THE WORDS OF HISTORY
Phraseology as a key to historical argument

DAVIDE MAZZI
Università degli Studi di Modena e Reggio Emilia

Abstract – Over the last twenty years, the interest in the disciplinary practices of history has been documented by a wide array of works. However, in spite of the inspiring nature of these rich accounts, only tangentially have scholars become interested in the inherently textual dimension of historical argumentation. In an attempt to bridge some of the gaps left by existing research, this paper calls for phraseology as a suitable candidate for the study of the argumentative peculiarities of historical prose. The qualitative and quantitative study of recurrent phraseology in a synchronic corpus of research articles from a set of specialised journals provides evidence that historians appear to be keenly observant of the practice of speculating about their own job in terms of either a successful quest for research answers or its potential dead ends. Moreover, data show that historians position themselves as disciplinary experts at a variety of levels, as they attempt to establish their credentials in the eyes of their intended readership: first, when they compare sources and thereby carve out a niche of expertise from their interpretation of them; secondly, when they proceed to singling out what they see as a key-moment in the historical processes under investigation; and finally, in the act of shaping their discourse from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator.

Keywords: history; argumentation; phraseology; corpus; discourse.

1. Introduction

Over the last twenty years, the interest in the disciplinary practices of history has been documented by a wide array of works. These have been primarily devoted to an investigation of the epistemological underpinnings of this academic field (cf. Ricoeur 2000) as well as to a study of historical discourse in terms of teaching strategies, more recently (Schall-Leckrone, McQuillan 2012; Schleppegrell, de Oliveira 2006). Moreover, an increasing number of works have focused on the distinctive features of historical argumentation.

In this area, a fruitful line of research has been the parallel drawn between the figure of historians and that of judges (Bloch 1949; Ginzburg 1991, 2000; Prost 2002; Thomas 1998). The main tenet of this approach is that the historian's endeavour resembles the judge's task when it comes to the retrieval of hints and clues aimed at grounding a rigorous reconstruction of facts; still, historians detach themselves from judges because they are also expected to pay attention to contextual factors bringing about cause-effect relations in time, and they are ultimately requested to analyse rather than acquit or condemn. Additionally, a few attempts have been made to classify the most widely spread forms of argument in history: for instance, Carrard (1992, pp. 201-202) delves into the use of figurative language on the part of the so-called New Historians such as Le Goff and Braudel, and he describes the rhetorical strength attained through geological metaphors – cf. in terms of 'successive layers', 'residue' and 'amalgam' by Braudel – employed to define the central question of France's identity. Furthermore, Prost (1996) discusses the increasing tendency to use systematic exemplification and statistical evidence as cornerstones in the unfolding of convincing historical arguments.

However, in spite of the inspiring nature of these rich accounts of the disciplinary peculiarities of history, only tangentially have scholars become interested in the inherently textual dimension of historical argumentation. This may be due to the fact that, unlike fields such as economics or medicine and the other hard sciences (Malavasi, Author 2010; Author 2012), history generally falls short of codifying argument as systematically and as predictably. In fact, historians appear to have their own way to the dissemination of specialized knowledge, not least because their prose features a captivating co-presence and cross-fertilisation of narrative (White 1973) and argumentative components (Perelman 1970). In this regard, indeed, the reconstruction of a spatio-temporal background constituted by major events and issues selected and foregrounded by the historian as meaningful, is tightly knit to the formulation of the scholars' putatively authoritative argument.

In an attempt to bridge some of the gaps left by existing research on historical argumentation, this paper aims at tackling the following questions: how do historians set about developing argumentation in order to establish their credentials as trustworthy reviewers and interpreters of past events, and how do they shape their discourse accordingly? And more precisely: are there any language tools eligible as suitable candidates for the description of the structure of historical argument? In this vein, the paper combines corpus (Gabrielatos *et al.* 2012; Schulze, Römer 2008) and discourse tools (Ädel, Reppen 2008; Swales 2009) for the purpose of arguing that phraseology deserves to be seen as a valuable clue to the argumentative configuration of historical prose. 'Phraseology' is used here as a general term to account for the tendency of words to come together and make meaning by virtue of their combination (Sinclair 2004). Therefore, 'phraseology' is intended here as an umbrella term that refers to an extensive range of items. As such, it will be taken to include both forms one would straightforwardly recognise as discourse organisers (e.g. *as a result of*), and clusters which may not appear to play such a role if taken at face value, but are nonetheless reported by quantitative corpus overviews as outstandingly frequent combinations (cf. *the extent to which*).

Corpora are of invaluable assistance as both an exploratory and a confirmatory tool for the recurrently top-down nature of discourse studies preoccupied with whole, individual texts reflecting upon the social context of their production and reception alike (Charles *et al.* 2009). It is therefore postulated that the interest for writing as a social practice – discussing both the effect of social roles on text as well as the converse influence of writer and text on context – and the growing concern with recurrent formal and rhetorical patterns of text across genres, are in need of a firm, possibly representative textual basis guaranteed by corpus linguistics. In this respect, the rigour of corpus-assisted discourse studies (Morley, Partington 2009; Partington 2010) lies in collecting and using large amounts of language to perceive patterns of co-occurrence. These patterns can in turn be related to significant elements of context, such as real-world events. The benefit of this method is that the unprecedented scope and granularity allowed by corpus-assisted investigations are well balanced with the development of techniques helping analysts deal with the complexity of large amounts of data they are exposed to, and at once undertake focused qualitative analyses by downsampling from large corpora.

The implementation of corpus tools to generate discourse-relevant findings appears well suited to the investigation of phraseology as an indicator of a number of distinctive features of historical argument, too. As Hunston (2008) argues, the study of individual word forms in context is highly instrumental in describing the subject matter of a discipline; however, the phraseology at the heart of the key semantic sequences in disciplinary argument may be indicative of its epistemology, because it is less linked to the

subject matter than it is to well-established meanings and functions. In this paper, phraseology is observed to shed light on the way professional historians carve out a niche of expertise for themselves in more confident or tentative terms, and in so doing they evaluate sources or interact with the peer members of their parent research community. In Section 2, the materials on which the research is based are discussed and analytical criteria are clarified, whereas Section 3 is dedicated to a presentation of findings to be discussed in Section 4.

2. Materials and methods

The study focuses on the upper end of historical knowledge dissemination. As such, it deals with research articles as the most specialized strand of historical research. In particular, it is based on the so-called HEM-History corpus, an English monolingual corpus comprising 306 history research articles. These were taken from the 1999 and 2000 editions of the following specialized journals: *Labour History Review* (LHR), *Historical Research*, *Gender & History* (GH), *Journal of European Ideas* (JEI), *Journal of Medieval History* (JMH), *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* (JIH), *Journal of Social History* (JSH), *Studies in History* (SH), *American Quarterly* (AQ) and *American Historical Review* (AHR). Even though journals were partly identified through exogenous criteria such as availability in electronic form, recourse was made to disciplinary experts who suggested a set of reliable publications to choose from. The corpus contains 2,416,834 words, and it consists of full texts whereby only footnotes, tables and reference lists were removed.

From a methodological point of view, the investigation focused on phraseology as an organizing principle of discourse (Sinclair 1998). Phraseology has been taken as a starting point to describe the communicative practices of scientific communities by means of the recurrence of co-occurring items in medium to large-size corpora (Biber *et al.* 1999; Groom 2010; Hunston 2008). What is argued here is that phraseology may stand as a suitable candidate for the identification of a number of distinctive aspects and a set of recurrent structures of historical argumentation.

On an operational plan, a wordlist was generated by means of the linguistic software package *WordSmith Tools 5.0* (Scott 2009). By adjusting settings so that 3/6-grams were included instead of single word forms, the list was used to retrieve the ten most frequent clusters in the corpus as quantitatively representative exemplars of phraseology. These were then concordanced (Sinclair 2003) in order to more systematically study their use in context: this stage of the analysis was aimed, first of all, at investigating the recurrent collocational patterns of the selected phraseology. Following Sinclair's theorisation on units of meaning, 'collocation' is intended to be the frequent co-occurrence of words; 'colligation' is a subset of collocation, and it denotes the co-occurrence of grammatical phenomena, e.g. the tendency of a word to regularly co-occur with the same kind of grammatical item such as an adjective or an adverbial; by 'semantic preference', finally, we refer to "the restriction of regular co-occurrence to items which share a semantic feature" (Sinclair 2004, p. 142), as in the case, say, of an adjective co-occurring with nouns from the lexical field of sports.

Yet the study of phraseology was, at the same time, aimed at pursuing a second aim as well, notably the identification of a number of key argumentative sequences in historical text offering insights about the writers' strategy to position themselves as credible scholars under the rigorous scrutiny of their fellow academics. The integration of quantitative and qualitative observation was therefore intended to examine the relationship

Lingue e Linguaggi

between the construction of authorial argument, imbued as it is with the evaluation of documentary sources, and the historians' attempt to situate their contribution in the larger narrative of the discipline as authoritatively as possible.

3. Results

The creation of the wordlist mentioned earlier on allowed for the selection of the range of phraseological items displayed in Table 1 below:

Cluster	Frequency (raw)	Cluster	Frequency (raw)
at the same time	315	*as a result of*	102
on the other hand	256	*for the first time*	97
on the one hand	166	*the fact that the*	94
the nature of the	105	*the way in which*	86
the extent to which	105	*on the part of*	82

Table 1
Selected phraseology and related raw frequency.

The concordance-based analysis of the selected n-grams reflected the tendency of historians to shape their argument by positioning themselves interpersonally at four main levels. The first and foremost can be referred to as 'the historian as methodologist and issue-raiser', and is dealt with in sub-section 3.1: data show that historians appear to be keenly observant of the practice of speculating about their own job in terms of either a successful quest for research answers or its potential dead ends. The other three levels at which historians position themselves are closely linked with their attempt to establish their credentials in the eyes of their intended readership (3.2), first when they compare sources and thereby carve out a niche of expertise from their interpretation of them; secondly, as they proceed to singling out what they see as a key-moment in the historical processes under investigation; and finally, in the act of shaping their discourse from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator.

3.1. The historian as methodologist and 'issue-raiser'

A major aspect of historical argument is the propensity of writers to make use of the research-reporting process in reflexive terms. This entails an in-depth reflection upon a number of epistemological cornerstones on which the discipline is founded. Of the multi-faceted issues addressed by largely metadisciplinary and metadiscursive passages, the potential shortcomings in the approaches adopted, and the extent to which historians can venture out into drawing safe conclusions from the data at their disposal, may be observed to have the lion's share. Evidence about this dimension was collected from the occurrence of the clusters *at the same time*, *the extent to which*, *the fact that*, *the way in which* and *on the part*.

First of all, 55% of the corpus entries of *at the same time* underlie the writer's effort to problematise materials or research perspectives that might all too easily be taken for granted. In a fragment about the overall reliability and historicity of chronicles, for instance, the author warns that the effectiveness of chronicles as pieces of writing often combining the expertise of historians and linguists, may sometimes lend itself to bias (cf. "may…reflect the perception of the crusaders" in 1). On a similar note, the writer in (2)

points to the other side of the coin in opting for gendered history as a path for future research: its forthcoming comprehensive nature, the argument goes, is thus to be paired to the partiality it might as well imply:[1]

(1)   If we use Ambroise again as an example of how co-operation can work we note that the only accessible translation of Ambroise's Estoire was the result of a historian and linguist working together, the historian providing the factual notes, the linguist the translation.[56] However, philological, literary and historical research from the last fifty years now allows new light to be shed on the text. We have mentioned above the recent studies on Berengaria. The historian needs to know that the description of Berengaria in Ambroise owes a great deal to literary tradition, yet may *at the same time* reflect the perception of the crusaders.

(2)   It seems to me that work is no longer a field of research; it is rather a point of entry for studying people in the past, one of many others. By incorporating public and private, structure and agency, experience and language, reality and representation, gender and class and race, this gendered history of work should *at the same time* accept its partiality. And as feminist history and theory have already claimed, partiality is not a weakness but an option. In this respect, specific, contextualised, particular research on work and gender contributes to the feminist assertion that the study of history can only disclose partial truths.

Among the traits (1) and (2) share is a genuine concern for the choice of a method that is both rigorous and suitable. In historical prose, this is likely to lead writers to perform a two-part rhetorical move, where the definition of an important research question is followed by a comparison of more or less rewarding methods one could adopt to answer it. Evidence can be found in 9.8% of the occurrences of *the extent to which*, where the cluster collocates with such verbal elements as "speculate about", "must be…for purposes of assessing", "the question now becomes" and "one problem was" (cf. 3 below):

(3)   […] the differences between the advanced societies on the one hand and the developing economies and the economies in transition on the other, are of such magnitude that they really must be bracketed for purposes of assessing *the extent to which* modern capitalism produces convergence among social and political systems. […] The question of convergence, then, may be recast in terms of these shared and divergent traits: has the balance between traits common to these nations and characteristics that set them apart shifted over time to make them more alike? And if so, what has caused this change and is it likely to continue to assimilate distinctive national patterns to a common model, or is it likely that divergent patterns will persist? To answer these questions comprehensively would require an enormous effort at data collection and analysis as well as an investigation into the sources of social change; and in view of the complexity of the issues involved, it is likely that even the most heroic empirical work would remain in the end unsatisfactory. What is more feasible – and hence the strategy of this essay – is to review some of the more recent literature that looks at these issues and to tease from it tentative answers to both questions.

In (3), the author argues that the probing question to be tackled is the degree to which modern capitalism produces convergence among different and heterogeneous social and political systems. Not only does he reformulate the question by means of a set of interrelated queries ("has the balance…?"; "And if so, what has caused…?") , but he also skilfully compares two available methods to handle the query itself, i.e. an enormous and altogether impractical collection of empirical data as opposed to the review of significant literature opted for in the current paper. A critical attitude towards unviable or potentially unreliable sources also emerges from the use of *the fact that the*, *the way in which* and *on the part*.

---

[1] In all numbered examples, the clusters under investigation as well as any other element useful in understanding the points raised in the text, are italicized.

*L*ingue e *L*inguaggi

In 9.1% of its entries, the first of these items is used to describe the facts historians are purportedly entitled to take for granted as ascertained by comparison to those they had better not infer, as in (4), where the use of documents from Inquisition trials is debated. On a similar note, 4.6% of the occurrences of *the way in which* seem devoted to the attempt to set parameters for historical judgment about the admissibility of controversial sources like memoirs and autobiographies (see 5), as the cluster collocates with items like "raise a serious question". Finally, it is remarkable that 4.8% of the tokens of *on the part of* serve the purpose of outlining – and lamenting – failures by fellow historians to adopt more comprehensive approaches. Interestingly, *on the part of* is observed to be part of the articulated pattern ['Failure' + *on the part of* + 'Fellow members of the research community'], where the 4-gram is preceded by lemmas such as "reluctance" and "oversight" shedding negative light on the inadequacy of prior research, and it is followed by the nouns "historians", "scholars" and "writers" denoting the peers responsible for the alleged failures (6):

(4)   It is only because of these trials that historians can reconstruct the sect at all. Yet these descriptions come to us in the written language, terminology, and codes of the Inquisition. The denunciations, confessions, and interrogations contained in the trials never record first-person accounts but, rather, are written in the more remote third person used by the notary. Beyond *the fact that the* statements of individuals were transformed by the notary of the Inquisitorial court, *the historian can never know* how individuals tailored their confessions and denunciations to reveal or to hide what they did or did not know, or to protect or to incriminate those around them. […] The Inquisitorial court did not record the testimonies of any Indian or African slaves who participated in the sect. *The historian cannot even list the names of the believers*.

(5)   In hindsight, it is possible for memoirists like Hughes and Fairbank to see what aspects of the situations in France, China, and Washington they did not understand and to give some account of why history worked out as it did. Hindsight also shows them, however, that even they, from what should have been their privileged observation points, were whirled about by forces they did not comprehend and could not control. At a fundamental level, these memoirs thus raise a serious question about *the way in which* historians describe the behavior of historical actors in the past. These historically trained autobiographers suggest that the human condition is to be overwhelmed by circumstances and to arrive at results entirely different from those intended. If these are first-person examples of "history from the bottom up," they more often portray ineffectuality and incomprehension than the empowering sense of agency microhistorians usually attribute to their subjects.

(6)   Perhaps contrary to expectations, the published and manuscript resources available for research relating to early nineteenth-century publishers are very extensive. The problem has not been a shortage of sources, but *a reluctance on the part of historians of science* to allow publishers the historical significance which they undoubtedly have. […] Fully accepting the role of the book trade in creating the audience relations that are so distinctive of science has wide-reaching implications for the practice of history of science.

The search for appropriate methods generally serves as the premise for the writer to put a cautious interpretation on historical facts. Historians thus act as issue-raisers in that they bring up burning issues in disciplinary debate: these are discussed by means of a fair balance of concurring or competing viewpoints, whereby the historian's voice, if tentative, takes sides with one of the multiple perspectives brought to the issue on the ground. The occurrence of *on the one hand*, for example, may pave the way to passages where writers embark in extensive comparisons of interpretive options. In 4.7% of its entries, the cluster does more than merely introduce the first of two sides of the coin, as it were; in fact, it prefaces the onset of a rather comprehensive survey characterized by a hedged representation of a broad spectrum of expert opinion on the matter. In (7), the writer sets about resolving a protracted dispute about the driving forces of black access to northern

manufacturing jobs between 1910 and 1940 in the United States: here as well as elsewhere, the writer's use of hedges ("it is possible that", "may", "suggests", "perhaps", "another possibility is") gradually leads him to review a set of interrelated interpretations and to discard any they see as erroneous:

(7)   Although these results provide evidence of how personnel policy affected black employment patterns in 1940, we would like to have a better sense of black access to northern manufacturing jobs between World War I and 1940. *On the one hand*, *it is possible that* the correlations observed for 1940 reveal conditions particular to that year, not persistent, policy-related employment patterns. On the other hand, these correlations *may* derive from fixed characteristics of these industries other than their interwar-era personnel policies. [...] The apparent correlation of representation ratios in 1910 and 1940, however, raises some questions. [...] The strength of the correlation over time in production-worker representation ratios *may be due*, at least in part, *to* stability in the relative sizes of the unskilled laborer sectors [...]. The correlation of rankings by 1910 and 1940 non-laborer representation ratios, though weaker and not statistically significant at conventional levels, *suggests* that some of the cross-industry variation in black employment is related to fixed industry characteristics distinct from, but nonetheless correlated with, the use of formal internal labor-market policies. *Perhaps* concerns related to turnover costs, training, and internal labor allocation were already beginning to affect employers' attitudes toward employing black workers in non-laborer positions [...]. *Another* intriguing *possibility is that* experience with cheap black labor before World War I may have helped shape personnel policy later. [...] Given the nature of the evidence, though, these connections must be considered speculative at best.

What passages like (7) highlight is both a strongly dialogic character of historical argument, and an argumentative structure to be associated with other clusters in Table 1, too. To begin with, the dialogic nature of (7) is revealed by "another intriguing possibility is that", which should be read not only as an acknowledgement of a concurring expert argument the writer cannot but take into due consideration, but also as a preamble to a forthcoming objection: however captivating, the suggestion of a correlation between the advantages of cheap labor and black employment patterns on the verge of World War II is more of a speculation than a conclusive piece of evidence. Corpus data show that dialogism similarly underlies the expression of authorial standpoints as of the occurrence of *the way in which* and *the fact that*: in 3.8% and 16.3% of their respective tokens, the two items are embedded in contexts where they collocate with hedges whose function is to anticipate views or criticisms refuted by the counterarguments put forward by the writer in the ensuing sentences or clauses ("is somewhat dubious, but" in 8; "seems to underline [...]. But, on the other hand" in 9):

(8)   Political prophecies have, in the recent past, been extensively studied as source material for the early modern period. [...] Although now only accessible in Tudor sources, these prophecies may well have been contemporary with important periods of Richard's [Richard III] political life. One of these prophecies *is somewhat dubious*, *but* the other two merit serious consideration when assessing *the way in which* Richard of Gloucester and his actions in 1483±5 were perceived by at least some of his contemporaries. The first of these is the 'prophecy of G', first mentioned by John Rous between the years 1489 and 1491…

(9)   After her second husband's death Theodelinde's position was secure enough to take over the regency for her minor son Adaloald. To some extent, the demand for remarriage after her first husband's death *seems to underline the fact that the* autocratic rule of a woman was, in general, not tolerated. *But, on the other hand*, the transmission of rule by a woman was similar in the cases of both Pulcheria and Theodelinde, and in circumstances where the formal rulers, Theodosius and Adaloald, were young, both women were able to take over actual rulership for several years. From a modern point of view these problems belong mainly to the political sphere. But in early Christian societies the political and the ecclesiastical spheres were deeply linked.

Still, dialogism is not the only aspect emphasized by (7) above. The other one is an argumentative structure in which the overall balance of plausible interpretations of the cause-effect relationships unveiled by history is preceded by an inherently metadiscursive stage. Here, authors set the scene for the upcoming argument by drawing the readers' attention to the issue they consider to be crucial: in this respect, the formula "raises some questions" is echoed by "invites the question" co-occurring with 12.5% of the occurrences of *the way in which* illustrated in (10) below:

(10)   It is clear that King Pedro IV had the resources and the skill with which to compose his own speeches but *the way in which* Pedro IV wrote the histories of his reign by supervising a team of collaborators[10] inevitably *invites the question*: did he write his parliamentary speeches in this way too? One piece of evidence, a letter dated 15 June 1367 from the king to the Viscount de Roda in which the former described the rebellion of the Judge of Arborea, is tantalisingly inconclusive. […] Luckily other letters in the royal registers, hitherto unpublished, provide more conclusive evidence for Pedro IV's role in developing ideas and planning his speeches.

Indeed, (10) condenses the whole of an argumentative structure we may depict as follows: [Setting the scene for argumentative discussion] + [Weighing up of evidence / Formulation of authorial standpoint] + [Refutation of alternatives]. In (10), the ground is prepared for critical discussion with the writer enquiring about any connection between King Pedro IV of Aragon's writing skills in drafting chronicles and the composition of his own parliamentary speeches. Then, the hypothesis supported by the author is corroborated by "other letters" he considers as conclusive evidence of such a connection, whereas the argument that proper evidence be derived from the king's letter to Viscount de Roda is rejected as inconclusive and unviable by all disciplinary accounts. The order of the various stages in the above structure may vary, but there is reason to believe that the sequence described by the structure should be retained as a central element in the articulation of historical argument. Accordingly, the formulation of authorial standpoints out of a comparative review of other 'voices' as a stepping stone in the process of crafting a niche of expertise for the writer's own voice, will also become evident in the two sub-sections that follow.

3.2 The historian carving out a niche of expertise

A sense of methodological accuracy behind the identification of major issues in historical research stands out as a fundamental component in the attempt of professional historians to bring a high level of expertise to bear on the questions they address. This is not only emphasized by the sequence of stages illustrated through (10) above, where the writer's formulation of a leading question is followed by an appreciation of available evidence as a preliminary step for the historian's own assessment, but also in three further respects documented in this section. First of all, it can be noted that historians compare sources and thereby carve out a niche of expertise from their interpretation of them; in the second place, they proceed to singling out what they see as key-moments in the historical processes under investigation; and thirdly, they may be observed to shape their discourse from the viewpoint of an omniscient narrator.

The presence of narrative sequences interspersing historical argument is a well-known dimension of historical prose, and it is interesting to point out that there is a tight link between narrative and argument in the construction of expert discourse. Accordingly, the writers' tendency to expatiate on the sources they are working with can be read as a strategy to build suitable credentials for a putatively authoritative verdict, so to speak, to

be handed down in the next portion of the text. The study of *on the other hand* and *the nature of the* appears to confirm this view. In 22% of the former's occurrences, we therefore see that the writer's step-by-step comparison of the selected sources sets up a narrative that, more than simply establishing a degree of proximity between them, shapes them as a repertoire of arguments in support of the writer's standpoint ("Aristotle might be regarded as a more careful observer, and thus even as a better scientist than Galen" in 11 below). Furthermore, 14.2% of the entries of *the nature of the* signal the endpoint of the writer's review of sources – as stressed by the colligation with verbs of perception such as "notice", "recognize", "show", "distinguish" and "examine" – with the two-fold aim of identifying the key-issue highlighted by the comparison and eventually offering a viewpoint about how one source may have developed from the other (see "The crux of the theory is […]. Bentham succinctly incorporated…" in 12):

(11)   In a recent article Elisabeth Lloyd notes that modern theories of female sexuality often assume that female sexual response is like male sexual response (Lloyd, 1996, p. 96). […] Thinking only in terms of a male body, Galen ignores examples in which female sexual desire and pleasure are simply different from the male variety something that Aristotle, by contrast, does not overlook. […] For instance, the Galenic model made it possible for a man who impregnated a woman through rape to claim that the act was not forced.[27] Although Aristotle was not aiming to emancipate women by writing about their sexuality, it seems that his observations could, in principle, allow women more autonomy and at least allow for the possibility that sexual pleasure between men and women be undertaken for reasons other than childbearing. Galen's rigid commitment to the essential sameness of the sexes means that he is often unable to see relevant differences between them. Aristotle, *on the other hand*, does not think exclusively from the point of view of a male body and so is more open to considering the possibility of female difference. To that extent, Aristotle *might be regarded as a more careful observer*, and thus even *as a better scientist* than Galen. At least with regard to female sexual response, Aristotle's observations *are clearly more accurate* than those of Galen.

(12)   Despite Beccaria's appeals to sentiment and compassion, he appeared therefore to have left the door open to careless punishments […] in that he failed to allow sufficiently for the assessment of individual circumstances and intention. In contrast, Bentham's theory examined circumstances, sensibilities and intention, and placed emphasis on the 'primary' and 'secondary' pains found to be inflicted on individuals [61].[82] From this more precise foundation progress could be made to a consideration of how inflictions of pain might be gauged, and an attempt made to distinguish *the nature of the* dispersal of the 'shapes' of pain throughout society. […] *The crux of the theory is* an overwhelming concern for quantities of pain. Bentham's first 'rule' is all that needs to be mentioned here since, with this, Bentham *succinctly incorporated Beccaria's notion* of proportioned deterrence *into his own* by stating that, [...]

In (11), the parallel between Galen and Aristotle involving their concept of male and female bodies is what prompts the writer's view that Aristotle deserves to be considered as more accurate a scientist than Galen, at least in so far as his notion of female sexual behavior is concerned. In (12), the writer investigates Beccaria and Bentham's contribution to the debate on justice and punishment: based on the outcome of the review, he argues that they converge in providing an account of how pain is perceived in society. More specifically, he asseverates that the concern for quantities of pain being a common denominator to both, what should be acknowledged is that Bentham essentially upgraded on Beccaria's theory by encapsulating it into his own.

A meticulous care in the choice and critical examination of comparable sources is shown by corpus data to be a turning point in the historian's establishment of proper research credentials, and one that possibly culminates in the confident effort to outline any watershed moments in the historical processes under investigation. Not surprisingly perhaps, the cluster *for the first time* marks the apex of a rising climax in historical

narrative. In 13.4% of its attested uses, it signals a transition from a chronicle of events to the identification of the purportedly most significant fact (pinpointed by the collocation with verbs sharing a semantic preference of 'beginning' like "introduce" and "begin") writers draw the attention to, before proceeding to their own evaluation (cf. "This may indicate that […], it is worth considering the possibility that" in 13 and "The claim of royal foundation […] justified increasing royal interventions" in 14):

(13)   From the seventh century onward, seal impressions had been affixed to royal documents exclusively, by a chancellor who had custody of the royal seal and was responsible for the production and validation of royal diplomas. In early Frankish times, under the Merovingian kings (sixth to mid-eighth centuries), the royal seal affixed to diplomas did not function as a means of documentary validation. Its use imitated the usage of the Byzantine imperial chancery; to seal a document was, for the Merovingian kings, to behave as a ruler. […] By early Capetian times (early eleventh century), however, the royal seal was used only sporadically and had lost some of its standing as a formula and prerogative of kingship.[67] During the second half of the eleventh century, the royal chancery resumed the systematic sealing of diplomas, while French non-royal elites *began*, *for the first time* in the medieval West, to seal charters issued in their own names. Non-royal sealing demonstrated and articulated the loss of a royal prerogative. *This may indicate* the establishment of competing comital, episcopal claims to authority, a desire to share the aura of royal status by the emulation of royal chancery practices, or both. However, since the appearance of non-royal sealing and the revival of royal sealing are contemporaneous, it is worth considering *the possibility that* eleventh-century usage of royal seals was a part of, rather than the model for, the new spread of sealing to non-royal elites.

(14)   Royal interest in the Mercedarians waned until the 1350s when Pere the Ceremonious […] resurrected Jaume's claim of a royal foundation and elaborated *for the first time* an actual narrative of events. […] By ascribing all the privileges that the Order had accumulated over the previous century and a half to Jaume I, Joan completed the story of Mercedarian origins. *The claim of royal foundation*, almost non-existent in the thirteenth century, rare in the early fourteenth century, had in the reigns of Pere and Joan become commonplace. It *justified increasing royal interventions into Mercedarian affairs* as well as the ius patronus that sought to sever the Order's juridical ties to the rest of the Church. […] For more localized organizations like the Mercedarians […], the kings of Aragon utilized claims of foundation, real or fabricated, to assert a ius patronus that could become the basis of a wider royal jurisdiction.

In (13), a passage devoted to a detailed reconstruction of the history of seals in Western Europe, the author singles out the eleventh-century tendency of non-royal elites to seal their documents as a substantial change, because it testifies to an evolution in seal usage from mere royal prerogative to other competing élites. In (14), moreover, the brand new "narrative of events" elaborated by Pere the Ceremonius in the mid-fourteenth century and later perfected by Joan I brought about the effect of superimposing an order of discourse that would later justify an extension of Spanish royal jurisdiction over to orders such as the Mercederians. On a similar note, the writer's emphasis on a defining moment seems to apply to 4.9% of the occurrences of *as a result of*: here, a reflection upon a radical socio-political development – made explicit by the colligation with verbs sharing a semantic preference of 'status change' (i.e. "change", "drop", "destabilize") – becomes the starting point to question someone else's views. In (15), thus, the writer discusses the political repercussions of the Home Rule policy pursued by a wave of British governments following William Gladstone's liberal executive. These include Asquith's Government too, the stability of which is reported to have been undermined by the difficulty posed by the challenge of proper implementation at the beginning of the twentieth century. These remarks form the basis for the writer's subsequent assessment of an influential work by Jalland, part of which can be endorsed and part "more reasonably disputed":

(15) *As a result of* its legislative efforts in 1912±14 to fulfil the "Gladstonian Liberal dream" of home rule for a united Ireland, Asquith's government became embroiled in a series of complicated and embarrassing issues related to the maintenance of order in Ireland, in which it has found few defenders among historians. […] Much can be said in favour of Jalland's thesis that the introduction of a different type of home rule measure in April 1912 would have saved Liberalism much embarrassment, and perhaps much pain […]. But *the complementary hypothesis, that* new Liberal journalism and academia, in their relative apathy about home rule, sensed the desirability of compromise early in 1912 along the lines proposed by Lloyd George and Churchill, *can be more reasonably disputed*.

However at times cautiously argued, the historian's standpoint takes on an aura of authority with the attempt to look for and comment upon the important landmarks of world history. This can be even more obvious when one looks at those contexts where the writer acts as a kind of omniscient narrator whose value judgments about historical characters are pronounced from the vantage point of someone that belongs to posterity. In 11.7% of its occurrences, *the fact that* is used by historians to evaluate in retrospect the behaviour or attitude of one or more actors on the stage of history, as observed with the collocation with verb phrases such as "this eclipses", "Voth neglected" and "he ignored". The focus of the current paper thus becomes an event or factor which, from the writer's privileged perspective, acquires a fact-like status that might not have been so straightforward to those living in the very days of the narrated episodes:

(16) Hammond was unquestionably an English patriot, whose patriotism was based on a sincere belief in the distinct contribution of English heritage to global ideas of freedom, toleration and democracy. He could never understand that the strongest focus of Irish nationalism was often simple hostility to England, just as *he could not grasp the fact that the* strongest focus of Ulster Unionism was distrust and fear of 'the other lot'. Liberal efforts for political compromise in Ireland *were thus destined to be* far more difficult than Hammond and others imagined.

(17) *Ignoring the fact that the* identification of each fragmentary movement according to the method it promoted owed as much to the antagonism of European critics as to self-conscious naming on the part of participants, many critics shared Roosevelt's exasperation at what they saw as a foolish, indulgent, and ultimately unhelpful practice.

What the two extracts share is that in both cases, the writer's feelings about the people in question – Hammond in (16) and art critics in (17) – are largely determined by the wider spectrum of historical knowledge secured by the decades elapsed between the periods in which they lived, and the more comfortable historian's perspective relying on well-consolidated research. It therefore comes as no surprise that just as critics from Roosevelt's era could not benefit from the more extensive overview on avant-garde movements we have at the turn of the twenty-first century ("Ignoring the fact that"), Hammond and his contemporaries could hardly sense the complexity the Ulster question would eventually pose to the relationship between the United Kingdom and the about-to-be born Irish Free State ("he could not grasp the fact that").

Taken together, 3.1 and 3.2 show a number of regular features to be accounted for as typical of the distinctive argumentative style adopted by professional historians while they seek to establish their disciplinary credentials towards the discourse community they aim at situating themselves in at a variety of levels, from more cautious standpoints to more overtly assertive and authoritative value-judgments.

4. Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study bear potential relevance to the study of argumentative practices in two main respects. First of all, a fruitful line of research in recent years has been the quest for argumentative indicators in discourse, defined by Van Eemeren *et al.* (2007, p. 2) as not "merely words and expressions that directly refer to *argumentation*, but [also] all words and expressions that refer to *any of the moves* that are significant to the argumentative process". In their comprehensive overview of argumentative indicators, the Dutch pragma-dialecticians consider texts from a wide range of sources – e.g., the Eindhoven corpus, the proceedings of the Dutch Lower House and the Internet, to name but a few. The soundness of the theoretical foundations underlying their research now deserves to be further extended to more homogeneous data sets from specialized communication, of which history is taken here as an example. In this vein, although the status of phraseology as an argumentative indicator may be open to discussion, what is argued here is that the items retrieved on a frequency-count basis in the paper are at least a good example of argumentative metadiscourse. As a matter of fact, their observed use, though not immediately argumentative per se, signals the emergence of a number of recognizable and reiterated patterns in the construction of historical argumentation. Accordingly, the use of the selected phraseologies in context documented widespread regularities in historical argumentation, whether on the reflexive plane described in 3.1 about methodological concerns, or in the activation of argumentative structures such as those detected across 3.1 and 3.2 (cf. 10 and 15 above).

Secondly, it has been consistently pointed out that a pivotal point in argumentative structure lies in unexpressed premises and/or unexpressed standpoints. Accordingly, a useful yardstick by which to determine the commitment of an arguer is said to be a pragmatic analysis based on standards for reasoned discourse: in these terms, unexpressed premises are those that "help[s] to make the argument logically valid" and are "more precisely defined on the basis of contextual information and background knowledge" (Van Eemeren *et al.* 1996, p. 17). As far as our data are concerned, the question of unexpressed premises or standpoints is pertinent at two levels. The first one has to do with historians acting as omniscient narrators pronouncing retrospective judgments on historical characters or phenomena: in (16), therefore, asserting that Hammond could not grasp the complexity and would-be long-term implications of Ulster Unionism in the hard road to Irish independence, appears to embed both the major premise "We speak from posterity" and the minor premise "As such, we have access to a wide array of documents enabling us to draw certain conclusions about people's attitudes back then".

One more level at which corpus findings are correlated with the issue of unexpressed premises is the relationship between these and the room for strategic maneuvering. The notion of strategic maneuvering is a well-established acquisition of the pragma-dialectic theory of argumentation, where it denotes "the continual efforts made in all moves that are carried out in argumentative discourse to keep the balance between reasonableness and effectiveness" (Van Eemeren 2010, p. 40). Going back to 3.1, there is more than one example that lends itself to being critically re-read in that light. Thus, the remarks on the quest for suitable methods in (3) and (4) can be interpreted not only as genuine concerns for a rigorous scrutiny of historical data, but also as concerted attempts to exploit the potential of strategic maneuvering. In (3), it may indeed be reasonable to acknowledge that a comprehensive answer to the questions raised by modern capitalism would require an enormous and altogether unlikely effort of data collection. Still, claiming that "what is more feasible – *and hence the strategy of this essay* – is to review some of

the more recent literature that looks at these issues" seems to effectively imply the following standpoint: "[Given that I opted for the more feasible solution,] I stand out as a trustworthy historian". The same applies to (4), where valuable evidence of the limits in documents from the Inquisition does not simply lead to the reasonable inference that historians should not venture too deep into them as a historical proof, but also to the effective standpoint '[Given that I myself have managed them with caution,] I stand out as an academically sound member of the historical research community'.

By all accounts, the challenges posed by history in shaping argument in somewhat less predictable ways than in other academic fields, can be successfully handled by means of the largely corpus-driven approach adopted here. In this context, phraseology was shown to operate as a set of clues in various respects. First of all, it works on a cline between more confident positioning of the authorial self in the face of the parent discourse community, and contexts where the use of hedges (cf. 7 and 9) presupposes more tentative standpoints. And secondly, phraseology sheds light on the argumentative implications reviewed in this section and worth further investigation in future research.

References

Ädel, A. and Reppen, R. 2008, *The Challenges of Different Settings: An Overview*, in Ädel, A. and Reppen, R. (eds.), *Corpora and Discourse*: *The Challenges of Different Settings*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 1-6.

Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. 1999, *Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English*, Longman, London.

Bloch, M. 1949, *Apologie pour l'histoire ou métier d'historien*, Colin, Paris; trad. it. di Goutier, G. 1998, *Apologia della storia, o Mestiere di storico*, Einaudi, Torino.

Carrard, P. 1992, *Poetics of the New History. French Historical Discourse from Braudel to Chartier*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore.

Charles, M., Pecorari, D. and Hunston, S. (eds.) 2009, *Academic Writing: At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*, Continuum, London.

Gabrielatos, C., McEnery, T., Diggle, P.J. and Baker, P. 2012, *The Peaks and Troughs of Corpus-Based Contextual Analysis*, in "International Journal of Corpus Linguistics" 37, pp. 151-175.

Ginzburg, C. 1991, *Il giudice e lo storico* Einaudi, Torino.

Ginzburg, C. 2000, *Rapporti di forza. Storia, retorica, prova*, Feltrinelli, Milano.

Groom, N. 2010, Closed-class Keywords and Corpus-driven Discourse Analysis, in Bondi, M. and Scott, M. (eds.), *Keyness in Text*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 59-78.

Hunston, S. 2008, *Starting with the Small Words. Patterns, Lexis and Semantic Sequences*, "International Journal of Corpus Linguistics" 13, pp. 271-295.

Malavasi, D. and Author 2010, *History v. Marketing. Keywords as a Clue to Disciplinary Epistemology*, in Bondi, M. and Scott, M. (eds.), *Keyness in Text*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 169-184.

Author 2012, *"...such a reaction would spread all over the cell like a forest fire": a Corpus Study of Argument by Analogy in Scientific Discourse*, in Berkenkotter, C., Bhatia V. and Gotti, M. (eds.), *Insights into Academic* Genres, Peter Lang, Frankfurt/Bern/New York/Brussels, pp. 89-105.

Morley, J. and Partington, A. 2009, A Few Frequently Asked Questions about Semantic – or Evaluative – Prosody, in **"**International Journal of Corpus Linguistics" 14 [2], pp. 139-158**.**

Partington, A. 2010, *Modern Diachronic Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (Md-Cads) on UK Newspapers: An Overview of the Project*, in "Corpora" 5 [2], pp. 83-108.

Perelman, C. 1970, *Le champ de l'argumentation*, Presses Universitaires de Bruxelles, Bruxelles.

Prost, A. 1996, *Histoire, vérités, méthodes. De structures argumentatives de l'histoire*, in "Le débat" 92, pp. 127-140.

Prost, A. 2002, *Argumentation historique et argumentation judiciaire*, in de Fornel, M and Passeron, J.-C. (eds.), *L'argumentation. Preuve et persuasion*, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, pp. 29-47.

Ricoeur, P. 2000, *La mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*, Seuil, Paris.

Schall-Leckrone, S. and McQuillan, P.J. 2012, *Preparing History Teachers to Work with English Learners through a Focus on the Academic Language of Historical Analysis*, in "Journal of English for Academic Purposes" 11, pp. 246-266.

Schleppegrell, M. J. and de Oliveira, L.C. 2006, *An Integrated Language and Content Approach for History Teachers*, in "Journal of English for Academic Purposes" 5, pp. 254–268.

Schulze, R. and Römer, U. 2008, *Patterns, Meaningful Units and Specialized Discourses*, in "International Journal of Corpus Linguistics" 13, pp. 265-270.

Scott, M. 2009, *WordSmith Tools 5.0*, Lexical Analysis Software, Liverpool.

Sinclair, J. 1998, *The Lexical Item*, in Weigand, E. (ed.), *Contrastive Lexical Semantics*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, pp. 1-24.

Sinclair, J. 2003. *Reading Concordances*. *An introduction*, Longman, London.

Sinclair, J. 2004. *Trust the text. Language, corpus and discourse*, Routledge, London/New York.

Swales, J. 2009, *Afterword*, in Charles, M., Pecorari, D. and Hunston, S. (eds.), *Academic Writing. At the Interface of Corpus and Discourse*, Continuum, London, pp. 291-294.

Thomas, Y. 1998, *La vérité, le temps, le juge et l'historien*, in "Le débat" 102, pp. 17-36.

Van Eemeren, F.H., Grootendorst, R. and Snoeck Henkemans, F. 1996, *Fundamentals of Argumentation Theory*, Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah.

Van Eemeren, F.H., Houtlosser, P. and Snoeck Henkemans, F. 2007, *Argumentative Indicators in Discourse. A Pragma-Dialectical Study*, Springer, Dordrecht.

Van Eemeren, F.H. 2010, *Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentative Discourse*, Benjamins, Amsterdam/Philadelphia.

White, H. 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore; trad. it. di Vitulano, P. 1978, *Retorica e storia*, Guida, Napoli.