

ISSA Proceedings 2002 - Keywords As Passwords To Communities



The purpose of this paper is to assess the role of cultural keywords in argumentation processes which take place within communities' boundaries.

The paper will focus on the relationship between keywords and endoxa, i.e. that set of values, rules, knowledge and beliefs that are assumed to be shared within a community.

In particular, it will analyze one of the main argumentative functions of keywords: the negotiation of the membership to a community. Keywords, in fact, might be considered as passwords that allow or disallow individuals to be part of a community, to enter it, and to understand it.

1. Cultures and communities

In order to better understand the role of cultural keywords in argumentation processes that take place within given communities, it will be useful to outline in brief the relationship between the concepts of 'culture' and 'community'. These two concepts, in fact, are strictly related to each other: culture can be considered as the substance of communities, since it is their non-hereditary collective memory, it is what enables them last over time (Lotman & Uspenskij 2001: 43). The relation between communities and cultures is a relation of mutual implication: on the one hand, in fact, cultures offer the conceptual categories of communities and generate their grammars and their signs; on the other, a community necessarily shares, in some ways or in some respects, a culture, and in the same time it generates a culture. We can conclude that culture is the shape of the communal life of a community, and that on the other hand communities can be considered as 'instantiations' of cultures.

The Semiotic School of Moscow-Tartu has singled out three different but complementary ways in which culture can be conceived of from a semiotic point of view: culture can be considered as a hierarchy of particular semiotic systems, as a family of texts linked to a set of functions, or as a device that generates these texts (Lotman & al. 1975). We can thus distinguish two basic meanings in the word 'culture': culture as a system, and culture as a family of texts, i.e. as a 'hypertext'. Both meanings can be led back to a common root: the concept of

culture as a structure of reception: culture, in fact, is a structure that welcomes man on the one hand by teaching him the nitty-gritty of reality, on the other by providing him with its categories, by teaching him how to relate with reality (Rigotti 2002).

Corresponding to the two basic meanings of 'culture', two ways of conceiving of communities can be pointed out: a community can be seen as a set of people who just have something in common, i.e. who share a culture as a system, or as a group of people who interact, who share common texts, i.e. who share a culture as a hypertext. We call the former 'paradigmatic communities', the latter 'syntagmatic communities'. Paradigmatic communities are characterised by similarity: their members are similar, they share similar interests, similar ways of thinking and of arguing, similar features, and so on. Syntagmatic communities, on the contrary, are characterised by differences: through members' interactions, in fact, combinations of elements emerge, which can carry out both different and complementary functions.

To the first typology belong communities such as the community of the Italians, the community of the inhabitants in Milan, the community of English speaking people, the community of pediatricians, the community of the Catholics, and so on. Usually the members of such communities don't know each other, they don't communicate each with all the others, but they have the perception of belonging to the community, they are aware of being part of it. Examples of syntagmatic communities are communities of practice **(i)** such as the families, the colleagues, the members of a work group, the classmates, the members of a club, and so on.

The difference between syntagmatic and paradigmatic communities is basic, since it has to do with the level of the common ground that needs to be shared among two or more people in order to allow them to communicate **(ii)**. The members of a paradigmatic community share a communal common ground, i.e. they have a common encyclopedic knowledge, they share an evidence about the cultural communities people belong to; the members of a syntagmatic community, on the other side, share not only a communal common ground, but also a personal common ground, which derives from people's direct personal experiences with each other and has thus its roots in the interactions that took place among them (Clark 1996: 100).

2. Keywords and endoxa in enthymematic arguments

Both the concepts of 'community' and 'culture' are strictly related to those of

'keyword' and 'endoxon'. According to linguist Anna Wierzbicka (1997: 1), cultures can be analyzed through their keywords, due to the 'very close link' existing between the life of a society and the lexicon of the language spoken by it. The concept of 'key words' is a principle that links vocabulary and culture, since keywords are words that result to be very important and revealing in a given culture (Wierzbicka 1997: 15-16).

Aristotle defines the endoxa as the remarkable opinions of a community: they are those propositions that are in the common opinion (*doxa*), they are those opinions which are shared by everyone, or by most people, or by the experts of a given community (*Topics I* 100b).

Endoxa are therefore the very core of enthymematic arguments, since enthymemes differ from analytical syllogisms in that enthymemes' premises are not necessary, but only probable, or rather endoxa, i.e. shared and accepted by a community (*Rhetoric II* 1402a). This is also probably the main reason why in enthymemes one of the premises is often left unexpressed. Aristotle explains this point through the well-known example of Dorieus, the winner in an Olympic competition: if I want to show that Dorieus has won a competition where the prize is a crown, it's enough for me to say that he won the Olympic games; I don't need to add that the prize of the Olympic games is a crown, since everybody knows it. In this case the hearer is able to add the unexpressed premise himself (*Rhetoric I* 1357a). The speaker, thus, leaves unmentioned the taken-for-granted aspects of an assertion ('everybody knows it'), and leaves unsupported those aspects which get immediate assent ('everybody agrees on it') (Jackson & Jacobs 1980: 262).

Endoxa have thus largely to do with presuppositions: in an enthymeme a premise is presupposed exactly because it is assumed to be an endoxon, it is assumed to be shared by a given community in that it is known and it is agreed on. Therefore, not only it is unnecessary to state the shared premise, but it would even be injurious to the audience, since it would prejudice that confidence between the speaker and the hearer which is required by any persuasive discourse **(iii)** (Tardini 1997: 440); furthermore, giving too much support for an assertion would be detrimental also for the argumentation, since it would increase the number of places where disagreement may occur, without improving prospects for agreement (Jackson & Jacobs 1980: 264).

We can thus single out three basic reasons for the presupposed premise not to be expressed: a cognitive one, which can be led back to the need to proceed in the interaction and not to come back again to what has already been agreed on; a

psychological one, in order not to hurt the interlocutors by explaining them what they already know well (Rigotti 1999: 49); and an argumentative one, intended as a recommendation not to offer to the interlocutor 'for free' grounds for disagreement.

In this perspective, keywords might be considered as a constituent part of the endoxa of a community: they are terms (predicates or arguments) which refer to specific endoxa; their meaning, thus, is no longer matter of discussion, insofar as they are shared and accepted by the community itself. If so, then the concept of 'keyword' proves to be significant also with respect to argumentation theory. On the one side, in fact, the analysis of arguments can help hypothesizing and testing those terms which can rise to the status of cultural keywords, i.e. those terms which are particularly significant inside a specific culture or community. On the other side, the analysis of cultural keywords can provide us with a better understanding of the role of endoxa and *topoi* in argumentation (Rigotti & Rocci, paper presented at the ISSA Conference 2002).

In particular, cultural keywords can play a significant role in enthymemes, acting in the argument as the middle terms, as we will show further on. Keywords, in fact, are the predicates that result to be decisive in order to create enthymematic arguments, in that they are linked to the endoxa which act as the unexpressed major premises of the enthymemes; these endoxa, in their turn, define keywords' positive or negative value for the community with regard to the action.

Obviously, in enthymematic arguments keywords might function in the same time as tools for manipulation practices as well, due exactly to their strict relationship with endoxa and presuppositions. Well-known is Gottlob Frege's example concerning 'the will of the people', an expression which has no generally accepted reference, but has often been demagogically abused in order to achieve the agreement of the audience (Frege 1952: 70).

3. Communities in argumentation theory

Endoxa and cultural keywords are inserted into the common ground of a community. In particular, they operate at the level of the communal common ground of a cultural community. Cultural communities can be defined as sets of people with a shared expertise that other communities lack; this shared expertise consists of facts, beliefs, procedures, norms, and assumptions that members of the community assume they can take for granted in other members (Clark 1996: 102).

With respect to the argumentation processes that take place within given

communities, endoxa are propositions which need not to be expressed because they are part of the common ground shared by a community. They can thus be considered as a constituent component of that shared expertise which shapes a cultural community. Cultural keywords, in their turn, are the constituents of the endoxa of a community. Keywords, in fact, can not stand by themselves: they must be anchored to propositions (endoxa) that found them as such, as we will show.

If we move from the field of cognitive sciences to that of argumentation theories, the notion of 'cultural community' can be associated to that of 'field of argumentation', which was first proposed by Stephen Toulmin (1958: 14). According to Toulmin, fields are 'rational enterprises', 'logical types', and can be equated with intellectual disciplines. He exploited this notion in order to set the 'soundness' conditions for an argumentation, since the soundness of argumentation is an 'intraterritorial', not an 'interterritorial' notion (van Eemeren & al. 1996: 134). In other terms, according to Toulmin, arguments can be field-invariant, when they remain the same in all fields of argumentation, or field-dependent, when they are different in each field of argumentation; the claim of the so-called field theories is that there are no significant field-invariant standards for the evaluation of arguments (Johnson 2000: 191-192).

The notion of 'argument fields', as it has been defined by Toulmin, is indeed vague, and it has each time been interpreted as 'rhetorical communities', 'discourse communities', 'disciplines', 'collective mentalities', and so on (van Eemeren & al. 1996: 204). According to David Zarefsky (1996: 49), the term 'field' was a metaphor for the location of arguments. In this sense, Toulmin's argument fields resemble very much Aristotelian *topoi*, which are nothing but the most important means of selecting the arguments for the enthymemes: they are a repository of arguments. Aristotle distinguished between common *topoi*, which can be applied in many cases, and specific *topoi*, which are peculiar of a subject (*Rhetoric II* 1396b). In general, we can conceive of the Aristotelian *topos* as the plot of the enthymemes, as the template (pattern) of enthymematic arguments, as the application of the general rule of the deductive implication to the various fields of human arguing; these patterns, or these templates, are drawn from the shared experience of the community which uses them (Tardini 1997: 440). The *topoi* have thus their roots in the endoxa of a community.

Argumentation can thus be considered as a social activity, not only because it implies two or more interlocutors (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1991: 153) (iv),

but also because every argument is deeply rooted in the common ground of a community, i.e. it is rooted in its shared experience. With regard to this, Ray McKerrow spoke about 'argument communities', claiming that argument can be discussed in terms of the community, field or sphere in which it takes place (McKerrow 1990: 27). By doing so, McKerrow emphasizes the relationship that exists among shared values, common personal bonds, and argument evaluation, since communities are characterized by the specific rules which govern their argumentative behavior, by the social practices which determine their communication rules, and by their own 'display' of these rules and social practices in response to challenges from within or outside the community (McKerrow 1990: 28).

The relation between argumentation and communities is also stressed by Blair & Johnson (1987), who determine argumentation by a community of interlocutors. They regard argumentation as a particular activity regulated by the community of model interlocutors; therefore, acceptability of premises and arguments depends on this community, which is defined in normative terms.

On the one hand, thus, argumentation is a constitutive property of communities (Maier 1995: 369); on the other the existence of a community is a necessary condition in order for an argument to take place and to be effective. All the implicit premises of the enthymemes, their reference to the endoxa and the topoi, in fact, can only be effective when a common ground (both personal or communal) is established among the interlocutors, i.e. when an even minimal form of community already exists.

4. Keywords as passwords to enter virtual communities

We define virtual communities as the new social realms that emerge through on-line interaction, capturing a sense of interpersonal connection as well as internal organization (Baym 1998: 35); they are thus social relationships forged in cyberspace within a specified boundary or place (e.g., a conference or chat line) that is symbolically delineated by topic of interests (Fernback & Thompson 1995). The term community occurs in the virtual world also in another sense. It is, in fact, often employed to refer to the regular visitors of a website and to the habitual users of a web service: it refers to the stable community that is recognizable behind a hypertext. In the former case, we have to do with syntagmatic communities, in the latter with paradigmatic communities.

Dealing with paradigmatic communities, both on-line and 'real', we can determine a first role played by keywords: they help to outline communities' symbolic

boundaries. In this perspective, they can be considered as the bricks that build what semiotician Yuri Lotman called the 'semiosphere' of a culture (or community), i.e. the semiotic space necessary for the existence and functioning of languages; outside this space no communicative event can take place (Lotman 2001: 123-124).

This is particularly clear in virtual communities: as a matter of fact, on-line communities have no real (physical) boundaries which delimit them. Their boundaries are only symbolic(**v**), and are represented by the topics of interest which people discuss about, and by the corresponding keywords. Virtual communities, in fact, normally gather people around a common topic of interest, which is proposed and established by the founder of the community. He has also the chance to supply a short description of the community, which usually is required by the web services which host the community, in order to classify the community in the proper public directory.

For example, Classic Movies(**vi**) is a community hosted on the MSN website which gathers together movies fans from all over the world. This is the description of the community given by the founder: "We're a community that celebrates Hollywood from the early days of the silents through the New Hollywood Era of the 70's". MSN requires the founder to supply, in addition to the short description, also some keywords which have the main function to help the search engine to easily find the community. In the case of Classic Movies, they are: "movies, classics, Clark Gable, Marilyn Monroe, silent films, western, classic films, classic movies". These keywords can be considered as the elements that delineate the semiosphere of the community: outside these semiotic boundaries, no communicative event is allowed to take place inside the community.

In a certain sense, these keywords act as passwords to the community: who is not interested in movies, classics, Clark Gable, and so on, is not allowed to access the community; or rather, he can physically access the community, but takes no real part in it, he really does not belong to the community. Keywords act as the passwords that users must enter in order to access reserved areas of web services or limited-access websites. The mechanism at work here, in fact, is the same, and it can be led back, on the side of the website or of the community, to the conditional proposition: "if you tell me the right password/ keyword, you can access the website/ community". Depending on whether the condition comes true or not, the whole structure follows the *modus ponens* or the *modus tollens*: "if you

tell me the right password, you can access the website; you told/ did not tell me the right password; so you can/ can not access the website”.

These keywords have in themselves no explicit argumentative function; they are the keys that open the doors of the community, both in a physical sense, as is the case of passwords allowing access to a website, and in a semiotic sense, as with keywords that disclose the understanding of a semiotic world, that outline the semiosphere of a community. Actually, this function of keywords has an argumentative value as well, in that the semiosphere defines the relevance for a given community, it establishes the community's field of argumentation. Furthermore, if we analyze the communicative exchanges that take place in on-line communities, we can see that keywords are often exploited for their argumentative power. A significant example of keywords' argumentative value occurs when they are used to negotiate the belonging of a single to the community.

5. Negotiating the membership to a community: examples from the cyberspace

We are going now to analyze an example taken from an Italian on-line community, CurvaNet(**vii**). It is one of the biggest and most active Italian virtual communities for football supporters. CurvaNet has the structure of a newsgroup, i.e. it consists in a big archive of the messages posted by the members, subdivided into boards, which in their turn are subdivided into discussions (forums). The community is free, has nearly 2500 members, and it collects about 700 messages per day. It is indeed an unusual community, since it was founded directly by MSN (which also hosts it), and it is maintained and administered by it. The description of the community is very simple: 'The Serie A league championship'; the keywords provided by the administrator are: 'football', 'support', 'team'. The messages we are going to take into consideration are taken from a discussion that took place in February 2001 in a board called 'Racism' ('Razzismo'); the discussion was opened by the community's administrator with the title: 'Mr. Crimar, I have deleted your nonsense'.

The first message is worth reporting integrally(**viii**):

1. Dear mr. Crimar, I wanted to inform you of a great pleasure: I have deleted your insane speeches. Probably, you don't know - but there are a lot of things you don't know - the limits of decency. Don't stick to your racist howlers, for I'll throw you out of this community. Mr. Crimar, you'd better conform yourself to the directive. Understand? Or not?

Without my best regards,

Ulisse

Administrator of the Community

The prevailing illocutionary act in this message is clearly a warning: what the administrator is doing through the message is warning a member of the community not to write further racist messages, otherwise he will be thrown out of the community. The warning is accomplished through different speech acts: a prohibition ('don't stick to your racist howlers'), followed by the threat of the foreseen sanction ('I'll throw you out of this community'); a direct advice ('Mr. Crimar, you'd better conform yourself to the directive') followed by a rhetorical question ('understand?') which has the function of sealing the whole warning. It is worth noticing here that the administrator could also warn the member through a private e-mail message; he has instead chosen to do it in public: this means that the addressee is not only the 'racist' member, but the whole community, and the message acquires thus the function of a public warning.

The message is clearly not argumentative in itself. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to recognize that it has a rigorous logic structure, since the warning takes the shape of a conditional proposition: $p \rightarrow q$ (if p , then q : "if you go on writing racist messages, then I'll throw you out of this community"). A warning, in fact, can be led back to a conditional proposition which has some peculiar features that the conditional relation imposes to both the condition (p) and the consequence (q): in the first place, p must be an action the addressee has in mind to do (or not to do), and must therefore depend on the addressee's will; secondly, since q is a threat, it must be something negative for the addressee and it must depend on the sender's will; finally, the sender must be in a position hierarchically higher than the addressee, or anyway he must be in the right condition to make a warning.

Moreover, a warning is nothing but an attempt to induce somebody not to do something; it presupposes a disagreement about something, a conflict which is carried on verbally and which can be supported, although this does not always happen, through justifications, reasons, explanations, and so on. Thus, in the warning of the administrator an argumentative value can also be recognized. The argument that underlies and founds the warning can be traced back to the following enthymeme: 'you posted racist messages, so you can be thrown out of the community'. The argument, in other words, is constituted by the threat and by its reason.

Finally, a strong argumentative value can also be recognized in the signature of the administrator. In fact, it was not necessary for the administrator to sign as

'Ulisse Administrator of the community', since everybody in the community knows that Ulisse is the administrator; nevertheless he signed in that way, because it was important to stress that fact in order to strengthen the warning. We can see here a sort of argument *ex auctoritate*, which the administrator uses to validate his warning: "the warning I made is valid, because I am the administrator of the community; and I stress it by reasserting it in the signature". Actually, this argument is implicit in the semantics of the warning, since for a warning to take place, the warner must be hierarchically higher than the warned, he must be in a position of power, as we have noticed above.

The keyword of the whole message is 'racist'. This is, in fact, the middle term of the enthymeme underlying the administrator's threat. The major premise of the enthymeme can indeed be rendered explicit in this way: "racists are not allowed to belong to the community" (**ix**). This is clearly an endoxon, since it is a common opinion shared and accepted by the whole community - and not only by this specific one. Keywords are always linked to endoxa, they are pointers to endoxa which often act as major premises in enthymematic arguments, or, according to Toulmin's terminology, as warrants (Toulmin 1958: 98); the more endoxa a keyword points to, the more significant would be that keyword for a given community or culture. Our keyword 'racist' is linked to the aforementioned endoxon, which acts as the major premise in the argument; but it is also linked to a further endoxon that supports the former: 'racism is contrary to the nature itself of communities'. As a matter of fact, there cannot exist a racist community, since, as Raymond Williams has pointed out, the concept of community has only favorable connotations (Williams 1983).

We can reconstruct the whole argument in this way:

- a. Racism is contrary to the nature itself of communities
(endoxon founding the major premise, unexpressed);
- b. Racists are not allowed to belong to the community
(major premise, consequence of the endoxon, unexpressed);
- c. Crimar is racist
(minor premise, stated);
- d. Crimar is not allowed to belong to the community
(conclusion, unexpressed);
- e. Crimar should be thrown out of the community
(consequence of the conclusion, unexpressed);

f. Either Crimar stops writing racist messages, or he will be thrown out of the community
(implication, stated).

The enthymeme, thus, shows a contradiction between the behavior of a member and the nature of communities. It is worth remembering here that the ancient rhetoric explicitly linked the enthymeme to the contradiction (*contrarium*); in particular, Anaximenes, the author of the *Rhetoric to Alexander*, which is not much prior than the Aristotelian *Rhetoric*, first defined the enthymeme as being characterized by showing contradictions (*Rhetoric to Alexander* 1430a). Anaximenes' concept had particular influence with the most important Latin rhetoricians, such as Cicero, Cornificius, and Quintilian (Tardini 1997: 429-431).

The keyword 'racist' acts as the turning point in the enthymematic argument, since it points to the endoxon that states the contradiction. By showing a contradiction, the enthymeme implies also the necessity of a choice for the member whose behavior is fallen into contradiction. Keywords, thus, are linked to endoxa which have also the function of directing community's and people's attitude toward action by defining the positive or negative value of the keyword with regard to the community. In our example, the endoxon which the keyword is linked to sets the value of 'racism' as negative, and it implies the necessity for the racist member to change his behavior and the possibility for the community to expel the member.

It is worth noticing here that from the linguistic perspective of text analysis the middle term of our enthymeme coincides with the rheme of the sequence, since, as we have seen, it is through this term that the sequence can carry out its function (Rigotti 1993: 90); thanks to the keyword 'racist', in fact, the sequence can act as a prohibition linked to a threat.

After some other messages posted by other members and by the administrator, Crimar replied in this way:

2. Hi Ulisse, I'm sorry you are as intolerant as you censor the opinions that don't agree with yours. (...) You have used such heavy terms as 'stupid', 'ignorant', and so on, but don't you think that, when a behavior involves thousands of people, (...) they can't be anymore branded with exceptions? Are we all stupid? All ignorant? Or rather are we just people who think otherwise? You may believe it or not, but I don't think I'm a racist (...).

The accused member grounds his counter-argument by denying the truth of the

minor premise of the administrator's enthymeme ('Crimar is racist'). He accepts the formal validity of the argument, and also the validity of all the endoxa involved, but challenges the truth of a premise stated by Ulisse. He does so by shifting the attention on different keywords: from 'racism' to 'tolerance' and 'difference'. These new keywords lead us to endoxa such as 'Different opinions must be accepted (tolerated)', 'Who doesn't accept different opinions is intolerant', 'Intolerance is a negative quality', 'Intolerance is contrary to democratic communities', and so on.

The argument of Crimar starts with the negation of the minor premise of Ulisse's one: it is not a matter of racism, it is just a difference of opinions. Crimar supports his claim through a particular argument, which deals with the nature itself of endoxa.

We can render explicit his argument in this way:

- a. If a behavior is shared among many people, it must not be rejected
(endoxon, major premise, stated);
- b. My behavior is shared among many people
(minor premise, stated);
- c. My behavior must not be rejected
(conclusion, unexpressed);
- d. Racism must be rejected
(endoxon, unexpressed);
- e. My behavior is not racist
(conclusion from c. and d., stated).

The first endoxon which supports this enthymeme is about the concept of endoxon itself; in this case we can consider the term 'endoxon (shared opinion)' as a keyword which points to the endoxon that acts as the major premise.

Crimar, then, develops his enthymeme in the following way:

- a. Who doesn't accept different opinions is intolerant
(major premise, endoxon, unexpressed);
- b. Ulisse censored my opinions
(minor premise, stated);
- c. Ulisse is intolerant
(conclusion, stated);
- d. The administrator of a community must not be intolerant
(endoxon, general rule, unexpressed);

- e. The administrator of a community must accept different opinions (conclusion from a) and d), unexpressed);
- f. Either Ulisse stops censoring my opinions, or he is a bad administrator (implication, unexpressed).

Also in this case the argument shows a contradiction that implies an alternative. The contradiction is between Ulisse's behavior and the rules imposed by his role of administrator: the administrator of a community must be just, democratic, tolerant, and so on, while Ulisse has been intolerant. This contradiction implies the necessity for him to change his behavior.

All the keywords Crimar used to found his arguments act as middle terms in the preceding enthymemes: 'tolerance' and 'difference' point to the endoxa necessary to reach the conclusion that Ulisse must stop censoring Crimar's messages; 'shared opinion' is the keyword which permits Crimar to assert that his behavior must not be considered as racist.

6. Conclusions

The analyzed examples help us to understand the role of keywords in enthymematic arguments, and to explain their relationship to the endoxa of a community. We have analyzed two moves of a discussion which deals with the belonging to a football fans' community of a member who wrote racist messages. Neither the warning of the community's administrator nor the reply of the member are explicitly argumentative texts; they present only a few argument markers, as 'for' in the administrator's message. Nevertheless, a clear argumentative structure underlies these messages, since they present a conflict that needs to be solved: arguments are one of the means the interlocutors use to solve the conflict; in particular, arguments are used to ground a warning, to reject a premise, to support a claim, to show contradictions, and so on.

The belonging of the member to the community is negotiated through the reference to keywords that are particularly significant within the community, in that they point to the endoxa that constitute its communal common ground. The analysis of the keywords of a community, thus, can be very useful to well understand the arguments that occur in it; it is important for the social studies about communities as well, since it helps understand the identity of the community and of its members.

We can single out two different kinds of keywords which play a significant role in the negotiation of the membership to a community: the 'relevance keywords', i.e.

those terms which outline the semiosphere of the community and set the relevance conditions for the communicative acts that take place inside it; and the 'cultural keywords', i.e. those terms which are shared by a whole culture and by all the communities generated by it. Going back to the football fans' community, relevance keywords are all those terms which concern football; cultural keywords are, for instance, those we have singled out in the messages, such as racism, tolerance, difference, democracy, and so on. The former keywords are valid only for a specific community; the latter count in all the communities generated by a culture, exactly because they are constituent parts of the concept itself of 'community', as it is conceived of inside that culture.

NOTES

- i.** "A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage" (Lave & Wenger 1991: 98).
- ii.** "Two people's common ground is the sum of their mutual, common, or joint knowledge, beliefs, and suppositions" (Clark 1996: 93).
- iii.** Also Lloyd Bitzer argued that the incompleteness of the enthymemes is due to the essential features of the interaction between speaker and audience, which in rhetoric takes on a particular form (Bitzer 1959: 408).
- iv.** Even in the case of one person conferring with himself, argumentation can be considered as social (see van Eemeren & al. 1996: 2).
- v.** Obviously, real world communities can have symbolic boundaries, too. Anthropologist Anthony Cohen, for example, considers communities as entities of meaning rather than structures, and their boundaries as symbolic entities which encapsulate the identity of the community (Cohen 1985: 12).
- vi.** <http://groups.msn.com/ClassicMovies/>.
- vii.** <http://groups.msn.com/CurvaNet>. It is worth noticing that from June 2002 the section of MSN website which had always been called "Communities" changed its name in "Groups".
- viii.** The original messages are in Italian. Crimar is the nickname of a member of the community, Ulisse is the nickname of the administrator.
- ix.** The argument needs also a general rule in order to proceed to its conclusion, a rule such as "who posts racist messages is a racist"; this rule is a topos, and it proves to be necessary to link the major premise, which remains unexpressed, to

the minor stated by the administrator.

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