Marta Zampa* and Marina Bletsas

On the production of a multimodal news item: An argumentative approach

Abstract: The present paper deals with the production of a multimodal news item from an ethnographic perspective, aiming at fully understanding the role played by news values, i.e. shared criteria for news selection, in newsroom argumentation. The news item we consider is the *picture news* from *Corriere del Ticino*, the main Italian-language newspaper in Switzerland. As the Italian name *fototesto* says, this news item combines a verbal and a photographical component, presenting the journalists with particular challenges in its selection. To shed light on this production process, we take as a case study a picture news on eco-friendly heat distribution and the editorial conference leading to its choice, which took place on January 24, 2013. We analyze the interaction from the viewpoint of argumentation theory, combining Pragma-Dialectics (van Eemeren and Grootendorst) and the Argumentum Model of Topics (Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2009, 2010, under review), and unravel the reasons behind choices in content and form taken collaboratively by the journalists.

Keywords: argumentation, newsmaking, interaction, news values, multimodal news item

1 Introduction

> Every newspaper when it reaches the reader is the result of a whole series of selections as to what items shall be printed, in what position they shall be printed, how much space each shall occupy, what emphasis each shall have. There are no objective standards here. There are conventions (Lippmann 1922: 192).

Though dating back to 1922, this statement still accurately renders an important issue in newsmaking: the conventional and non-objective nature of a newspaper's features. The elaboration and continuation of these conventions takes

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place inside each newsroom, especially in editorial conferences. This process involves a rich argumentative dimension, which has not enjoyed much scholarly attention until very recently. Studies on journalism have just started looking at the argumentative moment of the coming into being of news products.[1] Likewise, although argumentation theory has devoted its attention to the study of visual and multimodal argumentation, especially in advertisement and political cartoons (see Groarke 2002; Kjeldsen 2012; Mazzali-Lurati and Pollaroli 2014; Rocci et al. 2013), argumentative studies on the production of a multimodal object, to our knowledge, are lacking.

We hereby wish to contribute to filling both gaps in argumentation theory by reconstructing how decision-making leading to editorial choices functions, with a focus on the design of a multimodal feature of a newspaper in an editorial conference. We present the argumentative analysis of a deliberative discussion at the main Italian-language newspaper in Switzerland, *Corriere del Ticino*,[2] concerning the design of a multimodal news item labeled "picture news" (see Section 2).[3] Applying Pragma-Dialectics (see van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004), we reconstruct the structure of argumentation; then, by means of the Argumentum Model of Topics (from now on: AMT; see Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2009, 2010, under review; Rocci 2017), we give an example of the inference connecting relevant arguments to the standpoints they support. We particularly aim at highlighting the argumentative role played by news values (i.e. criteria guiding news selection, see Section 3) entailed in the discussion and reflected in the resulting semiotic product.

In the present publication, we analyze an editorial conference that took place on January 24, 2013. The picture news appeared on *Corriere del Ticino* the following day. The example we focus on is taken from a newspaper corpus constructed by applying Progression Analysis (see Perrin 2003, 2013).[4]

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1 Argumentative decision-making in fact takes place at different levels in the newsroom: apart from editorial conferences, the focus of this paper, argumentation can also be found in informal meetings between journalists and co-workers and in the writing process itself, where decision making about text production entails interior argumentation (see Zampa 2015; Zampa in press; Zampa and Perrin 2016).

2 *Corriere del Ticino*, the main Italian-language newspaper in Switzerland, was founded in 1891 in a critical time in Ticino's history, right after a revolt of the liberal party against the conservatives (for detailed information concerning the history of Corriere del Ticino, see Agliati 2003). It has belonged to a non-profit foundation since 1941.

3 Parts of the characterization of the picture news and the analysis of the case are included also in Zampa (2015, in press).

4 A computer-based method to collect and evaluate the writing procedure in natural setting that combines "ethnographic observation, interviews, computer logging, and cue-based retrospective verbalizations to gather linguistic and contextual data" (Perrin 2013: 63). Considering

2 The multimodal news item *fototesto*

Our interest lies mainly in the relation between the picture news (it. *fototesto*) as a news sign and the argumentative discussion leading to its creation during the editorial conference. In order to adequately represent this, a brief description of the picture news is needed, for it is this semiotic product the journalists have in mind and aim at during the discussion. The analysis of the *fototesto* will be underpinned by the discussion data, which permits a well-founded consideration of the producers' intents.

As the Italian term *fototesto* (verbatim: 'phototext') describes, the picture news is a multimodal news item made up by both a visual and a verbal component: the former is represented by a photograph, the latter by a capitalized capture above the picture, as well as a by a short titled article below it. These jointly convey the news story. We here focus on this specific news item due to the prominent position it occupies on the front page and the newspaper representativeness it accordingly holds.

The first striking element in the characterization of this news item of *Corriere del Ticino* is in fact its eminent place in the layout of the front page as far as information value and salience are concerned. Following the social semiotic framework of Kress and van Leeuwen (see 1998, 2010 [1996]), we can easily identify the cues for this: the picture news is placed almost at the center of the page, which means "all the other elements are in some sense subservient" to it (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998: 196–198, 2010 [1996]: 196).[5] On the other hand, the imposing size and the centered and top-oriented placement in the visual field give the exposed news story great salience, meaning that, in "a hierarchy of importance among the elements" on the page, the picture news is quite near the top (Kress and van Leeuwen 1998: 196–198). The high color contrast between the red upper margin of the picture news and the page background underlines the salience; moreover,

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the newsmaking context this method was originally invented for, the writing situation is defined through interviews with journalists and editors and through field observation. Special attention is devoted to the writing task, the writers' professional relations and experience, as well as the economic, institutional, and technological situation in the workplace. Recordings of editorial conferences belong to this macro level, as it is in this framework that decisions are made concerning what events the journalists will write about and how they should frame them. The *Corriere del Ticino* corpus has been collected during the Swiss National Science Foundation project "Argumentation in newsmaking process and product" (PDFMP1_137181).

5 Kress and van Leeuwen (1998: 196) point out that this structure of front pages, which seems to apply to *Corriere del Ticino*, is "relatively less common" in Western layouts, while it appears more frequently in Asia.

the same red element constitutes a chromatic anaphora to the field containing date, website, and price information just below the masthead, thus further connecting page top and picture news. The considerable amount of time[6] dedicated to the discussion of the picture news during the editorial meeting in question (see Section 5) can also be adduced in support of its high salience. We therefore regard the picture news as a representative item for the entire front page and, in a metonymical game of Chinese boxes, ultimately of the newspaper, which the front page in its turn stands for. Finally, the verbal and pictorial elements of the picture news are framed together and at the same time separated from other news items on the front page by frame lines and empty spaces. This indicates that the picture news can be considered as a single unit, a sign of its own on the front page. What is more, it can be regarded as independent from the related article inside the paper: on a semantic level and from the receiver's perspective, because the news story is in its core exhaustively conveyed by this front page news item; furthermore, from the producer's point of view, because the very production process focuses the front page item in itself.

Though we cannot indulge here in a detailed analysis of the relations between verbal text and picture in this news item, a few words in this sense shall be allowed. The picture news collocation in the economy of the front page is reflected analogously in the internal structure of the picture news. The picture salience is attested by its spatial dominance, as far as both width and proximity to the news item top are concerned. Again, the top orientation of the most salient element is combined with its centrality, since the picture is preceded by a small – thus more marginal (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2010 [1996]: 197) – text field (the capture) and followed by a more extended text (the short article). As the image occupies most of the top section of the news item, it seems to establish itself as the core element of the news. In this sense, the *Corriere del Ticino* picture news can be assimilated to standalones as described by Bednarek and Caple:

> This is a type of news story where the image dominates – both the verbal text and often the page. This is why they have also been called *image-nuclear* news stories [...] There is also typically a headline with the image, which relates directly and often playfully to the photograph [...] An extended caption [...] is also included with the image and the headline. (Bednarek and Caple 2012: 182)

As in standalones, in the picture news the modes do not reach the highest possible degree of integration: from the point of view of the layout, picture

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6 Around seven minutes out of a 25-minute editorial conference.

and text never overlap; from a linguistic perspective, there are mostly no explicit deictic connections between the two. Despite this partial modal integration, modal intertwinement is still given, to the extent that we can speak of an integrated multimodal sign in the sense that "the parts should be looked upon as interacting with and affecting one another" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2010 [1996]: 177). Semantic coherence between the modes of the picture news takes place implicitly and largely thanks to layout patterns (image and text appear connected by the proximity of their fields and by the above described isolation of the *fototesto* from the rest of the page). Moreover, this multimodality is strongly suggested by the name the journalists give to the news item (i.e. *fototesto*), which focuses both modes.

Now, what exactly is the functional relation between the two components of the picture news? Is it a symmetrical relation or can one of the components be identified as nuclear in the sense of Rhetorical Structure Theory,[7] i.e. as independent, less substitutable, more essential to the writer's purpose than the other (cf. Mann and Thompson 1988: 266)? A deletion test[8] might suggest a satellite function for the picture, thus establishing the text as nucleus: in fact, the absence of the photograph would not hinder the passing of news information. This could seem particularly true of our specific *fototesto*, in which a layperson would hardly recognize the depicted object, so that the verbal component is vital for the interpretation both of the picture and of the news story. And yet, we think that this path would be misleading, overlooking not only the place that the specific picture holds both visually and in the production process at *Corriere del Ticino*, but also the fact that the pictorial mode is the marked one in a newspaper. A relation between picture and text seems more plausible, which means that the text "relates the situation presented" in the picture "to a framework of ideas not involved in the knowledge presented" in the picture itself (cf. Mann and Thompson 1988: 277). This would establish the picture as the nucleus of the

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7 Rhetorical Structure Theory (see Mann and Thompson 1988) aims at a linguistically founded analysis of text structures, based on the mostly hierarchical relations that hold between different units of a text. Such relations are identified taking into account the writer's most plausible intention (cf. Mann and Thompson 1988: 258). Developed on verbal texts, it has also proven useful in the study of multimodal texts: focusing on coherence relations between graphs and tables and verbal text, Taboada and Habel (2013) apply RST to a multimodal corpus of 1,500 pages formed by newspaper articles, scientific magazine articles, and scientific articles.
8 Using the deletion test suggested on multimodal documents, Taboada and Habel (2013) find that, in most of their corpus, the depiction acts as a satellite of the text (cf. Taboada and Habel 2013: 71). We must however note that in spite of characterizing the picture as hypotactic, the RST constraints for the relation type are used more laxly for newspaper illustrations, whose salience is particularly stressed (cf. Taboada and Habel 2013: 75).

news item – in line with the fact that the news item choice is mainly based on arguments about the pictorial component, as evidenced by the recordings of other editorial conferences in the corpus (see Section 5).

Observing the news product in Figure 1, we can notice how the two modes interact and specialize in different ways of conveying the intended meanings. As far as the news story is concerned, it is the headline that offers a univocal key to understanding the picture and the referred news, while building an implicit, elliptically deictic connection between photograph and text through the term *rubinetto* ('tap'), which metonymically signifies – on a first level we might call denotative in Barthes' sense – the selected news event, i.e. the initiated eco-friendly heat distribution. The sole fact that the image message is carried by means of a photograph – of all image types, the one that can be, at least in principle, less liable to connotation[9] – demonstrates of course the centrality of such denotative meaning: the primary purpose of this multimodal sign is to inform about a news event. In our case, this denotative meaning even seems to be the prevailing one, since the picture cannot boast particular merits as to its attractiveness – unlike the classical standa-lone, which "has the potential to construe a news event as aesthetically appealing" (Bednarek and Caple 2012: 182).

But is this the only level at which our picture news, considered in its whole, conveys meaning? We think not. What Barthes calls the photographic paradox is here at play:

> The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the "art," or the treatment, or the "writing," or the rhetoric, of the photograph) [...] here the connoted (or coded) message develops on the basis of a message without a code. (Barthes 1983 [1961]: 198)

Our picture, then, with its naturalistic use of color and brightness, the articulated background, high representation of pictorial detail and central per-spective, clearly marks a high truth value (cf. Kress and van Leeuwen 2010 [1996]: 159–163). Now, are we to assume that this is entirely incidental? We rather believe that the picture news also signifies specific news values to which the *Corriere del Ticino* avows, building its identity as a quality Swiss broadsheet paper. This works on a connotative level, i.e. on a level where an evaluation is at play. On this level, the verbal component does not prevail, confirming the above established nuclearity of the picture: in our picture news, for example, it is the choice of a naturalistic photograph of an event rather than the text that signals the value placed on an unembellished objective portrayal of reality. After all,

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9 Barthes (1983 [1961]: 197–198) speaks, with regard to the press photograph, of a "purely denotative statute."

Figure 1: *Corriere del Ticino's* front page on January 25, 2013 and the picture news.[10]

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10 Verbal part of the picture news:

Calore dai rifiuti nel Bellinzonese. Aperti i rubinetti del teleriscaldamento. Il teleriscalda-
mento del Bellinzonese con il calore della combustione dei rifiuti è in funzione. Ieri la Teris

"the credibility of newspapers [...] rests on the 'knowledge' that photographs do not lie and that 'reports' are more reliable than 'stories'" (Kress and van Leeuwen 2010 [1996]: 154).

In contributing to the newspaper's identity, such values link it to its readership, thus participating in the "ongoing discourse between the institution of the newspaper and the readership" (Knox 2007: 20). Decoding the semiotic structure of the picture news allows us to hypothesize some news values of *Corriere del Ticino*, such as focus on national/regional news, objectivity, seriousness.[11] In this paper we will try to verify them in the encoding phase by conducting an argumentative analysis of the editorial conference devoted to the choice of the picture news item we have just described and trace out the values that emerge there. The analysis will provide evidence of the role that news values play in decision-making related to a semiotic object. But first we need to provide our understanding of news values.

3 News values and picture newsworthiness

The notion of news value, well known to practitioners and scholars of journalism, embraces a complex variety of guidelines, value judgments, and characteristics of a story, which aim at answering the question "*how do 'events' become 'news'*?" (Galtung and Ruge 1965: 65, emphasis in the original). As Bednarek and Caple (2012: 103) point out, the definition of news values is not agreed upon, but in all formulations they "are said to determine what makes something newsworthy – worthy of being news." In line with scholars like Galtung and Ruge (1965), Bell (1991), and Cotter (2010), we

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SA lo ha inaugurato aprendo i rubinetti tra l'impianto di termovalorizzazione e la rete di distribuzione. Oggi le tubazioni si estendono dalla Migros di S. Antonino alla Forbo di Giubiasco, passando per le serre del Piano. Nel 2018 avrà una lunghezza di 20 chilometri e permetterà di evitare tonnellate di emissioni nocive all'anno. "Questa è ecologia nei fatti," ha rilevato il presidente Andrea Bersani. ['Heat from rubbish in the Bellinzona area. District heating taps are open. District heating in the Bellinzona area, deriving from rubbish combustion, is now active. It was inaugurated yesterday by Teris SA with the opening of the taps between the waste-to-energy incinerator and the distribution net. Today the pipelines run from Migros in S.Antonino to Forbo in Giubiasco passing through greenhouses in Piano. In 2018 they will be 20 kilometers long and allow avoiding tons of harmful emissions every year. "This is actual ecology" the president Andrea Bersani stated.']

11 Extended results on *Corriere del Ticino*'s news values emerged in the analysis of the rest of the corpus can be found in Zampa (2015, in press).

conceive of news values as criteria for news selection that are shared within a given community of newsmakers and guide their choice of events as potential news items (for an account of news values in argumentation, see Zampa 2015, in press).

Trying to answer the question of the role that news values have in decision-making related to a news sign, we will highlight some examples of news values at play in the *Corriere del Ticino* newsroom (see Section 5). It will not be redundant at this point to briefly draw attention to the newspaper as an "inter-action field" (Rigotti and Rocci 2006: 172), i.e. a given piece of social reality defined in terms of the shared goals of their participants – in the present case, the mission of the media organizations concerned. In its statutes, *Corriere del Ticino* is described as committed to defending the Swiss liberal-democratic institutions and principles, independently from religious, ideological or economic constraints. It does however take into particular consideration the Catholic religion, as the one professed by the majority of the canton population (see Fondazione Corriere del Ticino 1941). Today *Corriere del Ticino* plays the role of the Swiss national newspaper in Italian.

As for the picture news, it has to comply with given standards of quality and seriousness, all the more because of its salience on the front page (see Section 2). Thus, there are specific *Corriere del Ticino* news values that guide the selection of a photograph to be picked for the front page picture news. Such criteria of picture newsworthiness have been singled out through investigation of the corpus and can be summarized as follows:

a) newsworthiness of the depicted event;
b) avoidance of pictures that have been or may be chosen by other newspapers, which entails giving priority to pictures by *Corriere del Ticino* photographers over those from agencies;
c) authoritative source of the picture (avoidance of amateur pictures; preference for pictures by the chief photographer);
d) avoidance of pictures that might hurt the audience's feelings;
e) aesthetic appeal;
f) technical quality of the picture.

These criteria are integrated: the ideal situation is that the highest possible number of them be met. Sometimes, though, it is not possible to attain this ideal: it is for instance often the case that only low quality and/or non-exclusive photographs of a very relevant event are at one's disposal (especially if one wants to report unexpected negative events, e.g. terrorist attacks). Such circumstances can justify the selection of a picture that would otherwise not be picked, as in the examined case.

Thus, these pictorial news values guide decision-making concerning the creation of picture news during editorial conferences. Such decisions are embedded in deliberative discussions concerning the design of the front page, which can be characterized as argumentative activity types (for a detailed characterization and typology of the argumentative activity type "editorial conference discussion", see Zampa 2015; in press). These revolve around the deliberative issue "What is the best course of action to fulfill the goals of the media institution X?" In our case, the issue is specifiable as "Which is the best front page design to fulfill the goals of *Corriere del Ticino*?" and, considering our focus on the picture news, also as "What event can be presented as picture news to best fulfill the goals of *Corriere del Ticino*?" It has to be underlined that only practical matters are subject to deliberation in a news organization, e.g. deciding what events will be news items, when and how they will be published (or broadcasted) or assigning tasks concerning the production. The final goals of the organization, as well as the characteristics of the news product, are not debatable. For example, it is not matter of discussion whether the paper has to be out the day after, or – in the case of *Corriere del Ticino* – whether it should feature a picture news on the front page or not. The argumentative discussion strives to shape a news product that responds to given characteristics fulfilling the goals of the media organization, i.e. its mandate. Complying with the guidelines means implementing the organization's news values.

4 Theoretical framework of the argumentative analysis

The present analysis of argumentative interactions concerning the choice of picture news is embedded in the framework of Pragma-Dialectics, according to which argumentation is the process of defending or refuting a standpoint by putting forward arguments for or against it, with the aim of resolving a difference of opinion on the merits. Argumentation constitutes a complex speech act linked to the standpoint: both are staged in a critical discussion, in which a protagonist puts forward a standpoint and defends it, while an antagonist casts doubt on and/or argues against it (cf. van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004: 57–68).

In Section 5, we first reconstruct the structure of argumentation following the outlined pattern, which shows how arguments are connected to standpoints

and how they support them. We then explain why given arguments effectively support a standpoint by tracing out the inference that allows moving from standpoints to arguments. To this end, we apply the AMT (see Rigotti 2006; Rigotti and Greco Morasso 2009, 2010, under review), which explains inference by considering it as based on the intersection of two syllogistic lines of reasoning: a topical one (responsible for the inferential mechanism) and an endoxical one (providing persuasive effectiveness by linking the argument to a shared opinion in the community). The intersection of the syllogisms originates what is called a "Y-structure" that highlights "the crossing of lines of reasoning stemming from premises of different nature" (Greco Morasso 2011: 128) and is thus able to provide an account of all inferential nodes in argumentative reasoning. For the present research, it is fundamental to focus on the endoxical component: *endoxa* are those opinions "which commend themselves to all, or to the majority, or to the wise – that is or to all of the wise or to the majority or to the most famous and distinguished of them" (Aristotle *Topics* I: 100b). Such opinions are internalized and shared by the members of a community, thus they mostly remain implicit. The effectiveness of an argumentative move is guaranteed by rooting it in the context in which argumentation is embedded by means of the endoxical premise. In newsroom reasoning, the role of endoxical premises is often played by news values. This is thus where news values and argumentation meet: news values, like *endoxa*, make it possible – as our analysis will show – to argue effectively by activating premises that are shared – thus already accepted – in a given community (including both the newsmakers and the audience).

5 Choosing an event for the front page picture news: An argumentative analysis

We will now show how news values internalized and shared in a community of newsmakers guide their choice of events as potential news items. The example we take into consideration is a deliberative discussion from an afternoon meeting at *Corriere del Ticino*. After having reviewed what each desk is going to publish on the next issue, the largest part of afternoon discussions is always devoted to designing the front page, especially deciding which event to pick for the splash and for the picture news. In this meeting, the splash has been quickly agreed upon (a law on brothels). However, there are only feeble candidates for the picture news. The co-editor in chief (L), who leads the discussion, suggests putting a picture of the Italian rock band Litfiba, which is holding a concert in

Mendrisio (Switzerland) two days later. No one else supports his standpoint; on the contrary, the editor of the cultural events desk (MR) states repeatedly that this interview is not worth receiving so much attention. They exclude using the splash topic on the grounds that it is overused and would hurt the audience's sense of common decency. It is noteworthy that the pictorial mode is considered to carry certain values more powerfully, as anticipated in Section 2: the brothel law news is not banished *per se* from the front page (it is in fact chosen for the splash and thus placed even above the picture news); what is apparently considered to cast a non-respectable shadow on the paper in the eyes of the readership is the *picture* featuring a prostitute. As other proposals are not very convincing and do not encounter support from the co-editor in chief, the journalists' team finally agrees on choosing the picture of a pipeline (see Figure 1), signifying the distribution of heating generated from garbage combustion that started the day before.

Given his protagonist role in this discussion, we now focus on the co-editor in chief's argumentation in favor of making a picture news on the rock band Litfiba (see Figure 2). This standpoint is supported by coordinative argumentation: the interview to Litfiba is an exclusive of *Corriere del Ticino* (1.1), using a picture related to the splash is inappropriate (1.2) and all alternatives are weak (1.3). The argument "a picture news with prostitutes is inappropriate" (1.1b) is supported by multiple argumentation, provided both by L and by a section editor, HC: it is inappropriate because it could hurt the audience's feelings (1.2.1) and because it is an image that has been used many times before (1.2.2). It is indeed remarkable that two almost contradictory arguments are put forward
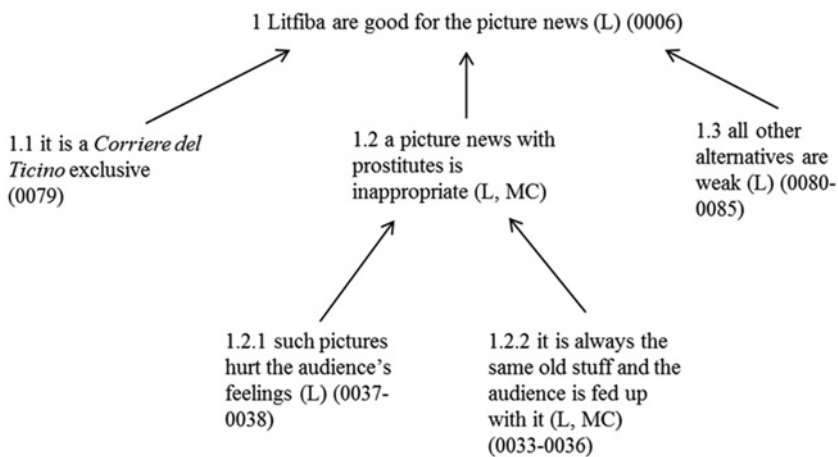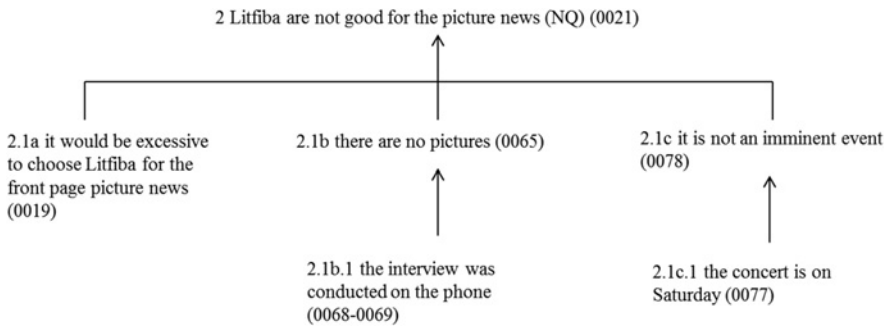

Figure 2: Multiple argumentation supporting L's standpoint.

to support 1.2: in fact, if a topic is perceived as outrageous by a newspaper's audience, it is awkward that it has been repeatedly selected in the past.

The editor of the cultural events desk (NQ) argues against L's standpoint by stating that the interview is not good enough for the front page (Figure 3). He does so by providing a set of three coordinated arguments, based on the fact that giving such importance to the interview is excessive (2.1a), they have no exclusive pictures (2.1b) because the interview was made on the phone (2.1b.1), and the concert is not an imminent event (2.1c) as it takes place two days after the meeting (2.1c.1).

2 Litfiba are not good for the picture news (NQ) (0021)

2.1a it would be excessive to choose Litfiba for the front page picture news (0019)

2.1b there are no pictures (0065)

2.1c it is not an imminent event (0078)

2.1b.1 the interview was conducted on the phone (0068-0069)

2.1c.1 the concert is on Saturday (0077)

Figure 3: Coordinative argumentation supporting MR's standpoint.

NQ's argumentation is based on the low newsworthiness of the interview to Litfiba, which lacks the traits for an event to become a picture news. The inferential relation between this coordinative argument and the standpoint works as shown in Figure 4.

A prototypical front-page picture news of *Corriere del Ticino* is an exclusive story of *Corriere del Ticino*; features a good quality image that has been taken by *Corriere del Ticino'* photographers or is an exclusive of *Corriere del Ticino*; depicts a picture-newsworthy event; depicts a topical event; is aesthetically appealing; does not hurt the audience's feelings. The more an image features these characteristics, the more picture-newsworthy it is. Considering these *endoxa*, the *datum* that there are no pictures of the interview with Litfiba, and the datum that it is neither a topical nor a significant event, the interview with Litfiba features no characteristics of a prototypical front-page picture news (first conclusion). By combining the latter with the maxim from the locus from prototype definition "If a prototypical X is defined by a set of characteristics and Y features few or none of these characteristics, then Y cannot be a X", the final conclusion follows that the interview with Litfiba
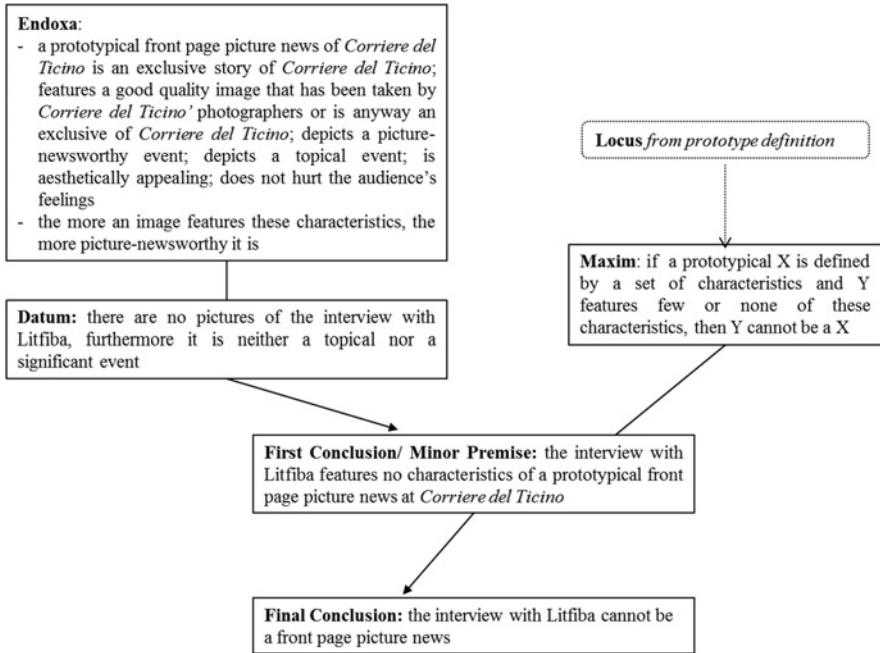
Endoxa:
- a prototypical front page picture news of *Corriere del Ticino* is an exclusive story of *Corriere del Ticino*; features a good quality image that has been taken by *Corriere del Ticino'* photographers or is anyway an exclusive of *Corriere del Ticino*; depicts a picture-newsworthy event; depicts a topical event; is aesthetically appealing; does not hurt the audience's feelings
- the more an image features these characteristics, the more picture-newsworthy it is

Locus *from prototype definition*

Datum: there are no pictures of the interview with Litfiba, furthermore it is neither a topical nor a significant event

Maxim: if a prototypical X is defined by a set of characteristics and Y features few or none of these characteristics, then Y cannot be a X

First Conclusion/ Minor Premise: the interview with Litfiba features no characteristics of a prototypical front page picture news at *Corriere del Ticino*

Final Conclusion: the interview with Litfiba cannot be a front page picture news

Figure 4: Y-structure reconstructing the low newsworthiness of the interview to Litfiba.

cannot be a front-page picture news. The *locus from prototype definition* has been elaborated by Musi (2014), who, in her study on the argumentative reconstruction of reasoning crystallized in Italian appearance verbs, discovered the argumentative significance of the prototype, i.e. "the most representative exemplar of the category" and

> the one that has the majority of common features with the other members of the category and shares the minor number of features with members belonging to other categories. The prototype is hence considered as the most salient member since it presents most of the features normally attributed to a category. (Musi 2014: 432)

Therefore, in the case under scrutiny, the more prototypical characteristics can be traced out in an image, the more likely it is that it will become a picture-news.

It is noteworthy that the locus from prototype definition is applied here, as this presupposes that the picture news is a well-defined and shared ontology at *Corriere del Ticino*. In fact, it would be impossible to rely upon an *endoxon* that sums up the characteristics of an entity if they were not

precisely defined and known to all participants in the interaction. The co-editor in chief's argumentation thus is not attacking this definition, but rather trying to fit the picture he wishes to publish into it by stressing the fact that it is an exclusive. This is even more remarkable if one remembers that journalists are often unable to justify from where they draw the criteria for news selection and formulation. They mostly tend to refer to this know-how as something they have observed or even absorbed "by osmosis" (Breed 1955: 328) at the working place.

In the midst of a lengthy list of suggestions for the picture news, L proposes the distribution of heating generated from garbage combustion that started the day before. HC supports this idea by underlining how a picture news on district heating satisfies exactly one of the criteria that the Litfiba interview did not comply with: the availability of pictures of the event. Later on, L eventually decides for this topic, putting quite an abrupt end to the discussion by virtue of his hierarchical position and without arguing against the latter proposal from HC to use a picture of the Ticinese town of Ascona (which would satisfy the aesthetical requirement). In this instance of newsmaking, it becomes evident how news values work in parallel to newsroom hierarchies for the purpose of making a decision. On the one hand, it is the intrinsic absence of newsworthiness of the interview to Litfiba as well as the lack of original pictures what stops it from becoming a picture news, despite L's opinion. At the same time, on such a slow picture-worthy news day, the image that is eventually selected is not aesthetically appealing, but depicts at least an event that has some impact on the Ticinese population and of which there are original pictures at disposal. On the other hand, hierarchy comes into play, since the co-editor in chief makes the final decision: he does in fact surrender to his colleagues' rejection of the Litfiba photo, but eventually ignores their further input and picks the event he prefers.

6 Conclusions

The present article allows a step forward in understanding what role news values play in decision-making related to a multimodal news sign. This was made possible by means of a semiotic analysis of the multimodal news item "picture news" and of the argumentative reconstruction of decision-making leading to its composition at *Corriere del Ticino*.

First of all, we provided an account of the nature and structure of the picture news, which proved to be more than just a device to catch the reader's attention by interrupting the monotonous verbal flow of a front page. Its salient position

on the page, its high information value, the nuclearity of the pictorial compo-
nent, as well as the attention given to its choice by the journalists, testify its
importance as an alternative vehicle of information, but most of all of value
transmission. Thanks to the higher impact granted by its multimodality, the
picture news sums up and emblematically depicts the newspaper identity,
metonymically standing for the front page and for the whole newspaper.

These findings are confirmed by observing the argumentative discussions that
lead to choosing the picture news story. In fact, such discussions function like
those devoted to the selection of events to be dealt with in articles, and are guided
by comparable criteria. However, these criteria are adapted to the peculiarity of
this sign: besides news values related to the newsworthiness of the depicted
event, news values assessing pictorial newsworthiness (it. *fotonotiziabilità*) are
taken into account (Section 3). In particular, great care is devoted to securing that
the photograph does not offend the audience's sensitivities. As clearly exemplified
in the discussion we considered here (Section 5), the possibility of gaining a
stronger impact over the audience is sacrificed for the sake of not shocking it. It
can be thus argued that the picture news contributes to a great extent to main-
taining the ethos of *Corriere del Ticino* as a serious and reliable newspaper,
strongly bound to its audience. These criteria, stemming from the specific news-
room considered, have a stronger argumentative power than generic assessments
of newsworthiness that could be applicable to every newsroom.

Future research in this line could thus build upon our results to investigate
the argumentative function of picture news as well as of other design features
and multimodal elements with respect to the construction of a newspaper's
public image, or look further into the making of a multimodal news item.

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