Argumentation in biblical narrative

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ARGUMENTATION IN BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

The paper opens with the premise that some theories of argumentation are not suitable for any Biblical genre, for example a theory of formal dialectic. For the genre of Biblical narrative a pragma-dialectical theory is needed, since it is action-directed. The theory of van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984) was found suitable for application to Biblical narrative, since it had extended speech act theory. We supplemented this theory mainly with van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs (1993). The story of Joseph and his Brothers (Genesis, chapters 37, 39-45) was chosen as an example of Biblical narrative. The arguments in this narrative may be compared to argumentation in real life situations, since they are based not only on rationality, but also motivated by strong emotions, and frequently culminate in settlements of conflicts, affected by human needs, especially by the survival instinct. The analysis of the narrative showed that all categories of speech acts were performed, and in each category various types of speech acts, and not only those mentioned in van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984). It emerged that speech acts may be analyzed not only from the illocutionary act to the perlocutionary act, but also in reverse order, when the illocutionary act is not explicit. Analysis in reverse order sometimes also reveals the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' from the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' (terms used in van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 25).

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1. Introductory Remarks

The various genres in the Bible that include argumentation do not facilitate analysis by only one theory of argumentation. Moreover some theories of argumentation are not suitable for any Biblical genre. For example the theory of "formal dialectic" developed by Barth and Krabbe (1978) based on the work of Kamlah and Lorenzen (1973) may not be applied to any Biblical genre. The book of Job, for instance, contains arguments expressed by Job and counter arguments by his friends, however they do not constitute formal argumentation but rather theological discourse.

Many of the arguments in Biblical narratives are action-directed, therefore a pragma-dialectical theory is needed. Van Eemeren and Grootendorst have extended Speech Act theory that was formulated by Austin (1962), Searle (1969; 1979) Vanderveken (1985) for the analysis of argumentation. They define argumentation as follows:

> Argumentation is a speech act consisting of a constellation of statements designed to justify or refute an expressed opinion and calculated in a regimented discussion to convince a rational judge of a particular standpoint in respect of the acceptability or unacceptability of that expressed opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984: 18).

To the *communicative* aspects of speech acts van Eemeren and Grootendorst added *interactional* aspects, and claimed that in argumentation both kinds of aspects are involved. They clarify that "translated into terms of speech act theory, the communicative aspects of language are expressed in attempts to bring about *illocutionary* effects and the interactional aspects in attempts to bring about *perlocutionary"* effects (1984: 23). They point out, that Searle's basic theory applies to illocutionary acts, while perlocutionary acts are disregarded (ibid.), and by contrast Austin enlarged upon perlocutionary acts in *How to Do Things with Words* (1984: 25-26) - [the foundational book of speech act theory]. From the examples given by Austin for perlocutionary acts they cite those that are involved in argumentation: persuading, convincing, and alarming (Austin [1962] 1975: 101-108). It seems to me that they borrowed from Austin the notion of 'consequence' (1975: 107), and made a distinction between 'inherent perlocutionary effect' and 'consecutive perlocutionary *consequence*' in the interactional aspects of their model (van Eemeren and

Grootendorst 1984:25). In their model they bring as an example the illocution speech act of 'arguing', and state that the illocutionary effect is understanding the argumentation. The perlocution of this illocution is 'convincing'. The 'inherent perlocutionary effect' is accepting the argumentation, and the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' is, for example, desisting from opposition to a point of view (ibid.).

In their book van Eemeren and Grootendorst dealt mainly with rational argumentation, and showed that only a few types of speech acts, and only some members of these types, contribute to the resolution of disputes: Assertives, more precisely Austin's Verdictives (1984:96-97); requests, questions, challenges in the category of Directives; acceptances, agreements in the category of Commissives; and only Usage Declaratives, such as definitions, precization, explications (1984:98-111).

In a book published eight years later they explained why regular declaratives cannot be a part of a critical discussion, claiming that since declaratives require some special authority, they cannot contribute to the resolution of a dispute; at best they can lead only to a settlement of a dispute (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992:40). They also expanded on their omission of the category of Expressives from the list of speech acts that play a constructive role in a critical discussion, claiming that expressing feelings does not lead to a commitment that is relevant to resolving disputes (1992: 39).

In analyzing conversational arguments Jacobs and Jackson point out that arguments stem from speech acts that belong to the category of Expressives (e.g. complaints), just as they stem from speech acts that belong to the category of Directives (e.g. requests), or Commissives (e.g. promises). On the other hand, they claim that arguments over the truth or falsity of assertions are not so common in conversations (Jacobs and Jackson 1982: 227).

While describing the pragmatics of conversational arguments Sally Jackson brings examples of arguments in the context of practical activity, and shows that the argumentation is conveyed by means of speech acts other than assertives. Nevertheless the conversational acts can be reconstructed in the form of assertives (Jackson 1992:260).

Van Eemeren and Grootendorst convey a similar idea, while using the word 'indirectly' (which is familiar from speech act theory): "In practice all speech acts that are crucial to a critical discussion can be indirectly performed by way of speech acts, that at first sight do not express their primary function". They also give examples of indirect expressions of a stand-

point, indirect expressions of argumentation (by expressive, directive, commissive), indirect expressions of doubt, indirect challenges (by directive, assertive, expressive), indirect requests for usage declarative (by assertive, expressive, commissive) (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 48).

In a research published by van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs (1993) the authors explain that "a system built for resolution of disputes must operate in such a way as [...] to assure that if it [=a dispute] comes to any settlement at all, it is recognized by both parties as correct, justified and rational. Hence, one characteristic of the ideal model is an unlimited opportunity for further discussion" (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson and Jacobs 1993: 25). They add that the model "can provide a framework for interpreting and reconstructing the argumentative features of actual discourse [...] and can serve as a standard for guiding improvement in the practice of argumentation" (1993: 34).

The authors point out that throughout argumentation a variety of activities and expressions occur aimed at the pursuit of goals and topics that may be only incidentally related to the purpose of resolving a difference of opinion in a rational manner (1993: 39). Most important is the authors' realization that "actual human interaction is not 'naturally' resolution oriented", and that people who disagree are not disinterested in the outcome, but rather have a strong interest in one outcome or another (1993: 34).

Obviously, the argumentation in Biblical narrative is subordinated to action, to certain goals and to strong emotions, and therefore it is not mainly rationally oriented.

2. The Story of Joseph and his Brothers

The Biblical story of Joseph and his brothers is considered by many literary critics as a short novel, and since its plot is a conflict between the protagonist and other characters, it is rich in argumentative dialogues. The story appears in *Genesis*, chapters 37, 39-45. However, only a selection of the main dialogical arguments were chosen for analysis. The citations are from the King James Version of the Bible, translated from Hebrew in 1611. Where the language is obsolete, equivalents from modern translations, such as the JPS, are brought in parentheses.

At the beginning of the story we are told that Israel (Jacob) loved Joseph more than all his sons, and he made him a coat of many colors. Therefore, Joseph's brothers hated him. This exposition confronts the analyzer of the story with a problem, since researchers are advised to

avoid psychologizing by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (1984: 6). Yet, the author of the story does it himself. In the first dialogue, which is in chapter 37, Joseph shares a dream with his brothers:

6) And he said unto them: Hear, I pray you this dream which I have dreamed.
7) for behold, we were binding sheaves in the field, and, lo, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and, behold, your sheaves stood round about, and made obeisance (bowed down) to my sheaf.
8) And his brethren said to him: Shalt thou indeed reign over us? or shalt thou indeed have dominion over us? (Genesis 37: 6-8).

Joseph tells the contents of his dream as a plain narrative. Thus on first impression it seems that Joseph performs an Assertive Illocutionary Act. His brothers respond with rhetorical questions, which convey refutation. However, they are not able to argue that the propositional content of the Assertive is false, since only the dreamer may bring evidence about the contents of his dream. Thus their refutation is not related to the contents of the dream, but rather to its implicature (in the terminology of Grice 1975). The 'inherent perlocutionary effect' on the brothers is non-acceptance (following the terminology of van Eemeren and Grootendorst, 1984: 25). Since the non-acceptance does not relate to an Assertive Illocutionary Act, we must seek another kind of illocutionary act that the brothers do not accept. As we try to avoid psychologizing, in this case interpretation of dreams, we have to analyze the argumentation in a reverse order – to reveal the illocutionary act that Joseph had made from the perlocutionary effect on his brothers as implied by their reactive speech-act. The brothers' rhetorical questions lead to negative answers: thou shall not reign over us; thou shall not have dominion over us. Therefore the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' is non-acceptance of a directive, and the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' is non-compliance with a directive to be reigned by Joseph and to live under his dominion. However, since Joseph did not perform a *direct* Directive Illocutionary Act, we have to analyze his speech act as an *indirect* Directive Illocutionary Act. In sum, the analysis of this argumentation is done in reverse order, from the perlocutionary act to the illocutionary act.

The second dream narrated by Joseph may be analyzed in a similar way:

9) And he dreamed yet another dream, and told it to his brethren, and said: Behold, I have dreamed a dream more; and, behold, the sun and the moon and the eleven stars made obeisance (bowed down) to me.

10) And he told it to his father, and to his brethren: and his father rebuked him, and said unto him, What is this dream that thou hast dreamed? Shall I and thy mother and thy brethren indeed come to bow down ourselves to thee to the earth?

11) And his brethren envied him; but his father observed the saying (kept the saying in his mind) (Genesis 37: 9-11).

In this section Jacob - Joseph's father - interprets the dream by giving a literal meaning to the metaphors or images it contains, and formulates his response in terms of rhetorical questions that lead to negative answers. The 'inherent perlocutionary effect' is non-acceptance. However, there are difficulties in deciding what is the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence'. If we analyze it as non-compliance with a directive, we have to assume that Joseph performed a Directive Illocutionary Act, the propositional content of which is that even his parents will bow down to him. This idea is far-fetched, and I therefore accept the narrator's assistance by describing Jacob's speech act as a rebuke. A rebuke is classified in the category of Expressives in speech act theory. A question arises whether Joseph's arrogance or his aspirations provoked the rebuke. In any case, outwardly Joseph is rebuked for telling the propositional content of his dream.

Jacob's rebuke may be compared to a rhetorical question phrased: "Then how can you say such and such?" - that is aimed to cause the confronted to back down from his original standpoint (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, Jacobs 1993: 43).

In the next section of argumentation Joseph is not one of the interlocutors, but rather fulfills a passive role:

19) And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh.

20) Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him; and we shall see what will become of his dreams.

21) And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

22) And Reuben said unto them, Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him; that he might rid him out of their hands, to deliver him to his father again (Genesis 37: 19-22).

In this section most of Joseph's brothers conspire to kill him, performing a Directive Illocutionary Act, in which they refer to the first person plural: "let us slay him". After hearing his brothers talking, Reuben responds even though they did not address him directly. Reuben's response is similar to the brothers' Directive Illocutionary Act, as he also refers to the first person plural. The only difference between the speech acts is Reuben's use of a word of negation: "Let us **not** kill him". Thus his speech act may be analyzed as a counter directive. Reuben performs another Directive Illocutionary Act, but in this one he refers to the second person plural "Shed no blood". Its propositional content serves as a moral-religious argument against the plotted murder.

In order to convince his brothers to accept his directive, Reuben suggests a substitute plan - to cast Joseph into a pit in the wilderness. The brothers do not answer him in words, but the narrator tells us of the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' - casting Joseph into a pit, and this implies that the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' is acceptance of the advice (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984:25). Obviously, Reuben's attempt to persuade his brothers is successful, and it might be partly due to his authority as the elder brother.

After casting Joseph into a pit, the brothers saw a caravan of merchants with their camels carrying spices to Egypt. Judah, another brother who had authority, seized the opportunity to save Joseph's life, as we will see in the following section:

26) And Judah said unto his brethren, what profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood?

27) Come, and let us sell him to the Ish'maelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh: and his brethren were content (listened to him).

28) Then there passed by Mid'ianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ish'maelites for twenty pieces of silver. And they brought Joseph into Egypt (Genesis 37: 26-28).

The appearance of the caravan and Judah's seizure of the opportunity is a good example of action-directed argumentation. Judah presents counter arguments in order to convince his brothers not to let Joseph die in the pit. The first argument is not moral but rather evokes the material greediness of the brothers. It is phrased as a rhetorical question: "what profit is it if we slay our brother...?" The question leads to a negative answer:

there is no profit, and to the following Directive Illocutionary Act: "Come, and let us sell him…" that implicates the purpose of making money. The next speech act is a Directive, formulated with a word of negation: "let **not** our hand be upon him". It is followed by an argument, opening with a causal connective "for", by which Judah tries to touch on the familial feelings of his brothers: "for he is our brother and our flesh". Thus we may conclude that the speaker uses an Expressive in his argument, in order to convince the listeners to accept his standpoint. And indeed the listeners were convinced, since the narrator reports of the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' - "and his brethren listened to him", and also of the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' - "they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit".

The following argumentation takes place in Egypt, and the interlocutors are Potiphar's wife and Joseph:

7) And it came to pass after these things, that his master's wife cast her eyes upon Joseph; and she said, Lie with me.

8) But he refused, and said unto his master's wife, Behold, my master wotteth (knoweth) not what is with me in the house, and he hath committed all that he hath to my hand;

9) there is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?

10) And it came to pass, as she spake to Joseph day by day, that he hearkened not unto her, to lie by her, or to be with her (Genesis 39:7-10).

Potiphar's wife makes a speech act of request. Joseph does not refuse her request directly, but presents four moral counter arguments for not complying with her request, each of which is stronger than the previous one. The arguments have to do with his (but not her) fidelity and faithfulness to his master and his obligation to reciprocate to him for the trust invested in him. Joseph even presents explicitly his master's point of view, opening the argument with a causal connective: "…because thou art his wife". In doing so Joseph alludes to the precept of marital fidelity, even though he does not moralize directly to Potiphar's wife. Joseph concludes with a religious – theological argument, formulated as a rhetorical question: "how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"

The 'inherent perlocutionary effect' of non-acceptance is not phrased explicitly by Joseph, as none of his counter arguments contains a word of

negation. We learn of the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' of refusal from the narrator, who is apparently less tactful than Joseph.

In the next section of argumentation Joseph's brothers come to Egypt to buy food:

6) And Joseph was the governor over the land, and he it was that sold to all the people of the land: and Joseph's brethren came, and bowed down themselves before him with their faces to the earth.

7) And Joseph saw his brethren, and he knew them, but made himself strange unto them, and spake roughly unto them; and he said unto them, Whence come ye? And they said, From the land of Canaan to buy food.

8) And Joseph knew his brethren, but they knew not him.

9) And Joseph remembered the dreams which he dreamed of them, and said unto them, Ye are spies; to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

10) And they said unto him, Nay, my lord, but to buy food are thy servants come.

11) We are all one man's sons; we are true men ; thy servants are no spies.

12) And he said unto them, Nay, but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come.

13) And they said, Thy servants are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Canaan; and, behold, the youngest is this day with our father, and one is not.

14) And Joseph said unto them, That is it that I spake unto you, saying, Ye are spies:

15) Hereby ye shall be proved: By the life of Pharaoh ye shall not go forth hence, except your youngest brother comes hither.

16) Send one of you, and let him fetch your brother, and ye shall be kept in prison, that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you: or else by the life of Pharaoh surely ye are spies (Genesis 42:6-16).

In this dialogue the inequality in power and resources of the interlocutors stands out. Joseph is the governor of Egypt and also the chief authority for selling food in a period of famine, while the brothers come to Egypt as foreigners to buy food. The inequality in their status is stressed by the narrator's recounting that the brothers bowed down before Joseph. Thus we may conclude right at the beginning that the brothers are not going to win in this "argumentation". (See reference to argumentation in conditions of power inequality, van Eemeren, Grootendorst, Jackson, Jacobs 1993:118).

Joseph opens the dialogue with a Directive Illocutionary Act, which may be further analyzed as a question, or more precisely as an investigation. The brothers answer the question, and provide a reasonable explanation for coming to Egypt. They perform an Assertive Illocutionary Act, the propositional content of which is true. Thus it is successful, or "happy" in terms of speech act theory. However Joseph, who knows that the brothers are telling the truth, claims that they are lying, and says: "Ye are spies" (verse 9). So the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' is accepting the information (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984:25), but the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' is an outward rejection of the information and an accusation. The brothers negate Joseph's accusation directly: "thy servants are no spies" (verse 11), repeat the reason for coming to Egypt, and add the information that they "are all one man's sons"(ibid.). However, their repetition of the information supposedly does not convince Joseph of its truth, and he repeats his accusation verbatim: "Nay but to see the nakedness of the land ye are come" (verse 12). The brothers add more information about their family, revealing that their youngest brother is with his father in Canaan, and that another brother is dead. The supposedly dead brother is Joseph himself, and thus the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' on Joseph must be some sort of a strong emotion. Nevertheless the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' is an expression of greater disbelief. However, the information about their youngest brother Benjamin, who is Joseph's only brother from both parents, probably had awakened Joseph's longing to see him, and he demands that they bring him to Egypt, in order to prove their innocence. This so called "proof" is actually irrelevant to the argumentation, as it cannot disprove the accusation (see discussion of irrelevance in Jackson 1992:264-265). Moreover, Joseph demands that one brother go to Canaan to fetch Benjamin, and meanwhile all the rest will stay in prison in Egypt. Joseph's demand is a compound illocutionary act: it is a Directive and also a Declarative, since Joseph swears by the life of Pharaoh, that if the "proof" is not provided, they are spies. Yet in order not to stray completely from logic, Joseph presents a rationalization, which is similar to a proof by a lie detector: "…that your words may be proved, whether there be any truth in you" (verse 16). However, in this section Joseph himself does not stand up to the sincerity condition, in terms of speech act theory. Moreover, Joseph does not act as a rational judge but rather as an arbitrary and unjust one.

The next argumentation takes place in Canaan, and it is held between Jacob and Reuben, his eldest son. Reuben tries to convince his father to comply with Joseph's demand that they bring Benjamin to Egypt:

36) And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me.

37) And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him (back) to thee again.

38) And he [Jacob] said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave (Genesis 42:36-38).

The first speech act is made by Jacob. In the first reading it sounds like an illocutionary act of accusation for bereaving him of two sons. But the conclusion of the speech act implies a refusal to let the brothers take Benjamin with them to Egypt. Thus the accusation serves as a strong argument for Jacob's refusal. Trying to convince his father to let Benjamin go to Egypt, Reuben performs a compound illocutionary act: a Declarative – as he swears on the life of his sons; a Directive - "deliver him into my hand"; and a Commissive - "and I will bring him to thee again" (verse 37). Reuben's oath, "Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee" (ibid.) serves as a strong counter argument to Jacob's implicit pro-argument for his refusal – losing two sons. Reuben's attempt to convince his father to let Benjamin go results in the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' of non-acceptance of the argumentation (following the model of van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984:25), as revealed by Jacob's explicit refusal: "My son shall not go down with you" (verse 38). In support of his refusal, Jacob repeats his previous arguments and adds that he will die as a bereaved man. And indeed Jacob adhered to his refusal until the food supply that had been brought from Egypt was consumed, as the narrator recounts in Genesis 43:11-14.

3. Summary and Conclusions

The story of Joseph and his brothers is action-directed, and thus the choice of a pragma-dialectical theory proved to be suitable for the analysis. The analysis of the story reveals that argumentation in real life situations is based not only on rationality, since people involved in argumentation are not motivated only by rational arguments, but also by feelings or strong emotions. Settlement of conflicts, rather than rational solutions, are often effected by human and existential needs, and especially by the survival instinct. Inequality in power or resources often effects the consequences of argumentation and may be crucial in settlement of conflicts.

In the story analyzed direct illocutionary acts from all categories of speech acts were performed, and in each category various types of speech acts, and not only those mentioned in the model of argumentation. In the category of Directives not only questions and requests for information were made, but also real orders; in the category of Commissives not only acceptances, commitments and agreements were found, but also real promises; even speech acts in the category of Expressives were made, such as rebukes, and some of them were used in attempts to convince the listener to accept a standpoint; in the category of Declaratives not only usage Declaratives were performed, but also real declaratives, such as taking an oath. As to the category of Assertives, it should be noted that the speech acts were formulated not only as statements but also as rhetorical questions.

This empirical research has showed that speech acts might be analyzed not only from the illocutionary act to the perlocutionary act, but also in reverse order, from the perlocutionary act, to the illocutionary act, when the latter is not explicit. In natural conversation it happens when one of the interlocutors interprets an implicit or hidden meaning. Of course, such interpretation or reconstruction might not always coincide with the intention of the speaker.

Analysis in reverse order applies also to revealing the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' from the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence'. Sometimes there is no accordance between the 'inherent perlocutionary effect' and the 'consecutive perlocutionary consequence' in natural conversation, especially when the sincerity conditions are not fulfilled.

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