

Introduction

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Behold, a sower went forth to sow; And when he sowed, some seeds fell by the way side, and the fowls came and devoured them up: Some fell upon stony places, where they had not much earth: and forthwith they sprung up, because they had no deepness of earth: And when the sun was up, they were scorched; and because they had no root, they withered away. And some fell among thorns; and the thorns sprung up, and choked them: But other fell into good ground, and brought forth fruit, some an hundredfold, some sixtyfold, some thirtyfold.

Matthew 13, 1-8 The King James Version

This special issue of *Token: A Journal of Linguistics* contains a collection of papers drawing on the work presented at the Colloquium *Exploring the Discursive Creation of Argumentation and Ideology in Evolving Specialized Knowledge Domains* organized by Prof. Rita Salvi as part of an Italian national research project¹ under the auspices of the CLAVIER research centre.² The Colloquium was held in Rome on June 13-14, 2019 and some of the papers published here were presented at the Colloquium, while others have been inspired by the topic which was intensively and extensively discussed during the two days of study.

The papers cover a wide range of contexts in which knowledge dissemination can take place, focusing on different domains, participants and levels of specialisation. Knowledge dissemination is, in fact, characterised by asymmetrical cognitive relationships. The recipient of the knowledge

¹ PRIN 2015, no.2015TJ8ZAS: "Knowledge dissemination across media in English: continuity and change in discourse strategies, ideologies and epistemologies".

² Corpus and Language Variation in English Research <https://clavier.fileli.unipi.it/>.

being transmitted knows less than the transmitter, even in peer-to-peer communication. However, all the papers start from the assumption that the dissemination of knowledge does not consist in the mere transfer of information and data, but rather it involves a necessarily complex set of cognitive and pragmatic acts which may be positioned along a message-bearing continuum linking the production to the interpretation of the message, the encoding to the decoding. To disseminate any message, including one bearing specialised knowledge, the text creator needs to construct it linguistically, or through other semiotic systems, in such a way as to ensure its propagation, acceptance and entrenchment in the target discourse community.

If we associate the idea of dissemination of knowledge with the biblical parable in the epigraph, or with the impressionist painting of *Le semeur* by Jean François Millet, we can use them allegorically to describe how argumentation and ideology characterise knowledge. Like the Sower and the Semeur, those who seek to disseminate the seed of their knowledge need to scatter it into the furrow traced by those who preceded them. He or she trusts that most of the seed will bear fruit a hundred, sixty or thirty times, but is also aware that some seed may fall by the wayside, among stones or amid thorns. The Sower encodes the seeds of knowledge using semiotic substance and forges them through argumentation and ideology.

Knowledge can be understood simply as information, facts, descriptions, but it also implies a deeper understanding of a phenomenon or subject acquired through study and experience. When we receive information, we interpret and integrate it in accordance with our ideological makeup, our beliefs, values and social positionings which underlie individual and group behavior. In the words of van Dijk (2003: 86), "Knowledge is not only mental, but also social". Unless it is acquired, shared and used by people in interaction, it will remain simply a personal belief. Consensus, therefore, is an essential factor which has to be built up and reinforced in the discourse. Knowledge also has a cultural dimension, insofar as it unites, coalesces and consolidates a community, whether it be a community of practice or a community in the broader sense of a social or national group. Once again quoting from van Dijk (2003: 86), "One can only act competently as a member of such a culture when one shares its knowledge and other such social cognitions".

From a linguistic point of view, we can therefore say that the dissemination of knowledge through textual production is not due to a purely objective observation of reality, but is "always filtered through acts of selection, foregrounding and symbolisation" and construed "through

processes that are essentially social, involving authority, credibility and disciplinary appeals” (Hyland 2004: 6). Knowledge dissemination necessarily implies the transfer and transformation of information, which, in turn, produce changes in the discursive constructions used to place emphasis on different meanings, thus bestowing an argumentative structure upon the text. Moreover, the selection of dissemination mechanisms made to establish such a hierarchy of meanings in the recontextualization of knowledge are highly influenced by the ideology of text creators who, in the first place, choose what is valuable for knowledge dissemination from their perspective (Beck et al. 2019).

This collection of papers is, in fact, centred on the two closely interwoven themes of argumentation and ideology, which are intrinsic to the dissemination of knowledge. The construction of texts for the conveyance of knowledge is an ideologically oriented operation, as it presupposes choosing semantically stratified and discursively recontextualized materials from the semiosphere, which bear the imprint of the significance they have acquired within a given field. However, ideology here is not intended just as a political or economic doctrine, but also as the tacit assumptions, beliefs and value systems which are shared by members of a social group, and therefore can influence the relationship and discourse between interlocutors.

Knowledge dissemination is inherently argumentative, since those who seek to inform (to disseminate) need to adopt persuasive strategies functional to the correct interpretation and acceptance of their messages. The creation of knowledge and its diffusion is “managed, controlled and manipulated through discourse [...] to be fully comprehended, for it to meet the needs and expectations of the readers, or even to activate and elicit specific expectations on their part” (Sala 2020: 12). Argumentation, therefore, has to work within different dimensions. The force of logos may not always be sufficient to garner consensus, and therefore persuasion may also require appeals to the realms of ethos and pathos. The choice of argumentative and para-argumentative techniques used by creators of texts as disseminators of knowledge may reveal their value-laden inclination and compliance with certain ideological positions inscribed in and conveyed through the text, more or less intentionally.

Knowledge dissemination is, therefore, a multi-faceted and ubiquitous process and this is reflected in the plurality of perspectives adopted and the variety of discursive domains investigated by the authors of the papers featured in this volume. The first papers are all concerned with argumentation in the academic domain. The subject of **Rita Salvi**'s paper

is an example of highly specialised discourse – the Nobel Prize Lectures in Economic Sciences. She combines a corpus and a discourse perspective to examine patterns of argumentation. In particular, the discourse analysis shows how argumentation is constructed across a variety of fields through the exposition of models, methods and theories, at a symptomatic, comparative and causal level. It also shows how some rhetorical strategies, such as the use of questions, narrative and figurative language, characterize the relationship between the Lecturer and the audience.

Silvia Cavalieri's paper turns to a completely different context, though still within the domain of economics. She addresses the question of the changes in the argumentative realizations of two academic genres, written and video abstracts in management journals, thus assessing the influence of digital media technologies on academic discourse. The study proposes an analysis of the rhetorical strategies, with the focus on the metadiscourse used by authors to express their authorial selves and to create a relationship with readers. The construction of academic arguments using visual abstracts is shown to be more interactive than in their written counterparts because of the presence of the author and the search for scholarly solidarity.

The next paper focuses again on academic discourse, but within the field of medicine. Drawing on a corpus of scientific research papers, **Renzo Mocini** explores the role of existentials in the construction of medical knowledge and their argumentative function. Thanks to their semantics, existentials form a privileged environment in which to tackle medical discourse from a quantitative angle, especially as quantification represents one of the techniques of objectification characteristic of scientific writing. On the strength of their quantificational import, existentials, as they present themselves throughout a medical paper, can bring inherently argumentative intentions to the surface since they are used to justify the validity of the claims made by the authors of clinical studies.

Moving away from the academic field, but remaining within the sphere of argumentation, the next two papers deal with the formation of public opinion through the media. The first focuses on the creation of texts and investigates the strategies adopted by journalists of two leading U.S. newspapers when reporting Hillary Clinton's first congressional hearing on the Benghazi attacks of September 23rd, 2013. **Cinzia Giglioni** analyses how official material of the hearing is incorporated in the final texts, the newspaper articles, either to endorse/criticise Clinton's version of the events, or to present a more neutral stance. The author proposes that, in terms of input-source usage, specific processes and strategies were employed

to avoid the explicit endorsement of Clinton's point of view. The second paper starts from the premise that the public generally has only mediated knowledge and construct their opinion about events on the basis of their interpretation, the decoding of the message(s) in the media. **Douglas Ponton** presents a study based on data collected in interviews with ordinary people about the Skripal/Novichok affair in 2018. Drawing on Grice's cooperative maxims he examines the role of explicit or implicit argumentation to explain, and account for, their opinions and explores patterns of evidentiality in the discourse of the interviewees about the topic. The study highlights the way Grice's maxims allow for the identification of covert patterns of meaning that provide support for the speakers' stated positions.

With **Gaetano Falco's** paper we enter the area of ideology. It reports on a study of the terms and concepts originating in neoliberal ideology that became widespread during the 2008 financial crisis. He investigates the way in which they are textually construed and in particular the linguistic devices such as metaphorical expressions used to express the ideology overtly or covertly. Using an approach which draws upon cognitive linguistics, corpus linguistics, and critical metaphor analysis, the author shows how some terms, expressions and their metaphorical meanings reflect the rise and fall of the neoliberal ideology in the wake of the 2008 subprime crisis.

Judith Turnbull takes a different perspective on ideology, which leads us outside the usual political or economic contexts and into the field of museum discourse. She suggests that a museum's approach to communication with visitors reflects its attitude and beliefs about the role it plays in society today. Some museums seem to maintain the traditional, asymmetrical power relations between expert and non-expert, whereby museums and curators fulfil their role as communicators of intellectually important ideas. Others embrace a more contemporary approach based on the ideology of social inclusion and thus aim to share their knowledge and transfer authority to visitors.

The volume closes with a contribution that highlights the enigmatic nature of argumentation. **Silvia Cacchiani** focuses on the transfer of knowledge about *copyright* and *copyleft* to lay-people and (semi-)experts with different profiles, needs and goals, in different user situations. The analysis moves from an objective exposition of COPYRIGHT in the *Oxford Dictionary of Law*, to institutional and non-institutional webpages appearing at the top of Google search listings. The high-ranking online pages are generally considered objective, credible and authoritative sources of knowledge. However, in the non-professional online dictionary articles self-promotion

and persuasion may affect expository content, revealing the ideology of the author and organization and, therefore, creating an argumentative dimension.

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