

“MAYBE THERE’S A VERY SIMPLE DEBATE”: HOW JOURNALISTS FRAME A PUBLIC DEBATE IN THE NEWSROOM

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Abstract

Taking the perspective of a newsroom ethnographic approach, our paper interrogates the decision-making process that leads to establish a public debate as a news product. More precisely our paper details the argumentation in interaction engaging broadcast journalists during an editorial conference: who argues? When and how is argumentation joint constructed? By the means of what interactional and linguistic resources? How does argumentation in interaction shape the news product? In our case study we focus on how argumentation develops within the specific genre of “debate”, and how the journalists come to debate about a specific genre of news item : a public debate to be broadcast as a report in the news bulletin.

Keywords : newsroom ethnography, editorial conference, decision-making process, public debate, argumentation in interaction.

1. Introduction

Adopting the framework of a newsroom ethnographic approach of news media discourse, our paper focuses on one specific backstage activity of broadcast journalists : argumentation during editorial conferences. How and why do journalists propose, discuss, and attribute the topics of the reports of the news bulletin? More precisely, we interrogate the complex decision-making process that leads to establish a public debate as a news product. On the basis of data collected in 2007 in the newsroom of the French-speaking public service television (TSR) in Switzerland, our paper details the argumentation in interaction during the morning meeting : who argues and when? How is argumentation joint constructed? By the means of what interactional and linguistic resources? What

is it for? Also, what is at stake with it? More specifically, how does argumentation in interaction shape the news product? The aim of this paper is to reflect on one important aspect of news making processes and products : the double role of argumentation in interaction and that of linguistic markers. Indeed, arguing in the newsroom favors moments of metadiscourse reflecting the norms and values of the community of practitioners and at the same time shapes and constitutes the community itself.

Our paper is divided into four sections. In section §2, we position briefly our paper within the domain of linguistic ethnography and make explicit a relevant link between an ethnographic approach of news media and media linguistics as a sub-domain of applied linguistics. We also evoke in section §2 the broader research projects in which our paper is anchored. Then, in section §3 we define the paradoxical constraints of current news media practices and its functioning in terms of « critical situations ». In such professional contexts, the norms, the values, and the ideologies that shape journalism as a specific community of practitioners are emerging and discussed. As for section §4, it is dedicated to a complex and yet representative case study: during the morning editorial conference at the News Department department of the TSR, the topics of the news bulletin are discussed and attributed. One of these topics has to acquire a more specific status. Indeed, « Point fort » is a debate sequence engaging experts disputing on air about a hard news. What is at stake with « Point fort » is to make the audience engage in a public discussion in turn. As a matter of fact, the journalists and editorial staff disagree on what a public debate is. In the conclusion of the paper (§5), we explicit some positive outcomes of an ethnographic approach for media linguistics and for the study of news media discourse.

2. An ethnographic approach to news media

Our paper is rooted in the domain of the linguistics of the news production (NTT 2011) or the linguistics of newswriting (Perrin 2013). Broadly speaking, such a perspective comprises all language issues of « research on the media that is informed by newsroom realities » (Cotter 2010 : 10). As such, the linguistics of news production or newswriting is an ethnographically grounded approach to news media analysis. “Doing ethnography means trying to understand a community, by looking at how a community works” (Cotter 2010:19). We are

considering the community of news people and we look at what these practitioners do: how do they use language by the means of what discursive practices to produce what language of the news? To detail the dynamics of news production, we focus on a specific site of engagement, i.e. the newsroom, and the actions of particular participants, i.e. the journalists and editors, both as individuals and as members of a media organization. Day after day, they engage jointly in complex news production processes leading to specific news products. They work according to particular routines, rules, expectations and ideologies that reflect and at the same time define and shape their community of practice.

The linguistics of news production or newswriting focuses on language use in a particular social domain. Therefore, it resorts to the broader domain of applied linguistics (see Perrin 2013: 1-40). Generally speaking, the findings and outputs of an applied perspective concern both the researchers and the practitioners. The former gain a better understanding of the functioning of a specific community of practice (journalism), a particular language use (the language of news media), and complex discursive products (the news items within genres). The latter gain language awareness by reflecting on what they do (instead of what they say or think they are doing). Thus, the practitioners benefit from a repertoire of good and bad practices on how to handle a certain journalistic task. Thus, in the long-term the perspective can lead to knowledge transformation of the insiders, and possibly improve the news practices of the newsroom under investigation (see §5).

Our paper is anchored in two broader ethnographic research projects in the Swiss media. Both are aimed at a greater understanding of the community of practice of the news journalists¹ (for a synthesis see Perrin *et al.* 2009 ; Luciani, Rocci & Zampa 2015 ; also Perrin & Furer and Luciani & Rocci, both in this issue). We collected data in three newsrooms in distinct linguistic parts of Switzerland (French, German and Italian-speaking parts). Twenty news journalists were under investigation during one week each. We video taped, recorded, and observed the participants in various activity fields : editorial conferences, individual work place sessions, cutting rooms interactions. We also did biographical interviews and retrospective verbal protocols.

¹ “Idée Suisse: Language policy, norms and practice as exemplified by Swiss Radio and Television” (SNF NRP 56, 2005-2010), and “Argumentation in newsmaking process and product” (SNF PDFMP1_137181/1, 2012-2015).

Besides the consideration of the newsmaking processes, we gathered two types of news products : the reports of the broadcast news bulletin of the TSR and SF (e.g. the Swiss public companies broadcasting in French and German), and the editorials published in the *Corriere del Ticino* (e.g. the main written press newspaper in the Italian-speaking part of Switzerland). The double focus on processes and products is useful as it provides a rather relevant picture of the practitioners at work. Indeed, the projects allows us to reflect on how the norms of practices brought into being in the processes constrain and at the same time shape the newsproducts.

Analytically, an ethnographic approach is a claim to interdisciplinary relevance, and methodologically it calls for a multi-method or multi-perspective of analysis (Rampton, Maybin & Roberts 2015 : 32-40). We use the framework of « progression analysis » (Perrin *et al.* 2009), collecting and analyzing data related to three levels: before, during and after the writing and production processes of news items (for the details see Perrin 2013 : 63-68). In our paper, we concentrate on the first level: the talk at work at the TSR during editorial conferences. Then, the journalists and editors discuss and attribute the topics to be part of the newsbulletin. They formulate arguments, support thesis, form alliances, and challenge authority on the basis of complex institutional, organizational, practical but also personal concerns. Our focus is on the decision-making process that leads to establishing a topic as a news product. As a preamble of our analysis in §4, we briefly introduce the tension that characterize journalism and the current news media practices.

3. Journalism and newsmedia : practices under influence

An increasing amount of research suggest the news practices are under influence. Indeed, the newsmedia face complex and antagonistic constraints. News has a civic function of informing about the public spheres, but at the same time news has a commercial function of winning the loyalty of buyers. Hence, on the one hand, news addresses an audience of citizens. It is therefore a means to participate to public discussion and the construction of public opinion (e.g. Livingstone & Lunt 1994; Kovach & Rosenstiel 2001; Koller & Wodak 2010; Gonzalez & Skuza 2014; Charaudeau 2015). But on the other hand, news addresses the same audience considered as customers as well: it then aims to gain

audience (e.g. Mc Manus 1994; Thompson 1995; Croteau & Hoynes 2001; Charaudeau 2005; Tolson 2006). Such an apparently contradictory state of affair defines the news practices from the origins and constitutes the main dimension of what sociologists and ethnographers call the “media mediation” (Macé 2005: 135²) or the “craft principle” (Cotter 2010: 32). Pierre Bourdieu comments on this matter in terms of “the principle that determines what journalists select both within social reality and among symbolic productions as a whole. [It is] a journalistic selection in order to catch the public eye [with] the effect of censorship, which journalists practice without even being aware of it” (Bourdieu 1998: 47)³.

3.1. Big media utopias and small journalistic assemblages

We consider here one fundamental dimension of the “craft principle” underlying news media practices: the critical situations that journalists are facing everyday. According to Daniel Perrin, “critical situations denote exemplary constellations of circumstances which could lead to a failure” when managing a task (Perrin 2013: 2020). Journalists possibly “overcome critical situations with good practices – good according to their own, their organizations’, and/or theoretically – grounded principles” (*ibid*). As a matter of fact, besides blending civic and commercial concerns, journalists must subtly combine various antagonistic constraints in the news items. As an example, they have to take into account local as well as global considerations, mono- but at the same time multilingual aspects; make it simple and summarize but put it complex and develop; articulate textual together with visual scripts, etc.

As a consequence, “critical situations” are contexts that directly rely on and reflect best the complexity of news practices. The challenging task for the practitioners is to take into account simultaneously the ideological and the practical concerns of the craft principle. Both can lead by themselves to potential critical situations. We suggest to call the former “big media utopias” and the latter “small journalistic assemblages”. The utopias resort to ideology : it’s an abstract matter that reflects the prevalent vision of newsvalue of a given media (what is

² “médiation médiatique”, in French.

³ News media analysts also characterize the “craft principle” in terms of “news value” or “newsworthiness” (e.g. Bell 1991; Montgomery 1997).

news ?). Thus, the big media utopias necessarily lead to discussions. They are controversial, and fundamentally negotiable⁴. In terms of agency, the big media utopias resort at first to the macro political and institutional decision level of media managers. Conversely, the small journalistic assemblages resort at first to logistical resources (how to manage a news item ?) : it's a practical matter to be achieved according to time and space constraints of a given newsroom. Thus, small journalistic assemblages call for prompt, pragmatic and appropriate decisions by the newsmakers (e.g. journalists, desk editors, sub & copy editors, animators, technicians, etc.) and operate at the micro organizational level of the desk or the department⁵.

3.2. Editorial conferences as a site of (meta) argumentation

Our data show that editorial conferences (EC) represent a privileged locus for the study of decision-making processes. EC's involve both the "big media utopias" and the "small journalistic assemblages" issues and show how these dimensions are entangled. Both are necessarily closely tied up when it comes to decide to cover a news item; though one of the dimensions could appear as dominant depending on the moment of negotiation that is under investigation. As an example, during the morning editorial conference at the TSR on Thursday March 8, 2008⁶, 10:00 a.m., the journalists dispute ideologically (the what?) and practically (the how?) about to report the International's women day: should they do the interview of a woman politician or rather make a report on a day of a supermarket cashier? Should they already use available archives or send a crew to hit the ground to meet with people? If so, when? Given that the report should already be broadcast at noon. And with what TV crew? Given that no technician is yet available? Deciding whether the micro topic should be a "woman politician" or a "women supermarket cashier" resorts to the media utopias: it's an ideological matter that can infinitely be debated. This matter is closely linked with journalistic

⁴ Big media utopias (BMU) are uncertain and undecidable by nature. They cannot lead to a broad consensus or general agreement. Nevertheless, every media culture favors more or less the same utopias: this is the "circular circulation of information" criticized by Bourdieu (1998: 23). In terms of linguistic markers, BMU resort to the intra-propositional semantic level of a speech act, while the small journalistic assemblages (SJA) concern the pragmatic level of illocutionary forces (see § 4.3.).

⁵ In terms of Bell's roles in producing news language (Bell 1991 :39), the macro level of "utopia" is that of the influence of policy makers, proprietors and managers. Which does not imply that the micro level of "assemblage" has not an influential role in turn: It has.

⁶ tsr_tj_070308_0830_editorial_1_discourse.mov

assemblage: there’s only a couple of hours left to do the report and in addition no crew is able to film outside the studio. This represents a decisive practical concern constraining in turn the media utopia.

For our case study in section §4, we focus on editorial conferences at the TSR with the aim of describing the decision-making process supported by utopias and assemblages and realized through argumentation in interaction. At the News department where the news bulletin is produced, the journalists and editorial staff meet three times a day: at 8:30, then 9:30 in the morning, and again in the afternoon at 2:30. The morning EC are aimed at defining the topics of the first news bulletin (broadcast at noon). The afternoon session is mainly a discussion aimed at improving the edition then broadcast in the evening. The screen shots below show the EC settings:

Figure 1: the setting of the morning EC



The setting changes minimally. Indeed, the editorial staff, i.e. the editor-in-chief (R) and his associate (AR) are always sitting at the end of the table. At 8:30 a.m. only 5 to 8 desk editors attend the EC to be held in R’s office. Conversely, at 9 :30 a.m., the EC is held in a large conference room open to all journalists (without obligation), but, likewise, journalists with higher-status such as the TV anchorman/woman and the desk editors sit immediately on the right and on the left of R (and or RA).

The EC that took place at 9 :30 a.m. on March 1, 2007 is our focus. After a brief review of the broadcast of the previous day, it comes to choose the « Point fort », that is the main report of the bulletin in terms of content and length. This specific news item resorts to a debate as a genre: it has to show at least two

antagonistic voices arguing against each other about an issue of public interest⁷. On the EC of March 1, 2007, the decision-making process about such a report gave rise to a complex discussion engaging both levels of the big media utopias and the small journalistic assemblages. Alliances formed and rapidly argumentation in interaction developed so that a debate about what a public debate is took place in the newsroom. We propose a close consideration of this argumentation linked with what is at stake with it in terms of the « craft principle ». What are the newsmaking rule and procedures that are invoked? How are these entangled in « media utopias » and/or « journalistic assemblages » ? Why and how is (meta) argumentation developed? By whom and at what moment?

4. Journalists debating on how to stage a public debate

We take here a micro-linguistics perspective to analyse how the news topic is decided through argumentation in interaction among journalists. We take into account the institutional and interactional identities (Van De Mieroop 2008; Norris 2011) manifesting the constitution of leadership; and besides verbal resources, we also look closely at the para- and non verbal dimensions of the EC. Empirical studies on gatekeeping based on interaction analysis and power management (Clayman & Reissner 1998, Van Hout & Van Praet 2011, Gravengaard & Rimestad 2012), provide us with a theoretical framework that we aim to complement with an argumentative approach to decision-making in editorial conferences as a polylogical interaction.

Indeed, we observe during EC's that the journalists use categories⁸ to discuss the state of affairs of a current event. They orient towards a specific framing of the event and at some occasions they rise objection against competing framings. We call the management of objections in this context "argumentation in interaction". During the EC, a moment of argumentation displays the crucial role

⁷ There is an increasing amount of research about debate and public discussion as a news media genre (e.g. Livingstone & Lunt 1994; Hutchby 1996; Bourdieu 1998; Luginbuehl 2007; Burger 2009, 2013; Thornborrow 2015; Charaudeau 2015). Interestingly, everyone agrees that debate as a genre realizes best a major contradiction of news media: a debate is at the same time a "spectacle" chaired and favored by a media and a means to contribute to the construction of the "public opinion".

⁸ In the sense of the ethnomethodological perspective in sociology (Sacks 1979): see the recent research of Fitzgerald, Jaworski & Housley (2008); , Housley & Fitzgerald (2015), Stokoe & Attenborough (2015).

of language and negotiation skills beside institutional power: indeed, the selection of an event as a news item depends on the institutional leadership of the editor-in-chief as much as on the journalists who are free to intervene. The outcome of the news-item is then partly determined by the ability of journalists to bring into being a discursive and interactional leadership (Hutchby 1996, Ekström 2007). This helps form coalition to challenge and negotiate an issue at stake (Heritage & Raymond 2005; Heritage 2012) and lastly allows « to gain primacy in the management of meaning for the organization » (Clifton 2012 : 154).

4.1. Framing a public debate : macro and argumentative analysis

Let’s consider the excerpt 1 below. It shows how journalists frame a potential public debate as a news item. The issue is about the new smokefree law in Switzerland as a possible news-item to be broadcast for Point Fort. It shows what a controversial event in a public sphere is :

Excerpt 1. (R: editor-in-chief / OC: economy-swiss desk)

```
0007OC there is gastrosuisse
0008 that submits an an alternative to secondhand smoke
0009 today in bern (.)
0010 it could be a debate topic (.)
0011 there is the initiative of gutzwiller
0012 that plans to make into law
0013 the protection of workers=
0014R =yeah=
0015OC euh against secondhand smoke
0016 and then gastrosuisse fearing this initiative
0017 and fearing that the motion comes into force
0018 what would lead all the bistros eh being non-smoking area
0019 therefore presents an alternative in bern this morning
0020 here there is (.) maybe a very simple debate=
```

A public debate represents at least two voices arguing against each other in the public and political sphere about a controversial social issue. This is what the journalist OC establishes⁹. He puts that “Gastrosuisse” (l.7) constitutes an “alternative” (l.8) to a citizen activism (an “initiative” l.11; a “motion” l. 17). The issue is of public interest (“to make into law the protection of workers against

⁹ OC refers metonymically to the Swiss government (“Bern” l. 9 & l.19) and to Swiss public & political spheres (“Gastrosuisse” l.7 & l.11, “initiative of Gutzwiller” l.16). Gastrosuisse is the Swiss Caterers Association, and Felix Gutzwiller is a deputy at the Swiss National Assembly. He is also working in the field of preventiv medicine.

secondhand smoke” l. 13-15), and therefore, it represents a possible “debate topic” (l. 10 & 20).

Argumentation in interaction develops on this basis that day during the EC. It appears that two antagonistic argumentative positions (proponent: PRO & opponent: OPP) are cristallized around one argumentative question (QU):

QU: Is the Gastrosuisse initiative a potential topic for *Point Fort*?

PRO: Yes (because it raises a public debate between Gutzwiller and Gastrosuisse)

OPP: No (because smoking in restaurants is no controverial point anymore)

To give a comprehensive view of the argumentation that emerges in the newsroom, we propose to sketch step by step the argumentation in interaction, as on Figure 1¹⁰.

¹⁰ The scheme is based on recent propositions for mapping debates (Plantin 1996; Jacquin 2014). It provides a sequential overview of the emerging arguments of PRO & OPP used by the participants to define what is at stake with the topic and to support their standpoint about QU.

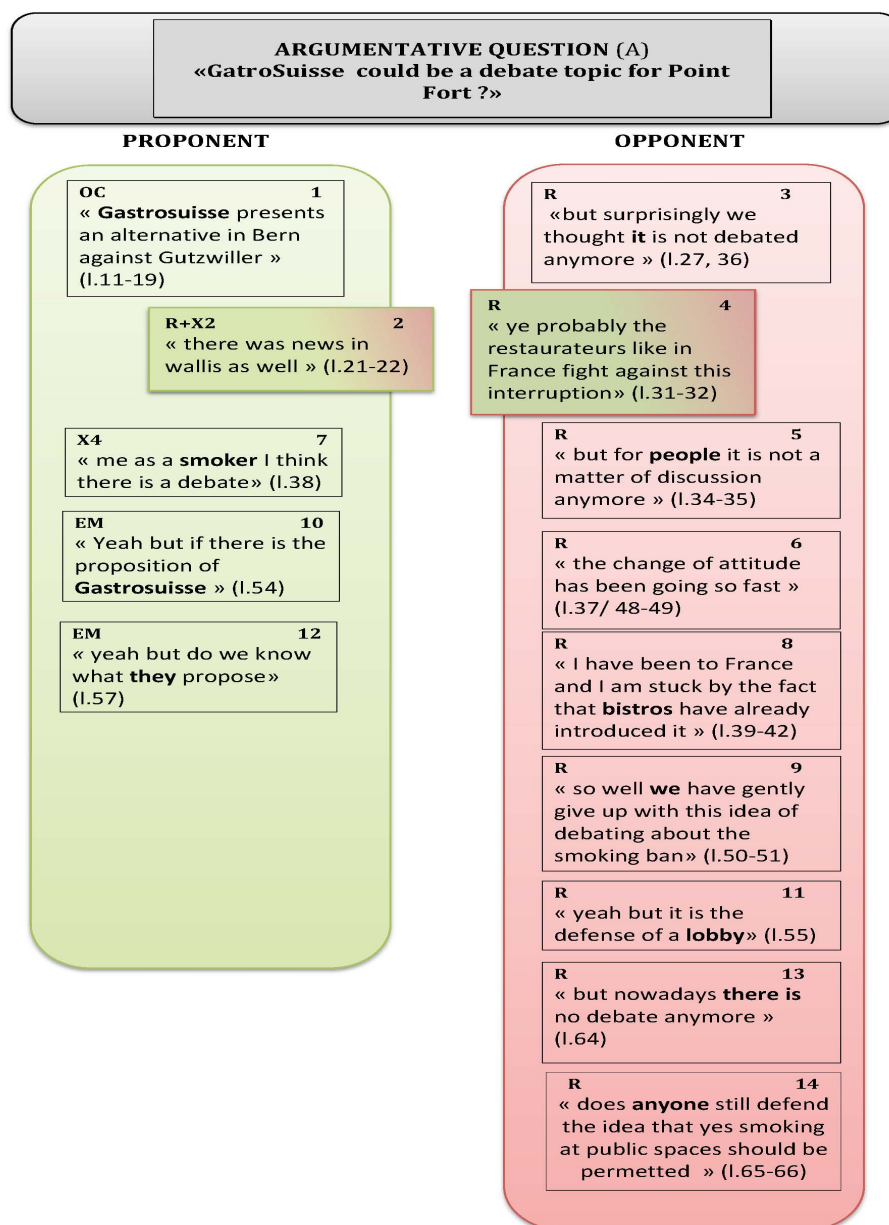


Figure 1: argumentation in interaction about QU (A)¹¹

At the interactional (or sequential) level of argumentation, the issue under discussion gives rise to 15 arguments (slots 1-15) divided into OPP and PRO. One observes that the editor-in-chief systematically rejects the PRO arguments endorsed by three different journalists. He makes twice an apparent concession (slots 2 & 4), but indeed it’s a means to impose a decisive counterargument: “it’s not debated anymore you know” (slot 3) and “for people, it’s not a matter of discussion anymore” (slot 5). At the topical (or thematic) level of the content, we

¹¹ Participants’s acronym are on the top left. Numbers on the top right indicate the sequential emergence of arguments.

observe that the participants frame the issue (Entman 1993, Kuypers 2010, Reese, Gandy & Grant 2010) using semantic categories¹² opposed to each other to describe the actors taking part in what can be called the Gastrosuisse debate. This opposition is crucial. It is required by the framing of a legitimate topic for the specific news item genre under discussion (e.g. a public debate).

However, the argumentative question will soon shift toward a new question that leads to the emergence of a debate about the public debate. Debating about what a public debate is or should be turns the newsroom itself into a kind of a micro public space of negotiation where the positions represented in the potential public debate are embodied in the journalists. The Figure 2 shows this peculiar meta-argumentative moment :

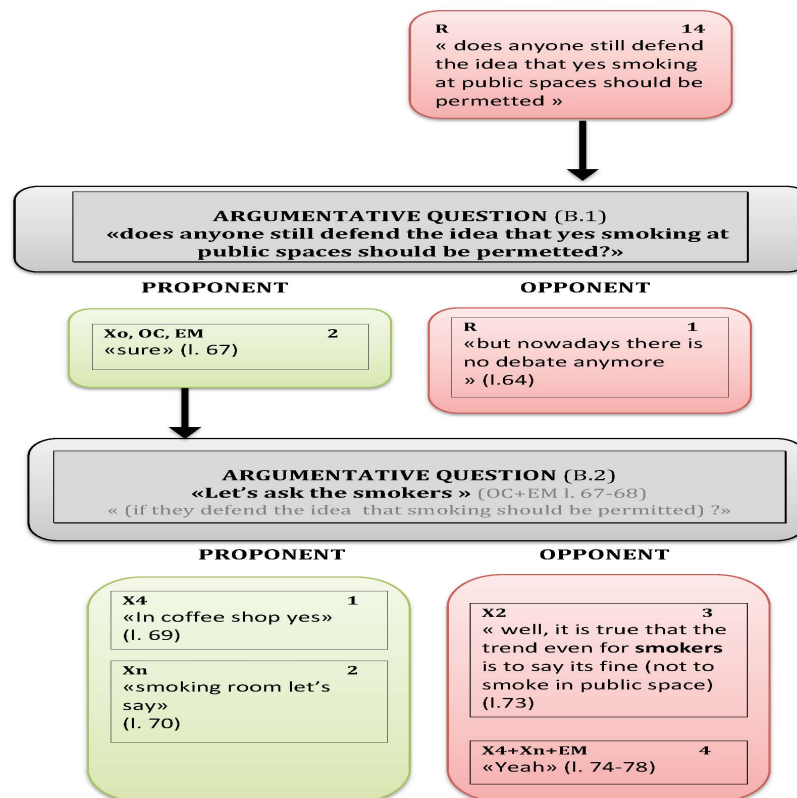


Figure 2: meta-argumentation about argumentation in interaction

¹² “Gutzwiller” versus “Gastrosuisse”; “restaurateurs” versus “people”, “smokers” versus “non-smokers”, “lobby” versus “we”.

Interestingly, the editor-in-chief (R) imposes his opinion and at the same time opens the discussion. Indeed, his last argument (slot 14 in figure 1) acquires the status of a new issue to be debated (B1 in Figure 2). Three journalists: XO, OC and EM immediately challenge R, reword and reframe the issue as a complement argumentative question (B2). In the newsroom, a new positioning emerges apparently opposing journalists that are smokers (PRO) and journalists that rely on the point of view of smokers who are against B1. In other words, some journalists personally take position (they endorse an argument) and others represent the position of people out there in the public sphere (they take into consideration an argument). The step-by-step process of argumentation in interaction as shown in figures 1 & 2 is pictured at a macro level. But to consider the complexity of what is really going on in the newsroom, we have to complement the argumentative analysis and focus on the micro level of negotiation. This calls for a multimodal analysis including the para- and non verbal resources exploited by the journalists to frame the topics.

4.2. Proposing a topic : micro and multimodal analysis

The final framing of the news-item is the result of a negotiation of the categories used to describe the issue at stake. Proposing a new topic is the first step of this process. Let’s consider again excerpt 1 (extended):

Excerpt 1. (R: editor-in-chief / OC: economy-swiss desk / X: journalists¹³)

0003R anyway we we have haven’t settle the argument yet
 0004 we haven’t made a decision=
 0005X2 =what did you want to say mister Cajoux
 0006R [(or alternatively)]
 0007OC [yes so] I wanted to say that-that there is gastrosuisse
 0008 that submits an an alternative to secondhand smoke
 0009 today in bern (.)
 0010 it could be a debate topic (.)
 0011 there is the initiative of gutzwiller
 0012 that plans to make into law
 0013 the protection of workers=
 0014R =yeah=
 0015OC euh against secondhand smoke
 0016 and then gastrosuisse fearing this initiative
 0017 and fearing that the motion comes into force
 0018 what would lead all the bistros eh being non-smoking area
 0019 therefore presents an alternative in bern this morning

¹³ Unidentified journalists are named with numbers (2-4) and letters (l-q). X2 is out of camera range, on the left corner.

0020 here there is (.) maybe a very simple debate=
 0021R =there was news in wallis as well
 0022 I thinks it is=
 0023X2 = yeah yeah the first day [of the smoking ban]
 0024HG [xxx toward R]
 0025X2 at the --
 0026R but surprisingly we thought actually
 0027 it is not debated anymore (1.5) you know

About ten minutes after the beginning of the editorial conference (EC), a potential topic has been discussed, but the editor-in-chief (R) is not convinced (l. 3-4). An alternative is then proposed by OC. Interestingly, the space left open by R allows X2 to request OC's opinion (see the gaze: #1), but OC engages at first with R, who focuses his attention on him (#2 & 3)



#1

04 X2: what did you want to say mister Cajoux#



#2

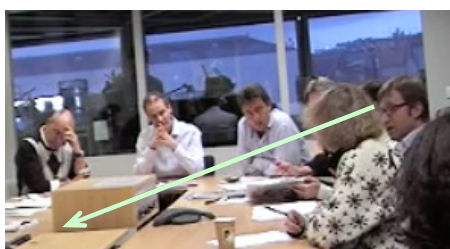
07 OC: who presents an alternative to secondhand smoke



#3

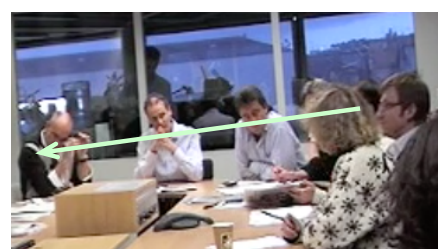
09 OC: today in bern#
 10 : it could be a debate topic

After a micro-pause, OC provides more details about the issue (l.11-19) and shifts reciprocity, addressing X2 (#6) and then other journalists (#7):



#6

11 OC: there is the initiative of eh #Gutzwiller



#7

16 OC: and then gastrosuisse fearing this initiative

As a matter of fact, R enacts his institutional position in a way that allows the journalists to joint-construct interactional and discursive leadership. The EC becomes a locus where to « claim primary rights to manage to meaning of the emerging decision » (Clifton 2012:156). Indeed, one can hypothesize that X2's

question (l.05) is interpreted by OC as an interactional strategy to open a new topical line that other journalists are invited to align and affiliate with. In using “very simple” to characterize the debate, OC opposes this new proposition to the one that was first discussed, but didn’t lead to “any decision” (l. 03-04). Even if OC modalizes his opinion (“maybe”), he puts an additional argument to highlight the suitability of the proposition in terms both of media utopias (the what?) and journalistic assemblages (the how?).

Interestingly, these entangled constraints on news are diversely emerging in discourse. Big media utopias (BMU) are best manifested here by propositional semantic categories while small journalistic assemblages are marked in terms of pragmatic reference and illocutionary force. Thus, the anaphoric and/or deictic (“there is”, l. 7,11,20) referring objectively to attested facts in the public sphere combined with subjective markers referring to the stance of the current speaker (the adverb “very” and the evaluative adjective “simple”) calls for a micro linguistic emergence and embodiment of journalistic assemblage (SJA). In the same speech acts, categories like “to fear” (l. 16,17), “(to) debate” (l. 20,27), “motion” (l. 17), “initiative” (l. 11,16) etc. combined with metonymical contents (“Bern”, “Gutzwiller”) resort to media utopias. These linguistic items globally frame an opposition between pros and cons according to a controversial social issue. In spite of an apparently coherent combination of BMU and SJA, the journalist’s proposition is rejected by the editor-in-chief at the end of the macro argumentative move: “it’s not debated anymore you know” (l.27).

From the micro and multimodal analysis of the excerpt, it appears that leadership and emerging decisions are closely related. They are central in moments of argumentation in interaction and manifest then the blending of media utopias and journalistic assemblage as a crucial issue. In our excerpt X2’s and OC’s interventions lead to the opening of a proper debate in the newsroom engaging explicitly these aspects. Let’s develop this latter dimension of the craft principle of journalism.

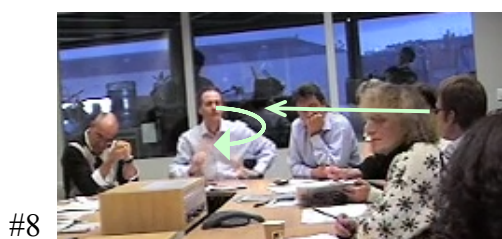
4.3. Challenging the right to assess : a macro-micro analysis

The excerpt 2 below shows how the journalists discursively joint-construct their right to challenge the opposition of the editor-in-chief.

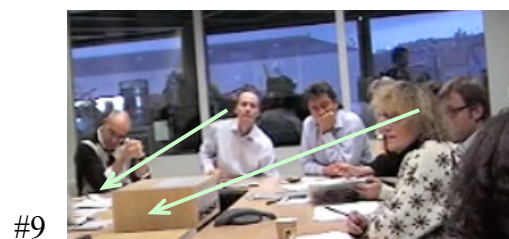
Excerpt 2. (R: editor-in-chief / OC: economy-swiss desk / HG: international desk / X: journalists)

0019 OC Gastrosuisse) therefore presents an alternative (to
Gutzwiller) in bern this morning
0020 here there is (.) maybe a very simple debate=
0021 R =there was news in wallis as well
0022 I thinks it is (.)
0023 X2 yeah yeah the first day [of the smoking ban]
0024 HG [xxx towards R]
0025 X2 at the --
0026 R but surprisingly we thought actually
0027 it is not debated anymore (1.5) you know
0028 X1 mhm
0029 R (1.0) I mean eh
0030 Xm xxx
0031 R yes probably that (1.0) like in france
0032 the the the restaurateurs fight against this interruption
0033 of the market later on
0034 but (1.0) for people it is not really a matter of discussion
anymore
0035 the fact that we must smoke outside instead of inside
0036 (1.0) it seems there is no debate anymore
0037 the changing of attitudes has been going so fast

The opposition starts when R laps with OC's turn (l. 21). At first, the editor-in-chief extends the topic ("in wallis") and apparently aligns ("as well"), but then he turns toward the right side of the audience as if he wanted to yield the turn to X2 (see #8 and #9).



20 OC: here there is #(.) maybe a
very simple debate



20 OC: here there is (.) maybe a
very simple #debate=
21 R: =there was news in wallis
as well

Indeed, X2 identifies himself as an addressee and completes R's turn (l.23). But then, the editor-in-chief shows that he has already evaluated the newsworthiness of the issue during the meeting that took place earlier ("we

thought that”, l.26); and rejects the proposition (l.27). He also produces non verbal signals to supports his decision not to broadcast the items addressing alternatively X2 and OC¹⁴ as shown in (#10) and (#11):



R could directly rely on his institutional position to impose his opinion. However, he provides further back up arguments (l. 31-37). He draws a parallel between the two news items under discussion: *first day of smoking ban in Wallis* and *Gastrosuisse initiative*. Indeed, R compares the french and the swiss context. He links the category of agents: “restaurateurs” (in France) with the that of an (their) activity: “fighting against the interruption of the market” (l. 32). In doing so, the editor-in-chief enacts a BMU (big media utopia) that is appropriate to the generic constraints of the news-item (a debate implies opponents and proponents arguing against each others). Interestingly, in terms of BMU, the editor-in-chief reframes the argumentative question. The “restaurateurs” (damaged by the new law) are a sub category not anymore relevant to frame the news-item. Indeed, a debate implies a more encompassing category : “people” that refers here to anyone who is somehow concerned by the new law.

The reframing of an appropriate condition of the news-item as a debate is not challenged by other journalists. But one observes that the assumption : “there is no debate anymore” (l.36) becomes a practical issue in the newsroom.

Excerpt 3: (R: editor-in-chief / X: journalist¹⁵)

0036R (1.0) it seems there is no debate anymore
0037 the changing of attitudes has been going so fast
0038 X4 me as a [smoker I think there is a debate]
0039R [and I have been to france the other day and I]

¹⁴ At the beginning of the argumentative move X2 requested OC opinion (l.05), knowing they were aligning.

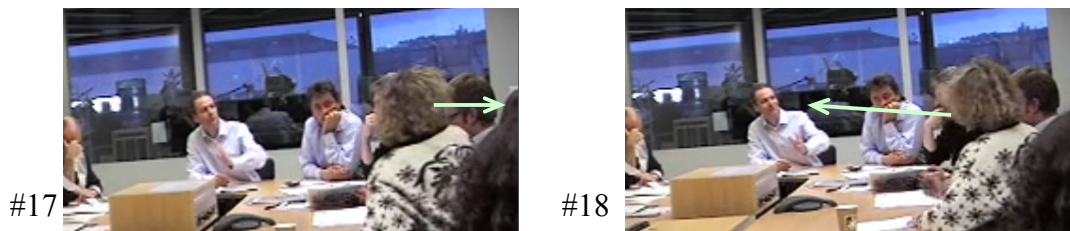
¹⁵ X4 is out of camera range, on the right side, behind OC.

0040 am struck by ((laugh))
 0041 I am struck by the fact
 0042 that many bistros have already introduce the non-smoking

An explicit counterargument is raised by a journalist (l.38): “me as a smoker I think there is a debate”. The category “smoker” refers to her own experience (or expertise) to support her standpoint as shown by the linguistic markers “me as”. One might note here that it is the first time that the category “smoker” is mobilized. It launches a slight shift toward an internal debate in the newsroom. However, X4’s turn is not ratified by R, who overlaps (l.39). A multimodal analysis shows how the framing of the debate is closely related to the right to assess.



37 R: the changing of attitudes has been going so fast
 38 X4: me as a [#15 smoker I think there is a debate]
 39 R: [#15 and I have been in france#16 the other day and I]



40 am stuck by #17((laugh))
 41 I am #18 stuck by the fact that
 42 many bistros have already introduce the non-smoking

R overlaps just one second after X4 initiated her turn (#15 and #16). X4’s intervention is noticed by some colleagues (HG and X6 on #16 and #17) who gaze at her and bodily orient toward her. However, as R keeps the floor, these colleagues quickly reorient toward R (#18). Therefore X4’s right to assess is collaboratively denied. Such a non-ratification can be explained by the craft principle, and more precisely in terms of small journalistic assemblage (SJA). One can consider X4’ intervention as an irrelevant self-selection in the course of

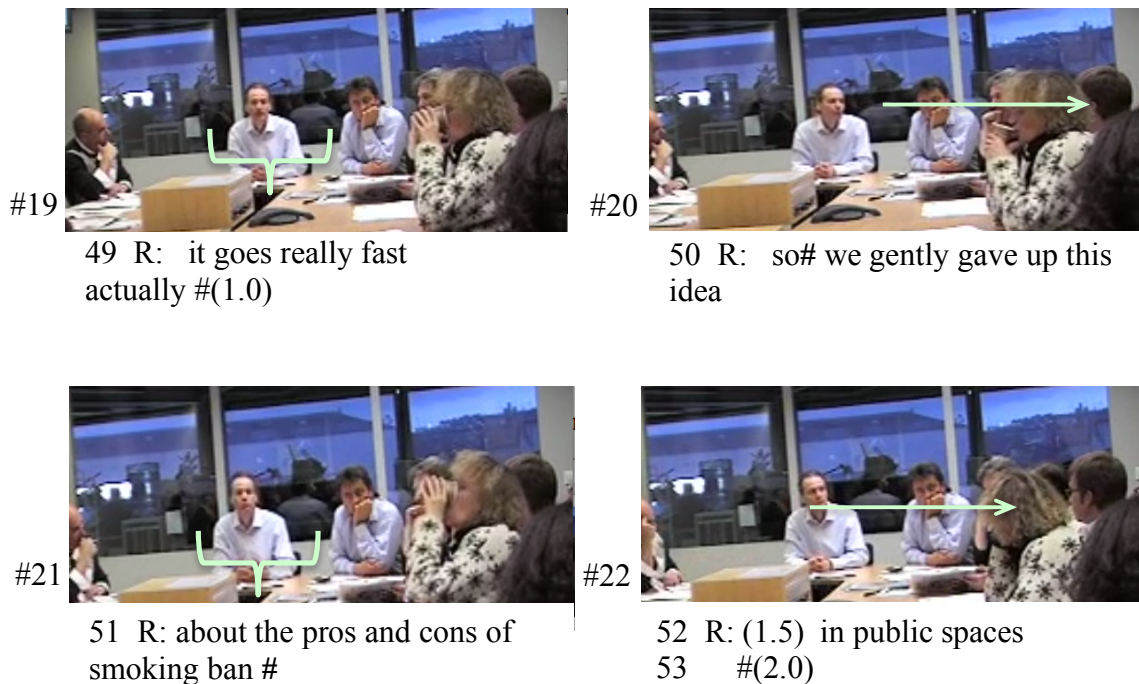
interaction at a moment when she is not a ratified addressee. This is a practical matter : it resorts to SJA and so do more generally the interactional skills of journalists during ECs.

Excerpt 4 below shows best the editor-in-chief’s interactional skills. It illustrates how the blending of an institutional position (being the editor-in-chief vs a journalist) and the enactment of a right to assess operates (that is, how BMU and SJA combine themselves):

Excerpt 4: (R: editor-in-chief / OC: economy-swiss desk / EM anchorwoman)

0048R but but but it is true that I am surprised that (0.5)
 0049 it goes really fast actually (1.0)
 0050 **so we gently gave up this idea of debating**
 0051 about the pros and cons of smoking ban
 0052 (1.5) at public spaces
 0053 (2.0)
 0054EM yes but if there is this proposition of gastrosuisse in
 0055R yeah but it is the defenses of a lobby
 0056 it is it is [it is-
 0057EM [yeah but do we know what they propose]
 0058OC not at all it must be kept secret
 0059R yeah
 0060EM ah
 0061 (2.0)
 0062X2 and when [will it be discussed]
 0063EM [but the problem]
 OC this morning=
 EM =the problem is
 0064R **but nowadays there is no debate anymore**

In terms of the dynamics of the interaction, R repeats encompassing arguments “it goes really fast actually” (1.49) and “there is no debate anymore” (1.64). These support his stance: “ we have gently give up with this idea of debating about the pros and cons of smoking ban in public space” (1.51) which works here as the final answer to OC’s initial proposition. At the para and non-verbal level, one observes also very clearly that R’s turn is indeed constructed as a conclusive turn.



During the pause of 1.0 (#19), R looks straight in front of him without addressing potential opponents. Then he addresses explicitly OC (#20) and performs a conclusive marker (“so”). The falling intonation after “public” (1.52) also marks the end of the turn. Furthermore, R inclines his head on the side, joins his hands and looks at OC (#22), who doesn’t reply. Therefore, R’s intervention appears implicitly less as an argumentative move to be part of an ongoing discussion than the editor-in-chief’s somehow last word that closes the debate : “Gastrosuisse could (not) be a potential topic for *Point Fort*”.

The editor-in-chief has therefore not only the legitimacy to take the final decision. He also evaluates the suitability of the arguments advanced by the journalists. Indeed, he orients toward media utopias (BMU) as a criteria for evaluating and rejecting arguments. The framing of a news item, such as a public debate, is interactionally negotiated in the decision making process. And this process itself, is subject to the constant monitoring of good and bad practices. This monitoring relies on the one hand on an ideology that might be invoked as a normativ motivation and an essential reason for adopting or opposing an idea, and on the other hand on journalistic assemblage (SJA), that are the constant effort of journalists to frame news in such a way as it is consistent with the constraints of

being informative and being business oriented at the same time. In the GastroSuisse example, the ideal of what a public debate is about, or even, what the very notion of “public” is about, is constantly reframed in the course of the interaction. What seems to be at the heart of the argumentation is not much whether Gastrosuisse is a good debate to be broadcast or not, but rather to stabilize the definition of what is essentially-ideally a public debate. To this very ideological question, the institution answers with very practical reflections, that indeed show the tensions that characterize the newsroom (and the craft principle of news practices).

4.4. Debating about a public debate

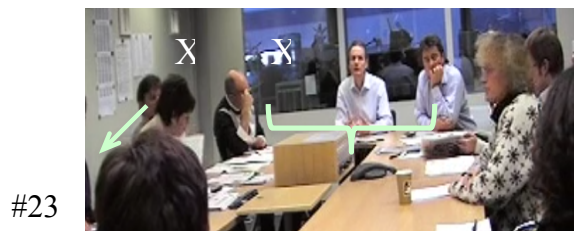
The last argumentative move in the excerpt below is extremely complex and requires a close attention. Firstly, R shifts quickly from one argumentative position to another. He first agrees to re-enter into the debate (l. 64-65) while occupying the position of the opponent (slot 14 in Figure 1). Then, the editor-in-chief distances himself from the ongoing argumentative discussion (organized around “Gastrosuisse”) and aims to reorient the discussion toward the issue he defends himself (“but for people it is not a matter of discussion anymore”).

Excerpt 5. (R: editor-in-chief / OC: economy-swiss desk / EM¹⁶: anchorwoman / X: journalists)

0064R but nowadays there is no debate anymore
 0065 is there anyone who still defends the idea
 0066 that yes smoking should be permitted at public spaces
 0067Xo (0.5) of course
 0068Xp (xxx)
 0069OC (0.5) lets ask the smokers
 0070EM yeah
 0071X4 in coffee shops yes=
 0072Xn =smoking rooms let’s say=
 0073X2 =well it is true that the big trend
 0074 even for smokers
 0075 is to say that it is fine
 0076X4 yes
 0077X2 I pre[fer] you know
 0078Xn [yeah]
 0079R (0.5) yeah
 0080Xq yeah
 0081X4 (0.5) yeah
 0082R (0.5) no no we will try to go [into it]
 0083X4 [there are some bistros]

¹⁶ The anchorwoman is on the left corner, out of camera range

The shift towards a new argumentative question “does anybody still defend the idea that yes smoking at public spaces should be permitted” (1.65) is interesting. It puts R in the position of a third-party or animator and constructs a participative framework that is similar to the former debate in which he was an opponent. Thus, R doesn't take position anymore, but apparently opens the floor to the other participants. He ends his turn with a rising intonation, makes a short break and looks around him for potential answer (#23 and #24). Therefore the participative framework shifts to include all the journalists. Indeed, X₀, X₁ and X₆ gaze at other participants (#23 / #24), as the turn-taking system is now open for self-selection.



#23

65 R: is there# anyone who still defends the idea

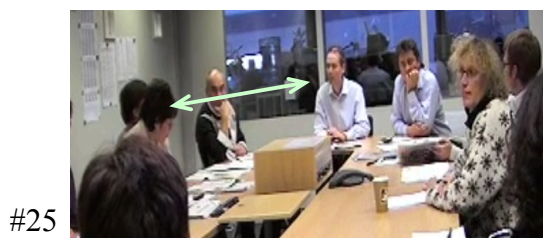


#24

66 R: that yes smoking should be permitted at public spaces # (0.5)

The framing of the argumentative question is broad: “anyone” (1.65). At this point it is not clear whether R refers to the participants or to the people in general. In the first case, R's question would sound like an opinion poll where the journalists are invited to give their position about the issue. In the second case, the question would appeal to the journalist's “gut feeling” (Schultz 2007) and somehow expertize. Indeed, journalists are supposed to know whether a given topic is alike to be discussed in the public space or not. At least, they might pretend to have the ability to choose the right topic according to the media mandate and the audience's expectation. R's question therefore calls for two distinct types of answers.

X₀' “of course” (1.67) represents the first type of answer to R' question. It cannot be interpreted as a personal position (like “I still defend”), but only as an opinion about what is going on for the people (namely “yes, there are some who still defends this idea”). Manifestly, OC interprets X₀'s turn in this way and suggests to “ask the smokers” in order to back-up X₀'s position. EM joins OC's (1.68), and hence, OC and EM (1.70) occupy then somehow the position of the third party as they set up a proper debate sequence as shown in (#25 / #26).



#25

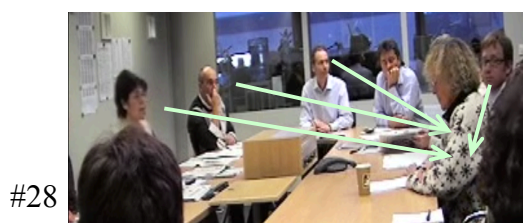
67 XO : (0.5) #of course



#26

69 OC: let ask the smokers #
70 EM : yeah

The way the category “smokers” (l. 69) is mobilized to define the debaters, excludes OC and EM (i.e. they cannot be smokers). In this very sense, they challenge twice R’s leadership : they occupy the third party position (in place of R) and restrict the framing of the question to a category (“smokers”) that R had excluded earlier (l.38-40). Therefore, OC and EM take the right to assess the relevance of the category for the debate. In doing so, they legitimate X4’s previous intervention “as a smoker” (l.38) and give her indirectly the floor a second time (as shown in l. 71). Then one observes that the journalists follow the OC-EM’s proposition and interprets the question of R as an opinion poll that addresses exclusively “the smokers in this room”. Therefore, they take position “as smokers” and express their personal opinion. The screenshots (#28-29) show how R displays his skepticism about the emerging debate: he waddles in a very explicit manner in order to display the irrelevance of giving a personal opinion.



#28

71 X4: in the café#restaurant yes



#29

72 Xn : smoking room# let’s say

The late intervention of X2 then shows that the initial question of R is re-interpreted as addressed to the journalists as experts of public affairs (and not them as smokers). Indeed, X2, constructs himself as a support of R’s negative conclusion: “if even the smokers prefer the non-smoking law then nobody defends anymore the idea that yes smoking should be permitted”. In doing so, X2 disalign with X4 and Xn. He distances himself from a personal position to represent that of the “smokers” as a category (interestingly, X2 uses the direct reported speech to express the opinion of smokers, l.75 & 77). The fact that the journalist refers to

“a trend” displays his expertise: he has knowledge about societal issues, and thus he reinforces his epistemic stance and therefore his right to assess. At this moment, R stops waddling (# 30): X2’s intervention is followed with strong markers of agreement “yeah” (l. 78-81) that support his position and R therefore witnesses the emergence of a proper debate in the newsroom (#31/#32).



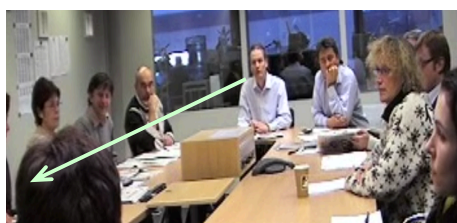
#30

73 X2: well it is true that# the big trend



#31

74 X2: even for smokers
75 is to say its fine
76 X4: #yes ((R gazes at X4))



#32

77 X4: I [pref]er and all #
78 Xn : [yes]



#33

82 R: no no # we will try to go into it

This moment of debate around the argumentative question “Is the *GastroSuisse* initiative a potential topic for *Point Fort*?” functions indirectly as an argument in support of OC’s initial proposition for *Point Fort*. Indeed, the emerging debate demonstrate to R, in a very practical manner, that his position “there is no debate anymore” cannot work as a strong argument to oppose to OC’s proposition. R acknowledges this argumentative move and concludes with “no no we will try to go into it” (l. 82, #33).

5. Conclusion

In their effort to define what is at stake with the topic *GastroSuisse* as a possible news-item, the journalists and the editor-in-chief struggle over one main issue : is it a topic open to debate in the public space ? Is it a news-item that could engage citizens into a reflection about the pro and con of smoking ban? This matter resort to what we have termed the big media utopias (BMU). They reflect

the prevalent vision of newsvalue of a given media (what is news ?), or say the semantic aspect of news (what news product is appropriate ?).

At the same time, the journalists and the editor-in-chief discuss practical matters : how to achieve the topic so that it fulfills the generic requirements of the news-item ? More generally, they exhibit argumentative and negotiation skills in interactions where the news agenda and media utopias are brought into being. This matter resort to what we have termed the small journalistic assemblages (SJA). They reflect what is logistically at stake with newsmaking in a given newsroom (how do we do news ?), or say the pragmatic aspect of doing news.

Our hypothesis is that editorial conferences represent a relevant locus to observe how, why, by whom these aspects of the craft principle of news journalism are performed. During editorial conferences, the journalists and the editor(s)-in-chief discuss, argue and make daily decisions that manifest best the emergence and the implicit/explicit blending of media utopias and journalistic assemblages. Editorial conferences as a locus of investigation also call for the consideration of the crucial role of language and linguistic resources in decision-making processes that precede the construction of news-items.

Thus, analysing what is going on in editorial conferences (and how it’s going on) implies ethnographic considerations. The purpose is a greater understanding of a “community” and more precisely “the values, community routines, and community roles and relationships” (Cotter 2010: 20). We addressed this issue in focusing on the argumentation in interaction as a means to blend BMU & SJA. Only a linguistic ethnographic perspective enables fruitful findings. It favors a double and combined focus on the practice (the newsmaking by the journalists in the backstage) and the products (the news-items addressed on stage to an audience). The analysis leads to a better understanding of the news media practices for the researchers. But it can also lead to a better understanding of what is at stake in a newsroom for the practitioners themselves. What utopias and assemblages are best combined in what kind of new-items ? How are they emerging and discussed ? How are the journalistic skills enacted and « transferred » from experienced practitioners to interns and novices ? How is leadership constructed and embodied in institutional as well as in emergent interactional positions.

Addressing such issues by the means of linguistic ethnographic considerations of newsmaking (processes) and news (products) can be termed an « implied »

perspective. Then, the research directly impacts the practice and the other way round : Researchers and practitioners become partners in the field of investigation. This is what our broader research project aimed at (e.g. Perrin et al. 2009; Perrin 2013 ; Burger & Perrin 2014 ; Burger & Delaloye 2016). And also what this paper claims : we focused on how and why journalists debate about a public debate. Eventually, in discussing the newsworthiness of the topic, the journalists perform the craft principle of the news practice in this particular newsroom. They produce and negotiate quite antagonistic framings of the news-item, and therefore they participate in the framing of the public debate itself. Thus, the journalists are not only reporting about a social controversy, but they are also directly shaping the controversy.

A multimodal analysis of the argumentation in interaction during the morning editorial conference has shown how the right to define, to challenge and to negotiate the issue at stake is interactionally achieved and how the news-item is reframed in the course of the interaction. Then, the role identity of the editor-in-chief appeared to be peculiar. He relies on his institutional position to impose his opinions and make decisions. But at the same time, he constantly leaves space to open the discussion even if he still remains the master of ceremony who decides when and how to conclude a moment of argumentation. A close look at the dynamics of interaction during editorial conferences has shown a rather positive picture in terms of relationships and decision-making : personal initiative is not denied; interactional negotiation and argumentation skills are improved; space is left for discussion but the framing is quite obvious and unchallenged, though. In one word, the news department under investigation seems to favor a win-win option preserving as well as renewing institutional authority of the members of the community.

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