

The Semantics and Pragmatics of Argumentation

Carlotta Pavese (Department of Philosophy, Duke University)

1) Why do you think both linguists and philosophers find the phenomenon in question interesting?

Arguments have been the object of philosophical interest for a long time. Logicians have studied the formal properties of arguments at least since Aristotle. The study of the structure of arguments by epistemologists (e.g., Pollock (1987); Pollock (1991)) has given rise to *formal argumentation theory*, that has developed into a branch of computer science in its own right (e.g., Dung (1995)). Comparatively less attention has been paid to arguments and argumentations *qua* distinctive linguistic constructions with a distinctive semantics and pragmatics. And yet, just like we use language for exchanging information, for raising questions, for issuing orders, for making suppositions, etc, we also use language to give *arguments*, as when we argue on behalf of a certain conclusion and when we share our reasonings. Indeed, giving arguments is one among philosophers' favorite speech acts; and it is quite remarkably widespread outside the philosophy classroom. This chapter is about the semantics and pragmatics of argumentation.

(2) What recent developments in linguistics and philosophy do you think are most exciting in thinking about the phenomenon in question?

Although arguments have not been widely studied *qua* linguistic constructions (if at all), recent developments in linguistics provide ample new resources for providing a semantics and pragmatics argumentation. We make arguments through constructions of the form “ P_1, \dots, P_n therefore C ” or “Suppose P_1, \dots, P_n , then C .” These constructions are sets of sentences or *discourses*. It is therefore natural to study these constructions by looking at semantic approaches that take discourses rather than sentences to be the main unit of semantic analysis. Because of this, dynamic approaches to the semantics of arguments will be at the centre of my discussion. In particular, I will discuss the resources that discourse coherence approaches as well as dynamic semantic approaches to the study of language have to understand the semantics and dynamics of arguments (cfr. Asher (1993), Asher and Lascarides (2003), Le Draoulec and Bras (2007); Bras et al. (2009); Bras et al. (2001), Jasinskaja and Karagjosova (2015); Beaver (2001), Brasoveanu (2007), and Pavese (2017)).

(3) What do you consider to be the key ingredients in adequately analyzing the phenomenon in question?

Speech acts tend to be conventionally associated with certain linguistic features. For example, assertions are associated with the declarative mood of sentences; suppositions with the subjunctive mood, orders with imperatival mood, questions with interrogative features, etc. Like other speech acts, giving an argument is conventionally associated with certain grammatical constructions, of the form:

P_1, \dots, P_n . Therefore/thus/hence/so C; Suppose P_1, P_n . Then C.

In order to study the speech act of giving an argument, I will therefore look at the semantics and pragmatics of words such as “therefore,” “thus,” and “hence.” “then” — *argument connectives* as Beaver (2001, 209) calls them — which are used in natural languages to signal the presence of arguments and to express relations between premises and conclusions.

(4) What do you consider to be the outstanding questions pertaining to the phenomenon in question?

Here are a few outstanding questions pertaining the semantics and pragmatics of argumentations: what does the speech act of arguing and making an argument amount to? In particular, how does it affect the context set? What relations do argument connectives express (if any) between premises and conclusions? In virtue of what mechanisms do they get to express those relations? How does the semantics of these words compare to their counterparts in formal languages? How should we model the dynamics of contexts that is triggered by use of argument connectives? Can a unified semantics of argument connectives be provided across different usages?