed since the late 1970s.² Recently the two of us have started a project aimed at explaining the pragma-dialectical theory of argument schemes and extending it with new insights. This paper is intended to be the first instalment of a more encompassing series of studies that is to result in a monograph in which a complete overview will be given of the current state of affairs in the pragma-dialectical treatment of argument schemes and their categorization in a theoretically motivated and empirically justified typology.

In the pragma-dialectical perspective, argumentation is aimed at resolving a difference of opinion about an evaluative, prescriptive or descriptive standpoint. Based on the starting points accepted as their point of departure by the parties in the difference, the standpoint at issue is in argumentation defended by advancing one or more reasons in its support. The reasons that are advanced in argumentation are intended to offer an informal justification of the acceptability of the standpoint at issue, not a definitive proof of its truth.³ When a standpoint can be proven

¹ See for instance Walton, Reed and Macagno (2008), Lumer (2011) and Wagemans (2016).

² The idea of argument schemes and critical questions in a dialectical testing procedure was introduced in van Eemeren, Grootendorst and Kruijer (1978). Van Eemeren and Kruijer (1987) give an account of the identification of argument schemes. In van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) the pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes is elaborated, while van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) give a detailed account of the pragma-dialectical testing procedure. Garssen (1997) presents an exploration of possible subtypes and variants based on a comparison of the pragma-dialectical typology and other prominent typologies of argument types. Van Eemeren and Garssen (2014) explain the pragma-dialectical view of analogy argumentation and its role in prototypical argumentative patterns in political argumentation. Van Eemeren (2018:) provides an update of the pragma-dialectical treatment of argument schemes.

³ Instead of an informal justification, an informal refutation can also be offered. For the sake of brevity, we will refrain from adding this all the time.

true by an immediate empirical check or a demonstration that it follows logically from true premises, doing so will suffice and there is no need for argumentation – or at most this proof could be presented as an irrefutable argumentation.

When the truth of a standpoint can be shown beyond any doubt by presenting a *modus ponens*-like formal derivation of the standpoint, the only step that needs to be taken in evaluating the argumentation thus advanced is checking the logical validity of the reasoning involved. However, in ordinary argumentation the reasoning is as a rule not explicitly presented in this way, so that carrying out such a check will usually not be possible – or can only be accomplished in an extremely artificial way. In ordinary argumentation the acceptability of a standpoint is in principle defended by linking the propositional content of the argumentation by means of a particular justificatory principle to the standpoint at issue. This means that the acceptability of the standpoint at issue depends on the suitability and correctness of the use of the *argument scheme* brought to bear in applying this justificatory principle.

There are various types of argumentation that can be used in defending the acceptability of a standpoint, each of which is characterized by having a particular argument scheme. Each argument scheme represents a particular justificatory relationship between a reason (or cluster of interdependent reasons) and a standpoint that is supposed to legitimize the transfer of acceptability from the reason (or cluster of interdependent reasons) advanced to the standpoint that is defended. The various argument schemes that can be used and the way in which their use is to be evaluated are in the pragma-dialectical view part of the joint starting points that are in principle by intersubjective agreement established at the opening stage of a critical discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits.

When the argumentation advanced in defence of a standpoint consists of a plurality of reasons that are in some combination or other advanced in support of a standpoint, it has a complex argumentation structure. Since each individual justification of a standpoint has its own argument scheme, whether it consists of a single or a coordinative argumentation (as in the case of the use of interdependent reasons), such complex argumentation may involve the use of more than one argument scheme. This means that, in principle, the argument schemes that are used in complex argumentation do not automatically pertain to the argumentation as a whole, but to its various justificatory constituents. Although in 1978, when we started to make use of this concept (van Eemeren et al. 1978), we had initially opted for using the term *argumentation scheme*, we therefore later decided for the sake of clarity to give preference to the term *argument scheme* (e.g. van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004).

2. INTERSUBJECTIVE PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATING ARGUMENTATION

According to the “Munchhausen trilemma” sketched by critical rationalist Hans Albert, there are three ways in which providing a justification of a standpoint will finally always come to a dead end. Two of them, circularity and an infinite regress, are indeed fatal. However, the third option that Albert distinguishes, breaking off the justification at an arbitrary point, is in our view not inescapable. If the justification process is ended when a starting point has been reached that is recognized by both parties, the justification is not concluded in an arbitrary way, but has a pragmatic basis in well-considered intersubjective agreement. This reliance on existing agreement, which may have been established explicitly or correctly presumed, is in fact quintessential to any serious conduct of argumentation. It is the very reason why in pragma-dialectical approach to argumentative discourse the “opening stage”, where the procedural and material starting points of the resolution process are determined, is considered vital to resolving a difference of opinion on the merits.

The pragma-dialectical rules for resolving a difference of opinion on the merits include a set of procedures for evaluating argumentation that are supposed to be intersubjectively agreed upon in the opening stage of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 135-157). The *identification procedure* involves determining whether a proposition called into question in resolving the difference of opinion is identical to any of the propositions which may be regarded jointly accepted starting points. If a proposition may be regarded to be part of the point of departure that has been accepted at the opening stage of the discussion, it may not be called into question in the argumentative exchange of the ongoing discussion. In order to allow for new information to be used in the argumentative exchange that is not already included in the starting points, the parties may in the opening stage agree to leave room for sub-discussions in which it is determined whether a proposition that was initially not agreed upon can be accepted as a starting point in the second instance.

Next there is the *inference procedure*, which is aimed at determining whether in cases in which the reasoning is fully externalized the reasoning “proposition involved in the argumentation, therefore proposition involved in the standpoint” presented by the protagonist is logically valid as it stands.

If the reasoning is *not* completely externalized, so that the argumentation cannot be logically valid as it stands, as is in argumentative practice generally the case, the question is whether the argument schemes that are brought to bear in the argumentation are admissible to both parties and have been used correctly in the case concerned. If it first needs to be determined which argument scheme has been employed before this can be decided, then the *explicitization procedure* needs to be followed, which is for this purpose added to the available pragma-dialectical tools.

To check whether a particular argument scheme has been used correctly, the *testing procedure* must be carried out. This procedure consists of asking the critical questions appropriate for checking the correctness of the use of a particular argument scheme. Each argument scheme gives cause to different critical questions, which open up different kinds of dialectical routes. For a conclusive defence of the standpoint, *both* the propositional content of the argumentation that is advanced *and* its justifying force must have been defended successfully in accordance with the relevant evaluation procedures. For a conclusive attack on the standpoint, *either* the propositional content of the argumentation *or* its justifying force must have been attacked successfully in accordance with the relevant evaluation procedures.

In the present context it is worth repeating that the intersubjective agreements that are part of the joint starting points established in the opening stage of a critical discussion aimed at resolving a difference of opinion on the merits are supposed to include the various argument schemes that can be used and the way in which their use is to be evaluated.

3. THE PRAGMA-DIALECTICAL TYPOLOGY OF ARGUMENT SCHEMES

In order to be able to carry out the pragma-dialectical testing procedure, a problem-valid inventory of argument schemes is required. This means that the inventory cannot be just a taxonomy but must be a theoretically-motivated typology that involves a categorisation relating to the properties of argumentation that are relevant to its evaluation. It stands to reason that in the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation the rationale for distinguishing between the various categories of argument schemes in a general classification has a pragmatic as well as a dialectical dimension.⁴

⁴ See Garssen (2001) for an overview of other kind of classifications of argument schemes.

The pragmatic dimension relates to the kind of justificatory principle that legitimizes in an argument scheme the transfer of acceptance from the reason advanced to the standpoint that is defended. This is in the pragma-dialectical view not a formal principle, as it is in establishing logical validity, but a pragmatic one, based on human experience, i.e. grounded in the practical justificatory experiences of arguers in ordinary argumentative discourse.⁵ The dialectical dimension relates to the dialogical evaluation procedure associated with the argument scheme that is used, i.e. to the critical questions that are to be answered satisfactorily in order to legitimize the use of the argument scheme concerned. When taken together, these two dimensions constitute the *principium divisionis* underlying the typology of argument schemes that is in pragma-dialectics presumed to be part of the intersubjectively accepted starting points for a critical discussion.

The three main categories of argument schemes distinguished in pragma-dialectics are “symptomatic” argumentation (also known as “sign” argumentation), “comparison” argumentation (also known as “resemblance” argumentation) and “causal” argumentation (also known as “consequence” argumentation) (van Eemeren et al. 1983: 137-141; van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 94-102). Symptomatic argumentation, to start with, is a type of argumentation in which an argument scheme is used that is based on the pragmatic principle of something being symptomatic of something else, i.e. the one being a token or a sign of the other. Symptomatic argumentation involves a relation of concomitance between the reason advanced and the standpoint defended (e.g. “Pinchao is a Chinese [and it is goes with Chinese people that they are diligent], so he is bound to be diligent”).

Comparison argumentation is a type of argumentation in which an argument scheme is used that is based on the pragmatic principle of something being comparable to something else, i.e. the one resembling or being similar to the other. Comparison argumentation involves a relation of comparability between the reason advanced and the standpoint defended (e.g. “Camera surveillance in the Amsterdam metro will be effective because it is also effective in the London underground [and the situation in Amsterdam is comparable to the situation in London]”).

Causal argumentation is a type of argumentation in which an argument scheme is used that is based on the pragmatic principle of something being causal to or consequential of something else, i.e. the one being instrumental to or leading to the other. Causal argumentation involves a relation of instrumentality or consequentiality between the reason advanced and the standpoint defended (e.g. “Because Alfonso has exercised very long [and exercising very long leads to tiredness], he must be tired”).

Because each of the argument schemes calls out its own set of critical questions, the three categories of argument schemes thus distinguished are associated with specific dialectical routes in resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. The differences between the dialectical routes instigated by the use of symptomatic argumentation, comparison argumentation and causal argumentation are in the first place determined by the basic critical question connected with the category of argument schemes concerned, which relates to the (usually unexpressed) bridging premise.

The basic critical question associated with symptomatic argumentation is whether what is claimed in the standpoint (Y) is indeed a sign of what is stated in the reason advanced (X) (or whether what is stated in the reason (X) is indeed a token of what is claimed in the standpoint (Y)). In argumentation of this type, protagonist P defends standpoint Y (e.g. Chinese Pinchao is diligent [PD]) against antagonist A’s doubt Y? (e.g. [PD?]) by advancing symptomatic

⁵ This is probably the same grounding in “native analytic categories” as Douy (2018) speaks of. This pragmatic basis, which is similar to that of the “ortho-language” of the logical propaedeutic of Kamlah and Lorenzen (1984), manifests itself in the various expressions by which the argument schemes are indicated in ordinary language (van Eemeren & Kruiger 1987).

argumentation X (e.g. Chinese people are diligent [CD]) and A responds critically by asking the basic critical question connected with symptomatic argumentation (e.g. whether being diligent is indeed characteristic of Chinese people [C//D?]), which will lead to an answer by P (e.g. [D//C: OK]) and may be followed by further discussion.

A simplified dialectical profile of symptomatic argumentation that only includes the just indicated dialectical route instigated by the basic critical question looks as follows:

1. P: Standpoint: Y [PD]
|
2. A: Y? [PD?]
|
3. P: Symptomatic argumentation: X [DC]
|
4. A: Basic critical question: Is Y symptomatic of X (Y//X)? [D//C?]
|
5. P: Answer to basic critical question: Y//X: OK [D//C: OK] (which may be followed by further discussion)

The basic critical question associated with the use of comparison argumentation is whether what is claimed in the standpoint (Y) is indeed comparable to what is stated in the reason advanced (X) (or whether what is stated in the reason (X) is indeed similar to what is claimed in the standpoint (Y)). In argumentation of this type protagonist P defends standpoint Y (e.g. Late-comer Vahid should not be allowed to participate [\sim VP<VL]) against antagonist A's doubt Y? (e.g. [\sim VP<VL]?) by advancing comparison argumentation X (e.g. Other people who did not meet the deadline in the past were not allowed to take part [\sim OP<OL]), to which A responds by asking the basic critical question connected with comparison argumentation Y=X? (e.g. whether your being late is indeed comparable to other people not meeting the deadline in the past [VL=OL?]), which leads to an answer: Y=X: OK (e.g. [VL=OL: OK]) and may be followed by further discussion.

A simplified dialectical profile of comparison argumentation including only this dialectical route instigated by the basic critical question is as follows:

1. P: Standpoint: Y [\sim VP<VL]
|
2. A: Y? [\sim VP<VL]?)
|
3. P: Comparison argumentation: X [\sim OP<OL]
|
4. A: Basic critical question: is Y comparable with X: (Y=X)? [VL=OL?]
|
5. P: Answer to basic critical question: Y=X: OK [VL=OL: OK] (which may be followed by further discussion)

The basic critical question associated with causal argumentation is whether what is stated in the reason that is advanced (X) leads to what is claimed in the standpoint (Y) (or whether what is claimed in the standpoint (Y) indeed results from what is stated in the reason that is advanced (X)). In argumentation of this type protagonist P defends standpoint Y (e.g. Alfonso must be tired [AT]) against antagonist A's doubt Y? (e.g. [AT?]) by advancing causal argumentation X (e.g. Alfonso has exercised very long [AE]), to which A responds by asking the basic critical question of causal argumentation (e.g. whether exercising very long does indeed always lead to

great tiredness [(T<E)?] or, more precisely, [((x)xT<(x)xE)?], which leads to an answer (e.g. [T<E: OK] or [(x)xT<(x)xE: OK]) and may be followed by further discussion. A simplified dialectical profile of causal argumentation including only this dialectical route instigated by the basic critical question is as follows:

1. P: Standpoint: Y [AT]
- |
2. A: Y? [AT?]
- |
3. P: Causal argumentation: X [AE]
- |
4. A: Basic critical question: Does X lead to Y? (Y<X?) [T<E? or ((x)xT<(x)xE)?]
- |
5. P: Answer to basic critical question: Y<X: OK [T<E: OK or (x)xT<(x)xE: OK]
(which may be followed by further discussion)

4. CRITICAL QUESTIONS: PRAGMATIC ARGUMENTATION AS A CASE IN POINT

Next to the basic critical question connected with the category of argument schemes that is brought to bear in the argumentation, in the testing procedure carried out in evaluating the argumentation there are always still other questions that the antagonist may be supposed to ask. Which other critical questions are relevant depends in the first place on the type of argumentation involved. Let us, in explaining what kind of further critical questions can be relevant in evaluating argumentation, by way of example concentrate on “pragmatic” argumentation, a prominent subtype of causal argumentation.

The idea underlying pragmatic argumentation is that we must do something because it leads to something we want to happen. Put more precisely, in pragmatic argumentation the prescriptive standpoint that a certain action should be carried out is defended by pointing out that carrying out this action leads to a certain desirable result – or, in the *negative* version of pragmatic argumentation, that a certain action should *not* be carried out by pointing out that carrying out this action leads to a certain *undesirable* result. The positive version of the argument scheme brought to bear in pragmatic argumentation can be specified as follows:

1. Action X should be carried out
 - 1.1 Action X leads to desirable result Y
 - (1.1’) (If action X leads to a desirable result such as Y, X must be carried out)

All critical questions asked in carrying out the testing procedure in order to evaluate the use of argument schemes pertain to the argumentation as it has been externalized by means of the intersubjective explicitization procedure. The basic critical question asked in this procedure always concerns the relationship established by the use of the category of argument schemes concerned between the reason that is advanced and the standpoint that is defended. When, as in the case of pragmatic argumentation, a causal argument scheme is used, the basic critical question therefore is: (a) Does action X indeed lead to result Y? As the bridging premise externalized in the explicitization of the argumentation makes clear, when the subtype of

pragmatic argumentation is used the next relevant question relating to this basic critical question will be: (b) Must actions that lead to a desirable result Y always be carried out?⁶

Other relevant critical questions included in the testing procedure pertain to the non-bridging premise of the argumentation as it has been externalized in the explicitization procedure (or to the non-bridging *premises* in cases where the argumentation is coordinative). Some of these critical questions concern the acceptability of such a premise or vital presuppositions involved in this premise. In the case of pragmatic argumentation the critical question about the acceptability of the explicit non-bridging premise (Does action X indeed lead to result Y?) has in fact already been asked because it happens to be identical with the basic critical question for causal argumentation in general. However, in the case of pragmatic argumentation another relevant critical question relating to the non-bridging premise concerns a crucial presupposition involved in this premise: (c) Is result Y indeed desirable?

There are also some further critical questions that are relevant to testing the acceptability of the use of pragmatic argumentation which are in a more indirect way connected with the critical questions just distinguished. They relate to the specific point of pragmatic argumentation that carrying out an action is justified by its desirability and refer to other possibilities or options that need to be taken into account when deciding about the adequacy of the argumentation. One of these critical questions pertains to the explicit premise “Action X leads to desirable result Y” (1.1): (d) Would another result not be even more desirable than Y? Two other relevant critical questions pertain in different ways to the unexpressed bridging premise “If action X leads to a desirable result such as Y, X must be carried out” (1.1’): (e) Does action X not have unavoidable undesirable side-effects?; (f) Could result Y not be achieved more easily or more economically by other actions?

If in the argumentative discourse any of the critical questions (a)-(f) is anticipated or answered, the argumentation involved becomes automatically complex. Then the difference of opinion at issue can no longer be said to have been resolved by argumentation that is pragmatic in the sense that it is conclusive by putting the difference in one go to an end. If, for instance, in view of critical question (c) relating to pragmatic argumentation, the desirability of the result that will be reached needs to be motivated since this desirability is not beyond doubt, the argumentation that has been advanced loses its pragmatic force of instantaneous effectiveness. In such a case the argumentation remains, of course, causal but turns from straightforward pragmatic argumentation into “complex pragmatic (problem-solving) argumentation”, in which the initial pragmatic argumentation is embedded in more complex argumentation. As always in argumentative discourse, it then depends on the argument schemes that are brought to bear in the argumentation advanced in answering the critical questions associated with pragmatic argumentation which further critical questions need to be answered in the continuation of the discourse.

5. SUBTYPES AND CONTEXT-DEPENDENT VARIANTS OF ARGUMENTATION

As we have indicated, pragmatic argumentation is a subtype of the general category of causal argumentation in which the basic critical question applying to causal argumentation is complemented by an additional critical question that focuses on the presupposition crucial to

⁶ Unlike in other subtypes of causal argumentation, the bridging premise relates in the case of pragmatic argumentation, due to the complex nature of this subtype, only indirectly to the basic critical question of causal argumentation: the causal relation at issue in the basic critical question is in pragmatic argumentation presumed. In evaluating the use of pragmatic argumentation, just as in evaluating the use of other subtypes of causal argumentation, the basic critical question is to be answered first before it makes sense to turn to the critical questions specifically relating to this particular subtype.

the justificatory point of this subtype that the desirability of the result of the action justifies carrying it out. The basic critical question of causal argumentation (“Does action X indeed lead to result Y?”) is in the case of pragmatic argumentation supplemented by the additional critical question “Must actions that lead to a desirable result Y always be carried out?”. Such subtypes cannot only be distinguished within the category of causal argumentation but also within the categories of comparison argumentation and symptomatic argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992: 97). Like in the case of the main categories, the rationale for distinguishing between the various subtypes is both pragmatic and dialectical. This means that each subtype should be characterized by relying on a specific justificatory principle based in human experience and leading to a different, i.e. uniquely specified, set of critical questions in the intersubjective testing procedure. By avoiding any differentiations in which these two preconditions have not been fulfilled our typology lives up to the old adage that “a difference that makes no difference is no difference”.

Among the other subtypes of causal argumentation are – to name just a few – argumentation from cause to effect, argumentation from effect to cause and argumentation from means to goal. The subtypes that belong to the general category of comparison argumentation include, for instance, normative analogy (argumentation based on a model, argumentation based on the rule of justice) and descriptive analogy. Symptomatic argumentation manifests itself, among others, in subtypes such as genus-species argumentation, classification, whole-part argumentation, argumentation based on criteria and argumentation by/from authority. Just as in the case of pragmatic argumentation, the basic critical question going with the general category of argument scheme concerned must in all these cases be complemented with an additional critical question in which the specific justificatory point of the argumentation advanced in the subtype is put to the test.⁷ By specifying the critical questions associated with the subtypes concerned, the dialectical routes instigated by the use of particular subtypes of argumentation can be succinctly described in dialectical profiles.

When evaluating argumentation, it does not only depend on the specific subtype of the argumentation at issue exactly which critical questions are pertinent in carrying out the testing procedure, but also on the institutional preconditions of the macro-context in which the argumentation takes place. The specific conventions of the various communicative activity types that have been established in a certain domain determine to some extent which critical questions are pertinent in a particular case and what shape they should take. This means that in dealing in the testing procedure with the argumentative moves that are made in justifying a standpoint by means of argumentation the general soundness criteria pertaining to the (sub)type of argumentation concerned that are expressed in the critical questions need to be specified or otherwise amended or complemented in accordance with the requirements of the macro-context concerned. This is in fact what should also always happen in applying the general standards involved in the rules of the code of conduct for reasonable argumentative discourse in evaluating any of the other argumentative moves that are made in argumentative discourse. In all cases it is to be considered in the philosophical component of the research program to which extent the reasonableness of the argumentative discourse is affected by the deviations from the

⁷ Although the pragmatic principles on which the argument schemes are based remain in all cases the same, for some subtypes the basic critical questions need to be reformulated in a slightly different way. A case in point is the subtype of symptomatic argumentation based on evaluative criteria, in which a value judgment is defended by pointing at certain characteristics. The basic critical question, “Is what is claimed in the standpoint a sign of what is stated in the reason advanced?”, should then be reformulated as “Is the judgment given in the standpoint implied by the characteristic mentioned in the argument?”. The argumentation in “This book is wonderful because it presents a vivid picture of the miseries of growing up” is to be questioned by “Are books that present a vivid picture of something wonderful?”.

model of a critical discussion instigated by the institutional preconditions of the communicative activity type – and additionally perhaps also by ideological preconditions.⁸

As a consequence of contextual differentiation, the soundness criteria for judging the use of a specific (sub)type of argumentation may differ to some extent depending on the institutional preconditions pertaining to the macro-context in which the argumentation is advanced. Imagine two people who are playing a game of scrabble. At a certain moment one of them claims to have compiled a long word, but the other one doubts that the combination of letters that has been laid out really constitutes an English word. Now the first player uses an argument from authority to defend his claim: “This is an English word, because it is in the dictionary”. Whether his appeal to authority is in this case a sound strategic manoeuvre, depends in the first place on the kind of agreement that exists between the players on how to decide whether or not a combination of letters does indeed count as an English word. The verdict on the soundness or fallaciousness of an argument from authority relates in this sense always to the starting point that is operative in the macro-context in which the argumentative exchange takes place regarding how authoritativeness is to be decided.

If the players have agreed at the start of their game that a combination of letters will be regarded as an English word if it is included in the dictionary, then there is nothing wrong with the first player’s authority argument – his argumentative move cannot be considered fallacious and is even likely to be effective. However, the same argumentative move would be fallacious if the game was played in a macro-context in which it has been agreed upon from the start that the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* will be the ultimate judge while in his argumentation the arguer is referring to Webster’s. The argumentative move would be sound again if the manufacturer of the scrabble game had imposed a binding procedure for deciding about the Englishness of a word upon the players that prescribes going by a dictionary without giving any further specification as to which dictionary. If, however, the players agreed at the start of their game that a combination of letters will only be recognized as an English word if they all know the word, then the appeal to the authority of any kind of dictionary would be irrelevant and therefore fallacious.

The various scenarios sketched in the scrabble example can be viewed as constituting specific macro-contexts that represent different communicative activity types or variants of a particular communicative activity type. In specifying who or what counts as an authority, the general soundness criterion pertaining to the use of the Argument Scheme Rule involving relying on a qualified authority is in each of them implemented in a different way. In the empirical counterpart of the opening stage of the exchange a crucial starting point concerning how the game is to be decided is in each case given its own specification. In the first case, it is defined by the parties by explicitly agreeing before the argument from authority is used that the dictionary should be the specific soundness criterion that is authoritative in judging the Englishness of a word. In the second case, this specific soundness criterion is defined even more precisely by agreeing, in addition, explicitly that it is the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* that is to be authoritative. In the third case, the soundness criterion is defined in the same way as in the first case, but this time this criterion is simply imposed on the players as a starting point for their exchange – in the empirical counterpart of the opening stage they only have to acknowledge what the criterion involves. In the fourth case, at the start of their exchange the participants explicitly agree on a starting point that boils down to only accepting a word as English if its Englishness is recognized by all participants – a starting point that changes the game more drastically.

⁸ In the various communicative activity types manifested in the different kinds of argumentative practices the “extrinsic” constraints on argumentative discourse may be to some extent determined by institutional as well as ideological (or “cultural”) preconditions or by a mixture of both.

In weakly conventionalized informal communicative activity types, such as a chat between friends, the specific soundness criteria applying to the argumentative moves that are made are often simply determined by the parties on the spot, when they are needed. However, these soundness criteria may also have been made familiar to the arguers in their primary socialization at home or at school, while they were growing up. In strongly conventionalized formal communicative activity types, such as a civil lawsuit, various crucial starting points, including certain evaluation procedures, are as a rule already partly or wholly given before the argumentative exchange takes place. Usually they have been explicitly taught to the participants in their secondary socialization, during their professional training as future lawyers or other specialised form of education. This institutional imposition of starting points, which happens particularly in strongly conventionalized and formalized communicative activity types, resembles in fact closely the third scenario just sketched. In practical terms in that case the situation is similar as in the case of exchanges with starting points based on an already existing agreement between the parties.

In the strategic manoeuvring taking place in the various kinds of argumentative practices of argumentative reality the various types and subtypes of argumentation may manifest themselves in specific, context-related ways. The contextually-determined ways in which a subtype of argumentation manifests itself can be viewed as different *variants* of the subtype concerned. In describing the various manifestations of argumentative reality in the empirical component of the research program distinguishing between these different variants is an important task.⁹ In this endeavour more precise distinctions can be made between variants that differ primarily in the kind of selection of the topical potential that is made (relating to differences in subject-matter), variants that differ first of all in the way they appeal to the audience (relating to different ways of associating with the listeners or readers), and variants that differ first of all in the choice of presentational devices (relating to differences in the means of expression). The general aim of this empirical research is to identify institutionally-determined variants of (sub)types of argumentation and provide accurate descriptions of the distinctive features of their sound and fallacious manifestations.

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⁹ When discussing the pragma-dialectical approach to the fallacies, van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992) already pointed out that, next to establishing general standards and specific criteria to check whether these standards have been complied with, typical manifestations of (sound or fallacious) argumentative moves need to be traced.

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