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## THE RELEVANCE CRITERION OF ARGUMENT EVALUATION: PRAGMATIC INTERPRETATION

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### Abstract

In the paper I consider the relevance criterion for argument evaluation within informal logic. I focus on the dialectical relevance concept, which is the result of dialogical interpretation of argumentation process.

**The research topicality** is due to the lack of the relevance notion unified understanding within the contemporary argumentation theory. This notion analysis is important because relevance is one of the criteria for argument evaluation. The elimination of its interpretation's contradictions can be the step towards to both better practical argument evaluation using and integrative relevance understanding conception.

**The purpose** of the article is to find out the specific features of the dialectical relevance in compare with others relevance kinds. To achieve this goal I, firstly, analyzed the key characteristics of the dialogue argumentation model in the relevance perspective. Secondly, I clarify the essential features of the dialectical relevance and irrelevance. Thirdly, I provide a comparative analysis of the dialectical and premissary relevance.

**The methodology** of this research is based on the informal logics and dialogical approaches to an argument and argumentation analysis.

**The novelty** of the research results is the dialectical and premissary relevance notions comparison. **As the result** I conclude that, firstly, dialectical relevance is merely dialectical, not logical criterion of evaluation. Secondly, dialectical relevance deals with argumentation process, not with argument as a premise-conclusion relation. Thirdly, dialectical and premissary relevance have common features, as the relation to the conclusion justifying. However, the dialectical relevance specifics are its rule's compliance, dynamic and dialectical character, and relation to the argumentation correctness.

**Keywords:** informal logic, argument evaluation, dialectical relevance.

**Introduction.** In the middle of the XX century logic is undergoing a transformation from formal symbolic to practical logic. It means also the main research issues modification from solving the paradoxes of mathematics to dealing with the real argument analysis and evaluation.

**This research is based on** the informal logic approach to the argument evaluation. I must admit, informal logic deals with practical aspects of the real-life argument.

This paper is devoted to the relevance criterion, especially its pragmatic interpretation by Douglas

Walton within his dialogue model of argumentation.

**The purpose of this article** is to reveal the dialectical relevance essential features in correlation with other relevance kinds formulated within informal logic.

**The analysis of recent publications on the research topic.** The argument evaluation, and particularly, the relevance criterion, is the research subject of many informal logic representatives, namely A. Allen, A. Blair, P. Bondy, J. Bowles, J. Freeman, R. Johnson, T. Govier, R. Pinto, D. Hitchcock, and others.

**The topicality of the research.** The logic's subject changing makes clear the necessity of new criteria for its analysis. Let us describe shortly the real argument identities. Firstly, arguments are considered indissolubly linked to their *content*. Secondly, they depend on the argument *context*, such as proponent, recipient and communicative situation, or dialogue. Thirdly, argumentative reasoning is considered to be non-deductive and non-inductive (so-called case-by-case reasoning).

Thus, such kind of reasoning needs new criteria of evaluation and new standards for its implementation. The analysis of such criteria essence is a step towards to eliminate the debatable issues within informal logic over the past few decades. The issue of the argument evaluation criteria is one of the most discussed ones within informal logic.

**The unresolved parts of the general problem to which this article is devoted.** In their fundamental book "Logical self-

defense" R. Johnson and A. Blair have presented principally new approach to argument analysis and evaluation, which has become the origin of the informal logic. The so-called RSA-model of argument evaluation, which involves relevance, sufficiency and acceptability criteria is presented in their book. However, despite dynamic discussions on the relevance criterion nature and its role in argument evaluation, there is no clear and universal vision of this criterion today.

**1. Dialectical relevance within dialogical approach to argumentation.** Relevance criterion is used to evaluate, is the specific kind of relationship appears between the argument premises (or one of the premises) and the conclusion. Such a relationship suggests premises support to the conclusion acceptance by the hearer [2].

However, many recent interpretations of the relevance criterion nature and role presuppose a broader sense of the relevance notion. In particular, it concerns involving external elements, between which relevant link has to be built.

This is how the concept of *dialectical relevance* is formed within Douglas Walton's pragmatic concept of relevance.

Primarily I would like to reveal the dialogical framework key features in which this relevance kind is considered. Such a framework appears as rules of dialogue:

(R1) The respondent accepts the premises as commitments.

(R2) Each inference in the chain of argument is structurally correct.

(R3) The chain of argumentation must have the proponent's thesis as its (ultimate) conclusion.

(R4) Arguments meeting (R1), (R2), (R3) and (R4) are the only means that count as fulfilling the proponent's goal in the dialogue [10, p.121].

The argumentation can be evaluated as dialectically relevant if and only if it fully complies with these rules. Otherwise, straw man fallacy, red herring fallacy or irrelevant conclusion appears in the argumentation. Besides this, dialogical rules underlay the possibility of dialogue type shift in the communicative act [13, p.108].

Thus, dialectical relevance relates to dialectical shifts, which occur between types of dialogues or different contexts within a dialogue. Dialogue is seen as a purposeful communicative exchange, and types of dialogue have different purposes. It makes the relationship between relevance and dialogue shift important in the relevance perspective. Thus, setting another goal affects the reasoning (dialectical move) relevance to the new goal [8, p.117]. Dialectical shifts can be licit and illicit, as well as sudden or gradual [8, p. 107].

I would like to note, that in real communication there can be several various shifts of dialogue types or contexts within one conversation. In the relevance context, the shift kind (not quantity) is important. Namely, *licit shift* occurs in such a way that an argument is *dialectically relevant* to the dialogue purpose both before and

after such a shift. The licit shift presupposes that the new dialogue

type (or the other context of the same dialogue) is related to the previous one in the way that they both become steps towards the overall conversational goal. On the contrary, illicit shifts either hinders the constructive course of the dialogue, or merely does not perform any role in achieving the conversational goal [8, p.107; 11, p. 150].

In particular, the goal of persuasion dialogue is to convince the interlocutor of the proponent's thesis acceptability. At the same time, a shift from persuasion dialogue to information-seeking one can occur in the case if some new additional information important for convincing has to be known by respondent. For example, if the mother tries to convince the child not to use rough words, she can make a shift from persuasive dialogue to providing information about the reasons for such behavior unacceptability (information-seeking dialogue). It is the licit shift. At the same time, if the mother makes a shift to deliberation (for example, tries to reconcile positions), it is difficult to imagine a situation in which it would be a rational step towards the dialogue goal. Thus, it is the illicit shift.

All these means, the dialogue type can shift another in dialectically relevant or irrelevant way [8]. To find out an argument dialectical relevance, it is necessary, firstly, to clarify communicative goals of dialogue participants, and, secondly, find out whether an argument contributes to goal's achievement [11, p. 169].

Let us return to the dialogue rules. I would like to stress, the second and

third rules are directly responsible for dialectical relevance. Since 3 and 4 rules establish the requirements for the connection between argumentative reasonings (which are considered as steps in dialogue) on the way from the premises to the ultimate conclusion [10, p.126].

Therefore, dialectical relevance focuses on an argument correct using in dialogue as a communicative framework. And also, dialectical relevance protects from making fallacies of irrelevancy, which are, therefore, dialectical (and non-logical) by the nature [10, p.125]. Thus, dialectical relevance helps to evaluate whether propositions put forward by proponent are really steps towards stated conclusion [10, p.126].

D. Walton points out the main characteristics of the relevance within his pragmatic theory:

1. the logical notion of relevance is central to pragmatic theory;
2. this theory deals with kinds of irrelevance fallacies;
3. the conversational framework of relevance is a necessary component of the theory [11, p. 120].

In my opinion, the first statement refers to the contradictions in the representation of this concept by the author. Thus, firstly, dialectical relevance establishes not logical, but dialectical norms of communication, particularly, argumentative one. Secondly, the violation of the dialectical relevance requirement leads to a spectrum of dialectical fallacies, not logical ones. Thirdly, dialectically relevant arguments are rationally and correctly inscribed in the conversational framework. Thus,

dialectical relevance should be interpreted as a dialectical rather than a logical concept.

That suggests that such relevance kind is specific as a criterion for argument evaluating. While the relevance criterion within RSA-model regulates internal relations between an argument` elements, the dialectical relevance concerns on relation of external elements with argument as a whole. Moreover, such criterion can be used for evaluating the relationship between the argumentation process and the dialogue type in which it takes place.

It let us to stress on the principal distinction between argument and argumentation [1]. The last one involves a sequence of several reasonings (arguments). In the other words, argumentation is the dynamic way of the static arguments` using. This points clearly to the conclusion that premissary relevance is the criterion of logical evaluation of arguments, which constitutes argumentation. While dialectical relevance is the criterion of evaluation of the rationality of argument way to use. Thus, the distinction between argument and argumentation evaluation is significant for our research.

On the other hand, as A. Blair has noted, an argument` full inclusion to the discourse in which it occurs in the real life makes impossible to separate an argument from the way it is used. In the other words, it is not possible to evaluate a reasoning logically without dialectical level of argumentation consideration [1, p. 148].

Such a relation has also another side. Dialectical tier uses logical arguments structure as bricks to build the argumentation. Thus, arguments` chain is aimed to make evidence for respondent`s accepting of the conclusion. This is the logical tier of argumentation. Dialectically relevant argument is considered as a step in the way to the conclusion as argumentation`s goal [10, p. 141].

**2. Fallacies of dialectical irrelevancy.** Let us turn to the fallacies of irrelevancy discussed in the second D. Walton`s thesis on relevance. I have to note, on the one hand, all of these fallacies relate to the way of argument using in the argumentation process, so they are dialectical. On the other hand, they also have logical grounds, as they occur in the case of the failure of probative function. The specificity of dialectical fallacies of irrelevance consists on the incorrectness of their connection with the conclusion, not on the premise`s flaws [10, p.126].

Such connection is manifested in the reasoning functioning within a dialogue governed by strict rules. Thus, the dialectical interpretation of fallacies is based on the fallacies understanding as rules violation. That is why dialectical irrelevancy occurs in the case of illicit dialectical shifts.

In general, there are three main fallacies related to the lack of relevance. Firstly, it is the straw man fallacy. It appears when an opponent tries to refute proponent`s point of view by changing (often, hyperbolizing) his position and attacking a suitable thesis, however, which is not the real thesis proved by

a proponent [4, p. 286; 11, p. 24]. Secondly, it is red herring fallacy. It occurs when the conversation topic is changed incorrectly. The participant of communication can use this fallacy to move away from the disadvantage dialogue subject. In contrast to the straw man, red herring fallacy involves no misunderstanding of the point of view [11, p. 24].

Thirdly, it is the fallacy of irrelevant conclusion, also called *ignoratio elenchi*. It occurs when there is no connection between the premises and the conclusion [11, p. 24].

To sum up, the fallacies of irrelevance are related to the incorrect way of using arguments in the argumentation and in the dialogue as its communicative framework.

Meanwhile, the relevant relation, which is necessary to link two propositions in an argument, is a matter of *material relevance*. This kind of relevance is established among thematic, or subject, relevance. In D. Walton`s conception of relevance material relevance is considered as a kind of dynamic version of the local premissary relevance. It aims to regulate the connection of the arguments chain with the context of a particular communicative situation [11, p. 26]. It let us to conclude, fallacies of irrelevancy are the results of material dialectical relevance failure.

A vivid example of material irrelevance manifest in practical communicative situations D. Walton has found is the famous Irwin Copy`s textbook [3, p. 110]. The core of it remains that the irrelevant conclusion occurs in the following situation. The

parliament considers a specific legislative initiative concerning housing legislation. The members of parliament support the bill, arguing that it is necessary for *all citizens would like to be provided with decent housing*. In italics, I have highlighted the argument premise. Such premise is not relevant to the conclusion, because it relates merely to the topic as a whole, while the proposal deals with the specific item [10, p. 129].

D. Walton outlines this fallacy as a dialogue rule 3 violation. The premise here is relevant to another conclusion, not to the discussed one. Thus, it makes no evidence in favor of the conclusion under consideration. In addition, D. Walton notes, this case does not comply with rule 4. Since the persuasion is carried out by using the ways, not provided by the dialogue rules [10, p.129].

Nevertheless, the other two rules (1 and 2) can be performed in such a situation. Since, firstly, premise is acceptable and that is why can be some argument premise. Secondly, argument (and argument chain) structure can be correct [10, p. 130].

D. Walton focuses on that such a fallacy does not mean full relevance failure. Firstly, this argument looks like correct for recipients. Secondly, one can intuitively attribute the fulfilment of 3 and 4 rules to it [10, p. 130]. The reason of it is *subject relevance* matters in this argument. Subject, or thematic, relevance means content agreement of premise and conclusion subjects. However, this relevance kind cannot to fulfill probative function in an argument [10, p.130].

Thus, this example makes clear both the difference between thematic and material relevance, and the pragmatic nature of fallacies of irrelevance in argumentation [10, p. 131].

**3. Dialectical relevance in compare with others types of relevance.** In this regard, it is worth to emphasize two key aspects of relevance evaluation. Firstly, such an evaluation deals with the way of argument is used in the argumentation, not with the argument itself. Secondly, it concerns the rationality or correctness of its using, not logical characteristics. Despite the fact that D. Walton repeatedly calls it a logical notion, all outlined above allow us to conclude that the essence of this type of relevance is purely dialectical.

It is significant, that there are notions very similar in the meaning to dialectical relevance. It is D. Hitchcock's epistemic relevance, and Ch. Tindale's contextual relevance. The common meaning of these concepts implies that relevance is a relation between informational contribution to an argument, and the argumentation purpose, which becomes the argument context [6;11].

It is important to distinguish two kinds of relevance: dialectical and dialogical. Both of these notions are frequently used in D. Walton's papers and books. Therefore, it is necessary to find out how these notions relate to each other.

D. Walton defines dialogic relevance as the relationship that appears between a speech act and the type of dialogue in which it is carried

out [11, p. 104]. Thus, we can conclude dialogical relevance is a partial case of dialectical one.

I would like to refer to the other relevance kind, called premissary relevance. It is the "classical" evaluation criterion, which deals with premises relation to the conclusion. As mentioned above, the relevance interpretation transforms because of adding some external argument elements to the consideration in the pragmatic conception. This makes us think about the specific correlation of these relevance types with each other.

I must admit, A. Blair's concept of premissary relevance means a type of meaningful premise-conclusion relation. The specific feature of such a relation is premises` providing support to a conclusion, or premises increasing evidence in conclusion`s favor [2].

In D. Walton's pragmatic approach, this sense of relevance transforms acquiring a dynamic interpretation and including external elements to the relevant relationship. Dynamic interpretation is due to the fact that propositions are considered as steps towards a dialectical goal, not as static premises` information. The extension of the relevant relationship elements concerns involving dialogue as a communicative framework and pragmatic goals of its participants in the consideration [8, p. 113].

In addition, it is necessary to clarify the peculiarities of the relation between different types of dialectical relevance. The broadest are global and local relevance. These notions are formulated by the pioneers of informal logic - R. Johnson and A.

Blair in their famous work "Logical Self-Defense". In their concept of argument evaluation, global and local relevance are types of the generic concept of the premises` relevance to the conclusion [7].

In D. Walton's interpretation, these notions are used as types of the generic concept of dialectical relevance. This demonstrates the correlation between premissary relevance and dialectical one. They seem to be a kind of relevance modus. Premissary relevance is static, and considered only within internal argument structure. Dialectical is dynamic and due to the conclusion understanding as the dialogue purpose [10, p. 110].

Therefore, subject and material relevance are types of both local dialectical and global dialectical relevance. While the premissary relevance types are subject and probative (which essentially coincides with the material one).

In his work "Relevance in Argumentation" D. Walton gives an illustrative example of the functioning of these relevance types in a real situation. He has considered the situation in which the doctor had offered to transfer the hopelessly ill patient from the intensive care unit. Doctor`s arguments had consisted in that it is economically inexpedient. Another doctor had noted that this situation concerns the case of the patient himself, not economic issues. Therefore, economic arguments (that the money spent on patient care can be used for preventive medicine) are not relevant to the purpose of the conversation. Thus, the economic

argument is thematically (subject) relevant in the situation, because it concerns the transfer of the patient to the therapeutic department instead of resuscitation. However, it is not materially relevant, as financial issues are not a step towards to conclusion about patient health [11, p. 13].

**Conclusion.** Let me to draw the results of dialectical relevance analysis. Firstly, this notion is considered within dialogical approach to argumentation, namely, pragmatic concept of relevance. It causes its dynamic and normative character. Secondly, the last one is related to the

function of dialogue rules violations fixing. It implies the fallacies of irrelevance specific interpretation as those arising from rules` violation. Thirdly, dialectical relevance is considered as the relation forming within dynamic argumentation process as static arguments` using. Fourthly, dialectical relevance is all or nothing matter, therefore argument cannot be more or less relevant. In general, the research of dialectical relevance in compare with other relevance kinds seems to be the step towards to overall integrative concept of relevance in argumentation.

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## КРИТЕРІЙ РЕЛЕВАНТНОСТІ ДЛЯ ОЦІНКИ АРГУМЕНТАЦІЇ: ПРАГМАТИЧНА ІНТЕРПРЕТАЦІЯ

### Анотація

У статті розглядається критерій релевантності для оцінки аргументації у межах неформальної логіки. Зокрема, увага фокусується на понятті діалектичної релевантності, яке виникає в результаті діалогічної інтерпретації процесу аргументації.

**Актуальність дослідження** пов'язана з відсутністю єдиного розуміння поняття релевантності у сучасній теорії аргументації. Аналіз цього поняття важливий у зв'язку з причетністю релевантності до оцінки аргументації в якості одного з критеріїв хорошого аргументативного міркування. Виключення суперечностей у його інтерпретаціях може бути кроком на шляху як до удосконалення практичного використання оцінки аргументації, так і побудови інтегративної теоретичної концепції релевантності.

**Мета статті** – виявити специфічні ознаки діалектичної релевантності у порівнянні з іншими видами релевантності. Задля досягнення поставленої цілі у статті, по-перше, здійснено аналіз ключових характеристик діалогічної моделі аргументації у аспекті релевантності. По-друге, виявлено сутнісні ознаки діалектичної релевантності та нерелевантності. По-третє, проведено компаративний аналіз діалектичної релевантності та релевантності засновків.

**Методологія** дослідження базується на діалогічному підході та підході неформальної логіки до аналізу аргументативних міркувань та аргументації.

**Новизна дослідження** полягає у тому, що вперше здійснено порівняння релевантності засновків та діалогічної релевантності. **У результаті дослідження** встановлено, по-перше, що діалектична релевантність є саме діалектичним, а не логічним поняттям. По-друге, що діалектична релевантність стосується процесу аргументації, а не аргументативних міркувань самих по собі. По-третє, що діалектична релевантність та релевантність засновків мають спільні риси, такі як відношення до обґрунтування висновку. Проте, до специфічних ознак діалектичної релевантності відносяться підпорядкування діалогічним правилам, динамічний та діалектичний характер та відношення до коректності аргументації.

**Ключові слова:** неформальна логіка, оцінка аргументації, діалектична релевантність.

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## **КРИТЕРИЙ РЕЛЕВАНТНОСТИ ДЛЯ ОЦЕНКИ АРГУМЕНТАЦИИ: ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКАЯ ИНТЕРПРЕТАЦИЯ**

### **Анотація**

В статье рассматривается критерий релевантности для оценки аргументации в неформальной логике. В частности, внимание фокусируется на понятии диалектической релевантности, которое возникает вследствие диалогической интерпретации процесса аргументации.

Актуальность исследования связана с отсутствием в современной теории аргументации единого понимания релевантности. Анализ этого понятия имеет значение в связи с причастностью релевантности к оценке аргументации в качестве одного из критериев хорошего аргументативного рассуждения. Исключение противоречий в его интерпретации может стать шагом на пути к усовершенствованию практического использования оценки аргументации, а также к построению интегративной теоретической концепции релевантности.

**Цель статьи** - выявить специфические черты диалектической релевантности в сравнении с другими видами релевантности. Для достижения поставленной цели, в статье, во-первых, проведен анализ ключевых характеристик диалогической модели аргументации в аспекте релевантности. Во-вторых, обнаружены сущностные черты диалектической релевантности и нерелевантности. В-третьих, проведен компаративный анализ диалектической релевантности и релевантности посылок.

**Методология** исследования основывается на диалогическом подходе и подходе неформальной логіки к анализу аргументативных рассуждений и аргументации.

**Новизна** исследования состоит в том, что комплексное сравнение релевантности посылок с диалектической релевантностью проводится впервые. **В результате**

**исследования** установлено, во-первых, что диалектическая релевантность является именно диалектическим, а не логическим понятием. Во-вторых, что диалектическая релевантность касается процесса аргументации, а не аргументативных рассуждений. В-третьих, что диалектическая релевантность и релевантность посылок имеют общие черты: отношение к обоснованию вывода. Однако, к специфическим чертам диалектической релевантности относятся подчинение диалогическим правилам, динамический и диалектический характер, отношение к корректности аргументации.

**Ключевые слова:** неформальная логика, оценка аргументации, диалектическая релевантность.

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