Argumentation in the speeches of the United Nations Security Council

Annotation Guideline

1. Introduction

Argumentation mining research requires high quality textual data reflecting argumentative structure of texts. In fact, conceptualization of arguments varies depending on the domain (e.g., political, medical, social media, student essays). Thus, creating novel corpora with argumentative structure from yet inexistent domains remains in demand. As one of the objectives of our study, we aim at building a novel dataset with argumentation structure labels. We focus on diplomatic speeches from the gatherings of the United Nations Security Council (hereinafter, UNSC) – a genre which is yet unexplored in the field of argumentation mining. To facilitate the working process of annotators, we present this annotation guideline.

When creating this guideline, we originally relied on the guideline by Haddadan et al. (1), which covers the procedure of annotating arguments in political debates - a discourse related to ours. We build upon argumentative concepts and examples introduced in their work and extend their guidelines – in order to account for subtleties of the UNSC speeches and provide some illustrative examples from our data collection.

Argumentation mining pipeline can be comprised of multiple tasks, each of which requires different types of input data and labels. Within the scope of our project, we focus on the tasks of **a)** argumentative structure detection – define whether a text contains an argument or not; **b)** argument component classification – whether the present argument component is a claim or a premise; and **c)** components' relation detection – whether a given premise and a given claim are related, i.e., if they belong to the same argument.

To provide labels to these classification tasks, we focus on the following annotation steps:

- labelling the spans of texts as claims or premises (Section 3)
- linking premises with their respective claims (Section 3)
- marking their relation type, which could either be a support or an attack (Section 4).

2. Corpus

The materials for the dataset were retrieved from the website of the United Nations Digital Library (link). We selected speeches from the UNSC gatherings dedicated to discussions of the conflict in Ukraine. We considered gatherings that took place from 2014 to 2018. The total number of speeches is 144.

3. Argument components

Arguments are complex structures, comprised of several units - argument components. The central component of an argument is a claim – a controversial standpoint that needs to be justified. It is justified through a premise – another argument component, which provides reasons why the claim is true and should be perceived as such. The following subsections explain how claims and premises can be identified in the UNSC speeches.

3.1. Claims

In diplomatic speeches, where the thematic focus is a military conflict, claims might be the nation's interpretations and evaluations of the current situation. In the example (1), the representative of France first claims that Russia did not follow a protocol it agreed upon, and then provides a list of reasons why this is the case, to support their first judgement.

(1) France, 2014:

On the other hand, **[the Russian side has complied with none of the 17 April commitments]**. *[There has been no condemnation of the separatist actions that have spawned new violence and no call for public buildings to be evacuated]. [There has been no appeal to the pro-Russian militants to exercise restraint and end their attacks on munitions depots and on their compatriots. . .]*[1]

Another possible form of claims in the diplomatic speeches is the nation's stance towards the conflicting party's policies and activities, as in the example (2).

(2) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

[We strongly condemn the detention of military monitors of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), as well as of Ukrainian staff by illegal armed groups].

In addition, claims might be represented as the nation's expectations towards further development of the conflict. Such claims can appear in a standalone manner and not necessarily be supported by premises, as in (3). At the same time, they can appear in

[1] Claims are written in **bold**, premises are in *italics*, [brackets] indicate the component boundaries.

a group of consequent claims, advocating for the same main idea, but covering it from different angles, as in (4).

(3) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

[All provocative actions and hostile rhetoric aimed at destabilizing Ukraine must cease immediately].

(4) Lithuania, 2014:

[The safety of the international observers deployed across Ukraine must be guaranteed by all of the parties]. **[We take this opportunity to reiterate our strong condemnation of the kidnapping of a team of military inspectors deployed under the OSCE 2011 Vienna Document]**. **[We reiterate our call on Russia to continue using all of its influence on the pro-Russian separatists to free, unconditionally and without delay, the seven monitors from OSCE participating States, whom they have been detaining in Sloviansk for one week now, as well as the Ukrainian personnel accompanying them]**.

Sometimes certain linguistic markers can be indicative of claims. Such linguistic markers usually take the form of complement clauses as "we think", "we believe" or be in the form of discourse connectives as "thus", "as a result", "this is why". In diplomatic speeches of our corpus, the presence of such modal verbs as "must" and "should" might indicate the country's position towards a situation and the expectations towards other party's policies. Utterances starting with "we condemn", "we call for", "we reiterate our position" are likely to be claims as well.

It is also important to remember that sometimes one claim is the only element of an argument. It is typical for cases when speakers do not provide any justifications for their statements, thus omitting premises in their argumentation. In the context of UNSC gatherings, it is often the case for shorter speeches.

3.2. Premises

The most common type of premises typical for the conflict-related diplomatic speeches include references to some events or documents. Such statements can feature dates, participants, describe precise actions, consequences, including, e.g., the number of victims, number and types of weapons used. Examples (5), (6) and (7) are representative of premises. More rarely, like in the example (8), premises can be preceded by an interrogative structure, initiating the reasoning and justifications on a certain issue.

(5) United States, 2014:

Since 17 April, **[the Government of Ukraine has acted in good faith and with admirable restraint to fulfil its commitments]**. *[The Kyiv city hall and its surrounding area are now clear of all Maidan barricades and protestors]*. *[Over the Easter holiday, Ukraine voluntarily suspended its counter-terrorism initiative, choosing to de-escalate*

despite its fundamental right to provide security on its own territory and for its own people]. *[Unlike the separatists, Ukraine has cooperated fully with the OSCE special monitoring mission and allowed its observers to operate in regions about which Moscow had voiced concerns regarding the treatment of ethnic Russians]*.

(6) United Kingdom, 2014:

[The situation in eastern Ukraine has continued to deteriorate]. *[Armed groups stormed the Prosecutor's office in Donetsk yesterday, further increasing the number of Government buildings occupied since the 17 April Geneva agreement]*. *[We remain seriously concerned about the kidnapping and continued detention of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Vienna Document inspectors. . .]*

(7) Ukraine, 2015:

As of today, **[the Russian Federation is continuing its military aggression in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of Ukraine]** *[by sending military units into our territory, delivering heavy weapons to the local terrorist groups, training, equipping and financing mercenaries and waging an information war]*.

(8) Ukraine, 2015:

On mobilization, yes, **[we are in the process of reforming our army, which was fully destroyed in recent years]**. Why are we doing that? Because of the facts expressed today - *[the enlargement of the Russian military presence in Donbas, Ukraine, with thousands of Russian nationals and sophisticated weaponry]*. *[We have a right to defend ourselves]*. **[That is why we are doing so, ourselves]**.

Like claims, premises can also be characterized by various linguistic markers. As stated in the guidelines for USElecDeb annotations, markers like "because", "as" and "for example" might indicate premises. Applied to diplomatic speech in the setting of UNSC meetings, the premise-related linguistic markers can also include "this is the reason why…", "the report shows…", "as reported/stated…". We note that, however, even though certain lexical or syntactic means might signal premises, their presence does not necessarily mean that the unit is a premise and, it is always more important to consider the paragraph as a whole rather than simply rely on linguistic markers.

3.3. Positions of argumentative units

When an argument is comprised of a claim and one or more premises, the position of a premise in relation to a claim can vary. A premise can be preceding (9) a claim or following it (10). In cases when a claim is supported by more than one premise, premises can be positioned before and after a claim as well as surround a claim from both sides.

(9) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

[We are acutely alarmed by the observations reported by the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission, detailing the influx of military equipment, weapons and armed personnel into the region of Ukraine held by armed rebel groups]. **[It represents a clear violation of the Minsk agreements, a serious encroachment on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, and a challenge to the future of the country]**.

(10) Australia, 2014:

[This investigation is independent]. *[It is being undertaken by an independent body – the Dutch Safety Board]*.

3.4. Boundaries of argumentative units

Each argumentative unit must independently convey a meaning, as stated in the guidelines by Haddadan et al. Such units are not always limited to the sentence level and can sometimes take smaller forms, e.g., clauses. The main motivation for annotating two different clauses as two independent argument units should be independence in the key argumentative points they carry. Example (11) represents a sentence with two clauses, where each clause introduces a separate argumentative point, and, consequently, each clause represents an independent claim.

(11) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

[While the situation on the ground remains tense], **[such constructive diplomatic efforts give us reasons for hope]**.

Sometimes argumentative units are preceded or followed by discourse connectives, - words or phrases that connect or relate two coherent sentences or phrases and indicate the presence of discourse relations. Examples include "but", "in contrast", "because", "thus", "later", "previously" and so on. The full list of discourse connectives for English can be found, for example, here[2]. Such discourse connectives typically do not enhance to the meaning of an argument. Thus, we advise excluding such connectives from argumentative units whenever possible, without damaging the meaning. Example (12) illustrates such exclusion and a sentence with a claim in it.

(12) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

In conclusion, **[the Republic of Korea supports the ongoing diplomatic efforts towards the stabilization of Ukraine, including the recent meetings on the sidelines of the Asia-Europe summit in Milan]**.

[2] https://github.com/discourse-lab/en_dimlex

Sometimes, claims or premises are introduced following a complementary clause. For example, in a sentence "I believe, abortions must be legal", the core part of the claim is introduced after the complementary structure "I believe". We consider such structures to be necessary parts of arguments, and, thus, suggest including them into the argumentative span. Examples (13) and (14) illustrate similar cases.

(13) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

[We need to keep in mind that the slightest provocation could once again cause the situation to spiral further out of control].

(14) The Republic of Korea, 2014:

In that regard, **[we believe that there must be effective control and credible verification of the ceasefire as an integral part of the implementation of the Minsk ceasefire memorandum]**.

3.5. Claim vs. premise controversial case

Differentiating claims and premises can be challenging in certain contexts. In case of the UNSC speeches, there are situations when a sentence or a phrase possesses necessary claim's properties but is in fact a premise. This happens in the presence of another claim, which provides a more global, key conclusion, while the phrase that seemed to be a claim from the first sight is in fact serving as a premise for this global claim. To see this through an example, consider the following sentence: "Rwanda remains of the view that military action will only worsen the already tense situation". Indeed, it could be a claim as it represents a county's opinion towards the future course of events. However, in the speech, it is followed by "We encourage all the parties involved, particularly in the current situation, to exercise full restraint.", which makes us interpret the second sentence as a claim and the first one as a premise, meaning that Rwanda believes that that countries should exercise full restraint *because* the opposite would only worsen the already tense situations.

4. Relation types between premises and claims

Annotating relations implies drawing a directed link from a premise to its corresponding claim as well as labelling the type of their relation. Two relation types are typically distinguished – support and attack.

A premise that is linked to a claim by a **support** relation contains evidence, reasons or justifications that are used to persuade the audience that a claim is true, plausible or reasonable. The support provides the reasoning behind the claim and aims to substantiate it. Example (15) illustrates an argumentative structure where a supporting premise is following a claim. The premise provides evidence from the past that explains why a given claim should be perceived as true.

(15) France, 2014:

[The violence continues]. *[Seven observers of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) were taken hostage on 25 April].*

A supporting premise often answers the question *why* the claim holds.

(16) Russian Federation, 2014:

[Kyiv has not evacuated civilians from those areas]. **[People must risk their lives to flee the areas of military clashes by themselves]**.

Another premise-claim relation type is attack. An attacking premise contains either potential counterarguments to the speaker's own claim or criticisms towards a claim held by someone else. In the first case, the counterargument is usually given in order to preempt an objection that a hearer could make, effectively saying "I am aware of this counterargument". Example (17) illustrates such a case. In the second case, the purpose of the premise is to undermine or refute an opponent's claim and to point at the claim's inconsistencies, contradictions or (most often) lack of evidence.

Example (17) introduces an issue (armed attacks in the context of the conflict), and states that massive armed clashes are absent since some time. Despite this evidence, the claim is presenting a contradictory point – that the security situation is nevertheless unstable.

(17) China, 2014:

China notes that, *[since the signing of the Minsk agreements between the Ukrainian Government and eastern militias at the beginning of September, there have been no large-scale armed clashes in eastern Ukraine]*. However, **[the security situation on the ground still remains fragile with sporadic violent attacks in violation of the ceasefire agreement, causing casualties and damage to infrastructure]**.

It should be noted, however, that in the UNSC speeches it is expected that the majority of premises *would support rather than attack* a claim. These speeches are typically prepared and pithy monologues which serve to express a given country's standpoint on the discussed matter. The elements of debating and refuting different countries' positions (where attacking premises typically occur) is infrequent in diplomatic speeches of this kind, where speakers aim at promoting diplomacy and collaboration while maintaining linguistic decorum.

References

1. Shohreh Haddadan, Elena Cabrio, and Serena Villata. 2019. Yes, we can! Mining Arguments in 50 Years of US Presidential Campaign Debates. In *Proceedings of the 57th Annual Meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics*, pages 4684–4690, Florence, Italy. Association for Computational Linguistics.