

Judit Bihari:
 Kertész, András & Rákosi, Csilla (eds.):
The Evidential Basis of Linguistic Argumentation
Argumentum 11 (2015), 34-37
 Debreceni Egyetemi Kiadó

Recenzió

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The most widely discussed, and, at the same time, the most challenging metatheoretical issues of modern linguistics involve delineating applicable data-types, data-handling procedures and the very notions of data and evidence. In András Kertész and Csilla Rákosi's view, their interpretation has immediate consequences for the practice of linguistic theorizing. They therefore facilitate the answering of some of the most acute questions by offering a series of studies (e.g. Kertész (2001), (2004a), (2004b), Rákosi (2005), Kertész & Rákosi (2008)) dedicated to the essential methodological problems of contemporary linguistics. In order to tackle these problems, in their most recent works the authors have put forward a fully-fledged model of linguistic theorizing, namely, the *p-model of plausible argumentation*. The p-model's presentation and explication, which is well-supported both in terms of methodology and the history of science, was published in the authors' 2012 volume, *Data and Evidence in Linguistics. A Plausible Argumentation Model* (Kertész & Rákosi, 2012). The volume under review, *The Evidential Basis of Linguistic Argumentation* is the latest publication in the series, presenting prospects in *the application* of the p-model by scholars from the most varied fields of linguistics.

The p-model, a radically new approach to linguistic theorizing, attempts to account for the nature of linguistic data and evidence by establishing a distinct metatheoretical framework, instead of evaluating linguistic theories by the yardstick(s) of other fields of science. This is a crucial insight, especially bearing in mind the discipline's struggle for self-justification as an independent field of science in itself. In the framework of the p-model, linguistic theorizing is regarded as an instance of *plausible argumentation*, and thus as *problem-solving*. It is a heuristic process: as the authors put it, the mechanism of plausible argumentation is responsible for turning a problematic informational state into a non-problematic or less-problematic one. This process consists of what the authors call *argumentation-cycles*: in possession of new information, or considering the problem under examination from another perspective, one constantly and retrospectively re-evaluates former decisions, thus making the argumentation process cyclic and prismatic. A successful argumentation process yields the resolution of the problem at hand. Another novelty of the p-model is the acceptance of uncertainty: this allows the investigator to operate with pieces of information which are

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plausible to some extent instead of being *true* with certainty. In accordance with this idea, the p-model is also able to account for inconsistencies. It also offers innovative definitions of the concepts *datum* and *evidence*, underlining that the latter have crucial functions in every stage of linguistic theorizing and therefore their role must not be restricted to testing a hypothesis. As a heuristic tool, the model is supposed to serve twofold objectives: on the one hand, it is intended to be a tool of object-scientific theorizing while on the other, it is a form of metatheoretical reflection. The volume under review is designed to shed light on both of these functions. Multiple studies exemplify how the p-model can be applied in everyday research practice and the book also features cases in which the model answers the purpose of metatheoretical reflection. The structure promotes a step-by-step introduction to the p-model and its applications: an Introduction in Chapter 1 explains *The state of the art and the structure of the book*, while Part I (Chapter 2) provides a brief introduction to *The p-model of data and evidence in linguistics*, explicating it with the help of some central notions which serve as pillars in the model's structure. Part II (Chapters 3-8) is devoted to *Object-theoretical applications* and Part III (Chapters 9-11) features *Metatheoretical applications* and a concluding chapter. References follow every chapter, assisting orientation in the relevant literature.

The introductory chapter of Part I is designed to elaborate on the need for raising the problem of data and evidence and for metatheoretical reflection, and thus motivate the necessity of putting forward the p-model. As the authors conclude, although linguists seem to have realized the urgent need to involve a variety of data-types in linguistic theorizing — in opposition to the confident use of *the appropriate type* characteristic of previous decades — there is no consensus as regards implementation. Similarly, the demand for well-motivated definitions of the very notions and functions of datum and evidence, and their consistent use, has been recognized but left unanswered. As Kertész and Rákosi argue, these problems can only be tackled when utilizing an “elaborated, systematic and solid metatheoretical (methodological) background” that surpasses the naïve reflection of the linguist. The p-model is intended to serve as such a metatheoretical background, against which the concepts of linguistic theorizing at issue can be clarified. At the same time, Kertész and Rákosi underline that their findings should not be considered as the ultimate answer to the metatheoretical debates on the nature of linguistic theorizing and data and evidence, but much rather offer them as a means of triggering new insights. Chapter 2, *The methodological framework*, targets a brief discussion of the substance and principal technical details of the p-model. To set up the latter, the authors introduce its fundamental notions, and gradually elaborate the model. Kertész and Rákosi provide ample examples to accompany the definitions, to promote better understanding.

Part II features case-studies. In these, the previously presented p-model is applied in diverse areas of linguistic inquiry, facilitating the solution of object-scientific problems. The authors of the six articles, for the most part dedicated to phenomena found in the Hungarian language, scrutinize different interpretations of the respective problems. They reconstruct them with the help of the p-model, and systematically compare and evaluate the different solutions offered for the problems, which, in many cases include the one they put forward. They then resolve the problem by choosing the best, most plausible, solution. In Károly Bibok's article, *The plausibility of approaches to syntactic alternation of Hungarian verbs*, two rival approaches to syntactically alternating verb classes, namely the lexical rule approach and the constructional approach are reconstructed and evaluated in the light of the p-model.

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Bibok argues that their combination, their supplementation with one another, is the best solution to the problem of interpreting syntactic alternations. Katalin Nagy C. devotes her contribution, *Methods and argumentation in historical linguistics: A case study*, to the study of historical linguistic argumentation. In her investigation of three rival hypotheses that explain the grammaticalization of the Catalan structure “anar ‘go’ + infinitive”, Nagy C. utilizes the p-model to assist the search for the best account. The application of problem-solving strategies introduced by the p-model allows the author to deem one of the three candidates — all similarly plausible at first sight — more acceptable than its rivals. Enikő Németh T. provides an example of the benefit to be gained from the conscious and consistent usage of multiple data-types in the argumentation process. Her paper, entitled *Hungarian verbs of natural phenomena with explicit and implicit subject arguments: their use and occurrence in the light of data*, aims to provide a novel description of these verbs. Németh T. applies the p-model to shed light on the inconsistency between the literature, which claims the verbs of natural phenomena to be subjectless, and the data stemming from different sources that affirm the opposite. The author puts forward an interpretation that is able to account both for the presence and the absence of the explicit subject. For the problem tackled by Helga Vanda Kocogh in *The development of a taxonomy of verbal disagreements in the light of the p-model*, the literature currently available does not seem to provide an adequate solution. None of the four approaches demonstrated in the article give a satisfactory account of Hungarian verbal disagreement. Therefore, after reconstructing, evaluating and ruling out all four rival candidates, Kocogh introduces her own category-system. György Rákosi’s case study, *A case of disagreement. On plural reduplicating particles in Hungarian*, is an instance of plausible argumentation by means of applying one of the problem-solving strategies offered by the p-model. The latter is called the Combinative Strategy, and, as its name suggests, it involves combining two competing approaches and offering a paraconsistent solution to the problem in question. Thus the inconsistency between two rival accounts can be tolerated and they can be separated in a systematic and well-motivated manner. In Rákosi’s study, the two competing explanations concern the Hungarian reduplicating particle construction: the problem the author tackles is whether it can be plural or not. *A plausibility-based model of shifted indexicals* by Zoltán Vecsey discusses a case where there seems to be an inconsistency between theory and data stemming from sources consulted over the past few years. The problem is, then, whether the classical interpretation of shifted indexicals is feasible in the light of plausible argumentation involving a wider range of data.

In Part III, Kertész and Rákosi turn to metatheoretical applications of the p-model. Chapter 9, *Thought experiments and real experiments as converging data sources in pragmatics*, seeks to solve a methodological problem. The question the study aims to answer is whether and how real experiments and thought experiments can be integrated into theorizing in pragmatics. The authors apply the p-model to a thought experiment and to two real experiments and argue that their combination serves as a source of data for present-day pragmatics. In her article, *Data and the resolution of inconsistency in Optimality Theory*, Csilla Rákosi focuses on inconsistencies in Optimality Theory. She identifies and reconstructs strategies that are applied to eliminate the respective conflicts within the framework of the p-model. The *Conclusion* of the volume by Kertész and Rákosi (Chapter 11) sums up the most important findings of the case studies pertaining to plausible argumentation. It places special emphasis on the cornerstones of the p-model, namely the acceptance of the uncertainty of data, the application of plausible inferences, the cyclic and prismatic character of theorizing, the

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treatment of inconsistencies and the acceptance of pluralism in linguistic theorizing, and highlights how the authors of the case-studies benefit from these features.

The brief overview of the p-model and the case studies demonstrating the manifold possibilities inherent in its utilization constitute a well-structured, informative and thought-provoking publication. Ample examples facilitate the understanding of the line of argumentation; nonetheless, it is only intelligible when accompanied by a solid background in linguistics.

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