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A Description of Argument Schemes Employed in Citizen Television's News Gang Talk Show: A Pragma- Dialectical Approach

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Abstract

This study aimed to describe the argument schemes employed in Citizen Television's News Gang talk show using a pragma-dialectical approach. The study was guided by the pragma-dialectical theory developed by Frans H. van Eemeren and Rob Grootendorst, which explains how discussants balance reasonableness and persuasion in argumentative discourse. A descriptive research design and qualitative approach were employed to collect and analyse data. The study used systematic sampling to select 12 episodes from a target population of 47 episodes broadcast between February and December 2025. Data were obtained from online archival records on YouTube, manually transcribed, and analysed using pragma-dialectical principles. The findings established that News Gang employed three types of argument schemes: symptomatic, causal, and comparison. These schemes were used at different stages of critical discussion, particularly during the argumentation stage, to advance and justify discussants' standpoints. The study contributes to the understanding of argumentation in televised talk shows and demonstrates the applicability of the pragma-dialectical approach to discourse analysis. Furthermore, analysing argument schemes provides a framework for reconstructing premises and identifying the underlying logical structures of televised discourse.

Key terms: Argument schemes, discussants, premise, standpoint, talk show.

INTRODUCTION

Televised political discussions are structured and serve as a highly significant setting for analysing argumentation. This gives room for scholars to study how argument schemes are constructed. When dealing with Television talk shows, it is unavoidable that differences in opinion arise among discussants. There is limited understanding as to how argument schemes are utilised in the News Gang talk show; thus, the study discusses the argument schemes (symptomatic, causal and comparison). News Gang serves as a platform for breaking down and criticising current affairs and issues affecting the country. The main role of News Gang is in- depth political analysis, holding the state accountable and general public education.

News Gang talk show employs argument schemes as it deconstructs matters affecting Kenya as a country. According to van Eemeren (2010), argument schemes are patterns used in a discussion to connect evidence to a conclusion. Discussants in the New Gang talk show use these patterns to ensure there is a balance of two goals at the same time: reasonableness and persuasion (van Eemeren, 2010). The show makes use of symptomatic, causal and comparison argument schemes at different stages of a critical discussion.

In talk shows, it is inescapable that differences in opinion arise among the discussants. This therefore calls for the use of argument schemes. This paper therefore sought to describe argument schemes employed in Citizen Television's *News Gang* talk show to uncover the reasoning patterns used in the News Gang talk show and examine their effectiveness in resolving differences of opinion on the merits. This was done by breaking the speaker's discourse into claims (conclusions) and supporting reasons (premises). A talk show is a semi-formal, blended genre that merges elements of casual, unscripted dialogue with strict rules and regulations of public, media-driven broadcasting (Ilie, 2001).

News Gang talk show utilises three argument schemes: symptomatic argument schemes to recognise structural issues such as political goonism, causal argument schemes to give immediate accountability and comparison to contrast contemporary issues against historical happenings.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study applied the pragma-dialectical theory, which deals with how discussants resolve differences of opinion on the merits through reasonableness and persuasiveness. Resolving a difference of opinion usually involves four stages, namely: Confrontation stage- the very first stage of critical discussion where a difference of opinion is established. The discussants in this stage express their own points of view freely and reject the opposite point of view (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). In this stage, the discussants establish the necessary context for choosing the most appropriate argument scheme. The second stage is the opening stage, where discussants determine if there is enough common ground so as to resolve the difference of opinion on merits. In the opening stage, discussants determine their point of departure, agree upon the rules of discussion and establish which propositions they use in their argumentation (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004).

The opening stage determines which specific types of argument schemes are used in the discussion. The argumentation stage is the third and the most critical phase of a critical discussion, where the protagonist utilises the scheme and defends their point of view by putting forward the argument to counter the antagonist's objection or doubts (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004). The concluding stage is the fourth and final phase of a critical discussion, where the two parties need to clarify whether the difference has been resolved and, if so, to whose advantage (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2004).

This stage evaluates the success of the argument scheme employed in the discussion. The four stages generally provide a sequential systematic framework to conduct a discussion. Evaluation of argument schemes is directly linked to the four stages of a critical discussion and is governed by the rules of a critical discussion.

Sibalatani (2024) looks at "A pragma-dialectical approach in TV talk show: argumentation in Namibia Broadcasting Corporation's one-on-one discourse." Sibalatani's work is guided by the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation, which concludes that the arguers manoeuvre strategically at every stage of discussion to maintain their standpoints. Sibalatani

(2024) focuses on how the three categories of argument schemes- symptomatic, causal or comparison are functionally deployed to achieve interactional outcomes.

Mwai (2018) observes that talk show programs serve as a platform for public policy discussions and political accountability by analysing the generic structure, question topology, and communicative purposes of argumentative talk shows on Kenyan radio and television. The structure Mwai (2018) utilises can be applied in analysing the argument schemes of the *News Gang* talk show discussions. While Mwai (2018) looks at the question-and-answer discourse structure, this study addresses argument schemes (causal, symptomatic and comparison) with hidden premises. Oduma (2025) contends that discussants used symptomatic argument schemes, specifically argument from administrative authority, to give directions on debates in Nairobi County Assembly, thereby determining the assembly's decisions in order to resolve a difference of opinion.

Oduma (2025) was limited to parliamentary discourse as compared to other forms of political discourse such as speeches, interviews or campaign speeches. These studies are important to the current study, which analyses argument schemes in Citizen Television's News Gang talk show using the pragma-dialectical approach. Oduma (2025) gives the theoretical blueprint for analysing argumentation works through the pragma-dialectical framework. Analysing how discussants engage in the News Gang talk show using argument schemes (symptomatic, causal and comparison) builds on the application of the pragma-dialectical theory as a framework for analysing debates.

Both Oduma (2025) and Sibalatani (2024) agree on the categorisation of argument schemes and the utilisation of the pragma-dialectical approach that was established by van Eemeren and Grootendorst (2004). The two (Oduma, 2025 & Sibalatani, 2024) rely on the same three main categories of argument schemes (symptomatic, causal and comparison) to analyse how discussants attempt to resolve a difference of opinion on merits, just like the current study relies on the three categories of argument schemes.

As Oduma (2025) and Sibalatani (2024) employ the pragma-dialectical approach, they differ in their findings regarding which particular argument scheme dominates their data sets and how the schemes interact with the communicative genre. Oduma (2025) establishes that discussants mainly use pragmatic and symptomatic argument schemes, while Sibalatani (2024) utilises symptomatic argument schemes, particularly argument by authority and argument by example. This study employed the three categories of argument schemes at all stages of a critical discussion. The argument schemes mainly occurred at the argumentation stage.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive research design using qualitative methods to collect archival data consisting of past episodes of the *News Gang* talk show on Citizen Television. The descriptive qualitative approach allowed the researcher to explain how an argument was built. Descriptive design also gives the researcher the flexibility to formulate hidden logic and unstated assumptions, making it much easier to reconstruct an argument.

The data consisted of 47 episode transcripts available in the online archive, of which 12 episodes were systematically sampled by picking the second episode (second Thursday) of every month. Data between February, 2025 and December, 2025 (Thursdays) were collected, equating to 11months. Qualitative archival data from YouTube of the records of News Gang transcripts were obtained. Data were analysed using the pragma-dialectical theory. Only transcripts that had relevant moves and counter-moves were selected for analysis. This involved an analytical overview where relevant moves helped in reconstructing argument schemes.

The researcher acknowledged all the sources of other works related to this study by citing them accordingly. Ethical guidelines relating to respect, honesty, anonymity and confidentiality of the discussants were observed. The research permit was obtained from the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The News Gang episode data that was used for analysis was obtained from YouTube. The News Gang episodes were categorised and organised based on the subject matter of discussion. A summary of the sources from which the data for this study were extracted is presented in the table below.

Table: Table Showing the News Gang Episodes for Analysis

No.	Episode Title	Broadcast Date
1	Corruption: Waititu's Iceberg	13th February, 2025
2	Garbage in Garbage Out	27th February, 2025
3	The Mongrel Edition	13th March, 2025
4	Drama after drama, after drama…	10th April, 2025
5	DCP… And other parties	15th May, 2025
6	Police Service: Beyond Redemption?	3rd July, 2025
7	Saba Saba; Protests and coups	10th July, 2025
8	Trouble in Paradise	14th August, 2025
9	A Scrutiny of the cost of Living and debt	11th September, 2025
10	Ruto Bags Gideon Moi	9th October, 2025
11	Jumuiya: Fridges, Freedom and Democracy	13th November, 2025
12	By - Elections; Goons and Goodies	11th December, 2025

Source: Field research 2025

The study revealed that the News Gang talk show employed three types of argument schemes: symptomatic, causal and comparison when presenting their standpoints. These argument schemes were employed at all stages of critical discussion (confrontation, opening, argumentation and concluding). These schemes mainly occur at the argumentation stage of critical discussion.

Example 1: Causal Argument Scheme at the Confrontation Stage

Excerpt 1: The Mongrel Edition (ME)

> YO: *It is an extensive mongrel edition as we peruse the 10-point marriage vows between UDA and ODM. What the Constitution of Kenya hides in the text of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) can be revealed in the picture at KICC.*

In the above excerpt, YO and the panel establish a standpoint that the sharing of power between the government and the opposition should not be encouraged using a causal argument scheme. YO gives reasons in support of the standpoint that the government is busy forming political coalitions instead of working for the people as per the promises. The argument scheme generated from excerpt 1 is described below:

'*Sharing of power between the government and opposition should be discouraged*'

Because the government concentrates on forming government coalitions. Therefore, sharing power is a bad thing that should be discouraged.

From the above example, a standpoint which is established is that *sharing power should be discouraged*. The results agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory that there is a cause-and-effect link between the standpoint and the argument (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2002).

Example 2: Causal Argument Scheme at the Opening Stage

Excerpt 2: (ME)

> JM: *The problems that this country is facing are because of handshakes, but*

> *that goes to the exact same arrangement with Raila with 10 points, some of which were actually included in the arrangement that was in the BBI report that was between Raila and Uhuru. Did we as Kenyans really need Raila to come into this arrangement so that the government can start doing its job?*

In the above excerpt, JM in the opening stage is in support of the standpoint that the sharing of power between the government and the opposition should not be encouraged. JM gives reasons that the problems this country is facing are because of the handshakes. Handshakes lead to problems rather than creating solutions. The government did not necessarily need the handshake to start doing its job. The reconstruction of the argument scheme is;

'Sharing of power is bad'

The country is facing problems because of power sharing. Thus, *sharing of power between the government and the opposition is a bad thing.*

Example 3: Causal Argument Scheme at Argumentation Stage

Excerpt 3: Drama after drama after drama

> JB: *"Echoes of war" was not the only play that was linked with Malala in this year's context. There were about six other plays that had different people's names on them. There were also other plays by other directors that were more lethal-the dominant theme being greed by government officials and bad governance.*

The panel presents a standpoint that the banning of the play "Echoes of war" by Butere Girls was bad. JB supports this by agreeing with LK that the reaction from the government is to Cleophas Malala and not the young girls. The panel argues so because "Echoes of War" was not the only play associated with Cleophas Malala and addressed greed by government officials and bad governance as the dominant themes. The reconstruction of the argument scheme is as below;

'Banning of the play "Echoes of war" was bad'

There were other plays associated with Cleophas Malala, and addressing greed by government officials and bad governance as the dominant themes, but had different people's names on them. Therefore, *banning of the play was wrong.*

From the above discussion on the causal argument scheme, the results agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory that there is a cause-and-effect link between the standpoint and the argument presented (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2002). The findings reveal that the causal argument scheme is employed across the four stages of a critical discussion model: confrontation, opening, argumentation and concluding phases of the debates in Citizen Television's News Gang talk show. The application of the causal argument scheme plays a crucial role in substantiating the validity of standpoints in Citizen TV's News Gang talk show, thereby facilitating the resolution of differences of opinion among panellists in a discourse regarding the merits at hand. This scheme helps in breaking down complex political issues affecting the country, hence providing an understanding of how these issues could be addressed by providing the cause-and-effect link between the standpoints and the arguments.

Example 4: Symptomatic Argument Scheme at Argumentation Stage

Excerpt 4: Trouble in Paradise

> JB: *Maybe he (the president) should have said that we have presented this evidence to the executive and submitted it to the required authorities, not just mentioning that there will be no calls whatsoever. There are certain people who are affected and would expect calls to be made on their behalf, either to relieve them of these accusations or to keep them safe.*

In the above excerpt, JB and the panel argue that the cure for the trouble in paradise needs cleanup that must start within the executive branch itself rather than using parliament as a scapegoat.

They employ a symptomatic argument scheme by noting that the President is just making verbal attacks at the Devolution Conference without providing more details on the allegations, which is a symptom of fear and will not help solve the problem. The reconstruction of the argument scheme is;

'The cure for the trouble in paradise needs cleanup that must start within the executive branch itself rather than using parliament as a scapegoat'

Since just giving verbal attacks at the Devolution Conference without providing more details on the allegations may not be a solution to the problem. Hence, *the only cure for the trouble in paradise needs cleanup*, starting with the executive branch.

Example 5

Excerpt 5: Garbage in, garbage out

> LK: *A lot transpired on this day, and surprisingly there were no police officers to ensure law and order. Several crimes were committed, and there were no police officers to address this, not just by being present during protests and politics.*

In the above excerpt, the panel uses symptomatic argument schemes to support the standpoint that dumping of garbage in the city was a massive failure of governance. It is the responsibility of the police officers to ensure that there is order, but then they fail to. LK and the panel treat the absence of police officers as a sign of selective law enforcement since in other events like protests they would be present to address the situation at hand. The reconstruction of the symptomatic argument, therefore, is;

'Dumping of garbage was a massive failure of governance'

Absence of police officers was a sign of selective law enforcement. Thus, *dumping of garbage was a bad sign of government failure*.

The results agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory that there is a connection of coexistence between the argument presented and the standpoint defended. (Van Eemeren, 2002).

Example 6: Symptomatic Argument Schemes at Argumentation Stage

Excerpt 6: Ruto Bags Gideon Moi

> SG: *On the eve of presenting papers, Gideon Moi meets President Ruto in State House. This is the first time KANU leadership is meeting at State House during President Ruto's leadership. This resulted in Gideon Moi withdrawing from the race because he failed to present his papers.*

The panel observes that Gideon Moi's abrupt withdrawal was not a sudden change of heart, but a result of the negotiations at State House using a symptomatic argument scheme. SG and the panel argue that the meeting at State House led to that sudden change of everything. A formal meeting at State House and later not showing up to present his papers were signs that there was something wrong. Gideon Moi finally withdrew from the race just before the deadline for submitting his papers to the commission. The reconstruction of the argument scheme is;

'Gideon Moi's abrupt withdrawal from the race was not a sudden change of heart'

He did this after an indoor meeting with the president at State House. Therefore, Gideon Moi's abrupt withdrawal from the race was a shock to his supporters, who were eagerly waiting for him to submit his papers.

From the above discussion on symptomatic argument scheme, the results agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory that

there is a connection of coexistence between the argument presented and the standpoint defended. (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2002).

The application of the symptomatic argument scheme plays a crucial role in substantiating the validity of standpoints in Citizen TV's News Gang talk show, thereby facilitating the resolution of differences of opinion among panellists in a discourse regarding the merits at hand. This scheme helps in breaking down complex political issues affecting the country, hence providing an understanding of how these issues could be addressed by providing a sign, expression or symptom of what is claimed in the standpoint as the discussants try to overcome the doubts.

Example 7: Comparison Argument Scheme at Argumentation Stage

Excerpt 7

> LK: *The play "Echoes of War" (directed by Malala) attempts to illustrate the widening gap between two generations, the old and the young. The very same Malala, at the time, wrote a play entitled "Shackles of Doom" that caused similar controversy. It was about an imaginary place (Turkana) and the discovery of oil. When it caused a lot of controversy, Murkomen, who was by then a colleague, tweeted at that time that there is no greater publicity that the play would have gotten than the controversy that it had generated. This implies that when an issue arises, it depends on who is involved. Between "Shackles of Doom (2013)" and "Echoes of War (2025)," Malala has been holding two main positions: as a senator and as the Secretary General of the UDA and of course, regarding the controversial removal. He therefore seems to be fighting back using art, which he has used before.*

In the above excerpt, LK and the panel support the standpoint that the banning of the play "Echoes of War " by Butere Girls was bad. The panel defends the standpoint by using comparison argument schemes. LK looks at Shackles of Doom versus the current play Echoes of War. The panel also looks at the generation gap comparison by considering fiction versus reality. It compares the script directly to the real-life Gen-Z street demonstrations. The comparison here proves that the state is not angry at the play because it is fake; the state panicked because the fiction mirrors the exact reality of the country. The argument scheme generated from the analysis of the above excerpt is as below;

'Banning of the play "Echoes of War" by Butere Girls was bad'

The two plays Shackles of Doom and Echoes of War give a reality of what is happening in the country. Therefore, *banning of the play Echoes of War by Butere Girls was bad.*

The results thus agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, where something is being compared to something else that is, resembling or being similar to the other and involves a relation of comparability between the explanation offered, and the viewpoint defended (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2002).

The above comparison of the two plays (Shackles of Doom and Echoes of War) was relevant and necessary since both plays share the same genre (political theatre), the same director (Cleophas Malala), the same performing institution (Butere Girls' High School) and the same outcome (state censorship and legal battles).

Example 8: Argumentation

Excerpt 8: Police service: Beyond redemption?

> JB: *There have been reforms in the police sector every time a new administration comes in. Unfortunately, as they leave office or in the course of their practice, the bad habits and manners within the police service still exist. In the olden days, people knew that the easiest way of making money was to become a police officer.*

The panel in the excerpt establishes a standpoint that police reforms fail because of a failure to bridge the gap. JB supports the standpoint by giving a vivid comparison based on personal upbringing, like joining the police service was the quickest and easiest way to make money. The reconstruction of the argument scheme is;

'Police reforms fail because of failure to bridge the existing gap'

This happens because people grew up knowing that the easiest way of making money was to become a police officer. Therefore, the police service is functionally beyond redemption under the present framework of zero accountability and the subcultures embedded within the stations.

Example 9: Comparison Argument Scheme at Concluding Stage

Excerpt 9

> JM: *Plays like 'I Will Marry When I Want', 'The trial of Dedan Kimathi', which had issues, 'Kifo Kisimani', which has such themes about leadership and what is happening at that particular time. There is also 'Shamba la Wanyama', which critiques leadership among other plays. People have used plays, spoken word, and song to express what is going on in society creatively and artistically. I therefore think that space should be protected.*

In this excerpt, JM and the panel support the standpoint that banning the play "Echoes of War" was bad. JM gives examples of plays that have had similar issues, such as Kifo Kisimani. The panel concludes that literature will remain to reflect society. The state can therefore not run away from criticism by shutting down a theatre. The panel also concludes that satire serves as an important tool for holding political power accountable and therefore a healthy society must be allowed to laugh at its leaders.

The reconstruction of the argument scheme is as follows;

'The banning of the play "Echoes of War" by Butere Girls was bad'

Because we have had several plays that have had similar issues, such as 'Kifo Kisimani', literature remains a reflection of society. Thus *banning of the play was bad* because satire serves as an important tool for holding political power accountable, and a healthy society must be allowed to laugh at its leaders.

The results, from the above discussion on the comparison argument scheme, agree with the observations made in the pragma-dialectical argumentation theory, where something is being compared to something else that is resembling or being similar to the other and involves a relation of comparability between the explanation offered and the viewpoint defended (van Eemeren & Grootendorst, 2002). The findings reveal that the comparison argument scheme is employed mostly at the argumentation phase of the debate in Citizen TV's News Gang talk show.

The comparison argument scheme helps in breaking down complex political issues affecting the country, hence providing an understanding of how these issues could be addressed by giving a relation of comparability between the explanation offered and the viewpoint defended as the discussants try to overcome the doubts.

While Sibalatani (2024) observed that the participants in talk shows utilise argument styles selectively based on conversational control and speaking time, the current study demonstrates that News Gang talk shows consistently employ symptomatic, causal and comparison argument schemes across the four stages of a critical discussion model, revealing an approach that is structured as opposed to the fragmented turn-taking observed by Sibalatani.

The News Gang analysis reveals total structural ambiguity, with all three argument schemes (symptomatic, causal and comparison) actively employed across all four stages of a critical discussion (confrontation, opening, argumentation and concluding). Oduma (2025), on the other hand, observed a linear and selective distribution of

symptomatic, causal and comparison schemes across dialectical stages.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The objective of this paper was to describe argument schemes employed in Citizen Television's News Gang talk show. The findings revealed that the News Gang talk show employs argument schemes (causal, symptomatic and comparison) that occur primarily at the argumentation stage of a critical discussion. By discussing argument schemes, discussants resolve a difference of opinion on merits as they balance the two goals: reasonableness and persuasion.

The study on a pragma-dialectical analysis of argument schemes in Citizen Television's *News Gang* talk show was within the pragma-dialectical theory framework, which presents innovative research in the field of argumentation, particularly the application of argumentation in talk shows.

Discussing argument schemes in the News Gang talk show provides the discussants with analytical frameworks to identify, analyse, and evaluate claims efficiently. There is a need for other researchers to conduct research in other talk shows, giving them a different approach.

Recommendations: The study described the argument schemes in the News Gang talk show aired on Citizen TV using the pragma-dialectical theory. We recommend that similar studies be carried out in other talk shows in other genres away from politics that this study focused on. The researchers also recommend that similar studies be done using theories like Speech Act Theory (SAT) by J.L. Austin, Walton's Theory of Presumptive Reasoning by Walton Douglas and Rhetorical Structure Theory (RST) by William Mann.

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