

## Using argumentation theory to analyze verbal interactions in organizations

### Örgütlerdeki sözel etkileşimlerin analizi için argümantasyon teorisinin kullanımı

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#### **Abstract**

Compared to the artificial language of mathematics, the language in use is often ambiguous and usually not amenable to objective interpretations. Interpretative methods are still able to produce rich linguistic evaluations, though. Yet, the loose structure of those methods can be challenging, especially for junior researchers. The argumentation theory of new rhetoric can fill this gap as a structured method of systematically dissecting arguments to generate new theoretical propositions from textual data. Arguing is practical reasoning to produce conclusions by using logically or empirically imperfect justifications. It is a way of employing rationality when formal logic and self-evident demonstrations are not applicable. Argumentation analysis can systematically capture personal views within arguments and the reasoning processes that led to those views. Accordingly, this study proposes five steps for argumentation analysis. These five steps guide researchers to identify critical arguments, analyse their structure, establish intentions behind arguments and produce hypotheses accordingly. The proposed method aims to facilitate inquiries into verbal interactions in organisations.

**Keywords:** Argumentation Analysis, New Rhetoric, Argumentation Theory, Organisational Conflicts

**Jel Codes:** M19, M1, M0

#### **Öz**

Matematiğin yapay diliyle karşılaştırıldığında, normalde kullanılan dil sıkça muğlaklık arz eder ve çoğunlukla objektif bir şekilde yoruma uygun değildir. Dil yorumlama yöntemleri yine de zengin sözel değerlendirmeler üretebilmektedir. Ancak bu yöntemlerin belirsizliklere açık yapısı, özellikle deneyimsiz araştırmacılar için zorlayıcı olabilmektedir. Bu boşluğu doldurmak amacıyla, bir argümantasyon teorisi olan yeni retorik, metinsel verilerden yeni teorik önermeler üretmek amacıyla argümanları sistematik olarak incelemek için kullanılabilir. Argümantasyon, mantıksal veya deneysel olarak mükemmel olmayan çıkarımlar yaratan pratik bir akıl yürütme şeklidir. Argümantasyon, formel mantık veya deneysel kanıt uygulanmadığında rasyonaliteyi kullanmanın bir yoludur. Argümantasyon analizi ise, argümanları ve argümanlara yol açan muhakeme süreçleri içindeki kişisel görüşleri sistematik olarak değerlendirmeye yarar. Bu doğrultuda, bu çalışma argümantasyon analizi için beş adım önermektedir. Bu beş adım, kritik argümanların tespiti, argüman yapılarının analizi, argümanların arkasındaki niyetin tespiti ve bunlara göre hipotezler üretmeye yönelik araştırmacıyı yönlendirmektedir. Çalışmada önerilen yöntem, örgütlerdeki sözlü etkileşimlerin sorgulanmasını kolaylaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Argümantasyon Analizi, Yeni Retorik, Argümantasyon Teorisi, Örgütsel Anlaşmazlıklar

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## Introduction

Interpretive qualitative research can improve its capabilities with new structured methodological approaches that bolster its technical features. Structured methodological approaches are instrumental, as they can facilitate technical criticism beyond philosophical and theoretical disputes. From a technical perspective, interpretative research is challenging for researchers as it often exclusively relies on the researchers' hermeneutic skills. As such, it is particularly challenging for junior researchers who often suffers from procedural uncertainties concerning how to produce solid—but also rich—claims out of qualitative data (Bartels and Wagenaar, 2018; Graebner et al., 2012; Point et al., 2017). Procedural flexibilities can help to capture researcher creativity in unique ways that are not that so readily available when quantitative methods are used (Bansal et al., 2018; James, 2013; Springgay and Truman, 2018). However, those flexibilities also introduce a worrying level of anxiety into the research process (Hammersley, 2019), making qualitative research a risky endeavour, especially when trying to elicit acceptance of research findings (Bitektine and Miller, 2015).

Interpretative quality research is beneficial for theory building (Bodner, Song, & Szulanski, 2019), which involves conjecturing about an observation through abductive reasoning, i.e. deductively approaching a phenomenon with specific theories to inductively discover new theories (Van de Ven, 2007). The 'conceptual leap' between one theory to another with the help of an observation can be serendipitous, but it certainly depends on artistic thinking fostered by the researcher's scholarship level (Klag and Langley, 2013). While it is elusive to be perfectly systematic about this discovery process, as it is partly an art, structured qualitative methods can help train new researchers.

Responding to the need for structure in qualitative interpretive research, this study advocates a new verbal data analysis method by drawing on a particular argumentation theory referred to as new rhetoric (Perelman, 1982; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). The suggested method is specifically devised to study discursive interactions between individuals in conflict. In this regard, it can be beneficial to study organisational conflicts (Alvesson, 2019; e.g. Lewin, 2001; Nechanska et al., 2020; O'Neill and McLarnon, 2018), dissent and interactional justice concerns (See Bies, 2005; Lee, 2001; Woodilla and Forray, 2008), as these issues are firmly rooted in argumentative interactions. As such, the aim of this study is to offer a method that can be used to analyse organisational interactions that are riddled with personal disagreements involving clashes of different ethical views.

Since the offered method is specifically devised to study discursive interactions between conflicting individuals, it is just applicable to a particular type of verbal data. Yet, the offered method has essential connotations for qualitative research in general. Qualitative researchers are in many respects in the business of making sense of other people's accounts, such as when researchers aim to understand interview accounts of research participants who express their subjective and hence debatable personal views on specific issues. As individuals' accounts reflect their practical use of reasoning within arguments (Perelman, 1982), this paper proposes that analysing arguments can be helpful for all sorts of qualitative research by appropriate designs of new research methods. Thus, with some appropriate modifications, the offered method can be adapted to new domains as diverse as supply chain management (Houé and Murphy, 2017) or economics (Piore, 2006). Before presenting the details of the offered theory and method, the argumentation theory of rhetoric will be outlined first.

## Theoretical framework

### Argumentation theory of new rhetoric

Arguing is the informal and practical use of reasoning when indisputable demonstrations (apodictic), self-evident truth, or perfectly deductive conclusions are not possible (Perelman, 1980). Arguing involves establishing justifications that elicit voluntary adherence to a certain conclusion (Toulmin, 2003). Justifications can rely on factual factors as well as subjective values since practical reasoning may require reference to value preferences as heuristic tools (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). As arguments are formed to convey persuasively framed opinions, arguments constitute the primary pathway to understanding a personal point of view and the reasoning behind that view. Therefore, it is worthwhile to study arguments to explore the various organisational phenomena that are subject to persuasion attempts (Hartelius and Browning, 2008).

Many studies have embraced argumentation analysis (e.g., Alvesson, 1993; Bouwmeester, 2013; Brown et al., 2012; Erkama and Vaara, 2010; Sillince and Brown, 2009; Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005; Symon et al., 2008). Yet, in contrast to methods like grounded theory and content analysis, argumentation analysis methods have been vastly underutilised (Bluhm, Harman, Lee, & Mitchell, 2011). One reason might be that currently available argumentation analysis methods are not sufficiently structured to

initiate a steady research stream. Another reason might be that argumentation analysis is often exclusively associated with social constructionist projects that require a commitment to certain philosophical and political values that, in many projects, may not be applicable (See Baillie and Meckler, 2012). In this respect, the rhetorical theory has typically been a conceptual arsenal for poststructuralist or relativistic analyses, pointing to the multiplicity and fragility of rationality (Hartelius and Browning, 2008; Sillince and Suddaby, 2008). By contrast, new rhetoric (Perelman, 1982; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969) advocates the strength of practical rationality on the basis that it both facilitates the discovery of reasonable solutions to problems encountered and restrains relativism. However, at the same time, new rhetoric is against the rigidity of positivistic approaches and advocate a pragmatic stance (e.g., Morgan, 2014) which endorses a realist ontology alongside an interpretive epistemology. The proposed method in this paper is suitable for researchers who are subscribed to a realist ontology.

As Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) argumentation theory posits, arguments can be based on fundamental premises as well as on value-based premises. Actual premises can be perceived (alleged) facts, which are products of sense data. Truth is another accurate premise. Truth assertions are recognisable relations between factual observations, as in theories asserting certain relations between observed variables. Other actual premises are presumptions, which are confirmed in the sense that they are based on what is usually expected. For instance, when a person has a PhD, they are presumed to be an expert in their field. All-natural factors are only tentatively objective, as their veracity can still be challenged by contrary claims asserting a different reality. In that sense, perfect access to reality is admittedly elusive in argumentation. Otherwise, one would not need to argue; instead, one would demonstrate.

Value-based premises are comprised of values, value hierarchies, and loci of value preferences (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Values are subjective preferences and moral principles that set out how one should act in certain circumstances. Though people may share similar values, they often prioritise them differently. Thus, distinct value hierarchies can produce distinct conclusions from the same set of values. When individuals subscribe to values and value hierarchies in their arguments, they are, in fact, implicitly resorting to the loci of their value preferences (i.e., the heuristic principles that determine which values to prefer and in which order) (Perelman, 1982). Loci of value preferences provide heuristic reasons for value-based preferences. For instance, some people can justify their hasty decisions by valuing simplicity and ease of action, whereas others, in response, can argue against such decisions by valuing rigor in decision making. Exploring distinct loci of value preferences can be important for qualitative researchers, as they can reveal the sources of some of the values and value hierarchies implicit in an argument. Social context, as well as psychological imperatives, can help to explain why certain loci of value preferences are preferred over others in an argument.

The importance of value-based preferences versus real factors depends on the audience of an argument. When individuals argue to persuade all rational beings, they address the universal audience: an imagined abstract community of listeners whose value-free rational thinking is amenable to persuasion (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). By contrast, when individuals address a particular audience, they must consider the value commitments of that group of people to persuade them effectively. In this respect, argumentation is a rhetorical speech tool whose nature changes according to the addressed audience (Perelman, 1982). Likewise, arguments strategically emphasise certain aspects of an issue over others as a means of persuasion. In other words, an argument is by its nature partial, selective, and framed from a unique point of view, as it aims to give credence to a limited aspect of reality (Perelman, 1984).

It is possible to employ different types of arguments with both value-based premises and actual premises. To categorise arguments, their mechanism can be observed to reveal the arguments' reasoning processes. To this end, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca's (1969) theory distinguishes association arguments from dissociation arguments. Association arguments produce conclusions in three different ways: (1) by linking an observation with a specific interpretation, (2) by building quasi-logical relations between certain phenomena, or (3) by identifying resemblances between different elements of reality. Arguments that adopt the first method are termed arguments representing reality, as they inductively derive arguments from observation. Arguments adopting the second method are termed quasi-logical association arguments. Arguments adopting the third method are termed association arguments establishing a structure of reality, as such arguments depict an imagined reality by drawing on resemblances.

Arguments that represent reality can be built using sequential relations in observed phenomena or by identifying coexistence relations. Examples of both subtypes are presented by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969) as follows. Examples of sequential relations are act-consequence relationships (observing

an outcome as a consequence of an action), act-waste relationships (observing acts with no consequences), redundant action-consequence (futility of action is observed), act-direction relationship (the trend is observed after an action), and act-continuous consequence relationship (observation of a constant improvement or deterioration). Examples of coexistence relations, on the other hand, are act-person relationships (attributing an action to a person's attributes such as to his or her character), act-context relationships (attributing an action to an exceptional, contextual situation rather than to a person's character), act-essence relationships (attributing an action as an essence of a specific group of people or era in history), act-accident relationships (attributing an action to an accidental, unrepresentative, feature of a person or era), or act-group member relationships (attributing a person's action to his or her group membership characteristics, such as by stereotyping).

Quasi-logical association arguments use ostensibly logical relationships instead of empirical observations to generate conclusions. Such arguments are only quasi-logical, as their logical features are imprecise and, therefore, disputable. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyceta (1969) present rich examples of such association arguments as follows. Individuals can support a conclusion by stating that it is logically compatible or otherwise incompatible with a particular rule. A conclusion can be accepted or rejected by praising or ridiculing its possible logical consequences.

Similarly, when a conclusion is to be rejected, it can be presented quasi-logically as implying the sacrifice of another, valuable, alternative conclusion. Unverified probabilistic estimations can also be used to support or reject a choice. Furthermore, quasi-logical consistency relations can be established to accept or reject a specific choice. For instance, the arguments made by a person in the past can be quasi-logically connected to his or her current arguments to make a point. Finally, transitive conceptual relationships can be used, such as by stating that the enemy of a friend becomes an enemy.

Arguments establishing a structure of reality can be generated in three ways (Perelman, 1982; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). The first way is by using illustrations or examples. Illustrations are employed to strengthen adherence to an argument that readily has some other means of support. Examples differ from illustrations in that, whereas examples are used to present a pattern inductively to establish a real claim, illustrations reinforce an argument that already benefits from other means to elicit adherence. The second way of establishing a structure of reality is by using models. Here, argumentative models are distinct from mathematical models in that argumentative models do not employ deductive or geometrical reasoning principles. Instead, argumentative models are presented as a perfect or ideal example of something. For instance, an employee's idealised version can be described by outlining a model representing the employee's kind that should be desired in an organisation. Finally, the third way of establishing a structure of reality is by using analogies or metaphors to establish an accurate claim. Metaphors are considered condensed analogies, while analogies are complete expressions of resemblances between two elements. For instance, a shareholder can liken the CEO of a company to a lion. If how the CEO resembles a lion is made explicit, it can be called an analogy. However, if the resemblance is presumed and implicit rather than fully expressed, it can be called a metaphor.

On the other hand, dissociation arguments do not merely disconnect an association built by observation, a quasi-logical claim, or a resemblance to a genuine claim. Instead, dissociation arguments connect a reality claim with an interpretation that devalues commonly presumed observations, quasi-logical claims, or resemblances. In other words, dissociation operates at the conceptual level to deny apparent logical, empirical, or resemblance relationships. For instance, a certain person's apparent failure of action can be denied by citing different failure criteria than those generally assumed. Adopting new definitions, identifying distinctions, and introducing exceptions are other means of dissociation that distance a concept from its usual meaning—all of which can devalue apparent observations, quasi-logical connections, or resemblances. Consequently, all dissociation arguments imply new associations that deny the commonly presumed association, while every association likewise implies dissociation from alternative associations (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969; Van Eemeren et al., 2014).

### Heuristic versus eristic intentions

It is possible to categorise arguments based on their strategic intent. Accordingly, if interlocutors use arguments to discover solutions to their problems, their intentions are heuristic. However, if they tend to use arguments to win a dispute at all costs, their intentions are eristic (i.e., interlocutors are fighting with words rather than arguing in eristic expressions) (Walton, 1998, 1999). There is a dogmatic and irrational ignoring of counter-arguments in eristic argumentation, which is not the case in heuristic argumentation. If an audience has eristic intentions, "the appeal to reasonableness would be pointless if the audience were not presumed to evaluate the argumentation as a rational judge" (Van Eemeren et

al., 1996:5). Fanatics can be considered extreme examples of eristic arguers, whereas philosophers and scientists are prime examples of heuristic arguers (Perelman, 1965, 1968, 1982).

In eristic argumentation, the aim is to defeat the counter-party by persuading a different audience (such as the general public or actual arbitrators) who can potentially or adjudicate the conflicting views (Perelman, 1963). Hence, in eristic argumentation, there is an attempt at persuasion directed to the judging audience rather than the apparent counter-party to whom the arguments are ostensibly addressed. The basic strategy of eristic arguments is to put a rival into a difficult position with sophistry by using words cynically, with pretence reasoning (Perelman, 1963, 1979). Eristic arguments are possibly responsible for the widespread disdain for rhetoric, especially when preposterous arguments are seen to support essentially baseless claims.

Identification of heuristic and eristic arguments is essential, as the presence of eristic arguments suggest that the arguer is pursuing his or her self-interests rather than pursuing to find a mutually reasonable solution. Eristic arguments are likely to be employed to serve socially narrow personal interests (e.g., expecting an unfair gain), which can appear to be reasonable, albeit opportunistically, only from the arguer's perspective. For instance, managers' untruthful legitimacy claims can be considered eristic to cover up ethically controversial practices. Besides, eristic arguments can be products of unreasonable passions, prejudices, myths, and instincts, indicating a dogmatic opposition to rationality, a close-mindedness (Perelman, 1963). By shutting down the possibility of dialogue, eristic arguments can precipitate other sorts of solution methods, such as politics or violence (Perelman, 1980).

Eristic argumentation is interest-seeking at the expense of problem-solving and truth-seeking. It can be easily observed in ethical decision-making. For instance, one can resort to nepotism but defend it with eristic argumentation, as if the favoured friend or relative were justifiably recruited. Similarly, one can choose to reduce one's sense of anxiety without actually trying to solve a problem, defending that choice if it were a reasonable way of solving the problem. For example, a physician can prescribe certain drugs to avoid being sued, despite their being aware that the prescribed drugs will not help the patient.

Eristic arguments can also be used for another irrational motive: namely, to humiliate a disputant verbally, in front of a judging audience, for the sake of psychological relief rather than to resolve an issue by reasoning. This is the cathartic function of eristic arguments, which can be used, in particular, when the speaker already knows that it is impossible to persuade the counter-party (Walton, 1998). In other words, when rational means of problem resolution wane, disputants may resort to irrationality as a means of attaining goals other than problem resolution, such as psychological relief. Here, the aim is not to win the dispute but rather to hurt the disputant in the judging audience's eyes.

## Methodology

### The proposed method of argumentation analysis

Based on the theoretical perspective covered so far, the proposed method of argumentation analysis in this study is as follows. The proposed method focuses on arguments as the unit of analysis. Once relevant arguments are identified, they should be classified thematically depending on the research question and the theoretical view adopted. For instance, a study attending to individuals' personality would benefit from personality themes. In this process, arguments should be labelled by the researcher succinctly, while quotations from the text can be extracted to demonstrate the content of arguments in their original form. While arguments are thematically classified, contextual information should also be detected to make sense of each argument. Contextual information should be summarised by the researcher for ease of presentation, while short excerpts can further demonstrate the arguments' veracity. Thematic classification of arguments, along with their contextual information, helps compare the relevant arguments in the light of the specific theoretical view adopted. For instance, opposing views can be contrasted to establish how participants differ in their views.

The identified arguments should then be categorised according to the outlined argumentation theory of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). This will enable one to tell whether the argument stems from an observation, a quasi-logical link, a resemblance relationship, or a conceptual distinction brought about by the arguer. Furthermore, each argument's rhetorical features can be analysed as to whether they are value-based claims addressed to a particular audience or factual claims addressed to the universal audience. When searching for fundamental factors in the arguments, researchers should look for the availability of factual observations and truth claims based on the observations. Presumptions should be questioned as to how they support the factual claims. By contrast, researchers should look for value preferences and endorsed value hierarchies when searching for value-based factors. The next question is to understand why a specific value is endorsed against others. For this goal, identifying the

loci of value preferences within arguments will be particularly conducive to generating rich findings. The preferred rationale behind value endorsements can reveal the psychological and cultural factors that underlie the arguer's reasoning process.

The final categorisation of argumentation analysis relates to understanding whether the analysed argument is for heuristic or eristic purposes. This is not an easy distinction to establish in practice, as all arguments can be heuristic or eristic to varying degrees (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969). Even so, it may be possible to identify the predominant motivation of the arguer (Jia, Cheng, & Hale, 2017), mainly if the arguer is conscious of his or her motives and openly admits those motives. If there are unconscious or hidden motives, the analyst should evaluate arguments to detect implicit signs of eristic arguments.

Eristic arguments can be recognised by arguers' dogmatic and hostile attitudes toward counter-views and their reliance on rationally deficient but ostensibly good arguments. Eristic arguers can also resort to deliberately misleading dissociations to misinterpret the situation on hand conceptually. Finally, eristic arguments can be distinguished from heuristic arguments by their deceptive sophistry (Booth, 2004; Walton, 1999). While future research is needed to establish more precise distinctions between predominantly heuristic and eristic arguments, interpretations based on such cues can help practice.

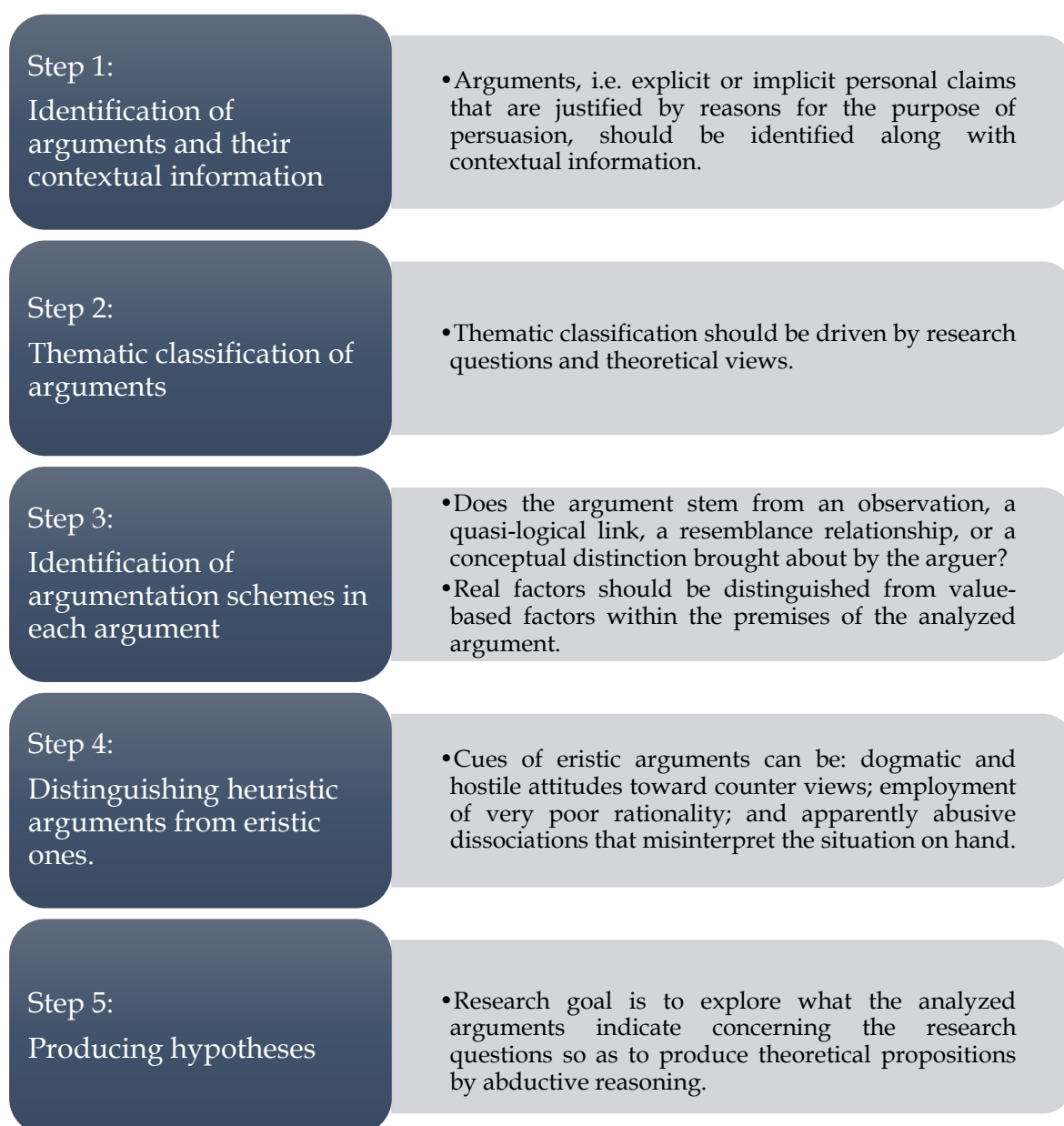
Overall, the analytical approach suggested here is to discover how individuals justify themselves in the speech and construct their arguments accordingly. This is suggested to be realised by relying on the framework introduced below, which draws on the argumentation theory advanced by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969). Here, the focus is not on the eloquence of speech delivery. Likewise, the aim is not to examine speech styles. Instead, it is proposed that the focus should be solely on the mechanics of arguments and the reasoning behind arguments. As such, the chief goal is to explore what the analysed arguments indicate concerning the research questions. In this regard, hypotheses can be produced by responding to various concerns that can be inferred from the argumentation analysis: What are the psychological or sociological sources of their conflicting arguments? Are they, for instance, simply a product of cultural differences? If culture is considered an issue, what kind of cultural differences can explain the situation? Or are there any psychological impulses behind conflicting views rather than cultural differences? Or is the issue just a matter of personality differences? What are the roots of the analysed associations and dissociations in the interviewee accounts?

If individuals are observed to have an eristic debate, in which disagreements are not genuinely negotiated, it would be possible to ask different questions about why they were arguing eristically: Why do the parties dogmatically cling to their views not consider counter opinions? What are the irrational motives behind the eristic attitude? Are there any vested interests that motivate the eristic attitude? If so, what leads to the emergence of vested interests? What are the incentives? If there are no vested interests, it is appropriate to check the presence of passions or prejudices that cloud willingness to negotiate rationally. If spotted, what are the antecedents? Again, various theoretical views can help to produce new hypotheses to answer these questions. Likewise, all arguments in the sample can indicate specific patterns that may help to form new hypotheses. In all these respects, analysed arguments can precipitate fruitful further psychological or sociological inquiries. All the steps of the proposed data analysis method are presented in Figure 1 on the next page.

We aim to offer a theoretical guideline to researchers who can apply our method using the five steps outlined. Our method outlines a road to follow with its structure, but it does not specify minute details of data analysis by its interpretative nature. Due to the verbal nature of our method, a specific data analysis example would require ample space. On the other hand, a short illustration is unlikely to be helpful as it might lead to confusion without a thorough treatment of the data. As to see how our method can be applied, we recommend reading the doctoral thesis of Kurdoğlu (2018), who had already applied the methodological principles of our work.

With the offered argumentation analysis method, it is possible to produce conceptual-theoretical abstractions out of empirical data. In this regard, while the offered method does not allow empirical statistical generalisations, it generates new theories that can be valuable to explain empirical data. These explanations can then be tested statistically for statistical generalisations. Yet, the method offered in this paper only covers how to generate such theoretical explanations as an initial step required for theory generation. To realise this research objective, researchers should reason abductively during the argumentation analysis as that will enable them to explain the observed data conceptually. By argumentation analysis, researchers can produce explanatory hypotheses rather than produce statistical generalisations beyond the observed data (Godfrey-Smith, 2007).

To reason abductively means thinking iteratively in a way using both deductive and inductive reasoning. This involves approaching the empirical data deductively with some different theoretical perspectives to check those theories' applicability to the situation at hand. Simultaneously, one should be ready to produce inductively generated conclusions from the data by observing meaningful patterns (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Folger and Stein, 2017; Peirce, 1997). By these iterations comprised of deductive and inductive reasoning sequences, one can eventually reach the best explanation making sense of the data at hand. Abduction is a beneficial reasoning method that can be employed to produce novel theoretical explorations out of theory-laden observations (Thomas, 2010; Van de Ven, 2007). Unlike the deductive reasoning methods employed in mathematical or probabilistic techniques, abductive reasoning offers theoretical explanations which are yet to be tested statistically. However, abductive reasoning provides theoretical statements that are still worthwhile as the generated theoretical statements are reasonable and powerful explanations enabled by iterative deductive and inductive reasoning (Godfrey-Smith, 2007).



**Figure 1.** Proposed Method of Analysis

### Other rhetorical approaches and novelty of new rhetoric as a method

New rhetoric does not study language as a macro-level sociological structure; instead, it has a micro-level focus. In that sense, it does not deal with cultural identity construction (e.g. Hartelius and Browning, 2008), nor with how rhetoric can be employed to build a new institutional system (e.g. Brown et al., 2012), and nor with how certain types of decisions can be legitimised across an institutional domain (e.g. Green, Li, & Nohria, 2009). Likewise, it does not deal with how specific institutional logics influence individuals. Additionally, new rhetoric is not concerned with how cultural rhetoric shapes our interpretation (e.g. Heracleous and Barrett, 2001). However, new rhetoric does focus on how individuals try to find solutions to their decision-making problems in rational terms.

Compared to discourse analysis approaches, such as conversation analysis (Roulston, 2018) or discursive psychology (Wiggins and Potter, 2008), the verbal analysis method proposed in this paper relies on a specific unit of guided analysis systematic approach. In this respect, the proposed method unambiguously focuses on arguments on individuals' arguments and the reasoning process behind those arguments, instead of dealing with macro and micro level discourses whose definitions can be conceptually confusing.

As opposed to discourse analysis approaches, grounded theory is often advocated as a systematic way to analyse qualitative data (Charmaz and Belgrave, 2019; Gioia et al., 2013; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Owen Lo, 2014). Admittedly, grounded theory has many unique variations, and as such, it is evolving with different modifications (e.g., Charmaz, 2020). As such, it is perhaps hard to pin down what grounded theory is or is not precisely (see Suddaby, 2006), but we believe that, especially for theory-driven research projects, grounded theory is in any way, not an unproblematic choice. The grounded theory leads researchers to identify distinct patterns of relationships between observed variables in the qualitative data, culminating with exploring new theories that can explain identified relationships (Kenealy, 2012). However, with its many variations, grounded theory comprises sophisticated coding procedures to extract information from textual data (Apramian, Cristancho, Watling, & Lingard, 2017). In this regard, it functions as a pattern recognition tool that captures the theoretical relations visible in a set of related texts. Its coding procedures can be too mechanical for an interpretative analysis (e.g., St. Pierre and Jackson, 2014). More importantly, the grounded theory runs the risk of producing restricted research outcomes for theory-driven research projects, as it aims to ground its conclusions solely on empirical data. However, this goes against the idea that there is no observation without a theory. It is a "Baconian myth that all science starts from observation and then slowly and cautiously proceeds to theories" (Popper, 1972:272). In that sense, while some variations exist between different grounded theory approaches, in grounded theory research, the theoretical roots of empirically grounded observations are often obscure.

Another concern is that grounded theory does not set an a priori primary unit of analysis. Therefore, analysts are not guided in the entire text; they should focus during the laborious text coding process. According to grounded theory, emerging themes of analysis are expected to present themselves to the researcher (O'Reilly et al., 2012). This means that research questions should generally be comprehensive and widely explorative, which is not helpful for research projects with empirically focused but theoretically more profound interests.

In contrast to grounded theory, qualitative interpretative methods, such as discourse analysis methods (Fairclough, 2013; Wooffitt, 2005) in their many forms, derive deeper interpretative possibilities from an analysed text. However, compared to the method proposed in this study, such discursive methods are more unstructured, as they depend more on hermeneutic skills than analytical structures. Also, their analyses do not have specific foci that direct the data analysis process. By contrast, the method proposed in this paper explicitly focuses on the immediate context of the individuals to understand their arguments and avoids an excessively wholistic outlook that may confuse a novice researcher.

As an alternative micro-level discourse analysis method, discursive psychology focuses on rhetorical elements of speech to discover which interests are served by psychological and linguistic constructions (Lester, 2014; A. Whittle et al., 2014; Andrea Whittle and Mueller, 2015). Discursive psychology is interested in exploring how individuals persuade or impress other people with new social constructions and how they can resist opposing views (Phillips and Jørgensen, 2002; Wooffitt, 2005). Discursive psychology might be a helpful starting point for researchers who are particularly interested in socially constructionist research projects. However, it is helpful for researchers who are subscribed to a realist ontology. More crucially, as a method, discursive psychology does not supply any explicit prescription about how a researcher can perform discourse analysis. The method, again, primarily relies on the hermeneutic competence and inventiveness of the researcher (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) rather than on underlying analytical procedures that can guide such skills.



## Conclusion

Conducting qualitative research is challenging, owing to its procedural ambiguities and its reliance on less established standards than those of quantitative research (Frost, 2014; Gioia et al., 2013; Graebner et al., 2012; Hunt, 1994; Saunders and Townsend, 2016). However, qualitative research can also be a promising way of generating exciting theories (Bansal et al., 2018; Harley and Faems, 2017; Willing, 2019). Relative to quantitative research, qualitative research is currently not receiving sufficient intellectual attention, which technical methodological improvements can remedy. To that end, this study has offered a specific qualitative research method to study individual interactions. Further research could broaden the scope of the suggested research method.

The argumentative analysis method offered in this study opens new possibilities for psychological as well as sociological inquiries. Drawing on the theoretical and philosophical view of new rhetoric (Perelman, 1982; Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1969), the proposed method describes how researchers can analyse practical reasoning processes within arguments to raise essential questions that can lead to the identification of attractive theoretical propositions. While the generation of theoretical propositions eventually requires abductive reasoning to conceptually leap from data to theoretical conclusions (Klag and Langley, 2013; Martela, 2015), the argumentation analysis method offered in this study systematically guides researchers to the step that immediately precedes the eventual conceptual leap.

While the suggested method is, in its present form, applicable only to research dealing with interactions, it has crucial implications for qualitative research in general. Qualitative researchers are, in many respects, in the business of making sense of other people's accounts, such as when they aim to understand the interviews of research participants who express their subjective, and hence debatable, personal views on specific issues (Point et al., 2017). As individuals' accounts reflect their practical use of reasoning within arguments (Perelman, 1982), analysing arguments can, by underpinning the design of new, appropriate research methods, benefit all sorts of qualitative research. Thus, with some appropriate modifications, the offered method can be adapted to new domains.

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