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Commentary on: Marta Zampa's "The editorial meeting discussion as an argumentative activity type"

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In her paper, Marta Zampa examines an interesting communicative practice. Editorial meeting discussions play an important role in shaping the news but, as Zampa rightly emphasises, they remain under-investigated. Zampa's work presented in this paper is just a part of her PhD project. This is important to keep in mind when discussing her methodology and findings and even more when making suggestions. The goal of Zampa's PhD project is to "reconstruct how decision-making leading to editorial choices functions" and to "trace out the inferential structure of the most significant arguments" used in editorial meetings (p. 1). In this paper, she tells us, she carries out three tasks: first she characterizes "editorial meeting discussions about a potential news item and its production as an argumentative activity type", second, she reconstructs "the argumentation structure of the issues occurring in an actual discussion" and third, she "highlights the news values that are entailed in the discussion". The actual discussion she analyses is from an editorial meeting of a daily reportage program on the Swiss German-language public broadcast service.

Marta Zampa delivers what she promises. She offers a clear characterisation of the activity type and a fine analysis of the argumentation in the meeting she examines, and she makes explicit, in the argumentation structure, what values are appealed to in the discussion. However, the tasks she commits to are not really simple. More reflection and consideration are definitely needed in order to refine the characterisation of the activity type and to connect it to the analysis of the case study. In what follows, I will make suggestions for how to achieve that.

In characterising the activity type of "editorial meeting discussion", Zampa uses the *model of communication context* developed by Rigotti and Rocci (2006). First, she describes the interaction field of the practice at issue in terms of the shared goals of the participants and the social roles they assume. Zampa considers the editorial meetings discussions in the Swiss public service institution SRG SSR as the general interaction field, and the redaction of the program *10vor10*, as the specific one. Second, in the context of this interaction field, she describes the (interaction) scheme which is typical in these discussions. Quite intuitively, or at least so it seems, she presents the interaction scheme of deliberation, in which "participants jointly decide on a course of action over a matter of common concern". Furthermore, Zampa uses the pragma-dialectical framework to characterize the

activity type in terms of the four stages of a critical discussion (van Eemeren & Houtlosser, 2005). She describes the initial situation in the editorial discussion meetings, their material and procedural starting point, the argumentative means typically used in these discussions and the way in which the outcome is determined.

Zampa's characterisation of the activity type offers a quite intuitive account of the practice at issue. Supporting the good intuitions with evidence and/or reflection can certainly help refine the characterisation proposed. Furthermore, the characterisation remains general, ignoring many of the interesting complexities of the practice. For example, in characterising the initial situation, Zampa identifies multiple differences of opinion: a difference of opinion about a possible news item, about its production and about its broadcasting. The characterisation can be refined by investigating the nature of these differences and the way they are linked. An important question to be asked, for example, is whether the differences are discussed simultaneously or is a certain order one after the other. In addition to that, one can safely assume that in a single editorial meeting, several news items are discussed. Consequently, one needs to consider how the differences of opinion about the different news items are related. Another question that can shed more light on the practice is how the progress of a discussion about one of the issues affects the discussion of another. Furthermore, more questions can be asked about the argumentative roles and obligations that can be associated with the social roles identified.

The analysis of the case study, namely, the discussion about the snow news item, seems to be aimed at highlighting the *news values* that are entailed in the discussion. The analysis is thorough and detailed; it reflects a good grasp of the interaction in this type of practice and it indeed sheds significant light on the different values appealed to in a discussion about news items. Zampa is diligent in reconstructing the arguments and making the value premises explicit. But this cannot be all what the case study is meant to achieve. After all, the analysis needs to contribute to the characterisation of the activity type, and it certainly can do that. For example, the identification of the news values can help specify the material starting points of the activity type. Also, the identification of argument schemes can, for example, help specify the argumentative means of the activity type. There are many ways in which the analysis can contribute to the refinement of the characterisation of the activity type. Unless these ways are explored, the potential of the analysis will remain unrealised. Links between the characterisation of the activity type and the analysis need to be drawn also in the opposite direction. That is to say that the analysis needs to benefit from the findings of the characterisation. For example, Zampa can certainly make it clearer how the definition of the interaction field and scheme proposed as part of the characterisation of the activity type can guide the reconstruction of the argumentation.

In carrying out the above suggested elaborations, it is important to keep in mind what the goal of Marta's PhD project is. As she puts it, her main goal is to "reconstruct how decision-making leading to editorial choices functions" and to "trace out the inferential structure of the most significant arguments" used in editorial meetings. In view of that, it seems that elaborations that relate to the argumentative means and the interaction scheme are particularly crucial.