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UNIVERSITÀ CATTOLICA DEL SACRO CUORE

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Word Meaning in Argumentative Dialogue

Homage to Sorin Stati

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WORDS IN CONTEXT. AGREEING AND DISAGREEING WITH *ALLORA**

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1. *Introduction*

There is a growing interest, in argumentation theory, for “argumentative indicators” (van Eemeren, Houtlosser and Snoeck-Henkemans 2007), especially lexical indicators. This is a desirable development from several points of view:

- argument reconstruction (cf. e.g. Houtlosser 2002; Rocci 2008),
- conversation analytical research on argumentation in interaction (Keim 1996; Graumann & Kallmeyer 2002; Spranz-Fogasy 2002),
- semantics and pragmatics, which will be our main concerns in this paper.

Thanks to Anscombe’s and Ducrot’s work and more recent research on discourse markers (cf. e.g. Fischer 2006), we know that argumentation plays a role as a functional domain of many linguistic items and structures. The relationship between semantic analysis and use in argumentative texts is still not too clear, though (cf. e.g. Ducrot 2004), and there is no stabilized consensus on the range of possible argumentative functions. The identification and description of lexical argumentative indicators is complicated not only by the difficulty of defining argumentative functions, but also by the fact that there is rarely a one-to-one correspondence between a form and a however defined argumentative function (cf. e.g. van Eemeren this volume).

This difficulty is related to the more general problem of indeterminacy and context-dependence in language: word meaning tends to be underdetermined, polysemic and polyfunctional (cf. Weigand this volume). In language use, indeterminacy is compensated by inference and by reference to context (cf. Akman & Bazzanella 2003). This context-dependence appears clearly e.g. in phenomena such as *dialogic repetition* (the same item acquires different meanings and performs different functions according to its specific occurrence, cf. Bazzanella 1996), metaphorical language (two different domains are associated and “blended”, cf. Fauconnier & Turner 2000; Leezenberg 2001), or translation (“literal” correspondences often fail to convey the “intended meaning” which rather requires a functional correspondence, cf. Bazzanella & Morra 2000).

The related phenomena of polysemy, polyfunctionality and context dependence rise methodological problems that are particularly evident in the lexical zone of function words such as modal markers or connectives (cf. Bazzanella 2006), highly relevant to the description of argumentative indicators.

* We would like to dedicate this paper to the memory of two excellent scholars and friends: Sorin Stati and John Sinclair.

Modal verbs may be cited as an example. As has been shown by a recent analysis of English modals in an argumentation theoretical perspective (Rocchi 2008), a careful analysis of the modals' polysemy is an important prerequisite of their description as argumentative indicators. Certain readings of the modals – the epistemic ones – may indeed be considered “direct indicators of argumentation”, inasmuch as their semantic structure as inferential evidential markers (cf. Dendale 1994 for an exemplary analysis of French *devoir* in terms of evidentiality) matches a schema of enthymemic reasoning: they invariantly mark their host utterance as a standpoint based on certain premises¹. In contrast, the non epistemic readings of the modals do not intrinsically, or directly, express argumentative relations. This does not mean, however, that the functional domain of argumentation is irrelevant in the case of these readings. As a matter of fact, they are recurrently used in certain types of argumentation schemes and may therefore be considered useful “indirect indicators” of argumentation². Recurring to the concept of polyfunctionality, we might say that in these readings, invariant properly modal functions co-exist with more strongly context-dependent argumentative functions.

In what follows, we will explore similar problems with regard to a connective, Italian *allora* (corresponding roughly to English *at that time*, *then* and *so* in its core meanings). Building on preceding corpus-based research (cf. Bosco & Bazzanella 2005; Bazzanella *et al.* 2007a, b, 2008; Bazzanella & Miecznikowski *forth.*)³, we will present a qualitative analysis of *allora*'s argumentative uses. We will focus on readings of *allora* that express a causal-consequential relation, distinguishing different uses with regard to their potential to mark an inferential relation (section 2.1), and then investigate in more detail the way speakers exploit inferential readings as an argumentative resource in dialogue (section 2.2). Throughout the analysis, we will insist in the role of contextual parameters (with a special attention to prosody) and in polyfunctionality, claiming that even the most clearly inferential readings of *allora* fulfill important functions not only in the construction of reasoning, but also in the organization of argumentation as a joint activity⁴.

¹ “[...] we have seen that epistemically interpreted modals help us (a) to recognize the standpoints being advanced, (b) to make explicit the force of the commitment towards the standpoints, and that at the same time they prompt the anaphorical recovery of premises (c)” (Rocchi 2008:184).

² “[...] that non-epistemic modals can be indirect indicators and that they can convey information on the argumentation schemes being used (d) – as in the case of ontological modalities pointing to causal argument schemes or deontic-practical modalities functioning as indicators of practical reasoning” (Rocchi 2008:184).

³ Besides the corpora analyzed in the studies mentioned above (see, in particular, Bazzanella *et al.* 2008), a small corpus of audio-video recordings of political debates (various TV programs broadcasted during March-April 2007) was also considered for the present study.

⁴ In the examples discussed below, the following transcription conventions will be adopted: ‘[]’ overlap; ‘:’ vowel lengthening; ‘(h)’ inbreath; ‘allora-’ truncation; ‘.’ pause.

2. *Allora* in argumentative dialogue

2.1 Consequential *allora*: a potential argumentative indicator

In previous work, where we have taken into account both monological and dialogical uses of *allora*, we have distinguished three basic values:

- (1) the use as a temporal adverb, expressing simultaneity or consecution relative to a distant reference point (“at that time”, “then”);
- (2) the use as a consequential connective (“if p *allora* q”, “given q *allora* p”);
- (3) the use as a discourse marker with textual and interactional functions, indicating the beginning of a new sequence of activity.

These three values (1 being the most archaic one, 3 the most recent one) differ as to their syntactic and semantic properties and may fulfill a range of functions depending on co- and contextual parameters such as position, sentence mode, speech act and text type, and prosodic correlates (e.g., intonation contour, volume, lengthenings and pauses).

We will here concentrate on value (2). As a consequential connective, *allora* can be placed utterance initially or finally, in contrast to (1), characterized by greater syntactic freedom, and (3), which can occur exclusively in utterance-initial position. When used utterance-initially, prosodic cues are important indicators to distinguish the values (2) and (3):

- Consequential connective *allora* in utterance initial position is in tight prosodic connection with the following material and can have a rising or a falling pitch accent;
- In contrast, *allora* as a text and interaction structuring DM, in its “prototypical” use (i.e. when marking a clear thematic and/or sequential boundary; cf. Bazzanella & Miecznikowski forth.), tends towards a falling intonation contour and to be followed by a strong prosodic boundary.

Consequential *allora* expresses a causal relation, in the broadest sense, between a state of affairs or a speaker’s utterance q and an antecedent p, construed as in some way distant from the speaker’s point of view. Within this group of uses, one can further distinguish between modal uses in hypothetical constructions (“if p *allora* q”) – which are diachronically prior –, and inferential or speech act introducing uses, in which the distance of p to the speaker’s point of view is not modal, but polyphonic (“given p, I infer q / I perform speech act q”; cf. Bazzanella & Miecznikowski forth.).

It is noteworthy that all types of consequential *allora* are relevant to argumentation as indicators of an act of reasoning. However, those cases are of particular interest in which *allora* contributes to realize an argumentative “schema” (Toulmin 1958) or “cell” (Plantin 1990) or “sequence” (Adam 2004), introducing a conclusion based on premises uttered in the immediately preceding discourse according to a schema of enthymemic reasoning: “given the fact p [+implicit warrants] *allora* I claim q”.

This type of argumentative function can be present in conditional constructions in which consequential *allora* introduces a possible future consequent, as in the following fragment taken from a play by Carlo Goldoni:

(Torquato Tasso (1755), second act, scene 8a, cf. Goldoni 1955)

1. T: Lo vuoi ricever solo. Ve l'ho da dir cantando?
I want to receive him alone. Do I have to sing to convince you?
2. G: Voi mi mandate via. *You are sending me away.*
3. T: Sì signore, vi mando. *Yes, sir, I am.*
4. G: So che scherzate, amico, perciò non me n'offendo.
I know you are joking, my friend, therefore I do not offend myself.
5. Dovete restar solo, è ver, non lo contendo.
You [2nd pers. pln.] must be left on your own, it is true, I do not contest it.
6. Ma quando il forestiere sia stato un pezzo qui,
But after the foreigner being here a while
7. Potrò venire **allora**?
Will I/I will be allowed to come, then?
8. T: Signor no. *No, sir.*
9. G: Signor sì. (parte.) *Yes, sir. (leaves)*

In this example, utterance final *allora* has ambiguous scope. It expresses a relation between possible states of affairs (p1: “quando il forestiere sia stato un pezzo qui”; q: “potrò venire”)⁵. Simultaneously it may be interpreted as introducing a more complex conclusion (p2: “quando il forestiere sia stato un pezzo qui, potrò venire”), based on the premise “lo vuoi ricever solo” (ln. 1), taken up by G in ln. 5 (“dovete restar solo”) and on further implied warrants.

Argumentative functions are not an invariant of *allora* in conditional constructions, though. Their activation depends on contextual parameters; in the fragment above, for example, the inferential reading of the conditional is favored by indicators that make explicit the argumentative organization of G's turn (“non lo contendo”, ln. 5: concession of a premise; “ma”, ln. 6, as a marker of contrast). We may therefore consider *allora* in conditional constructions an indirect argumentative indicator.

In contrast, *allora*'s inferential and speech act introducing uses are intrinsically argumentative in the sense that the entities *allora* relates as a consequential connective are speech acts and the relation expressed is not construed as a property of the world, but as a discursive relation established by the speaker.

⁵ Note that the relation between states of affairs expressed by *allora* in this interpretation is both temporal (posteriority) and modal (p *allora* q as a conditional construction). In the antecedent, the temporal aspect is underlined by “quando” (“when”), which, however, in Goldoni's time is frequent also in conditional constructions; the hypothetical aspect is reinforced by the conjunctive “sia stato”.

So in (2), taken from a map-task dialogue⁶, *allora* introduces a conclusion (ln. 7) the speaker infers from premises given in the preceding discourse:

- 2.
1. F: ah ah quindi cioè in pratica rispetto al lago
aha so practically, in which angle do I have to
2. anomalo di quanti gradi mi devo spostare cioè di
move away from the anomalous lake,
3. quanti centimetri rispetto al bordo?
how many centimeters from its edge?
4. G: rispetto al bordo sarà a un centimetro che ne so?
from its edge it must be about one centimeter,
5. due sarà a un centrimetro potrebbe essere anche
whatever, two, it's one centimeter I think, it could be
6. sarà un centimetro
also – one centimeter, I think
7. F: toh eh **allora** sono arrivato sì
wow, this means I've reached the end, yes
8. G: eh
9. F: eh
10. G: eh, basta sei arrivato
yeah, that's it, you've reached the end

In (3), taken from *Porta a porta*, a TV political debate, *allora* motivates a non-assertive speech act ("stai zitto") by referring to the immediately preceding discourse (ln. 1-3), via an inference left implicit (something like "I infer that you are not competent in these matters").

- 3.
1. T: tu non sai neanche quant'è il prodotto interno
you don't even know how much is Italy's gross
2. [lordo dell'Italia]
[domestic product]
3. F: [no, non so neanche cos]'è, sei felice (h)
[no, I don't even know what it] is, are you happy now
4. X: allora-
ok-

⁶ This fragment is taken from the map-task dialogue C03 of the corpus AVIP-API (cf. Bertinetto 2001; Albano Leoni 2003). This is an experimental setting in which one participant instructs the other to trace a path in a map, exclusively by verbal means. The label C03 codes the type of maps used ("C") and the dialogue considered ("03").

5. T: [OH::: **e allora** stai zitto]
[OH::: **so keep quiet**]
6. F: [io s- io ti faccio questa domanda no] . io ti faccio questa domanda
[Is- I ask you a question okay]. I ask you a question

In the next section, we will investigate in more detail the functions inferential and speech act introducing *allora* fulfills in argumentative dialogue.

2.2 Agreeing and disagreeing with inferential *allora*

2.2.1 Properties of inferential *allora*

Argumentation in dialogue is intertwined with the organization of interaction as a dialogic action game (Weigand 2000) in various ways. Speakers not only express, justify and relate standpoints, but attribute standpoints and entire lines of reasoning to the arguing parties and negotiate agreement and disagreement on them. Moreover, argumentation can become functional to the organization of interaction at a meta-communicative level.

The expression of inference, in particular, is closely related to the expression of commitment and to the evidential, eventually polyphonic, specification of the premises. On the textual and interactional level, the expression of inferential relations can be used by speakers to make explicit the way they relate their dialogic moves and the sequential implications of these moves to the preceding discourse⁷.

Which specific functions does inferential *allora* fulfill in dialogue?

To understand these, one must pay attention to two properties of inferential *allora*:

- (a) *allora*, as a connective, is undetermined as to the expression of commitment. Commitment to the conclusion introduced by *allora* depends on the degree of assertiveness of the conclusion, expressed by an interaction of parameters such as sentence mode, modalizations, and prosody⁸. As a matter of fact, inferential *allora* is used also in utterances that are not analysable as expressions of standpoints at all, especially in certain question types.
- (b) Inferential *allora* is strongly polyphonic, in contrast to other Italian inferential connectives such as *dunque* or *quindi*. It signals that the premises are textually given and marks the act of drawing a conclusion as clearly separate from the act of formulating the premises (cf. also Mosegaard Hansen 1997:170-180 with regard to French *alors* as opposed to *donc*). In dialogue, in an overwhelming majority of cases, speakers use it to refer to premises formulated by their interlocutors.

⁷ Cf., e.g., anaphorical properties of modal verbs as inferential markers (Miecznikowski forth.; Rocci 2008), or discourse and interaction related properties of inferential uses of the conditional form in Italian and French (Miecznikowski 2008).

⁸ For prosody, in particular, both phonological choices (such as those relating to rising and falling pitch patterns) and phonetic parameters (higher vs lower pitch values) may play a role in conveying the degree of commitment through the communication of various degrees of certainty/uncertainty (Gussenhoven 2002).

Allora's polyphonic properties and its compatibility with all degrees of assertiveness and in particular with a wide range of interrogative "cotexts" make it an inferential marker that is highly relevant to the dialogic co-construction of argumentation and to the negotiation of agreement, a functional domain we will explore in the next three sections.

2.2.2 Conclusions the speaker is committed to

Allora is frequently used in utterances that can be analysed as an expression of a standpoint the speaker is – more or less strongly – committed to. In what follows, we will distinguish two types of dialogic moves that differ as to the degree of commitment to the standpoint and as to their function in the interactive negotiation of agreement and disagreement.

The first type of move signals overall agreement with the interlocutor's standpoint and dialogic actions, which implies an interpretation of preceding discourse as shared by the speaker and the interlocutor. Combined with signals of agreement, the polyphonic semantics of *allora* implies a convergence of perspectives, i.e. a process that reduces the distance between the speaker's and the interlocutor's perspective. In this kind of move, the inferential semantics of *allora* is regularly exploited to draw a conclusion that the speaker considers a good candidate for concluding not only a schema of reasoning, but also an interactive sequence of negotiation.

Example 2 (see above) illustrates this particular pragmatic configuration (Bazzanella 2006). *Allora*, in ln. 7, introduces a conclusion based primarily on premises given in the preceding turn and marked by *sì* as an agreeing reaction to that turn. By using *allora*, the speaker underlines that he has no direct access himself to the information concerning the map in question, but is relying on his interlocutor's discourse as evidence. At the same time, by agreeing with his interlocutor, the speaker ratifies the preceding turn as an acceptable answer to his question and acknowledges that the given information is plausible to him – a fact that, in a setting with partially differing maps, does not go without saying.

Furthermore, it is typical, in this example, that the inference marked by agreeing *allora* introduces the closing sequence (ln. 7-10) of a more complex sequence of negotiation, extending in fact the anaphoric scope of the connective from the immediately preceding turn to a longer stretch of preceding discourse. In cases such as these, prosodic characteristics help recognizing this orientation towards the end of a phase of argumentation. The intonation contour of the utterance is usually falling. *Allora* itself, prosodically connected to the following material as in all its consequential interpretations (cf. section 2.1), is pronounced with a falling pitch, whereas it tends to have a rising pitch (within a globally descending melodic contour) when it marks a conclusion that the speaker considers still to be further debated (see also our discussion of example 3 below, where prosody marks both the phase of negotiation and the dis-

agreement of the speaker)⁹.

In a second type of move, assertive inferential *allora* is combined with signals of disagreement. In this context, the polyphonic properties of the connective are exploited to accentuate the divergence between the speaker's and the interlocutor's perspectives. The inferential relation tends to have local anaphoric scope and is used polemically to turn preceding discourse into an argument for a conclusion not projected by the interlocutor, usually by implying warrants clearly not shared by the interlocutor.

Example 3 illustrates this case. In the turn containing inferential *allora* (ln. 5), T utters a speech act ("stai zitto") presented as motivated by a premise that had been formulated by T in 1-2 and ironically up-graded by F in his turn in ln. 3. "Stai zitto" contradicts the ironical conclusion from this premise sketched by F in the same turn ("sei felice"), and consequential *allora* is realized with rising pitch, in accordance with the highly controversial character of a conclusion most obviously not suited to end the on-going negotiation of consensus. Disagreement is accentuated by various signals of reduced cooperation: T's turn ignores any possible sequential implications of the second part of F's preceding turn; it is pronounced in full overlap with F's next turn; it constitutes a face-threatening speech act; and it contains prosodic indicators of disagreement such as an overall high volume and focus phenomena (in the above mentioned example, the word "zitto" is clearly focused and realized with emphasis).

2.2.3 Conclusions the speaker is not committed to

Allora may occur in ironical utterances that express a conclusion not subscribed by the speaker. In such contexts, *allora* always implies non commitment to the premises identified in preceding discourse. When these have been formulated by the interlocutor, the connective necessarily implies disagreement.

An interesting aspect of this use of *allora* is that, in virtue of the polyphonic dissociation, signaled by the connective, between the act of formulating the premises and the act of drawing the conclusion (cf. Mosegaard Hansen 1997:178), the speaker's ironic distantiation¹⁰ from the conclusion does not usually serve to imply that the conclusion is attributed to the hearer. Rather, *allora* is used to formulate a *reductio ad absurdum*: an inference that is unacceptable both for the speaker and the interlocutor and therefore can be used by the speaker to demonstrate the invalidity of the premise from which it follows.

⁹ Differences in the prosodic realization of inferential *allora* appear to be related much more to the final *vs.* non-final position in the argumentation than to the degree of commitment to the conclusion, a finding that is congruent with the strongly connective and anaphorical nature of consequential *allora* and its general underdeterminedness as to illocutionary force and degree of illocutionary force (see point (a) above).

¹⁰ Irony, in general, exploits polyphony and underlines dissociation (cf. e.g. Sperber and Wilson 1981).

Consider the following fragment taken from *L'infedele* (TV political debate):

- 4.
1. A: Alitalia. non è da: da ieri credo che sia in questa situazione disastrosa,
Alitalia. has been in this disastrous situation not just recently,
2. (h) sono un po' di anni (h) e il Governo Berlusconi m-
it's been a couple of years now (h) and Berlusconi's Government m-
3. [heh:::
4. B: [E **allora** la svendiamo [ai francesi?]
[**ok** *why don't we just sell it [to the French then?*]¹¹
5. A: [No, lasciami and-] lasciami finire
[No, *let me go-*] *let me finish*

In this example, *allora* introduces an ironical question by B oriented towards a negative answer (ln. 4), marked as such among others by a particular prosodic contour not rendered in the transcript. Speaker A reacts with disagreeing “no” immediately after the key-word “svendiamo” (“sell it out”) (ln. 4), recognizing the question as a disagreeing move.

What is it B disagrees with? In non-subscribed ironical inferences marked by *allora*, disagreement directly concerns the premise in the interlocutor's discourse the inference is based on, and, as a consequence, the entire line of argumentation the interlocutor is developing. In the above example, the premise rejected is A's strongly negative evaluation of *Alitalia*'s state of health as a company, expressed by the adjective “disastrosa” (ln. 1) and insistence in long duration. Indirectly, then, B rejects certain further implications of this premise, too. It is not by chance that B takes the floor just after A has pronounced the topic of the next utterance, “il governo Berlusconi”, and does not ratify the introduction of that topic. On the basis of relevant background knowledge, it can easily be inferred that the last bit of A's turn projects in fact an argumentative structure proceeding from the argument given in ln. 1-2 to a conclusion consisting in an accusation of Berlusconi's government. It is reasonable to assume that B's manoeuvre against the argument in ln. 1-2 is designed to indirectly and preventively refute precisely that conclusion.

2.2.4 Searching for a conclusion by means of interrogative *allora*

Besides the cases of subscribed or unsubscribed conclusions discussed in the two preceding sections, *allora* occurs in a range of interrogative cotexts in which the speaker does not formulate any standpoint, but suggests a line of reasoning starting out from the interlocutor's discourse and exhorts the interlocutor to complete it. Typically speakers urge their interlocutor to draw a conclusion that he/she has not thought of

¹¹ Lit. “**And so** we will send it to the French?”

or is refraining to draw: the polyphonic semantics of *allora* combines with the illocutive force and sequential implications of questions as requests to constitute a corrective intervention of the speaker in the argumentative organization of the interlocutor's discourse.

Consider the following stretch of TV talk-show dialogue (*Amici di Sera*, partly quoted in Bazzanella *et al.* 2008) between a young girl (A) and an expert invited to the show (P). The girl had previously accused her father of not being interested in her. In (5), P asks A a question that aims at eliciting a declaration of intents on which to base further plans of action (ln. 1). Note that the question is introduced by non inferential, discourse structuring *allora*, pronounced with a rising accent within a falling contour that conveys the presence of a prosodic boundary, even without any following pause:

5.
 1. P: allora, vuoi papà o non vuoi papà
Ok, do you want your dad or you don't you want your dad
 2. A: posso instaurare un rapporto con mio padre
I can have a relationship with my father
 3. ma una persona che mi [è stata vicina vent'anni come x-
but a person that has been staying close to me for 20 years
 4. P: [**allora** vuoi papà o non vuoi papà?
so do you want your dad or don't you want your dad?
 5. perché se vuoi l'affetto di tuo padre devi conoscerlo
for if you want your dad's love you have to know him

The girl gives an answer with a contrastive structure (ln. 2-3), which the expert interrupts by repeating his question, this time introducing it by clearly inferential *allora* (ln. 4). The connective has, typically for its consequential value in a context of an on-going controversy, a rising pitch accent, particularly strong in this context of competition for the floor, and is in tight prosodic connection with the rest of the utterance. By repeating his question, in overlap, P rejects the answer begun by A. Inferential *allora*, in this cotext, motivates this non-acceptance, interpreting the two turn parts contrasted by A as premises not allowing to make the desired decision between the two alternatives proposed by P.

The hetero-correcting function of this question type can serve various goals, from the co-construction of argumentation in an asymmetric context (e.g. teacher-student) to the management of disagreement. In the above example, both these goals may be considered relevant. There exists one variant of inferential interrogative *allora*, then, which is preponderantly polemic: the inferential discourse marker *e allora?*, typically realized as an independent intonation phrase with a contrastive rising-falling accent and meaning roughly "so what" (to be distinguished from temporal-consequential *e allora?* meaning "and then?").

(6) illustrates this case:

6.
 1. A: l'ho invitata diverse volte a venire con me e la mamma
I've invited her many times to come with me and with her mom
 2. a farsi la pizza ... e la devo pregare in ginocchio
to eat a pizza ... and I have to beg her on my knees
 3. B: **e allora?**
so what?

In this fragment of a TV talk-show (*Amici di sera*), a father (A) advances an argument (ln. 1-2) to justify his standpoint that he is doing more to improve the relationship with his daughter than she does. Speaker B's reaction, whole-turn *e allora?* (ln. 3), asking A to complete his reasoning, ignores the obvious link between A's argument and a standpoint already expressed before and thereby implies disagreement with this standpoint.

E allora? is used in an analogous way in the following title of a newspaper article (La Repubblica, 21 maggio 2008), as a type of polyphonic monologue:

7.

L'ultimo strappo del gerarca Ugo. 'La Valsusa si arrabbia? E allora?'
Hierarch Ugo's most recent affront: 'The Susa Valley is upset? So what?'

Polemic *e allora?* is here attributed to an important promoter of the TAV fast train connection between Torino and Lyon, leading through the Susa Valley. It conveys the idea of an arrogant attitude that ignores all consequences that could possibly derive from the opposition of the Susa Valley inhabitants against this project and thereby, in a nutshell, nullifies this opposition.

3. Conclusions

In face-to-face interaction, argumentation is intertwined with the negotiation of agreement and, more generally, with the coordination of action and the management of interaction at all levels. In the examples discussed in this paper, we have seen e.g. the relevance to argumentation of phenomena such as the management of the floor and of topics, the interactive construction of adjacency pairs and of longer sequences, or speaker roles and face.

This tight relationship between argumentation and interaction is likely to be reflected in the lexical semantics of discourse markers and other potential argumentative indicators such as *allora*. In our opinion, such indicators are highly useful to argument reconstruction and discourse analysis, provided that sufficient attention is paid to prosodic and sequential micro-contextual phenomena.

The analyses proposed in section 2 confirm the importance of not privileging a priori one level of analysis over the other. By means of a careful analysis of the word's

polysemy, it is possible to identify those of its readings that are most directly linked to argumentation, in this case consequential *allora* used to express inference to motivate speech acts. But even those readings remain strongly polyfunctional – in particular, connective *allora* always combines argumentative functions with text and interaction structuring functions – and depend on context as to the actualization of their argumentative functions. They are used e.g. to mark consensual conclusions (example 2) or standpoints in an on-going controversy (3), to ironically refute arguments (4), or to ignore potential conclusions projected by the interlocutor, often implying disagreement (5, 6, 7).

These configurations result from a close interaction between the connective's invariant meaning components and contextual parameters such as speech act type, degree of assertiveness of the host utterance, and sequential implications of the host turn. In spoken dialogue, prosodic cues related to *allora* and to the adjacent cotext play an important role in conveying different possible interpretations. In particular, the melodic contour and prosodic phrasing as a whole (involving melodic changes together with variations in volume, lengthening and presence/absence of pauses) contributes to differentiate various situations ranging from an open contrast of standpoints to convergence and sequence closing.

In conclusion, in order to grasp relevant form-function correlations it is necessary to move from the level of lexical analysis to the level of complex pragmatic configurations, which include the propositional content, global and local context (Akman & Bazzanella 2003), the speaker's attitude, the relational level, and the sequential development of argumentation and conversation.

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