Abstract: The use of ambiguous expressions in argumentative dialogues can lead to misunderstanding and equivocation. However, even a normative model for reasonable and critical discussion ought not to ban such active ambiguities altogether, one reason being that it cannot always be determined beforehand what expressions will turn out to be actively ambiguous. Instead, it will be proposed that the rules for persuasion dialogue enable each party to put forward ambiguity criticisms as well as self-critical ambiguity corrections, in order to induce them to improve upon their language. In order to prevent them from nitpicking and excessively high levels of precision, the parties will also be provided with devices with which to examine whether the ambiguity corrections or ambiguity criticisms have been appropriate. A formal dialectical system, in Hamblin’s sense of the term, will be proposed that satisfies these philosophical desiderata.

Keywords: active ambiguity; argument; critical discussion; equivocation; persuasion dialogue; pseudo-agreement; pseudo-disagreement

1. Introduction

Argumentative types of dialogue can be hampered by expressions that are ambiguous or equivocal. A participant can show his dissatisfaction with such ambiguities by disambiguating his own formulations or by inciting the other side to improve upon her formulations. A typical example can be found in the case where W.B. had been arrested for drinking and driving and for driving while his license had been suspended. In an attempt to bring his car to a parking lot without breaking the law, “W.B. pushed the car, walking next to it, while he operated the steering wheel through the open window of the left car door” (Dutch jurisdiction: HR, June 12, 1990, NJ 1991, 29). W.B., however, disagreed with the police officer that his behaviour constituted driving. In the way the officer uses the term, W.B. drove a car and as W.B. himself uses it, he did not. Expressions that are ambiguous in ways that hinder argumentative discussion by inciting misunderstandings (Naess 1953, 1966; Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 1999, 2002) or by masking argumentative weaknesses (cf., on equivocation, Mackenzie 1988, 1990; Walton 1996) will be referred to in this paper as actively ambiguous.

Two issues will be examined. What is an appropriate notion of active ambiguity? And in what ways should discussants themselves deal with issues of active ambiguity? In order to answer these questions, I will develop a model for persuasion dialogue (cf. Walton & Krabbe 1995) or critical discussion (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004) where two parties, who start from a difference of opinion, try to resolve this difference on, what they perceive as, the merits of the case. The result is a formal dialectical dialogue system such that it can be determined univocally what moves are available for an agent, at each stage. Specific for the model developed in this paper, is that the agents are enabled to raise the issue of active ambiguity in various ways, and to deal with such procedural moves in a critical manner. In this way, the paper develops Hamblin’s programme for a theory of argument (1970, chapter
8) that is *immanently dialectical* (Krabbe 1997) in providing the interlocutors with the means to deal with the argumentative problems and fallacies they encounter. The resulting system, *Ambiguity Dialectic*, forms a proposal for dealing with active ambiguities in argumentatively reasonable ways. First, the model can be used for the analysis and evaluation of ambiguity in argumentation and criticism, as well as of the moves with which participants themselves attempt to solve ambiguity problems. Second, the model can be used for developing interaction protocols enabling machines to deal with active ambiguities.

In *Ambiguity Dialectic*, specified in section 5, four distinct components for dealing with active ambiguity have been integrated in a model for critical discussion or persuasion dialogue: a component that enables a protagonist (or: proponent) of a thesis or standpoint to offer, self-critically, an ambiguity correction, a component that enables the protagonist raise an ambiguity criticism against his antagonist (or: opponent), a component that enables the critical antagonist to offer a self-critical ambiguity correction and one with which the antagonist can offer an ambiguity criticism against the protagonist.¹

Section 2 introduces the dialogical approach to argument and criticism. Section 3 provides an explication of the pejorative sense of ambiguous for the purpose of developing a theory of argumentation. Section 4 introduces a number of philosophical desiderata of a dialogue system that is to accommodate active ambiguities. Section 5 contains the outlines of a dialogue system along these lines.

### 2. Arguments and criticisms in ambiguity dialogues

The dialogue system that will be developed, *Ambiguity Dialectic*, is a close relative of the family of models for persuasion dialogues and critical discussion, as presented by Walton and Krabbe (1995) and by Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004). In line with these dialectical approaches, the notions of argument and criticism are understood here from the perspective of a critical exchange between a protagonist who defends a standpoint against the criticisms of an antagonist, using propositions that the antagonist has committed herself to at the start of the exchange.

An *ambiguity dialogue*, that is, a dialogue according to the rules of Ambiguity Dialectic, starts from a situation where the protagonist and the antagonist assume to have a difference of opinion that they intend to resolve on what they perceive as the merits of the case. It suffices to say that the parties assume to disagree, for it will not be excluded that the parties come to decide, at a later stage, that the assumed difference of opinion has been merely verbal, rather than substantial.

At a preliminary stage, the antagonist has committed herself to a, possibly empty, set of formulated propositions, called her *(initial) concessions* (Barth and Krabbe 1982). In his first move of the dialogue, the protagonist expresses his standpoint. The individual aim of the protagonist is to show to the antagonist that her initial concessions also commit her to the acceptability of the proposition he intends to express in his standpoint.² The individual aim of the antagonist is to show to the protagonist that she is able to retain a critical stance vis-à-vis the standpoint, notwithstanding her initial concessions. This dialectical division of labor (Rescher 1977) is instrumental to the realization of the dialogue’s main goal, which is the resolution of the difference of opinion.³ As the individual aim of the protagonist is to show that the commitments of the antagonist also commit her to his standpoint, he is to bridge these concessions with his standpoint by reasoning, stepwise, from concessions to standpoint. So, an argument will only be successful, in this framework, by *ex concessis* argumentation. In order for the protagonist’s strategy to be successful against an antagonist with some acumen, both the reasons and the connection premises within his configuration of arguments must either be conceded or they must follow from what is conceded.
What resolution amounts to is specified by the rules that constitute an ambiguity dialogue. The general idea is that the participants have resolved their difference of opinion if either the protagonist has given up defending his standpoint or if the antagonist has given up challenging the protagonist’s defence, although they have had all the opportunities, they themselves consider needed, in order to achieve their individual aim. The discussion rules provide an explication of what it means to works towards a resolution of a difference of opinion.

In an ambiguity dialogue, participants converse at two levels (cf. Krabbe 2003). At a base level, the parties exchange arguments and criticisms. The antagonist is allowed to pose critical questions, which must be understood as requests for argument. In response to a challenge “why ϕ?”, the protagonist has a prima facie obligation to offer an argument “ψ so ϕ”, such that ψ is the argument’s reason and ψ → ϕ is the argument’s connection premise. As challenges always target elements that are part of an already presented argument, the set of arguments that have been put forward at a particular stage in the dialogue form a tree-shaped configuration, called the global argument at that stage, of various local arguments presented at previous stages. At the earlier stages, the global argument will consist just of one local argument. Even the initial standpoint, at all stages where not yet a single reason has been put forward, will be dealt with as the global argument at those stages, having zero premises. At a meta-level, the parties can deal with the adequacy of choice of words as well as with the appropriateness of ambiguity criticisms or self-critical, spontaneous disambiguations.

In the context of an ambiguity dialogue, the term argument refers to pieces of reasoning, used for persuasive purposes, that are reasonable in the sense of producible by the rules for Ambiguity Dialectic. This notion of argument can be used to define argument in a broader sense, including arguments that violate discussion norms, in the following way. Presenting an argument, in this broader sense, then, is presenting a text such that the arguer pretends that the addressee will be capable of reconstructing from the text a flawless ambiguity dialogue with the arguer in the role of protagonist and the addressee in the role of antagonist in which the antagonist poses the critical questions she considers pertinent and in which the antagonist nonetheless gets persuaded by the protagonist’s defence and gives up her critical stance towards the standpoint. (cf. Krabbe’s dialogical definition of the notion of ‘an argument that can reasonably convince someone,’ 2003). The presentation of an argument can thus be seen as the expression of three pretences: a pretence to the argument having a clear enough dialogical structure, a pretence to the argument’s being reasonable according to a set of argumentative norms and a pretence to the argument’s being effective by bringing the antagonist to withdraw her critical stance towards the standpoint. These latter two pretences closely correspond to the objective of dialectical reasonableness and the objective of rhetorical effectiveness that make up strategic manoeuvring, as examined by Van Eemeren and Houtlosser (1999, 2002). A similar story can be told about a more inclusive notion of ‘criticism’. In what follows, I will use argument in the stricter, more exclusive sense of a contribution to an ambiguity dialogue.

At each stage, a party has a commitment store that contains the propositions that he or she is committed to at that stage of the dialogue (Hamblin 1970; Walton and Krabbe 1995). In Ambiguity Dialectic, the protagonist’s commitment store remains a singleton that contains the global argument at that stage. This commitment of the protagonist, however, can become more and more complex due to the addition of arguments and by subsequent disambiguations. The antagonist’s commitment store contains her concessions. The concessions can change through subsequent disambiguations and the number of concessions can increase by the antagonist’s accepting various readings of one and the same concession.

3. Active ambiguity
What is the pejorative sense of ambiguity, as we use this notion when dealing with argumentation and argumentative criticism? When developing an interactional account, I will prepare for an appropriate division of labour between the protagonist and the antagonist by pointing out who is likely to profit from and who is likely to pay for leaving the ambiguity unnoticed and unresolved. The latter party will be given the devices with which to get the discussion back on track again.

The following argument can be used as part of a case in favour of the contention that the English expression *ambiguous* can be *ambiguous*, in its pejorative sense, at some occasions of use. The argument can be seen as having two acceptable reasons and an acceptable, implicitly left, connection premise, but a clearly unacceptable standpoint:

(1) Almost all English expressions are ambiguous. (2) If a speaker uses an expression that is ambiguous then we can object to the use of that expression. So, (3) we can object to the use of almost all English expressions.

I am interested here in the sense of the expression *ambiguous* that makes reason (2) acceptable while making reason (1) quite implausible. Ambiguity, in this pejorative sense and if applying to argumentative contexts, will be dubbed *active ambiguity*. The definition has three clauses and is restricted to the propositional content of speech acts. So, I will refrain from dealing with ambiguities in illocutionary force and with ambiguities in the supersentential structures in the text, such as with respect to whether something is an argument or an explanation, or to whether reasons are to be seen as linked (or compound) or convergent (or multiple), etc.

First, the expression allows of various readings in this particular dialogue, even after having taken the contextual clues into account. Particular exemplifications of the word *bank* can be contextually ambiguous: ‘I’ve seen Scrooge walking to the bank so Scrooge’s leg has been recovered.’ *Active ambiguity* applies to expressions as used in particular argumentative situations.

Second, the ambiguity is not overt. It has not been made clear to the addressee that the expression admits of more than one reading, for example by conveying the message that the expression is to be understood in both readings. Active ambiguity is not a figure of style. According to Sharp, Thoreau used he expression *civil* in *civil disobedience*, in his pamphlet ‘On the duty of civil disobedience’, overtly in two distinct uses, referring to politeness and humaneness as well as to what befits us as members of a community of citizens (1963, p. 3). The above Scrooge-example can easily be imagined to contain a covertly ambiguous occurrence of *bank*.

Third, among the covert and contextual ambiguities, a further distinction can be made. Some of them can be expected to allow of interpretational options such that choosing the one over the other has consequences for whether or not the standpoint, reason or connection premise is acceptable to the antagonist. Other interpretational divergences, however, are so overly subtle, fine-grained, far-fetched or irrelevant to the topic at issue that choosing the one reading over the other would be inconsequential to the course of the dialogue. The first is what makes up an active ambiguity.

If the parties are only interested in Scrooge’s physical well-being, the Scrooge-sentence can be covertly ambiguous without leading to any interactional problems. Of course, the interlocutor can desire to know what the speaker has in mind, when using the term *bank*. However, for the argumentative purpose of this dialogue, a request for disambiguation would probably initiate an irrelevant detour. Similarly, a request for more precision seems inappropriate when the protagonist states that Mozart was a musical child, for it is clear that
he was *musical* in all relevant senses (cf. Pinkal for a semantic theory of reasoning that fits this idea, 1995). Again, the interlocutor can be interested in what the speaker has in mind, in more detail, but this interest extends the aims of resolving disputes. Active ambiguity is not a merely communicative, but an interactional phenomenon.

On the other hand, some covertly ambiguous expressions are plausible candidates for confusion that extends the mental and influences the discussion, and are consequently *actively ambiguous*. Think of the term ‘unbearable suffering’ that constitutes a ground for exempt from liability in Dutch euthanasia law. Does it include mental disorders, such as extreme depression or does it not? (Van Laar 2003, chapter 8).

Or take the *drive*-example from the introduction. Suppose the police officer stated to W.B.:

**Officer:** You’re driving a car although your license has been suspended, so a fine is in order.

Then, W.B., if he would be sufficiently reflective, would notice two directions in which *to drive* can be taken, in this dialogue situation. Either the term is taken in a stricter sense, excluding W.B.’s act, or in a looser sense, including it. If W.B. would detect these interpretational options, he would subsequently notice that accepting the officer’s reason in the looser sense need not harm his position, while accepting it in the stricter sense would amount to losing the discussion. Now, W.B. has two options that might turn out opportune.

First, he might raise the issue of ambiguity, pointing out the two meanings *to drive* admits of in this situation and the fact that he is willing to concede the officer’s reason in the looser reading but not in the stricter. He might want to add that his acceptance of the reason in its looser reading does not provide the officer, in his capacity of the protagonist, with a winning argumentative strategy, the reason being that W.B. is not accepting the connecting premise according to which driving in this loose sense would be a transgression of the law.

If the one party first introduces an expression and the other party thinks it opportune to point that out, this raising of the issue of ambiguity can best be seen as, what I call, an *ambiguity criticism*. The reason is that the party who introduces an expression, remains at least partly responsible for the problems that the expression gives rise to. Raising the ambiguity amounts to the message that the other side has transgressed a norm for reasonable discussion and harmed the other side by doing so. So, an ambiguity criticism can best be seen as a special kind of fallacy criticism (cf. Krabbe 2002). In this case, the antagonist (W.B.) puts forward an ambiguity criticism, given that the protagonist (the officer) is responsible for introducing the expression *to drive* in this dialogue.

Second, W.B. might choose not to raise the issue of ambiguity and simply challenge the officer’s reason that W.B. had been driving a car:

**W.B.:** Why would you say I’ve been driving a car?

As compared to simply challenging a reason that contains an actively ambiguous expression, raising an ambiguity is a milder form of critique. For it provides the protagonist with much more information as to how to adapt his argument in a way that is convincing to the antagonist.

Be that as it may, now it is the officer’s turn, and the officer might notice the two interpretational options. He might raise the ambiguity issue, pointing out that W.B. was probably challenging his reason while taking it in its strict sense but that he meant it in the loose sense, which will, as he surmises, acceptable to W.B. He might add that if, as he expects, W.B. accepts the statement in its loose sense, he has a strong persuasive strategy
available, for the reason that he also expects to be capable of convincing W.B. of the proposition that driving in the loose sense constitutes a violation of the law. (With respect to the connection premise, the disagreement appears to be substantial, but not with respect to the reason.)

If the one party first introduces an expression and this same party thinks it opportune to point that out, this raising of the issue of ambiguity can best be seen as a self-critical move, called an *ambiguity correction*. Raising an ambiguity criticism amounts to the message that a party himself has transgressed a norm and harmed himself by doing so. So, an ambiguity correction can best be seen as acknowledging a strategically weak move, or even a blunder, that is subsequently repaired and corrected. In this example, the protagonist (the police officer) offers such an *ambiguity correction*, given that he himself is responsible for introducing the term.

In the antagonist’s (W.B.’s) ambiguity criticism, the antagonist appeals to the possibility that she accepts a reason, while the protagonist intended a different reading that, as a matter of fact, is not acceptable to her. So, she appeals to the possibility of a particular kind of misunderstanding that Naess has called *pseudo-agreement* (1966). More precisely, she appeals not so much to the feasibility of a misunderstanding, but to the feasibility of her performing a speech act, i.e. accepting a reason, that could better have been avoided. Clearly, such a pseudo-agreement, if materialized in the speech acts of the parties, is detrimental to the antagonist’s chances for winning the discussion. Pseudo-agreement is always *prima facie* disadvantageous to the antagonist and advantageous to the protagonist.

In the protagonist’s (the officer’s) ambiguity correction, the protagonist appeals to the possibility that the antagonist challenges a reason, while the protagonist intended this reason in a different reading that, as a matter of fact, is acceptable to the antagonist. So, he appeals to the possibility of a different kind of misunderstanding, that Naess dubbed *pseudo-disagreement*. More precisely, the protagonist appeals to the feasibility of the antagonist’s performing a speech act, i.e. challenging the reason, that is not really in place. Clearly, a pseudo-disagreement, if materialized in the speech acts of the parties, is always *prima facie* disadvantageous to the protagonist and advantageous to the antagonist.

The kind of reasoning that is normally discussed under the heading of *equivocation* (Walton 1996) must, within this argumentative setting, be seen as a special case of trading on an actively ambiguous expression that leads to or might lead to pseudo-agreements. An equivocation is an argument that contains an covertly and contextually ambiguous expression that admits of more than one reading such that: (1) there is a reading that makes all reasons acceptable to the addressee; (2) there is a reading that makes the connection premise acceptable; (3) but there is no reading that makes both all reasons and the connection premise acceptable. These readings, for example of the connection premise, can be *mixed disambiguations* (Lewis 1982) where the expression at issue obtains distinct disambiguations at distinct occurrences within a sentence. This analysis of equivocation applies to the argument that trades on the expression *ambiguous* discussed at the start of this section, and also to the police officer’s argument as expressed vis-à-vis his or her detainee. An equivocation can be understood as involving more than one pseudo-agreement. Failing to notice the ambiguity, and gullibly accepting the reasons and connection premise (due to their having an air of acceptability), leads to a complex kind of pseudo-agreement: for at least one reason as well as for the connection premise it holds that there is a reading that makes it acceptable as well as a reading that makes it unacceptable to the addressee.6

An expression, as used in a particular argumentative discussion, is only to be called an *active ambiguity* if its usage is likely to have one of these interactional consequences, instead of merely communicative effects. *Active ambiguity* refers to expressions in argumentative discussions that can be understood, within those contexts, in various ways, such that choosing
between these readings affect the acceptability of statements that contain the expression. So, if an expression motivates the addressee to ponder about the intended meanings, without its being the case that the one interpretational option would make him accept the assertion while the other would make him challenge is, then the expression, in this context, is not actively ambiguous. But, if it can be made plausible that a pseudo-disagreement, pseudo-agreement or an equivocation is at play, then it is. The proper definition of *active ambiguity*, that is, of *ambiguity* in its pejorative sense as used in argumentative situations, is that of a covert, contextual ambiguity that is of interactional consequence.

In this section, three distinctions have been drawn that will be used in the specification of Ambiguity Dialectic. (1) Some covert contextual ambiguities are not interactionally relevant in a discussion while others are. The latter are active ambiguities. (2) Active ambiguities either are connected to pseudo-agreement, including the ambiguity in equivocal reasoning, or to pseudo-disagreement. In the first case, it is up to the antagonist to solve the ambiguity problem, in the second case, it is up to the protagonist. (3) Either the protagonist first introduces the expression that turns out to be actively ambiguous, or the antagonist does so. In the first case, raising the issue of ambiguity amounts to an ambiguity correction if this is done by the protagonist and to an ambiguity criticism if done by the antagonist. In the second case, raising the issue of ambiguity counts as an ambiguity criticism if this is done by the protagonist and as an ambiguity correction if done by the antagonist herself.

4. Philosophical requirements on a dialogue system for ambiguity dialectic

In section 5, a dialectical system will be developed that is to be a part of a dialogical argumentation theory that, among other things, accommodates active ambiguities. In order for the model to be useful for such a theory, it has to satisfy a number of requirements: the theory should be immanently dialectical, it should strike a balance between normative bite and a tolerance of imperfections, it should implement the correct norms regarding the use of actively ambiguous expressions, it should be organized in accordance with a dialectical division of labour, it should strike a balance between enabling meta-remarks and sticking to the topic at issue, and it should start from a clear conception of disambiguation. I will discuss these six desiderata in turn.

1) A theory of argumentation is meant for agents who are dealing with a contentious issue. The disagreement can easily extend to the criteria with which to decide whether expressions are actively ambiguous. Therefore, the theory should accommodate situations where the participants disagree about whether an expression is actively ambiguous. In Krabbe’s words, the theory is to be ‘immanently dialectical’, in the sense of providing the participants to solve their own problems, without having resource to alleged objective criteria and without the presence of a third party who acts as a judge with the power to settle disagreements, rather than resolve them. Consequently, the dialogue system to be introduced will contain the option to perform speech acts with which ambiguous arguments or ambiguous concessions can be disambiguated, but also speech acts with which the linguistic admissibility of a disambiguation can be challenged and with which the interactional relevance can be tested.

2) The theory is to provide norms at two distinct levels. First, the theory must make it clear what a commitment to the clear use of language amounts to, as far as the avoidance of ambiguities is concerned. The ideal is simply to steer clear of active ambiguities. However, there are two reasons not to adopt this norm as constitutive of critical discussion. Active ambiguities do occur in our discussions. First, because there are opportunistic discussants who try to exploit the potential of contextual ambiguities. Second, because we cannot expect a
participant to be capable of calculating all linguistically admissible readings of each utterance. Third, because there are situations where a participant cannot determine whether or not an expression, when used in a concession or in an argument, will turn out to be actively ambiguous, due to the circumstance that whether or not an expression is actively ambiguous is in part determined by the choices still to be made by the addressee. Therefore, it is useful to have a set of norms that tell us how to respond to alleged active ambiguities in a way that facilitates the resolution of our differences of opinion. So, the desired model for dialogue must on the one hand provide rules and on the other hand allow for rule-violations.

These requirements can be balanced by distinguishing between two kinds of norms. There is a regulative rule that prohibits active ambiguities, and this regulative rule is implemented by constitutive rules that enable the participants to deal with violations of this ideal in the best possible manner. In this way, a stricter model for critical discussion that prescribes the parties not to employ actively ambiguous expressions is embedded a looser model for critical discussion that does not make it impossible for the parties to use such expressions but that, instead, enables them to raise the issue of ambiguity and to improve upon their language if they consider that needed (cf. Mackenzie for a similar solution of the problem of modelling rule-violations in normative model for dialogue, 1988, 1990.) So, by adopting a model that strikes a balance between normative bite and tolerance of imperfections it is possible to commit oneself to the ideal of a language that is free of active ambiguities, while adopting an appropriate measure of realism, lenience and flexibility.

3) Next, the model must implement the correct norm. First, given the explication of the pejorative kind of ambiguity as active ambiguity, any multiplicity in meaning that is either not contextual or not covert or not interactionally relevant should not be banned as actively ambiguous from argumentative discussion. In order to keep things simple, it will be assumed in Ambiguity Dialectic that covert ambiguities and interactionally relevant ambiguities coincide. So, parties should not be discouraged from using expressions that are merely contextually ambiguous. Second, the consequences of having used an actively ambiguous expression should not be overly severe. For example, if the antagonist successfully points out an active ambiguity and forces the protagonist to disambiguate his argument, it remains entirely up to the protagonist to make the disambiguation choices that he considers appropriate and opportune. The protagonist retains the right to choose how his global argument is to be understood and the antagonist how her concessions are to be taken. Third, a participant must be capable of choosing a mixed disambiguation where various occurrences of an expression within a sentence obtain a distinct disambiguation: “Scrooge went to the bank, in sense 1, near the bank, in sense 2.” Fourth, a participant must be able to accept a sentence in two or more readings: “Mozart was musical, in all senses of the word you distinguish.” Fifth, even an expression that is the result of a proper disambiguation can turn out to be actively ambiguous itself. So, the model should do justice to Lewis’ pessimist (1982) who reckons with the possibility that the parties will never reach a level of precision that suffices. However that may be, it is a matter to be decided by the parties. It is not excluded that they can agree on a proper level of precision, but then, in some cases they may not. In short, the theory must implement the correct norms, enabling parties to correct real mistakes and fallacies and allowing participants to defend themselves successfully to incorrect ambiguity criticisms.

4) Related is the requirement to strike a balance between enabling the parties to raise the meta-issue of ambiguity, by correcting themselves or by criticizing the other, and to stick to their attempts to resolve the base level dispute that started the discussion. The rules must enable meta-dialogues about alleged active ambiguities, but incite the parties to return to the base level topic as soon as possible. The meta-dialogue must be instrumental to and embedded in the base level discussion.
5) A further requirement is that ambiguity dialogues are based upon a distributing of rights and obligations that fits the asymmetrical, dialectical division of labour (Rescher 1977, p. xiii), such that each party can continue to work towards his individual aim, also when dealing with ambiguity problems. As explained in the last section, if party A is responsible for introducing an expression $\alpha$, then party A can do something about $\alpha$'s active ambiguity with an ambiguity correction if it harms himself and party B can something about it with an ambiguity correction if it harms party B. To be more specific, the antagonist attempts to solve or avoid pseudo-agreements, including equivocal reasoning, and the protagonist pseudo-disagreement. This implementation of a division of labour goes beyond the theories of Walton, according to whom the proper use of language is a shared responsibility (1996, pp. 34-5) but who does not provide procedural details.\textsuperscript{12}

6) Finally, the model must start from a clear concept of disambiguation. Disambiguation can, in the kind of context we are examining, apply to the global argument at some stage (which may, initially, happen to be just the standpoint or a single argument) or to the set of initial concessions at some stage. Suppose a global argument $G_i$ (or a set of concessions $C_i$) has a number of occurrences of the expression $\alpha$. Then a disambiguation of $G_i$ (or of $C_i$), based on $\alpha$ and a set of disambiguating reformulations $\alpha_1,...,\alpha_n$ of $\alpha$ is a result of replacing each occurrence of expression $\alpha$ in $G_i$ (or in $C_i$) with one of the expressions from $\alpha_1,...,\alpha_n$. Different occurrences of $\alpha$ in a sentence can be replaced by different disambiguating reformulations from $\alpha_1,...,\alpha_n$. A concession $\varphi[\alpha]$, i.e. $\varphi$ with an occurrence of $\alpha$, can be replaced by various disambiguations $\varphi[\alpha_1],...,$ $\varphi[\alpha_n]$, in case the antagonist is willing to accept various readings of one of her concessions. There is no restraint on what counts as a disambiguating reformulation $\alpha_i$ of $\alpha$. The parties are free to choose them. However, if the other side is dissatisfied and suspects that $\alpha_i$ is not a proper disambiguating reformulation of $\alpha$, in the sense that $\alpha_i$ is ruled out as such by the semantic rules the parties share, he may initiate a linguistic test to check whether his suspicion is right. If the number of occurrences of $\alpha$ is $m$ and the number of proposed disambiguating reformulations is $n$, there are exactly $n^m$ possible disambiguations of the argument and at least $n^n$ possible disambiguations of the concessions set.

Disambiguation is related to retraction (cf. Walton and Krabbe 1995), but differs in the important respect that the person who disambiguates remains committed to a proposition expressed by the replaced sentence, even though it can at certain stages in the discussion still be undefined what proposition that is. So, if statement $\varphi[\alpha]$ is disambiguated with $\varphi[\alpha_i]$ as a result, then it is supposed that all propositions expressed by $\varphi[\alpha]$ in this context are also expressed by $\varphi[\alpha_i]$, but not vice versa (cf. Naess on *precization*, 1953, 1966). According to my use of terms it is wrong to say that the protagonist was first committed to all propositions expressed by $\varphi[\alpha]$ and retracts, by disambiguating $\varphi[\alpha]$ to $\varphi[\alpha_i]$, all propositions expressed by $\varphi[\alpha]$ but not by $\varphi[\alpha_i]$. We should rather say that the protagonist was committed to the formulation $\varphi[\alpha]$ and to at least one proposition expressed by $\varphi[\alpha]$, whether or not the parties know exactly what proposition that is. After disambiguation, the proponent is no longer committed to the wording of $\varphi[\alpha]$, but is still committed to at least one proposition expressed by $\varphi[\alpha]$. He becomes committed to the wording of $\varphi[\alpha_i]$. Thus, seen from the perspective of the wording, disambiguation might be called some special kind of retraction. Seen from the perspective of meaning, disambiguation is not retraction at all, but a way in which it may be made more clear what exactly a propositional commitment consists in.\textsuperscript{13}

In accordance with the requirement of immanent dialectics, there is no supposition as to whether, ‘as a matter of fact’, a real disagreement has been threatening the discussion or has occurred at some point in the dialogue. Instead, the parties can never be sure what the other side has in mind, or even what they themselves have in mind, exactly. What the rules implement, however, is that they are committed to some proposition or propositions when
making a concession or when presenting an argument. The model, however, does start from the supposition that the parties can, at least sometimes, come to agree on disambiguation relations between sentences, so that they agree on the one sentence $\phi[\alpha_i]$ being more precise than another $\phi[\alpha_j]$, thereby excluding some rival disambiguations $\phi[\alpha_j]$. That the proposition expressed remains hidden is what enables the parties to construe some agreements and disagreements as instances of pseudo-communication and others as substantial and real.

Fulfilling these six requirements will lead to a dialogical or dialectical theory that both has normative bite and is at the same time suitable for real and imperfect reasoners in an argumentative discussion.

5. Ambiguity dialectic

5.1 Definitions and conventions

The letters $\alpha, \alpha_1, \alpha_2, ... \beta, \beta_1, \beta_2, ...$, etc., are variables for atomic sentences of the language, while $\phi, \psi, ...$, etc., are variables for sentences of the language, atomic or complex. $G_i$ refers to the global argument at stage $i$, that is, the tree-shaped configuration of local arguments, put forward by the protagonist at the stages $j, j \leq i$. The global argument at $i$ is the unique item in the commitment store of the protagonist at that stage. $G_i$ can contain the initial standpoint, a single argument in favour of the standpoint, a chain of arguments, or a disambiguation of them. The expression $f(G_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$ refers to a result of replacing each occurrence of expression $\alpha$ in $G_i$ with expressions from $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$. Different occurrences of $\alpha$ can be disambiguated in different ways. The expressions $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$ are in this manner presented as disambiguating reformulations of $\alpha$. $C_i$ refers to the commitment store of the antagonist, consisting of her initial concessions, at stage $i$. $C_i$ can only change due to disambiguations. The term $f(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$ refers to a result of replacing each occurrence of expression $\alpha$ in $C_i$ with expressions from $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$. Different occurrences of $\alpha$ can be disambiguated in different ways. A concession can be substituted with more than one disambiguation. The expressions $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$ are in this manner, again, presented as disambiguating reformulations of $\alpha$. An expression $\alpha$ is disqualified at a stage $i$, if at an earlier stage $\alpha$ has been the focus of an ambiguity correction, also called a spontaneous disambiguation, or of an ambiguity criticism, and if this disambiguation or criticism has not been withdrawn in the meantime.

5.2 Types of locutions

There are six types of speech act or locution that can only be used by the protagonist:

1. He can present his initial standpoint by uttering something of the form $ST\phi$.
2. He can present a local argument using $SO\phi$.
3. He can present a spontaneous disambiguation of his global argument at stage $i$, i.e., an ambiguity correction, using $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n, n > 1$, as disambiguating reformulations of $\alpha$, using $SDf(G_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$. By stating $\alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$ the protagonist presents his linguistic analysis of $\alpha$’s ambiguity. However, $f(G_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$ need not contain each disambiguating reformation of this list $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n$. This also applies to similar locutions below.
4. He can present a forced disambiguation of the global argument at stage $i$, using $\alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n, n > 1$, as disambiguating reformulations of $\alpha$, offered in response to a critical move of the other side, by $FDf(G_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$.
5. He can return to the global argument at $i$, thereby withdrawing a disambiguation $f(G_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, ..., \alpha_n)$, $i < j$, and reinstalling $\alpha$ as no longer disqualified, by using $WIG_i; \alpha$. 
6. He can present his global argument at that stage, using $G_i$.

There are five types of locution that can only to be used by the antagonist:

7. She can challenge a standpoint, reason or connection premise, using $WH\phi$.

8. She can present a spontaneous disambiguation of the set of concessions at stage $i$, i.e., an ambiguity correction, with $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$, $n > 1$, as disambiguations reformulations of $\alpha$, using $SD(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$.

9. She can present a forced disambiguation of the set of initial concessions at stage $i$, using $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$, $n > 1$, as disambiguating reformulations of $\alpha$, offered in response to a critical move by the other side, using $FD(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$.

10. She can return to the set of concessions at stage $i$, thereby withdrawing a disambiguation $f(C_j; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$, $i < j$, and reinstalling $\alpha$ as no longer disqualified, using $WIC_i; \alpha$.

11. She can present an analysis of a pseudo-agreement, by stating that she would have been willing to concede a sentence in one reading without accepting it in another reading, uttering $CO[\alpha_i]; WH[\alpha_j]$?

There are five types of locution that can be used by both:

12. A party can raise an ambiguity criticism, such that $\alpha$ is characterised as actively ambiguous between $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$, $n > 1$, by stating $\alpha AA\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$.

13. A party can challenge the relevance of an ambiguity criticism or a spontaneous disambiguation, using $RE$?

14. A party can challenge the linguistic admissibility of an ambiguity criticism or a spontaneous disambiguation, using $LI$?

15. A party can withdraw the criticism that $\alpha$ is actively ambiguous, uttering $WI\alpha$.

16. A party can give up, saying $GIVE UP$.

5.3 The commitment rules

The commitment store of the antagonist at stage $i$, $C_i$, contains the concessions the antagonist has made, vis-à-vis the protagonist, at a preliminary stage of the discussion. The number of initial concessions remains the same or increases in case the antagonist chooses to accept various readings of one and the same concession.

C1: If the antagonist disambiguates her initial concessions by presenting $SD(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$ or $FD(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$ at stage $i$, then $C_{i+1} = f(C_i; \alpha; \alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n)$, that is, the result of disambiguating $C_i$ in this particular way.

The commitment store of the protagonist at stage 1 is empty. Given that each first stage of a dialogue contains the utterance of $ST\phi$, by the protagonist, $G_2$ just contains $\phi$. The commitment store of the protagonist remains a singleton, but its element can both become more and more disambiguated, if the protagonist chooses to disambiguate in the course of the dialogue, as well as more and more complex, if the protagonist chooses to offer reasons for his standpoint or for premises that support his standpoint. As every argument put forward by the protagonist is an argument in favour of an element that is already a part of his global argument at that stage, the protagonist is building one, ever more complex defence for his position. That makes it convenient to determine that the content of $G_i$ is the tree-shaped structure of standpoint, reasons, connection premises and their relations that represents the protagonist’s defence at stage $i$. So, a first local argument, $SsoT$, would lead to the following element in the protagonist’s commitment store:

```
S & S → T
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C2: If the protagonist utters STφ at stage 1, then G₂ just contains φ.

C3: If the protagonist utters ψSOφ at stage i, then Gi+1= contains Gi with ψ and ψ→φ, connected with an accolade, written above the occurrence of φ that was under attack and an arrow between the accolade and φ.

C4: If the protagonist at stage i utters SDf(Gi;α;α₁,...,αₙ) or FDf(Gi;α;α₁,...,αₙ), then Gi₊₁ contains exactly f(Gi;α;α₁,...,αₙ), that is, the global argument such that each occurrence of α has been replaced with a disambiguating reformulation from the list α₁,...,αₙ, just as indicated in the locution.

C5: If the protagonist at stage i utters WIGj;α, j < i, then GAi+1=GAj. This enables the protagonist to withdraw his disambiguation, if it has turned out to be linguistically inadmissible or interactionally irrelevant, by returning to an earlier version of his global argument.

C6: If the antagonist at stage i utters WICj;α, j < i, then CAi+1=CAj. This enables the antagonist to renounce her disambiguation, if it has turned out to be linguistically inadmissible or interactionally irrelevant, by returning to an earlier version of her store of concessions.

Part of each local argument in the global argument at some stage, is a connection premise. The argument’s connection premise is a conditional sentence having the argument’s conclusion as its consequent and the conjunction of all reasons of that argument as its antecedent. So, if the protagonist has put forward the argument

\[
S \quad \& \quad S \rightarrow T
\]

and subsequently disambiguates the distinct occurrences of S differently, for example by replacing S’s first occurrence with S₁ and S’s second occurrence with S₂, a new connection premise gets installed as part of the global argument at the next stage, in the following way:

\[
S₁ \quad \& \quad S₂ \rightarrow T \quad \& \quad (S₁ \land S₂ \rightarrow T) \rightarrow T
\]

5.4. The dialogue rules

There is one regulative rule.

R1. Do not use expressions that are, within the context of the discussion, actively ambiguous.

If an ambiguity correction or ambiguity criticism, focusing on an expression α, is not appropriate, for the reason that α is not really actively ambiguous, the disambiguation must be seen as overly nitpicking and opportunistic or as an attempt at filibustering. Therefore, when a party P₁ is confronted with an ambiguity correction or an ambiguity criticism, focused on α
and mentioning $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$ as the disambiguating reformulations, P1 needs to be able to test the linguistic admissibility of $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$ as expressing possible senses of $\alpha$ and to test the interactional relevance of this multiplicity in meaning.

The dialogue model is provided with the option to follow a procedure in which it is determined whether the parties share linguistic norms that exclude one or more of the proposed disambiguating reformulations $\alpha_1, \ldots, \alpha_n$ as expressing something that $\alpha$ expresses in the context of use. I do not propose any details of such a procedure. The important thing here is that discussants can be seen as agreeing on a set of linguistic norms, and if they are able to further agree on the fact that a disambiguating reformulation $\alpha_i$ is linguistically inadmissible, then the ambiguity correction or ambiguity criticism counts as improper. If the result of the linguistic procedure is clearly positive or if the matter remains contentious or doubtful, from a linguistic stance, the disambiguation counts as having been sustained. So, in cases of doubt, the presumption is on the side of the party who strives for more precision. How a relevance criticism is to be responded to depends on who is the target. The protagonist must show there to be a pseudo-disagreement, the antagonist a pseudo-agreement.

In most rules it has been stated in parentheses what rule apply if certain options will be chosen.

C1. The protagonist starts the dialogue at stage 1 by uttering ST$\varphi$ (C3).

C2. The parties move alternately.

C3. If stage i contains the protagonist’s **standpoint** ST$\varphi$, then stage i+1 contains the antagonist’s
a. WH$\varphi$ (C4), or
b. SDf(\(G;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) if $\alpha$ occurs in $\varphi$ and in $C_i$ (C6), or
c. $\alpha$AA$\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n$ if $\alpha$ occurs in $\varphi$ but not in $C_i$ (C7), or
d. GIVE UP.

C4. If stage i contains $\varphi$ as a standpoint, a reason or a connection premise and if stage i+1 contains the antagonist’s **challenge** WH$\varphi$, then stage i+2 contains the protagonist’s
a. $\varphi$SO$\varphi$ (C5), or
b. SDf(\(G;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) if $\alpha$ occurs in $\varphi$ but not in $C_i$ (C7), or
c. $\alpha$AA$\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n$ if $\alpha$ occurs in $\varphi$ and in $C_i$ (C8), or
d. GIVE UP.

C5. Is stage i contains $\chi_1, \chi_2, \ldots$ as unsupported elements (standpoint, reason or connection premise) of the **protagonist’s argument** $\psi$SO$\varphi$, or of the **forced disambiguation** FDf(\(G;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)), or of the **ambiguity withdrawal** WIG;\(\alpha\) presented at i, or of the presented **global argument** $G_i$ presented at i, then stage i+1 contains the antagonist’s
a. WH$\chi_j$ for some $\chi_j$ (C4 or C10), or
b. SDf(\(C;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) if $\alpha$ occurs in some $\chi_j$ and in $C_i$ (C6), or
c. $\alpha$AA$\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n$ if $\alpha$ occurs in some $\chi_j$ but not in $C_i$ (C7), or
d. GIVE UP.

C6. If stage i contains the **antagonist’s spontaneous disambiguation** SDf(\(C;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) or the **antagonist’s ambiguity criticism** $\alpha$AA$\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n$, then stage i+1 contains the protagonist’s
a. linguistic criticism LI? (C11 or C12), or
b. relevance criticism RE? (C13), or
c. disambiguation FDg(\(G;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) (C5).

C7. If stage i contains the antagonist’s WH$\varphi[a]$ and stage i+1 contains the **protagonist’s spontaneous disambiguation** SDf(\(G_{i+1};\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n\)) with $\varphi[a]$ as part of the result, then stage i+2 contains the antagonist’s
a. linguistic criticism LI? (C16), or
b. \( WH\phi[\alpha_j] \) (which functions here as a sustained relevance criticism) (C18), or
c. \( WH\psi \) such that \( \psi \) is a not yet challenged reason or connection premise in
   \( f(G_{i+1};\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \), joined by \( FDf(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \)
   with which the ambiguity correction is acknowledged (C4).

C8. If stage \( i \) contains the **protagonist’s ambiguity criticism** \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \), then stage \( i+1 \)
   contains the antagonist’s
   a. linguistic criticism LI? (C17), or
   b. relevance criticism RE? (C19), or
   c. disambiguation \( FDg(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) (C9).

C9. If stage \( i \) only contains the **antagonist’s forced disambiguation** \( FDg(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \),
   then \( i+1 \) contains the protagonist’s forced disambiguation \( FDg(G_{i+1};\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) (C5).

C10. If stage \( i \) contains the antagonist’s WH\( \phi \), \( i+1 \) the protagonist’s ambiguity criticism
    \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \), \( i+2 \) the antagonist’s RE?, \( i+3 \) contains the protagonist’s
    \( FDF(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) with \( \phi[\alpha_j] \) as part of it and \( i+4 \) contains the
    **antagonist relevance criticism** \( WH\phi[\alpha_j] \),
    then \( i+5 \) contains the protagonist’s WIG;\( \alpha \) (C5).

C11. If stage \( i \) contains the antagonist’s SDF\( (G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \), stage \( i+1 \) the
    **protagonist’s linguistic criticism** LI?, then stage \( i+2 \) contains the protagonist’s
    \( FDF(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) if the linguistic test is not clearly negative (C9)
    and WIC;\( \alpha \) if the test is clearly negative (C15).

C12. If stage \( i \) contains the antagonist’s \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \) and stage \( i+1 \) the
    **protagonist’s linguistic criticism** LI?, then stage \( i+2 \) contains the antagonist’s
    \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \) if the linguistic test is not clearly negative (C6) and WIG\( \alpha \)
    if the test is clearly negative (C15).

C13. If stage \( i \) contains the antagonist’s SDF\( (G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) or \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \),
    and stage \( i+1 \) the **protagonist’s relevance criticism** RE?, then stage \( i+2 \) contains the antagonist’s
    a. \( CO\phi[\alpha_j]; WH\phi[\alpha_j] \) (C14), or
    b. WIC;\( \alpha \) in case stage \( i \) contains SDF\( (G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) and WIG\( \alpha \)
    in case stage \( i \) contains \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \) (C15).

C14. If stage \( i \) contains the **antagonist’s relevance defense** \( CO\phi[\alpha_j]; WH\phi[\alpha_j] \), then stage
    \( i+1 \) contains the protagonist’s
    a. \( FDF(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) (C5), or
    b. GIVE UP.

C15. If stage \( i \) contains the **antagonist’s ambiguity withdrawal** WIG\( \alpha \) or WIC;\( \alpha \), then stage
    \( i+1 \) contains the protagonist’s G\( i \) (C5).

C16. If stage \( i \) contains the protagonist’s SDF\( (G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \), and stage \( i+1 \)
    the **antagonist’s linguistic criticism** LI?, then stage \( i+2 \) contains the protagonist’s
    \( FDF(G_i;\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \) (C5) if the linguistic test is not clearly negative and WIG;\( \alpha \)
    (the global argument before is was disambiguated) if clearly negative (C5).

C17. If stage \( i \) contains the protagonist’s \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \), and stage \( i+1 \) the **antagonist’s
    linguistic criticism** LI?, then stage \( i+2 \) contains the protagonist’s \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \) if the
    linguistic test is not clearly negative (C8) and WIG;\( \alpha \) if clearly negative (C5).

C18. If stage \( i \) contains the antagonist’s WH\( \phi \), \( i+1 \) the protagonist’s SDF\( (G_{i+1};\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \)
    containing \( \phi[\alpha_j] \) as a disambiguation of the challenged \( \phi \), and \( i+3 \) the **antagonist’s
    relevance criticism** WH\( \phi[\alpha_j] \), then stage \( i+4 \) contains the protagonist’s WIG;\( \alpha \) (C5).

C19. If stage \( i \) contains the protagonist’s ambiguity criticism \( \alpha AA\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n \), and \( i+1 \) the
    **antagonist’s relevance criticism** RE?, then stage \( i+3 \) contains FDF\( (G_{i+1};\alpha;\alpha_1,\ldots,\alpha_n) \)
    (C5).

C20. The antagonist is not allowed to challenge \( \phi \) (standpoint, reason or connection premise) at stage \( i \)
    if \( \phi \) is an element of C\( i \).
C21. At stage \( k \) it is not allowed to use expression \( \alpha \), if at an earlier stage \( i \) there is an occurrence of \( \alpha AA_1, \ldots, \alpha a_n \) or of \( SDf(C_i; \alpha; \alpha a_1, \ldots, \alpha a_n) \) or of \( SDf(G_i; \alpha; \alpha a_1, \ldots, \alpha a_n) \), unless there is a stage \( j \), \( i < j < l \), that contains either \( WIG_j; \alpha \) or \( WIC_j; \alpha \) or \( W1 \alpha \).

C22. It is not allowed to raise the exact same ambiguity criticism, linguistic criticism or relevance criticism.

There is one win-loss rule:

W1. The party who utters GIVE UP loses the discussion and the other party wins it.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, an explication of the pejorative sense of ambiguous, dubbed actively ambiguous, has been presented that can be used for the analysis and evaluation of arguments and argumentative criticisms. It has been argued that even a normative model for reasonable and critical discussion ought not to ban active ambiguities altogether. Instead, it has been proposed that the norms for critical discussion must first enable each party to put forward ambiguity criticisms as well as self-critical ambiguity corrections, in order to induce them to improve upon their language, and second enable them to examine whether the ambiguity corrections or ambiguity criticisms are appropriate, in order to prevent nitpicking and filibustering.

A dialogue system, Ambiguity Dialectic, has been specified that satisfies six philosophical requirements on normative models for argumentative discussion that accommodate active ambiguities. Ambiguity Dialectic is immanently dialectical; it strikes a balance between normative bite and a tolerance of imperfections; it implements the correct norms regarding the use of actively ambiguous expressions; it is organized in accordance with a dialectical division of labour; it strikes a balance between enabling meta-remarks and sticking to the topic at issue; and it starts from a clear conception of disambiguation. The model can be used for analyzing and evaluating the ways agents deal with ambiguities, as well as for the further development of interaction protocols for agents trying to achieve their argumentative aims using imperfect languages.

References


The latter component was part of the incomplete sketch of ambiguity dialectic in (Van Laar 2001).

If a protagonist defends a standpoint as true, rather than merely acceptable to the antagonist, this can be considered as a special case where he defends his thesis *ex concessis* and where the concessions used are presented as true, rather than as merely accepted by the antagonist.

I follow Walton and Krabbe (1995) in characterizing dialogue types by referring to the initial situation, the individual aims of the participants and the common goal of the dialogue. Ambiguity Dialectic is a subtype of what Walton and Krabbe call *permissive persuasion dialogue*.

In (Krabbe & Van Laar 2007) a typology of functions of reasoning has been proposed.

This is unproblematic if it is the protagonist who introduces the expression. In case the antagonist has, in his initial concessions, used an expressions that, as used by the protagonist, turns out to be actively ambiguous, the antagonist remains partly responsible for any resulting problems, even though the protagonist is probably also in part to blame. In order to obtain a clear division of tasks, Ambiguity Dialectic assigns, in that case, the burden of solving these problems to the antagonist alone.

In (Van Laar 2003) I have defended that whether or not an argument constitutes a fallacy of equivocation is in part dependent upon what the addressee is willing to accept.

The immanent dialogical nature of the theory is in line with Hamblin’s proposal to study ambiguity within the setting of a theory of charges (1970). His idea is that given that we lack objective criteria for determining expressions that give rise to equivocation, we should study charges of equivocation.

In the drive-example, I assumed the parties to discuss critically, so without, at that point in time, appealing to the judge, who, as a matter of fact, did in the end settle the dispute by choosing the wider meaning of *to drive* as the proper legal meaning.

The theories of Mackenzie (1988, 1990), Walton (1996) and Van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004) do not provide participants with fully explicit linguistic devices for testing the correctness of ambiguity charges or the appropriateness of ambiguity corrections.

This is not so in Mackenzie (1988, 1990), where a critic who charges an arguer with equivocation is enabled to adapt the commitments of this arguer in a direction of the critic’s choice.

So, even in a discussion in line with the rules for Ambiguity Dialectic, there is no guarantee that the initial difference of opinion will be resolved by the parties. This feature is shared by other extant models for reasonable discussion (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004; Walton & Krabbe 1995).

Walton’s dialogue system presented in (Walton 2007) does start from a clear division of labor. However, this system is meant for clarifying unclear expressions and not specifically tailored to ambiguity problems.

Presenting a disambiguation is related to presenting a definition in the following way. If a party disambiguates his position with respect to expression $\alpha$, he provides a kind of stipulative definition of $\alpha$ in that he makes it clear how in this context this expression is to be understood. Moreover, he also makes it clear for at least one other definition of $\alpha$ that this is not to be understood as providing $\alpha$’s meaning. No method for stipulative definition needs to be excluded for the purpose of definition (Robinson 1972).

Disambiguation implies a definition, but not vice versa for the reason that definitions can also be used just for clarifying an expression’s meaning, that is not considered ambiguous. Presenting a disambiguation is
less closely connected to dissociation, for the party who disambiguates his position can, but need not claim that his choice of disambiguation makes his choice of words correspond to the ‘real meaning’ of the ambiguous term. (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969).