



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

Argumentations in the Qur'an: A Perspective of Generalized Argumentation Theory

Liang, Hanze; Ju, Shier; Boogaart, Ronny; Garssen, Bart; Jansen, Henrike; Van Leeuwen, Maarten; ... ; Reuneker, Alex

Citation

Liang, H., & Ju, S. (2024). Argumentations in the Qur'an: A Perspective of Generalized Argumentation Theory. *Proceedings Of The Tenth Conference Of The International Society For The Study Of Argumentation*, 333-339. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107799>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4107799>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Argumentations in the Qur'an *A Perspective of Generalized Argumentation Theory*

HANZE LIANG & SHIER JU¹

*Institute of Logic and Cognition, Department of Philosophy
Sun Yat-sen University
Guangzhou 510275
P. R. China
1072920595@qq.com*

*Institute of Logic and Cognition, Department of Philosophy
Sun Yat-sen University
Guangzhou 510275
P. R. China
hssjse@mail.sysu.edu.cn*

ABSTRACT: This paper adopts Shier Ju's Generalized Argumentation Theory (GAT) to analyze some cases of Qur'anic argumentations. By comparing it with Rosalind Gwynne's analysis of the same cases using some of the methods of modern argumentation theory, the paper illustrates the feasibility of adopting GAT to study Qur'anic argumentations and the relative advantages of it, and shows Qur'anic argumentations comply with the social norms of the local communities at the beginning of the rise of Islam.

KEYWORDS: argumentation, Generalized Argumentation Theory, Qur'anic argumentations

1. INTRODUCTION

Rosalind W. Gwynne's research (Rosalind, 2004, pp. ix-x) found more than thirty kinds of argumentations, expressed in both explicit or implicit ways, in the Qur'anic text. These argumentations are the pronouncements of God's appeal to His authority, and this authority has no any other source except that of Himself. Rosalind argues that the Qur'an does not present its content in a way that has self-evident meaning but constructs its own schemes of argumentation to show how its content appeals to its audiences in terms of how they understand it and act upon it. The schemes of argumentation that Rosalind summarizes from the Qur'an overlap with those of argumentation theory focus, e.g., comparison, contrast, categorical argumentations, conditional and disjunctive argumentations, and there are certainly some schemes of argumentation that are unique to the Qur'an, e.g., rule-based Reasoning, logic of commands. (Rosalind, 2004, pp. xii-xiii). The second section of this paper will begin with a case from each of these two schemes of Qur'anic argumentations and a brief introduction to Rosalind's analysis of it.

In two papers published 10 years apart, Shier Ju proposed and refined the research methodology of Generalized Argumentation Theory (GAT) (Shier, 2010 & 2020). He led a team of researchers who sought to study argumentative practices in different cultures

¹ Professor, Department of Philosophy, Sun Yat-sen University and Institute of Logic and Cognition, Sun Yat-sen University. He is the corresponding author of this paper.

from both anthropological and sociological perspectives. The team's research programs are based mainly on GAT (van Eemeren et al., 2014). The third section of this paper will briefly demonstrate the research methodology of GAT and reconstruct the cases of Rosalind mentioned above using GAT to show how the cases serves as a social interaction that comply with the social norms of the local community in the period of the rise of Islam. The fourth section will briefly summarize GAT's relative advantages compared with the method employed by Rosalind.

2. TWO CASES OF ARGUMENTATIVE SCHEMES THAT ARE UNIQUE TO QUR'AN

As mentioned above, here we have selected some short cases of Qur'anic argumentations offered by Rosalind. The reason for the selection is as follows: her book is the only collection of works in the English-speaking world devoted to Qur'anic argumentations, as the author herself states: "Though Qur'anic reasoning underlies the immense structure of Islamic theology and law, relatively few books analyze the structure of Qur'anic proofs."

(Rosalind, 2004, pp. xiv-xv) Moreover, the argumentations selected from the book specifically describe some of the basic patterns in the human-god relationship as well as the argumentations in the earliest scriptures of Islam.

1. Rule-based reasoning. This scheme of argumentation has such a feature: "Whatever the structure of the original rule-sentence, it must be restatable in the following form: In circumstances X, Y is required/permitted." This pattern is the product of following four "structural characteristics...necessary for the rule to function as a rule...: a. an indication of the circumstances in which the rule is applicable; b. an indication of that which ought, or may, or must be, or not be, concluded or decided; c. an indication of the type of inference contemplated, whether under the rule it is permitted, required, or prohibited; d. an indication that the statement is indeed designed to function as a rule or inference-warrant."

As an example of a rule that governs human relations and offers more than one possible course of action, let us consider a verse on divorce.

When you divorce women, and they fulfill the term of their waiting-period, either take them back on equitable terms (*bi-ma'rūf*) or set them free on equitable terms; but do not take them back to injure them, (or) to take undue advantage; if any one does that; He wrongs his own soul. Do not treat God's Signs as a jest, but solemnly rehearse God's favours on you, and the fact that He sent down to you the Book and Wisdom, for your instruction. And fear God, and know that God is well acquainted with all things.

(Q 2:231)

Taking just one part of the complex rule the verse demonstrate, It shall be restated it as follows: "When a husband who is considering divorce decides to take his wife back, he may do so provided that he treats her equitably and does not intend to harm her." In which:
a. Circumstances: A man considers divorcing his wife. b. Decision: He decides not to divorce her. c. Type of inference: This decision is permitted, provided that his intention is to treat her equitably and not to harm her. d. Status as rule: If the man fails to observe

this rule, he will bring punishment upon himself, because he is ignoring what God has sent down for his instruction.

2. The logic of commands. God's primordial mode of speech in the Abrahamic faiths is that of command, so that the study of divine command is in a sense coextensive with the study of revelation. God's very acts of creation are commands: ... "He created [Adam] from dust, then said to him 'Be!' and he was." (Qur'an 3:59). Toshihiko Izutsu has written that, the imperative is a very remarkable linguistic device for designating the action or event desired in so straightforward and compulsory a way that the mere mention of the action or event in that form is generally sufficient to bring about its immediate realization (Rosalind, 2004, pp. 67) . For example:

(Allah also) forbidden to you for marriage are your mothers, your daughters, your sisters, your paternal and maternal aunts, your brother's daughters, your sister's daughters, your foster-mothers, your foster-sisters, your mothers-in-law, your stepdaughters...
(Q 4:23)

As above are the two cases I quoted. For Rosalind, rule-based reasoning can still be considered some analysis of the verse, whereas the logic of the command does not analyse its structure in depth, except to emphasize that it consists of imperatives. And both make no consideration of the social context in which the verses were descended.

3. GAT AND ITS RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CASES

3.1 *An introduction to GAT*

GAT suggests that the concept of argumentation should be defined on the interactions in socio-cultural groups:

An argumentation in a socio-cultural group is a sequence of discourses actions aimed at reasoning following the norms of the group; where discourses are meaningful linguistic units consisting of natural language, body language, visual image language and other symbols. (Shier, 2010 & 2020)

Therefore, the study of a socio-cultural group's argumentations (or "reasoning styles") should be conducted in a localized perspective (and is expressed in the "six steps" in the following). A localized perspective does not imply a development of a specific theory of argumentation, but allows us to provide a "container", i.e., a possible framework for containing all argumentations, especially including those from minority or non-mainstream cultures.

The GAT treats argumentative participants as subjects of social interaction who subordinate to a socio-cultural group (or groups) and share the (at least relatively) same context. They understand the (functional) discourse actions of other participants in terms of the social norms which are developing elements of the context or being consistent with it and then they perform certain (functional) discourse actions regarding the same things. Clearly that each part of this periodic process will be governed by the social norms mentioned above. The social norms argumentations are also served as the rules we have to indicate by which the socio-cultural group (or groups) constructs its argumentations. Socio-

cultural groups are localized in terms of their ethnic history, places of residence, population size, psychological structure, etc., and therefore argumentations that conform to the corresponding socio-cultural norms are also of localized reasonability in the corresponding senses.

The above two schemes of Qur'anic argumentations using the GAT to demonstrate its perspective and use. While it is true that the fundamental beliefs of Islam consider this religion to be universal, Muslims are still a part of a socio-cultural groups but not the whole. In this sense, we can say that the universality of the Qur'anic argumentative patterns in the cognitive state of Muslims is not in conflict with the localized reasonability in the sense of this paper.

Now for the specifics of the GAT: the six-step approach. Starting from the effectivity² of locally reasonable argumentations, we analysed the socio-cognitive process of argumentative discourse actions in social interactions of arguers, and finally developed a six-step procedure of argumentation localizing method, which consists of the following:

i. Socio-cultural background information gathering; ii. Conducting argumentative fieldwork (including textual fieldwork, as taken in this presentation); iii. Analysis of data to offer candidate rules of argumentation; iv. Candidate rules defence or interpretation; v. Validating the rules in the field (Finding grounds in the sense of social norms); vi. Modifying or adding to these rules according to the socio-cultural context or our needs (step vi is the subsequent extension of the theory).

The following rules are composed of four classes of rules & one class of preferences. A single rule is not restricted to one class, it can belong to different classes at different points of time in an argumentative discourse or a sequence formed by various discourses. By noting the “the class consisting of the norms and customs of the socio- cultural group of the current arguer” as A, and “the class consisting of the norms and customs of the socio-cultural group of all the arguers that appear in the whole corpus” as B, we have: a. Rules of (Argumentative) contextual understanding. These rules answer the question of which ways (including thinking and expression, hereinafter) of A or which ways of conforming to A the current arguer has taken to understand the meaning of the discourse actions performed by other arguers and the contextual changes they have caused in the previous context, and to update their own context. b. (Argumentative) functional rules. These rules answer the question of which of A, or of which ways conforming to A the current arguer should take to decide the intended function of the argumentative discourse action to be taken in the updated context in order to achieve a certain function (or its sub-functions). c. (Argumentative) rules of expression. These rules answer, with the completion of the answer in b., of which ways of A or which ways of conforming to A the current arguer has followed in that context in order to achieve that function, and to select the discourse actions to perform and achieve that function. c'. (Argumentative) expression preferences. These preferences answer the question of what personal preferences the current arguer has when selecting discourse actions in c.. These preferences must not be contradictive to A nor to the rules of expression. d. Nth-order (argumentative) chunking rules. This type of rules answers the question of which, from the point of view of the corpus as a whole as an argumentative process (and not from any intermediate point in the time period occupied by contextual updating or functional realization), the respective

² effectivity involves the elements of successful communication, persuasiveness, and coherence with knowledge in the domain of discourse, in contrast to the concept of validity in formal logic.

argumentation (and its sub-ones) therein construct functional sequences for their discourse actions (or call them discourse turns chunk sequences from the point of view of conversational analysis) according to which of B, or according to which of the ways that are consistent with B. With the Nth-order chunking rules, we can clearly see how the process of implementing any of the argumentative functions as an argumentative corpus whole is supported by the implementations of its sub-functions using the chunking rules. In the Nth-order argumentative sequences, the total function is implemented at the Nth order, i.e. LN. (Shier, 2020, pp. 11-13)

With regard to the application of the six-step approach to argumentations that has a contextual basis of localized reasonability, we defend the following: First, the rules of the six-step approach have a feature of social-functionalism, which takes the social function of the argumentations as the entry point for understanding the argumentations in a particular socio-cultural context; and the so-called function is cognitively neutral because it refers to “the ability of a thing making a change to something else”. Therefore, as long as a particular researcher is able to identify a “change” in an argumentation, they will be able to confirm what a function of the discourse action in the argumentation is. It is true that this requires the researcher to have some knowledge of the cultural background of the local persons, but it does not require the researcher to have the same cognitive status as the local persons do. Hence the six-step approach is positionally neutral and does not conflict with the locally reasonable contextual basis and argumentative methods. Specifically, for examining argumentations in the Qur’an, there is almost no dispute among Muslim and non-Muslim cognitive subjects as to what function an argumentative discourse performs, because the persuasive process of argumentation itself specifically demonstrates the function and the researcher only needs to summarize.

Second, the GAT does not intend to abstract the argumentations, and then to introduce a theory that constructs a set of plausible norms or rules to which argumentations must adhere. The rules and norms of argumentations, if there are any, are entirely determined by the socio-cultural norms followed by the argumentation subjects in the analysed argumentative discourses, being independent of the GAT.

According to these two defences, the six-step approach applies to argumentations with localized contextual bases and argumentative methods, which makes the GAT a container mentioned above. Therefore, we can say that the GAT can serve as a candidate for a metatheory of argumentation theories.

For a purely textual field, the six-step approach is perhaps a little weak, because of the length of the text in hand and the associative unavoidable tailoring of contextual factors and discourse interactions, the current text may need to be complemented by other texts. But it is more dynamic for real fieldwork in real contexts, because the concrete audio and video materials can reflect the strategies of discourse selecting and corresponding rules of argumentation in dynamic contexts in a delicate way.

3.2 GAT's reconstruction of the cases

We now consider the reconstructions mentioned in Section 2. To the rule-based reasoning case with the form “In circumstance X, Y is required/permitted. In circumstances X, Y is required/permitted.” GAT can discover anything new based on this. As mentioned above, we have to consider this rule (and its various examples in Qur’an) in a particular socio-

cultural context. At least in the perception of believers, the verse is sent down from God, and the context of its sending and the circumstances together constitute a rule of contextual understanding for the believers (if they religiously knowledgeable enough, like an Imam), and then he can arrange the corresponding functional rules, rules of expression, and preferences in his argumentative discourse according to this rule of contextual understanding. The Nth-order (argumentative) chunking rule does not appear here for the time being, because it needs to be summarized by the researcher from longer discourse interactions.

We will first briefly describe the context of the verse and then give a specific example. It was narrated from Ibn Abbas: This verse was sent down by Allah when this man abandoned his wife, then returned to her before the end of the abstinence period, only to abandon her again, which hurt her and made things difficult for her. The example is, suppose an Imam is receiving a religious counsel from a husband (the corresponding discourse is often not very brief). The husband states that he is unpredictable in his relationship with his wife. At this point, the Imam can immediately give the above verse as an exhortation. If the husband does not understand the meaning, the Imam can tell him the context of the above verse, so that both of them are in the same context regarding the topic at hand.

This kind of religious counsel is a part of the traditional Muslim way of life, dating back to the very beginning of Islam, and is abundantly reflected in the Hadith records. In fact, the rule-based reasoning embodied in the Qur'anic argumentations is abundant in the Hadiths, meaning that the Qur'anic argumentations and the rules they demonstrate not only a layer of meaning that is consistent with the local social norms at the beginning of Islam (since the verses were constantly becoming social norms), but are themselves becoming arguments for new social norms (such as the Hadiths) and are presented to us as a process of social interaction.

In the GAT's perspective, from the Imam's discourse action in giving the verses, we can obtain the corresponding rules of contextual understanding, and the way his exhortation discourse action for the next discourse allows us to extract functional rules, rules of expression, and expression of preferences. For the entire religious counseling discourse, which is often not very brief, we then construct the support relations between the functions of its sub-discourses layer by layer (i.e., extract the Nth-order chunking rules), and thus obtain the total function of the entire discourse.

Thus, we will achieve a cognitively neutral reconstruction of the entire discourse in a GAT manner, with the concept of function at its core, so that rule-based reasonings as rule-building elements of the GAT towards constructing Islamic argumentations has the feature of obtaining socially interactive functions, rather than just being seen as abstract propositions that provides norms for action.

It is easy to see that for all the verses in which rule-based reasoning can be found, this rule can be embedded in the construction of the rules of the GAT in the manner described above, to explain traditional or contemporary Muslim argumentations. We can defend this rule based on the context of the Qur'anic revelation, and thus indirectly defend the rules of the GAT.

To the logic of command case, the verse cited was used as a rule of command, and was soon used in early Islamic communities for social interaction, as seen in the chapter on "Marriage" in *The Complete Hadith of Bukhari*, article 5100:

It is narrated from Ibn Abbas that the Prophet was asked, "Why did you not marry the daughter of Hamzah?" He replied, "He is the daughter of my nursing brother."

In the GAT's perspective, the rule of contextual understanding for this hadith is clearly Q 4:23 (or the overlapping verses), and we can easily obtain the functional rule of the Prophet's next discourse based on its content: to tell the questioner that the Prophet is the one who obeys Allah's commands and therefore cannot break them. The corresponding rule of expression is: omitting premise - the Prophet could have quoted the verse directly and revealed his intention directly, but he chose to express himself using a statement that would allow the questioner to deduce his intention. The rule of expression is also reflected in the expression of preference at the same time. At this point such a short social interaction discourse is analysed, and if it is more complex, we construct its total function as described above.

4. CONCLUSION

Shortly speaking, this paper shows the basic approach of the GAT and two short examples of its use of the concept of function to construct (or reconstruct) discourse rules. The social-functionalism advantage of the GAT is not only its neutrality of cognitive status, but also in its consideration of the social-cultural contexts in which discourse is situated.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS: The writing of this paper is supported by the national social Science Fund of the People's Republic of China 2021 Major Project "Research on the Localization of Chinese Translation Logic Terminology and the Construction of China's Logic Discourse System (Approval No. 21&ZD065)".

REFERENCES

- Gwynne, R. W. (2014). *Logic, rhetoric and legal reasoning in the Qur'an: God's arguments*. Routledge.
- Shier, J. (2010). The Cultural Relativity of Logic: From the Viewpoint of Ethnography and Historiography. *Social Sciences in China*, 31(4), 73-89.
- (2020). Theory and Methods of Generalized Argumentation Theory. *Studies in Logic*, 13(1), 1-27.
- Eemeren, F.H. van, Garssen, B., Krabbe, E.C.W., Snoeck Henkemans, F.A., Verheij, B. & Wagemans J.H.M (2014). *Handbook of Argumentation Theory* (pp. 776). Dordrecht: Springer.