BOOK REVIEWS

Frans H. van Eemeren & Bart Garssen (Eds.). (2015) *Scrutinizing Argumentation in Practice*. Amsterdam/Philadelpia: John Benjamins.

Reviewed by Rudi Palmieri

After editing "Examining argumentation in context" (2009) and "Exploring argumentative contexts" (2012), Frans van Eemeren and Bart Garssen propose a third collection of studies in the increasingly important field of contextualized argumentation. The volume is organised in six parts (or sections) and contains 19 contributions selected from the 8th ISSA conference, which took place in Amsterdam in July 2014.[1]

The first paper corresponds to Jeanne Fahnestock's keynote talk at the said conference. As the title suggests ("Arguing in the grooves. Genre and language constraints in scientific controversies"), Fahnestock analyses several cases of scientific controversies to highlight the importance of genre conventions in constraining the kind of argumentation that occurs when a scientific claim is debated. The fascinating and well-detailed argumentative description of the considered examples let emerge very clearly how important it is to take into account genre aspects when reconstructing and evaluating argumentative discourse.

The second part of the volume includes three contributions devoted to political argumentation. In "Cultural differences in political debate", Hinck, Hinck, Dailey, Hinck and Ghanem make a comparative study on face threat strategies used by high office candidates in the USA, in Great Britain and in Egypt. The authors find a similar amount of direct face threat across the three countries examined and some differences in indirect face threat.

Duran's chapter deals with deep disagreement in the context of Chile's political debate. Combining Gilbert's argumentation model with the strategies to overcome deep disagreement outlined by Zarefsky, Duran analyses two blogs from the newspaper *El Mercurio*, where the 1973 military coup was debated on the occasion of its 40th anniversary. His findings reveal a poor level of argumentative engagement by debaters as most discussions fail to go beyond the pragma-dialectical stage of confrontation.

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1. While this collection is context-oriented, a second volume (van Eemeren & Garssen eds. 2015) with twenty papers focusing on theoretical issues has been yielded from the same conference (see Greco 2016 for a book review).

In the third chapter of this part, Zarefsky elaborates an argumentative analysis of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address. While this document is often taken as an example of epideictic discourse, the analysis of Zarefsky – which includes the dialectical dimension of argumentation structure and the rhetorical dimension of strategic manoeuvring – shows that this significant piece in the history of the USA actually represents a true case of deliberative argumentation supporting a practical standpoint advanced by Lincoln ("We should strengthen our commitment to the nation and its founding principles"). In my view, Zaresfky's overall point entails an important suggestion for argumentation students who could be tempted to hastily neglect any argumentative function to apparently ceremonial-only political speeches.

A theoretically-intensive paper by Bletas opens the third section, which is devoted to the legal context. A good example of how linguistics can inform argumentative analysis and more specifically rhetorical analysis with a normative concern, this chapter combines Extended Pragma-Dialectics and the ScaPoLine approach to polyphony. From this perspective, Bletas considers a case of judgment by the Italian Constitutional Court by dissecting the legal decision in all the stages of a critical discussion and showing how polyphony manages to accomplish different kinds of strategic manoeuvres at each stage.

Pragmatic argumentation in legal justifications is the focus of the chapter written by Feteris. The famous case of *Holy Trinity vs. US* is analysed. Here, the Supreme Court established that a rule prohibiting the importation of foreigners to perform labour in the USA could not be applied to the case at hand (the import of a religious minister) as the spirit of such a rule (coinciding with the evil which it is designed to remedy) was contemplating another classes of workers. Feteris interprets this reasoning from a pragma-dialectical viewpoint in terms of a stereotypical pattern of argumentation from consequences (or pragmatic argumentation), where the application of the rule to the specific case should be excluded as it would lead to absurd consequences.

Plug's paper deals with strategic manoeuvring by the judge whose decision needs to satisfy the needs of a composite audience. More specifically, she distinguishes two effects a judge aims at achieving: have the argumentation understood (communicative effect) and have it accepted (interactional effect). Two examples are examined to illustrate how this particular audience adaptation is accomplished while complying with the institutional constraints imposed by the context.

After handling with two "traditional" contexts, the volume enters into the argumentative domain of education. Though being a relatively young argumentative context, over the last ten years education has attracted numerous scholars, both from psychology and from linguistic disciplines (see for instance Muller-Mirza & Perret-Clermont eds. 2009). A good example of such a cross-disciplinary

endeavour is the first chapter of this section, which results from an established and ongoing collaboration between an educational psychology group based at the *University of Neuchâtel* and an argumentation group based at the *Universitá della Svizzera italiana*. Perret-Clermont, Arcidiacono, Breux, Greco and Miserez-Caperos examine knowledge-oriented argumentation (or epistemic argumentation) by children engaged with a revised version of a classical Piagetian task. The five authors challenge the view positing that children lack crucial argumentative skills. On the contrary, the paper exploits the analytical tools of argumentation theory to offer evidence that children hold significant argumentative competences. This result has substantial implications as to the role educators should assume. According to the authors, such a role "amounts to creating conditions for these [argumentative] competences to be used" (p. 146).

Paraskevi presents a study on the use of argumentative strategies in adolescents' school writing. A reading assignment test about the unemployment of young people constitutes the basis for the experiment. More in particular, the author considers the diversity of standpoints advanced by students, whether gender influences this diversity, the extent to which standpoints are elaborated, negotiation of ideas with the reading assignment text, construction of voices and contexts, and argumentation schemes. As the results of the study point to a low level of argumentative elaboration of standpoints, Paraskevi suggests that the teaching of contextualized argumentative move should rely on the concept of strategic manoeuvring as a way to enhance students' awareness of and reflection about the context and the opportunities it offers for the design of argumentative strategies.

The third chapter of the section is an elaborated theoretical reflection by Baker on the integration of pragma-dialectics and collaborative learning research. The author maintains that the pragma-dialectical approach fulfils both the descriptive function of reconstructing the stages of a problem-solving discussion involving students and the critical function of identifying gaps between actual argumentation and what a normative standard of reasonable argumentation would suggest. On the other hand, Baker suggests to integrate some psychological dimensions that pragma-dialectics tends not to consider as primary. In particular, Baker questions the view according to which thinking is reduced to exclusively internal cognitive phenomena, thus neglecting its socially situated nature (see pp. 194–196).

Ellis reflects on the ubiquity of the Toulmin model in the teaching of written argumentation by US instructors. First, she identifies common problems in student writing which, in her view, are due to the fact that a heuristic function is wrongly attributed to the Toulmin model. For Ellis, more helpful to the purpose of guiding written argumentation is the pragma-dialectical approach, with its emphasis both on problem discussion and resolution (dialectic) and on finding the most effective strategies (rhetoric). A main problem in the Toulmin model is

that it represents a single argumentative move, while most argumentative writings exhibit complex argumentation structures which pragma-dialectics is able to capture. Also, some conceptual distinctions in the Toulmin model – like qualifier and qualification – create confusion which reflects on students' texts. Other common problems singled out by Ellis are the identification of warrants and an excessively defensive attitude focused on advocating standpoints rather than developing viewpoints. Hence, Ellis proposes to integrate the critical questions from which Toulmin derives the components of the layout of arguments (data, warrant, etc.) with a set of questions inspired from the pragma-dialectical model.

Part V of the volume contains five essays which, though examining different social domains (e.g. health, politics or sport), deal all with a context of interpersonal argumentation. By examining polemical exchange on political issues in France, Doury and Mansier analyse the use of a particular form of abusive ad hominem attack, which occurs when the opponent is referred to with an adjective of mental disorder (such as paranoia or autism). Through the discussion of several examples, they come to the conclusion that these attacks, besides being disqualifying towards the interlocutor, somehow contradict a cultural evolution in current society which intends to look at mental pathologies from a de-stigmatising, normalising and non-discriminatory perspective.

The papers by Kline and Oaks discusses the effect of interpersonal familiarity on argument in online discussions. An experiment is designed where some students are given the opportunity to reciprocally familiarise with a topic before discussing it. When these students are compared to a control group, the results show that interpersonal familiarity produces more cohesion and more disagreement acts, and this in turn suggests that familiarity enhances status equality among discussants. These findings have evident implications for the design of platforms aimed at enhancing political engagement.

The sportsmen's defences against doping accusations is the object of Jansen's paper. The author focuses on a recurrent apologetic argument used in this context, which is synthetically rendered as "I did not do it, because I would not do it" (p. 253). Basically, the defendant maintains that he/she could not accomplish the alleged violation because the harmful consequences it would yield actually exclude the existence of plausible motives for doing that. Jansen outlines a critical questions-based evaluation of this reasoning and tries to explain how this argument, while dialectically weak, is rhetorically convincing. According to the author, criticising this type of argument would convey impoliteness towards the arguer, thus discouraging to question such a fallacious move.

Greco's study on migrants' decision-making accounts comes at a time where migration is an extremely topical issue. Based on a corpus of narrative interviews to mothers migrating in the London area, the author discovers the frequent use of

the argument from analogy and analyses the function it achieves. By reconstructing the mothers' inner argumentation with the analytical toolkit of the pragma-dialectical critical discussion (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004) integrated by the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2010), Greco shows that analogical reasoning is instrumental to justify the feasibility of the migration project. As such, this argument scheme cannot alone justify the eventual practical standpoint of migrating but constitutes, in any case, an essential component within a more complex argumentative structure.

Through an observational study in diabetes care, Bigi argues for the usefulness of argumentation skills as a therapeutic tool. At the beginning of her paper, Bigi reports evidence obtained through interviews with doctors on their lack of argumentative awareness (for example, they do not distinguish the activities of information-giving and argumentation). With an argumentative analysis of video-recorded medical consultations, the author brings to light clear cases where doctors fail to see actual opportunities for critical exchange and constructive dialogue with their patients. Bigi concludes that by improving their argumentation skills, doctors could better achieve their therapeutic goals, in particular those which largely depend on the quality of the doctor-patient discussion.

The sixth and last part of the volume contains three chapters on strategic manoeuvring, being the pragma-dialectical concept that refers to what arguers actually do when using argumentation in a real context of human interaction. In the first chapter, Gata explores the strategic functions of argumentation in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports. In line with Extended pragma-dialectics, she first frames the CSR report as an argumentative activity type, emphasising the institutional and regulatory conditions imposed on the considered genre. Subsequently, she analyses strategic manoeuvring by focusing on the adaptation to the audience demand. She reconstructs strategic moves towards audiences by highlight how audiences are described, pointed to their benefits and their cooperative behaviour and what advantages are brought to them.

As a part of a wider project aimed at testing the conventional validity of the pragma-dialectical critical discussion rules by comparing them with ordinary arguers' judgements of reasonableness, van Eemeren, Garssen and Meuffels examine the *ad baculum* fallacy. Their experiment starts form the hypothesis that *ad baculum* moves are judged as less unreasonable when they are presented as well-meant advices where the speaker is not responsible for the envisaged negative consequences. The results of the original experiment and of the replication confirm their hypothesis.

The final paper by Kato and Suzuki offers a reconstruction of Japan's first internet elections (2013) from the perspective of strategic manoeuvring. The authors argue for the importance of the Internet in creating public spaces for

critical discussion and, more in general, in enhancing citizens' active participation in political life.

As the relevance of argumentation for a certain domain of social interaction is being increasingly acknowledged by scholars in the disciplines relating to the context – such as accounting (Brennan et al. 2010) and management (Green 2004), just to mention a few – the effort of argumentation scholars in taking care of how reasoning and critical discussion is realized in institutional fields and activity types becomes a crucial endeavour. This volume contributes to this research enterprise not simply by consolidating existing projects and themes, but also by suggesting stimulating research paths that remain largely underexplored. Several chapters of this volume conclude with important practical implications for societally-relevant professions such as educators and medical doctors. This kind of results is what we should expect and hope to get from the study of argumentation in context. In this regard, *Scrutinizing Argumentation in Practice* offers numerous interesting and precious insights.

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Reviewer's address

Rudi Palmieri
School of the Arts, Department of Communication and Media
University of Liverpool
19–23 Abercromby Square
Liverpool, L697ZG
United Kingdom

rudi.palmieri@liverpool.ac.uk