

Cues for Reconstructing Symptomatic Argumentation

Francisca Snoeck Henkemans¹

1 Argumentative indicators

Every argument can be characterized by an argumentation scheme which defines the justificatory relation between the argument and the standpoint to which the argumentation relates. In the pragma-dialectical approach, a distinction is made between three main categories of argumentation schemes: argumentation based on a causal relation, argumentation based on a relation of analogy and argumentation based on a symptomatic relation [2]. A similar division of types of schemes can be found in the classical rhetorical literature, in the traditional American debate textbooks and in the work of modern rhetoricians such as Weaver [7].

In a research project on argumentative indicators Frans van Eemeren, Peter Houtlosser and I are carrying out, we investigate which clues in the verbal presentation can be used to reconstruct the relationship on which an argumentation is based and to determine what type of argument is used. The project is embedded in the theoretical framework of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation. Its aim is to make a systematic inventory of the verbal means used in the Dutch language to express an argumentative function of language use, to classify these means in terms of the ideal model of a critical discussion and to identify the conditions under which they can fulfil a specific argumentative function.

In our project we pay attention to all elements that are crucial to the evaluation of the argument and need to be represented in an analytic overview of an argumentative text or discussion, such as the type of dispute, the argumentation structure and the argumentation schemes. For each discussion stage we establish which words and expressions can function as indicators of the relevant moves in that particular stage and as indicators of the relations between these moves. Each type of argumentation has its own assessment criteria: for each type of justificatory relation different critical questions are relevant. Someone who makes use of a particular argumentation scheme, thereby takes the first step in a dialectical testing procedure that requires the arguer to deal with specific forms of criticism in order to defend the standpoint successfully (see van Eemeren, 'The importance of being understood'). In anticipation of possible criticism, the protagonist of a standpoint can follow up his argument with further arguments dealing with relevant objections. In a fully externalized discussion, the reactions of the opponent will relate to the evaluation issues that are relevant to the argumentation scheme concerned. It is therefore not only in the presentation of the argumentation itself, but also in the critical reactions of the opponent, and in the speaker's follow-up to his argument, that clues can be found as to the type of relation between argument and standpoint.

In this paper, I shall illustrate our approach to argumentative indicators by discussing various types of indicators of symptomatic argumentation. I shall make a distinction between 1) clues in the pre-

sentation of the argumentative relation, 2) clues in the critical reactions of the opponent, and 3) clues in the speaker's follow-up to his argument. I shall first explain why the expressions concerned can be seen as indicators. Then I shall specify to which elements of the symptomatic argumentation scheme the expressions concerned refer.

2 The symptomatic relationship

In argumentation that is based on a symptomatic relation, a property, class membership, distinctive characteristic, or essence of a particular thing, person, or situation is mentioned which implies that this thing, person or situation also has the characteristic property that is ascribed to it in the standpoint. The following example is an instantiation of the symptomatic argumentation scheme:

- (1) Bill is very egocentric
because Bill is an only child
and Egocentrism is characteristic of people who are an only child

In this example, the fact that Bill belongs to the class of people who are an only child is used as a basis for concluding that he also has the characteristic of being egocentric. Such a symptomatic relation can also be used in the opposite direction. The fact that Bill is egocentric is then used as an argument for the conclusion that he must be an only child:

- (2) Bill must be an only child
because He is very egocentric
and Egocentrism is characteristic of people who are an only child

According to their definition of symptomatic argumentation, van Eemeren and Grootendorst consider this variant as the prototypical form of symptomatic argumentation:

The argumentation is presented as if it is an expression, a phenomenon, a sign or some other kind of symptom of what is stated in the standpoint [2, : 97].

By this definition, the argument that is advanced can be seen as an indication or a sign that something is the case, or that a particular qualification is justified. For Perelman [5], the distinction between the sign (or the manifestation of a particular phenomenon) and the phenomenon itself is a hierarchical distinction. In relations of *co-existence* (Perelman's term for symptomatic relations), the elements that are connected are always on an unequal level:

Liaisons of coexistence establish a tie between realities on unequal levels; one is shown to be the expression or manifestation of the other [5, : 89-90].

¹ Faculty of Humanities University of Amsterdam

A prototypical example given by Perelman of the relation of co-existence is the relation between a person and his actions, opinions or works. There is a continual interaction between the person and his actions. The relationship can therefore be used in two ways: the image one has of the person makes it possible to arrive at conclusions concerning his acts (or other manifestations of the person) and vice versa [5, : 90].

The general argumentation scheme for the symptomatic relation is, in the pragma-dialectical theory, as follows:

Y is true of X,
because: Z is true of X
and: Z is typical (characteristic/symptomatic) of Y.

According to van Eemeren and Grootendorst [2, : 101] the following critical questions are to be asked about a symptomatic argument:

- Is Z indeed typical of Y?
- Is Z not also typical of something else (Y')?

3 Clues in the presentation

3.1 Expressions referring to a symptomatic relation

In characterizations of the symptomatic relationship the notions 'characteristic' and 'sign' play a crucial role. I shall take these two notions therefore as the starting point in my search for examples of expressions that are indicative of the symptomatic relation. I make a distinction between (1) expressions that can indicate relations in two directions: the characteristic can be mentioned either in the argument or in the standpoint, and (2) expressions that can only indicate relations in one direction and the characteristic or sign can only be mentioned in the argument.

In order to determine which type of expressions can serve as indicators of the symptomatic relation, I start by looking at the definitions of these two key notions that are given in the *Oxford English Dictionary* [6]. The following uses are, among others, mentioned of the words 'characteristic' and 'sign':

Characteristic

- a distinctive mark, trait, or feature; a distinguishing or essential peculiarity or quality
- (adj.) that seems to indicate the essential quality or nature of persons or things; displaying character; distinctive; typical

Sign

- a mark or device having some special meaning or import attached to it, or serving to distinguish the thing on which it is put
- a token or indication (visible or otherwise) of some fact, quality etc.
- an objective evidence or indication of disease
- a trace or indication of something
- a mere semblance of something
- an indication of some coming event

According to these definitions, the notion 'characteristic' can both refer to the characteristic properties of a person or thing and to a sign of something being the case or something or someone being of a particular type. 'Sign' is used as a synonym of 'proof' or 'evidence' for

the existence or the nature of something or someone. An important aspect of the meaning of a characteristic as well as a sign is that they make something perceptible - or at any rate knowable.

By also taking into account the synonyms of the terms that are used in these definitions, a non-exhaustive list can be made of expressions that may be indicative of the symptomatic relation². In these expressions it is more or less explicitly stated that the relation is symptomatic. Most of these expressions (with the exception of the last four expressions under b.) will generally be found in the major premiss of the argument, since this is the premiss in which the relationship between standpoint and argument becomes apparent.

a. Indications of symptomatic relations in two directions

X is characteristic of Y
 X is typical of Y
 X is illustrative of Y
 X marks Y

b. Indications of symptomatic relations in one direction

X is a sign of Y
 X is evidence of Y
 X shows Y
 X implies Y
 X means Y
 X proves that Y
 X indicates Y
 X testifies to Y
 X is a token of Y
 X tells us something about Y

X, (so) apparently Y
 X, (so) obviously Y
 X, (so) it is clear that Y
 X, (so) it turns out that Y

In the examples (3) to (6), various indicators of symptomatic argumentation are used:

- (3) The woman had requested her family to let the cats be put to sleep and to bury them with her in the position in which they would normally sleep in her bed at night: one at the head of the bed, one on her belly and one at the foot of the bed. This development *tells us something about* our society, that *apparently* sees an animal as the substitute of a fellow creature (*de Volkskrant*, May 10, 1996).
- (4) The truth is, sex and violence have never been bad business for advertisers, *proven by the fact that* one of the world's biggest sponsors, Procter & Gamble, has for years produced daytime soaps - including CBS' "The Guiding Light" and "As the World Turns" - that contain as much sexuality ounce for ounce as any other programming on television. (*Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2000).
- (5) Only a few thousand curious fans stopped by the Arrowhead Pond to check out Pierre Gauthier's summer remodeling job. What they witnessed Monday was hardly worth the trip. One lackluster offensive showing would be forgivable as typical of early exhibition games. Two wouldn't be anything to fret about. But three in a row *means* a disturbing trend has developed, which is where the Ducks stand today after a 2-0 loss to the Phoenix Coyotes left

² In van Eemeren and Grootendorst [2, : 98-99] a list of more or less standardized expressions for indicating a particular argumentation scheme is provided in which many of the expressions I deal with are mentioned.

them winless in three exhibitions. (*Los Angeles Times*, September 19, 2000).

- (6) Cadans has never done anything to rehabilitate me or support me, never have I received a benefit or sickpay, nor have I ever been medically examined. *It's clear that* there is something wrong with the organization of this institution for social security (*de Volkskrant*, CD-Rom 1998).

A difference between the indicators of symptomatic relations in one direction and those in two directions is that the former, unlike the latter, always establish an argumentative connection between the two connected elements: they also indicate that the first element (X) is evidence for or proof of the other (Y). The indicators of symptomatic relations in two directions, on the other hand, can also be used to argue for the opposite, i.e. that Y is evidence for X, as in example (1). They may also be used non-argumentatively, for instance when giving a description of something or someone. Within the group of expressions indicative of the symptomatic relationship in one direction, the expressions 'X, apparently Y,' 'X, obviously Y,' 'X, it is clear that Y,' and 'X, it turns out that Y' form a separate group, because they can be combined with 'so', while this is not the case with the other expressions. 'Apparently', 'obviously' etc. can only occur in the standpoint of the argument, not in the major premiss.

3.2 Expressions referring to aspects of the symptomatic relation

There are also expressions that do not express the whole relationship between argument and standpoint but that can be indicative of specific aspects of the symptomatic relation. In particular, there are a number of expressions that refer to aspects connected with what Perelman calls a relation between the person and his manifestations. The expressions mentioned below, for example, are an indication that a particular quality or trait is inherent in a particular person, animal or thing, that it is an essential characteristic, or that someone or something constantly has a certain quality or repeatedly shows a particular kind of behavior.

Only if these expressions occur in the major premise of the argument they are a direct indication of the symptomatic relation. In that case, they provide just as strong evidence as the expressions already mentioned, which make the symptomatic relation explicit. All the expressions indicative of certain aspects of a symptomatic relation can not only occur in the major premise, but also in the minor premise and in the standpoint. If they occur in the minor premise or the standpoint, they offer an indirect clue that the relation in question may be symptomatic. Then the use of these expressions shows at least that the presence of certain inherent or permanent qualities plays an important role in the argument, so that there is reason to believe that we could be dealing with a symptomatic argument.

Expressions indicative of aspects of a symptomatic relation

is by nature
is in his blood
is a seasoned/experienced

is a true, real, regular, veritable, first-rate
is essentially, basically, at bottom, at heart, fundamentally
is simply/just
is by definition
is known as/reputed to be
is by tradition

will (always) be
remains
always/all his (or her) life

In example (7) to (9) such expressions are used. To show clearly which statement contains the indicator, I give a reconstruction of the argumentation in these examples.

- (7) [It has turned out that a Scottish bishop has a son and is living together with a divorced woman]
Fortunately there was in Kendal also Mrs. Mitchell, the neighbor of the sinful Scottish bishop. She told the paper that she could easily understand all this. "Men will be men" (*de Volkskrant*, September 23, 1996).
Reconstruction example 7 (indicator of relation in major premise)
It is understandable that the bishop has violated the rules of celibacy (because he is a man)
and *men will be men* [= it is characteristic of men that they find it difficult to remain celibate]
- (8) "Do you really believe that businessmen in the West set light to each others shops?", I asked. "It has to be so," he said. "Because actually, Russians are good by nature" (*de Volkskrant*, August 29, 1996).
Reconstruction example 8 (indicator of relation in minor premise)
It can't be Russians who set light to the shops
because Russians are good *by nature*
(and it is characteristic of people who are good by nature that they do not set light to shops)
- (9) Brinkman has become a real Italian. She lives from one day to the next, *carpe diem* (*de Volkskrant*, September 23, 1999).
Reconstruction example 9 (indicator of relation in standpoint)
Brinkman has become a *real* Italian
since she lives from one day to the next
(and living from one day to the next is characteristic of Italians)

3.3 Clues for the symptomatic relation in the sentence structure

Apart from the expressions that can be indicative of the symptomatic relation or aspects of it, there is a sentence structure that is pre-eminently suitable for constituting the standpoint or minor premise of a symptomatic argument. Some of the expressions that point to aspects of the symptomatic relation can be combined with this sentence structure. The structure in question is the 'subject - copula - complement' sentence structure, in which the complement consists of an adjective or a noun. Examples of this structure are the following:

X is (a) Y
X seems (to be) (a) Y
X appears to be (a) Y

This sentence structure has a number of properties which seem to make it suitable for presenting the standpoint or the minor premise of a symptomatic argument. According to Greenbaum [4], predicates typically characterize the subject, and the verb 'to be,' when used in such a construction, is a stative verb, that is, a verb used in referring to a state of affairs (1996: 73-74). Since symptomatic argumentation is generally speaking about qualities and features and not about events or processes, it is plausible to assume that when an argument or standpoint has the sentence structure subject - copula - complement, this is already an indication that the argumentation might be based on a symptomatic relation. The similarity of the

properties of this sentence structure to that of the symptomatic relation becomes even more apparent when variants of the symptomatic argumentation scheme are taken into account. In his comparison of various approaches to argumentation schemes, Garssen [3] considers the following types of argument that are mentioned in the literature as variants of what pragma-dialecticians call the symptomatic argumentation scheme:

- Argumentation based on a classification
- genus-species argumentation
- argumentation based on evaluation criteria
- argumentation based on a definition
- identity relations [3, : 77, 120, translation FSH]

When we compare these variants with the functions the *Collins Cobuild English Grammar* [1] lists of the sentence structure subject - copula - complement, there appears to be a close parallel between the purposes for which this sentence structure is used and the types of relation that are considered to be symptomatic:

- to say what type of person or thing someone or something is
- to describe or identify the subject
- to indicate what qualities someone or something has
- to indicate exactly who or what someone or something is ('indicating identity') [1, : 173-176]

The copulas 'to seem' and 'to appear' can fulfil similar functions as 'to be' when they are combined with a complement, but lend a specific modal shade to the sentence: 'to seem' and 'to appear' are both used when the speaker is making a statement of which he is not completely certain or that he knows from hearsay.

4 Clues in the way the argumentation is criticized and the arguer deals with criticism

Since the reactions of the opponent may be expected to relate to the evaluation issues that are relevant to the argumentation scheme concerned, it is not only in the presentation of the argumentation itself, but also in the critical reactions of the opponent, and in the speaker's follow-up to his argument, in which he comes up with further supporting arguments to deal with anticipated or real criticism against his original argument, that clues can be found as to the type of relation between argument and standpoint. The wording of the criticism may give an indication of the type of critical question the opponent is raising. And the arguer's follow-up to his argument may provide clues as to the type of criticism he is anticipating. I shall illustrate this by discussing some examples.

In example (10), Mr. Moghraby suggests that the warm reception he and his fellow passengers received in Iraq might be seen as a sign that the hijack he was involved in had been planned, or at the very least, that treating the stranded passengers so well suited the purposes of the Iraqi government. This argumentation is subsequently criticized in a letter to the editor: the letter writer claims that the good treatment that was given to the passengers cannot be seen as an indication of any ulterior motive (first critical question), since it is characteristic of Iraqis that they always treat foreigners well. One should therefore "not read something into this situation that is not really there."

- (10) Britons taken to Baghdad by hijackers aboard their Saudi plane were astonished to discover that their detour coincided with the start of "Iraqi Tourism Week". [...] The 86 passengers, 40 of

them Britons, aboard the Jeddah-London flight hijacked on Saturday, were "treated like royalty", said Omer Moghraby [...] Mr. Moghraby said: "I don't know if the warm reception was a set-up, but it did all *seem* convenient. It didn't feel like the hijack was planned, but they were *obviously* very happy to see us and made full use of our being there" (*The Daily Telegraph*, October 17, 2000).

Reaction (letter to the editor):

SIR - I can easily believe that the hijacked passengers taken to Baghdad were treated like royalty (report, Oct 17). Iraqis *have always* treated foreigners, whether they are British or not, as VIPs. It is a shame that the "world" is *reading something into this situation that really isn't there* (*Daily Telegraph*, October 18, 2000).

In example (11), Smoak-Bartolo reacts to the argument that the fact that Latin American women spend much time in front of the mirror proves that they are vain. She accuses people who think this of not understanding that the behavior of Latin American women is in fact a sign of something else (second critical question): it is a way of honoring their tradition - or in Smoak-Bartolo's words: it is a reflection of our grandmothers, our homeland and our pride:

- (11) Why is it that Latinas catch so much flack over the time we spend in front of the mirror? "It can *seem* like vanity, but I think those who think that about us do not understand it's part of our heritage," says Smoak-Bartolo. "It's deeply rooted. It's a *reflection* of our grandmothers, our homeland and our pride." (*Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2000)

The way in which a protagonist follows up his argument in an attempt to silence possible opponents by showing that a possible criticism does not apply can also provide a further indication of the type of relation on which the argument was based. In example (12), Lamar Alexander's leaving the presidential race and Warren Beatty's entering it are presented as a sign of new developments in the presidential race. To make it clear that these two actions are indeed a sign of new developments (first critical question), the arguer supplies further argumentation: Beatty's entering the presidential race and Alexander's leaving it show that this race is growing more attractive for message candidates and less attractive for conventional contenders.

- (12) Lamar Alexander - two-term governor of Tennessee, former Education secretary - has left the presidential race. And Warren Beatty - actor, director and behind-the-scenes Democratic activist - might enter it. That's a sure *sign* some new curves are emerging on the road to the White House. [...] As Beatty's flirtation *suggests*, the presidential race is growing more attractive for message candidates, even as it becomes more daunting for conventional contenders like Alexander (*Los Angeles Times*, August 23, 1999).

5 Making use of indicators in reconstructing the argumentative relation

To arrive at a well-founded reconstruction of symptomatic argumentation, one cannot restrict oneself to merely pointing out there is an indicator of symptomatic argumentation. In the first place, it has to be established that the indicator is really used in an argument. A lot of the indicators of symptomatic argumentation also occur in non-argumentative discourse. An example of this is the expression 'is characteristic of,' which can be an indicator of the symptomatic relation 'in two directions'. The presence of an expression such as 'is

characteristic of' is by itself not sufficient evidence of an argumentative relation, since indicators of symptomatic relations in two directions do not establish an argumentative connection between the connected elements. That is exactly why they can be used in two directions when they *are* used to connect the minor premiss of an argument to the standpoint. The expression 'is characteristic of' can also be used merely descriptively, as in example (13):

(13) [From a book review]

This over-consciousness, of usage, but also of emotions, gestures and minimal changes in behavior *is characteristic of* this novel (*de Volkskrant*, 22 January 1999).

Even if a text is clearly argumentative, the indicators that have been mentioned here are not always decisive. Some of the weaker indicators can be used in more than one type of argument. Whether they really are an indication of symptomatic argumentation or of a different type of argument, may depend on their position in the argument, but in the analysis other conditions may also need to be taken into account.

In this paper, I have only discussed indicators of symptomatic argumentation. In our research project, we have also looked at clues in the verbal presentation for the two other types of argumentation schemes, causal argumentation and argumentation by analogy, and their subtypes. From Garssen's [3] empirical research on the recognition of argumentation schemes by ordinary language users, it has emerged that in particular distinguishing symptomatic argumentation from causal argumentation proves to be difficult in practice. By comparing the various clues for the different argumentation schemes, we argue that, especially in cases where there is room for doubt, it is possible to arrive at a more well-founded analysis of the type of argumentation at issue.

Let me illustrate some of the problems of analysis by taking one of the less strong indicators of symptomatic argumentation, 'it is clear that' as an example. A first condition for this expression to be indicative of symptomatic argumentation is that it should occur in the standpoint, not in the argumentation. If 'it is clear that' is part of the reasons, the argumentation may also be based on a causal relation or a relation of analogy. In example (14), for example, the argumentation is a pragmatic argument based on a causal relation:

(14) '*It is clear that* our economy suffers from the lack of confidence on the part of national and international investors, said Minister of Finance Thanong Bidaya. 'It should therefore be the first priority of this government to restore that confidence' (*de Volkskrant*, August 6, 1997).

As we have seen, some expressions only function as indicators of a particular relation if they occur in a specific part of the argumentation scheme (the standpoint, the major premise or the minor premise). But the position of the indicating device is also not always decisive. Even if the expression 'it is clear that' is part of the standpoint, the argumentation may still be causal, as in example (15):

(15) *It is clear that* the present system of schools with different denominations is going to founder. The number of types of schools keeps growing. You can already see it now: next year an evangelical school will open its doors, and the year after that probably an Islamic school (*de Volkskrant*, October 1, 1998).

In this example the standpoint consists of a prediction ('the present system of schools with different denominations is going to founder'), which is by itself an indication that the argumentation might be

causal. The arguer supports this prediction by pointing at present and future developments that will lead to the failure of the present system. A further indication that the argumentation in this example is causal, and not symptomatic, is the fact that both the standpoint and the argument refer to processes or events, not to states of affairs. This is different in example (16), where 'it is clear that' functions as an indicator of a symptomatic relation:

(16) *It is clear that* the boy's behavior was very difficult indeed. One neighbor was reported as saying that he had threatened her with a knife when she tried to stop him throwing stones at dumped cars. (*The Sunday Times*, September 24, 2000)

In this example, the standpoint qualifies the boy's behaviour as 'very difficult', thereby referring not so much to a particular event but to a repeated pattern of behaviour or disposition, in other words to a static situation or state of affairs rather than an event. Next, a particular instance of the boy's behavior is mentioned as evidence of the fact that he has been behaving badly. So, 'it is clear that' can only be an indication of a symptomatic relation if the expression occurs in the standpoint and either the standpoint or the argument (or both) refers to a state of affairs.

6 Conclusion

Starting from an analysis of the main characteristics of the symptomatic relationship, I have discussed various types of clues for symptomatic argumentation. These clues are to be found in the presentation of the reasons and the standpoint, in the critical reactions and in the speaker's follow-up to his argument. Each of these verbal devices may provide a strong or a less strong indication that the argumentation may have to be reconstructed as symptomatic. As an illustration of the use of these presentational clues for symptomatic argumentation, I have given a number of examples, taken from various journals, in which these clues are present.

Some of the indicators of the symptomatic relation I discussed have already been mentioned in earlier pragma-dialectical publications. I have made an attempt to provide an explanation for the fact that these expressions can be a clue for identifying symptomatic argumentation and to specify the conditions that need to be fulfilled in order for the expressions to fulfill their indicative function. The clues that I have discussed range from expressions by means of which it is stated explicitly that the relation is symptomatic ('X is a sign of Y') to less unambiguous indications of the symptomatic relationship ('apparently') or expressions associated with aspects of the symptomatic relationship between the person and its manifestations ('is by nature'). The list of expressions I have discussed is, of course, by no means exhaustive.

As I hope to have made clear, for a well-founded reconstruction, apart from the indicating device, a number of factors need to be considered, among which the main characteristics of the argumentation scheme at issue and those of the alternative schemes, the part of the argumentation scheme in which the potential indicator occurs and the type of propositions that constitute the premisses and the standpoint. It is only by looking at the combination of these factors that the analysis of the relationship between argumentation and standpoint can be justified.

REFERENCES

- [1] *Collins Cobuild English Grammar*, London/Glasgow: Collins, 1991.

- [2] F.H. van Eemeren, and R. Grootendorst, *Argumentation, Communication and Fallacies. A Pragma-dialectical Perspective*, Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1992.
- [3] B. Garssen, *Argumentatieschema's in pragma-dialectisch perspectief. Een theoretisch en empirisch onderzoek*, Amsterdam: IFOTT, 1997.
- [4] S. Greenbaum, *The Oxford English Grammar*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.
- [5] C. Perelman, *The Realm of Rhetoric*, Notre Dame/London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982.
- [6] *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.
- [7] R. Weaver, *The Ethics of Rhetoric*, Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953.