

PRAGMA-DIALECTICS ON THE BASIS OF STATE EXAMINATION COMPOSITIONS

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Abstract

The present research is based on a study analysing the argumentative skills of Estonian gymnasium students in state examination compositions. The aim of the study is to establish the choices made by students while writing their state exam composition as an argumentative text type. The research considers the implementation of the stages of critical discussion of the pragma-dialectical theory by F. van Eemeren and R. Grootendorst on the basis of one state examination composition (2006, code 356047). In establishing the structure of argumentation in compositions, the macrostructures by T.A. van Dijk were employed as these allow highlighting the macro speech acts expressing more complex speech acts. The stages of critical discussion of the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory could be associated with the argumentation practice used in Estonia. The implementation of the pragma-dialectical theory enhances the comprehension process of argumentative texts from the pragmatical and dialectical point of view.

Key words: *argumentation, dialogue, Estonian language, pragmatics, stages of critical discussion.*

Introduction

In state examination compositions, students must express their viewpoints in arguments and counterarguments, justify and explain their opinions and arguments. Thus, the state examination composition should meet the requirements of the argumentative text type. However, the students' argumentative skills in state exam compositions were not satisfactory. The given evaluation was confirmed by the studies of both K.Lepajõe (2002) and M.Hennoste (2005). Also the present author's study of the students' argumentative skills in state exam compositions in 2004-2006 lets us assume the same. The main sample of the study includes 1500 state exam compositions. The study results reveal the students' various choices based on argumentation. The problems are largely due to the fact that the study materials and the respective literature base their teaching of the type and kind of texts, the development, strategies and argumentation on dissimilar foundations. Thus, the Estonian students' skills to express arguments and counterarguments in state exam compositions pose a serious problem that could be solved by the model of stages of critical discussion based on the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory. Argumentation requires a dialogue and the stages of critical discussion effectively highlight the discussion based on opposing opinions on the dialogue level of the state exam compositions. The research hereby presents a state exam composition given the maximum points by the evaluation committee, which is analysed according to the stages of critical discussion based on the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory.

In case the aim includes the structure of an argumentative text type, the suitable foundation for the improvement of the Estonian students' argumentative skills could be found in the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation devised by Dutch scholars Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst (1984). According to Eemeren and Grootendorst, the aim of argumentation is to justify or refute certain opinions. Based on the pragma-dialectical theory, the justification

of a statement by arguments does not only mean the evaluative expression of one's opinion but also a consideration of the opinion in a context of opposing opinions.

The topic of the stages of critical discussion based on the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory presented in the article is followed by the article "Writing the State Exam Composition as an Argumentative Text" by M.Kaldjärv (2010) in which a problematic state exam composition is analysed according to the transformations based on the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory. As a result of the reconstruction of the state exam composition, an analytical overview is devised including all the potentially influential elements relevant to solving the difference of opinions.

The aim of article "Pragma-dialectics on the basis of state examination compositions" is to show how the implementation of the critical discussion stages of the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory could be used to enhance the students' argumentative skills in state exam compositions and other argumentative text types.

Methodology of Research

The theory of linguistic communication (Winograd, 1977) introduced pragmatics into linguistics enabling the presented argumentation to become a research object. The present study of argumentation has been set in the context of pragmatics.

The state examination composition is an extensive and complex text (400-600 words) and various approaches need to be employed in the research analysis. Out of the various possible theories, the most suitable one for analysing argumentation in state exam compositions was selected on the basis of the pragmatic framework. The reasons for combining the structure of argumentation (Kaldjärv, 2007), the speech act theory (Searle 1969; 1979), macrostructures (Dijk, 1980) and the stages of critical discussion based on the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory are explained in the following discussion.

The typical structure of a state exam composition consists of the introduction, development of the topic and the conclusion. The students express the main statement in the introduction, but also in the development of the topic sub-theses or statements are given and justified by argumentation. It may be stated on the basis of the study that there are no compositions with the topic development consisting only of arguments, i.e. specific examples.

Estonian study materials provide two versions of argumentation structure: the three-part version – SEC, including the statement, example or argument, and the conclusion (Hennoste, 1998), and the four-part version – SPEC, including the statement, premise or explanation, example or argument and the conclusion (Kaldjärv, 2007). Based on the ten most widely used structures, it was discovered in the study that in 2004 the proportion of SPEC usage was 23% and SEC 4%, the following year SPEC was used 32% and SEC 2%, and in 2006 the proportion of SPEC in compositions was 31% and SEC was not used at all. The analysis of state exam composition argumentation shows that students prefer the four-part structural unit (SPEC). However, primarily the statement, premise, example (SPE) category is used meaning that in the argumentation process the proof is not developed into an explicit conclusion on the paragraph level. The argumentation of the whole text is somewhat better. Based on the given results, the statements are justified on the level of both the paragraph and the whole text. In the communicative process the aim of the action is of primary importance and such choices are made by the student while writing the state exam composition.

In pragmatics the attention is drawn to the fact that language enables various actions. A speech act (Searle, 1969) lets us express statements, orders, promises, warnings and thus bring about changes in the communicative situation. Complex speech acts, i.e. argumentation are used in giving reasons to a statement. According to J. Searle (*ibidem*), the communicative acts of the argumentative text type are categorised as assertives (statement, reference) or directives

(request, order, advice, question). In describing linguistic phenomena, the theory of speech acts also considers the speaker's aims. In the state exam composition, the expression of the statement as a speech act has a specific aim that is reached by the logical implementation of the argumentation structure. Each component of the structure has a specific role as a speech act.

In order to determine the hierarchical level of the state exam composition, macrostructures are used in the study. One of the aims of pragmatics is to establish macrostructures. Macrostructures or the topics and themes expressed in the text (Dijk, 1980) form a unit of a comprehensive thought consisting of a network of mutually related utterances. Macrostructures serve three main functions in the context of the study: the organisation of the state exam composition as a complex text establishing the coherence of the micro-level; the reduction arranging and expressing more general information, and the semantic function determining the more general meaning deduced from the meanings of the lower level. The meaning of the syntactic structure of a sentence lies in the semantic structure, however, the meaning of the semantic structure is revealed in the pragmatic aspect of the sentence (Öim, 1973). The aim of the macrostructures is to establish the coherence on the general level of the text.

Macro speech acts are worded on the basis of macrostructures, i.e. the speech acts revealing the main topic of the macrostructure adequately highlight the coherence of the whole text. Macro speech acts facilitate the understanding of the text, as they concentrate only on the most important aspects of the text.

The argumentation in the state exam compositions is described through the structure of argumentation, speech acts and macrostructures, however, the students' argumentative skills would be considerably enhanced by including the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory in the study process.

Although the concepts of argument and argumentation are ambiguous and difficult to define, we may agree with Frans van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst (1999, p.43-44) that argumentation is a complex of speech acts aimed at solving a difference of opinions. The given approach adds dialectics next to pragmatics and thus the arrival at the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory is the logical continuation.

The studies based on pragma-dialectics rely on four meta-theoretical principles: functionalization, externalisation, socialization and dialectification (van Eemeren, & Grootendorst, 2004, p.52). The speech act conditions in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory determine their communicative and interactive aims in solving the difference of opinions.

In functionalization every linguistic act is considered as a purposive act: the verbal expressions (utterances) used in the text are considered as speech acts and the exact conditions of their nature and validity during the speech act are determined in detail. Externalisation considers the commitments created by the speech acts in the given context. In socialization the above-mentioned principles are related to the interaction taking place during the speech acts. The obligations assumed together with a certain opinion are activated by the interactive context. In dialectification the speech acts are considered as an attempt to solve the difference of opinion according to the critical norms of reasonability. The dialectical procedure of a critical discussion is related to every speech act of the text playing a specific role in the study of the acceptability of statements.

Every utterance has its function in the stages of critical discussion. The speech acts are realised according to the rules that must be followed in a critical discussion aimed at solving a difference of opinions. Four stages of critical discussion (Eemeren, & Grootendorst, 2004, p.59) may be analytically differentiated: defining the difference of opinion (confrontation stage), determining the starting point of the discussion (opening stage), expressing the argumentative and critical reactions to solve the difference of opinions (argumentation stage) and determining the results of the discussion (conclusion stage).

The structure of argumentation used in Estonian study materials could be related to the stages of critical discussion and speech acts. The statement that forms the viewpoint to be proven is expressed in the confrontation stage and the assertive is formulated. The expressed viewpoint will be questioned in the confrontation stage (Eemeren, & Grootendorst, 1992, p.35). In the given stage it is determined that the standpoint is unacceptable as it clashes with doubt or opposition and thus creates a difference of opinions.

In the opening stage, the premise is added to the statement explaining the basis for proving the statement – these are mainly additional facts about the background, values etc. In the opening stage, the participants of the dialogue try to explain to what extent their viewpoints coincide. When writing the state composition thesis, the common basis is determined by the student, however, in doing so he should consider his previous reading and recall various respective differences of opinions, and note also the background knowledge of the assumed reader. In practice students mainly keep to their personal opinion and cannot add any opposing viewpoints. Nevertheless, in the opening stage of the state exam composition an interrogative sentence is often used to state the problem, a directive in terms of speech acts.

Based on specific arguments or reasons the assertion is proven in the argumentation stage. In the state exam composition the student presents arguments to support his standpoint and also adds the reader's assumed counterarguments as assertives. The given arguments and counterarguments are critically evaluated.

The student presents the conclusion stemmed from the assertion in the conclusion stage. With the assertive he confirms the presented standpoint and determines the conclusion of the discussion. The argumentation is formed out of the coherent sequence of speech acts: the utterances must be linked to other speech acts in a specific manner.

As an argumentative text the state exam composition cannot include typical strategic manoeuvres (Eemeren, & Houtlosser, 2005) in presenting various viewpoints, as there are no different parties. In the confrontation stage, the student presents a statement based on his and the assumed party's train of thought, in the opening stage the common basis, in the argumentation stage the arguments defending both sides, and in the conclusion stage both sides are brought to a conclusive ending. While writing, the student must consider the dialectical and rhetorical goals of both sides and alleviate the possible tensions between them.

The following will explain how a state examination composition is analysed. As the state exam composition is a relatively extensive text, the macrostructures by T.A. van Dijk and the expressed macro speech acts are employed in determining the argumentation. The category of analysis in a paragraph and in the whole text is constituted by the structure of argumentation (statement, premise, argument/reason or example, conclusion). As the main statement made in the introduction must be proven in the sub-theses of the development of the topic, the structure of argumentation and the stages of critical discussion may be mutually connected on both the paragraph and text level.

The article presents the primary text of a state examination composition (2006, code 356047) and its analysis based on the four-part argumentation structure, however, the argumentation of the macrostructures of paragraphs and the whole text will be explained with reference to the types and schemes of argumentation structure. The argumentation structure is combined with the stages of pragma-dialectical critical discussion and speech acts.

Results of Research

The sample of the state exam composition (2006, code 356047) written on the topic "People who are difficult to understand" is a primary text presented in the columns of the table 1. The first is the number of the paragraph in the whole text, the second column includes

the enumerated sentences of the given paragraph, and the third column features the stages of the critical discussion and the speech acts. The composition consists of an introduction, development of the topic and a conclusion.

Table 1. State exam composition „People who are difficult to understand” (2006, code 356047).

Para-graph	Text	Critical discussion stages, speech acts
Introduction		
1.	1.1. <i>Despite the similarities in appearance, every individual is unique and incomparable.</i> 1.2. <i>Further singularity is added by his soul and way of thinking.</i> 1.3. <i>It has nevertheless developed so that extremes do not fit into the society.</i> 1.4. <i>Due to incomprehensibility, they are shunned.</i> 1.5. <i>Such people have, for instance, included thinkers and they have also been depicted in literature.</i> 1.6. <i>What is it that makes an individual incomprehensible to others?</i>	Confrontation stage, assertives Opening stage, assertives; 1.6. directive
Development of the topic		
2.	2.1. <i>The ideas of the philosophers of the antiquity were so universal that they apply even today.</i>	Confrontation stage, assertive
	2.2. <i>However, some of their thoughts were not as popular and comprehensible as today.</i> 2.3. <i>Plato did have his own school of followers, but apart from them his ideas were not extensively supported.</i> 2.4. <i>Instead, the philosopher's Allegory of the Cave and the theory of the soul being pulled by two horses have gained far more popularity today.</i>	Opening stage, assertives
	2.5. <i>In the Allegory of the Cave Plato describes people seeing only shadows of the truth on the wall.</i> 2.6. <i>Only philosophers and intellectuals are able to look at the real light and get used to it.</i> 2.7. <i>Plato discussed the soul as a chariot pulled by two winged horses.</i> 2.8. <i>The soul yearns towards the edge of heaven behind which the truth may be seen.</i> 2.9. <i>However, one of the horses starts to buck thus pulling the chariot towards the sensual world.</i> 2.10. <i>Eventually the wings of the horses break, the soul falls without seeing the truth.</i> 2.11. <i>Plato's ideas seemed much too complicated and incomprehensible to the common people of his day as the discussion of the soul was still novel.</i>	Argumentation stage; assertives
	2.12. <i>Therefore the philosopher's followers included only intellectuals.</i> 2.13. <i>The innovative way of thinking made Plato incomprehensible to other people.</i>	Concluding stage, assertives
3.	3.1. <i>The ancient philosophies of life have found their supporters today.</i> 3.2. <i>Some of the teachings have even developed into religions.</i>	Confrontation stage, assertives
	3.3. <i>Their full comprehension, however, requires patient concentration and attention that many lack.</i>	Opening stage, assertive
	3.4. <i>Buddha's teaching has become increasingly more popular in the Western world.</i> 3.5. <i>Nevertheless, there are only few ardent followers and people who understand it deeply.</i> 3.6. <i>The Dalai Lama has dedicated his life to meditation and the search for harmony in solitude.</i> 3.7. <i>He propagates the concept of peace and harmony in the world that can only be achieved by renouncing desires and wishes and accepting oneself.</i> 3.8. <i>Many find his ideas interesting but fail to reach its true content and understanding.</i> 3.9. <i>The English writer T.S. Eliot believes that it is the faraway Eastern culture that will come to save the Western world.</i> 3.10. <i>The statement finds confirmation in the seventh part "Fire Sermon" of his poem "The Waste Land".</i> 3.11. <i>According to the section, the war-torn West should look for support in Buddhism and peace that enables the understanding of the world.</i>	Argumentation stage, assertives
	3.12. <i>Unfortunately only few people can follow, concentrate on and properly interpret the teachings of the Buddha and the Dalai Lama.</i>	Concluding stage, assertive

4	4.1. <i>The human soul is sometimes so restless that it cannot find support in religion or philosophy.</i>	Confrontation stage, as- sertive
	4.2. <i>The individual is then directed by peculiar principles and understandings that may be incomprehensible to others.</i>	Opening stage, assertive
	4.3. <i>Raskolnikov, the protagonist of D. Dostoyevsky's masterpiece "Crime and Punishment" followed his concept of dividing people into the important and the unimportant ones. 4.4. Trying to find confirmation to his theory, he decided to murder a usurer in order to foreground his own position. 4.5. The man's state of mind and behaviour thereafter caused bewilderment in his family, in Sonia and Razumikhin. 4.6. Similarly, Raskolnikov's previously published article on his theory did not shed light on the situation. 4.7. The man's introversion and inner stress made him mysterious. 4.8. The writer R. Browning has said: "When the fight begins within himself, A man's worth something."</i>	Argumentation stage, assertives
	4.9. <i>The innovative principles and theories of an individual may make him difficult to understand, but on the other hand also add to his peculiarity and singularity.</i>	Concluding stage, asser- tive
5.	5.1. <i>The person's mystery must not always lie in inner conflicts.</i>	Confrontation stage, as- sertive
	5.2. <i>By following solid convictions opposed to the present traditions one may appear highly enigmatic to others.</i>	Opening stage, assertive.
	5.3. <i>Timo, the character in J. Kross's "The Czar's Madman" was a person ahead of his time and the respective principles. 5.4. The man wanted to implement his ideas of equality and democracy. 5.5. According to Timo, people from different classes should have been equal. 5.6. Despite general disapproval he married a simple peasant girl. 5.7. However, the highly unconventional act for a Baltic German was justified, as the love between Timo and his wife lasted until death. 5.8. In the relatively stagnant and closed czarist country even mere ideas of democracy were unthinkable. 5.10. Therefore he sent his ruler a letter expressing his ideas of a more liberal order of the state. 5.11. The punishment included a long imprisonment, but even that could not break the man's beliefs. 5.12. However, his family and friends came to suspect Timo suffered from a mental disorder as his behaviour was unthinkable within the contemporary norms.</i>	Argumentation stage, assertives
	5.13. <i>The society was not yet mature enough for the man's ideals and thus could not think along with Timo's ideas.</i>	Concluding stage, asser- tive
6.	6.1. <i>Instead of inability, the incomprehensibility may sometimes be caused by the wish not to see the truth. 6.2. However, there are some who also want to draw other people's attention to the reality.</i>	Confrontation stage, as- sertives
	6.3. <i>In most cases such people will not be heard and they are reprimanded as understanding them is difficult in the given situation.</i>	Opening stage, assertive
	6.4. <i>Russian writers A. Blok and A. Akhmatova criticised severely the revolution of early 20th century and its consequences. 6.5. Although A. Blok at first supported the reconstruction, he soon saw its devastating effect. 6.6. The following poetry expressed the despair and criticism related to the situation. 6.7. A. Akhmatova, however, criticised the younger generation for having been too naive to foresee and avoid the chaos. 6.8. The authorities shunned the texts of both writers and their work seemed to be futile. 6.9. But in his poem "Time" A. Alliksaar has said: "There are no futile times. / Their sense may not be revealed now."</i>	Argumentation stage; assertives
	6.10. <i>So it happened also to these writers. 6.11. The poetry of Akhmatova and Blok gained popularity and their truth came to be understood only decades later when the nation's eyes had been opened after the mass psychosis.</i>	Concluding stage, asser- tive

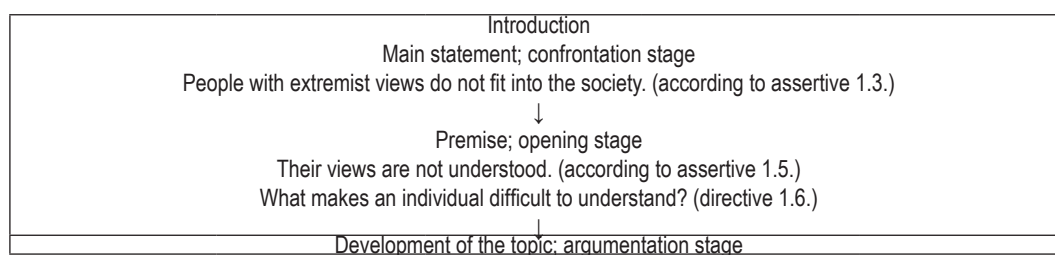
Conclusion		
7.	<p>7.1. <i>The inner world of a person is often incomprehensible even to himself.</i> 7.2. <i>An individual becomes incomprehensible to others due to his strenuous inner world and the peculiar or innovative philosophy which is not in keeping with the general convictions of the age.</i> 7.3. <i>The well-known writer O.Wilde has said: "Most people are other people. Their lives a mimicry, their passions a quotation."</i> 7.4. <i>There are only very few people who dare to think differently and express innovative ideas.</i> 7.5. <i>Thus, the exceptions should be all the more valued.</i> 7.6. <i>They are mostly criticised, however, it is precisely the people who are difficult to understand that may perceive the truth and perfect the world.</i></p>	Concluding stage, assertives

The state exam composition (Table 1) consists of seven paragraphs first of which is the introduction leading to the problem (1.6.). However, the student has explicitly expressed the main statement (1.3.) which will be the basis for the paragraphs developing the topic (2.-6.). The wording of the sub-theses is based on the main statement. Each of the paragraphs developing the topic includes an explicit sub-thesis, i.e. the statement explains the problem to understand the background of the specific statement, and expresses arguments to prove the statement. The reasoning process of each paragraph is taken together by a conclusion. The paragraphs in the development of the topic are logically connected and developed into a conclusion (7.4.-7.6.). Macro speech acts presented in table 2 may be easily deduced from the discussion.

The statistics given in the methodological part of the article show that the usage of four-part argumentation structure has increased over the years. Considering that the most widely used category of the argumentation structure unit is the statement, premise, and example (SPE), then the useful aspect of the critical discussion model of the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory is its capacity to bring dialogue into the discussion based on a difference of opinions and the development of reasoning into a conclusion. The four-part structure in both the argumentation structure and the stages of critical discussion enables the combination of the different treatments.

The following step is to devise an analytical overview of the primary text based on macro speech acts. Table 2 includes the introduction with the confrontation and opening stage of the whole text; the development of the topic including the argumentation stage based on the whole text, however, with independent proof of sub-theses also in each paragraph; and the conclusion constituting the concluding stage for the whole text. In the paragraph developing the topic the critical discussion stages are marked by abbreviations, each component of the specific argumentation structure and speech act have been written out in full.

Table 2. Analytical overview of state exam composition "People who are difficult to understand" (2006, code 356047).



Paragraph 2. C.s: The ideas of ancient philosophers still hold true today. (assertive 2.1.) / statement O.s: Plato's contemporaries found it hard to understand his ideas. / premise	Paragraph 3. C.s: Ancient philosophies on life have their followers also today. (assertive 3.1.) / statement O.s: Understanding requires patient concentration and attention which many people lack. / premise	Paragraph 4. C.s: Sometimes people don't find support either in religion or philosophy. (assertive 4.1.) / statement O.s: Individuals are driven by their peculiar ideas and views which may remain incomprehensible to others. / premise	Paragraph 5. C.s: The mystery of man is not always revealed in inner struggles. (assertive 5.1.) / statement O.s: There may be an opposition with the conventions of the given period. / premise	Paragraph 6. C.s: Sometimes people do not want or wish to see the truth. (assertive 6.1.) / statement O.s: In most cases they are ignored and discouraged as it is difficult to understand them in the given situation. / premise
A.s: +/philosophers-intellectuals ↔ - /common people; present day / examples	A.s: +/Buddha's teachings, Dalai Lama, T. S. Eliot's "Waste Land" ↔ -/few understand / examples	A.s: +/Raskolnikov ↔ -/family, Sonia, Razumikhin; R. Browning / examples	A.s: +/Timo's ideas ↔ -/Czar; family, acquaintances / examples	A.s: +/Blok, Akhmatova; Alliksaar ↔ - /Soviet power / examples
C.s: Intellectuals understood the innovative conceptual world. / conclusion	C.s: Few can follow the teachings of Buddha and Dalai Lama, understand and interpret them correctly. / conclusion	C.s: Individual's innovative principles may make him incomprehensible to others, but also add peculiar and unique features. / conclusion	C.s: Society did not understand his ideals. / conclusion	C.s: The poetry of Akhmatova and Blok gained popularity and their truth was understood only decades later when people's eyes were opened from the mass psychosis. / conclusion
↓ Conclusion; concluding stage People who are difficult to understand may know the truth and perfect the world. (assertive 7.6.)				

The analytical overview (Table 2) of the state exam composition (2006, code 356047) is an example of the use of four-part argumentation structure in the whole text, and it similarly explains the ways to use the argumentation structure in conjunction with the pragma-dialectical critical discussion stages.

Table 2 presents the stages of critical discussion of pragma-dialectical argumentation theory and the structure of the composition based on the principles put forward in Estonian study materials on the basis of the whole text, however, the stages of critical discussion and the argumentation structure may be employed together also in the paragraphs developing the topic.

The macro speech act expressed in the introduction – People with extremist views do not fit into the society – is based on the main statement of the primary text. It is the macro speech act guiding the discussion in the argumentation stage of the composition (paragraphs 2-6). Prior to the argumentation stage the background is explained – Extremist views are not understood. The given macro speech act functions as the opening stage, in the same paragraph the problem is expressed as a question – What makes an individual difficult to understand? The macro speech acts of the topic development logically further the main statement from various aspects. It is important that the examples or arguments given as a proof of the statement be considered as arguments or counterarguments in the composition. These have been highlighted in Table 2 by respective symbols. The concluding phrase of the whole text brings together the conclusions of the argumentation stage and expresses the generalising macro speech act – People who are difficult to understand may know the truth and perfect the world.

Table 2 shows that all the stages of the critical discussion model have been structurally opened from paragraph to paragraph in the development of the topic. In the confrontation

stages, the macro speech act assertive has been conveyed as a statement enabling the formation of opposition and a difference of opinions. In the opening stages of state exam compositions, the premise is explicated as background information. As the writer also considers the statement from the opponent's point of view, the utterances could rather be called assertives. In the argumentation stage of each paragraph the reader is presented with assumed counterarguments characteristic of argumentation. The writer depicts an implicit discussion that could form between the reader and the writer of the state exam composition. Even if the reader did not think of counterarguments similar to the ones presented by the student, the text could be perceived dialectically. The results of the discussion in paragraphs are worded as assertives.

The argumentation of the whole text forms a logical train of thought. The transitions between paragraphs are firm. The standpoint is expressed in the confrontation stage (1.1.-1.2.), the obligation to defend one's viewpoint is assumed in the opening stage (1.3.-1.4.). In the opening stage the writer clearly expresses the starting point and assumes the obligation to defend his views in comparing the other opinions. The student considers the reader's potential counterarguments. Paragraphs 2.-6. forming a further argumentation stage in the whole of the text play a crucial role in solving the difference of opinions. In proving his statements, the student mainly resorts to complex argumentation in which several valid arguments and counterarguments are presented to prove the statement, and primarily to the temporal-causal scheme of argumentation. The main statement finds its answer in the conclusion, the whole text is generalised by assertives (7.1.-7.4.), a directive (7.5.) and an assertive (7.6.) mark the conclusion of the discussion. In the concluding stage (7.4.-7.6.) the implicature of the whole text is expressed corresponding to the standpoint taken in the confrontation stage of the introduction.

The coherent sequence of the macrostructures in the state exam composition ““People who are difficult to understand” (2006, code 356047) is opened by the macro speech acts of the whole text.

Introduction

(1) People with extremist views do not fit into the society.

Problem: Their views are not understood. What makes an individual difficult to understand?

Development of the topic

- (2) The ideas of ancient philosophers still hold true today.
- (3) Ancient philosophies on life have their followers also today.
- (4) Sometimes people don't find support either in religion or philosophy.
- (5) The mystery of man is not always revealed in inner struggles.
- (6) Sometimes people do not want or wish to see the truth.

Conclusion

(7) People who are difficult to understand may know the truth and perfect the world.

It is easy for the reader to read the text as a whole as the writer considers the communicative cooperation principle. The whole text is based on a logical structure, the argumentation structure and the critical discussion stages may be considered both on the paragraph and the text level. The student explicitly expresses the main statement in the introduction. The theme-related problem of the difficulties of understanding is opened in the paragraphs of the topic development with the discussion of the inability or unwillingness to understand the truth due to philosophical, political or personal reasons. Macro speech acts foreground the macro structure of the text (topic and theme) and the macro structure gives the characteristic of the coherence and the main idea of the text.

Macrostructures serve the main functions from the point of view of the present study:

the organisation of the state exam composition as a complex text determining the coherence of the micro level; the reduction organising and conveying the more general information; and the semantic function determining the general meaning deduced from the lower level meanings. The aim of the macrostructures is to explain the coherence on the general text level and the macro speech acts adequately foreground the coherence of the whole text. Macro speech acts facilitate the understanding of the text as they focus only on the most important aspects of the text.

The writer of the composition gives the reader information on both the pragmatic context and the dialectical aspect. In the introduction the macro speech act is presented as a confrontation stage – People with extremist views do not fit into the society – giving the reader a chance to present his counterargument. The same paragraph also includes an opening stage – Their views are not understood. What makes an individual difficult to understand? – which is formulated both as an assertive and a directive. The argumentation stage is presented in the paragraphs developing the topic, however, in each paragraph sub-theses are separately proven, and arguments presented to prove the initial standpoint and refute the assumed counterarguments by the reader. Even if the reader does not have similar counterarguments to the statement, the writer's attempt to tackle the topic dialectically may be perceived. The macro speech act of the concluding stage – People who are difficult to understand may know the truth and perfect the world – generalises the train of thought and explanations presented in the argumentation stage.

The composition analysed in the present study is a positive example in the sense that the writer has selected the argument structure unit for argumentation, formulated statements and proven them comprehensibly on the basis of the difference of opinions. The choices made in the state exam composition also highlight the various structures employed on the paragraph and the text level. The argumentation structure, which could be considered as a train of thought, based on complex speech acts may be connected to the critical discussion stages of the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory. Based on the author's study, it is possible to use the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory together with the argumentation structure employed in the Estonian study materials and thus by the argumentation theory related to pragmatics and dialectics enhance the students' argumentative skills in argumentative compositions.

Discussion

The problem of argumentation in the students' compositions is also asserted by the study by R. Oostdam, K. Glopper and M.H. Eiting (1994) analysing the explicit and implicit statements and argumentation structures used in student essays. In the last part of their article (*ibidem*, p.140-141) the authors make the following suggestions for writing based on the pragma-dialectical theory: make an explicit statement taking together the main idea of the paragraph; present arguments and counterarguments; connect the argument closely with the statement; analyse the connections of the arguments and the argumentation structure (simple, compound, coordinate, subordinate argumentation); ensure that the reader understands the relations between the statement and argument. The given suggestions are also needed for the improvement of Estonian students' argumentation in the state examination compositions.

The analysis of an Estonian student's state exam composition awarded with maximum points shows that the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory is applicable and necessary for the improvement of students' argumentative skills. The same results are also confirmed by the analysis of a state exam composition using pragma-dialectics (Kaldjärv, 2010). The Estonian state examination composition follows a long tradition, however, as the argumentative text type must include a discussion based on a difference of opinions, the students' attention must be drawn to the critical discussion phases created according to the pragma-dialectical argumentation

theory that would highlight the analysis of the content of arguments and counterarguments. Although the studies by K.Lepajõe (2005) and M.Hennoste (2005) have similarly stressed the students' poor argumentative skills in state exam compositions, no argumentation theories have been referred to prior to the study by the author of the present article.

Conclusions

An argumentative text is dialogical, however, in state examination compositions monologue dominates. Students do not have the skills to express different opinions in state exam compositions. In order to employ a dialogue, it is important to understand the cooperative principle. The implementation of a discussion based on a difference of opinions would make the dialectical aspect more tangible for the author and steer the complex speech acts expressed by the student towards the conclusion in greater detail. The participants of the dialogue could be connected in the communication process by the speech acts in which they have a specific obligation in terms of justification. The speech act is a linguistic unit with a comprehensive communicative aim. The understanding of the connections within the context of both linguistic pragmatics and the pragma-dialectics would enhance the students' knowledge of the communicative function of argumentation.

A student's state examination composition (2006, code 356047) on the topic "People who are difficult to understand" is a suitable example of the usage of the argumentation structure on the paragraph and text level, however, the strength of the composition also lies in the critical evaluation of opposing opinions. As a writer the student has assumed the opponent's counterarguments to his statement, compared the different opinions and formulated his conclusion based on the examples or arguments.

It may be stated that such a text is based on a dialogue. The student has taken a step further of the use of simple argumentation, i.e. developed the personal monologue into an imaginary dialogue and tested the acceptability of his standpoint on the basis of opposing opinions. Thus, the strength of the composition presented in the given article lies in the coherent structure of the whole text, the connection between macro speech acts and the logical organization of the whole text.

The pragma-dialectical approach of critical discussion stages based on dialogue focuses on testing the acceptability of the standpoint. The question whether the statement may be defended against a critical doubt or counterarguments foregrounds the dialectical level. The pragmatic level is revealed in the specific culturo-historical background as the moves made in order to solve the difference of opinions are considered as verbal acts, i.e. speech acts. The latter have a significant role in an argumentative text type as the argumentation is formed out of mutually connected complex utterances. The analysis of the argumentation given in the present article was based on a state exam composition in which the justification was based on the main statement made in the introduction with the sub-theses or statements elaborating on the discussion and developing the main statement to a conclusion. On the other hand, there are compositions consisting of 30 paragraphs with only two or three sentences. Such choices in an argumentative text type cause the argumentation structure to diffuse in the whole text, and in most cases students lack the skills to compose a text based on a difference of opinions.

Even if the pragmatic aspect is in some form always present in state exam compositions, the texts mainly lack the dialectical approach. Presenting the dialogue on the basis of the critical discussion stages of the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory would solve some of the essential problems in state exam compositions as discussions based on different opinions. With the necessary knowledge the student would be able to select specific examples foregrounding the conflict of opinions for his argumentation, i.e. the presentation of arguments and counterarguments to prove his statement.

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