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NEGATIVE OPPOSITIONS IN ARGUMENTATION

MARIA CRISTINA GATTI

1. *Introductory remarks*

The aim of this paper is to present the first results of an ongoing research, which intends to bring to light the relevant contribution of negation to the structural organization of argument schemes.

The theoretical perspective here adopted will be the approach to the analysis of argument schemes developed within the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT), characterized by a particular explanatory capacity in eliciting the inferential as well as the endoxical components hidden in argumentative moves (Rigotti 2006; Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2006; Rigotti 2007; Rigotti 2008, this volume; Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming). In this approach the relevant contribution of the Topic tradition to an exhaustive identification of the mostly implicit components of an argumentative move is presented in all its heuristic force, showing at the same time its strict connection with the contemporary debate on argumentation schemes, in particular with the theoretical and methodological perspectives of the Pragma-Dialectical account (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992; van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2004).

In outlining the particular ontologico-semantic organization of the argumentative moves structured on negative oppositions we intend to bring to light how insightful it is from a methodological point of view to adopt an in-depth semantic analysis for the individuation of the inferential connections activated by the argument (see paragraph 2.1), as well as for the identification of the conditions to be met for its valid or fallacious use (see paragraphs 2.2 and 3).

2. *Loci ab oppositis in the taxonomy of loci*

Negation can affect an argumentative move in different ways. It can occur in the standpoint, which in this case corresponds to a negative state of affairs, for whose acceptance by the addressee the arguer intends to argue (*I am not going out. It's raining*). It can appear in the argument (*You are wrong. She is not at home now*), when negative is the state of affairs proposed in order to support the reasonableness of the claim. Negation can, again, occur both in the standpoint as well as in the argument (*Mary doesn't vote. She isn't yet eighteen*), when both states of affairs presented in the claim and in the argument are negative.

Negation can indeed affect the structuration of an argumentative move still in a different way, when it intervenes in the form of a negative opposition in shaping the semantico-ontological relation which links the standpoint to its argument.

In relation to the ‘topical potential’, i.e. the set of argumentative moves an arguer has at disposal to prove the acceptability of his claims (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002: 139), negative oppositions are extremely significant for the role they play in the constitution of a considerable number of *tópoi*, known as *loci* from opposites (*ab oppositis*), which according to the classical taxonomy belong to the broader class of extrinsic loci.

Before taking into account the particular inner structure of this sub-group of loci, it may be useful to outline briefly the Aristotelian notion of *locus*¹, characterised by the author in his *Topics* “as a method for finding out an appropriate argument in relation to any standpoint” (*Topica* 100a 1, Ross 1958 ed.; Rigotti 2008)².

Assuming as point of departure the deep understanding of the nature of loci developed within the Argumentum Model of Topics, a *locus* can be described as a “semantico-ontological relation linking the class of states of affairs to which the standpoint belongs to another class of states of affairs in the same or in another possible world” (Rigotti 2008, § 1)³.

Each semantico-ontological relation corresponding to a locus – or using the Medieval scholars’ terminology each *habitus* (Rigotti 2008, § 1) – generates a series of inferential connections or maxims (*maximae*)⁴, each of which activates a logical form of *modus ponens* or *tollens* (Rigotti 2008, § 3)⁵.

The inferential dimension so far described does not exhaust the structural organization of a locus. Its inferential component remains indeed unactivated, if it is not integrated through a further component, this time of endoxical nature – in Pragma-dialectics characterised as “material” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004) – which is responsible of the persuasive effectiveness of the argumentative move. In order to meet the audience demand (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002), the inferential process generated by the maxims of the locus has in fact to be anchored to opinions (*endoxa*)⁶ already accepted by the audience, entering the cultural *common ground* (Clark 1996) the arguer shares with his addressee⁷.

¹ For a deeper understanding of the proper nature of this not simple notion see Rigotti, this volume § 3 and § 4.

² On the conceptual and theoretical framework of Topics and its relevance for contemporary Argumentation Theory see Rigotti 2006, 2007.

³ This is the first of the three levels distinguished by the Argumentum scholars within the procedural component of an argument scheme (Rigotti & Morasso, forthcoming § 3).

⁴ In this sense a locus can be defined as “a class of maxims generated by the same ontological relation” (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming; Rigotti 2008). In relation to the ancient notion of *maxima* the Argumentum scholars signal its closeness to the contemporary notion of procedural starting point (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 2004), to Toulmin’s warrant (Toulmin 1958), to Kienpointner’s Schlussregel (Kienpointner 1992) and to the notion of argumentative principle (Garssen 2001).

⁵ The maxims and the logical forms activated by them are respectively the second and the third level the AMT scholars distinguish within the procedural component of an argument scheme (Rigotti & Morasso forthcoming, § 3).

⁶ For Aristotle’s definition of *endoxon* see *Topics* 100b.21 (Ross 1958 ed.).

⁷ We are surely indebted to the Argumentum researchers for the reintegration in argumentation theory of this fundamental Aristotelian notion, practically neglected in the tradition of topics, probably because of the lack of explicit examples of endoxa in Aristotle’s *Topics*, where it is left to the reader to reconstruct them from the listed *tópoi* (Rigotti & Morasso, forthcoming § 3.5).

The *endoxon* intervenes in the argumentative strategy as a general premise, whose association to a second premise of factual⁸ nature generates a first conclusion. This first conclusion derived from the endoxon-based line of reasoning is then exploited by the procedural component of the locus, which associates it as a minor premise to the maxim, which plays the role of major premise, obtaining thus the final conclusion, corresponding to the standpoint or claim of the argumentative move.

The organizational structure of a locus may be considered so far outlined in its main features. We can now turn to the specific group of loci at issue in our work, loci from opposites, traditionally typologized under the broader group of extrinsic loci.

2.1 Intrinsic vs. extrinsic loci

In the taxonomy inherited from the Topics tradition, arguments are classified according to their different proximity to the standpoint.

If we look at the way in which standpoints and arguments are linked to each other in the semantico-ontological relations at the basis of a locus, their different kind of proximity allows to identify two main groups, corresponding to the ancient distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic loci⁹.

In his *Summulae Logicales* Peter of Spain, a Medieval scholar we are particularly indebted to for the systematization of the Aristotelian doctrine of Topics, describes this distinction as follows:

Locus differentia maximae dividitur per locum intrinsecum, extrinsecum et medium. *Locus intrinsecus* est ille, quando sumitur argumentum ab eis quae sunt desubstantia rei, ut a definitione. *Locus extrinsecus* est ille, quando sumitur argumentum ab eis, quae omnino separata sunt a substantia rei, ut ab oppositis, ut si quaeretur utrum Socrates sit albus et probetur sic «Socrates non est niger, ergo Socrates est albus.

(*Summulae logicales*, 5.08, Bochenski 1947 ed., 46)

[The locus difference of maxim is divided into intrinsic, extrinsic and middle locus. The intrinsic locus is that one, in which case the argument is taken from factors pertaining to the substance of the situation (in the

⁸ The identification within the “material” component of endoxical and factual premises highlights a relevant aspect of arguments, that is their context-boundedness (Rigotti 2006; 2007). They are always embedded in a specific interaction field, situated within a broader communication context which determines their argumentative efficacy. On communication context see Rigotti & Rocci 2006.

⁹ The topical tradition foresees also a third group of loci, called *medi* or *mixti*, situated at the border (*in confinio*) between the intrinsic and extrinsic ones. With respect to the two interpretations of the Aristotelian Topics offered respectively by Cicero (Stump 2004b ed.) and by Themistius, the taxonomy of loci in intrinsic, extrinsic and complex adopted by the Argumentum scholars is closer to Themistius’ interpretation, followed by Boethius (Stump 2004a ed.); see Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2006.

standpoint), as the locus from definition. The extrinsic locus is that one, in which case the argument is taken from factors that are completely separated from the substance of the situation (in the standpoint), as the locus from opposites; thus if it would be asked whether Socrates is white, it would be considered right also this: «Socrates is not black, then he is white».]

In intrinsic loci arguments refer to states of affairs that are constitutive of the possible fragment of world mentioned in the standpoint or that coexist with it (Rigotti 2006; Rigotti 2007; Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2006). Exploiting the linguistic notion of syntagm, opposed to that of paradigm, introduced in modern linguistics by Structuralism to differentiate the relations between contiguous elements *in praesentia* from the relations of alternativeness or *in absentia* (Seiler 1996; Rigotti 1992), the semantico-ontological relations at the basis of intrinsic loci are of syntagmatic nature, since in this case the arguments evoke aspects that are ontologically related to the syntagmatic context of the thesis¹⁰.

Let's consider for example the following argumentative move *This Scotch whisky is highly flavoured. It is made with malted barley dried over a peat fire.* The high quality of the product mentioned in the standpoint is supported through the particularly high quality of its material cause, a factor which is evidently ontologically linked in a direct way to the fragment of reality referred to in the standpoint, inasmuch as it conditions it.

Let's consider now a further argumentative move, seemingly very simple *Our daughter did not pass her last exam. Then she failed!* and let's compare it with the previous one. In this example the proximity of the argument to the standpoint is not the same. The state of affairs mentioned in the standpoint, to fail an exam, is in a relation of alternativeness to the situation of passing an exam, negated in the argument, i.e. it is linked to it through a relation *in absentia*, more precisely of contrary opposition. Linguistically speaking the aspect evoked by the argument is here ontologically related to the paradigmatic context of the claim (Rigotti 2006; Rigotti 2007).

Contrary opposition represents together with contradictory, privative and relative opposition one of the different negative oppositions that loci from opposites are built on; they include loci from contraries, from relatives, from privatives and from contradictories as further sub-groups. Peter of Spain introduces them as follows:

Quid sit locus extrinsecus dictum est prius. Locorum extrinsecorum alius ab oppositis, alius a maiore, alius a similitudine, alius a proportione, alius a transumptione, alius ab auctoritate. Item oppositionum quattuor sunt

¹⁰ For a typology of arguments included in the group of extrinsic or paradigmatic loci, see Rigotti 2006; Rigotti 2007; Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2006.

species, scilicet: oppositio relativa, oppositio contraria, oppositio privativa, oppositio contradictoria.

(*Summulae logicales*, 5.32, Bochenski 1947 ed., 53)

[What has to be meant for extrinsic locus was previously said. Extrinsic loci include locus from opposites, locus from major and minor, locus from similarity, locus from proportion, locus from metaphor, locus from authority. And so four are the species of opposition, i.e. relative opposition, contrary opposition, privative opposition, contradictory opposition.]

It comes here clearly to light the not secondary role played by the Aristotelian doctrine of oppositions¹¹ for the constitution of a considerable number of extrinsic loci.

In this work we have chosen to focus our attention on locus from contraries. In *Summulae Logicales*, after some preliminary words on the negative opposition of contrariety and on the difference between mediate and immediate contraries:

Contrarietas est contrariorum oppositio, ut albus-niger. Et sciendum quod quaedam sunt contraria mediata, ut albus-niger, inter quae sunt medii colores, quaedam sunt immediata, ut sanum et aegrum circa animal.

(*Summulae logicales*, 5.34, Bochenski 1947 ed., 53)

[Contrariety is the opposition of contraries, such as black-white. And it must be known that some are mediate contraries, such as black-white, between which there are middle colours, and others are immediate, such as healthy and sick with respect to the animal.]

the author passes to the definition of locus from contraries, which is characterised by describing first of all the *habitudo*, that is the semantico-ontological relation at its basis, and then the inferential connection or maxim generated by it, which can activate different logical forms, depending on the constructive or destructive use; with respect to the destructive use of the maxim, the validity conditions are specified for its non fallacious application, restricted to the case of immediate contraries:

Locus a contrariis est habitudo unius contrariorum ad reliquum; constructive sic: «hoc animal est sanum, ergo non est aegrum», vel sic: «hoc corpus est album, ergo non est nigrum». Locus a contrariis – maxima: posito uno contrariorum ab eodem removetur reliquum. Destructive tenet in contrariis immediatis cum constantia subiecti, ut «hoc animal non est sanum, ergo est aegrum». Locus a contrariis immediatis – maxima: remoto uno contrariorum immediatorum ponitur reliquum manente subiecto.

(*Summulae logicales*, 5.34, Bochenski 1947 ed., 53)

¹¹ For a further analysis of negative oppositions, see also § 2.2.

[*Locus from contraries* is the relation of one of the contraries to the other one; constructively so: «this animal is healthy, then it is not sick», or so: «this body is white, then it is not black». *Locus from contraries – maxim*: given one of the contraries, the other one is excluded from it. Destructively it holds with respect to immediate contraries with the same subject, such as «this animal is not healthy, then it is sick». *Locus from immediate contraries – maxim*: excluded one of the immediate contraries, the other one is given, remaining unchanged the subject.]

Peter of Spain's words are an emblematic documentation of the necessity of a semantic approach not only for the identification of the ontology of the standpoint, but also for the elicitation of the condition to be met for a valid use of the locus itself.

Before passing to consider in the next paragraph the different types of semantic paradigm generated by contraries – particularly interesting for the logical implications they can give rise to when submitted to negation, which are responsible for the valid or fallacious use of the locus in question – we will now outline briefly the complex inferential structure which underlies an apparently simple argumentative move as the locus from contraries proposed in our above-mentioned example.

Arguments have indeed a considerably complex inner structure, which results from the intertwining of two components, a topical and an endoxical one (Rigotti & Greco Morasso 2006; Rigotti 2006; Rigotti 2007), with distinct and complementary functions.

To represent it we adopt here the graphical notational system used within the AMT approach, which precisely identifies the maxim at work and makes explicit the point of crossing between the line of reasoning descending from the endoxon and the line of reasoning descending from the maxim.

As the diagram in Figure 1 shows, the maxim *In a contrary opposition, the truth of one extreme implies the falsity of the other one and vice versa*, directly engendered by the locus from contraries, intervenes as major premise in a syllogistic reasoning. In order to generate the final conclusion *Our daughter failed*, which corresponds to the standpoint to be supported, the maxim needs the following minor premise, *On occasion of our daughter's last exam it was false that she passed it*. This minor premise corresponds to the first conclusion of another syllogistic reasoning, descending from the endoxon, *On occasion of an exam, to pass or to fail are the two mutually exclusive alternatives for a student*, which anchors the argumentative move under consideration to an opinion already accepted by the public, which belongs to the common ground the arguer shares with his addressee. It is thanks to the endoxon that the locus is able to meet the audience demand and thus to reach its persuasive effectiveness. This first conclusion of the endoxical syllogism, obtained from the endoxon through the minor premise of factual nature, *Our daughter did not pass her last exam*, is exploited by the maxim, which activates here the logical form of *modus tollendo ponens* ($P \vee Q, \neg P \vdash Q$), *In a contrary opposition the falsity of one extreme implies the truth of the other one*, valid only with immediate contraries, and generates the final conclusion, *Our daughter failed*, which coincides with the standpoint that was to be supported.

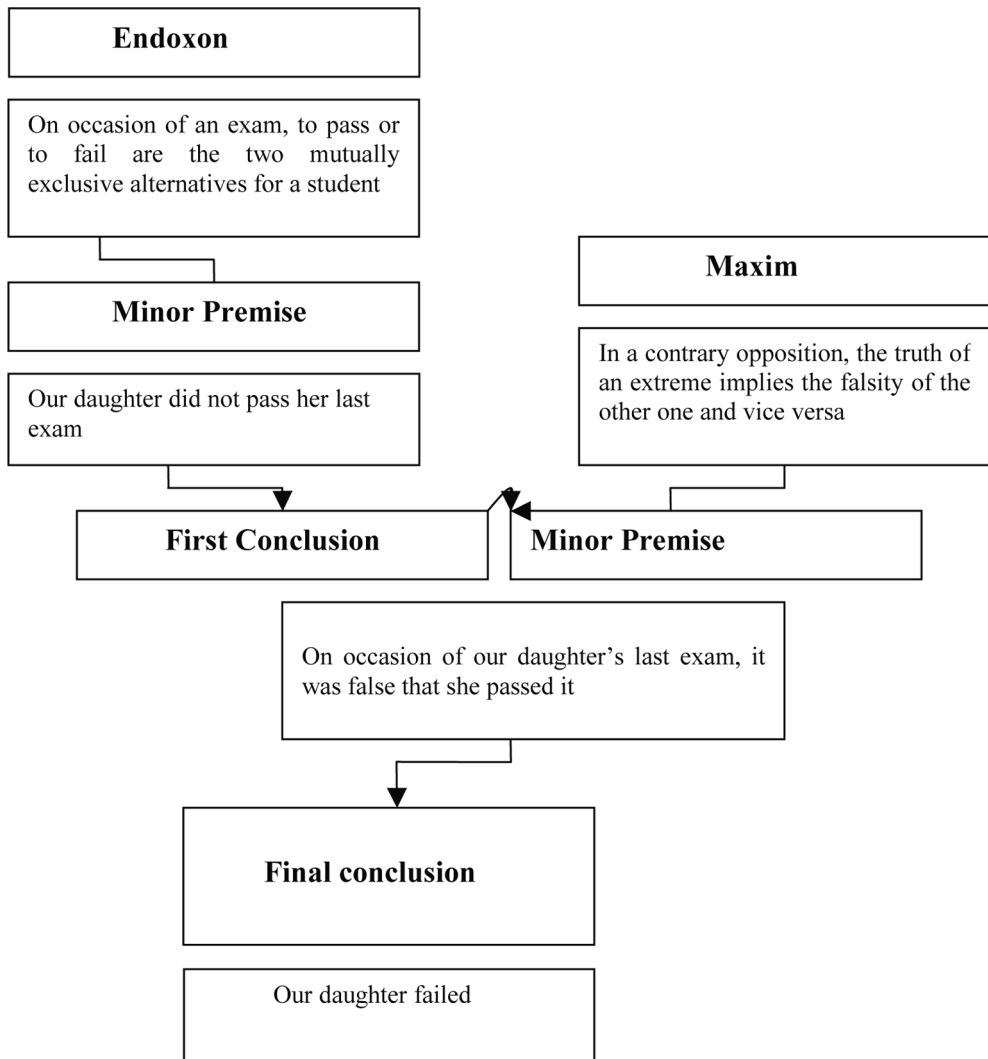


Figure 1: Representation of locus from contraries according to the AMT

2.2 Negative oppositions and semantic paradigms

Before proceeding to better specify the previously mentioned conditions of applicability of the locus from the contraries, strictly bound to the logical implications which arise from the interaction of negation with the semantic paradigm of the elements in contrary opposition, it can be useful to focus our attention on the typology of negative oppositions inherited from the classical tradition and to elucidate their relation with the linguistic notion of semantic paradigm.

If we look at negative expressions such as *black-white*, *rich-poor*, *good-bad*, *odd-even*, *major-minor*, *double-half*, *hot-not hot* etc. they are not homogeneous with respect to the kind of negative opposition they manifest¹². Negative terms can in fact oppose each other in different ways, traditionally known as correlation, contrariety and contradiction¹³.

Correlatives (called by Aristotle *tà prós ti*¹⁴) are opposite terms connected through a relation of mutual implication: it is not possible for a given entity to be for example *major* or *double*, without being *major* or *double* of something else. We are here in front of what contemporary semantics names converse predicates, i.e. properties which identify the same state of affairs by interpreting it in an opposite direction (Mel'čuk 1974 and 1999: 83; Gatti 1992: 172-173; Gatti 2004: 35).

Contraries (*tà enantia*¹⁵) are terms which oppose each other such as for example *black* to *white*, *good* to *bad*, *odd* to *even*. In some cases contraries do not admit any intermediate term, for instance a number can be either *odd* or *even*. In other cases between the two extremes of the contrary opposition it is possible to have intermediate values¹⁶, which are sometimes lexicalized, as for instance *grey* in the opposition *black-white*.

Contradiction (*antifasis*¹⁷) is the most radical negative opposition. Elements in contradictory relation, i.e. *white-not white*, *odd-not odd*, *major-not major* etc., analogously to contraries and correlatives cannot be simultaneously true, according to the principle of contradiction¹⁸, but differently from the latter, they cannot be also simultaneously false, being ruled by the law of excluded middle¹⁹. In other words the contradictory opposition cannot have mediate terms among its extremes.

Correlatives, contraries and contradictories are from a logico-semantic point of view predicates belonging to semantic paradigms (Gatti 2004: 40) of a different type.

Particularly relevant for the fallacious implications which can arise from their interaction with negation are the semantic paradigms with polarized structure generated by the contrary opposition.

¹² In lexicology these expressions are normally reconducted to the indeed generic linguistic category of antonymy (Mel'čuk 1974 and 1999: 83-84; Gatti 1992: 172-173).

¹³ The Aristotelian typology of negative oppositions, presented in *Categoriae* 10 and *De Interpretatione* 6 (Minio-Paluello 1949 ed.; Gatti 2004: 34-41) deeply influenced, through Boethius's mediation, the medieval doctrine of oppositions. The privative opposition (*stéresis*), which appears in *Categoriae*, 10, 11b 18 as a distinct group of negative opposition, denoting properties, as for example *blind* and *sighted*, which are present or absent by nature, in *Metaphysica*, I, 4, 1055a 33 (Jaeger 1957 ed.) is reconducted to the contrary opposition.

¹⁴ See *Categoriae*, 10, 11b 18.

¹⁵ See *Categoriae*, 10, 11b 18.

¹⁶ See *Categoriae*, 10, 12a 1-4 and *Metaphysica*, I, 4, 1055b 2-3. We have in this case *contraria mediata*, opposed to *immediata* (*Summulae logicae*, 5.34, Bochenski 1974 ed., 53-54).

¹⁷ See *De Interpretatione* 6, 17a 25-26.

¹⁸ See *Metaphysica*, Γ, 6, 1011b 13-22.

¹⁹ See *Metaphysica*, Γ, 7, 1011b 23-24.

3. *Contraries under negation and the “polarity temptation”*

The logical implications which are licensed by the denial of predicates in contrary opposition are strictly bound to the nature of the semantic paradigm contraries belong to.

It can be useful to recall here briefly the definition of semantic paradigm. As it was previously seen, a semantic paradigm is a set of predicates in relation of alternativeness (Rigotti 2005b: 73). Alternativeness implies reciprocal exclusion (Rigotti 1988: 348-349). Let's consider, for instance, the semantic paradigm of colours. If we assert that a certain colour pertains to a given entity, by uttering for example *This jacket is blue*, this implicitly excludes its being black, or white, or yellow, or any other colour included in the chromatic paradigm. On the contrary by negating the inherence of that colour to the entity under consideration through the utterance *This jacket is not blue*, it will be indeed implicitly affirmed that it can be either red, or green, or yellow or any other colour of the paradigm under consideration (Rigotti 2005b: 73-74; Gatti 2004: 41-51). Thus when a predicate belongs to a multiple paradigm, its denial implies the affirmation of the disjunction of all the other predicates in relation of alternativeness to it within the semantic paradigm:

$$\neg P \rightarrow P_1(x) \vee P_2(x) \vee P_3(x) \dots \vee P_n(x).$$

The inner structure of a semantic paradigm significantly influences the logical entailments licensed by the interaction of negation with its elements²⁰. If the paradigm is not multiple but binary, the negation of one element coincides with the affirmation of the other one in alternative to it; when we say for example that a light is not on, we evidently affirm that it is off.

Let's now turn our attention to paradigms with polarized structure, generated by the contrary opposition. With respect to them, a primary role is played by the above mentioned traditional distinction between mediate and immediate contraries, which is to ascribe to the gradable or not gradable nature of the predicates involved in the contrary opposition. If the predicates are gradable, the paradigm with polarized structure is continuous, i.e. it's possible to find intermediate scalar values between the two polarized extremes. It follows that in a multiple continuous opposition (*good-bad, rich-poor, white-black, friend-enemy*, etc.), the denial of one extreme does not coincide necessarily with the affirmation of the opposite one; the opposite extreme is “just one of the possible alternatives” (Rigotti 2005b: 74) offered by the continuous paradigm among other alternative values, which are situated in the intermediate zone of “neither... nor” (Sapir, 1951: 133; Gatti, 2004: 112). Thus to be not rich, or not good, or not friend does not necessarily coincide with being poor, or bad or enemy.

When the predicates in the paradigm with polarized structure are not gradable, the contraries are immediate (*odd-even, married-unmarried*, etc.) and in this case the negation of one extreme coincides with the affirmation of the other one, as in all binary paradigms: if for example a number is not odd, it will be even and viceversa.

The different inner structure of semantic paradigms with polarized structure becomes thus relevant for the identification of some fallacies, which arise when these paradigms are submitted to negation.

²⁰ For the interaction of negation with semantic paradigms, see Gatti 2004: 47-48 and 107-118.

It is first of all necessary to notice that overlapping between semantic and lexical paradigms seldom occurs. The intermediate states between scalar values in contrary opposition are sometimes lexicalized through corresponding terms, as for instance *grey* between *white* and *black*, or *medium* between *big* and *small*, or *lukewarm* between *warm* and *cold*. In many other cases this process of lexicalization does not take place. In English there is for example no mediate term between *friend* and *enemy*, as well as in Russian between *drug* and *vrag*, or in German between *Freund* and *Feind*, or in Italian between *amico* and *nemico*, although from a semantic point of view someone who is not friend is not necessarily enemy and viceversa. Notwithstanding the fact that the semantic paradigm here in question is multiple, the absence of lexicalization of the intermediate values induces to treat it as a binary paradigm, allowing the negation of one extreme to coincide with the affirmation of the opposite one. Consequently “someone who is not friend becomes enemy and the enemy of the enemy is erroneously viewed as friend” (Rigotti 2005b: 74).

Through the previous in-depth semantic analysis of the different logical implications licensed by the interaction of negation with the various types of semantic paradigm, the validity conditions for the application of the maxims generated by the locus from contraries are now more precisely identified. It is in fact now clearer why the maxim of the locus from contraries in its destructive use is valid only for immediate contraries (*Summule logicales* 5.34, Bochenski 1947: 53).

The polarity temptation (Rigotti 2005b: 75), that is this fallacious interpretation of the logical implications deriving from the negation of mediate contraries, erroneously treated as immediate opposites, is a strategy often used at psycho-socio-political level “in the process of group constitution and identification” (Rigotti 2005b: 75; Seiler 2004)²¹.

A historical documentation of the manipulative nature of this polarizing temptation can be found in our recent past, when according to the principle “The enemy of my enemy is my friend” during World War II many European countries became allies of Stalin in order to withstand Hitler’s power. The historical events immediately following the Yalta Conference clearly showed how misleading this view was.

A polarized vision of the world, dichotomized between two opposite spheres, a good and a bad one, with no intermediate possibilities, although not peculiar of totalitarianism (Weiss 2005)²², has found indeed a systematical application in totalitarian discourse²³. We can have an example in

²¹ This fallacy, traditionally known as false-dilemma, or also as black and white fallacy, is a reasoning based on a disjunctive syllogism, proceeding from a false disjunctive premise, in which the disjuncts are not mutually exclusive elements. For a deeper insight into false-dilemma see Hamblin 1970, 45-46; Engel 1999, 140-142.

²² As Weiss states, this axiological polarization of the world «is no peculiarity of totalitarian systems» but «the leading principle which is superimposed to every kind of political propaganda: any real propagandist simply cannot do without such a binary, Manichean approach. [...] This approach is in a trivial sense manipulative, since a dualistic view of the world excludes the existence of a third (fourth, fifth ... and n-th) referential world which belongs neither to the we-group nor to the ‘others’ and which has its own corresponding system of values, be it on an intermediate stage or on an independent level.» (Weiss 2005: 254). On this polarizing tendency, which «tends to force every entity [...] under a two-valued classification scheme, creating a setting where everything is black or white without the existence of shades of grey» see also Horn 2003: 270-271.

²³ For a comparison between the totalitarian discourse in Soviet and Nazi propaganda, see Weiss 2005.

the following slogans taken from Soviet propagandistic posters, appeared between the Twenties and the Forties²⁴:

Мы превращаем пустыни в цветущий край,
они превращают города и села в пустыню.
[We transform deserts into a blooming region,
they transform cities and villages into a desert.]

Два мира, два плана.
Мы насаждаем жизнь, они сеют смерть.
[Two worlds, two plans.
We spread life, they sew death.]

Тов. Ленин очищает землю от нечисти.
[Com. Lenin cleans the world from garbage]

Каждый удар молота – удар врагу
[Every hammer blow is a blow to the enemy]

It is interesting to notice that the polar opposition *good-bad* here does not appear in explication but is left to be inferred from the list of actions of opposite sign explicitly stated, which can be reconducted to the hyperonimical semantic paradigms of good actions – превращать пустыни в цветущий край (to transform deserts into a blooming region), насаждать жизнь (to spread life), очищать землю от нечисти (to clean the world from garbage) – and bad ones – превращать города и села в пустыню (to transform cities and villages into a desert) and сеять смерть (to sew death). The world is thus presented as divided in two groups, the world of we (мы), the good ones, which are represented through their positive activities, opposed to the world of they (они), the not good and therefore bad ones, engaged in activities of opposite sign, and which are to be rejected as enemies.

We cannot avoid to mention, finally, the manipulative exploitation of the polarity temptation at vocabulary level, emblematically described by Orwell in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as one of the strategies foreseen in Newspeak²⁵ for the reduction of the horizon of thought through vocabulary reduction. But let's give the word to the author:

Newspeak was designed not to extend but to *diminish* the range of thought, and this purpose was indirectly assisted by cutting the choice of words down to a minimum. (Orwell 1999: 313).

In this process of vocabulary reduction an important role is played by the negation of adjectives in polar opposition:

In addition any word [...] could be negated by adding the affix *-un*. [...] Thus, for example, *uncold* meant 'warm' [...]. By such methods it was found

²⁴ See <http://www.davno.ru> (last consultation December 2008).

²⁵ For the principles of Newspeak, see Orwell 1999: 312-326. A deep insight into *НОВОЯЗ*, the Soviet version of Newspeak, is offered in Сарнов /Sarnov 2002 and Thom 1987.

possible to bring about an enormous diminution of vocabulary. Given for instance the word *good*, there was no need for such a word as *bad*, since the required meaning was equally well – indeed better – expressed by *ungood*. All that was necessary, in any case where two words formed a natural pair of opposites, was to decide which of them to suppress. *Dark*, for example, could be replaced by *unlight*, and *light* by *undark*, according to preference. (Orwell 1999: 315).

The scalar nature of the adjectival forms under consideration is here evidently eluded (Gatti 2004: 68-69) and the alleged plain synonymy of these negatively prefixed forms with their polar extreme is clearly to reconduct to a fallacious interpretation of the implications licensed by the negation of mediate contraries.

4. Conclusions

Much work remains to be done for a complete description of the various types of oppositional loci, but already from this first step of our research it is not possible to avoid to notice the heuristic validity of a semantic-oriented approach to the analysis of argumentative loci.

The doctrine of oppositions and the adoption of the notion of semantic paradigm have revealed themselves an insightful tool for the individuation of the semantico-ontological structure of the locus here at issue with respect to its paradigmatic context, as well as for the identification of the conditions to be met for its valid or fallacious use.

We wish that “the great enterprise” of the analysis of the ontologico-semantic structure of loci “that is left to the AMT team and to all welcome researchers” which will join them (Rigotti & Greco Morasso, forthcoming) might find in the considerations offered in this paper an effective, although in any case initial, contribution.

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