Corpora and discourse analysis: argumentative metadiscursive markers

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1. Summary

The aim of this paper is to study the formal devices that mark arguments and counterarguments in Ancient Greek. In the last thirty years research on discourse studies has bloomed and the area of classical languages is no exception. Apart from many works on individual issues (see the bibliography in Bakker & Wakker 2007) Kroon’s work (1995) on particles has given a sound theoretical and practical frame to analyze discourse coherence and cohesive means. Nevertheless, most works are focused on a rather formal approach since they take as starting point the individual cohesive means (formal marks) and try to find out their meaning (cohesive force). Instead in this paper I will try to adopt a functional approach: the speaker’s need to formulate arguments and counterarguments in order to support his thesis and to undermine his opponent’s statements. Therefore I will try to give a holistic view of how the different formal devices (connectors, metadiscursive expressions, mood, etc.) fit into the general scheme of (counter-)argumentation.

This is a corpus-driven research. The corpus is mainly made up by Lysias’ works, which are tagged from a formal and semantic point of view in html (a system of CSS sheets allows to apply different styles on them according to the research purposes). This tagging follows Kroon’s theoretical frame (structural linear vs. dependent relationships, and semantic relationships) and tries to capture the hierarchical form of texts (see the example at the end). The html files containing the speeches so tagged are managed by a database that keeps track of the elements studied: connectors, metadiscursive expressions, topical entities, and so on.

Apart from the particles in their dennistonian sense (γάρ, καίτοι, etc.), the paper will take into account other less prototypical connectors that can also be used in the presentational level of discourse (intraclausal syntax), as for example εἶτα, ἑπεκτα, πρὸς τούτῳ/πρὸς τούτοις, ἔτι, νῦν δὲ, etc., many of which are absent from traditional descriptions. For example, the combination νῦν δὲ is used in similar contexts as ἀλλὰ γάρ in order to restate the speaker’s version of the facts after his opponent’s view has been undermined by counterarguments introduced by καίτοι; however νῦν δὲ is excluded from Denniston’s work unlike ἀλλὰ γάρ.

The research will include other devices, as metadiscursive expressions: for example the verbs σκέπτομαι and ἐνθυμέομαι (under certain conditions) are used in Lysias to present a new point within
the argumentation. One of the problems when dealing with metadiscursive expressions is that, unlike connectors or other invariable markers, they may exhibit different forms that cannot be known and classified a priori. For example, any of the following expressions are variants of the same formula and this formula (see the red word in the following example) is used in a consistent way in Lysias and other Athenian writers (Sophocles, Plato, Demosthenes, and so on) to introduce an argument within an (counter)argumentative chain, as I will try to prove in my paper: (i) ἐνθυμεῖσθαι/ἐνθυμηθῆναι/σκέψασθαι ἄξιον; (ii) ἐνθυμεῖσθαι/ἐνθυμηθῆναι/σκέψασθαι χρῆ; (iii) ἐνθυμεῖσθε/ἐνθυμηθήτε/σκέψασθε (imperative); (iv) σκέψασθαι δεί (v) σκέψασθαι προσήξει; (iv) σκέψασθαι ὑπέτερον ἔργον; (v) σκεπτέον. Only the tagging of whole corpora may bring to light the existence and forms of these expressions, since they are not collected nor studied in the reference grammars and works for evident reasons (see Bateman as an exception).

The following example taken from Lysias tries to capture the contribution of the different devices (connectors and metadiscursive expressions) to the hierarchical structure of the text:

(1) Lysias, Against Simon 21.4-26.6

Thesis ἐπειδὴ δὲ αὐτῷ οὐδὲν μέλει τῶν ὄρχων ὁν ἰδιωμάτα πειράσομαι καὶ περὶ ὧν οὕτως ἑξενθοτα διδάσκαλεν ἡμᾶς.

Simon1 Ἐσόβημεν γὰρ ἐπεκαίνων ὡς αὐτὸς μὲν τριακοσίας δραχμάς ἐδώκει Θησοῦ, συνθήκης πρὸς αὐτὸν ποιημένος, ἐγὼ δὲ ἐπαγγελέον τοῦτο τῷ μεταρχίον.

Counter2 καίτοι ἔχοντες αὐτῶν, εἴπερ ἦν ταιτ’ ἄλληθρη, παρακάλεσαν μάρτυρας ὡς πλεῖστοις κατὰ τοὺς νόμους διαπράττεσθαι περὶ αὐτῶν. οὕτως δὲ τοιοῦσιν οὐδὲν πῶποτε φαίνεται ποιήσως, ὑψίζω δὲ καὶ τύπων ἀµί ἁμοφθέρους ἡμᾶς καὶ κωμάξων καὶ τῆς θύρας ἐκβάλλων καὶ νῦκτωρ εἰσούς ἐπὶ γυναίκας ἑλεύθερας. [...] σκέψασθε δὲ ὡς ἠπίστατα εἰρήκη.

Simon2 Τὴν γὰρ οὐδὲν τὴν έκατον ἐπάθα σαμπνήκοντα καὶ διακοσίων δραχμῶν ἐτμήσατο.

Counter2 καίτοι θαμασαστιν εἰ τὸν ἐνταρῆσατο πλειώνον ἐμισάσατο ὅν αὐτὸς τυχάνει υπεκτιμέονος.

Simon3 ἐν τούτῳ δ’ ἤδη τῆς λόγος ὡς εὐκαίρ. ἐπει τούτω μονὸν αὐτὸς ἀνέβασσαν, περὶ τοῦ δεδομένου τὸ ἀργύριον, ἀλλὰ καὶ κεχουμένοις φησι.

Counter3 καίτοι πῶς εἰκάς ἄλλας τοτε μὴν ἡμᾶς τοιαῦτα ἠκαίραια σε οὐκ ἁμοφθέρους πρὸς τριακοσίας δραχμάς, ἐπειδὴ δὲ ἀπειραχεομένη, τηνχεκαστά ἄποδον τὸ ἄργυρόν αὐτῶ, μήτε ἀφεμένους τὸν ἐγκληματός μήτε ἀναγιγά τοὺς ἡμῶν κυριότερας γενομένης.

Thesis ἀλλὰ γὰρ, ὦ βουλή, πάντα αὐτῷ ταῦτα συγκεῖται καὶ μεμηκέντηται, καὶ δοῦναι μὲν φησιν [...] Counterarg. = Counterargument

The use of a corpus in the study of discourse is a game-changer, since it helps (or rather "forces") to detect devices that create text cohesion (metadiscursive expressions, non prototypical connectors), but are absent from the traditional descriptions in grammars and other reference works.
2. Bibliography

Bakker, St.J. & G. Wakker (eds.), *Discourse Cohesion in Ancient Greek*, Leiden, Brill.


