

Revisiting Argumentative Competence: Language Use and Indicators in Argumentation*

Zhixi Chen

Abstract. Argumentative competence, initially proposed in parallel to communicative competence, has been explored from multiple perspectives. However, its connection to language use remains underdeveloped. This paper advocates for a pragmatic approach to argumentative competence, examining both theoretical foundations and illustrative evidence, with a focus on argumentative indicators. We argue that a “non-formal, person-centered” logic stance and the essential role of language in argumentation necessitate a pragmatic perspective. Illustratively, we demonstrate that argumentative indicators function as pragmatic tools integral to argumentative competence and illustrate how they can be incorporated into its framework.

1 Introduction

The concept of argumentative competence first appeared in 1980s ([48]) and started to catch attention in academia (especially the field of education) in early 2000s ([6, 19, 31, 36, 44, 45]). However, “scholars of argumentation have shown very little interest in theorizing about the notion of argumentative competence” ([48, p. 619]), except for some sporadic comments and mentions (e.g., [41]). For this dearth, Hamble ([19, p. 442]) explicitly vocalized his expectation that “additional work” be stimulated by his discussion on arguing skills. Then what additional work can be expected with regard to argumentative competence?

To examine argumentation with respect to language use has a long history. It can be traced back to Aristotle, who examined the ways natural language may have impact on argumentation. More recently, argumentation is defined by some as “reason-giving use of language” ([41, p. 2]), which agrees in spirit with the objective of pragmatics, a discipline generally defined as the study of language use. This seems to suggest that argumentative competence could be approached from a pragmatic perspective. In what follows, we will argue, as some “additional work”, for a pragmatic approach to argumentative competence. We will explicate the pragmatics of argumentative competence with special reference to argumentative indicators. To this end, the

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Zhixi Chen

School of Literature and Media, Dongguan University of Technology
510332375@qq.com

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following two questions will be addressed: (i) Why is it necessary to approach argumentative competence from the pragmatic perspective? (ii) How can pragmatic knowledge of argument-related language use be integrated into argumentative competence?

To address these questions, we will briefly review in Section 2 the literature on argumentative competence. We will argue for a pragmatic perspective and specify its pragmatic constituents in Section 3. To further demonstrate how argumentative competence is manifested, we will examine a particular language form which epitomizes the pragmatics of argumentative competence, that is, argumentative indicators in Section 4. Later in Section 5, we demonstrate how argumentative indicators can be incorporated into argumentative competence. We conclude the whole discussion in Section 6 with some remarks.

2 Studies of Argumentative Competence: State of the Art

The notion of argumentative competence was first proposed in parallel to communicative competence by [48]. By this notion, they meant arguers' abilities in the "non-formal"¹ sense of "person-centered logics".([48, p. 619]) Different from communicative competence, argumentative competence is concerned with the reasoning aspect of communication, emphasizing the abilities to present, challenge, and defend positions in argumentation with consideration of both logical structures and social appropriateness, rather than abilities to conduct mathematical reasoning and produce demonstrative methods of proof as formal logicians do.

2.1 Defining argumentative competence

Although Yingling and Trapp did not provide a precise definition, subsequent scholars have attempted to fill this gap. [36, p. 488] defined it as the manifestation of argumentation skills in monological and dialogical contexts; [6, p. 466] emphasized its communicative dimension as "communicating appropriately and effectively in argumentative interactions"; and [26, p. 2] framed it as "the correct use of argumentation", focusing on error avoidance. Consensus remains elusive, but these definitions highlight skills in natural language persuasion over deductive proofs.

Drawing from [40]'s model of communicative competence, [48] identified three core components: knowledge, skill, and motivation. Knowledge encompasses cogni-

¹"Non-formal logic" is occasionally used in academic and philosophical contexts as a synonym or alternative phrasing for "informal logic", a more established term which designates the study of arguments and reasoning in everyday natural language, as opposed to formal logic, which relies on symbolic structures and strict rules. These two phrases don't represent distinct concepts with meaningful differences. "Non-formal logic" is used here to truthfully represent [48]'s discussion. For more information, see also [24, p. 94].

tive structures like scripts (generalized episodes from experience) and plans (abstract strategies for goal achievement), enabling efficient argumentative navigation. Skill divides into cognitive abilities (e.g., recognizing contrasts and perspectives) and behavioral ones (e.g., disagreeing and reason-giving to advocate positions and refute others). Motivation addresses affective drivers, where low engagement undermines competence despite strong knowledge and skills. These components underscore the interpersonal, language-dependent nature of argumentation, though their pragmatic dimensions—such as context-sensitive language use—remain underexplored.

2.2 Perspectives on argumentative competence

Argumentative competence has been examined from developmental, pedagogical, ethotic, and evolutionary perspectives, each revealing facets of its interpersonal and adaptive qualities while largely sidelining pragmatic language use.

2.2.1 Developmental perspective

[48] adopted a developmental lens, viewing argumentative competence as acquired rather than innate, evolving through the interplay of knowledge, skills, and motivation as individuals mature. Empirical support includes [1], who noted children's arguments often feature vague expressions, inexplicit conclusions, and missing warrants—deficits that improve with age, implying growth in language precision and argumentative structure.

2.2.2 Pedagogical perspective

Pedagogical approaches focus on assessment, often in educational contexts, evaluating competence via effectiveness (self-reported) and appropriateness (other-reported).([48]) [42] empirically derived a scale with five dimensions (instrumental, logical, skill, appropriateness, motivational), clustering into effectiveness and appropriateness. Later studies, such as [6], linked competence to traits and satisfaction in dyads, revealing self-rating biases; [26] showed error-based learning enhances students' argumentation in science education. These emphasize measurable outcomes but overlook pragmatic tools like indicators for real-world language adaptation.

2.2.3 Ethotic perspective

The ethotic perspective ties competence to arguers' character traits (ethos), influencing argument credibility.([5]) [47] argued for incorporating traits like veracity and openness into multi-agent models to boost plausibility. [10] described ideal arguers as dominant yet attentive, while [41] stressed credible, responsive ethos for "speaking

well” in rhetoric. This view highlights personal qualities in persuasion but underplays how language pragmatically constructs ethos.

2.2.4 Evolutionary perspective

Evolutionary approaches treat argumentative competence as a species-level adaptation shaped by natural selection and social factors. ([7, 9, 39]) [39, p. 174] defined it as establishing mutually beneficial beliefs and coordinating group actions, driven by cooperation, reputation, and niche construction. Competent arguing aids survival by enhancing resource tracking and reproduction. This perspective frames argumentation as an evolved faculty but neglects the pragmatic role of language in its manifestation.

3 Argumentative Competence: A Pragmatic Perspective

Argumentation theory has long acknowledged the role of language in argumentation. For instance, [33] pointed out that argumentation relies on a shared language and a common technique for communication. More recently, [41] defines argumentation as a reason-giving use of language, aligning with pragmatic perspectives that view argumentation as a socially situated activity. Similarly, [25, 46] treat argumentation as a type of social game carried out through language, further supporting the idea that pragmatics is fundamental to understanding argumentative competence.

3.1 Why a pragmatic perspective?

As pragmatics is traditionally defined as the study of language use in context, it is increasingly recognized as central to understanding argumentative competence. Argumentation is a communicative activity aiming to support or challenge claims. Successful argumentation, though inherently linguistic, depends on appropriate use of language. For example, Jewish culture favors unmitigated and unprefaced forms of language used in expressing disagreement or agreement ([4]) whereas American culture prefers the opposite ([11]). So, from the knowledge-based view of competence, our knowledge of language use can apparently be taken as a necessary constituent of what is believed to be argumentative competence. This constituent should be framed into a theory of argumentative competence.

First of all, a non-formal person-centered logic stance towards argumentative competence, as we see it, entails a necessary requirement of whole-person abilities with multiple dimensions, including that of the pragmatic. A competent arguer, under this conception, does not only make valid arguments in the sense of formal logic, but also need to take stock of whether the argument he/she produces is socially appropriate

and acceptable. To no lesser degree, he/she needs to be pragmatically able to make use of language to express argumentation in appropriate and effective ways.

On the knowledge-based view of competence, this stance requires that arguers have the knowledge of what makes an argument valid, the knowledge of what makes an argument socially appropriate and acceptable, and the knowledge of how to carry out argumentation effectively by making use of language. As [49, p. 621] observed, “argumentative competence ... has been found to relate to one’s developing general knowledge about language, interaction, and conversational structure.” For him, a complete model of argumentative competence should take account of these language-related components. The absence of these element, *by extrapolation*, may prevent a person from being perceived as a competent communicator and arguer. Besides, [48] has implied the possibilities of broadened perspectives on argumentative competence, saying “although the cognitive component of competence may be approached from a variety of perspectives, we have found the notion of ‘script’ ... to be useful ...”.([48, p. 622])

Secondly, argumentative competence was proposed at a time when the “remarkable revival” of argumentation studies ([12, p. 27]; [34, pp. 84–85]) since late 1960s was met with an ever-increasing interest in studying the relationship between argumentation and natural language.² Argumentation theorists are paying more and more attention to the important role of language in their studies. For some, argumentation is even defined with a view to language or concepts in linguistic terms. For example, [41, p. 2] sees argumentation as “a reason-giving use of language”; in a similar vein, [46] regards argumentation as a pragmatic notion that has to do with the uses of reasoning in a context of dialogue; [25] treats argumentation as a kind of social game carried out by way of language (“language game” of Wittgenstein); [13, p. 584] takes argumentation not simply as a “product” but also as a “(language usage) activity” which is subject to certain conditions.

When seen as a “reason-giving use of language” or “language game”, argumentation necessarily, and understandably, encompasses the essential reason-giving abilities of arguers, namely, argumentative competence. As [33, p. 15] pointed out, “the indispensable minimum for argumentation appears to be the existence of a common language, of a technique allowing communication to take place”. [20, p. 93] pointed out in a similar vein, “it should be clear at once that arguments are generally expressed in language, and that, therefore, it is both difficult to fully separate them and

²It has been well accepted among argumentation theorists as well as informal logicians that the study object of concern to them is the argument expressed in natural language, rather than the logical inferences dressed in such artificial forms as p , q , $\rightarrow$ and the like. Increasing attention among scholars had contributed to the inauguration of the international conferences (triennial): the *Argumentation and Language* (ARGAGE) at the University of Lausanne, Switzerland, in 2015, with two others recently held at the Università della Svizzera italiana, Switzerland in 2018 and the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland in 2021 respectively.

natural to study them together: Both their influence upon one another and the degree to which they get in one another's way". It seems fairly easy to ignore the fact that the "reason-giving use of language" or other phraseologies alike, at the same time, involve an ability³ to effectively and appropriately make argument-related language use.

Thirdly, observations and facts about argument-related language use, like the unmitigated and unprefaced forms of language used in Jewish and American cultures, have illustratively demonstrated how knowledge of language use in argumentation could contribute to argumentative processes. Two levels, at least, could be identified in this regard. They are argument-related language forms (for example, argumentative indicators), and argument-related speech acts. As for the first, research findings by [2] and others have demonstrated that linguistic indicators contribute to argumentativity of sentences (to be discussed in detail in section 4). On the speech act level, [3, p. 1] pointed out that competent arguers need to be able to make correct and appropriate uses of argumentative acts, saying "the practice of supporting claims with reasons presupposes the ability to take a reflective stance toward them: After all, it is because we may question whether our assertions are right or wrong that it makes sense to try to afford reasons to support them".

These observations and facts suggest that argumentative competence may involve the arguer's ability not only to recognize those argument-related language forms, but also to make correct use of the speech act in argumentative activities. Acknowledging such facts means having the belief that there is, in addition, argument-related language use ability, that is, to make particular argument-related language uses effectively and appropriately. It is a baseline kind of ability (being part of *argumentative competence*) and should be built in the reason-giving use of language.

When we take the three reasons into consideration, a pragmatic perspective on argumentative competence emerges not merely as an optional lens, but as an indispensable one. It underscores that competence in argumentation transcends logical validity alone, embedding it firmly within the contextual, interactive, and persuasive dimensions of language. This realization paves the way for a refined understanding of the concept itself, prompting us to redefine argumentative competence in explicitly pragmatic terms, as we do in the following subsection.

3.2 Redefining argumentative competence

Argumentative competence, as we have shown in 2.2, is a complex concept which can be approached from different perspectives. From the pragmatic perspec-

³An interesting idea about the ability to argue with respect to the role of language holds that it is language that "has created our ability to argue" and that "language is saturated with the elements which go into it". ([20, p. viii])

tive that we have argued for, **argumentative competence can be defined as abilities to use appropriate and effective language to achieve persuasion in context**. This definition views argumentation as a kind of language use and highlights the role that language plays in achieving argumentative goals in certain contexts, argumentative competence thus being a subtype of pragmatic competence. It is based on the following two theoretical presumptions.

First, argumentation is a social activity carried out by way of language. Argumentation, as we generally know, is social, as it occurs between people (even self-deliberation is projected as talking to oneself), and thus requires arguers to follow certain social rules or norms like those in the procedural rules in the critical discussion of pragma-dialectics (e.g., free expression rule) and those social norms (e.g., alliance leader norm) identified in the generalized argumentation theory ([25]). These rules or social norms are acquired in the process of socialization. This means that argumentative skills and strategies are developed in the process of socialization and the ability of argument-related language use is formed as part of the socialization.

Second, argumentation is a dynamic process of language use aiming at achieving persuasion. Among scholars, argumentation has been perceived as either a product, a procedure, or a process. In contrast to the view that argumentation is a product or a procedure, the view that argumentation is a process embeds it in contexts and takes it to be dynamic in the sense that arguers adapt to such contextual contingencies as the change of strategies, objectives, and even argumentative courses, and accordingly resort to appropriate and effective language to achieve the argumentative goal, that is, to achieve persuasion (in the rhetorical sense).

To persuade, arguers do not merely address the rational faculty of the audience but also answer to her affective needs. To implement persuasion, they appeal to logos, ethos, pathos and other possible methods of proof at hand and verbal language is the major means to express these proofs though non-verbal signs and gestures may also be used as in multimodal argumentation. As natural language lacks rigor and precision of formal language, there may arise linguistic misapprehensions and ambiguities which arguers have to pay efforts to settle for argumentation to move on. This means that argumentation as a persuading activity involves arguers' linguistic efforts, back and forth, to clarify, disambiguate, and rectify language uses.

Based on the two theoretical presumptions, argumentative competence can be characterized as developmental and persuasion-oriented. By "developmental", we agree with [48] that argumentative competence is not something that one is inborn with but acquired through socialization. In the process of socialization, one not only develops her reason-giving abilities but also acquires the ways that her language is organized to give reasons. By "persuasion-oriented", we mean that argumentative competence is manoeuvred in every possible way to achieve persuasion, including manipulation of linguistic devices at arguers' disposal.

3.3 The pragmatics of argumentative competence: Pragmatic constituents

Argumentative competence conceptualized in our way differs from that of [48]’s in that it takes pragmatic factors into account. It is composed of two essential parts: The reason-giving ability and the ability of reason-giving use of language. The latter part manifests itself as knowledge about how language can be used appropriately and effectively for achieving persuasion, i.e., knowledge about argument-related language use. Knowledge of this kind exhibits itself on three levels: language form, speech act, and pragmatic principle.

First, argumentation is a social dynamic activity, but it is presented primarily by way of language. As [20, p. 80] puts it, “the presentation of the argument may be crucial to its reasonableness, and certainly to its ability to convince.” Arguers need to be able to recognize the language forms in argumentative terms, such as argumentative indicators with argumentative orientations, as [2] and others have demonstrated, conversational organization institutionalized in language as conversational argument analysts (e.g., [23]) have revealed with regard to argumentative action, and sequences of argumentative discourses that leads to varying argumentative effects in accordance with different sequential orders and “modifies the conditions of their acceptance” ([32, p. 146]). In a word, argumentation processes involve linguistic efforts to recognize those language forms so as to make argumentative interactions more effective.

Second, competent arguers need to be able to make correct and appropriate uses of speech acts. According to pragma-dialectics, speech acts (such as assertives, commissives, expressives and declaratives) have particular roles to play in different stages of argumentation development. For example, the speech act of assertion mainly functions to take standpoints at the beginning of argumentation and make an argument or retract a standpoint at the debating stage. Likewise, “the practice of supporting claims with reasons presupposes the ability to take a reflective stance toward them: After all, it is because we may question whether our assertions are right or wrong that it makes sense to try to afford reasons to support them”, as [3, p. 1] pointed out.

Third, argumentation is subject to pragmatic principles. They guide the choice of language forms and the implementation of speech acts. One of the principles that work in argumentation is Grice’s cooperative principle (see [14, 23]), which plays instrumental role of explaining how implied meaning results from linguistic exchange. As in ordinary language argumentation, there is a lot that has not been expressed openly which needs to be worked out with the help of pragmatic principles.

These three levels—language form, speech act, and pragmatic principle—are interconnected, enabling effective persuasion via context-sensitive language use. Language form provides the base, involving linguistic elements that signal argumentative moves and structure discourse. These forms realize speech acts, such as asserting or refuting, manifesting communicative intent in interactions. Pragmatic principles, like relevance and clarity, oversee both levels, ensuring selections are cooperative and

adapted to context. This creates a feedback loop: principles inform acts, acts shape forms, and forms refine principled adjustments, fostering holistic competence as a person-centered “reason-giving use of language”.

In the sections to follow, we focus on a specific type of argument-related language form: argumentative indicators.⁴ We argue that these indicators are inherently pragmatic, positioning them as pragmatic knowledge ripe for integration into argumentative competence. We then tentatively elaborate on how this integration might be achieved.

4 The Pragmatics of Argumentative Indicators

Building on the pragmatic constituents outlined in Section 3.3, we now examine argumentative indicators as a key exemplar of linguistic form, illustrating their role in argumentative competence. A central line of inquiry in linguistic argumentation concerns how specific linguistic markers signal argumentative discourse. These markers, commonly referred to as argumentative indicators,⁵ serve as discursive cues that identify argumentative moves. As [15, p. 1] defined them, argumentative indicators are “words and expressions used in argumentative discussions and texts” that “often indicate that a particular argumentative move is being made”.

Extensive research has explored the nature and function of these indicators.⁶ The most acknowledged studies include [2, 15] and so on. [2] analyzed them as adver-

⁴While this emphasis on language form as a demonstration of the three pragmatic constituents leaves speech acts and pragmatic principles for deeper examination—such as how principles like Grice’s cooperative principle might elucidate the mechanisms of language’s interaction with argumentative processes, we intend this discussion as a preliminary exploration. It prioritizes building a pragmatic component into argumentative competence over exhaustive analysis or evaluation, given the concept’s inherent complexities.

⁵While discourse markers broadly cover linguistic elements that manage discourse coherence, turn-taking, and pragmatic relations, argumentative indicators are defined here as used in argumentative discussions and texts ... that often indicate that a particular argumentative move is being made (such as standpoint introduction, premise marking, or inferential connection). In other words, argumentative indicators are identified not merely for their cohesive or interactional role, but for their capacity to reveal the underlying argumentative moves and relations between propositions. Concerning the selection of terms, other scholars may use different terminologies instead of *argumentative indicator*. For example, [2] uses *argumentative operator*; [43] uses *argumentative markers*.

⁶[30] made a corpus-based comparative study of English and Italian epistential adverbs evidently and evidentemente as argumentative indicators. Their study reveals that the two adverbs in these two languages can serve as argumentative indicators both for premise-conclusion relations and for causal argument scheme from effect to cause, which can be used in automatic detection of argumentation and argument schemes. [37] examined children’s uses of such adversative connectives in different languages as *aber* in German, *mais* in French and *ma* in Italian. They find that in children’s speech, adversative connectives as potential argumentative indicators can be used to identify less apparent argumentative confrontations and implicit standpoints.

bial adjuncts (e.g., therefore, almost, barely) and linguistic topoi (e.g., This restaurant is expensive; you shouldn't go there), demonstrating their role in guiding argumentation toward specific conclusions. [15], within the pragma-dialectical framework, examined how argumentative indicators contribute particularly to the confrontation stage of critical discussions. These indicators function pragmatically by structuring discourse and clarifying the arguer's communicative intentions, thereby facilitating argumentative interaction.

4.1 Are argumentative indicators pragmatic?

Studies like the above focusing on the match between linguistic expressions and argumentative meanings (or functions) have brought to light a particular kind of argumentation knowledge that may remain out of awareness of native speakers, but immediately recognizable in the sense that native speakers, having internalized the knowledge, take the relation between the two for granted. An apparent theoretical justification for the unawareness may be found in Anscombe and Ducrot's semantic understanding of this relation in their radical argumentativism, which regards argumentative meanings as built in language *per se* and prioritizes argumentativity of language over its informativity which has traditionally been taken as primary for language.⁷

Is this relation between the linguistic indicators and argumentative meanings really semantic as radical argumentativism has commonly been so regarded? Or, in what sense is this relation semantic? The source of trouble to such questions lies, as ever, in the distinction between semantics and pragmatics. In the normal sense, semantics, as a branch of general linguistics, is the area that takes meanings within language system as its object of study, whereas pragmatics, as a counterpart to semantics, deals with meanings in the context of use.

Definitions apart, it is not always easy to make a clearcut distinction of semantics and pragmatics in practice. For example, Grice's conventional implicatures like even, but and therefore have been notoriously controversial as to being semantic or pragmatic. ([16, 17, 29]) In a similar vein, it is not easy to make such a distinction with respect to the argumentative indicators in our discussion. In what follows, we will argue that argumentative indicators are pragmatic from three perspectives, viz., terminology use of integrated pragmatics, a reanalysis of two typical cases with regard to contextual influence, and the socio-pragmatic bearings of argumentative indicators. Our point is that argumentative indicators, as a kind of pragmatic knowledge (knowl-

⁷[2] takes a non-truth-conditional semantic approach to the argumentative indicators and proposed a radical argumentativism theory which take argumentativity as an inherent feature of language (being semantic) and holds that "every form of language use has an argumentative aspect". ([12, p. 490]) It is interesting to note that the ideas of radical argumentativism have been taken up most recently by Martin Hinton who proposed a theory on the basis of semantics of informal argumentation. ([20])

edge of argument-related language use) should be taken as a necessary component for argumentative competence.

4.2 An answer in integrated pragmatics

According to [21], Anscombe and Ducrot, in the very beginning, simply took the truth-conditional/non-truth-conditional dichotomy as the standard to distinguish between semantics and pragmatics. They proposed *integrated pragmatics* (*pragmatique intégrée* in French) to capture the non-truth-conditional argumentative meanings. It is *integrated* in that “the non-truth-conditional aspects of meaning ... are, nevertheless, aspects of its encoded meaning and do not depend on the recovery of some prior truth-conditional semantic meaning”. ([21, p. 43]) It is *pragmatics* because “it is concerned with the sort of meaning that can’t be captured in terms of traditional truth-conditional semantics”. (Ibid.)

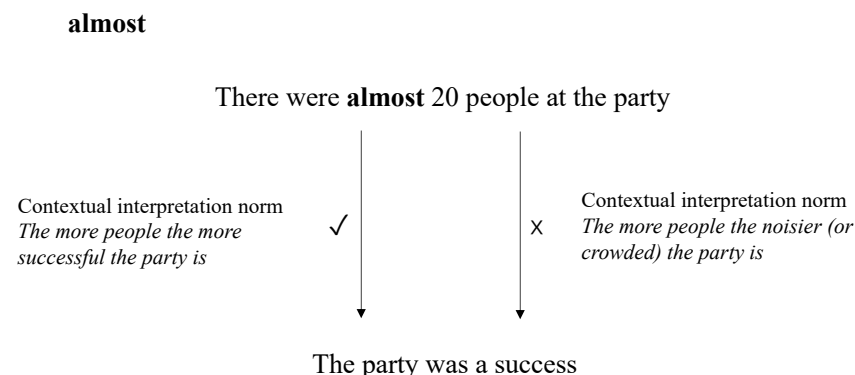
This categorization of non-truth-conditional argumentative meanings into pragmatics has been straightforwardly critiqued by scholars like [21]. [21] poignantly pointed out that [2] failed to make a principled distinction between semantics and pragmatics. The reason is that integrated pragmatics only deals with encoded non-truth-conditional meanings, leaving untouched non-encoded meanings of utterance (e.g., conversational implicature and the like).

The “principled distinction” problem with Anscombe and Ducrot lies in the difficulty of making a clearcut distinction between semantics and pragmatics, both of which deal with meanings. On the one hand, the conventionalization of argumentative meanings into linguistic indicators lends strength to Anscombe and Ducrot’s theoretical stance with regard to argumentativity *vis à vis* language. On this theoretical conception, argumentativity has been taken as an inherent feature of language system (semantics studies meanings within language system). It is likely in this sense that the relation may have been held as semantic. On the other hand, argumentative meanings, as non-truth-conditional meanings, are different from the truth-conditional meanings, in that the former shows roots in language use while the latter comprises the object of study for semantics. For example, the argumentative orientation of linguistic *topoi* falls to the contingencies of context of use (we will demonstrate soon).

Under such an elaboration, there seems to be something, at least, right that has been captured in the Anscombe and Ducrot’ intuition of proposing an *integrated pragmatics* to characterize the non-truth-conditional aspect of argumentative meanings. In other words, the non-truth-conditional meanings of utterance have some pragmatic components to it in the way that the relation between linguistic expressions and meanings is derived (conventionalized) extralinguistically from the context of use. This means that argumentative indicators as a kind of knowledge should be embedded in pragmatics, and people learn them in/through the context of use.

4.3 Two typical cases reanalyzed

We can make this idea clearer by analyzing two typical cases of argumentative indicators. They are the adverbial adjunct *almost* and the linguistic *topos* of *being expensive*. We want to show the important roles of context in interpreting the argumentative orientations of argumentative indicators. In the case of argumentative indicator of “*almost*”(see Eg. 1).



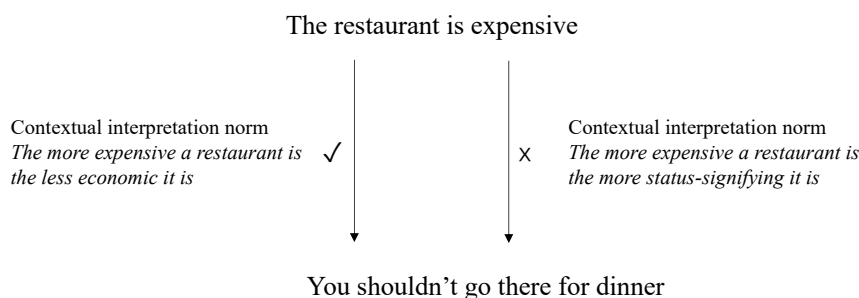
Eg. 1: There were *almost* 20 people at the party → The party was a success

In this case, the presence of such adverbial adjunct *almost* in “There were almost 20 people in the party” was said to orient toward such an argumentative conclusion *The party was a success*. Such an interpretation comes from the following particular contextual interpretation norm *The more people present at a party, the more successful the party is*. However, this norm is not to be regarded universal and applicable to all social groups and in all societies. An opposite contextual interpretation norm *The more people the more burden the party is* is, in all fairness, highly likely to be present and available to some social groups and communities. The same also applies to the following case of linguistic *topos* of *being expensive* (see Eg. 2).

Both cases, in interpreting the conclusions, have shown the features of context-dependency, in the way that the contextual interpretation norms are themselves socially variable. This means that people of different groups may appeal to different norms in regulating their social behaviors, thus rendering these argumentative indicators pragmatic.

4.4 The socio-pragmatic aspect of argumentative indicators

Such a pragmatic standing toward argumentative indicators in particular could be made more apparent by considering the following theoretical observations. These observations were made with respect to indicators of argumentative act of agreeing

being expensive

Eg. 2: The restaurant is expensive $\rightarrow$ You shouldn't go there for dinner

and disagreeing. [22, p. 157] pointed out, from the perspective of conversation analysis (CA), that some pre-sequences can serve the function of detecting disagreements in the argumentative exchanges between arguers; [11, p. 1500] found, "The use of the positive remark, for instance, has been identified as an important preface to disagreement among American English speakers"; similarly, [18, p. 167] observed, "Participants, then by the verbal style in which they respond and the listenership cues they produce, implicitly signal their agreement or disagreement; thus, they tune into the other's way of speaking".

Using positive remark to preface disagreement (among American English speakers), resorting to verbal style to signal agreement or disagreement, when taken account of in linguistic argumentation terms, are within the toolkit *on a par* with those argumentative indicators introduced above. The main difference is that these "way of speaking" and "verbal style" take on more of a pragmatic feature (socio-pragmatic⁸ in particular), which means that they are subject to the contingencies of context, and are not universal in all speech communities. For example, quite opposite from Edstrom's observation, [4, p. 1572] pointed out "Jewish ways of speaking have been characterized as highly argumentative in several domains", and Jewish culture favors not only disagreement over agreement but unmitigated and unprefaced forms of it.

The apparently contradictory scenarios for such uses of mitigating and prefacing devices (eg. *positive remark*) and the like in American and Jewish cultures enable us to add more strength to our idea of argumentative indicators being pragmatic in that being socio-pragmatic is being pragmatic.

⁸*Socio-pragmatics* here is used in Geoffrey Leech's sense, that is, it deals with "more specific 'local' conditions on language use", in contradistinction to the "general conditions of the communicative use of language" for general pragmatics. ([28, p. 10])

5 Integrating Argumentative Indicators into Argumentative Competence

Having established the pragmatic nature of argumentative indicators through theoretical critique, case reanalysis, and socio-pragmatic observations, it is clear that they represent a form of argument-related language knowledge deeply rooted in context and use. This pragmatic dimension positions argumentative indicators as essential components awaiting integration into the broader framework of argumentative competence. In the following section, we tentatively explore how this integration can be achieved by first delineating a pragmatic infrastructure for these indicators—encompassing linguistic expressions, multimodal symbols, and ways of expression—and then juxtaposing it with the core constituents of competence (knowledge, skill, and motivation) outlined in Section 2.1. This approach not only enriches the conceptualization of argumentative competence but also highlights its interpersonal and adaptive qualities in real-world argumentation.

5.1 A pragmatic infrastructure of argumentative competence

As has been shown, argumentative indicators are pragmatic knowledge. That is, these language forms/structures are pragmatic resources that arguers capitalize on in actual argumentative activities. We are able to specify and catalogue, by induction, two kinds of pragmatic infrastructure with respect to argumentative indicators, in particular, those expressing the argumentative act of (dis)agreeing which have socio-pragmatic bearings. They are *kenetic/prosodic paralinguistic knowledge* & knowledge of linguistic styles and code switching, and they are to be, we believe, juxtaposed together with other constituents of knowledge (for example, script and plan⁹) constituting argumentative competence.

5.1.1 Kenetic/prosodic paralinguistic knowledge

It has been well-established among linguists that meanings are conveyed not merely by way of linguistic symbols. There are other channels which can also communicate meanings in linguistic exchanges, such as *kenetic gestures*, *paralinguistic signs*. Anthropologist Ray Birdwhistell demonstrated “that in the act of talking, eyes, face, limbs and torso all emit automatically produced signs which tend to go unnoticed yet nevertheless convey information”.([18, p. 141]) These signs tend to be culturally specific. For the act of arguing, this also applies.

The most common body language in English that signals disagreement in linguistic exchange may be “frowning” (the act of raising eyebrow), which has even been lexicalized (*frown on/upon*) with fixed meaning of disagreeing. Whereas, it is

⁹Script and plan are the two constituents of knowledge component that were initially discussed by [48].

also worthwhile to note that this frowning, more often than not, happens as incidental to the linguistic exchange. About this, [8, p. 17] observed “A discourse marker such as *oh* at the head of an utterance, said with a raised eyebrow, can signal that what follows is likely to be a disagreement”.

We could even make the claim a little further that paralinguistic symbols accompany linguistic signs in expressing meanings. For instance, in English, different prosodic features with trans-sentential adverbial adjunct *so* may, depending on the context, make a contribution differently with respect to argumentativity. Utterance of *so* with a falling intonation often signals that the sentence that follows immediately is going to be conclusion-related. Whereas, *so* with a rising intonation doesn't have such conclusive orientation. What's more, there are so-called vocal segregates. They are represented, for the most part, by such suprasegmental sounds as *uh-huh* to indicate agreement or gratification; *uh-huh* to indicate disagreement; *tsk-tsk* to express mild disapproval; and by other graphic approximations of different kinds of snorts and sniffs. ([38, p. 75])

More obvious in this regard will be what is commonly known as the great Indian head wobble or headshake (a movement that involves tilting the head from side to side vertically). It is notorious for its vagueness and context contingency. In India, this head wobble may convey significantly different meanings depending on the context. The meanings may range from agreement, not sure of agreement or disagreement, to apparent disagreement. What's more, the commonly seen head nod (*nodding up and down from the neck*) in India will produce different meanings between south and north India. North Indians commonly take this nodding of head as conveying agreement (“yes”) while part of South India would, quite extraordinarily, regard this as conveying disagreement (“no”).

5.1.2 Knowledge of linguistic styles and code switching

Apart from the kenesic/prosodic signs, a conscious choice of linguistic styles or codes would also have an impact on argumentation, explicitly or implicitly. For instance, Kobayashi & Viswat made a comparative study of different cultural expectations in expressing disagreement between Japan and the United States. They found that Japanese students tend to keep silent when they don't agree with the teacher while Americans take silence as “an ineffective means of expressing disagreement”. ([27, p. 4]) The reason, as they explain, lies in the Japanese axiological emphasis on Confucianism “where interlocutors are expected to pay special attention to their social status, and not take a defiant attitude toward their superiors”. (Ibid.)

Linguistic styles can at times constitute the way that argumentation itself and things related to it are expressed. For example, [25] found that, in the political argumentation during the spring and autumn period of ancient China, arguers (mainly noblemen) resorted to reciting poems to express their ideas (by way of the content in

the poems). It was also a display of the prerogative statuses of the arguers (only the noblemen had access to poems!) In the same spirit, [35] identified the linguistic style of Inuit duel song (debating performance between the appellant and defendant), which is a special kind of language use in the traditional Ammassalik culture of Southeastern Greenland. He maintains that this singing duel falls into the argumentative genre, and could be characterized as “a multimodal, multifunctional interaction, violent in words and actions, involving two participants alternating turns of speech”. (Ibid.: 57)

Besides discussing on how listeners manipulate the verbal styles in order to implicitly signal their agreement or disagreement, Gumperz made an exploration on how code switching can indirectly make a contribution in speaker expressing (dis)agreements. He produced the following example: “Mother comes in, shifting to German in supporting her daughter. The fact that Father both sticks to his opinion and does not follow Mother’s code choice lends the ex-change an air of enhanced disagreement. The effect is created by the exchange itself rather than any other contextual factors”.([18, p. 83]) From this example, it seems apparent that a particular choice of a code over another (when available) may communicate argument-related information as well as some social-related information.

5.2 A summary

As we have redefined argumentative competence as the abilities to use appropriate and effective language to achieve persuasion in context, this following category of argumentative indicators (see Table. 1) summarized from above discussion could help to specify what forms appropriate and effective language may take. The abilities to make correct use of them, especially those culture-specific ones we have identified, should be built into argumentative competence.

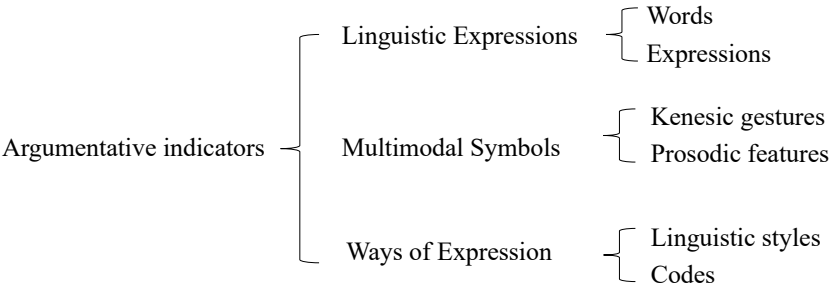


Table. 1: Category of argumentative indicators

In summary, we have made a theoretical exploration of the necessity and possibility of a pragmatic perspective of argumentative competence in section 3. In sec-

tions 4 and 5, we have made an illustrative inquiry into a particular kind of argument-related language use knowledge, that is, argumentative indicators. We have argued that argumentative meanings expressed by argumentative indicators are pragmatic from three aspects, and suggested that argumentative indicators being pragmatic knowledge should be integrated into argumentative competence. We have further elaborated on how this particular knowledge can be integrated into argumentative competence, that is, by specifying and cataloguing the pragmatic infrastructure of argumentative indicators first, and then juxtaposing it together with other knowledge to form a more complete conceptualization of argumentative competence, as follows.

6 Concluding Remarks

[48, p. 619] remarked “The development of the concept of argumentative competence is important both theoretically and pedagogically”. This paper aims at making a theoretical contribution. It attempts to build a pragmatic perspective into the unsaturated concept. In carrying out the objective, we made use of existing literature on argumentation and language with particular attention paid to studies of argument-related language use. Underlying this ambition lies our basic assumption: Argumentation is a special subtype of communication carried out through language, a process the implementation of which encompasses maneuvers or manipulations of linguistic devices on various levels, and naturally occurring arguments make full use of multifaceted-ness and complexity of natural language in reaching the argumentative goals in context.

With the guidance of this assumption and under the motivation of the goal, we have provided a tentative, yet coarse, exploration of how the concept of argumentative competence can be approached from a pragmatic perspective. We intend this paper to be preliminary exploration into the concept of argumentative competence. It is preliminary in the sense that it does more to build a pragmatic component into this concept than to specify how to analyze and evaluate argumentative competence with respect to pragmatics. We did not intend it to exhaust all that pragmatics has to offer as we are well aware of the complexities involved with the concept itself. At the same time, we are aware of the resourcefulness of pragmatics that may bring further light to the issues we have addressed in this paper. In particular, the mechanism of how language interacts and interferes with the process of argumentation may be explained by referring to some pragmatic principles.

It is our hope that these discussions would open the door for more explorations with regard to argumentation and pragmatics. From what we have started, there has been opened up, at least, an avenue for future research with regard to the pragmatics of linguistic argumentation knowledge.

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论证能力研究：论证中的语言使用与指示词

陈志喜

摘 要

论证能力最初是参照语言学中交际能力提出来的，目前学界已经从多个视角对其进行了探讨。然而，其与语言使用的联系并未得到充分研究。本文倡导采用语用学方法来研究论证能力，同时考察其理论基础与例证证据，并重点关注论证指示词。本文认为，“非形式化的、以人为中心的”逻辑立场以及语言在论证中的重要作用，必然要求采取语用学视角。作为例证，研究表明论证指示词作为语用工具，在论证能力中发挥着不可或缺的整合性作用，研究最后明确了如何将指示词纳入论证能力的框架之中。