Cultural Keywords in Arguments.
The Case of *Interactivity*[1]

Claves culturales en los argumentos. El caso de Interactividad

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Abstract: Cultural keywords are words that are revealing of a culture's beliefs or values. As such they are typically associated with evaluative connotations. Keywords have been said to play a significant role in arguments, with some authors seeing their persuasive use as opposed to logical argumentation. Here we develop a theoretical approach to keywords that was first proposed by Rigotti & Rocci (2005) through a case study of a keyword of contemporary cyberculture: *interactivity*. Keywords are words that play a twofold role in enthymematic arguments: (a) from a logical point of view they appear as termini medi; (b) from a communicative point of view they point to *endoxa* in the cultural common ground. The paper applies this model to the words *interactive* and *interactivity*, using argumentative indicators to extract a corpus of argumentatively relevant occurrences from the Internet. The investigation shows that keywords can be used to provide evidence supporting the reconstruction of tacit premises in enthymemes. It also shows that a keyword such as interactivity is vague and polysemous and yet characterized by a persisting positive connotation across different meanings. This seems to allow a shallow strategy of premise recovery in enthymemes where the persistent connotation provides a rough and ready justification for *ad hoc* premises.

Keywords: Keyword, cyberculture, interactivity, endoxon, enthymeme.

Resumen: Las palabras culturales claves son palabras que revelan las creencias o valores de una cultura. Como tales, son asociadas típicamente con connotaciones eva-

luativas. Se ha dicho que las palabras clave juegan un rol importante en los argumentos, indicando algunos autores que su uso persuasivo se opone a la argumentación lógica. Aquí desarrollamos un acercamiento teórico a las palabras clave que fue propuesto primero por Rigotti y Rocci (2005), a través del estudio de una palabra clave en la ciber-cultura contemporánea: *interactividad*. Las palabras clave son palabras que juegan un doble rol en los argumentos entimemáticos: (a) desde un punto de vista lógico ellas aparecen como término medio; (b) desde un punto de vista comunicativo ellas muestran endoxa del respaldo cultural común. Este trabajo aplica este modelo a las palabras *interactivo* e *interactividad*, usando indicadores argumentativos para extraer un corpus argumentativamente relevante de ejemplos obtenidos en la red. La investigación muestra que las palabras clave pueden ser usadas para proveer evidencia que apoye la reconstrucción de premisas tácitas en los entimemas. También muestra que las palabras clave, tales como interactividad, son vagas y polisémicas, y caracterizadas por una connotación persistentemente positiva que cruza distintos significados. Esto parece permitir una estrategia débil de recuperación de premisas en los entimemas donde la connotación persistente provee una justificación *ad hoc* instantánea y sin matices.

Palabras clave: Palabra clave, cibercultura, interactividad, endoxa, entimema.

1. Introduction

Cultural keywords are words that are particularly revealing of a culture's beliefs or values. As such, they are typically associated with evaluative *connotations*. In this paper we look at the relationship between keywords and arguments, taking the derivationally related words[2] *interactive* and *interactivity*[3] as cases in point. In the following pages, we first outline the

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[2] From a morphological viewpoint the relation between *interactive* and *interactivity* is a simple case of semantically unmarked, or "cold", derivation where an abstract *name of a property* is derived from the corresponding adjective as in: *hostile > hostility, futile > futility, rare>rarity*. However, things are complicated by the fact that *interactive* is itself a deverbal adjective, derived from the verb *to interact*. From this same verb stems the deverbal noun *interaction*, with which *interactivity* is indirectly related. The different derivation path is reflected in the different semantic classes to which these abstract nouns belong: *interactivity* is a stative, uncountable, property name, while *interaction* is a non-stative, countable, event name. For a basic discussion of morphology in relation to semantics see Rigotti and Cigada (2004: 147-172, 207-210) and Polguère (2008 *passim*).

[3] Rabaté and Laurraire (1985: 21) had noted that French *interactif* was much more used than *interactivité* and hypothesized that the noun derived also diachronically from the adjective. This assumption coincides with Oxford Dictionary of English in which *interactivity* is not present as a specific entry but it appears as a derivative of *interactive*. Moreover, it is still interesting to remark that in spite of the fact that both terms were coined to cope with the development of the new media, *interactive* became the adjectival form associated with *interaction* as well.

view – first put forth in Rigotti and Rocci (2005) – that in order to decide whether a certain word is indeed a cultural keyword one should look at how exactly this word is used in arguments in a corpus of texts representative of the cultural community under consideration. As we will see, this approach not only offers a previously lacking decision procedure to test candidate keywords, it also offers us a deeper theoretical insight of what a keyword is by connecting it with the notion of *endoxon* from Aristotelian rhetoric.

Starting from this conception of keywords, we go on to argue that if, on the one hand, looking at argumentation lends precious insights to research on keywords conducted within lexical semantics, linguistic anthropology or cultural studies, on the other hand, the study of argumentation can similarly benefit at various levels from paying attention to cultural keywords.

First, keywords can be used by argumentation analysts to validate their hypotheses about the *reconstruction* of tacit premises in natural enthymematic arguments.

Second, the evaluative connotations attached to keywords deserve a close scrutiny in the *evaluation* of the quality of arguments. These connotations may point to complex systems of cultural beliefs, that are actually mobilized in the audience in working out the structure of the argument, yet because of their very prominence they can also provide "shallow" suitable premises for the enthymeme, discouraging further elaboration in the audience. Additionally, keywords can be the target of rhetorical strategies that exploit their polysemy or vagueness, through *equivocation* or *persuasive definition*, so that their connotations (and the readily available premises that come with them) are abusively appropriated by the arguer. Conversely, an arguer can employ the strategy of *dissociation* on a vague or polysemous keyword in order to restrict the applicability of an argumentatively relevant connotation.

2. Research traditions in the study of keywords

Before we develop the argument sketched above with the help of the words *interactive* and *interactivity*, it is worth pausing briefly[4] on how scholars

[4] A much more comprehensive literature review on cultural keywords can be found in Bigi (2006).

from various areas of linguistics, anthropology and cultural studies have tried to capture the haunting but elusive notion of cultural keyword and have defined a series of partially overlapping notions of keyword.

The *key* metaphor is easily grasped intuitively and, to some extent, provides a common schema, masking the diversity of concepts associated with this term: *keywords* are in some sense *representative* of a body of knowledge to which they are associated, and thus can be used to provide some sort of *access* to this body of knowledge – be it an individual text, a corpus of texts belonging to the same discourse genre, or discourse community, or a whole culture. Stubbs (2008: 1) provides a broad characterization of the family of notions that interests us here: "Keywords are words that are claimed to have a special status, either because they express important evaluative social meanings, or because they play a special role in a text or text type".

An early, influential, contribution to the study of keywords can be found in the works of Williams (1959, 1976). For him keywords are "[...] significant binding words in certain activities and their interpretation; they are significant, indicative words in certain forms of thoughts" (Williams 1976: 20). Williams composed a dictionary of keywords, including mostly learned, specialized words such as *alienation, class, democracy, industry*, which is meant to illuminate the understanding of the crucial arch-keywords *culture* and *society*. Williams refers to his work as "historical semantics" and argues that it can illuminate our understanding of social and cultural realities as the change in the use of some words corresponds to changes in the way people think about ordinary life. Interestingly, Williams (1976) says that every word included in the dictionary has "virtually forced itself" on his attention "in the course of some argument"; yet he does not provide a method for identifying keywords other than his subjective choice, nor does he systematically elaborates on their relation with arguments. More generally, the recourse to textual evidence in elucidating keywords is quite limited in Williams, as he only relies on dictionary examples.

A more linguistic take on the analysis of cultural keywords, rooted in lexical semantics and the anthropological linguistic tradition, is represented by the work of Wierzbicka (1997). Wierzbicka's research deals with the semantic analysis of areas in the lexicon where highly language specific distinctions reflect specific ways of living as well as "ways of thinking". Further, these

distinctions have, historically, shaped their communities and perpetuate the ways of living they reflect. The domains covered by Wierzbicka's analyses range from social and political values, to ethics, folk-psychology and ethnic identity, all of which she examines with respect to a number of European and extra-European languages. According to Wierzbicka (1997: 22), linguistic semantics provides a rigorous methodology for decoding culture specific meanings and, consequently, for elucidating the tacit assumptions which are linked with them. In fact, her work is based on a formal (though naturalistic) system for the representation of linguistic meanings called Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM)[5]. Many of the words analyzed by Wierzbicka, both prestigious, like *liberty*, and colloquial like the typically Australian verb *whinge* contain an embedded evaluative connotation. Consider, for instance, her characterization of *whingeing* in Australian culture:

> What exactly is 'whingeing'? Clearly, it is a concept closely related to that expressed by the word *complaining*. But, first, *complain* is neutral, and does not imply any evaluation of the activity in question, whereas *whinge* is critical and derogatory. Furthermore, *complain* is purely verbal, whereas *whinge* suggest something that sounds like an inarticulate animal cry. Being purely verbal, *complaining* can be seen as fully intentional, whereas *whingeing* can be only seen as semi-intentional and semi-controlled. Finally, *whingeing*, like *nagging* and unlike *complaining*, suggests monotonous repetition. (Wierzbicka 1997: 215)

Basically, the word *whinge* represents a morally condemned behavior, which runs directly counter to the traditional Australian colonial ethos characterized by the values of toughness, gameness, resilience, "die-hardness", comradeship, and good humor (Wierzbicka 1997). This whole characterization is seen as embedded in the word meaning and made painstakingly explicit in the NSM semantic analysis of the complex semanteme *whingeing*:

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[5] The NSM was developed during 30 years by A. Wierzbicka, in collaboration with Cliff Goddard and others. The NSM makes a strong hypothesis on the universal nature of human concepts. It posits a finite inventory of basic universal human concepts, semantic primes (Wierzbicka 1996), which are lexicalized in all the languages of the world. The primes provide a natural metalanguage for semantic decomposition of complex meanings, and a touchstone and metric for evaluating differences across cultures.

(1) *whinge* (e.g. X *was whingeing*)
    (a) for some time, X was saying something like this:
           something bad happened to me
    (b) X was saying it as people say things
    (c) when they want to say something like this:
    (d) something bad is happening to me
    (e) I feel something bad because of this
    (f) I can't do anything ("about it")
    (g) I want someone to know this
    (h) I want someone to do something because of this
    (i) I think no one wants to do anything
    (j) I want to say this many times because of this
    (k) people think: it is bad if someone does this
                         (Wierzbicka 1997: 215-216)

While the method of semantic analysis followed by Wierzbicka is very explicit, the process of keyword selection remains largely intuitive[6]. Wierzbicka (1997) does mention a series of indicators that may help keyword selection (sheer frequency of occurrence, frequency of occurrence in a particular domain, frequency of occurrence in book titles, songs, proverbs, sayings, richness of the phraseological patterns in which the word occurs), but she also contends that the true justification of the choice of a keyword is given *a posteriori* by the insightfulness of the results of its semantic analysis. As regards the linguistic evidence used to support the analysis, it is still largely limited to dictionaries and other kinds of meta-linguistic texts, and does not involve systematic recourse to a corpus of culturally relevant texts.

Another major approach to the study of cultural keywords is the one developed by Stubbs. In several publications addressing the subject of keywords (Stubbs 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2008), he discusses different aspects of the notion. Stubbs' contribution is noteworthy for our investigation because it addresses the issue of the persuasive power of keywords. At its core, Stubbs' approach is the direct descendant of Firth's (1935) proposal of a "systematic study" of the "contextual distribution of sociologically important words"

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[6] Cf. Wierzbicka 1997: "there is no objective discovery procedure for identifying keywords in a culture".

– words which Firth called "focal" or "pivotal". For Stubbs the analysis of cultural keywords proceeds mainly through the examination of the recurrent linguistic contexts in which these words occur: typical collocates of keywords will provide evidence of their "cultural connotations". Through a study of recurrent collocation patterns, positive or negative "semantic prosodies" associated with a word can be discovered, providing evidence of the evaluative connotations attached to a word.

Stubbs places this inquiry within the study of *discourse* in the sense that Foucault gives to this word: "In phrases such as 'academic discourse', and 'racist discourse', 'discourse' means recurrent formulations which circulate in a discourse community." (Stubbs 2001b: 166). These recurrent patterns embody "shared meanings", "particular social values and views of the world" (Stubbs 1996: 158). As Stubbs puts it, "Such recurrent ways of talking do not determine thought, but they provide familiar and conventional representations of people and events, by filtering and crystallizing ideas, and by providing pre-fabricated means by which ideas can be easily conveyed and grasped" (ibid.).

It is particularly interesting, here, to consider the role played by cultural keywords and by recurrent patterns of discourse within argumentation. Stubbs (1996) opposes a logical/rational mode of argumentation to a mode of argumentation based on keywords. Examining a series of political speeches of British politicians, Stubbs (1996) observes how logically defective, if not outright fallacious, arguments derive their force from being part of "a discourse which calls up a set of linked key words, symbols and beliefs" and from the fact that they depend on a set of premises, which are *unstated* and *probably unconscious*" (Stubbs 1996: 162, we italicize).

3. Evaluative connotations and the persuasive power of keywords

The evaluative component of the meaning of many cultural keywords and its alleged persuasive power deserves particular attention in an investigation of the relationship between keywords and arguments. Also the fact that this evaluative meaning is to be considered a *connotation* of the word deserves some consideration. The term connotation has been used in widely

divergent manners in philosophy, linguistics, stylistics and semiotics (See Rigotti and Rocci 2005b for a review). What remains constant is the idea that connotations are additional, secondary meanings that are distinct and somewhat separate from the main meaning of the linguistic expression, be it conceptualized as the cognitive meaning, the denotation, or the truth-conditional meaning of the expression.

When Stevenson (1937, 1938, 1944) introduced the notion of *emotive meaning*, he had in mind words that seem endowed with a persuasive power of their own similar to those that we have been considering cultural keywords here. *Culture*, *dictator, democracy* are among the examples used by Stevenson. These words are endowed, alongside their conceptual meaning, with an emotive meaning, which Stevenson (1937: 23) defines as follows:

> The emotive meaning of a word is a tendency of a word, arising through the history of its usage, to produce (result from) *affective* responses in people. It is the immediate aura of feeling which hovers about a word. Such tendencies to produce affective responses cling to words very tenaciously.

For Stevenson this kind of meaning is wholly non conceptual, non representational. As a consequence the way in which these words persuade the hearer is totally unlike rational argument: it "depends on the sheer, direct emotional impact of words [...] A redirection of the hearer's attitudes is sought *not by the mediating step of altering his beliefs*, but by *exhortation*, whether obvious or subtle, crude or refined." (Stevenson 1944: 139-40).

With such a radical separation between the evaluative connotation and the representational content of words one cannot imagine that the evaluative component of keywords may play a role in an argument: we can only imagine that keywords yield their raw force to the persuasiveness of an argument from the outside at the level of rhetorical choice. Moreover, it becomes difficult to think of more specific and articulated evaluations attached to keywords that might go beyond the raw emotion and connect to a network of cultural values. As we will see later (§ 9), however, the analyses of Stevenson become useful when examining pathological situations, when evaluative connotations cling to polysemous or vague words irrespective of their denotative values.

As we have seen above, Stubbs (1996, 2001) proposes to look at the evaluative connotations carried by a keyword through the window of the *semantic prosodies* of the word in a corpus, which is seen as a more or less faithful approximation of the notion of *discours* elaborated by Foucault (1971). In this way the persuasive power of keywords coincides with the pressure to conform to the socially dominant discourse, and can be considered separate from rational argument. This view certainly contains a grain of truth as the persuasive power of repetition as a rhetorical technique cannot be discounted completely.

While this account of connotation and of its persuasive power does not completely eschew representations, it does not take into account the use of representations in reasoning, focusing instead on their involvement in sub-rational processes based on repeated association. As noted in Rigotti and Rocci (2005), relying just on this approach risks offering a dangerously simplified image of cultural reproduction. When processing the discourses circulating in a cultural community, language users do not simply register representations and remain impressed by their repetitions, they draw complex interpretive inferences, and, in the case of argumentative discourse they are able to reconstruct the inferential path proposed by the arguer.

In fact, Stubbs (1996: 162) does briefly comment on the reliance of keyword based arguments "on a set of premises, which are *unstated* and *probably unconscious*" but he does not develop an account of the relation between keywords and implicit premises. An account of this relation, on the contrary, forms the core of the present paper and, as we will see in the final sections of the paper, patterns extracted from corpus data can have an important role in illuminating this relationship.[7]

The treatment of evaluative meanings in Wierzbicka's work differs markedly from the notions of emotive meaning and connotation that emerge from Stevenson and Stubbs. As we have seen with the example of *whingeing*, the evaluative component is not only treated as representational, but even

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[7] A somewhat similar line of investigation is pursued by O'Halloran (2009). While largely sharing "the spirit" of the position expressed by Rigotti and Rocci (2009), O'Halloran laments that their work lacks a proper empirical component and sets out, in his contribution to develop an approach that combines the reliance on a corpus as a proxy to cultural common ground with consideration for discourse structure and inferential processes. The account of the keywords *interactive* and *interactivity* presented in the following sections is spurred, in part, by this criticism by O'Halloran.

embedded within the semantic analysis of the word. Wierzbicka's analyses typically contain clauses like the following:

(2)
    (a) people think: it is bad if someone does this (*whingeing*, Wierzbicka 1997: 215-216)
    (b) everyone thinks: this is good (*liberty,* p. 154)
    (c) it is bad if someone cannot think this (*freedom*, p. 154)
    (d) people think: this is good (*omoiyari*, p. 280)

There are three aspects of this treatment that deserve comment: the representational nature of the connotations, the structure of the representation, and their inclusion in the semantic content of the word.

That connotations can be represented propositionally and are not simply some non-representational psychological force acting on the hearer is essential for having them entering reasoning and argumentation. In this respect, our approach follows Wierzbicka.

As for the form of these evaluative clauses, it is interesting that the properly evaluative component (let us call it: "x is good/bad") is often subordinated to a modal preface specifying the source of the evaluation ("people think"). This specification, in fact, allows us to distinguish the particular connotations associated with cultural keywords from what we might call expressive meanings (Potts 2007), which implicate an individual, often immediate, evaluation on the part of the speaker, like the word *bastard* in the following example:

(3) He dumped me! That bastard!
    bastard (x) = "I think x is bad"

Moreover, the characterization of the source of the evaluative proposition as common belief is also important in view of the role this proposition might play as a premise in an argument, as it indirectly specifies its epistemic status, its degree of acceptability or plausibility (Cf. Rocci 2006: 429).

The straightforward inclusion of the evaluative proposition in the semantic analysis appears more problematic. The problem stems, in part, from a general feature of the NSM style of lexical semantic analysis, which, contrary

to other approaches (Seuren 1985, Fillmore 2003, Rigotti, Rocci and Greco Morasso 2006), does not set apart the proper semantic entailments of a lexical predicate from their presuppositions or from other kinds of inference (such as conventional implicatures) that may be triggered by the use of a word. It is dubious that this kind of evaluative propositions could be treated as semantic entailments of the word. If they were, an utterance such as (4.a) would contain an outright contradiction, just like (4.b):

(4)
    (a) Nobody thinks *liberty* is a *good* thing.
    (b) *Many surfers *killed* by sharks are still *alive* to tell their stories.

If we hear someone asserting (4.a) we may think they hold very strange beliefs that are patently empirically false, but we would not say that their assertion is contradictory or self defeating. On the contrary, if we hear (4.b) we think that the speaker not only happens to be wrong, but cannot possibly be right no matter what the statistics about shark attacks on surfers say. The falsity of (4.a) is an empirical matter, while the falsity of (4.b) is a semantic matter. For this reason we cannot consider "everyone thinks: this is good" as *part of the meaning* of *liberty*, at least not in the same way in which we consider "becoming not alive" as part of the meaning of *being killed*.

4. Keywords, enthymemes and *endoxa*

Rigotti and Rocci (2005) have suggested that in order to test whether a given word is a cultural keyword one should look at the role it plays in arguments. The proposed test adopts the model of the *enthymeme* inherited from Aristotelian rhetoric as a means of reconstructing natural language arguments and involves checking both (a) the logical role played by the candidate keyword in the reconstructed syllogistic structure of the enthymeme and (b) its role in triggering the pragmatic inferences required to supply the implicit parts of the syllogistic structure. Let us first illustrate the model with a rather trivial attested example[8]:

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[8] The example is, intentionally, very similar to the invented one used in Rigotti and Rocci (2005).

(5) Polynices should not be buried because he is a traitor.
    (Example extracted through WebCorp[9])

The first step in reconstructing (5) as an argument is recognizing that the speaker – who is, say, King Creon of Thebes – is advancing the standpoint *Polynices should not be buried* and presents the proposition *He is a traitor* as an argument in support of it. In order to make the standpoint follows from the argument we need to provide a suitable major premise, such as:

(6) Traitors should not be buried

Thus, we obtain the following syllogism:

(7)
    Major Premise: <u>Traitors</u> should not be buried
    Minor Permise: *Polynices is a <u>traitor</u>*
    Conclusion: *Polynices should not be buried.*

It is important here that our readers set aside any repugnance for the simplicity of the example and for the seemingly "mechanical" nature of the syllogistic reconstruction and bear with us in examining the logical role played by the term *traitor* in the syllogism, as well as its role in the pragmatic processes that are essential for bringing about said reconstruction and for anchoring it to the cultural context.

4.1. Keywords are termini medi

From a logical viewpoint, the word *traitor* in (7) plays the role of *terminus medius* of the syllogism. A *terminus medius* (middle term) is a term that occurs in both premises but not in the conclusion. In order to ensure the

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[9] Most of the attested examples used in this paper have been obtained simply by exploiting the Internet as a corpus through the excellent WebCorp (Cf. Renouf *et al.* 2007), a suite of tools for linguistic data search freely available at <u>www.webcorp.org.uk</u>. The main tool functions as a meta-search engine. WebCorp facilitates the formulations of linguistically relevant queries on a series of standard search engines (such as Google), collects the results and present them in an useable concordance format to the user.

validity of the syllogism the middle term has to be taken at least once in its full extension (e.g. *all those who...*).[10] Example (7) belongs to a very common deductive pattern traditionally called *Figure I* of the syllogism. In the Figure I the terminus medius occurs in the subject of the major premise and in the predicate of the minor premise:
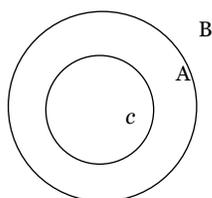
(8) Underlying structure of (7), where the predicate **A** is the terminus medius.

Major premise: $\forall$ (x): **A** (x) $\rightarrow$ B (x)
Minor premise: **A**(c)
Conclusion: B (c).

The pivotal role of the predicate A is perhaps even more evident if translated in set-theoretic terms: A is a (proper or improper) subset of B, and *c* belongs to A. Therefore we must conclude that *c* also belongs to the superset B.

Interestingly, in the case of an enthymeme this logical centrality is matched by a crucial communicative role.

4.2. Keywords guide and justify the construction of contextual premises

Enthymemes are not just syllogisms with missing premises. They are first of all enthymemes whose premises are *endoxa*. In Aristotle the adjective *endoxos* (from *en* 'in' and *doxa* 'opinion' or 'fame') refers to propositions

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[10] Failing to do so would result in the fallacy of *undistributed middle*.

that are in the common opinion and, as a consequence are generally accepted within a community. In the *Topics*, Aristotle gives an articulated definition of the *endoxa*:

> [*endoxa* are those opinions] which commend themselves to all, or to the majority, or to the wise – that is or to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them (*Topics* I 100b 21-23).

It seems that for Aristotle the possibility of leaving implicit some of the premises was a consequence of this more fundamental quality of endoxicality:

> [the enthymeme] is deduced from few premises, often fewer than the regular syllogism; for if any one of these is well known, there is no need to mention it, for the hearer can add it himself (*Rhetoric*, I, 1357a)

As Bitzer (1959: 407) puts it, "to say that the enthymeme is an 'incomplete syllogism' – that is, a syllogism having one or more suppressed premises – means that the speaker does not lay down his premises but lets his audience supply them out of its stock of opinion and knowledge".

Let us observe more closely how endoxical premises are recovered in enthymemes. Where does the premise *Traitors should not be buried* come from? Speaking of "implicated premises", pragmaticists Sperber and Wilson (1986: 195) say that they are "supplied by the hearer, who must either retrieve them from memory or construct them by developing assumption schemas from memory". In discussing the role of keywords in enthymemes this distinction has interesting consequences. In the first case we can imagine that the presence of the word *traitor* in the explicit minor premise triggers the recovery by the hearer of a proposition like the following in the cultural common ground[11]:

(9)   According to Theban law/custom: traitors should not be buried.

which is enough to conclude that *Polynices should not be buried*[12]. This is

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[11] For a precise definition of the notion of *common ground* see Clark (1996: 92-121). On cultural common ground see Danesi and Rocci (2009: 137-172).

[12] Note that the *should* in the conclusion expresses here the same deontic modality of the Theban law/custom expressed by the modality in the major premise.

the most straightforward case. Many enthymemes, however, cannot be realistically modeled as a simple case of retrieval. For instance, a hearer may be unable to access a proposition like (9) in the cultural common ground and yet be able to work out the missing premise of the syllogism. For instance, the hearer could have easy access to a culturally shared proposition such as (10):

(10) People think: treason is a heinous crime

And then use (10) and other culturally available propositions to provide a backing for the logically sufficient proposition *Traitors should not be buried.* In these more complex cases it is important to distinguish between the *computation* of the missing premises and their *justification* in the cultural common ground[13]. Working out a missing major premise supplying the logical minimum for making the syllogism work is often an easy task for the interpreter, and one that can be sometimes achieved, at least in some cases, in the absence of any background propositions. The possibility of interpreting *paradoxical* arguments attests to that. For instance, if we read the following statement in Charles Baudelaire:

(11) Le commerce est naturel, donc il est infâme
     (*Mon coeur mis à nu*, par. XLI, Baudelaire 1975-76: 703)
     (Trade is natural, therefore it is vile)

We can provide a formally valid major premise providing the logical minimum:

(12) All that is natural is vile/ abominable

Also, in interpreting Baudelaire's argument we do not have to think that he gives to the word *natural* a different meaning: we only have to hypothesize that Baudelaire subscribes to a very unusual set of values or entertains very

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[13] We take this distinction from the studies on the functioning of presupposition accommodation. Kamp (2001: 58) speaks of *presupposition computation* and *presupposition justification*.

peculiar beliefs about nature. The premise retains, however, an extremely shallow, "*ad hoc*" quality, because it is likely the result of a wholesale accommodation, which is not justified by any *endoxon* in the cultural common ground. We are able to reconstruct the logical role of *natural* as a *terminus medius*, but the logically sufficient major premise and the *endoxa* evoked by the word remain completely disconnected. Obviously, the argument is unlikely to be persuasive.

In the end, what happens behind the major premise of the syllogism appears to be the most interesting part of the story, as well as the most difficult to investigate. The richness of the *endoxa* evoked by the keywords and the quality of their inferential connection with the implicit major premise may vary enormously.

In a recent paper on the use of the Japanese cultural keyword *kyosei* in the corporate discourse of Japanese multinational companies, Filimon (2009) suggests that, in different circumstances, the same keyword may prompt different processing strategies in the hearer, and proposes linking keywords research with psychologically informed models of persuasion. When the cultural common ground is rich and the motivation to critically scrutinize the argument is high (high sufficiency threshold), the justification process might involve systematic processing based on a complex set of beliefs evoked by the keyword; while in the case of a limited cultural common ground and when the hearer is not motivated to effortful extended processing, the most accessible evaluative connotations may provide a "quick and dirty" justification for a major premise satisfying the logical minimum.

In the following pages, we look at the argumentative use of the keywords *interactive* and *interactivity* and we propose a complementary line of investigation into the quality of implicit premise justification, centered on the relation between the denotative meaning of the concerned keyword and the evaluative connotation it evokes.

5. Applying the model

Before moving to our case study, however, it is worth summarizing the approach that we have outlined above developing the proposal of Rigotti and Rocci (2005):

– Cultural keywords are words that are particularly revealing of a culture's belief system and values. As such, they are typically associated with "evaluative connotations".
– The "evaluative connotations" do not express online evaluations of the speaker, but have the pragmatic and epistemic status of cultural *endoxa* in Aristotle's sense.
– In order to test whether a given word has the status of a cultural keyword one needs to examine its use in arguments in a corpus of texts representative of the cultural community under consideration.
– We can consider serious candidates for the status of keywords, those words that play the role of *terminus medius* in an enthymematic argument, providing access, at the same time, to a cultural *endoxon* which either directly supplies the required major premise, or contributes to indirectly justify it, at least in part.

The core idea behind the testing procedure is simple: the presence of certain beliefs or values in a culture and their importance within it, is best attested by the finding that these beliefs or values *are indeed used*, maybe tacitly, by the members of the relevant cultural community to justify their positions in an argument.

Obviously, in order to provide meaningful results, the procedure needs to be applied to a corpus of culturally relevant texts. The first applications of the model (Bigi 2007, 2008, Filimon 2009) have been in-depth analyses of individual argumentative texts. Such analyses are important to flesh out and refine the model and can also offer relevant insights into the word investigated, provided that they independently make a case for the relevance of the chosen example (see, for instance, Filimon 2009). It seems clear, however, that, in order to make a convincing case for a keyword, larger-scale explorations are needed, and are indeed underway[14].

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[14] In the context of the SNSF project *Endoxa and keywords in the pragmatics of argumentative discourse*, Agatha Filimon and Andrea Rocci are investigating the argumentative use of cultural keywords in two large corpora of corporate annual reports and sustainability reports. Márcio Wariss Monteiro is expanding the corpus investigation of the words *interactive* and *interactivity* for his Ph.D. thesis, which will also include a study of keywords in a corpus of Brazilian political speeches and policy documents concerning the introduction of digital television in Brazil.

Establishing the *key-ness* of a word through the extensive application of the above testing procedure will be a matter of degree, rather than a categorical decision. Moreover, the degree of key-ness will be best regarded as resulting from multiple dimensions, factoring in not only the *frequency* of the use of the word as a *terminus medius*, but also the *hierarchical position* of the uses within the overall argumentative structure of the texts, the *consistency* in evoking the same *endoxon* or the same constellation of related *endoxa*, and also their *sufficiency*, that is their capacity of providing a premise that does not need further explicit support. We can illustrate the dimension of sufficiency with an example of use of the word *interactive* in a *Wall Street Journal* article discussing the commercial future of e-book readers:

(13) Amazon had been hoping to target the [academic] market with its 9.7-inch screen Kindle DX e-book reader, for example, but schools said the device wasn't sufficiently *interactive* and lacked basics such as page numbers and color graphics. (*WSJ*, 1/22/10)

What is striking in this example is that the author presents the word *interactive* as sufficient to evoke an argument without further specification. Unlike the case of page numbers and color graphics, it may be not at all obvious what should be the kind and degree of interactivity that is sufficient for e-book readers to hope to supplant traditional textbooks – which are, by the way, usually not considered interactive devices at all. Despite this difficulty, *interactive* is deemed *sufficient* to evoke an argument and is not elaborated upon in the paper.

6. What is interactivity?

It is really not easy to find an unequivocal definition of the word interactivity. In fact, since the term was coined in the early 1980s many authors have been trying to conceptualize it.[15] These attempts involve quite different ideas

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[15] The term *interactivity* was created in French (*interactivité*) by the beginning of the 1980s to designate a new technological-mediated communicative phenomenon. See Rabaté and Laurraire's (1985) pioneer research.

and taxonomies resulting in a practical impossibility of proposing a single definition. Trying to find some convergence, we can sum up the theoretical definitions and approaches we have found in the literature by saying that there are basically three types of *interactivity*: *user-to-user*, *user-to-machine* and *user-to-content*. Moreover, with respect to frameworks to deal with interactivity, basically we have found three approaches in which interactivity is conceived: as a *medium property*, as an *exchange process* and as the *result of a perceptional experience*.[16] According to the overwhelming majority of scholars, the notion of interactivity is *related to new media* and involves some kind of technological-mediated setting. Interactivity is often seen as the *novelty that adds value to new media*. It is said to be a new media founding principle, cornerstone, bedrock, central/key concept, and so forth (Lister *et al.* 2009, Dewdney and Ride 2006). The quality of "being interactive", in comparison with precedent media (press, broadcast etc.), conveys the idea of more *freedom*, more *participation* and *engagement*, more *equality of powers*, more *transparency*, more *possibilities to intervene in media contents*, more *decentralization*, more *entertainment* and so forth. It is these "more…", which we find in the literature, that make *interactivity* an interesting candidate for the status of cultural keyword in what we could call the contemporary global *cyberculture*.

Cyberculture could be defined as the contemporary sociocultural organization in which digital technologies play a crucial role. In this perspective, cyberculture should not be reduced to technological aspects neither should it be related only to what goes on in the so-called virtual environments. Actually, "cyberculture involves all the most socially important phenomena that arise in the contemporary world insofar as nowadays the predominant

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[16] The first type (user-to-user) corresponds to CMC (computer-mediated-communication); the second (user-to-machine/media/system) is based on HCI (human-computer interaction); and the third (user-to-content/document) is associated to the possibility of changing content in a given computer/media system). In the first approach (medium property) interactivity is conceived as a technical characteristic closely related to other technological properties like multimedia, user-friendliness, hypertextuality; the second (exchange process) is focused on dialogical and conversational dimensions and generally the process is mediated by some infotechnological device; in the third (result of a perceptional experience) interactivity relies on users' perception, it is such a psychological variable that depends on subjectivity. See McMillan (2002) for a review of multiple research traditions on *interactivity*.

objects, procedures and processes depend in some extent on digital technologies" (Trivinho 2001: 60, our translation[17]). This same ideia of cyberculture – despite quite different approaches – can be found in many other authors (Lemos 2002, Lévy 1997) and sometimes it come up as *network society* (Castells 1996), *cyberworld* (Virilio 1996), *information society* and so forth.

In order to cast light on the presumed role of *interactive* and *interactivity* as cultural keywords we will proceed with a two-step investigation, both based on corpus data. First, we will try to have a better grasp of the functioning of different denotative meanings of the predicate *interactive* by applying certain techniques of semantic analysis based on Congruity Theory[18] – a particular approach within a broad tradition of linguistic semantics[19]. Then we will move to examine the behavior of the words *interactive* and *interactivity* in argumentative contexts to find confirmation of the positive *endoxa* that are associated with them by spotting them in action.

7. The predicate *interactive:* polysemy and vagueness

In Congruity Theory the semantic contribution of virtually every content word in a language can be represented in terms of a predicate opening one or more slots to be filled by its *semantic actants* (Mel'čuk 2004) – also known as "arguments"[20]. To analyse the meanings of a lexical item means, first of all, to establish what kinds of predicates it can manifest. Predicates predefine the number and the semantic types of their possible actants imposing presuppositional conditions on their actant slots. If these conditions are

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[17] "A cibercultura está implicada em tudo o que de mais socialmente importante vem à luz no mundo contemporâneo, na medida em que todos os objetos, procedimentos e processos doravante predominantes dependem, em alguma medida, da matriz informática da tecnologia" (Trivinho 2001: 60).

[18] For a systematic presentation of Congruity Theory, see Rigotti (1993); Rigotti and Rocci (2001); and Rigotti (2005) and Rigotti, Rocci and Greco Morasso (2006).

[19] It would be beyond the scope of the present paper to mention all the approaches with which Congruity Theory is, in various ways, related. However, the reader can be directed to Mel'čuk (2004), to Seuren (1985, 1988) and to the first volume of Charles Fillmore's collected works (Fillmore 2003) as outstanding examples of the kind of semantic work with which Congruity Theory most closely relates.

[20] In fact, the word *argument* is the most widely used in the semantic literature. Here we prefer to use the term *(semantic) actant* to avoid the possible confusion arising from the homonymy with *argument* as a term of argumentation theory.

not satisfied by the filler of the slot an *incongruity* arises. At the same time, if two uses of a lexeme impose incompatible conditions on their actant slots or differ in the number of conceptually required actants we can say that the lexeme is polysemous and manifests different predicates. These incompatibilities can be established through appropriate semantic tests, such as the well known *zeugma test* (Cruse 2000), which allows us to see when different uses of a word depend on *diverging incompatible requirements* as in (14) – as opposed to *generic* or *vague* requirements.

(14) *Neither **Louis** nor **the word processor** were able **to read** the document.

Examining corpus evidence can be of help in discovering which kinds of actants can be selected by a given lexical item. In order to establish the kind of actants that can be selected by *interactive* we examined 100 occurrences extracted from the British National Corpus. Examples (15-24) show how puzzling the variety of uses of *interactive* is. The following ten occurrences are representative of the uses we found.

(15) **Interactive** media reformulates human interaction, minimalizing differences, maximizing control.

(16) The processor is scheduled in such a way that **interactive** machines get processor time more frequently than non-interactive (batch) machines

(17) But its game-oriented appeal will introduce basic **interactive** technology into thousand of homes.

(18) Twelve **interactive** computer terminals allow visitors to take an electronic walk through Pompeii's forum, amphitheatre, villas and baths, seeing from various perspectives.

(19) It is envisaged that the educational use of futures tools and techniques will require new, **interactive**, forms of software.

(20) In fact the brain has considerable anatomical scope for being **interactive**.

(21) Maintaining beautiful hair means finding a range of caring products and sticking with them **interactive** ingredients in products from shampoos through to mousses and sprays are formulated to complement each other, leaving your hair in maximum condition.

(22) Knowledge, rather, is an emergent of an **interactive** process between a collectivity of subjects and the objects that constitutes their environment.

(23) Tomorrow the Company hits Sandbach, where, at the Crown Hotel, patrons can see the **interactive** drama, which creates a pastiche of the Hollywood Wild West.

(24) All these lead to a decentralization of an organization's activities and the requirement of an **interactive** communications system.

In all the occurrences reviewed, *interactive* selects only one actant, i.e. it is always a one place predicate – which we can write as INTERACTIVE (x_i). In the broader scene other participants (e.g. *subjects*, *objects*, *visitors*, *hair* etc.) can be named and are even obligatorily conceptually present, but the narrow actancial frame of the predicate either spotlights only one participant (*brain*, *computer terminal*) or takes the whole situation as its actant (*process*, *drama*). Thus we can distinguish two broad classes of actant frames:

(a) x_1 = individual
(b) x_1 = process / system

In (a) the actant is often a piece of hardware or software, a technology as in (15-19), but there are also occurrences where x_1 is not a technology, such as *brain* in (20) and *ingredients* in (21). While (20) selects an actant which is able to process information, (21) does not. The involvement of human actors in the broader scene is likewise not obligatory as the whole scene may take place at a sub-human level (20), or refer to an entirely non-human situation (21). As for (b), the processes can be similarly non-technological as in (22) and (23). Thus, (a) and (b) should be split into at least 5 tentatively distinct actant frames:

(a.1) x_1 = technological element, capable of exchanging information
(a.2) x_1 = non-technological element, capable of exchanging information
(a.3) x_1 = non-technological element, not capable of exchanging information
(b.1) x_1 = technological information exchange process/system
(b.2) x_1 = non-technological information exchange process/system.

By applying the zeugma test across these frames we obtain results like (25) and (26) characterized by a more or less pronounced repugnance to the zeugma, which would corroborate the hypothesis of a polysemy of *interactive*:

(25) * It was an excellent hotel room: the digital TV set and the shower gel were both interactive.

(26) ?? The learning process should be interactive, just like the touch screen.

If we move from the conditions on the actant slots imposed by interactive to the proper semantic entailments of the predicate we are faced with a difficulty: in each of the frames outlined above, it is very difficult to sort out what are the necessary and sufficient conditions for *interactive* to be predicated truly. For instance, within (a.1) the possibility for the user to intervene to modify content is sometimes presented as a *necessary* condition for considering a technology interactive:

(27) The only downside to this method is that it isn't interactive (the user will not be able to complete any form-fields or modify the document in any way). (Example extracted through WebCorp)

One can wonder, however, whether this is a *sufficient* condition of interactivity. Someone could very well say that completing form-fields is not enough:

(28) That's not interactive: it's just a fillable form.

or, to cite an authentic example: choice between pre-scripted options may not seem *a sufficient degree* of intervention in the media content to truthfully predicate *interactive*:

(29) And everybody who's ever tried to use live actors in an interactive piece has only come up with multiple choice. That's as good as you can get, is multiple choice, basically. It's multiple choice, it's not interactivity. (Example extracted through WebCorp)

This seems to suggest that not only is the word *interactive* polysemous and that it selects fairly incompatible actant frames, but also that, within each frame the predicate expressed is scalar and *vague*.

In general, being able to discover polysemy – which is frequently observed in investigations of cultural keywords – and resolve it into distinct semantic representations can play an important preliminary role in argument analysis and evaluation, as it allows us to uncover fallacies of *equivocation* and semantic shifts in arguments. It can also play a role in evaluating rhetorical strategies such as *dissociation* (van Rees 2009), and *persuasive definition* (Stevenson 1938), which aim to partially restructure the semantic system. The study of polysemy is important to cast light on the relationship between the denotations of cultural keywords – in our case *interactive* – and its argumentatively relevant connotations.

8. *Because it's interactive.* Using corpus data to test keywords

We now move to test the status of keyword of the lexeme *interactive* by examining its behavior in arguments. In order to constitute a suitable corpus of occurrences of *interactive* in an argumentative context, we extracted texts from the World Wide Web by means of WebCorp including appropriate *argumentative indicators* in the query. According to van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck-Henkemans (2007) argumentative indicators are linguistic expressions or textual patterns that function as signs that a given argumentative move might be in progress. They need not be decisive signs or be directly connected with the move. It suffices that they exhibit, for whatever reason, a significant correlation with such a move. At this stage of our investigation it is sufficient to use relatively straightforward indicators, and the choice fell on the most obvious: the connective *because*.

Given the possible reading of *because* as introducing an argument, we can search for the string *because it's interactive* and obtain a number of

examples where *interactive* appears as the main predicate of a proposition presented as an argument in support of a standpoint – which usually appears as the proposition connected by *because*. It should be stressed here that what is meaningful in the results of this particular kind of probe of the uses of a predicate in arguments is not that we actually find these uses, nor that we find them in great number, but rather that we find a special *consistency* in the standpoints argued for. Adapting the term from corpus linguistics, we might call this consistency the *argumentative prosody* of the keyword. For instance, if we extract a string such as *because it's triangular* to investigate the use of the predicate *triangular* in arguments we find that it happens to be used to support all kinds of unrelated standpoints, as illustrated by examples (30-33).

(30) My question would be, does it hold up a lot of stuff? I'm concerned about the design **because it's triangular**. Maybe it could only accommodate people who travel light. (Extracted through WebCorp)

(31) It's an ackward area to deal with **because it's triangular** and has boundaries on each side: a chainlink fence, a brick garage and concrete stairs. (Extracted through WebCorp)

(32) And the pond, it must have been artificial **because it's triangular.** (Extracted through WebCorp)

(33) She said, this Empro pencil, however, didn't need to be sharpened and so easy to use **because it's triangular shaped**! (Extracted through WebCorp)

If we were to reconstruct the enthymematic structure of these arguments we will find very diverse major premises in which the denotation of *triangular* happens to play a role, like *There are no triangular natural ponds* for (32) or *Triangular shapes do not make spacious containers*[21] for (31), and so on. Interestingly, in all the examples triangular retains the same denota-

[21] This is, of course, a rough and ready commonsense formulation of an *endoxon*, not a meaningful statement in Euclidean geometry!

tive meaning. There is no polysemy and very little vagueness. If we look at the results of *because it's interactive* we are confronted with a completely different picture:

(34) Users are attracted to the WWW **because it is interactive**, because it is easy to use, and because it combines graphics, text, sound, and animation into a rich communications medium. (WebCorp)

(35) The use of computers in lessons is fun for my age group **because it is interactive**. My age normally like using computers. (WebCorp)

(36) Businessman Pg Anak Hj Awadi Pg Anak Latifuddin expressed his interest with the e-government's initiative, especially in the area of education. "The incorporation of ICT into the school curriculum by the Ministry of Education is good for children **because it is interactive**", he said. (WebCorp)

(37) Podcasting is an important tool that is used in the business world... It can serve as an advantage **because it is interactive**. There are more than just words to read, there is also someone or something to listen to. (WebCorp)

(38) I like this piece **because it is interactive** but does not require the user to do very much - only enter his or her name and the name of the piece. (WebCorp)

(39) Using the Promethean board is fun **because it is interactive** and we don't have to waste time. (WebCorp)

(40) Tilos Radio improves democracy **because it is interactive.** (WebCorp)

In the case of *interactive*, the standpoint argued for is unfailingly a positive evaluation: *attraction*, *fun, likeability, goodness, advantage, improvement of democracy*, etc. Examples (34-40) are only a small selection representative of the patterns that are repeated all over the sample of 153 occurrences that we examined. If we look for the string *because it is not interactive*, on the other hand, we land as expected on an uninterrupted series of standpoints expressing negative evaluations, such as those in (41-43):

(41) The TV is not an appropriate learning tool **because it is not interactive**. The child in front of the TV is totally passive. Children learn mainly by doing. (WebCorp)

(42) I don't think direct emailing system, as Obama's team is using, is effective **because it is not interactive**. (WebCorp)

(43) When the N Generation goes to school, it finds itself trapped in an offline space that is deadly boring. Teacher talk is boring **because it is not interactive** and only reinforces the rigidities of face-to-face conversation that the N Generation wants to free itself from. (WebCorp)

Most of the examples can quite easily be reconstructed as enthymemes where the word *interactive* plays the role of *terminus medius*. We will provide just an example of reconstruction using (35), reproduced below:

The use of computers in lessons is fun for my age group **because it is interactive**.[22]

Reconstructing the underlying syllogism, we get:

Major premise: (*endoxon*): ***Interactivity*** is fun. (for our age group)
Minor premise: (*datum*): The use of computers in lessons is **interactive**
Conclusion: The use of computers in lessons is fun (for our age group).

In most cases, the major premise of the syllogism seems to be directly supplied by a very generic and readily available evaluative *endoxon* evoked by the keyword:

People think: interactivity is good/fun/attractive

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[22] It might be useful to provide a minimum of context for this example. We have a student who writes a text called "My ideal teacher". At a certain moment she says that "teachers should not be boring", and while remembering one of her teachers who used to propose games in classroom, she states that the use of computers in lessons is fun because it is interactive. Nothing else can be grasped from the co-text in order to help us to understand what she means by interactive in this argument.

Interestingly, it is very difficult to go beyond that in the reconstruction, even if we look at the broader co-text of each example. Typically, the arguers do not feel the need to provide further support or a rationale linking the denotative meaning of interactivity with the evaluation. Very often what they mean by *interactivity* remains remarkably vague, such as in (36).

In some cases the use of the word *interactive* remains completely puzzling at the level of denotation. For instance, it is not at all clear in (37) why one should consider interactive to listen to audio recordings (*podcasting*) – or, in (43), why exactly face to face conversation should be presented as rigid (!) and contrasted with interactivity.

In sum, what we find is that *interactive* is used consistently in the examples to effect the shallow recovery of a small constellation of related evaluative *endoxa* that readily provide a sufficient major premise notwithstanding the vagueness of the denotation.

The vagueness of the predicate *interactive* and, more specifically, the difficulty to establish *minimal conditions* for something to be truthfully called *interactive* – which we discussed in the previous section – suggested a further foray of corpus exploration aimed at examining the use of *interactivity* in argumentative strategies based on dissociation.

9. Concerning real interactivity: keywords and dissociation

Dissociation, as a rhetorical technique was first discussed by Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958). Van Rees (2009: xi) summarizes their treatment as follows:

> [...] through dissociation, a notion that originally was conceived as a conceptual unity is split into two new notions, each of which contains only part of the original one, one notion containing the aspects of the original notion that belong to the realm of the merely apparent, the other containing the aspects of the notion that belong to the realm of the real.

As observed by van Rees (2009: 15), a dissociation amounts to more than a simple conceptual distinction, as it always involves the introduction of a *new definition* of the "real" notion, and the establishment of an *evaluative*

hierarchy between the two notions. These features make dissociation very close to the rhetorical technique that Stevenson (1938: 331) calls *persuasive definition*:

> A "persuasive" definition is one that gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and which is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people's interests.

For Stevenson (1938: 333), persuasive definitions become both easier and more powerful when applied to a particular class of words:

> There are hundreds of words which, like "culture", have both a vague conceptual meaning and a rich emotive meaning. The conceptual meaning of them all is subject to constant redefinition. The words are prizes which each man seeks to bestow on the qualities of his own choice.

Having observed that *interactivity*, and, in particular, the adjective *interactive* are highly polysemous and vague words that are nonetheless associated with persistent positive connotations, it is natural to consider them as privileged targets of rhetorical maneuvers based on persuasive definition and on dissociation aimed to appropriate their connotations, to claim exclusive ownership of them, or to deny access to them to the antagonist. We decided to investigate this matter, again, by using a simple argumentative indicator to construct a suitable query to extract corpus examples. This time it was: *That's not real interactivity* and a few other syntactic variants of this expression.

This allowed us to collect a striking variety of examples where, as expected, *interactivity* is the target of dissociations. However, instead of briefly presenting a larger sample of these uses, we prefer here to focus on a single striking example, considered in the context of the online discussion where it appears:

(44) The person 'conversing' with Milo believes it because they want to believe it. All it takes is for someone to step even slightly outside the bounds of the simulation for suspension of disbelief to be shattered. **That's not real interactivity**, it's the illusion of interactivity – the lack of meaning

and substance clearly shows that they're well into uncanny valley territory. (Extracted through WebCorp, original URL: www.ausgamers.com/forums/consoles/thread.php/2751146)

Example (44) appears in a post in an Australian forum dedicated to (computer) gaming in response to a video showing a virtual boy (Milo) "interacting" with a real girl. The video sequence is part of a technology demonstration of Peter Molyneux's *Project Natal* – a Microsoft technology development project aimed at creating "interactive" games involving fictional characters that possess "emotional AI" and are thus able to react properly to the users' facial expressions, tone of voice and gestures. In introducing the demonstration sequence, game designer Peter Molyneux says:

(45) I want to say one thing to you: that's the word **interactive**. Surely, we've been making **interactive** games for twenty years, haven't we? Or, thirty years. Well, no. I don't think we have. Because that thing in our hands, that thing that has evolved in our hands, that got more and more complex, got more and more buttons, actually has been the biggest barrier to what we want to create. Because what we want to create is a connection to our worlds.[23]

In (45) Peter Molyneaux makes a dissociation putting the minimal conditions of *real interactivity* at a very high level, never reached before, and identified vaguely with the possibility of having a "connection" with a virtual world. He focuses on the nature of the interface between the user and the system: the artificial nature of the interface is a barrier to "real" interactivity. So, only a natural interface that adapts to the user's facial expressions, tones of voice and gestures can ensure true interactivity. The dissociation involves a persuasive definition, because Molyneux focuses the attention of the audience on facial expression, tone of voice recognition, gaze coordination, and not, for instance, on whether the virtual boy Milo is able to answer meaningfully to unscripted questions by the user – which apparently he is not (Grant 2009). Interestingly, the poster of (44) does not directly question Molyneux's dissociation or his persuasive definition of interactivity. Instead

[23] The video containing both Molyneux's speech and the demonstration sequence is available on YouTube, at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HluWsMlfj68&feature=player_embedded (January 29, 2010). The transcription is ours.

he goes one step further and makes another dissociation between *real interactivity* and the *illusion* of it. He associates illusory interactivity with the so-called *uncanny valley* (Mori 1970) – the strongly unpleasant emotional effects provoked by very realistic simulations of human life that nevertheless fail to be fully believable and remain recognizable as "counterfeit".

Observing the facility with which the participants in the discussion move the bar of the minimal conditions of *interactivity* in these explicit negotiations of the denotative meaning of the word helps to cast a brighter light on a number other examples encountered in the previous section – such as (37) and (43) where no explicit dissociation and redefinition are present but implicit shifts of denotative meaning are performed by the arguer for strategic reasons: to extend to *podcasting* the positive connotations of interactive media in (37), or – rather outrageously – to boldly deny these same connotations to face-to-face conversation in (43).

10. Conclusions and perspectives

In this paper we have tried to show, through the analysis of the words *interactive* and *interactivity*, the productivity of a notion of cultural keywords as *termini medi* in enthymematic arguments pointing to implicit premises that are *endoxa* in the cultural common ground. Although the analysis could be still sharpened by the recourse to additional corpus evidence collected through the recourse of a wider variety of argumentative indicators, we believe that what we have offered is sufficient to support the claim that this notion of cultural keywords has a double relevance:

From the viewpoint of anthropological semantics, it offers a principled and concretely applicable procedure to test a candidate cultural keyword, gaining in the process not only important insights on its "raw" persuasive force, but also a clearer picture of the set of values and beliefs it evokes.

From the viewpoint of an argumentation scholar aiming to establish an accurate reconstruction of an argument relying crucially on unexpressed premises, it offers a method for empirically checking on a culturally relevant corpus that the implicit premises he attributes to the arguer are indeed recoverable or at least partially justified in the cultural common ground.

In fact, we believe that this article also makes a methodological point,

which has perhaps a broader import: argumentation scholars interested in analyzing and critically evaluating real texts should pay more than a cursory attention to lexical semantics, and should also rely on rich corpus data collected and queried using methods inspired by corpus linguistics.

As regards *interactivity*, these methods have led us to conclude that the keyword is polysemous and vague, and yet displays the same connotation across its uses, evoking simple evaluative *endoxa*, which provide access to suitable major premises that are recovered, so to say, at a very shallow level. This analysis is confirmed by the ease with which dicussants make interactivity the target of dissociation strategies.

It would be certainly too strong and simplistic to hurry and say that a massive fallacy of equivocation, operating at an intertextual level, ensnares all talk of interactivity in the contemporary information society. Yet, we believe that this exploratory analysis opens up interesting possibilities with respect to the critical scrutiny of cultural *endoxa*.

As authoritative accepted opinions, as defined by Aristotle, *endoxa* function as social values that are bound to guide actions and decisions in human affairs. It is precisely because of this social significance that studying *endoxa* is crucial to argumentation theory. Amossy (2002a) has recently observed that modern attitude towards *endoxa* is, to say the least, ambivalent. There certainly are those who continue the Aristotelian line, like Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1958) and Amossy (2000b) herself, and present them as the ideas and beliefs that constitute the indispensable common ground of a given society, fundamental not only to construct basic interpersonal interactions, but also, at a larger scale, the whole life of a cultural community. Yet, the negative strand seems to be the prevalent one. Terms like *commonplace*, *idée reçue*, *cliché*, *stereotype* all refer to the *endoxon* with a broadly negative connotation. And, from Flaubert's *idées reçues* to Barthes' *myth* (2000 [1957]) and Foucault's *discours* (1971), *endoxa* are equated with ready-made thoughts and cultural constructions tacitly accepted and broadly repeated, close to a kind of dominant ideology that hinders ordinary people from developing their own ideas. In this case, all that is endoxos is considered banality and may lead to alienation.

Looking back at what we have done in this paper we can see that, rather than advocating a wholesale rejection of the *endoxa*, we have moved from the Aristotelian recognition that *endoxa* represent an indispensable start-

ing point for argumentation within any cultural community, and ended up developing some theoretical and methodological tools that have showed to be relevant for critically evaluating their quality. Much remains to be done, but the direction seems promising.

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