

# **ISSA Proceedings 2014 - Interpersonal Argumentation Through The Context Of Distributed Cognition: The Case Of Christian Sermon**

*Abstract:* According to the biocognitive paradigm, communication is joint activity aimed at creating a consensual domain of interactions, including linguistic interactions. Applying this approach to the study of interpersonal argumentation gives an opportunity to view language in communication as a part of social and physical environment. The most important component of this environment is socially and subjectively conditioned values, patterns of social behavior. We argue that the aforesaid component is an implicit constituent element of persuasion.

*Keywords:* Communication, the Coordinative Function of Language, Distributed Cognition, Ethos, Strategic Maneuvering, Topos.

## *1. Background*

In a vast literature argumentation is considered as a rationally organized type of discourse. Primarily, it is analyzed from the point of view of the persuasive function of argumentative speech. Secondly, it is often seen as a means to resolve a difference of opinion. For the present purposes, the notable feature of argumentation is that it is seen as verbal and social activity, or behavior. In this regard, issues focusing on speech communication seem very promising as a way to tackle such problems in the study of argumentation as the production and interpretation of argumentative speech, its understanding, the problem of context, individual argumentative competence. However, despite the wealth of literature on argumentation studies, scholars specializing in speech communication don't often seem to be working "from a clear and common perspective" (Eemeren, 1996, p. 191). So, the aim of this paper is (1) to introduce a new approach to linguistic research in argumentative interactions which is closely connected with communicative and cognitive science, and (2) present a method of analysis illustrated by examples of arguments from the Bible.

## *2. Three generations of cognitive science*

Application of a cognitive approach to argumentation theory requires some justification. Even though speech act theory, Gricean theory, conversation analysis, discourse analysis are firmly established and well-known frameworks, they can hardly be described as cutting-edge, especially after the cognitive turn in linguistics circa 1990. Thus, accepting the linguistic component and using appropriate methodology, argumentation theory should take working of language science. One can speak of three generations of cognitive science (Howard, 2004; Kravchenko, 2009a; 2009b; Steffensen, 2012) in the context of its impact on linguistics.

The first generation is characterized as the cognitive science of the “Disembodied and Unimaginative Mind”. That is a research program pursued in classical artificial intelligence and generative linguistics which draws its descriptive apparatus from set theory and logic (Howard, 2004, xii). According to this program language is a fixed system of symbols, or a code in which “every sign form expresses a certain meaning (or a set of related meanings) attached to it” (Kravchenko, 2008, p. 54).

The second generation is characterized as the cognitive science of the “Embodied and Imaginative Mind”. It rejects set theory and logic to pursue putatively non-mathematical formalisms like prototype theory, image schema, and conceptual metaphor (Howard, 2004, xii). Language in second generation cognitive science is understood as a kind of cognitive activity (such as one individual speaking to another) that arises from mental processes. In this regard sender`s utterances trigger neural happenings in resceipient`s brain (with Steffensen (2012) expression).

Generally, a cognitive approach to the study of argumentation focuses on the nature of argumentation mechanisms causing the change in the mental state of the addressee of the argumentative message. Hample (1985) proposes to focus on the cognitive dimension of argument – the mental process by which arguments occur within people. According to Sergeev (1987), a system of arguments is the product of mental activity of a subject of conviction expressed by the language of inner representations. Baranov (1990) provides a detailed description of argumentation interaction as a process of knowledge acquisition using the “computer metaphor” and analyzes the possibility of changing the mental state of an addressee by means of “natural language argumentation”. Likewise,

Briushinkin (2009) treats argumentation as mental action intended to change the “world model” of the addressee. There are researches devoted to cognitive models of conscious and various cognitive procedures formalization. Oswald (2007) analyzes the problem of interpretation of an argumentative message, showing the inadequacy of Speech Act Theory suggesting that some module of meaning construction be construed. Korb, McConachy and Zukerman (1997) attempt to build a “cognitive model of argumentation” based on probabilistic modeling of natural reasoning.

The presented researches emphasize the common feature of the first two generations in cognitive science. That is described by Kravchenko (Kravchenko, 2009b, p. 103) tendency to consider cognitive ability with the connection of mental activity only within the heads of individuals, or at least, within their bodies (“internalist account”). The function of language in this view is to transfer messages (thoughts, meanings, intentions) from sender to receiver, which are input-output systems (the “conduit metaphor”). On this view communication is a process in which one expresses what one thinks or feels so that others can know what one thinks or feels, thus, meaning is seen as a function or translation of expression. This viewpoint is seriously criticized in contemporary research as invalidating many linguistic models. O`Reilly and Munakata (2000, p.14) associate this approach with “introspections into conscious aspects of human cognition” which are proverbial “tip of the iceberg floating above the waterline, while the great mass of cognition that makes all of this possible floats below, relatively inaccessible to our conscious introspections”.

The Third Generation of cognitive science (“The imaged and simulated brain” in terms of Howard) influenced by biological theory of cognition (Maturana, 1970) has emerged in recent years. Unlike its two predecessors, this direction treats cognition as integrated processes that take place, not only in the human brain, or body, but also in its extracorporeal environment. As such, social aspect of cognition is important. Proponents of this wave of cognitive science deny that language is a tool or symbolic code for the transfer of thoughts, rather they emphasize its embodiment and co-actionality: “concrete bodily actions, whether it involves the visible parts of the body (gestures), the invisible but not inaudible parts (voice), or the extra-bodily environmental resources” (Steffensen, 2012, p. 514). Communication, to use the terminology of the biologically oriented paradigm for the study of cognition and language (Maturana, 1980; Clark, 1997;

Kravchenko, 2008; 2012), is not exchange of information; rather, it is joint activity aimed at creating a consensual domain of interactions, including linguistic interactions or orienting behavior (the “dancing metaphor”). Maturana’s concept of languaging, (Maturana, 1987) as a consensual domain of interactions emphasizes that the most important function of language is coordination.

There are publications which can be considered as contribution to the cognitive approach for the study of argumentation from the third wave of cognitive science perspective. Gilbert coins the notion “interpersonal argumentation” (Gilbert, 1997; 2003). Even though the researcher doesn’t distinguish his understanding of argumentation as cognitive related, as will be shown later, Gilbertian approach allows us to examine arguments from the abovementioned viewpoint.

Guillem (2009) examines socio-cognitive aspects of argumentative communication and raises the issue of inequality of written and oral communication. According to the author “the fact that arguing can be equated to reasoning, therefore, does not mean that it is a purely internal process that takes place within the individuals’ minds and thus cannot be observed”. As explained by Guillem, such forms of “social cognition” as shared attitudes, ideologies, norms and values are crucial from the point of view of their influence on forming arguments and their perception (Guillem, 2009, p.730).

Kolmogorova (2013) explores semiotic basis of interpersonal argumentation. The author detects three levels of its objectification on the base of empirical material – “cognitive-linguistic argumentation”, “social-speech argumentation”, and “personal argumentation” (Kolmogorova, 2013, p. 124).

Cognitive mechanism of counterargumentation in the sphere of mediation practice with applying methodological principles of social autopoiesis is offered by Barebina (2013).

### *3. Distributed cognition and interpersonal argumentation*

Biological theory of cognition is attended by many scientific directions such as synergetics, autopoiesis conception, social systems theory, biolinguistics, biosemiotics, and distributed cognition theory.

Researchers of distributed cognition (Hutchins, 1995; 2001; Cowley, 2009) argue that cognitive processes are extended through material artifacts, social interaction and are distributed across time and space, allowing humans to

coordinate their interactional behavior in their cognitive niches on the cultural, historical and time scales. Thus, the distributed language view focuses on language as a key aspect of social (dialogical) activity distributed over different time scales. It is a framework that involves the coordination between individuals, artifacts and the environment.

Gilbert suggested the name *interpersonal argumentation* for the hybrid approach under discussion for studying all aspects of social influence in verbal interactions. He demonstrates that “a narrow understanding of argument as necessarily linguistically explicable is incorrect”, thus, “argument must be understood as a broad and open practice” (Gilbert, 2003). The notion of interpersonal argumentation refers to arguments which are considered as not isolated statements, but representations of human attitudes, emotions, beliefs, intuitions as opposed to construing arguments as autonomous sets of assumptions and premises. The suggestion that several components – “emotional, visceral (physical) and kisceral (intuitive)” – are vital to argumentative communication because they affect both arguments and results allows us to analyze interpersonal argumentation as a phenomenon closely related to distributed cognition.

Applying this approach to the study of interpersonal argumentation gives an opportunity to view language in communication as part of the social and physical environment. This environment refers to various artifacts, gestures, audible and visual signals, graphics, symbols of computer technologies. All these constitute the environment of modern human being. The most important component of this environment is socially and subjectively conditioned values, patterns of social behavior, stereotypes which are distributed across the members of a social group in space and time. We argue that the aforesaid component is an implicit constituent element of persuasion which can be investigated through the category of “topos” as a part of argumentative discourse.

#### 4. *Method of analysis*

The concept of strategic maneuvering as the subject of substantial and systematic theoretical research offers a method of analyzing how the arguer’s tries to reconcile aiming for the most beneficial effect with being reasonable (Eemeren, 2010; Rees, 2009; Zarefsky, 2008). As stated in (Eemeren, 2010, p. 93) “*strategic maneuvering always manifests itself in argumentative practice*” (emphasis added – B.N.) in the form of choice on three levels: the choice from the available “topical potential”, adaptation to “audience demand”, and the use of “presentational

devices”.

The suggestion that the framework of topos is structured by modi of logos, ethos and pathos in the practice of interaction within a particular communicative context as a social system and realized in most cases by the language use allows us to analyze interpersonal argumentation from the viewpoint of distributed cognition. The implicit structure forming the category of topos as a basis of argumentative behavior corresponds with the three fundamental characteristics of distributed cognition identified by Hutchings (Hutchins, 2001) cognition is

1. distributed across the members of a social group,
2. involves coordination between internal and external (material or environmental) structures,
3. distributed through time in such a way that the products of earlier events can transform the nature of related events.

This understanding of argumentative speech through the concept of distributed cognition may be illustrated using arguments from the Bible. The Bible is frequently interpreted as “the Infallible Word of God” which is spread in the Christian society. The assumption that the Bible is a gospel message, transformed by people many times allows to consider this book as both: ideal and material cognitive artifact. This is an artifact of a special kind. It is unique because it has cultural models, ethic norms, patterns and schemes of behavior, images and scenarios that are socially and subjectively significant. The Bible is a part of the human socio-cultural environment. By stating this, we mean that a great amount of topoi from the Scripture is widely represented in such lexical and phraseological units of the language as proverbs, interjections, quotes, catch phrases, names, and historical places. Here are some examples:

- (1) *Spare the rod and spoil the child* («Those who withhold the rod hate their children, but the one who loves them applies discipline» (Proverbs 13:24));
- (2) *As you sow so shall you mow* («Don’t be deceived. God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap» (Galatians 6:7));
- (3) *...by sweat of one`s brow* (By the sweat of your face will you eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken...” (Genesis 3:19));
- (4) *Golgotha* («Carrying his cross by Himself, He went out to a place called Skull Place (in Aramaic, Golgotha)» (John 19:16-18));

(5) ...*a prophet without honour* («A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country and in his own house (Matthew 13:57)).

Bibleisms from the Gospel are constantly used in speech, in literature, in headings of articles and book titles, as well as in politicians' performance. Scriptural symbols, images of Jesus, pectoral crosses, ikons, and gestures were and are also part of everyday life. This internal structure (in Hutchin's terms) can be described as an experience of inner communication with the Bible which is different for each person. Thus, we can investigate the second type of distributed cognition - the coordination between external and internal structures. The Biblical subjects can be considered as a corpus of topoi which have their spatial and temporal scale. Using the Biblical word, the arguer can appeal to ethical standards, traditions, code contained in the ethos of the Bible as a part of the topos. It gives an opportunity to effect the addressee through appealing to authority of the Bible (using authoritative arguments in classical taxonomy). Intellectual, semantic, historical component potentiates various strategies of argumentation.

The conception of strategic maneuvering enables us to analyze how the arguer uses the topical potential of the Bible and its presentational devices (direct quotation, lexical and phraseological units) to reach the most satisfactory outcome of argumentative speech.

The result of argumentative speech depends on how the field of audience interaction with the Bible is formed. Arguments from the Bible addressed to an audience of mixed religious beliefs (non Christians and non believers), are somewhat able to affect it. As shown above, the domain of interaction with the biblical texts to a greater or lesser extent, has been formed as part of the human social environment. However, such arguments can be considered as a guide to action for deeply religious people, and they believe that "the Word of God" changes human way of thinking.

We will analyze the argumentative passage of Christian sermon "When Hope Is Dead, Hope On!". The author William E. Sangster was one of the great British Methodist preachers of the 20th century. This message was preached for the British people during the most difficult periods of the World War II.

(6)

1 Many people think of hope as a poor, precarious thing, an illusion, a vanity, a disease of the mind. The cynic has said, "He, who lives on hope, will die starving". Cowly said, "Hope is the most hopeless thing of all". The soldier is apt to turn bright promises aside with a despondent question, "What hopes?". Schopenhauer, the

5. distinguished German philosopher, looked upon hope as the bait by which nature gets her hook in our nose, and makes it serve her interests, though they may not be our own. That is the common assessment of hope in the world – a poor, vain, deceptive thing.

But hope is not so thought of in the New Testament. Paul makes Faith, Hope, and  
10 Love the cardinal virtues of Christendom. "And now abideth faith, hope, love". He speaks also of "the patience of hope" and of "hope that maketh not ashamed". All through the New Testament, hope is spoken of in that same high way. The author of the Epistle to the Hebrews bursts out into that daring paradox, "A hope both sure and steadfast".

15 Now, how did this sharp contrast arise? An illusion: a steadfast reality. A dream: a fact. A disease of the mind: a cardinal virtue. Hope cannot be both. Is the world right, or the New Testament? Is it a bit of folly or is it precious beyond price? What is the solution of the dilemma?

The answer is not difficult. They are talking of different things. There is a higher  
20 and a lower hope. There is a genuine quality and a counterfeit. There is a real article and a substitute. There is gold and there is gilt. Let us look at each of them in turn...

(<http://www.newsforchristians.com/classics.html>)

In accordance with the chosen method of analysis we will show how the arguer strategically uses the topical potential, adapts his message to the views and preferences of the audience and exploits some presentational devices. Analytically, four stages can be distinguished both in an argumentative dialogue and a monologic message. The presented passage is a confrontation stage in which a difference of opinion manifests itself through an opposition between one or more standpoints.

#### 4.1. Strategic maneuvering evaluating

From the available topical potential the arguer selects the most appropriate topos for the audience under the circumstances which is connected with the theme of hope.

One of the presentational devices is an antithesis arising from contraposition of two opponents opposing (*World* and *New Testament*) in regard to how hope should be understood. The author forms a kind of argumentative dialogue (lines 1-14) between the first side members (*people, clinic, soldier, scientists*) and the second one (*Apostle Paul, the text of New Testament, the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews*). Among the other presentational device one can note a hypothetical question and the antithesis on the phrasal level (line 4-18).

The statements from the first group are put forward as arguments (line 1-4) for better adapting the chosen topos, while the arguer mentions an entire audience, each member of which can be the author of these statements. A slight shift towards rhetorical aim is being traced, that is, strategic maneuvering in regard to the position of this party, known as "Hasty Generalization" fallacy. Dialectically it is not correct to posit that "*the common assessment of hope in the world*" as "*a poor, vain, deceptive thing*" based on the opinions of people listed is totally accepted. However, in accordance with the objectives of the article, it is more interesting for us to analyze the strategic use of topical potential of the sermon. The theme chosen by Sangster rather presupposes an appeal to emotions and intuition (ethos) than to logic (logos). It is known that there are several hundred topoi in the Bible related to the theme of hope. These topoi are a kind of figures of scenes with their spatial and temporal scales. This allows the author, by quoting from the Scripture, to expand the topical potential of the sermon so as to form a series of disagreements between the two groups («*An illusion: a steadfast reality. A dream: a fact. A disease of the mind: a cardinal virtue*») and perform the aim of argumentative message at the given stage.

Obviously, the purpose of the whole speech is to convince the audience to think and act in a certain way and also to renew and strengthen their faith.

Realization of the third principle of the distributed cognition phenomenon, when earlier events, mentioned in the Books of the Scripture affect the subsequent events in people's life, is clearly seen using this example.

## 5. Conclusion

Going back to the purposes of the article, we claim that the presented approach still requires a thorough scientific reflection. However, we can say that it opens a new vista of argumentation study in the aspect of communication. For instance, the biocognitive paradigm and in particular the theory of distributed cognition

offers an alternative to transmission model of communication and dissolves the traditional divisions between the inside/outside boundary of the individual and the socium/cognition distinction.

An important conclusion is the fact that the fields of argumentation studies and communication studies have much to gain from one another. The biocognitive theory and its accompanying research areas have strong explanatory potential in explaining the issues in the argumentative communication functioning in various fields of human activities. The argumentative discourse by virtue of its tough addressing presents a fruitful ground for investigation the language orienting function.

We argue that *ethos*, which is realized in the socially and subjectively conditioned values, shared by members of a community, patterns of behavior, some stereotypes, images while being one of the constituent of the category *topos*, is also an implicit component of persuasion in interpersonal argumentation.

It is noteworthy that the concept of strategic maneuvering, which postulates that in the argumentative discourse the arguer's goal – to win the debate, to convince the audience is always traced, confirms the conclusion of even a radical variant of biocognitive theory concerning the adaptive function of language.

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