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From Epistemic Support to Argumentative Accessibility: A Linguistic Interface for the Epistemological Theory of Argumentation

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Abstract

The epistemological theory of argumentation defines a good argument by its epistemic function: it supplies the addressee with a basis that justifies accepting the conclusion. This function is grounded in a support relation between premises and conclusion. Siegel and Lumer both defend the centrality of this relation, yet the linguistic conditions under which an addressee recovers it remain underdeveloped within the theory. Lumer recognizes addressee accessibility as a condition of argumentative adequacy, though he does not develop it as a graded dimension systematically related to the linguistic realization of an argument. This paper develops argumentative accessibility as the degree to which the inferential relation linking premises to conclusion is recoverable from an argument's linguistic realization in context. It proposes a comparative criterion based on the components of the relation that a formulation makes recoverable, and it distinguishes inferential cueing, which facilitates recovery, from strength cueing, which signals how strongly the conclusion is supported. Constructed contrasts that hold propositional content and stipulated support constant establish the conceptual distinctness of support and accessibility, without any claim that accessibility is an empirically independent psychological variable. The distinction grounds a norm of calibration: the strength a formulation signals should be proportionate to the support its reasons provide, and the support relation should be sufficiently accessible for the intended addressee to evaluate it. The account thus extends the epistemological theory by connecting epistemic support to its linguistic presentation, and it maintains that epistemic priority does not entail linguistic independence.

1 Introduction

When someone advances an argument, the support relation between premises and conclusion has to be recovered by the addressee from the words in which the argument is put. Two speakers can offer the same reasons for the same conclusion and still make the step between them easy or hard to follow, simply by phrasing it differently. How linguistic form guides the recovery of that step is a pragmatic matter, yet it has no settled place in the theory that treats the support relation as the heart of argumentative quality. This paper asks how an addressee gains access to the support relation through its linguistic realization, and what difference that access makes to the evaluation of arguments. Whether support can be specified independently of language is a separate question, and I leave it aside.

The account of quality at issue is the epistemological theory of argumentation. On this theory a good argument performs an epistemic function: it improves the addressee's epistemic standing by supplying a basis that justifies accepting the conclusion. The quality of an argument then depends on whether a support relation obtains between premises and conclusion, and an argument is good to the extent that it establishes this relation in a justification-conferring way. Siegel gives the conception a careful articulation. He distinguishes several senses of 'argument', treats the abstract propositional sense as fundamental, and locates the core of argumentation in case-making, which he understands as an epistemic act (Siegel, 2023, pp. 468, 471, 517). Lumer, writing from within the same school, glosses the fundamental sense as a sequence of propositions representing a thesis and the reasons that perform

the epistemic function of supporting it, and he concludes that this sense is epistemic per se (Lumer, 2023, p. 575).

One question is left undeveloped in this picture. Siegel conceives of arguments primarily as reason–conclusion complexes and of the relation between premises and conclusion as one of support (Siegel, 2023, p. 519). Lumer objects that the relation is described only metaphorically and is not further clarified. In his view the usual characterizations of the good argument's function (support, justificatory support, case-making, warrant) are each correct, yet too indeterminate to yield an applicable criterion (Lumer, 2023, pp. 593, 596–597). Siegel has since replied that the notion is not obscure. A reason, in Scanlon's sense, is a consideration that 'counts in favor of' its target (Scanlon, 1998, p. 17), and counting in favour of may be treated as roughly equivalent to supporting (Siegel, 2024, p. 539). The two authors remain, in Siegel's phrase, 'brothers in arms' on the epistemological road (Siegel, 2024, p. 531), and I do not need to settle the dispute between them. Even if we grant Siegel that the support relation is intelligible, neither side develops an account of how an addressee recovers it from the linguistic form in which an argument is expressed.

The difficulty has usually been read as the lack of an operational criterion, to be supplied from within epistemology. One proposal of this kind, made within a pluralistic framework, singles out a specifically epistemic domain of argumentation and governs it by the modal norm of safety taken from modal epistemology. As its proponent notes, the norm had not previously been applied to epistemic theories of argumentation (de Grefte, 2022, p. 389). Whatever its merits, such a strategy stays at the level of abstraction where the difficulty arose. It looks for a criterion of support and leaves open the route by which support becomes recognizable in discourse.

My thesis is that the difficulty goes deeper than a missing criterion. Both accounts share a structural tendency to treat the propositional argument as standing above language, so that whether a support relation obtains is kept apart from how that relation is made accessible in discourse. Neither Siegel nor Lumer declares language unimportant. The point concerns the architecture of their theories, which places the manner of accessibility outside what the theory sets out to explain. Siegel treats the complex speech act of arguing as one that articulates and utilizes an abstract propositional structure (Siegel, 2023, p. 473), and evaluation is directed at the structure. Lumer's most explicit appeal to the addressee is the requirement that the premises be epistemically accessible, meaning that the addressee already accepts them or can recognize them as true ad hoc (Lumer, 2023, p. 580, n. 2). This is a condition on knowing the premises, and it says nothing about how the inferential relation is recovered from the words. He states it as a precondition within a four-place adequacy predicate, and it does not appear as a variable that is realized in discourse and comes in degrees.

Lumer does recognize addressee accessibility as a condition of argumentative adequacy, and the concept proposed here reconstructs something already present in his account. Among the adequacy conditions for the persuasive use of arguments he lists the exclusion of arguments that are epistemically inaccessible to people, such as deductive arguments whose derivation compresses so

many steps that the addressee cannot follow it. He also requires a definite order within the argument, the inclusion of only necessary elements, and he allows enthymematic abbreviation that anticipates what addressees can readily supply (Lumer, 2023, pp. 580–581). Each of these conditions concerns how readily an addressee can recover the support relation from the argument's form, and the last one already adjusts the form of an argument to its addressee. The question of accessibility is therefore not new to the epistemological theory. What I add is narrower. It consists of three steps taken together: a comparative criterion for how far a formulation makes the inferential relation recoverable, a separation of this accessibility both from the strength of support and from the strength a formulation signals, and the use of all three dimensions in a norm of calibration for the presentation of arguments.

Even so, a basic question remains undeveloped. How does the support relation, a property holding between premises and conclusion, become something an addressee recovers in the course of discourse, and how does the degree of recovery vary with linguistic form? The question belongs to the theory of argumentation itself, since it bears on the epistemic function by which that theory defines a good argument. If an argument is what improves the addressee's epistemic position, the addressee's access to the basis for acceptance is a condition on its doing so.

The gap can now be stated more exactly. The epistemological theory has no developed account linking the support relation to the conditions under which an addressee recovers it in actual discourse. The interface between epistemic support and its linguistic accessibility is left largely unexplained, and filling it calls for a mediating concept that gathers what existing notions treat separately. Section 2 develops the concept, a criterion for it, and an argument that it is distinct from support. Section 3 separates it from neighbouring notions, and Sections 4 and 5 describe its linguistic realization and its graded character. Section 6 presents its main payoff, a norm of calibration, and Section 7 tests the account against neighbouring frameworks. Section 8 works through illustrations, Section 9 states the theoretical consequence and the standing of the paper's claims, and Section 10 concludes.

2 The Central Distinction: Support Is Not Accessibility

I propose the concept of argumentative accessibility, defined as the degree to which the inferential relation linking premises to conclusion is recoverable by an addressee from the linguistic realization of an argument. Recoverability is its defining functional property. The central thesis follows: epistemic support is not argumentative accessibility. Inferential marking does not by itself alter the support relation between premises and conclusion; it alters how easily that relation can be recovered. This answers an obvious objection, namely that a linguistic device is irrelevant to an epistemic theory because it cannot make an argument stronger. The marker leaves the strength of support as it is and makes it easier to see what the support consists in, and that is what an addressee needs in order to evaluate it.

The distinction fits a differentiation already drawn within the epistemological theory, Lumer's distinction between the argumentative validity and the adequacy of an argument. Argumentative validity is a one-place predicate of the argument itself, whereas adequacy is a four-place predicate indexed to argument,

time, function, and subject (Lumer, 2023, pp. 579–580, n. 2). Accessibility has no bearing on argumentative validity. It belongs to adequacy, and it recasts as one graded dimension what Lumer states as a set of separate conditions about how the basis for acceptance becomes available to a given addressee on a given occasion. The concept therefore extends a distinction the theory already makes. One of Lumer's conditions must be set aside here. The epistemic accessibility of premises, in his sense, concerns whether the addressee can know the premises to be true (Lumer, 2023, p. 580, n. 2). Argumentative accessibility concerns whether the addressee can recover the inferential relation between premises and conclusion. The present concept takes up the second question, which Lumer's conditions on derivation, order, and abbreviation address, and it leaves premise accessibility as he states it.

Four terms need to be kept apart. The *support relation* is the epistemic relation between reasons and conclusion, and *support strength* is the degree to which that relation obtains. *Adequacy*, in Lumer's sense, is the fitness of an argument for a function, an addressee, and a time. *Accessibility* is the recoverability of the support relation from the argument's linguistic realization; it falls within adequacy without exhausting it, and it differs from strength.

Support, linguistic realization, and accessibility also belong to different levels. Epistemic support is a property of the argument's epistemic relation, and linguistic realization is a property of its discourse form. Argumentative accessibility is a relational construct that concerns the mapping between the two, that is, the extent to which a given form makes a given support relation recoverable for an addressee. It is a theoretical notion. It does not compete with support as a second epistemic magnitude, it is not a stylistic feature of the text, and it is not a measured mental state. How far actual addressees recover the relation is an empirical question, which the paper leaves open (Section 9).

2.1 A Criterion of Accessibility: Inferential Cueing and Strength Cueing

For accessibility to do analytic work, we need a way of comparing how different formulations make a support relation recoverable. I propose that, in a given context, four components may contribute to such recovery: (i) the *role assignment*, which proposition is offered as reason and which as conclusion; (ii) the *direction* of the inference, that the one is advanced in support of the other; (iii) the *type* of inferential relation, for instance causal, symptomatic, or based on authority; and (iv) the *warrant* that links reason to conclusion. A formulation affords greater accessibility when it makes more of these components recoverable from its linguistic form and its setting, so that the addressee does not have to supply them unaided. The first two components are closely related and need a word of separation. Role assignment identifies the argumentative function of each proposition, distinguishing the reason from the conclusion. Direction specifies the orientation of the support relation itself, that is, which proposition is advanced in support of which. The two are often conveyed by the same linguistic device. They remain analytically distinguishable, because identifying the function of a proposition does not by itself specify the relation through which one proposition supports another. In a passage with several reasons and an intermediate conclusion, for instance, an addressee may recognize that a sentence is offered as a reason and still be

unable to tell whether it supports the intermediate conclusion or the final one. I do not claim that the four components are independent in every case, only that they can be told apart in analysis.

The components give the comparison an analytical basis. They are not units of equal weight to be added up. How much each one contributes depends on the argument, the addressee, and the context. For an addressee who already knows that structural corrosion above a safety threshold calls for closure, the warrant of the bridge argument in (1) below adds little, while role assignment and direction may still matter. For a lay reader of a technical report, the warrant may be the component on which recovery chiefly depends. A formulation that makes more components recoverable is therefore more accessible when the other components are held equal and the context is fixed, and it need not be more accessible in every respect.

The criterion is accordingly comparative and ordinal, and it yields a partial ordering. Where one formulation makes recoverable everything another does and at least one component more, the first is more accessible. Where each makes recoverable something the other leaves implicit, for example when one encodes direction and type and the other states the warrant alone, the criterion does not settle the comparison, and the analysis should leave it unsettled. Imposing a ranking in such cases would credit the criterion with a precision it does not have. The number of encoded components is an analytical indicator of accessibility. It is not a complete quantitative measure of it. The value of the criterion lies less in ranking every pair of formulations than in the distinctions it draws in cases that other accounts leave undifferentiated, such as the contrast between (2a) and (2b) below and the incomparability of (10a) and (10b) in Section 8. Section 7 tests neighbouring frameworks against cases of this kind.

The criterion concerns what a formulation makes available for recovering the support relation, and the number of markers a text contains does not decide the matter. A connective such as *so* typically makes the roles of the propositions and the direction of the inference easier to identify, and it leaves the type of relation and the warrant partly to context. An explicit statement of the warrant can make a further component recoverable, and contextual information may support recovery where no overt marker is present. The relevant question is what inferential information the formulation provides in its context. I call this provision of resources *afforded accessibility*, and it must be kept distinct from actual recovery by a particular addressee. A relation may be plain from context with no marker, and an explicit marker may be misunderstood or read otherwise than the speaker intends. Afforded accessibility is an analytical property of a formulation in context. How far actual addressees use the resources it provides is an empirical question.

The criterion also separates two things linguistic marking can do. *Inferential cueing* encodes components of the support relation and so raises accessibility. *Strength cueing*, carried by expressions such as *clearly*, *undeniably*, or *it is obvious that*, signals how strongly the conclusion is supported and encodes no further component of the relation. The two often occur together. In *he is therefore, quite clearly, the person who committed the fraud*, *therefore* cues the inference and *quite clearly* cues its strength. Only the first operation bears on accessibility. The second bears on what I will call the *signalled*

strength of an argument, the degree of support its formulation presents the reasons as providing. Signalled strength is a property of the formulation, as accessibility is. How strong addressees actually take an argument to be is an empirical matter that this analysis does not settle.

2.2 The Conceptual Distinctness and Dissociability of Support and Accessibility

The case for distinguishing support from accessibility is conceptual. It rests on a modest principle: if one property can vary while the other is held fixed, in both directions and without incoherence, then neither can be defined as the other or as a determinate of it. Crossing support with accessibility gives four configurations (Table 1). Two of them do the argumentative work.

Table 1
Four configurations of support and accessibility

Configuration	Significance for the argument
Strong support, high accessibility	Congruent configuration: the support is strong and its components are recoverable. Not used in the argument.
Strong support, low accessibility	A support relation stipulated to be strong, realized so that its components are left to the addressee. Coherent; strength of support does not entail high accessibility.
Weak support, high accessibility	A thin relation whose role assignment and direction are explicitly encoded. Coherent; high accessibility does not entail strength of support.
Weak support, low accessibility	Negatively congruent configuration: no sufficient basis and no clear route to it. Not used in the argument.

The two intermediate configurations carry the argument. Were accessibility only another name for support, or a determinate of support fixed by definition, variation in both directions would be ruled out. It would be incoherent to describe a strong support relation whose route is obscured, or a thin one whose route is plain. Both descriptions are coherent, so support and accessibility can come apart in either direction and are conceptually distinct.

The third configuration is easily mistaken for a defect. A weak inference made highly accessible is not thereby bad argumentation, since a formulation that makes the step recoverable also opens it to evaluation. Where such a case is objectionable, the trouble usually lies in strength cueing that presents thin support as strong, which Section 6 calls inflation. Experimental pragmatics has documented related effects of formulation on the processing and acceptability of questionable or fallacious discourse (Schumann et al., 2019, 2021), and forms of linguistically induced shallow processing have been described as well (Lombardi Vallauri, 2021). These findings concern formulation effects, which is a different matter from the conceptual distinction drawn here, yet they suggest that the configurations in question are more than notional.

Constructed contrasts make the conceptual point most clearly, since they allow the propositional content and the stipulated support relation to be held constant while the linguistic realization of the inferential transition varies. Take an argument whose support relation is fixed by stipulation. Suppose a structural inspection has established that fatigue corrosion in a load-bearing cable has crossed the applicable safety threshold, so that continued heavy traffic poses an unacceptable risk. Against that background, compare the following formulations:

(1) a. The main cable has fatigue corrosion above the applicable safety threshold. The bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.

1. b. The main cable has fatigue corrosion above the applicable safety threshold, so the bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.
2. c. The main cable has fatigue corrosion above the applicable safety threshold; the bridge should therefore be closed to heavy traffic.
3. d. Given that the main cable has fatigue corrosion above the applicable safety threshold, the bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.
4. e. Since the main cable has fatigue corrosion above the applicable safety threshold, and for that very reason, the bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.

With the engineering evidence and background assumptions held fixed, the stipulated grounds for closing the bridge are the same in (1a–e). The formulations differ in how they make the inferential transition linguistically recoverable. In (1a) the addressee must infer that the first proposition is offered as a reason for the second and work out the direction of the inference. In (1b–d) the formulation gives more direct cues to that relation, and (1e) marks it redundantly. The comparison therefore shows inferential cueing varying while the stipulated support relation stays constant, and so, by the criterion of Sect. 2.1, a difference in afforded accessibility. How much easier actual addressees find one formulation than another is a question for empirical investigation.

The bridge variants already show the first intermediate configuration of Table 1. Given the stipulated context, support is strong in (1a), yet (1a) leaves role assignment and direction to the addressee, so it is less accessible than (1b–d). The same configuration appears with a more complex evidential basis in (2), where three findings bear on a causal conclusion. Assume that, taken together, they support it strongly:

(2) a. Incidence fell after the vaccination programme began. The decline was larger in cohorts receiving more doses. No comparable decline occurred among unvaccinated controls. The programme caused the decline.

b. Given that incidence fell after the vaccination programme began, that the decline was larger in cohorts receiving more doses, and that no comparable decline occurred among unvaccinated controls, the programme caused the decline.

In (2a) the four sentences are presented as separate assertions. Their sequence does not mark the first three as jointly supporting the causal conclusion, so the addressee has to infer their argumentative roles and the way they bear on the fourth. In (2b) the *given that* construction marks the three propositions as grounds for the conclusion, and their inferential role becomes easier to recover. The two formulations are not identical apart from a single word. The sentences are combined differently, and the evidence is gathered into one complex clause. What the illustration holds constant is the propositional content and its stipulated support for the conclusion. Neither formulation hedges or adds a strength cue, so the comparison isolates a difference in how the support relation is presented linguistically, with no difference in the support stipulated for the argument. Whether readers actually recover the relation more readily from (2b) is a testable prediction, and the example by itself does not establish it. A weak relation, conversely, can be given high accessibility, as in (3):

(3) The defendant was in the city that day; he therefore committed the fraud.

Here *therefore* encodes role assignment and direction, so the step is easy to recover, while the support it rests on, presence in a city, is negligible. Cases like (2a) and (3) are coherent, and together they show the two dimensions coming apart.

It helps to separate three claims at this point. That strong support does not entail high accessibility is one non-entailment, shown most clearly by (2a) and, in a milder form, by (1a). That high accessibility does not entail strong support is a second, shown by (3). Either one alone would establish only a one-way gap and would be consistent with accessibility being a determinate of support. Conceptual dissociability requires both directions of variation, with the identity conditions of each property held fixed. Support can be high while accessibility is low, and accessibility can be high while support is low, each property remaining what it is; hence neither can be defined as the other. This is why the argument needs both intermediate configurations.

The contrasts in this section are analytical constructions. They are not observations drawn from a representative sample of discourse, so questions of representativeness and sample size do not arise. Their purpose is to establish that the linguistic recoverability of an inferential transition can vary while the propositional content and the stipulated support relation are held constant. This controlled comparison is an idealization. It is most straightforward where discourse-procedural expressions make the inferential relation more explicit, and less exact where a marker also contributes to the interpretation of the propositions or of the relation between them, a point taken up in Section 4. The examples thus support a conceptual claim about the distinction between support and accessibility. Whether addressees actually draw the distinction, and how often the configurations occur, are empirical matters beyond the scope of this paper.

3 Demarcation from Clarity, Relevance, Strength, and Epistemic Vigilance

A new concept is worth having only if it does not simply relabel an old one, so accessibility must be marked off from four nearby notions. The first is clarity, a general property of a text. A text can be lexically and syntactically clear and still leave the support relation opaque, since clarity attaches to expression and accessibility to a particular inferential relation. The second is relevance, together with the relevance-theoretic accessibility of a contextual assumption. Relevance concerns the balance between cognitive effects and processing effort associated with an utterance in context (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 124–125), and relevance-theoretic accessibility concerns how readily an assumption or a context can be retrieved, a more accessible assumption being one that is easier to recall (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, pp. 77, 142). Argumentative accessibility concerns how readily an addressee can recover a determinate premise–conclusion support relation from its linguistic realization. Its object is a specific inferential relation between assumptions, which is neither the overall cognitive effect of an utterance nor the retrievability of a single assumption. The third notion is strength in the relevance-theoretic sense, the degree of confidence with which a single assumption is held. Boulat and Maillat (2023) reconstruct it experimentally as a cognitive marker of the speaker's commitment and of an utterance's epistemic value. Strength in this sense concerns the epistemic status of a single assumption, whereas accessibility concerns access to a relation between assumptions.

The fourth notion is epistemic vigilance, the suite of mechanisms by which hearers evaluate communicated information, its source, and its content, so as to guard against the risk of being misinformed (Sperber et al., 2010, p. 359). Vigilance governs whether a hearer accepts what is offered. Accessibility governs whether the hearer recovers the inferential relation in the first place. A vigilant hearer may recover a transition clearly and then reject the claim because the source is unreliable. The two are complementary, since vigilance can only scrutinize an inferential step once it has been recovered. With these four distinctions in place, the next task is the linguistic model of how resources grade access.

4 The Linguistic Model of Accessibility

If accessibility mediates between the support relation and its recognition, we need to say how linguistic form grades it. Two traditions that have largely developed in parallel supply the means. The first is argumentation within language, which holds that orienting the continuation of discourse is constitutive of the meaning of an utterance, and that argumentativity is a primary value of utterances, not one derived from their informational content (Anscombre & Ducrot, 1976, pp. 12, 14). Raccah (1990, pp. 447, 456) developed this view into graded inference rules through the notion of topoi, which shows that argumentative orientation can be modelled as a graded property and offers a precedent for treating accessibility in the same way. The second is relevance theory, which treats connectives as procedural instructions that guide inferential processing and constrain the interpretation of discourse relations (Moeschler, 2018, pp. 136, 146).

Both traditions have already connected connectives, scalar operators, and processing with argumentation. What they have not addressed in this form is how linguistic marking bears on access to

the epistemic support relation as the epistemological theory conceives it. In the present model, linguistic resources are treated as devices that grade an addressee's access to an inferential relation that already obtains. Their role as indicators of argumentation is a separate matter. Connectives above all, and to a lesser extent scalar operators and modals, thus become the means by which the mediating concept is realized.

These resources do not form one homogeneous class with one uniform effect. Accessibility is a family of mediations sharing a common function, and the resources differ in how they mediate. They can be distinguished by how directly they contribute to the recovery of the support relation and by how closely their contribution is tied to propositional interpretation. Inferential and causal connectives (*so*, *therefore*, *since*) often give direct cues to the roles of the propositions and to the direction of the transition, as the contrast between the bare (1a) and the marked (1b–c) shows, and they supply the clearest cases for analysing inferential cueing. Argumentative connectives such as French *mais* are commonly described as leaving truth conditions unchanged, so that discourses with and without the connective are truth-conditionally identical (Moeschler, 2018, p. 145; Schumann et al., 2021, p. 367). For other connectives the matter is disputed. Causal meaning associated with *and* has been analysed both as an implicature and as an explicature contributing to truth-conditional meaning (Moeschler, 2018, p. 137), and the precise contribution of connectives to discourse meaning remains, on Moeschler's account, insufficiently investigated (Moeschler, 2018, pp. 132, 136). The model therefore does not need the general claim that connectives never affect truth-conditional content. Their contribution depends on the connective, its construction, and the discourse context. What the controlled comparisons of this paper assume is narrower, namely the constancy of content and stipulated support stated in Sect. 2.2. Scalar operators are less direct. They place the utterance on an argumentative scale and may thereby affect which conclusion is made reachable, but their contribution is entangled with content, as (4) illustrates. I therefore treat them as a contributing resource, not a controlled one:

(4) a. The report has some support in the data.

1. b. The report has at least some support in the data.
2. c. The report has even some support in the data.

The scalar particles in (4b–c) reorient the utterance argumentatively and change how readily the addressee reads the passage as licensing a further conclusion, an effect that the argumentation-within-language tradition analyses in terms of argumentative scales, which order utterances by their argumentative strength for a given conclusion, as in Anscombre and Ducrot's analysis of *même* (Anscombre & Ducrot, 1976, p. 15). Because such particles carry semantic and pragmatic import of their own, their contribution to accessibility cannot be cleanly separated from content, and I leave them for separate study. Two further resources bear on accessibility indirectly, and I note them without relying on them. Epistemic-doxastic modals are mixed resources. They mark the type and degree of commitment and so act partly as strength cues, yet Rocci's analysis shows that their epistemic-doxastic uses are the ones that relate constitutively to the inferential form of an argument (Rocci, 2008, pp. 180, 183).

Evidential and attributive markers expose the source of justification and so bear on the type of the relation and on its warrant, as in (5):

(5) a. The bridge is unsafe; the cable has failed.

b. Given the inspection evidence, the bridge is unsafe; the cable has failed.

A comparison with modals shows why the ordering matters. A bare-versus-connected pair such as (1a) and (1c) keeps the propositional content fixed and changes only the encoding of the transition. A modal alternation changes the content itself, as in (6):

(6) a. The cable has failed, so the bridge must be closed.

b. The cable has failed, so the bridge may need to be closed.

Replacing *must* with *may* in (6) changes the force of the claim, and the recoverability of a fixed relation is no longer the only thing at stake. Scalar operators and modal expressions may affect the interpretation of the claim, its epistemic qualification, or the commitment the speaker conveys, in addition to the presentation of the inference. They belong to the broader model, yet they cannot be treated as interchangeable with discourse-procedural connectives or as equally clean evidence for isolating accessibility. For this reason the account builds its core on the connectives, where content stays constant across variants, and places modal and scalar resources at the margin, as cases in which accessibility interacts with content and which call for separate treatment.

The same ordering explains why the model does not identify accessibility with the presence of argumentative indicators. An indicator tells an analyst that an argumentative move is being made. Accessibility concerns how much of the support relation the formulation lets the addressee recover. The two often coincide in practice, since the connectives that signal argumentation also encode role assignment and direction. They come apart in two kinds of case. A formulation may indicate that something is offered as a reason and leave the type of relation and the warrant entirely to the addressee, as *so* does in (1b). Conversely, a formulation with no indicator at all may make the relation easy to recover, because the context supplies role assignment and direction, as when an answer to the question *Why should the bridge be closed?* consists of the single sentence describing the corrosion. Accessibility is thus a property of the fit between formulation, relation, and context, and an inventory of markers is only one of its sources.

5 Accessibility as a Graded Property

The criterion of Sect. 2.1 gives accessibility a principled gradation. Realizations of one argument can be ordered by the components of the support relation they make recoverable, one realization ranking above another when it makes recoverable all that the other does and more. At one end is a bare juxtaposition that leaves role assignment, direction, type, and warrant to the addressee; at the other is a formulation that encodes all four. The ordering is ordinal and comparative, and I do not propose a fixed scale with a

set number of ranks. Its purpose is to show that accessibility comes in degrees and that linguistic form helps fix where a given realization falls. Over-marking, as in (1e), repeats cues beyond the components they encode, so it increases the amount of marking without increasing accessibility.

Three features of the gradation deserve emphasis. First, it is relative to a context and an addressee. The same formulation may leave the warrant implicit for an expert who supplies it at once and for a lay reader who cannot, and the criterion compares formulations for a fixed addressee in a fixed context. Second, the ordering is partial. As Sect. 2.1 noted, two formulations that make different components recoverable may be incomparable, and the gradation does not force a decision between them. Third, the gradation concerns afforded accessibility. It describes what a formulation offers for recovery, and it leaves open how far a given addressee takes up the offer. These features keep the notion modest. They also make it usable, since a comparison between two formulations of one argument for one audience is the kind of judgement that arises when an argument is drafted, revised, or assessed.

The gradation also clarifies the relation between accessibility and enthymematic abbreviation. Lumer allows an argument to omit what its addressees can readily supply (Lumer, 2023, pp. 580–581). On the present account such omission lowers the explicitness of the formulation without necessarily lowering accessibility for the intended addressee, because the omitted component remains recoverable from shared background. The same abbreviation may lower accessibility for another addressee who lacks that background. Abbreviation is thus neither a defect nor a merit in itself. Its standing depends on the match between what the formulation leaves out and what the addressee can supply, which is the relation the concept of accessibility is designed to track.

This gradation suggests a secondary prediction: more explicit marking need not make recovery easier without limit. In relevance theory, processing effort is a negative factor in relevance: other things being equal, the greater the effort, the lower the relevance (Sperber & Wilson, 1995, p. 124). If this holds for inferential marking, marking beyond what is needed should bring diminishing returns, and the relation between the amount of marking and ease of recovery may be non-monotonic. Example (1e) gives an informal sense of this, since its accumulated markers add processing cost with no matching gain in guiding the inference. I leave open whether the relation is monotonic, has a threshold, or takes the shape of an inverted U, because the conceptual argument of the paper does not depend on it.

6 The Explanatory Payoff: A Norm of Calibration

A distinction is theoretically useful when it lets an account identify differences that would otherwise stay hidden. The distinction between epistemic support, argumentative accessibility, and signalled strength makes such differences available for evaluating how arguments are presented. I propose the following norm: *an argument's formulation is calibrated when the strength it signals for its conclusion is proportionate to the support its reasons provide, and when it makes the support relation sufficiently recoverable for its intended addressee to evaluate that support.* The term *calibration* is used here in the sense of bringing a presentation into proportion with the grounds available for it, as when confidence is

said to be calibrated to the evidence. Applied to the formulation of arguments, the norm concerns both the strength conveyed by the wording and the recoverability of the inferential transition. It is a norm of argumentative adequacy, and it leaves argumentative validity untouched. Whether the reasons support the conclusion remains a question about the argument's epistemic merits. Calibration asks whether the formulation presents those merits proportionately and makes them available for assessment.

The norm follows from the epistemic function that the epistemological theory assigns to argumentation. If a good argument is to improve the addressee's epistemic position, its presentation should allow acceptance to respond to the support the reasons actually provide. A formulation that signals more strength than the reasons warrant encourages acceptance on the strength of its presentation, at the expense of its evidential merits. A formulation that leaves substantial support difficult to recover may keep the addressee from recognizing the basis the argument offers. Calibration therefore requires two things together: proportion between signalled strength and epistemic support, and enough accessibility for evaluation. The required degree of accessibility is relative to the intended addressee and to the context of presentation, since what an expert can supply unaided may have to be made explicit for a less knowledgeable audience. The norm is consequently a normative principle. It does not come with a numerical threshold that could be applied identically to every addressee and every context.

The norm therefore rests on two premises of different kinds, and it is worth keeping them apart. The first is conceptual. The distinctions drawn in Sections 2 to 5 make the norm statable, since a requirement of proportion between signalled strength and support, together with a separate requirement of sufficient accessibility, cannot be formulated by an account that identifies any two of the three dimensions. The second premise is normative and does not come from those distinctions. It is the epistemological theory's own claim that good arguments afford epistemic improvement (Siegel, 2023, p. 476). The distinctions alone do not yield the norm, since they say nothing about how formulations ought to be. The normative premise alone cannot state it, since without the distinctions there is nothing for proportion and sufficiency to relate. The norm needs both, and this is why I present it as the payoff of the distinctions and defend it by appeal to the function of argument.

The norm yields diagnoses that cut across the three dimensions (Table 2). A formulation *inflates* its argument when signalled strength exceeds support, as when *quite clearly* is added to a thin inference. A formulation *obscures* its argument when strong support is given low accessibility, as in (2a), where the basis for acceptance is present but hard to recover. A formulation that makes a weak inference highly accessible without signalling more strength than it has, as in (3), counts as calibrated. The argument is weak, and its weakness is open to inspection. The least calibrated case combines weak support, low accessibility, and high signalled strength: the conclusion is asserted emphatically, and the step that would let it be checked is left implicit.

(7) Obviously, he committed the fraud. He was in the city that day.

In (7) the strength cue presents the conclusion as evident. The role of the second sentence as a reason is not encoded, nor is the direction of the inference, so the addressee is invited to accept the conclusion

on the signalled strength before the thinness of the support can be seen.

Table 2
Diagnoses under the norm of calibration (accessibility and signalled strength are relative to the bare formulation of the same argument)

Example	Support	Accessibility	Signalled strength	Diagnosis
(1b)	Strong (stipulated)	High	Neutral	Calibrated
(2a)	Strong (stipulated)	Low	Neutral	Obscured: support present but hard to recover
(3)	Weak	High	Neutral	Calibrated: weakness open to evaluation
(9c), Sect. 8	Weak	High	High	Inflated: signalled strength exceeds support
(7)	Weak	Low	High	Inflated and concealed

These diagnoses depend on keeping accessibility distinct from both epistemic support and signalled strength. If accessibility were support under another name, the formulation in (3) would appear stronger merely because its inferential transition is explicitly marked, although the support it rests on remains weak. If accessibility were identified with signalled strength, the contrast between (2a) and (2b) would be lost: the two formulations present the conclusion with the same strength, yet they differ in how readily the evidential relation to the conclusion can be recovered. The distinction lets the analysis of a formulation track three separate questions: how strongly the reasons support the conclusion, how readily the inferential transition can be recovered, and how strongly the wording presents the conclusion as supported. The calibration norm needs answers to all three at once. Section 7 considers how far neighbouring frameworks already provide these answers.

The same grounding explains a consequence that may at first seem odd. An addressee who accepts a conclusion because of the strength a formulation signals, and not because of the strength its reasons provide, has not had their epistemic position improved in the way the theory requires, even when the reasons happen to be good. By the same standard, making a weak inference accessible is a merit, because it gives the addressee what is needed to reject it. Calibration is the epistemological theory's own standard applied to the formulation of arguments.

Three objections help to fix the scope of the norm. The first holds that calibration is a stylistic virtue with no place in a theory of argument quality. The derivation above answers it. The norm is grounded in the epistemic function by which the theory defines a good argument, and a formulation that inflates or obscures interferes with that function whatever its stylistic merits. A well-turned sentence can be badly calibrated, and a clumsy one can be calibrated perfectly well, as (8c) in Section 8 shows.

The second objection holds that the norm demands maximal explicitness, so that every argument would have to state its warrant and mark every step. The norm demands sufficiency. Accessibility must be high enough for the intended addressee to evaluate the support, and for many addressees in many contexts that level is reached with role assignment and direction alone, or with no marker at all. Over-marking, as in (1e), does not raise accessibility and may add processing cost (Section 5), so the norm gives no reason to prefer it. The second clause of the norm is a floor set by the addressee and the context, and it sets no ceiling on economy of expression.

The third objection asks who determines the support that signalled strength is to be proportionate to. If support were contested, the norm would seem to inherit the dispute. It does, and this is as it should be. The calibration norm is parasitic on an assessment of support supplied by the epistemological theory, and it does not offer a rival standard of support. Where support is known, as in the stipulated cases of this paper, the diagnosis follows directly. Where support is uncertain, the norm still constrains the formulation, since signalling more strength than any defensible assessment of the support would allow is a form of inflation. The division of labour is deliberate. Epistemology says how strong the support is, and the theory of accessibility says how a formulation should present it.

7 Positioning: The Interface Layer

Several bodies of work lie close to the present proposal, and the comparison is most useful when it is functional. For each framework the relevant questions are what it sets out to explain, what it supplies that the present account uses, and what the present account adds (Table 3). The comparison is not meant to show that earlier work ignored language or accessibility. Much of it has studied both in depth.

The closest neighbour lies within the epistemological theory itself. As Section 1 noted, Lumer's conditions of adequacy already concern how readily an addressee can follow an argument, and the present proposal builds on them. It does not claim to introduce accessibility into the epistemological theory for the first time. Its more specific contribution is to reconstruct accessibility as a graded and linguistically mediated dimension, to provide a comparative criterion for how formulations make inferential relations recoverable, and to distinguish that dimension both from the support relation and from the strength the wording signals. Lumer's conditions, as formulated, work as thresholds. They say when an argument is too inaccessible to serve its function, and they do not relate how strongly an argument is presented to how strong it is. Whether this matters can be tested on particular cases, to which I turn after reviewing the other neighbours.

A second neighbour is the study of argumentative indicators. Van Eemeren et al. (2007, pp. ix, 1) examine how linguistic expressions help an analyst identify argumentative moves and reconstruct discourse as a critical discussion within a pragma-dialectical framework. Their question is which expressions indicate which moves at each stage of the resolution of a difference of opinion, and the ideal model of a critical discussion allows them to classify indicators functionally (van Eemeren et al., 2007, pp. 5, 17). The present account uses the same expressions, yet it compares them by the

components of the support relation they make recoverable, and it relates that recoverability to the support the argument provides. Comparing what a formulation signals with the support the argument has falls outside the aims of the indicator programme, and it is the comparison on which calibration rests.

A third neighbour is the study of modality in argumentation. Rocci (2008, pp. 180, 183) shows that epistemic-doxastic modals stand in a constitutive relation to the inferential form of an argument and serve as indicators within its reconstruction. His analysis supplies the reason why modals appear in the present model as mixed resources, which both encode aspects of inference and signal strength. Grading the recoverability of a fixed support relation is not among the aims of his study. A related line of work, discussed in Section 3, examines strength as a marker of commitment (Boulat & Maillat, 2023). Its object is the firmness with which one assumption is presented, and the present account takes up the question of how that firmness stands to the support relation between assumptions.

Attempts to find a criterion of quality within the epistemological theory have drawn on abstract epistemology, as in the proposal of a modal norm of safety for epistemic argumentation (de Grefte, 2022, p. 389), and they do not descend to linguistic form. Work in the argumentation-scheme tradition already grades relevance. Macagno (2018, p. 42) makes the assessment of relevance and of its strength depend on the number of inferential steps required, the types of argumentation schemes involved, and the implicit premises required, and he defines inferential distance by the number and the acceptability of the inferences needed to connect a premise to a conclusion (Macagno, 2018, p. 57). On his account argumentative relevance is scalar, since a premise can support a conclusion more or less effectively depending on the probative force of the type of argument and on the number and acceptability of the implicit premises or intermediate conclusions it needs (Macagno, 2018, p. 57). The present proposal is adjacent to his. Macagno grades the strength of relevance through inferential distance and schemes. I grade the recoverability of the support relation itself, holding the relation and the propositional content fixed while their linguistic realization varies. A recent account treats conventional implicatures as argumentative material anchored in linguistic form (Hautli-Janisz et al., 2023). Its focus is on how such material contributes to the construction and evaluation of arguments, and the recoverability of an independently specified support relation is not its topic. Experimental studies of how the formulation of an argument affects its processing and acceptability, including the acceptability of fallacies under different connectives (Schumann et al., 2019, 2021), are the closest empirical neighbours of the present account. They measure formulation effects and do not posit accessibility as a dimension distinct from epistemic support.

Table 3
The present account in relation to neighbouring frameworks

Framework	Question addressed	What the present account adds
Conditions of adequacy (Lumer, 2023)	When is an argument fit to persuade a given addressee rationally?	Accessibility as a graded dimension, related to support and signalled strength through the norm of calibration
Argumentative indicators (van Eemeren et al., 2007)	Which expressions indicate which argumentative moves and discussion stages?	Comparison of expressions by the components of the support relation they make recoverable
Modality and argumentation (Rocci, 2008)	How do modal expressions relate to the inferential form of an argument?	Modals treated as mixed resources that both encode inference and signal strength
Strength as commitment (Boulat & Maillat, 2023)	How firmly is a single assumption communicated?	Relation between the strength a formulation signals and the support between assumptions
Graded relevance (Macagno, 2018)	How strongly is an utterance relevant to a conclusion?	Gradation of the recoverability of a fixed support relation
Formulation effects (Schumann et al., 2019, 2021)	How does wording affect the processing and acceptability of arguments?	Conceptual distinctions from which such effects can be predicted

A description of what each framework studies does not settle whether the present account adds anything, since a framework may capture a distinction without naming it. A more direct test is to ask whether the concepts of each framework, as formulated, distinguish between formulations that the present account distinguishes. Two contrasts from this paper serve the purpose. In (2a) and (2b) support and signalled strength are the same and accessibility differs. In (9b) and (9c) support and accessibility are the same and signalled strength differs. Table 4 records the outcome.

Table 4
Two test contrasts and what each framework, as formulated, registers

Framework	(2a) vs (2b): same support and signalled strength, different accessibility	(9b) vs (9c): same support and accessibility, different signalled strength
Conditions of adequacy (Lumer, 2023)	Not distinguished: both formulations are ordered and present no overly compressed derivation	Not distinguished as a matter of support: the same argument is presented, and at most the strength cue could count as a superfluous element
Argumentative indicators (van Eemeren et al., 2007)	Partly distinguished: an indicator is present in (2b) and absent in (2a), with no gradation by components of the support relation	Partly distinguished: the strength cue may be registered as qualifying the standpoint, without comparison with the support provided
Graded relevance (Macagno, 2018)	Not distinguished: inferential steps, schemes, and implicit premises are the same	Not distinguished: the relevance of the reason to the conclusion is unchanged
Strength as commitment (Boulat & Maillat, 2023)	Not addressed: no difference in communicated commitment	Registered as stronger commitment in (9c), without relation to support
Present account	Distinguished: (2a) obscures its support and (2b) is calibrated	Distinguished: (9b) is calibrated and (9c) inflates its argument

Each neighbouring framework registers part of what separates the members of a pair, and none of them, as formulated, issues a verdict on both pairs. The second contrast is the decisive one. An account of adequacy evaluates (9b) and (9c) as one argument, an account of indicators finds the same connective in both, and an account of commitment finds a stronger commitment in (9c) with no standard against which to judge it excessive. Only an account that holds support, accessibility, and signalled strength apart can say that (9b) exposes a weak inference and (9c) inflates it. The claim is limited to the frameworks as they stand. Each could be extended to capture these contrasts, but the extension would have to introduce the distinctions argued for here, and that is the sense in which the present account adds something to them. The conclusion is also limited in a second way. It shows that the combined framework yields verdicts its components do not yield separately. It does not show that no other combination of existing concepts could yield them, which is a question an argument of this kind cannot settle.

The pragmatics–argumentation interface is already the subject of substantial research. Oswald (2023, pp. 144–145) organizes half a century of work on it into descriptive, normative, and explanatory contributions and judges its potential far from exhausted. The gap addressed here is narrower than a general absence of linguistic approaches to argumentation. It concerns the relation between the epistemic support an argument provides and the linguistic resources through which an addressee can recover that support. Existing accounts offer analyses of argumentative indicators, inferential processing, relevance, epistemic evaluation, and addressee-oriented adequacy. The present proposal

connects these concerns by treating argumentative accessibility as a graded, linguistically mediated dimension, by distinguishing it from epistemic support and from signalled strength, and by showing how the three dimensions jointly inform a norm of calibration. That is the specific theoretical contribution claimed here. Whether the proposed criterion reliably differentiates formulations in ways that predict how actual addressees recover and evaluate support remains an empirical question.

8 Analytical Illustrations

Since the concept is linguistic-pragmatic, it needs to be shown at work on linguistic material. The illustrations below are analytical. They display, case by case, how support, accessibility, and signalled strength come apart. They make no distributional claim, they are not a corpus, and they do not measure how addressees respond. The method is the same throughout. Except where noted for (10), premises and conclusion are held fixed and the support relation is fixed by stipulation, so any difference in how readily the transition can be recovered is due to realization and not to content.

Consider again the bridge argument of (1). Given the stipulated engineering evidence, the grounds for closure are the same in every variant. In (1a) the addressee must work out that the corrosion is offered as a reason for the closure and which way the inference runs; the connective in (1b) and the adverbial in (1c) state both. On the present abstraction, the support relation is the same with or without *so* or *therefore*, and only its recoverability changes. Further marking, as in (1e), adds nothing to the epistemic force of the reason and encodes no further component. A variant that stated the warrant, that corrosion above the threshold compromises the cable's load-bearing capacity, would raise accessibility by making the fourth component recoverable. The warrant is part of the stipulated background in every variant and is simply left unstated in (1a–e).

A second set of variants, taken from ordinary institutional reasoning, makes the same point. Suppose the only stated requirement for the post is ten years of relevant experience:

(8) a. The applicant has ten years of relevant experience. She meets the requirements for the post.

1. b. The applicant has ten years of relevant experience, so she meets the requirements for the post.
2. c. Because the applicant has ten years of relevant experience, it clearly and undeniably follows that she meets the requirements for the post.

Given the stipulation, the support is decisive and the same in all three variants. (8a) leaves role assignment and direction to be recovered unaided, (8b) encodes them with one connective, and (8c) adds the strength cues *clearly and undeniably* to an inferential cue. If accessibility were a relabelling of the strength of the argument, the three variants would have to be treated as equivalent, since their support is equal. They differ in how much inferential work their wording leaves to the addressee, and that difference is what the model isolates. Since the support really is decisive, the strength signalled in (8c) is proportionate. The variant is over-marked, but it does not inflate the argument.

The clearest illustration is one in which the dimensions vary one at a time. Recall (3) and place it between two variants resting on the same weak ground:

(9) a. The defendant was in the city that day. He committed the fraud.

1. b. The defendant was in the city that day; he therefore committed the fraud.
2. c. The defendant was in the city that day; he is therefore, quite clearly, the person who committed the fraud.

The support is equally thin in (9a–c). Being in a city does next to nothing to show that someone committed a fraud, and no marker can change that. (9b), which repeats (3), raises accessibility relative to (9a) by encoding role assignment and direction, and in doing so it makes the weakness of the step visible. (9c) encodes no further component and adds a strength cue that presents the step as evident. From (9a) to (9b) accessibility rises and support stays the same; from (9b) to (9c) signalled strength rises and both support and accessibility stay the same. Together with (2a), where strong support has low accessibility, these variants show variation in each direction and distinguish inflation from explicitness. They do not tell us how often such configurations occur or how addressees respond to them. They show that the configurations are coherent and can be constructed, and the conceptual claim requires no more.

A final pair illustrates a limit of the criterion. It compares two formulations directed toward the same conclusion and set against the same stipulated background. They differ in what they make explicit: one marks the inferential transition, and the other states the warrant that connects the evidence to the conclusion.

(10) a. The main cable is corroded beyond the safety threshold, so the bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.

b. The main cable is corroded beyond the safety threshold. A cable in that condition cannot be relied on to carry heavy loads. The bridge should be closed to heavy traffic.

In (10a) the connective *so* encodes role assignment and direction and leaves the warrant implicit. In (10b) the second sentence states the warrant, and the relation between the first sentence, the warrant, and the conclusion has to be reconstructed from their content and arrangement. The two formulations do not assert the same propositions, since (10b) adds a sentence. The added proposition, however, belongs to the stipulated background of both, so that (10b) makes explicit a part of the argument that (10a) leaves implicit. Each formulation therefore makes available a component that the other leaves implicit, and the criterion does not rank them, because neither makes recoverable everything the other does. For a particular addressee one may still be easier to follow than the other: an engineer may need only the connective, and a lay reader may benefit more from an explicit warrant. That difference depends on the addressee and the context, and the criterion registers it only once they are fixed. Both formulations can satisfy the norm of calibration, provided that the support is recoverable enough for the

intended addressee to evaluate it and that the wording signals no more strength than the support warrants.

9 The Theoretical Consequence

The analysis has a consequence for the structure of the epistemological theory. Siegel gives the abstract propositional sense of argument conceptual priority (Siegel, 2023, p. 517). This priority can be read as leaving the relation between that sense and its linguistic realization undeveloped. The present account accepts the epistemic priority of the propositional argument and denies that independence from language follows from it. The propositional argument may be epistemically primary while its accessibility is linguistically mediated; epistemic priority does not entail linguistic independence. The result is a repair from within the theory. It places the contribution of language where the theory says little, and through the norm of calibration it applies the theory's own standard, that arguments should improve the addressee's epistemic position, to the formulations in which arguments are offered.

The repair bears on the exchange between Siegel and Lumer in a specific way. Siegel answers the charge that support is a metaphor by appeal to the notion of a reason as a consideration that counts in favour of its target (Siegel, 2024, p. 539). Grant this answer. A consideration that counts in favour of a conclusion still has to be recognized as doing so by the addressee whose epistemic position the argument is meant to improve, and recognition takes place through the formulation in which the consideration is offered. The present account says how that recognition is afforded and when a formulation helps or hinders it. Lumer, for his part, already includes addressee-relative conditions within adequacy (Lumer, 2023, p. 580). The present account gives those conditions a common dimension and links them to the strength a formulation signals. The proposal does not require abandoning either commitment. Siegel's account can retain the epistemic priority of the propositional argument, and Lumer's account can retain the addressee-relativity of adequacy. The contribution is to specify a linguistic interface through which the support relation becomes accessible to the addressee, without identifying accessibility with support itself.

The consequence also has a methodological side. If accessibility is linguistically mediated, the evaluation of actual argumentative discourse cannot proceed by reconstructing the propositional argument and setting the formulation aside. Reconstruction remains indispensable for assessing support. The assessment of presentation, which includes the questions whether the formulation inflates its argument and whether it makes the support recoverable for its audience, requires attention to the very features that reconstruction removes. An evaluator who worked only with the reconstructed argument would find (9b) and (9c) identical and could not explain what is wrong with the second.

The claims of the paper differ in standing, and the difference should be kept in view. That a rise in accessibility does not entail a rise in support, and that signalled strength is distinct from both, is a conceptual claim established by analysis. The norm of calibration is a normative claim, defended by appeal to the epistemic function of argument. Neither depends on measurement. What the distinctions

open is an empirical question for future research: whether, and under what conditions, differences in linguistic accessibility affect an addressee's recovery and evaluation of an argument when its support relation is held constant.

10 Conclusion

The epistemological theory of argumentation grounds argumentative quality in the epistemic support that reasons provide for a conclusion. This paper has argued that a further question needs an answer: how does the linguistic formulation of an argument make that support relation recoverable to an addressee? I have proposed *argumentative accessibility* as the degree to which the inferential relation between premises and conclusion can be recovered from an argument's linguistic realization in context. The proposal distinguishes epistemic support, the recoverability of the inferential transition, and the strength the formulation signals, and it keeps all three apart from the addressee's actual recovery. Constructed contrasts show that these dimensions can vary independently at the conceptual level. A strongly supported conclusion may be presented so that the inferential transition is hard to recover, and a weak inference may be made explicit without becoming epistemically stronger. The norm of calibration draws on this distinction to assess whether a formulation signals strength proportionately and makes the support relation sufficiently accessible for evaluation by its intended addressee. Making a weak argument recoverable is a merit of presentation, and inflating or obscuring an argument is a defect. The contribution is an analytical and normative extension of the epistemological theory. It does not claim that accessibility has been absent from earlier accounts of argumentation.

The proposal has several limitations. First, it provides no empirical evidence about how actual addressees process, recover, or evaluate the formulations discussed. The examples establish conceptual contrasts and motivate testable predictions, and they do not demonstrate corresponding psychological effects. Second, the criterion of accessibility is comparative and ordinal. It supports the analysis of differences between formulations without assigning absolute values or assuming that its components carry equal weight in every context, and it leaves some comparisons unsettled. Third, the linguistic resources discussed here do not form an exhaustive inventory, and their contribution to accessibility may interact with contextual assumptions, propositional interpretation, and the knowledge of the addressee. The separation of linguistic realization from propositional content is therefore a controlled analytical idealization. It is most straightforward where the inferential transition is marked without any change in the stipulated support relation, and less exact for scalar and modal expressions whose interpretation may affect other dimensions of the utterance. Finally, although the proposal is meant to apply beyond English, the linguistic resources through which inferential relations become recoverable may differ across languages. Cross-linguistic comparison and empirical investigation are needed to establish how far the distinctions developed here generalize across contexts and groups of addressees.

Use of Generative AI

During the preparation of this manuscript the author used Claude (Anthropic), a large language model, to assist in drafting and revising the English text and in preliminary searches of the literature. The author directed the work and made all decisions about its content, and all sources, quotations, and page references were checked by the author against the original publications. The author takes full responsibility for the content of the article.

Declarations

Author Contribution

Jassim Khairy Haidar was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, investigation, formal analysis, writing of the original draft, and review and editing of the manuscript. The author approved the final version of the manuscript and takes responsibility for its content.

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