

Guest editor's introduction : argumentative processes and communication contexts

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Editorial

*Guest Editors' Introduction: Argumentative Processes and
Communication Contexts*

The present issue collects a total of fifteen papers, ten of which are included in the thematic section devoted to *Argumentative Processes and Communication Contexts*, while the remaining five papers tackle, as usually, various topics of communication sciences. We start by shortly illustrating the contents of the latter ones.

In the first paper of the General Section **Valérie Gorin, Annik Dubied** and **Claudine Burton-Jeangros** (*Une re-définition de la frontière Humain-Animal à travers les images des médias d'information suisses*) face a salient semiotic-semantic topic concerning media communication: the social representations of animals. The authors show, in relation to two recent crises, the bird flu epidemic (2004–2007) and dog attacks (2005–2008), that the undeniable growing zoocentrism is contrasted by a perception of animals as a threat to humans, thus signaling a permanent re-negotiation of human-animal frontier.

Luca Camerini and **Marco Boneschi** (*From Ethnography to Technology: Automatic Support to Health Information Coding Process in Tessin*) consider an important issue crossing I.T. and health communication: health information coding. This topic is crucial for patient safety as it assures the continuity of care as long as it involves the transmission of accurate information to general practitioners and other health care providers. An ongoing research project conducted in collaboration with Ente Ospedaliero Cantonale (EOC) in Tessin, (Switzerland) is presented by indicating its goals (analyze the practice of the coders in order to elicit its critical factors, design some technological interventions to support this practice and implement a prototype evaluating its actual efficacy) and its methodology (mainly qualitative methods, in particular ethnography of the workplaces). The results so far obtained in the research project are eventually presented.

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Luigi Anolli and Olivia Realdon (*Fostering Emotional Attunement: Optimistic Shaping of Emotional Experiences*) consider how emotion regulation affects interpersonal communication. After bridging core features of the dispositional optimism construct with theorizing and research on emotional coping and emotion regulation, move to identify the pathways through which optimism shapes emotional experience, focusing on major implications for interpersonal communication. Empirical evidence regarding optimists' and pessimists' narratives of their emotional experiences is also discussed, corroborating literature findings regarding emotion regulation strategies that shape optimists' sharing and communication of emotions.

Andrea Mangani (*The Variety of Online and Print Newspapers: Italy*), represents a first attempt to directly measure the content diversity across online and print newspapers. The level of content diversity between online and print newspapers in Italy and its variation over time is studied. Media economics and communication studies provide theoretical predictions regarding the variety of newspaper content. First, when the majority of revenue is derived from advertising, the degree of content diversity will be lower. Additional hypotheses are drawn from the very nature of online information services and from the readers' observed behaviour. Empirical observations of five major newspapers over two months showed that, as expected, the group of online editions presented less variety in content. On the other hand, online and print editions did not present significant differences in terms of content variation day by day.

Pascal Froissart and H el ene Cardy (*French Scholars in "Information and Communication Studies" [1975–2005]*) examine the evolution of "Sciences de l'information et de la communication" (SIC) studies in France since the emergence of the discipline in the 1960s. First, the national particularities of these studies are singled out on a thematic level, focusing on the "curricular marriage" of Information Sciences and Communication Sciences into a unified disciplinary field and the classification of scholars. The numerical evolution of scholars in comparison with other Social Science disciplines is also analyzed. Considering how rapidly the numbers of SIC scholars has grown, the authors come to quantify how communication studies have flourished in France. Thirdly a thematic landscape of university demand for SIC studies is drawn: half of the positions in this field are offered in only four categories: theory (15%), new technol-

ogy and multimedia (14%), good writing and presentation (11%), and organizational communication (10%). Finally, a glimpse is provided of the current research themes developed by SIC scholars.

A higher number of papers are included in the Thematic Section of the present volume of *SComS*. In fact, numerous researchers answered our call, thus confirming the importance of the theme. As we hoped, also numerous young researchers submitted their papers, part of which are published here. In the following we shall in 1) concisely situate the topic suggested for the Thematic Section in the framework of contemporary studies in argumentation and in 2) describe the contributions to this topic that are published in this volume.

1. The Contextual Dependency of Argumentation

Argumentation, namely people's attempt to provide each other with appropriate reasons justifying their beliefs and commitments in more or less institutionalised communication exchanges, constitutes an intrinsically context-dependent activity. Argumentation, in fact, does not exist unless it is embedded in specific domains of human social life. It cannot be reduced to a system of formal procedures as it takes place only embodied in actual communicative and non-communicative practices and spheres of interaction. In order to activate these practices and interactions, reaching a consensual and valid resolution of emerging differences of opinion by way of a reasonable and effective argumentative interaction constitutes an inescapable preliminary condition (Van Eemeren 2002; Rigotti 1998; Greco Morasso 2008).

Indeed, argumentation is one of the forms of communicative interaction by means of which social realities – institutions, groups and relationships – are constructed and managed. People unfold argumentation in numerous purposeful activities: to make sound and well-thought decisions, to critically found their opinions, to settle conflicts, to persuade other people of the validity of their own opinions and proposals and to evaluate others' opinions and proposals. These activities are significantly determined by the social contexts in which they take place: from family to social and political institutions, from financial markets to media, schools, hospitals, factories and courts. Thus argumentation too, as the bearing structure of these activities, moulds its strategies depending on these very different contexts.

The relevance of contexts for argumentation has gradually won a very wide consent in argumentation studies. After the dialectical and rhetorical tradition and its very significance for contemporary society were rediscovered in the late 1950s, the study of argumentation gradually regained the awareness of its scientific specificity as an autonomous discipline (Toulmin 1958; Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1958), also distinguishing itself from some “contiguous” disciplines, such as philosophy, logic, psychology and speech communication, which proved, however, to be useful in the study of different aspects of argumentative processes. Nevertheless, it is only in the last three decades that the theoretical core of this discipline has been established. And, in this endeavor, the communicative dialogical nature of argumentation is brought to light, focusing on its pragmatic dimension (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004; Walton & Krabbe 1995; Walton 1998), including the consideration of context, whose importance had already been highlighted in linguistic pragmatics, declaredly concerned with the study of real-life communicative interactions.

As many scholars have remarked (Van Eemeren 2002; Rigotti & Rocci 2006), argumentative analysis and evaluation cannot do without a proper consideration of context, as confirmed by the promising outcomes of recent argumentation research specifically devoted to situated argumentative discourse. These outcomes not only disclose a number of useful possibilities of applications in new contexts, but they also allow for a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of argumentative processes in general, of whom context shows to be a fundamental constitutive factor. Context is relevant both in the process of analytical reconstruction of argumentation (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004: 95 ff.), aiming at identifying those communicative moves that are relevant to the process of justifying a point of view and thus solving a difference of opinion, as well as in the critical evaluation of argumentation.

The importance of contexts for the theory of argumentation is also confirmed by recent theoretical research in the inferential structure of arguments, which brought to light the interplay of a dialectical component bound to logical rules and an endoxical component bound to “cultural” and typically context-dependent values and data (Rigotti 2006, 2008, 2009; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming). Contextual factors

also emerge as decisive for the choice of the themes that are allowed or expected to become an issue of discussion and, thus, for the constitution of “argumentative spaces.” Significantly, “topical choice” is, together with “audience adaptation” and “presentational design,” one of the three dimensions of strategic maneuvering in all stages of an argumentative discourse. Indeed, the available options vary to some extent according to the argumentative activity type and the contextual sphere in which the maneuvering takes place (Van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002, 2005).

Conversely, the interest in argumentation is also increasing in a number of disciplines concerned with contexts. Such interest arises from the fact that argumentation is relevant in the process of co-construction of meaning occurring in different interaction contexts. In this sense, it is not only true that argumentation processes are affected by the context in which they occur: not less relevantly, argumentative interactions also determine the co-construction of contexts. In a family, for example, how argumentation is actualized in real-life discussions determines the “degree of argumentativity” and the institutional rules of that particular context – e. g. which issues can be debated, how much a critical attitude is praised, and so on. All the more, it will affect the children’s future critical attitude and their familiarity with argumentation (Muller-Mirza et al. 2009).

Even more crucially, argumentation has been recognized by a number of authors as linked to the *quality* of communicative practices occurring in different contexts. All this explains why a significant number of approaches are incorporating argumentation in the study of verbal interaction and speech events, as illustrated in the following section.

Argumentation has traditionally been recognized as relevant in many domains of public communication. First and foremost, many studies are devoted to media argumentation (Burger & Marten 2005; Walton 2007; Cigada 2006; Christopher Guerra 2008; Rocci 2008) and to political sphere (Zarefsky 1986, 1990, 2008; Van Eemeren 2002; Ilie 2003; Goodnight 1990; Mohammed 2009; Tonnard 2009), where it conditions the building of consent in different forms of decision-making procedures like debates and deliberations (Aakhus & Vasilyeva 2007), eliciting and spreading new ideas, electing governors (Zarefsky 2007), and unmasking manipulation (Hamblin 1970; Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992; Rigotti 2005; Rocci 2005; De Saussure & Schulz 2005; Breton 2008;

Clément 2006; Tindale 2004). Another relevant sector of society in which the importance of a sound argumentative exchange has been traditionally highlighted is the juridical sphere. In spite of the differences among the legal systems, for all juridical traditions argumentation represents a constitutive moment of the phases of a legal discourse: supporting the parties' positions, comparing and evaluating the arguments advanced in favor or against such positions, justifying the decision by the judging authority, and so on (Feteris 1999, 2008; Godden & Walton 2008).

In religious discourse the role of argumentation should not be underestimated, in particular in the context of multicultural and multi-religious societies. Even though in different religious traditions an argumentative approach may be more or less allowed or fostered (Zittoun 2007), when religious communities present their views and moral values, the need for a critical argumentative foundation becomes all the more evident (Dichy et al., forthcoming).

The process of developing scientific knowledge and the dialogue characterizing scientific communities are also intertwined with argumentative practices in which written argumentative discourse is blended with representational devices (Latour & Woolgar 1979; Latour & Weibel 2002, 2005).

More recently, the role of argumentation has also emerged as the fabric of "less obvious" communicative interactions that are however equally fundamental in society. To quote a relevant case, argumentation is essential to negotiations supporting the exchange of economic and financial goods; it is the proper interface for the interaction between savers and entrepreneurs (Mishkin 2004; Healy & Palepu 2001; Leland & Pyle 1977), and is the basis of all types of market (Trosborg & Flyvholm Jørgensen 2005).

A particular mention is deserved by recent studies highlighting the cognitive and educational advantages of reshaping teaching and learning activities in terms of argumentative interactions (Muller-Mirza & Perret-Clermont 2009). The social and cognitive weight of argumentation has been highlighted not only in the school domain, but also in the more intimate sphere of family interactions (Brumark 2008; Pontecorvo & Arcidiacono 2007).

Besides, other socially important fields, such as health care communication (Goodnight 2006; Brashers et al. 2006; Rubinelli & Schulz 2006) and therapeutic discourse (Grossen & Salazar Orvig 2006) are gradually

discovering the opportunity of using insights from argumentation studies for improving the quality of practices and decisions.

2. Contributions to the Study of Argumentation in Communication Contexts offered by the Thematic Section of the Present Issue

The Thematic Section offered in the present issue of SComS aims at illustrating, by means of a sample of different contributions, the current status of research on argumentation in context and the opportunities offered by this type of theoretical and applied research to the study of communication.

The present thematic section is organized following the consideration that a good example can teach a lot about general principles. In this line of thought, each of the articles presents a thorough analysis of argumentation in a specific communication context. Without claiming to be exhaustive about the possible spheres in which argumentation plays a role or about the possible studies that can be made in each domain, these contributions represent fresh investigations about specific context-bound argumentative dynamics and also offer theoretical and methodological insights to the understanding of communication in context.

In the sphere of public discourse, **Jean Goodwin** and **Lee Honeycutt** (*When Science goes Public: From Technical Arguments to Appeals to Authority*) focus on the border between public argumentation and scientific argumentation; the field is also opened to considering how contexts can possibly be overlapping or cross-fertilizing. Goodwin and Honeycutt move from the fact that argumentation between scientists and citizens has become far more relevant after the recent calls for increased public participation in technical decision-making. In their paper, the authors examine what happens when arguments travel from the technical to the public sphere: based on a case study of a U.S. debate over the net energy balance of corn-based ethanol, they show how, in public debate, evidence-based technical arguments are transformed into appeals to expert authority.

Some of the contributions to this Thematic Section treat domains that, as mentioned, have been first recognized as relevant spheres of argumentative activities. Two examples referring to the same domain of political argumentation are presented by Micheli and by Andone, who however adopt different perspectives.

Raphaël Micheli (*Un processus argumentatif en contexte : La construction de la honte et de la fierté dans le genre du débat parlementaire*) pursues the goal of showing the argumentative role of emotion, not simply interpreting it in the traditional terms of appeal to emotion but considering the very argumentative construction of emotion within a particular genre: the parliamentary debate. Data are drawn from a corpus of debates that developed in French Parliament around the abolition of the death penalty. In this context the argumentative construction of two emotions is focused on: shame and pride. The author argues that parliamentary debate fosters the argumentative construction of these two specific emotions, in particular thanks to the possibility of rhetorically exploiting the institutional status of participants, which constitutes one of the most salient traits of this communication context.

Corina Andone (*Confrontational Strategic Maneuvering in a Political Interview: A Pragma-dialectical Analysis of a Response to an Accusation of Inconsistency*), tackles political argumentation in terms of the face-to-face interaction that is characteristic of political interview. She provides a pragma-dialectical analysis of an instance of confrontational strategic maneuvering in this domain. In a first, more theoretical and methodological, part, the institutional conventions that characterize a political interview are described; in doing so, the author provides an account of the contextually determined institutional constraints that affect confrontational strategic manoeuvring. A second, more empirical, part, focuses on an instance of confrontational strategic manoeuvring in which a politician responds by adopting a dissociation strategy to an accusation of inconsistency put forward by an interviewer.

Again in the area of public communication, **Rudi Palmieri** (*Regaining Trust through Argumentation. Financial Communication in the Context of the Current Economic Crisis. An Example from UBS*) considers the role that argumentation plays in the context of the current economic-financial crisis. The author studies the delicate attempt made by the bank UBS to retain stakeholders' confidence despite the crisis. As a case in point, he analyzes a press release through which the bank announces important changes in the Board of Directors. The argumentative strategy of such a document is clearly aimed to: convince stakeholders, in particular clients, to maintain their trust in the bank. The message exploits and emphasizes

the positive qualities (in Aristotelian terms, ethos) of the would-be chairman and levers on the interests and emotions of the concerned audience (pathos), in order to provide the inferential structure of the argument (logos) with those shared values (endoxa) that make it “trustworthy,” i.e. persuasive.

Yet argumentation also plays a role in private communicative exchanges that give form to interpersonal relationships. A typical example of such exchanges is represented by family conversations, examined by **Francesco Arcidiacono, Clotilde Pontecorvo and Sara Greco Morasso** (*Family Conversations: The Relevance of Context in Evaluating Argumentation*) through a case-study related to Italian families. Their analysis clearly shows how argumentation characterizes the communicative practices occurring at the family dinner table and how it can foster a critical attitude in the process of decision-making carried out in this context. At the methodological level, the authors demonstrate how carefully considering the specificities of context is essential both for the analytical reconstruction of argumentation and for the consequent evaluation of argumentative practices.

Eveline Feteris (*The Role of Arguments from Reasonableness in the Justification of Judicial Decisions*), focuses on legal context and, specifically on the deliberately argumentative genre of the justification of legal decisions; for this type of communication, she specifies an argumentation model to use for the analysis and evaluation of arguments from reasonableness. The legal background of the use of arguments from reasonableness and fairness is discussed. Similarities and differences with other forms of legal argumentation are explained and the conditions are identified under which arguments from reasonableness form an acceptable justification of a judicial decision. In relation to the model she proposes, the author also describes how its requirements are specified in Dutch law, thus further delimitating the contextual conditions relevant to the study of this specific type of argument. Finally, an exemplary demonstration of how the proposed argumentation model works is also given.

Silvia de Ascaniis's contribution (*Integrating Content Analysis and Argumentative Analysis to reconstruct a Media-Supported Public Debate*) is related to argumentation in public discourse, as other papers presented above; however it is media-supported public discourse that is specifically focused on. De Ascaniis discusses some methodological issues concerning the use

of content analysis (CA) to study media-supported debates. The article argues that CA can be integrated into the pragma-dialectical method of the analytical overview (Van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004); in this way, it can contribute to the argumentative analysis as a preliminary instrument, particularly useful when dealing with large corpora of data. Content analysis, in fact, allows a macroscopic view of the debate, thus laying the basis for the reconstruction, analysis and evaluation of the argumentative fabric.

Ioana Agatha Filimon (*Kyosei: An Example of Cultural Keyword Argumentative exploited in Corporate Reporting Discourse*) aims at showing the appropriateness of the theoretical construct of argumentative keyword proposed by Rigotti & Rocci 2005 in relation to an emergent discourse genre: top management's letters to stakeholders appearing in the introduction to corporate social responsibility/sustainability reports. As in Palmieri's case, Filimon thus considers argumentation in the economic-financial sphere, but she focuses on a decidedly different type of document in order to licit its characteristic argumentative strategies. In relation to this type of document, the argumentative and persuasive relevance of the Japanese business concept of *kyosei* is shown. The analysis is based on AMT Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti 2008, 2009; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming) and on a number of insights stemming from disciplines related to the context concerned.

Medical consultation, analysed by **Roosmaryn Pilgram** (*Argumentation in Doctor-patient Interaction. Medical Consultation as a Pragma-dialectical Communicative Activity Type*), constitutes a typical setting of interpersonal and institutionalised communication. Argumentation is clearly relevant to this type of setting: in fact, the doctor's advice is not always immediately acceptable to the patient who, for instance, may feel forced to drastically change his behaviour. An important way in which the doctor can nonetheless make his advice acceptable is by using argumentation. Pilgram argues that, argumentation can be adequately analysed and evaluated in medical consultation, if this is approached as a pragma-dialectical communicative activity type.

Eventually, with the paper of **Benedetto Lepori** and **Andrea Rocci** (*Reasonableness in Grant Proposal Writing*) argumentation in a specific type of scientific discourse is considered. The authors propose an approach to the study of grant proposal-writing based on the model of "critical dis-

discussion” elaborated by Pragma-Dialectics centering on the notion of reasonableness as the key concept explaining the selection of argumentative moves. Grant proposal writing is read as a discussion between a funding agency and a researcher, where the content of future research is negotiated in such a way, that it is acceptable for both parties and, at the same time, can reasonably be realized. The role of commitment to reasonableness in shaping the proposal text is confronted with the strategies adopted by proposal writers to reconcile their dialectical commitment to reasonableness with their rhetorical goals through different forms of strategic maneuvering. Furthermore, both the dialectical and rhetorical aspects of proposal writing are considered beyond the single episode of text production, for their function in the context of the long term interaction between the funding agency and the proposer.

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