

ISSA Proceedings 2010 - Argument Schemes, Topoi, And Laws Of Logic



1. Introduction

For the reconstruction of implicit elements in argumentative discourse, the pragma-dialectical account of “argument schemes” serves as an important heuristic tool[i]. Consisting of a description of the various ways in which an arguer may transfer the acceptability of the argument to that of the standpoint, the account enables the analyst to reconstruct the “unexpressed premise”[ii]. However, in reconstructing implicit elements, the analyst may also benefit from other accounts of the transfer of acceptability of the argument to that of the standpoint, such as *topoi* and laws of logic. These alternative accounts are especially helpful in the reconstruction of academic argumentation - scholarly, scientific, philosophical argumentation - in which the notion “necessity” plays a pivotal role.

In this paper, I will present a formal framework that encompasses the three theoretical accounts of acceptability transfer principles just mentioned (argument schemes, *topoi*, and laws of logic)[iii]. First, I will discuss some insights from speech act theory that underlie the pragma-dialectical account of argument schemes and that will serve as a starting point for the development of the framework (§2). Next, I will introduce the notion “acceptability transfer principle” (ATP) and describe the four types of this principle that make up the framework (§3). Finally, I will briefly indicate how the existing accounts of argument schemes, *topoi*, and laws of logic fit into the framework (§4).

2. Standpoints and arguments

In the pragma-dialectical view, statements are reconstructed as standpoints when the speaker or writer (henceforth: the “arguer”) meets or anticipates doubt of the listener or reader (henceforth: the “addressee”) with regard to that statement. Among the felicity conditions of putting forward a standpoint are the condition (I) that the arguer believes that the standpoint is acceptable and (II) that the arguer believes that the addressee does not already deem the standpoint acceptable.

In the same view, statements are reconstructed as arguments when they may be assumed to contribute to the realization of the aim of the arguer to render the standpoint acceptable to the addressee. The felicity conditions for putting forward an argument can be derived from this assumption. Among these are the condition (I) that the arguer believes that the argument is acceptable and (II) that the arguer believes that the argument has justificatory force – that is, that accepting the argument renders the standpoint acceptable. The second condition can be further differentiated in the condition (IIa) that the arguer believes that the argument is relevant and (IIb) that the arguer believes that the argument is sufficient. In this way, the felicity conditions correspond to the three criteria that are generally used in order to evaluate the soundness of arguments: An argument has the potential of realizing the aim of the arguer when it is acceptable (A), relevant (R), and sufficient (S)[iv].

In actual argumentative discourse, it is often the case that elements that are relevant for the evaluation remain implicit. In order to make these elements more explicit, the account of the felicity conditions for putting forward standpoints and arguments may serve as a heuristic device. The account is especially helpful for the reconstruction of the so-called “unexpressed premise”. From the felicity conditions it can be derived that an arguer, having put forward a standpoint and an argument, is not only committed to the acceptability of both the standpoint and the argument, but also to the justificatory force of the argument. By expressing the latter commitment in the form of a statement, the analyst has provided a theoretically motivated reconstruction of the unexpressed premise in the form of what I will call the “acceptability transfer principle” (ATP)[v]:

Accepting the argument renders the standpoint acceptable.

Abbreviating the standpoint as STP and the argument as ARG, a fully explicit reconstruction of a standpoint and an argument then consists of the following elements (*Figure 1*):

- 1 STP
- 1.1 ARG
- 1.1' ATP (1.1→1)

Figure 1

Apart from serving as a heuristic device for the reconstruction of the unexpressed premise, the account of the felicity conditions for putting forward standpoints and arguments may also be helpful for the reconstruction of other elements of the discourse. From a theoretical point of view, the addressee is assumed not to already accept the standpoint, but to accept it after (I) having deemed the argument acceptable and (II) having deemed the argument to have justificatory force. Of course, the addressee is not obliged to act accordingly. He is entitled to doubt or criticize the acceptability and/or the justificatory force of the argument or – in terms of the reconstruction above – the explicit argument (1.1) and/or the acceptability transfer principle (1.1'). These theoretical insights can be used in order to reconstruct the attempts of the arguer to meet the real or anticipated response of the addressee. Such an attempt can either be reconstructed as an argument in support of the original explicit argument (1.1.1) or as an argument in support of the acceptability transfer principle (1.1'.1). Any of these two types of arguments come with new acceptability transfer principles, so that a fully explicit reconstruction consists of the following elements (*Figure 2*):

1	STP
1.1	ARG
	1.1.1 ARG
	1.1.1' ATP (1.1.1→1.1)
1.1'	ATP (1.1→1)
	1.1'.1 ARG
	1.1'.1' ATP (1.1'.1→1.1')

Figure 2

Of course, all the arguments may be further supported by other arguments, thereby repeating the same pattern.

3. Acceptability transfer principles

Having spelled out the theoretical insights that form the basis for the development of the framework, I will continue with a closer analysis of the content of the acceptability transfer principle. Standpoints and arguments express an attitude (positive or negative) with respect to a proposition, consisting of two elements: a referent (R) and a predicate (P). The referent of the standpoint may either differ from the referent in the argument or be the same, and the same applies to the predicates. So, from a formal linguistic point of view, there are exactly four possible combinations of a standpoint and an argument (*figure 3*):

	(I)	(II)	(III)	(IV)
standpoint	P is true of R	P is true of R	P is true of R	P is true of R
argument	Q is true of S	Q is true of R	P is true of S	P is true of R

Figure 3

In line with these possibilities, the general acceptability transfer principle formulated in the previous section can be further specified by substituting “standpoint” and “argument” by the propositions mentioned above. This amounts to a description of four different acceptability transfer principles:

(I) PROPOSITION TRANSFER

In this case, the acceptability of the argument is transferred to that of the standpoint while the propositional content of the argument differs completely from that of the standpoint. This principle reads as follows: “Accepting that Q is true of S renders acceptable that P is true of R.”

(II) PREDICATE TRANSFER

In this case, the acceptability of the argument is transferred to that of the standpoint while the propositional content of the argument only differs from that of the standpoint with respect to the predicate. This principle reads as follows: “Accepting that Q is true of R renders acceptable that P is true of R.”

(III) REFERENT TRANSFER

In this case, the acceptability of the argument is transferred to that of the standpoint while the propositional content of the argument only differs from that of the standpoint with respect to the referent. This principle reads as follows: “Accepting that P is true of S renders acceptable that P is true of R.”

(IV) REPETITION TRANSFER

In this case, the acceptability of the argument is transferred to that of the standpoint while the propositional content of the argument is exactly the same as that of the standpoint. This principle reads as follows: “Accepting that P is true of R renders acceptable that P is true of R.”

In figure 1 below, the four acceptability transfer principles are presented in terms of the reconstructions in the previous section.

	different referent	same referent
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different predicate	(I) PROPOSITION TRANSFER	(II) PREDICATE TRANSFER
	1 P is true of R 1.1 Q is true of S 1.1' Q is true of S à P is true of R	1 P is true of R 1.1 Q is true of R 1.1' Q is true of R à P is true of R
same predicate	(III) REFERENT TRANSFER	(IV) REPETITION TRANSFER
	1 P is true of R 1.1 P is true of S 1.1' P is true of S à P is true of R	1 P is true of R 1.1 P is true of R 1.1' P is true of R à P is true of R

4. Conclusion

Having presented the framework, I will briefly indicate how the pragma-dialectical argument schemes, *topoi*, and laws of logic might fit in to it. I will do that by giving some examples of each of the four possibilities.

Proposition transfer seems to occur very rarely in the mentioned accounts of acceptability transfer principles. A reason for this might be that in this type of transfer, the argument does not share one of its terms with the standpoint and that this feature has traditionally been deemed necessary in order for the transfer of acceptability to take place. However, if there is a specific relation between the referent of the argument and that of the standpoint, and there is a relation of the same kind between the predicates, a transfer of acceptability in fact does take place. An example of a standpoint and an argument in which such a relation occurs is mentioned in Aristotle's list of general *topoi*: "Temperance is beneficial, for licentiousness is hurtful." (*Rhetorica* 1397a). The *topos* involved is called "from opposites" and functions as an argument supporting the acceptability transfer principle – or, more specifically, the relevance – of the original argument:

- 1 Being beneficial (P) is true of temperance (R).
- 1.1 Being hurtful (Q) is true of licentiousness (S).
- 1.1' Accepting that licentiousness is hurtful renders acceptable temperance is beneficial (Q is true of S -> P is true of R).
- 1.1'.1 The *topos* "from opposites" applies.

As far as laws of logic are concerned, in the example below, an instantiation of the law of the excluded middle functions as an argument supporting the relevance of the original argument (*Figure 4*):

- 1 Being competent (P) is true of the president (R).
- 1.1 Being not incompetent ($\neg \neg P$) is true of the president (R).
- 1.1' Accepting that the president is not incompetent renders acceptable that the president is competent ($\neg \neg P$ is true of R \rightarrow P is true of R).
- 1.1'.1 Either the president is competent or he is incompetent (Either P is true of R or $\neg P$ is true of R).

Figure 4

Predicate transfer corresponds with two of the argument schemes described in pragma-dialectics – symptomatic argumentation and causal argumentation. The statement that something is a symptom or a cause for something else functions as an argument supporting the relevance of the original argument:

- 1 P is true of R
- 1.1 Q is true of R
- 1.1' Q is true of R \rightarrow P is true of R
- 1.1'.1 Q is a sign of P (symptomatic) / Q leads to P (causal)

The most famous example of reasoning can also be subsumed under the heading of predicate transfer. In this case, the *topos* functions as an argument supporting the relevance of the original argument:

- 1 Being an animal (P) is true of Socrates (R).
- 1.1 Being a man (Q) is true of Socrates (R).
- 1.1' Accepting that Socrates is a man renders acceptable that Socrates is an animal (Q is true of R \rightarrow P is true of R).
- 1.1'.1 The *topos* “What belongs to a species, also belongs to the genus” applies.

Referent transfer corresponds with the argumentation scheme that completes the pragma-dialectical typology – argumentation based on a comparison. The statement that something is similar to something else functions as an argument supporting the relevance of the original argument:

- 1 P is true of R
- 1.1 P is true of T
- 1.1' P is true of T \rightarrow P is true of R
- 1.1'.1 R is similar to T

Finally, repetition transfer is included in logical approaches (one may derive p from p) but not the pragma-dialectical typology (it is evaluated as a fallacy of circular reasoning / begging the question / *petitio principii*). Nevertheless, since the evaluation should always be preceded by a reconstruction, an analysis in terms of acceptability transfer principles might still be of help. Consider the following example (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans 2002, p. 130):

1 Being a punishable offense (P) is true of racial discrimination (R).

1.1 Being against the law (Q) is true of racial discrimination (R).

1.1' Accepting that racial discrimination is against the law renders acceptable that it is a punishable offense

(Q is true of R -> P is true of R).

1.1'.1 Being against the law implies being a punishable offense.

This example of circular reasoning is reconstructed as a predicate transfer in which the identity of the predicates P and Q is revealed by 1.1'.1, thus resulting in a repetition transfer. One could imagine that there are also examples that can be reconstructed as referent transfers in which the identity of the referents R and S can be revealed in the same way. And also examples in which the identity of both the predicates and the referents can be made more explicit. In fact, the analysis shows that there are three types of referent transfer, one of each of the other types of acceptability transfer principles proposed in this paper.

By reconstructing these examples and, in some cases, abstract schemata, I have indicated that the framework developed is in principle capable of hosting other accounts of acceptability transfer principles, notably those developed in the pragma-dialectical typology of argument schemes, the traditional lists of *topoi*, and the laws of logic. It might therefore be a fruitful starting point for further research concerning types of argumentation and the critical questions that are associated with these types (e.g. sign argumentation, definitions, analogy argumentation, pragmatic argumentation).

NOTES

[i] I would like to thank two anonymous referees for their helpful comments on a previous version of this paper.

[ii] For an explanation of the pragma-dialectical insights mentioned and used in this paper see van Eemeren, Grootendorst, and Snoeck Henkemans (2002).

[iii] The present paper is an extended and refined version of Wagemans (2008).

[iv] Cf. Johnson and Blair (1977). Since their definition of “argument” includes the conclusion or standpoint, they would not say that an argument is or is not A, R, and S, but rather that an argument passes or fails the conditions of A, R, and S. For a “dialectification” of the criteria A, R, and S and their relation to argumentation structures see Snoeck Henkemans (1994, ch. 4).

[v] The ATP differs from other formulations of the “unexpressed premise” (like Toulmin’s “warrant”, the pragma-dialectical “pragmatic optimum”, etc.) in that the ATP is a general expression of the speaker’s commitment with regard to the justificatory force of any explicit argument. Cf. Toulmin (2003, ch. 3); Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1992, ch.6); Govier (1987, ch. 5), Garssen (2001).

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