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Commentary on Lilian Bermejo-Luque's "Two Conceptions of Rhetoric and their Role in Argumentation Theory"

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Because of the many new distinctions and notions that are introduced in this paper it is necessary to be selective in commenting on Bermejo-Luque's ideas. I would like to focus on two separate issues in the paper: 1) the distinction between speaker's meaning and rhetorical intention and 2) the rhetorical dimension of argumentation. My suggestion to the author in both cases is to systematically apply speech act theory to enlighten the distinctions that are made.

Bermejo-Luque proposes to make a distinction between speaker's meaning and rhetorical intention. Speaker's meaning is the meaning of an utterance brought about by the recognition of the communicative intention of the speaker. In Bermejo-Luque's view apart from speaker's meaning there are aspects in the utterance that are not automatically to be recognized as such.

This sounds like an interesting distinction but the notion of rhetorical intention is still not clear. According to the author "it is not the intention that you have to recognize in order to understand me." It looks like rhetorical intention is the ultimate goal of the speaker: that what he would like to achieve by uttering the speech act. If this interpretation is correct one wonders what the difference is between the rhetorical intention and the interactional effect or the perlocutionary act. Although Bermejo-Luque does mention perlocutions in a footnote, the relation between these two notions does not become clear. The perlocution and rhetorical effect seem so closely related that a thorough analysis and comparison in terms of speech act theory would have been very helpful here.

The second issue I would like to discuss is Bermejo-Luque's idea of the rhetorical dimension of argumentation and especially her ideas about the main roles of argumentation. According to Bermejo-Luque argumentation is a communicative activity that plays two basic roles, "both of them fundamental to humans as rational and social beings." First, argumentation is seen as a tool for knowledge and second, argumentation is a tool for the interplay with individuals. I find it very difficult to understand why these are the two basic roles of argumentation. First why is argumentation a tool for knowledge? Of course in the process of scientific and philosophical justification argumentation plays a vital role, but this is certainly not the only function of

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argumentation and this does not make it a basic role. Argumentation is also used for other purposes where knowledge is not an issue or not the primary issue. In democratic decision making, or in legal processes argumentation is used to defend decisions, not statements that enhance our knowledge in any way. Furthermore, in scientific discussions where acquiring knowledge is the main goal, argumentation is put forward in the process of defending a certain claim or standpoint before a specific scientific audience. Bermejo-Luque however suggests that this role of argumentation is to justify a claim not so much before an audience but for oneself: “in giving reasons for a claim, we try to show that it is correct in a certain sense, that it is not up to our audience to accept it or not.” Apparently the special role of knowledge has nothing to do with convincing a particular party. One is tempted to think that this role is the reasoning process used to prove that a certain claim is correct. Reasoning is an inherent aspect of argumentation whether it is about descriptive standpoints or normative standpoints but this does not mean that one of the main roles of argumentation is to justify something to be true or correct. Argumentation theorists are generally in agreement that argumentation involves an inferential step from an accepted premise to a claim or standpoint, but this does not make this step an aim of argumentation.

The second main role of argumentation is also a bit of a puzzle. Argumentation according to Bermejo-Luque is

a mechanism with causal powers: it is not only that we place a commitment on our addressees to accept the claims for which we afford good reasons, but also that, by means of them, we can manage to *cause* some beliefs in them, we can get to persuade them of our claims.

It looks like this is argumentation seen from a descriptive perspective: it describes what the effects argumentation can have.

Obviously the first role is normative in nature since it is about the correctness of argumentation. We may take that argumentation is correct if it is instrumental in gaining knowledge. The second role argumentation mirrors a purely descriptive perspective: it is a mechanism with causal powers inducing beliefs in the audience. This distinction between the normative and the descriptive seems becomes clearer when Bermejo-Luque states that argumentation can be seen as a justificatory device and a persuasive device. Still it remains unclear why exactly these two must be seen as the basic roles of argumentation.

Later on in the chapter on the rhetorical dimension of argumentation Bermejo-Luque claims that an act of arguing is an “act of putting forward a claim as a reason for another claim.” This formulation suggests that an act of arguing consists of the premises only. Here we are mistaken because the author continues:

thus both the reason and the target claim would be constitutive elements of any act of arguing. [...] An act of arguing is a complex speech act, i.e. a speech act consisting of an act of adducing and an act of concluding.

A full and complete conceptualization of argumentation in terms of speech act theory would certainly be a good point of departure for establishing the main roles or role of the communicative activity of argumentation. It is a pity that Bermejo-Luque does not apply speech theory from the start in a systematical way. It is also regrettable that she sees both

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the claim and the premises as elements of one speech act. In my view this defeats the purpose of a speech act analysis altogether. What is the illocutionary and perlocutionary effect of this complex speech act? What are the felicity conditions associated with the speech act? These vital questions cannot be answered if argumentation and claim are seen as elements of one speech act. In the speech act analysis made by van Eemeren and Grootendorst – who see argumentation as a complex speech act for totally different kind of reasons – putting forward argumentation and putting forward a standpoint are different speech acts each with their own communicative and interactional effects and each with their own set of felicity conditions. Again, in my opinion this kind of analysis would have helped Bermejo-Luque in clarifying her ideas about the rhetorical dimension of argumentation. This could also be helpful in understanding the relation between the ideas that are presented here and certain paradigmatic insights that are developed in argumentation theory.

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