Argumentation as coordinated

Jean Goodwin

North Carolina State University (US)

Arguments get made, understood and responded to in the course of talk exchanges; the interaction is the paradigmatic context for arguments. A key task for argumentation theory is thus to provide explanatory and normative accounts of the orderliness of argumentative interactions. One standard approach--common among theories that lean into dialectics--has been to take argumentation as cooperative. In this view, arguers seen as working together to achieve a shared goal. This cooperative model allows specification of why the interaction occurs at all and what participants can rightfully expect of each other at any moment. But cooperation appears on its face an odd assumption in light of the fact that argumentative interactions seem more contentious, more adversarial, more likely to provoke anger/fear and even more avoided than other types of interactions, either interpersonal or civic.

In this paper, I want to offer an alternative model: argumentative interactions as coordinated. I first develop a conception of coordination among persons as pursuit of individual activities while both showing and expecting respect to/from others. This conception emphasizes reciprocal expectations (an interactant's expectations of what another expects of them) and is defensibly near to what Grice originally meant by his misnamed "cooperative" principle.

Taking argumentative interactions as coordinated does not itself provide an answer to the surprising orderliness of argumentative interactions; instead, it opens a new set of research questions. Achieving coordination is a problem--how is this problem solved? I review several kinds of external resources arguers can draw on to solve coordination problems: experience, explicit agreements, and conventions, and suggest that these have been the focus of previous argumentation research. But there are numerous situations where external resources are absent or when they do not provide sufficient determinacy to allow arguers to develop reciprocal expectations of each others' conduct. In these cases, it is up to arguers themselves to solve their coordination problems. How arguers do this has been of central interest to the normative pragmatics program of argumentation research. So I close by reviewing a series of normative pragmatic studies that have documented how arguers constitute for themselves a normative terrain that manages the constraints of their situation and renders their interaction orderly.

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