

Argumentative analysis of cultural keywords: an exercise

D. Akizhanova, D. Kamzabekuly, S. Satenova and A. Kyzzyrova

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University, Mirzoyan Str. 2, Teaching and Administrative Bldg, Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan

Abstract. The paper focuses on the argumentative analysis of cultural keywords on the example of a bank offer. In the paper we claim that argumentative analysis can be used as a method for identification of cultural keywords in a text. Methodological part of the research is based on Argumentum Model of Topics which was proposed and further developed by Rigotti and Greco Morasso and others. With the help of the Model we tried to distinguish keywords in the text of a bank proposal. The survey of the literature includes the work of H. Perelman, St. Toulmin, F. H. van Eemeren, R. Grootendorst, B. Garssen, E. Rigotti, A. Rocci, S. Greco Morasso, S. Bigi, I. A. Filimon in relation to argumentation and argumentative analysis, as well as of A. Wierzbicka, R. Williams, G. Klueva in relation to cultural keywords, etc. The findings of the research make contribution to intercultural and cross-cultural communication and to argumentation as well.

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Introduction

Nowadays in the era of “global village” more and more we hear of globalization, as well as of intercultural and cross-cultural communication. Different people, different cultures from different corners of the world communicate with each other for economic, financial, educational, diplomatic, social and other reasons. That is why it is very critical to study intercultural and cross-cultural communication as a science. Moreover, it is not just a science it is an interdisciplinary field of science which combines cultural studies, linguistics, philosophy, etymology, logic, etc.

Keywords as a matter are taken into consideration by many studies. In the international standard GOST a keyword is described as “descriptive word, converted to standard lexicographic form and used for co-ordinate indexing” [1]. Here we can see that a keyword bears information and this characteristic feature makes it valuable. Moreover, taking into consideration present significance of *e-globe* (digital technologies, internet, mechanisms and machines, etc.) keyword is playing one of the main roles in searching and finding information. For instance, due to the rapid growth of internet technologies there is no text in the web without listing keywords. Following the proverb that “demand generates proposals”, a great number of research have been done and software created in the field of semantic analysis of keywords (Latent semantic analysis-LSA, SEO Analysis & SEO Analysis Tool, Key Word In Context-KWIC, etc.) can be an evidence to that.

But significance of cultural keywords did not come from the narrow meaning of the word, that is, as

it is defined in the dictionaries, but rather from its “complex relations with other, similarly complex words” in the dynamic cultural medium where it plays central role [2].

In our paper we consider cultural keywords in argumentative texts, in particular, by making argumentative analysis of proposal letters addressed to the common public by Kazakhstani banks. The research includes some aspects of intercultural communication. Hereinafter in this paper we will try to summarize and give a definition to cultural keywords, however, general understanding of cultural keywords is that they are “words that bear any value and significance to the culture in which this words exist.”

In his paper Rocci mentions that “argumentation strategies differ across cultures”, we can add to this statement that “whereas argumentation strategies differ across cultures, cultural keywords exploited in the argumentative texts would also differ in the argumentative strategies (because cultures are different)” [3].

As an example we have analyzed the letter of ATF bank (Kazakhstan) persuading people to place deposits using cultural keywords specific to the Kazakh people.

On the notion of cultural keywords

The first and early papers addressing the study of (cultural) keywords go back to Raymond Williams who gives the following definition to *keyword*: “[...] they are significant, binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thought” [4]. But his main objective in the study was

not cultural keywords but a number of words that play a particular importance. He states that these words can be used as a map that reflects the changes occurred in life and thought. He lists five words that are 'key points' of this map: society, industry, democracy, class, art and culture. According to Williams, the changes in the use of these words mirror the changes in people's understanding of common life at that time. In the Introduction to the *Culture and Society* he says that this book evolved from the study of the word "culture". He writes: "the words I linked it with, because of the problems its uses raised in my mind, were class and art, and then industry and democracy. I could feel these five words as a kind of structure" [5].

Later the research on cultural keywords in a number of languages from the semantic angle was made by Polish linguist Anna Wierzbicka. She considered Russian, English, Polish, German and Japanese languages by comparing certain words in their semantic meaning and their reflection in the culture. Coming to the cultural keywords, Wierzbicka defines them as the words that have some specific meaning to the culture: "*Key words* are words which are particularly important and revealing in a given culture. For example, In my *Semantics, culture and cognition* (Wierzbicka 1992b) I tried to show that the Russian words *sud'ba* (roughly 'fate'), *duša* (roughly 'soul'), and *toska* (roughly, 'melancholy-cum-yearning') play a particularly important role in Russian culture and offer invaluable insight into this culture" [6]. That is each nation has a number of cultural keywords that describe and reflect the culture of that nation. However, there is no 'finite set of such words' which we can list and say that this list contains cultural keywords of a certain language, as well as there is no 'objective discover procedure', that is, there is no certain way or methodology of defining these cultural keywords.

In considering cultural concepts linguists see the reflection of thinking peculiarities, mentality and outlook of people in the inner content of the word, define them as elements of culture, through which one can recognize not only specific, but also all that is characteristic of the national culture in general [7]. Thus some researchers think that cultural keywords are connected with the psychic, associative system of a human being, and others think that cultural keywords are defined and therefore connected with the frequency of their use in language. The more associations appear in mind of the representative of that nation when pronouncing the word, the more it is important to the national culture of that people.

Klueva provides the following definition to cultural keywords: "The more associations the representative of this nation has in pronouncing the word, the more important it is to the national culture.

Words with rich associative field are usually depicted in the folklore and in the works that become national classics. These words of special importance and indicative of a single culture are called key words" [7, p.25].

In modern linguistic and methodological literature, these word-concepts are interpreted differently. Some scientists (Wierzbicka A.) in her scientific writings speaks of the "cultural key words", others – (Stepanov Yu.S., Arutyunova N.D., Likhachev D.S., Masslova V.A., etc.) named these words as "cultural concepts", the third – following Vereshchagin Ye.M. and Kostomarov V.G. – keep the term "culture-specific vocabulary (words with no direct equivalents in other languages)", highlighting the "realia" (Mullagalieva L.K.), the fourth use the term "words with the cultural component of connotative nature" (Belchikov Yu.G.) or "cultural and connotative vocabulary" (Vorobiev V., Sayakhova V.G.), and sometimes we find in one work the use of all of these terms which are structured in a certain way (Vorobiev V., Sayakhova V.G., Badagulova G.M.).

Keywords within the frames of this paper are described and analyzed as the significant catalysts in communicative interaction. An interesting explanation in this respect is given by Liebert, defining them 'as linguistic points of reference within a communicative process. Their meaning is continually changed by the participants in the interaction [8].

Research of cultural keywords in terms of argumentation and pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation has started recently in the 20th century. In particular, argumentative approach to the study of cultural keywords can be seen in the works of western scholars (Rigotti & Rocci, Bigi, Filimon, etc).

In this paper we consider the cultural keywords in the argumentative text intended as a coherent sequence of utterances, where coherence is stipulated by "the congruity of the meaning of each utterance with the intended effect of the whole" [9]. This is based on Congruity Theory mostly discussed and developed by Rigotti, and then supported by Rocci, Greco Morasso and others.

Concerning keywords in the argumentation theory Bigi sums up the following definition: "*keywords are lexical items that cannot be lacking if the text is to achieve the communicative goal defined by the connective predicate...* Since arguments are the "bricks" for the construction of an argumentative text, *keywords* can be defined as the words giving arguments their persuasive power" [10]. In general sense she proposes to define cultural keywords as "words that are necessary for the text to achieve its intended communicative goal". Here, *intended communicative goal* can be explained by above

mentioned Congruity Theory, within which it corresponds to the task defined by the connective predicate.

Argumentation and Argumentum Model of Topics

Argumentation theory which takes its roots since antiquity has long history of its formation and establishment. Now we can talk about the emergence of a new *theory of argumentation*, emerging at the intersection of logic, linguistics, psychology, philosophy, hermeneutics, rhetoric and other sciences. Its topicality arises from the task of developing a general theory of argumentation which would answer such questions as the nature of the argument, methods of reasoning, originality of argumentation in different areas of knowledge and activity.

Argumentation theory, or *argumentation*, is the interdisciplinary study of how conclusions can be reached through logical reasoning; that is, claims based, soundly or not, on premises. It includes the arts and sciences of civil debate, dialogue, conversation, and persuasion. It studies rules of inference, logic, and procedural rules in both artificial and real world settings. That is, speaking generally argumentation is an art of persuading people in your own point of view.

The term argumentation originates from the Latin word *argumentum*. Rigotti and Greco Morasso define it as follows: "This word [argumentum]... is a noun derived from the verb *arguo*... The Latin verb *arguo* has kept one fundamental meaning, that of *pointing out*, of *bringing to acknowledge* and, therefore, also of *proving*. In other words, it basically seems to indicate the process of "helping" the interlocutor recognize something by (directly or indirectly) giving him the necessary justification" and coming back to the word *argumentum*, this word has "the fundamental value of *reason, evidence and proof*" [11]. However, they do not reject the other values (meanings) that the word argumentation (*argumentum*) may have.

Argumentation is bringing the reasons, or arguments, with the intent to cause or intensify the support of the other part (the audience) to the extended position. "Argumentation" is also known as a set of arguments [12].

The main ideas of the new theory of argumentation were formed by H. Perelman, H. Johnston, F. H. van Eemeren, R. Grootendorst, etc. However, at present the theory of argumentation is devoid of a single paradigm or few competing paradigms.

The Pragma-Dialectical approach to the study of argumentation was developed primarily by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984, 1992, and 2004) and it aims precisely at developing dialectics as a theory of ordinary argumentative discourse without

abandoning its normative orientation. Scholars working in Pragma-Dialectical discourse aim at taking full range of speech acts related to the resolution of disputes in a dialogue and evaluate the moves in this relation combining it with the model of critical discussion.

Any sentence having any type of argument will certainly contain argument scheme.

Many scholars agree that argument schemes are somewhat abstract structures or forms ascribed by the arguments. The first works using the term argument scheme are mentioned by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958). Walton et al. define argumentation schemes as "forms of argument (structures of inference) that represent structures of common types of arguments used in everyday discourse" [13]. Whereas van Eemeren and Garssen define argument schemes as "a representation of the pragmatic principle of support that is used when in the argumentation a reason is advanced for accepting a standpoint" [14].

First, let us define what comprises the argumentation itself. In order to be able to analyze a text from argumentative point, the argumentative scheme should contain a standpoint and then an argument that defends this standpoint.

This paper aims to contribute to the research in argumentation by making argumentative analysis to cultural keywords. The methodological and theoretical framework in the paper are taken from the Argumentum Model of Topics which was proposed by Rigotti and Greco Morasso (2006) and then developed in a series of publications (see in particular Rigotti, 2009; Rigotti and Greco Morasso, 2010).

"The Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) aims at proposing a coherent and founded approach to the study of argument schemes" [15]. It is compatible with the general framework of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation. The Argumentum Model of Topics is based on the following notions: *topics*, *endoxon*, *datum*, *loci (topoi)*, and *argument*.

Let us first define each of these notions.

Topics is a systematic method of finding arguments. According to Aristotle, it is "a method according to which we are able to put forward arguments about any standpoint (*problema*) starting from propositions which have already been accepted (*ex endoxon*)" [16]. Rigotti and Greco Morasso consider topics as a component of argumentation theory according to which arguments are "generated by specifying their inferential structure of a system of loci" [11]. Based on this definition we can derive two notions: *standpoint* and *locus*. A standpoint is a statement for which the arguer is going to argue in order to make the addressee accept the statement and agree with it.

A *locus* is defined as “an argumentative device that establishes the truth value of a standpoint for a certain public by applying to its common ground a maxim linking (hooking) the truth value of the standpoint to the already established truth value of a proposition concerning an aspect of the standpoint” [9].

Following Rigotti, “the *locus* is a specific relation connecting different states of affairs that generates one or more maxims, providing them with semantic transparency (*notitia*) and with a specific degree of analytical truth (*veritas*) and persuasiveness (*efficacia*)” [17]. In other words *loci* generate the arguments. They predetermine possible inferential relation between the standpoint and argument.

Generating arguments from an argumentative *locus* is usually based on two syllogisms, where one derives from *exdaxon*, and the second one – from a *maxim*. In Aristotle the word *endoxon* refers to the propositions that are in the common opinion, in other words values and beliefs that are generally shared within a community. Aristotle defines *exdoda* as “[opinions] which commend themselves to all, or to the majority, or to the wise – that is or to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them” [18].

Endoxa are the parts of the common ground of a community; “the portion of the shared knowledge and of the common beliefs of a community that is activated in the argumentative interaction in order to let the argument proceed and the standpoint be supported. In particular, *endoxa* are selected to be employed as premises – either implicit or explicit – in *enthymemes*” [19]. An *endoxon* is a proposition that is in common opinion shared by the actors of communication and as a consequence generally accepted.

The *maxims* are, according to Rigotti and Greco Morasso, “implications establishing a connection of the form $p \rightarrow q$ that generate inferential processes; each inferential process defines, within the locus, the form of a subclass of arguments that are produced in connection with proper *endoxa*. All the maxims of the same locus are implications of the ontological relation constituting the locus” [11].

Rigotti and Rocci propose to consider the cultural keywords as the words that play the role of terminus medius in an enthymematic argument which function as pointers to an endoxon or a set of endoxa used to provide an unstated major premise [20]. Here the term *terminus medius* means middle term which can be referred as the keyword in the syllogism. The terminus medius appears in both premises but not in the conclusion.

Summing up all theoretical foundations and “constituents” of the Argumentation theory, the

Argumentum Model of Topics proposed by Rigotti and Greco Morasso is illustrated in Figure 1 which shows the notions of topics, loci, maxims and exdoda and the AMT as a whole in a schematic form.

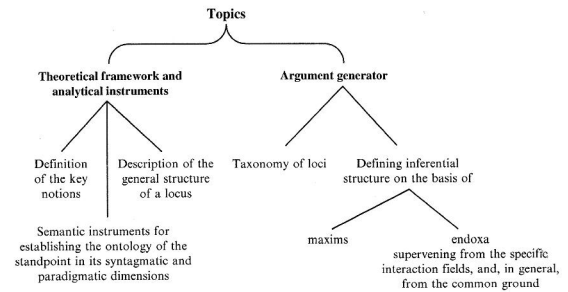


Figure 1. Map of the main components of the AMT by E. Rigotti and S. Greco Morasso [11]

Practical part: an example of argumentative analysis

Let us consider the following proposal letter as an example for analysis of the argument structure:

A SPECIAL OFFER FOR YOU – “DOUBLE DEPOSIT”!

Dear customer,

*JSC ATF bank offers you to get higher interest rate on deposits "ATF-Corporate" or "Business Select" or discount on the fee for the issuance of a bank guarantee or for making short-term bank loan in the form of an overdraft * with just two simple steps:*

- *Place the contribution of the "ATP-Corporate" or "Business Choice" for 3 or 6 months at a rate of one and a half and more than the average monthly balances in current accounts of ATF bank for the last six months, but not less than 200 000 KZT;*
- *Get the increased rate of interest on deposits "ATP-Corporate" or "Business Select" or discount on the fee for the issuance of a bank guarantee or for making short-term bank loan in the form of an overdraft in the amount of 15%.*

Do not miss your chance to get a double benefit!

The offer is valid until 31 December 2012.

** When placing a bank deposit in the amount of 200 000 to 999 999 KZT you can get a discount on fees for the issuance of a bank guarantee or short-term bank loan in the form of overdraft in the amount of 15%;*

When placing a bank deposit in the amount of 1,000,000 KZT and more, you can choose:

- Higher interest rate on deposits "ATF-Corporate" or "Business Choice"
- discount on fees for the issuance of a bank guarantee or for making short-term bank loan in the form of an overdraft in the amount of 15%.

For more information, please contact your advisor or your branch of business unit for signing the contract of bank deposit and registration of favorable conditions for bank guarantee and overdraft.

Sincerely yours,
ATF Bank

In this letter we can propose that the standpoint is: *you should (=it is good for you to) place a deposit at JSC ATF bank before December 31.*

The standpoint is supported by two arguments (Figure 2):

- Higher interest rate
- Discount on fee

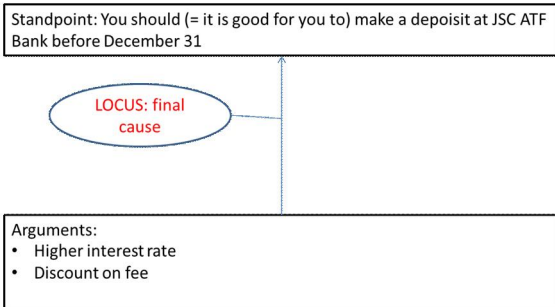


Figure 2. The standpoint supported by two arguments and the locus of final cause

Based on theoretical foundations described in the previous section we can state that the arguments rest on the *locus of final cause* which is included in the domain of the syntagmatic loci (Figure 3).

Specifically, in this example, the locus causes the maxim: *if an action causes a benefit this action should (= it is good to) be undertaken.*

Here we can distinguish two parts within the inferential structure of the argument: a topical component based on the maxim directly caused by the locus, and a component based on endoxon. The endoxon is part of the shared knowledge accepted by everybody, community and does not need to be justified further.

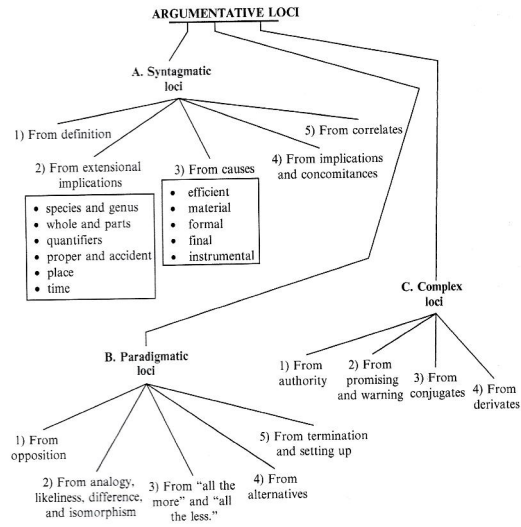


Figure 3. Taxonomy of loci by E. Rigotti and S. Greco Morasso [11]

The datum constituting the premise of the endoxon is that *making a deposit of no less than 200 000 KZT ensures a higher interest rate on a deposit.*

Proceeding from the endoxon and the datum we derive the final conclusion that *making a deposit of no less than 200 000 KZT ensures a benefit (something desirable)* which coincides with the standpoint to be supported (Figure 4).

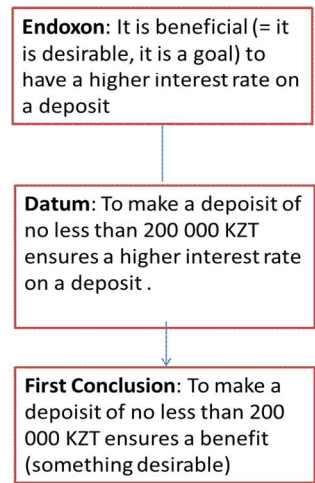


Figure 4. The final conclusion derived from the endoxon and the datum

Combining all the components of the argument structure we obtain the following diagram (Figure 5):

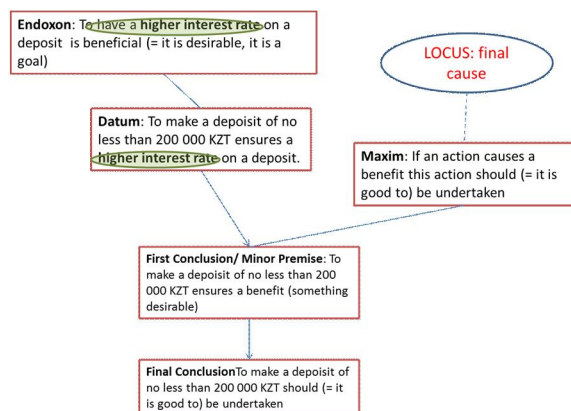


Figure 5. The complete structure of the argument

Cultural keywords obtain a persuasive power in supplying arguments to support the standpoint. The basic structure of an argumentative text consists of a standpoint supported by one or several arguments. So we can see that the acceptance of the standpoint depends on the ‘strongness’ and relevance of the arguments supplied.

According to Rigotti and Rocci the cultural keywords play the role of terminus medius (middle term) in the syllogism originated by the endoxon. Thus, in our argument scheme the keyword is *higher interest rate*, i.e. with the help of argumentation we have proved significance of this keyword.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to show argumentative analysis as a possible way of keyword identification. We have made an attempt to apply argumentative analysis and Argumentum Model of Topics as a research methodology. It can be noticed that cultural keywords can bear persuasive power from the point of argumentation. The analysis showed that the persuasive power of a keyword is dependent on the endoxon it is linked to and on the relevance and ‘strongness’ of this endoxon in relation to the standpoint to be supported. As in the example of a bank proposal letter persuading people to place deposits on a *higher interest rate* we can see its cultural significance. Though, this example does not show precisely the “culturality” of a keyword, but if the persuasive power of a keyword is dependent on the endoxon, and, taking into account that an endoxon is “proposition that is in the common opinion, in other words values generally accepted and shared within a community”, we can derive that most of keywords do bear cultural significance to that culture it is used in.

Corresponding Author:

Dr. Akizhanova D.

L.N. Gumilyov Eurasian National University
Mirzoyan Str., 2, Teaching and Administrative Bldg,
Astana, 010000, Kazakhstan. Tel.: +7 7015714331, e-mail: akizhanova_dm@enu.kz

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