

Phd seminar: “Argumentative perspectives on misinformation”

In the context of the PhD program in *Applied Linguistics: Argumentation in Professional Practice*

ECTS: 1.5

Program:

April 23	Prof. Fabio Paglieri (Istituto di Scienze e Tecnologie della Cognizione, CNR, Rome)
April 30	Dr. Elena Musi (Dept. Of Communication and Media, University of Liverpool)
May 7	Prof. Sara Rubinelli (Dept. of Health Sciences and Medicine, University of Lucerne) Dr. Maddalena Fiordelli (Istituto di salute pubblica, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano)
May 28	Dr. Jacky Visser (Computing, School of Science and Engineering, University of Dundee)

The seminars will take place online via **Ms Teams** on **Friday mornings**. Each event will have a duration of 3 hours (**9.00-12:00**), inclusive of discussion/ activities/ demos.

Topic, focus:

The series focuses on what argumentation scholars of various stripes have to say on the current perceived misinformation crisis. Online communication and, in particular, social media are nowadays perceived as potentially dangerous sources of misinformation, including deliberate disinformation, conspiracy theories as well as biased information on issues that are of great societal importance such as the democratic deliberative process, public health and environmental issues. The spread of misinformation is typically associated with highly polarized discussion environments and with a climate of skepticism and distrust towards expert opinions and institutional voices. Attempts at fact-checking / debunking misinformation often seem to have limited effectiveness and even contribute to the polarization of opinions. Students of argumentation, whose business is to study practices of reason-giving in the public sphere and to identify and foster practices conducive of critical engagement and, eventually, of epistemically sound decision making, are developing research on online misinformation and can offer valuable insights and novel perspectives to better understand and combat the spread of misinformation online.

Main value added from a theoretical and methodological perspective:

The seminar will demonstrate how conceptual tools from argumentation theory can be used to sharpen our conceptualization of phenomena such as misinformation, disinformation, bias and conspiracy theories. The approaches presented combine concepts from argumentation theory with insights from cognitive psychology and the social sciences. From a methodological viewpoint the approaches presented include experimental evidence, corpus evidence, as well as the design of interventions.

Main value added from a practical perspective:

The seminar offers a starting point reflecting of the development and teaching of critical skills for information professionals and information consumers, with concrete examples of vulgarization strategies and technology supported educational interventions.

Learning objective: knowledge. Learning how to analyze and assess online misinformation from argumentative viewpoint.

Learning objective: skills, practices. Learning how to avoid the most common pitfalls in processing and reacting to misinformation and how to design digitally based interventions for combating misinformation.

Learning objective: researcher attitudes. Critical thinking, design thinking, dissemination and vulgarization of research results.

Evaluation: Attendance to the whole series is required in order to obtain credits. Each seminar will involve an in-course activity which will be assessed with a pass/ fail evaluation.

Bio notes/ Profiles

Elena Musi. “Elena Musi is a Lecturer in Communication and Media. Her expertise lies at the interface between theoretical and Applied Linguistics, Communication Studies and Artificial Intelligence. Before joining the University of Liverpool, Elena worked as the Language Engineer for Alexa in Italian in the Amazon Alexa Applied Modelling and Data Science team (Cambridge, Mass.). She arrived to Amazon Alexa after having completed a Ph.D in Linguistics and Argumentation at the Università della Svizzera italiana and having been a postdoctoral fellow at the Center for Computational Learning Systems at Columbia University and at the Laboratory for the Study of Applied Language Technology and Society at Rutgers University. (...)

Elena investigates social and interactional meaning combining analyses grounded in linguistic theory with empirical validations through computational models with a particular emphasis on Argumentation and Artificial Intelligence. She deals mainly with Digital Media. She is particularly interested in the changes brought about by user-generated comments (forums, tweets) in community building, stance negotiation, persuasion strategies and social influence, as well as in the development of linguistically informed technologies to detect them. Bridging her academic research and her industry experience, Elena’s current research interweaves Artificial Intelligence and Communication Sciences with the broad aim of tracing back in a critical perspective debates about new technologies and their global impact, with particular focus on (mis)information and human-computer interaction.”

Fabio Paglieri. “The overall assumption of my research activity is that cognition is goal-directed, resource-bounded, and adaptively shaped. From this unifying perspective, I focus my research mainly on two areas of interest: decision-making for action (in particular, temporal preferences, long-term goals and risky choices) and belief dynamics, both individual (belief revision and critical thinking) and social (argumentation).

My work is interdisciplinary, combining theoretical analysis, conceptual modelling, behavioral experiments, and field observations. Although my main background is in psychology, I collaborate regularly with primatologists, economists, philosophers, computer scientists and educators to foster our shared research interests.

I am the current President of the [Italian Association of Cognitive Sciences](#) (AISC, 2017-2019) and the Chair of the Steering Committee of the [European Conference on Argumentation](#) (ECA, 2013-2021). Since 2012, I am Editor-in-Chief of [Topoi: An International Review of Philosophy](#) (Springer), and Director of [Sistemi Intelligenti](#) (Il Mulino), the leading Italian journal in cognitive science and Artificial Intelligence. I am also in the Editorial Board of the journal [Argument & Computation](#) (Taylor & Francis) and of the book series [Studies in Logic and Argumentation](#) (College Publications), and I am a member of the Workgroup on Psychology of the publishing house [Il Mulino](#).”

Sara Rubinelli. “Sara Rubinelli holds a degree in Classics and Philosophy from the Catholic University of Milan (I) and a PhD from the University of Leeds (UK) in the areas of argumentation theory, persuasion and rhetoric. Since September 2009 she is Scientific Coordinator of the Human

Functioning Unit at Swiss Paraplegic Research (CH) and leads there the Person-Centered Healthcare Group. Currently, she is Professor in Health Sciences with a focus in health communication at the Department of Health Sciences and Medicine of the University of Lucerne (CH). Her main research and teaching topics include: interpersonal communication, (health) behaviour change, social marketing and health campaigns, society in the information age, communication for education, empowerment and personal growth, professional communication and public speaking, philosophy of science and theories and models of health and well-being. Since September 2017 she is President of the European Association for Communication in Healthcare (EACH).”

Jacky Visser. “My main area of interest is argumentation and reasoning (both human and artificial), with a particular focus on the use of computational methods. This multi-disciplinary area of research touches on, among others, artificial intelligence and computer science, linguistics and philosophy of language, and cognitive psychology and logic. In my current research, as part of an EPSRC-/IBM-funded £1.1m UK project on Argument Mining, I work on the automated analysis of argumentative discourse. This has led to the first large-scale public deployment of argument mining technology: commissioned by the BBC, our software tools were distributed to 3,000 secondary educational institutions in the UK. Papers in the pipeline relate to, e.g., corpus annotation, argument schemes, rhetorical figures, and argument evaluation.”