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Publicazioni ultimo triennio (2008 – 2010)

“Institutional constraints on the (un)sound use of the argument from expert opinion in the medical context”. Submitted for publication in the *Proceedings of the Seventh ISSA Conference*, organized by the International Society for the Study of Argumentation (ISSA), Amsterdam University, 29 June-2 July 2010.

Abstract

The importance of sound argumentation for interactions in the medical context has been acknowledged by various scholars, nevertheless the debate is still open as to which moves can be considered legitimate and which are fallacious given the specific contextual constraints. Among these, the most challenging are: the social and knowledge asymmetry between doctors and patients; the necessity to build an interpersonal relationship with the patient, based on trust and understanding of the problems at issue. One of the most frequently used arguments from doctors is the *argument from expert opinion*, as is often the case when the interacting roles are defined by a strong asymmetry of knowledge. The use of this argument is often taken as a symptom of the old paternalistic attitude of doctors towards patients, therefore the question of its persuasive strength and legitimacy in this context becomes quite interesting. The paper focuses on such question, by attempting a description of the argument from authority in relation to the specific medical context in the Italian health system. First, the procedural and material starting points of the argument are described; then, also relying on examples from real-life interactions, the potentially fallacious uses of this argument are pointed out, along with the legitimate ones.

“The persuasive role of ethos in doctor-patient interactions”. Submitted for publication in the journal *Communication and Medicine*.

Abstract

In “expert – to – non-expert” interactions, one of the distinguishing features is that there is none or very little shared knowledge between the subjects. This situation may become particularly challenging when the unshared knowledge is of a very technical kind, as the likelihood of misunderstandings or unsuccessful communication becomes very high. This is particularly true of interactions between patients and physicians. In the course of such interactions, physicians are expected to inform, advise and persuade patients regarding their health problems. This has been shown to happen according to different styles and manners, depending on the physician’s personal communication skills, their approach to patients and their degree of expertise. It is especially when differences of opinion emerge that physicians need to be persuasive, but it is also then that this may become very difficult, as the patient does not share the medical expertise of the physician. At these moments, one of the most powerful means of persuasion in the hands of physicians is their professional *ethos*, or authority. The paper presents partial results of an ongoing research project aimed at describing the ways in which physicians construct their professional *ethos* in interactions with their patients, and how they use it to reconcile patients’ diverging opinions with their own. The analysis is carried out on a corpus of videorecordings of doctor-patient interactions and it is aimed at identifying different persuasive strategies based on the speaker’s *ethos*.

“What is that promise? Definitions and implicit meanings in Barack Obama’s speeches”, *Proceedings of the AIA Conference 2009* (forthcoming).

Abstract

The connection between language and power has been studied from various points of view. The way it is realized in specific contexts yields ever-new insights into human

nature and behavior. Barack Obama's speeches, from the beginning of the presidential campaign, have often been referred to in the international press as masterpieces of rhetorical skill. The paper presents the results of an analysis conducted on the speeches given by Barack Obama during the presidential campaign and on the Inauguration Day. The analysis is aimed at highlighting the rhetorical role played by definitions throughout the speeches. Definitions usually coincide with the premises in arguments that aim at evaluating or classifying aspects of reality. By defining reality in a certain way, the speaker implicitly asks the listener to accept the implications deriving from the definition itself. The analysis has been conducted following three phases: in the first phase, all definitions used in the speeches have been listed, grouping them according to the topic they refer to; in the second phase, their implications have been described, i.e. the inferences they trigger, the assumptions they entail, and the conceptual frames they activate; the third phase involves the assessment of the rhetorical function of the definitions.

“Analyzing doctor-patient communication: methodological issues”, *Bulletin suisse de linguistique appliquée*, 2, 2010, pp. 133-145.

Abstract

The quality of communication between doctors and patients is considered as one of the most important factors for a successful therapeutic strategy. Various studies have shown that when the communication is good, patients understand better and their *compliance* improves. Many scholars have put forward methods for the analysis and assessment of the quality of communication in the medical context. Nevertheless there is still lack of a sufficiently comprehensive theoretical framework, able to account for all factors described in the various analyses and to explain them. The present study focuses on the identification of the contextual elements that influence interactions between doctors and patients during medical consultations. An hypothesis is put forward of a theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis and assessment of interactions between doctors and patients.

“Using keywords to analyze conflicts in doctor-patient consultations”, *L'Analisi Linguistica e Letteraria*, 2, 2008, pp. 623-636.

Abstract

The present paper tackles the challenge posed by conflicts emerging in doctor-patient consultations. Communicative exchanges situated in the medical setting – consultations in particular – have been closely studied in the last thirty years from many points of view. One of the most important issues in the study of these communicative exchanges has been the asymmetry of roles between patients and doctors, which often causes misunderstandings, incomprehension, poor patient compliance and low satisfaction on both sides.

Such conflicts have often been studied from the point of view of the power relations generating them, more seldom looking at the communicative structure of the interaction itself and at its internal dynamics. The present paper focuses in particular on the argumentative structure of certain crucial parts of the consultation – namely the ones of patient education and counseling – in order to describe a heuristic strategy – keywords and key expressions – that can be used to understand the origin of the conflict.

(in collaborazione con S. Cigada - G. Gobber - S. Greco Morasso, “Cosa succede durante una consultazione medica? ‘Esame obiettivo’ di un’interazione medico-paziente” [“What happens during a medical consultation? ‘Physical examination’ of a doctor-patient interaction”]), *La Cura*, 4, 2008, p. 81.

Abstract

Doctor-patient interactions have been studied both by medical doctors and psychologists, and by linguists and researchers in the field of communication sciences. In spite of this, it is seldom the case that the expertise developed in one of these fields is used by the others. The study proposes the analysis of a doctor-patient consultation using a model developed within the field of communication sciences. The consultation is described according to its communicative aims and overall structure, paying particular attention to the linguistic strategies adopted to communicate emotions and to pose questions. The aim of the analysis is to highlight the contribution that researches in the field of communication sciences can give to studies conducted on doctor-patient interactions by medical doctors and psychologists.

“Keywords in argumentative texts and their persuasive power”, in F.H Van Eemeren - J.A. Blair - C.A. Willard - B. Garssen (eds.), *Proceedings of the Sixth Conference of the International Society for the Study of Argumentation*, Sic Sat, Amsterdam 2007, pp. 65-74.

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to investigate the role of *keywords* in argumentative texts. In order to do this I will first give a brief overview of some of the main definitions of the notion of *keyword* in the literature. Then I will outline a general definition of *keyword* and of *keyword* within the argumentative text. Finally these definitions will be used in the analysis of an argumentative text, which will show in which ways *keywords* play crucial roles within the argumentative strategy. Some concluding remarks will indicate possible further lines of research.

Pubblicazioni didattiche:

Bigi, S. (2010). *Coming to terms with English lexico-grammar*. EduCatt: Milano, pp.87. Workbook for the course of English Linguistics (2nd year), faculty of Linguistic Sciences and Foreign Languages, Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore.