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The Role of Context in Pragmatics

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I Dedication

To my dear family for their patience, understanding and support.

II

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ABSTRACT

The reasons underlying linguists renewed interest in Pragmatics are their concern in the users of language as compared to an earlier focus on language as abstract system; and their belief that users and language are at the core of all things pragmatic as a truly *existential* condition (Mey 2001: 29). In this user context, Mey asserts that speaker- hearer or interlocutors'' interaction is demanded of their concerns of the notions of register, such as formality or informality of language use, choice of connotative words, as well as speakers'' attitudes and rhetoric skill, such as how to get one''s point across, and the like.

Introduction

Previous work in the social sciences and psychology has shown that the impact and persuasive power of an argument depends not only on the language employed, but also on the credibility and character of the communicator (i.e. ethos) (Miller et al., 1976; Chaiken, 1979, 1980); the traits and prior beliefs of the audience (G. Lord et al., 1979; Davies, 1998; Correll et al., 2004; Hullett, 2005); and the pragmatic context in which the argument is presented (i.e. kairos) (Haugtvedt and Wegener, 1994; Joyce and Harwood, 2014).

Research in Natural Language Processing (NLP) has only partially corroborated these findings. One very influential line of work, for example, develops computational methods to automatically determine the linguistic characteristics of persuasive arguments (Habernal and Gurevych, 2016; Tan et al., 2016; Zhang et al., 2016), but it does so without controlling for the audience, the communicator or the pragmatic context.

Very recent work, on the other hand, shows that attributes of both the audience and the communicator constitute important cues for determining argument strength (Lukin et al., 2017; Durmus and Cardie, 2018). They further show that audience and communicator attributes can influence the relative importance of linguistic features for predicting the persuasiveness of an argument. These results confirm previous findings in the social sciences that show a person's perception of an argument can be influenced by his background and personality traits. To the best of our knowledge, however, no NLP studies explicitly investigate the role of kairos a component of pragmatic context that refers to the context-dependent "timeliness" and "appropriateness" of an argument and its claims within an argumentative discourse in argument quality prediction. Among the many social science studies of attitude change, the order in which argumentative claims are shared with the audience has been studied extensively: Haugtvedt and Wegener (1994), for example, summarize studies showing that the argument-related claims a person is exposed to beforehand