



UNDERSTANDING ARGUMENTATION THEORY: FROM CLASSICAL RHETORIC TO MODERN DISCOURSE

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Abstract *Argumentation theory examines how individuals use reasoning and discourse to justify claims, persuade audiences, and resolve differences of opinion. Rooted in classical rhetoric, it has evolved into an interdisciplinary field bridging philosophy, linguistics, communication, and artificial intelligence. This paper explores the historical foundations of argumentation—from Aristotle’s rhetorical triad to modern frameworks such as Toulmin’s model of practical reasoning, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca’s New Rhetoric, Habermas’s theory of communicative action, and the pragma-dialectical approach of van Eemeren and Grootendorst. Emphasis is placed on the linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of argumentative discourse, highlighting how language functions as both a medium and a tool for persuasion. Ultimately, argumentation theory provides essential insights into rational discourse, critical thinking, and democratic dialogue in contemporary society.*

Keywords: *Argumentation theory, rhetoric, critical thinking, discourse analysis, pragma-dialectics, Toulmin model, communicative rationality.*

INTRODUCTION.

Argumentation theory, often situated at the intersection of philosophy, communication studies, and linguistics, seeks to explain how reasoning, persuasion, and discourse interact in the process of constructing and evaluating arguments. It provides a framework for analyzing the ways individuals and groups use reasons to justify claims, resolve differences of opinion, and advance knowledge (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). In both everyday life and professional communication, argumentation is central to decision-making, critical thinking, and the negotiation of meaning. As societies increasingly rely on dialogue, whether in political debate, academic research, or online interaction, the importance of understanding argumentation theory continues to grow.

This article explores the historical development, major models, linguistic dimensions, pedagogical implications, and emerging trends in argumentation theory, emphasizing its interdisciplinary nature and its relevance for both theoretical and practical contexts.

Historical Development of Argumentation Theory

The roots of argumentation theory can be traced back to classical rhetoric. Aristotle’s Rhetoric laid the groundwork for understanding persuasion as a rational and ethical activity based on ethos, pathos, and logos (Aristotle, trans. 2007). The Aristotelian model emphasized logical reasoning (logos) as the core of argumentation, complemented by credibility (ethos) and emotional appeal (pathos). This triadic framework influenced subsequent rhetorical traditions in Europe for centuries. During the Middle Ages, argumentation took a scholastic turn, focusing on dialectical disputation as a method for resolving theological and philosophical disagreements. However, the modern concept of argumentation began to emerge in the 20th century as scholars challenged formal logic’s adequacy in analyzing real-life discourse (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Their New Rhetoric proposed that argumentation should be studied as a social and linguistic process rather than as purely formal reasoning. This view redefined argumentation as audience-centered and context-dependent.

In parallel, Stephen Toulmin (1958) introduced a model that bridged philosophy and practical reasoning, providing an analytical structure to understand how people construct and defend arguments in non-formal contexts. Later developments by Habermas (1984) and van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) solidified



argumentation theory as a distinct discipline, integrating insights from pragmatics, communication studies, and critical discourse analysis.

Major Models and Frameworks

1. The Toulmin Model

Toulmin's model remains one of the most influential analytical tools in argumentation theory. It divides an argument into six key components: claim, data, warrant, backing, qualifier, and rebuttal (Toulmin, 1958). Unlike formal logic, which focuses on deductive validity, the Toulmin model emphasizes practical reasoning—how people justify their beliefs in real contexts. The model is particularly effective in educational and rhetorical analysis, as it illustrates the implicit assumptions (warrants) linking evidence to conclusions (Freeman, 2011).

2. The Pragma-Dialectical Approach

Developed by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004), the pragma-dialectical model views argumentation as a critical discussion aimed at resolving differences of opinion through reasonable dialogue. It combines pragmatic analysis (how language functions in context) with dialectical norms (rules for rational discussion). The model identifies four stages of argumentative discourse—confrontation, opening, argumentation, and conclusion—and prescribes rules for maintaining reasonableness, such as avoiding fallacies and respecting the burden of proof. This approach has been widely applied in discourse studies, education, and legal reasoning (Eemeren, 2018).

3. Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action

Habermas (1984) advanced a broader sociophilosophical view by embedding argumentation within communicative rationality. According to this theory, argumentation aims to achieve understanding (*Verständigung*) through the free exchange of valid claims. Rational discourse, in Habermas's view, depends on the fulfillment of validity claims—truth, rightness, and sincerity—which participants must justify when challenged. This framework highlights the ethical dimension of argumentation as a democratic process oriented toward consensus (Rehg, 2009).

4. The New Rhetoric

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's *New Rhetoric* (1969) reframed argumentation as an art of persuasion directed at an audience's reason rather than as a method of proof. They distinguished between demonstration (formal logic) and argumentation (practical reasoning) and emphasized the role of values, audience adaptation, and rhetorical techniques. This model influenced later research on discourse analysis, intercultural communication, and the ethics of persuasion (Tindale, 2004).

Linguistic and Pragmatic Dimensions

Modern argumentation theory increasingly recognizes the linguistic realization of arguments in discourse. Pragmatic theories, particularly speech act theory, have expanded the analysis from propositional logic to communicative acts. Arguments are viewed as sequences of illocutionary acts (asserting, questioning, refuting) embedded in context (Walton, 2008).

Moreover, linguistic argumentation focuses on markers of stance, modality, and coherence that reveal an arguer's strategic positioning (Hyland, 2005). For instance, connectives such as *because*, *therefore*, and *however* signal argumentative relations, while hedges and boosters express degrees of certainty and engagement. The pragma-dialectical approach integrates these insights by analyzing how participants use language strategically to balance persuasion and reasonableness (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2002). Thus, language serves not only as a medium but as a constitutive element of argumentative activity.

Argumentation theory has profound implications for education, particularly in developing critical thinking, academic writing, and dialogic learning. Research in educational linguistics shows that teaching argumentation enhances students' reasoning, metacognition, and civic literacy (Kuhn, 1991; Andrews, 2010). Through argument-based learning, students learn to justify claims, consider counterarguments, and evaluate evidence critically.

A central concern of argumentation theory is maintaining reasonableness and ethics in discourse. The pragma-dialectical model introduces the concept of “critical discussion” governed by rules that prevent fallacies



and manipulation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). Violations of these rules—such as attacking the person rather than the argument or distorting the opponent’s position—are identified as fallacies, which hinder rational resolution.

Recent developments in argumentation theory reflect a convergence of cognitive, computational, and discursive approaches. Cognitive argumentation research explores how people process reasons and counterarguments, integrating findings from psychology and neuroscience (Mercier & Sperber, 2017). This perspective challenges the traditional view of argumentation as purely rational, showing that reasoning often serves social and epistemic functions.

Conclusion

Argumentation theory has evolved from its classical rhetorical roots into a sophisticated interdisciplinary field that examines reasoning, persuasion, and communication in diverse contexts. Through foundational models such as those of Toulmin, Perelman, Habermas, and van Eemeren, scholars have provided tools to analyze how humans justify claims and negotiate meaning. The theory’s applications—ranging from education and intercultural communication to AI and digital discourse—demonstrate its enduring relevance. Ultimately, argumentation is not merely a technique of persuasion but a cornerstone of rational and ethical interaction. In an age of information overload and polarized debate, the principles of sound argumentation remain vital for fostering critical thinking, mutual understanding, and democratic deliberation.

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