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Primary and Secondary Indicators

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Informal logic texts differ in the treatment of certain words and phrases used by arguers and argument analysts alike to locate premises and conclusions in arguments. Most agree on "therefore" and "because" and their synonyms; the disagreement concerns such words and phrases as "firstly," "in the second place," "on the one hand...on the other hand," "furthermore," "moreover" and, in fact, "in fact."

An exhaustive search of the literature on my bookshelves reveals some of the diversity. Johnson & Blair's *Logical Self-Defense*, Govier's *A Practical Study of Argument*, Fogelin's *Understanding Arguments* and Kelley's *The Art of Reasoning* make no mention at all of these words and phrases in their lists of indicators. Thomas' *Practical Reasoning in Natural Language* and Chaffee's *Thinking Critically* include those involving ordinal numerals, while Freeman's *Thinking Logically* treats "moreover" as a premise-indicator in an example on p.205. Wilson's *The Anatomy of Argument* is by far the most inclusive; it mentions three classes of locators (equivalent to indicators) other than the synonyms of "therefore" and "because."

Wilson's three classes are (a) the numerical devices mentioned above, (b) devices used to indicate an accumulation of considerations, including the non-numerical ones mentioned above, and (c) contrastive devices such as "but" and "however." He calls them all "specific premise locators," contrasting them with the synonyms of "because," which are called "general area premise locators." While Wilson is right in mentioning these devices, and in asserting that they play a role in the analysis of arguments, I think his treatment of them is incomplete.

Firstly, the same devices may be used to enumerate conclusions: they are not essentially premise-indicators. Secondly, students can easily become confused about how much they indicate, taking them as a sure sign that a passage contains an argument when in fact it doesn't. Though this is a feature they share with such equivocal indicators as "because" and "since", the non-argumentative contexts in which the latter occur are more clearly assigned an alternative interpretation. I want to suggest a way to complete Wilson's treatment in a way which brings greater clarity to argument identification and analysis.

Let us give the title "primary indicators" to the synonyms of "therefore" and "because", and the title "secondary indicators" to words and phrases in the other group. Primary indicators have an absolute direction or sense: they are conclusion- or premise-indicators, according to which role they indicate for the statement following them. Secondary indicators do not have an absolute sense, though they may have a sense relative to some features of the context in which they occur. In most cases, secondary indicators function as indicators of argument structure only to the extent that they occur in a passage in conjunction with some primary indicator. The sense of the

primary indicator and the relative position of the secondary indicator determines the sense of the latter.

There are exceptions to this rule (my fourth paragraph contains two!) when there is no relevant primary indicator. In these cases, however, the interpretation of the passage as argumentative and the ensuing analysis of its structure must rest on features other than the presence of the secondary indicators, and the determination of the sense of the latter must be made in relation to a prior construal of the overall structure of the argument.

Hence, on the one hand Wilson's account has gone beyond those of most authors in drawing our attention to some important devices, but on the other hand it is not general enough in its application. Furthermore, this very paragraph contains three examples of the limitations of the account.