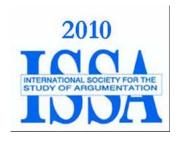# ISSA Proceedings 2010 – A Semantic Structure For Points Of View: About Linguistic Constraints On Argumentation

With almost no exception, all the approaches of argumentation acknowledge that utterances and discourses of natural languages play a role in argumentation; this role, which can be called *"argumentative power"*, is often considered to comprise *argumentative orientation* and *argumentative force* (see, for instance, Ducrot 1973). Pieces of evidence that the structure of natural languages constrain the possible argumentative power of utterances and discourses have been discussed since the mid '70s, in connection with so called *'grammatical words'*, like connectives or operators, mainly (but not only) within the framework called *"Argumentation Within Language"* (AWL) initiated by Oswald Ducrot (see, for instance, Anscombre and Ducrot (1976), Bruxelles *et al*. (1979), Ducrot (1980), Kay (1990)).

Oddly enough, according to their initiators, these discussions seemed to suggest that, *because* natural languages constrain argumentation, semantics should be *'pragmaticized'*. In this paper, I will show that that suggestion is a mistake, even from the point of view of AWL, and that there are strictly-semantic constraints on the argumentative power of discourses, imposed by those language units. In addition, I will give more evidence that language units constrain argumentation in a very precise way, and will show that not only *'grammatical words'*, but also all kinds of usual lexical items impose precise constraints on the argumentativity of the utterances in which they appear. To achieve this aim, I will introduce two technical concepts related to the usual blurry notions of *point of view*, and *ideology*, respectively; though the aim of the paper is not to give precise definitions of these concepts, the discussion will give elements for such definitions. In any case, the relationship between argumentation and those two concepts will be clarified, leading to a precise characterization of what *semantic constraints on argumentation* could look like. Several practical consequences of this approach will be discussed and, in particular, consequences on the notion of

metaphor and its role in argumentative discourses.

1. Marks of argumentation in languages: an old story re-told
At the end of the seventies, Ducrot showed that some so-called grammatical words, such as the French *peu* (*little*), *un peu* (*a little*), *mais* (*but*), etc. had to be described in terms of constraints on the argumentative power of the utterances of the sentences of which they are a part (*cf.,* for instance, Ducrot 1980). Typically, the argument is based on facts such as the following ones:
Original facts and first consequences
The difference between an utterance of (1) and an utterance of (2) in the same situation
(1) Max ate a little
(2) Max ate little
is not a matter of quantity eaten by Max

Among the very many evidences for that, is the fact that a disagreement between two observers may end up with
(3) Ok, he ate little but he ate a little
as well as with
(4) Ok, he ate a little but he ate little
none of them being contradictory…

What differs between the interpretations of utterances of (1) and (2) in the same situation is whether the speaker considers the quantity eaten as sufficient or not, *whatever that quantity is.*
In fact, (1) (weakly) suggests that Max can wait before eating more, but cannot be used to suggest that Max should eat more now.
On the contrary, (2) suggests that Max should eat more now, but cannot be used to suggest that Max can wait before eating more
Thus, the difference between "little" and "a little" cannot be expressed in terms of truth conditions, nor of reference, but rather in terms of argumentative orientation, or *points of view.*

Similarly, the difference between
A but B and
B but A,
as illustrated in the contrast between (3) and (4), is a matter of preference of the speaker and not a matter of truth or reference.

Examples of this kind could be multiplied infinitely and there is, of course, no point in invoking or consulting corpora for that matter: what has to be observed is the contrast between two possible interpretations, treasure that cannot be found in a corpus, exactly in the same way as gravity cannot be found in a basket of apples, even if they came from Newton's orchard...

As a consequence of these observations and of many others, the semantic description of a rather large set of words of natural languages (namely connectives and operators) must integrate constraints on the argumentative orientation of the utterances that may use them.

In order to take these facts and their consequences into account, Ducrot and some others thought they had to introduce the notion of *integrated pragmatics*. As a motivation for that move, Ducrot (1980, p. 72) says:
« *Non seulement la valeur argumentative d'un énoncé est, dans une large mesure, indépendante de son contenu informatif, mais elle est susceptible de déterminer partiellement ce contenu. Ce qui amène à refuser la séparation entre sémantique, qui serait consacrée aux notions de vérité et la valeur informative, et la pragmatique, qui concernent l'effet, notamment l'influence argumentative, que la parole prétend posséder* ».

Almost ten years later, Anscombre (1989, p. 13, footnote 3) insists:
« *Nous réservons ce terme [« sémantico-pragmatique »] à la partie de la sémantique qui fait jouer éventuellement des facteurs d'origine pragmatique, qu'ils apparaissent dès le niveau de la structure profonde (la pragmatique intégrée que nous défendons avec O. Ducrot) ou non* ».

Their erroneous reasoning can be reconstructed in this way:
a) Argumentative description belongs to pragmatics
b) Semantics must integrate elements of argumentation
Therefore
c) Semantics must integrate pragmatics

This reasoning carries two important errors which lead to the same:

- Since Morris (1938), semantics is construed to be the discipline which studies the relation between the signs of a system and what they mean within that system while pragmatics is the discipline which studies the relation between the sign system and its users in the situations where the

signs are used. It follows from that that *semantics* and *pragmatics* are not observable entities but *constructed concepts*; and that they are constructed to be complementary: by definition of the terms, what is semantic is not pragmatic, and vice versa. Now, suppose we construct A and B such that that AÇB=Æ, and suppose that, at some moment, we believe FÌB; if we discover that $x such that xÎF and xÎA, then, there is no way to avoid cancelling the belief that FÌB. Re-designing the construction of A and B differently, in order to get a new-A and a new-B which be no longer disjoint, would not help: new-A would no longer be A and new-B would no longer be B...

- Except if P is a catholic dogma, and the believer is the Pope, the *belief* that P does not guarantee the truth of "P": it is then clear that, since the belief that argumentation belongs to pragmatics is not a catholic dogma, even if all of us were the Pope, that belief would not guarantee the truth of "argumentation belongs to pragmatics"... Again, if something supports the falsity of some belief, then, the belief *must* be suspended, and not the definitions changed.

The correct reasoning should go this way:

- We have just seen evidence which supports the idea that at least some aspects of argumentation must be described within semantics

therefore

- Not all aspects of argumentation can be considered as belonging to pragmatics: on the contrary, some of them belong to semantics.

We will now see that that conclusion is reinforced by the fact that words of all sorts of other kinds also constrain the argumentation of the utterances of the sentences which contain them.

2. Other marks of argumentation in languages: points of view as lexical roots of argumentation
The argumentative orientation, which is constrained by the words of natural languages, characterizes not the real world entities about which the discourses talk, but rather the way those entities are approached through those discourses[i]. These points of view imposed by the discourses had been observed by Mikhaïl Bakhtin at the end of the 1920s and were one of the motivations of his

notion of *inhabited words*. Commenting on Bakhtin's thought on word dialogism, Tsvetan Todorov drew the attention on the fact that

« *Aucun membre de la communauté verbale ne trouve jamais des mots de la langue qui soient neutres, exempts des aspirations et des évaluations d'autrui, inhabités par la voix d'autrui. […] il reçoit le mot par la voix d'autrui, et ce mot en reste rempli. Il intervient dans son propre contexte à partir d'un autre contexte, pénétré des intentions d'autrui. Sa propre intention trouve un mot déjà habité.* » (Todorov 1981, p. 77).

In particular, as the discussion below illustrates it, some words have the strange property of being such that, when used in an utterance, they are able to modify the word meaning of other words used in the same utterance. What they really modify is the point of view through which the object of discourse is supposed to be seen. Thus, if we consider, for instance, the meaning of the English word *friend*, we do not see, in principle, anything negative with it; however, very few people would have positive feelings towards Max's friends after hearing an utterance of (5):
(5) Max is rich : he must have a lot of friends

It appears clearly that the presence of the word *rich* is responsible for that negative feeling towards Max's friends: the point of view triggered by "rich" is that of a certain power, degrading (if the reader forgives the moral negative point of view introduced by my use of this lexical item…) the meaning of *friend* to refer to a relation of profit. This way of explaining the semantic effect of (5) is reinforced by the strange effect provoked by utterances of (6):
(6) This baby is rich
in spite of the fact that (7)
(7) This baby inherited a big fortune
does not sound strange and that it logically implies (6): what is strange with (6) is not the fact or situation it refers to, but the *way* of referring to it (see Raccah 1998 for a contrastive discussion of Spanish *Rico* vs. French *Riche*).

Since (7) logically implies (6) and utterances of (7) do not provoke any strange effect, while utterances of (6) do provoke a strange effect, in order to account for the contrast between (6) and (7), we clearly have to rule out, without possible discussion, the possibility of a correct truth-conditional description of the semantics of words such as *rich*, even for sentences and phrases without connectives or operators. As the reader can easily realize (for instance, opening

an English dictionary), the case of *rich* is not a hapax. Altogether, the different linguistic data allow to generalize what was said about *rich* and strongly suggest both that (i) at least a part of the semantic description of words and phrases must directly evoke their role in the argumentative effect of their utterances, and (ii) that such a description, at least in the numerous cases observed, must be based on constraints on the points of view that the utterances may evoke.

If we see argumentation as suggesting or imposing points of view and relations on points of view, these two prescriptions yield to a semantic conception of argumentation**[ii]**, based on linguistic constraints on points of view: the *ViewPoint Semantics*. In such a framework, as we will see in more details, the so-called grammatical words impose constraints on the relationship between points of view, while other words impose the points of view through which the argumentation of the utterances will be built.

Before going into some technical aspects of the construction of utterance argumentation, it may be interesting to consider a few properties concerning points of view, culture and ideology.

3. Points of view, culture and ideology
a) The points of view carried by words, which combine to yield to the argumentation of utterances are *implicit*: they are not the object of the discourse, but are necessary to accept (perhaps very provisionally) in order to *understand* the utterance. For instance, a non English speaker who did not associate *power* with the English word "rich" would not understand properly utterances of example (5).
b) Some points of view are imposed by all occurrences of a word belonging to the lexicon of a given language. They are part of the common culture of the speakers of that language.

They are said to be *crystallized* in the word, or *lexicalized*. The point of view discussed in connection with example (5) belongs to that kind. However, some points of view are imposed only in some discourses containing a word, but not in all of them: the hearers of such discourses, especially the ones who do not share the points of view those discourses impose, understand them to belong to the speaker's *ideology*. Examples (8) and (9) below illustrate this point. Utterances of (8):
(8) John is a republican but he is honest

generally force the hearer to accept (at least provisionally) that, in general, republicans are not quite honest (this is why some utterances of (8) may provoke aggressive reactions among republicans...). However, this is not a property of the English word "republican", since utterances of (9):

(9) John is a republican but he is dishonest

which force the hearer to accept (at least provisionally) that, in general, republicans are rather honest, is also understandable. It follows that, contrarily to what happens with "rich" and the point of view according to which possession gives power, the English word "republican" does not impose the point of view according to which republicans are not quite honest (nor the opposite one, for that matter). Hearers of utterances of (8) or (9) understand that their speakers speak out of their ideological standpoint; the farther they are from that standpoint, the easier it is for them to understand that...

Since they are not situation-dependant, the points of view which are associated to all occurrences of a word must be described in the lexicon of the language; those which are associated with only some of them are related to specific ideologies and must all be excluded of the lexical description.

c) When a point of view really belongs to a word of some natural language, then, discourses using that word, even if they express some opposite point of view, clearly acknowledge the lexicalized point of view. Example (10) illustrates that point:

(10) Me gusta el bochorno (*I like scorching heat*)

Understanding an utterance of (10) implies understanding that what the speaker says (s)he likes is a kind of heat which is normally disliked: though utterances of (10) express a positive point of view towards that kind of heat, the negative point of view lexicalized in the Spanish word "bochorno" is acknowledged by them.

4. From lexicalized points of view to argumentation

Reminding that the concept of *point of view* used in this paper is intended to grasp *the way entities about which the discourses talk are approached through those discourses*, I will now sum up the explicit and implicit properties which, according to what has been stated, a 'viewpoint calculus' must meet in order to fulfill the tasks assigned to it (*i.e.* account for the argumentative properties of a discourse, through a semantic calculus on the lexicalized points of view). We will then see two additional properties of points of view, which will be of great help

for that 'calculus'.

1) The point of view of a word must be able to 'propagate' (within the linguistic unit of which it is part) in order to contribute to the argumentation of the utterances

2) However, the point of view of a word must not be necessarily that of its utterances

3) Though it must leave a trace in the argumentation of the utterance, even when they are distinct

4) Constraints on argumentation must be expressible in terms of relationship between points of view

5) Relations between discourse points of view must be able to express ideologies

6) Relations between word points of view must be able to express cultural items

7) Some words impose points of view on what they refer to

8) Other words (connectives, operators) impose constraints on the possible points of view expressed by the parts they connect, or on which they operate

The requirements summed up above seem hard to meet, especially the first three points. However, two interesting properties of points of view will help build an appropriated descriptive system.

The first property can be stated as follows:

P1: *Some points of view are mere positive or negative judgments about an entity*

These *elementary* points of view are completely determined by the pair <entity, *good*> or <entity, *bad*>. This is the case with the point of view imposed by the word "honest", which is completely determined by the pair <behavior, *good*> (while the point of view imposed by "dishonest" is completely determined by the pair <behavior, *bad*>)

The second property of points of view can be stated as follows:

P2: *A point of view on a certain entity can serve as a bias to view another entity*

We will shortly see why this property is important in order to meet the requirements: let us first see why this property is true of all points of view (actually, we will only *illustrate* here the property and *suggest* why it is true...). Suppose we accept that power is good, that is, suppose we see *power* as *good*. Now, if we accept that possession brings power, that is, if we see *possession* through the *power* it brings, we then see *possession* as *good* (and, obviously, the converse is true if we see *power* as *bad*).

The combination of these two properties allows building chains of embedded points of view, whose most embedded item is an elementary point of view. In such chains, the value (*good* or *bad*) contained in the most embedded point of view spreads up to each of the embedding sub-chain, and marks the chain itself (the recursive definition of these chains is unchanged with respect to the one proposed, in Raccah 1990, for an earlier version of the descriptive system). The point of view imposed by the word "rich" illustrates this phenomenon: according to whether one activates the elementary point of view

<power, *good*>

or the opposite elementary point of view

<power, *bad*>

one can build two different chains for the point of view imposed by "rich":

either <possession, <power, *good*>>

or <possession, <power, *bad*>>

It is interesting to note that these two chains characterize two different uses of the word "rich" which are actually attested. These uses are often considered to be pragmatic variations, but, since we now have a way to treat them systematically at the level of the lexicon, nothing prevents us to describe the word "rich" with two different meanings, related to the two different chains. Obviously, many other words would then happen to be ambiguous, for the same reason…

Whether there is a limit in the length of the chains which might be associated to the words of a given language, is an empirical question which has not been answered yet (the answer needs not be the same for all human languages). Among the five languages about which the author may claim to have semantic intuitions, no chain greater than 3 has been found.

5. Conclusion(s)
As a conclusion (or as a set of conclusions…) I will sketch several theoretical and practical consequences of this approach to semantics and to argumentation.
a) On the analysis of cultures and ideologies
From a strictly linguistic perspective, both ideology and culture express themselves, in discourse, through implicit points of view: in spite of the difference

we may strongly feel between the two notions, they are linguistically undistinguishable. This is not as surprising as it seems: if they were linguistically distinguishable, there ought to be linguistic markers of ideology and/or linguistic markers of culture; these markers would certainly be very useful to anthropologists, ethnologists, knowledge engineers, sociologists, etc. but, unfortunately (?) they do not exist... The distinction relies on extra-linguistic knowledge or beliefs of the observer (anthropologist, linguist, knowledge engineer, or else...).

However, observers normally know when they are studying ideology or culture: what they need is a way to determine the content of that ideology or of that culture. If the semantic analysis of discourses and texts can exhibit the implicit points of view with which they are committed, then knowledge management, cultural studies and ideological studies receive a great empirical help. And this is precisely what the framework presented here does (see Chmelik 2007 for more on ideology within this framework).

b) On communication: getting rid of the conduit metaphor...
Most linguistics teachers still present an obsolete model of linguistic communication, the 'conduit metaphor' (*cf*. Reddy 1979) as the base of any semantic work on human languages: according to that model, usually presented as Jakobson's model, linguistic communication would consist in encoding, transmitting an then decoding some message. All of the linguists I have talked with confess they know that that model is wrong (some of them even know that the aim of Jakobson was to try to better that model, which was not created for linguistic communication but for signal transmission...), but they keep teaching it because, as they say, there is no better alternative... Without commenting on such attitude, it may be interesting to inform them that the model of communication underlying the framework presented here *is* an alternative to the 'conduit metaphor' (see Raccah 2005 for a discussion on the subject).

The conception of linguistic communication underlying the ViewPoint Semantics does not suppose any encoding or decoding, nor transmission of anything (but sound...): it considers speech as a tool to have the hearer adopt the points of view that the speaker wants him/her to adopt. The most appropriated metaphor which would sketch this conception of communication would be that of *manipulation*... Contrarily to the 'conduit metaphor', the 'manipulation metaphor' does not suppose any 'message' which the speakers intend to 'convey' to the hearers'

mind: discourses are seen as tools which are used by the speakers in order to have the hearers adopt the points of view the speakers intend them to adopt. The language units which are uttered by the speakers instruct the hearers to build and relate points of view: though the hearers can reject part or all of these constructions afterwards, their ability to understand the language in which the discourses are uttered forces them to consider those points of view and relations.

c) On metaphor: getting rid of the notion of metaphor in semantics
The notion of metaphor, which is rather useful in literature, begs the question in semantics: if, in a metaphor, the metaphorical word changes its meaning, then there is no longer any metaphor... Obviously, a careful discussion of that problem would need at least a long paper on that subject (see Schulz 2004 for an example of such a discussion); I will only say a few words here about how the problem can be avoided.

In the ViewPoint semantics framework, since words introduce points of view, the metaphorical effect of some combination of words can be explained by a gap between the points of view activated by those words (see Raccah, forthcoming, for a detailed description).

This reconstruction of the metaphorical effect has two additional advantages: (i) it explains why metaphors can die (the gap narrows when it is no longer surprising), and (ii) it predicts that, though not all utterances are argumentations, all metaphorical utterances *are* argumentations (they impose a specific point of view on what they speak about). This prediction is interesting because it is falsifiable (though it hasn't been falsified yet) and may, thus, be useful to test the framework.

NOTES
[i] If the reader finds a similarity with Frege's distinction between *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* (sometimes translated into English by *meaning* and *reference* respectively), I would have no objection, on the contrary: my interest for the semantics of argumentation is, actually, rooted on my study of Frege (and, in particular, of Frege 1892). Frege's nowadays classical example *Abendstern* vs. *Morgenstern* (*evening star vs. morning star*) illustrates the fact that identity of reference is not identity of meaning and that, in the latter, one has to consider the *way in which* the former is accessed (*Art des Gegebenseins des Bezeichneten).* The way in which the referent of a discourse is

accessed by the hearer is indeed influenced (or partially determined) by the point of view (s)he has. The example of the morning/evening star illustrates that very nicely...

[ii] From what has been said so far, it should be clear that what the expression *"semantic conception of argumentation"* refers to here does not suppose that *all* of argumentation is semantics: acknowledging that some aspects of the argumentative phenomena do belong to semantics, we use the quoted expression to refer to the study of these aspects.

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