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The argument from authority in Doppagne's Franco-Belgian language column: Polyphonic interplays and construction of epistemic authority

Abstract: Albert Doppagne (1912–2003) was one of the main representatives of a language correction movement of the 1960s and 1970s which aimed at cleansing the practices of French-speaking Belgians of everything which seemed to deviate from the supposed good usage of French. The aim of this article is to examine Doppagne's use of the argument from authority in his "Chronique du langage". The focus is on argumentative schemes in which the language columnist accepts or rejects a point of view on linguistic issues, not on the grounds of an examination of the conformity of the point of view with the linguistic facts themselves, but only according to the sources from which the columnist received the point of view. The analysis is based on the Scandinavian approach to linguistic polyphony (*ScaPoLine*). This theoretical framework draws on the distinction between polyphonic authority and reasoning from authority and allows studying both the sources that Doppagne invokes as authority and the way in which he verbalises the argument from authority. The analysis makes it possible to verify the extent to which the argument from authority constitutes a discursive process with which Doppagne constructs his own image as an eminent authority in language issues.

Keywords: Franco-Belgian metadiscourse on language of the 1960s and 1970s, Argument from authority, *ScaPoLine*, Linguistic polyphony, Epistemic authority

1. Albert Doppagne and his work as a language columnist

Albert Doppagne (1912–2003), a leading figure in the Franco-Belgian prescriptive discourse on language of the 1960s and 1970s, was one of the main representatives of a language correction movement which aimed at cleansing the practices of French-speaking Belgians of everything which seemed to deviate from the *bon usage*, that is from the supposed good usage of French (Klinkenberg, 1985, 2000). Being essentially focused on the Franco-French language model, this correction movement culminated in the early 1970s with the publication of the famous *Chasse* and *Nouvelle chasse aux belgicisms* (1971 and 1974), of which Doppagne was one of the authors. Although Doppagne hesitantly evolved towards a more descriptive approach to language issues,

which is also reflected in the publication of his *Belgicisms de bon aloi* (1979) where he admits the existence of a total of seventy-nine traits which can be “sans rougir, peut-être même avec quelque fierté, present[és] aux Français” (Doppagne, 1979: 9), Doppagne nevertheless contributed to fueling the conflictive, often even self-depreciating relationship which Francophone Belgians have long maintained with their own variety of French (see for example Francard, 2017). Thus, despite Doppagne’s timid change of attitude, he was still called, in his death notice published in the Brussels daily newspaper *Le Soir*, “tueur de belgicisms” (Soumois, 2003) whose corrective efforts were retrospectively considered as having been in vain:

Il épinglait les « bourgmestre », « athénée », « clenche de porte » et même les « matières personnalisables », de drôles de mots qu’on n’utilise que dans la variété de français parlée en Belgique, comme d’autres chassent les papillons ou excavent les entrailles de fermes gallo-romaines. [. . .] Albert Doppagne s’est éteint le 13 novembre dernier [2003]. En 1961 [*sic*, il collectionnait les belgicisms pour les bouter hors de la langue admise, cosignant « Chasse aux belgicisms » avec Hanse. Un combat perdu d’avance. Avec les années, le linguiste dialectologue et folkloriste adopta plutôt la tactique du collectionneur gourmand, alignant les perles venues du wallon (pice-crosse, avare), du flamand (klachkop, crâne chauve) ou du langage kafkaïen local (« communautariser »). (Soumois, 2003)

A doctor in Romance Philology and graduate in Art History and Archaeology, Doppagne was, from 1957 to 1982, Professor of Spanish at the University of Antwerp and, from 1964 to 1982, holder of the Chair of European Arts and Traditions at the Free University of Brussels. In addition to his professional activities, he also demonstrated a strong commitment to various associations which aimed at defending the French language. For example, Doppagne was a founding member of the *Conseil international de la langue française* and secretary of the *Office du bon langage* at the Charles Plisnier Foundation, of which he became president in 1981. Showing not only a determined willingness to defend French, but also a profound “amour de la langue” (Paveau and Rosier, 2008: 71), Doppagne co-founded in 1971 the national spelling championships, which are today still held annually in Belgium. As president of the *Centre wallon de films ethnographiques* and member of the *Société de langue et de littérature wallonnes*, Doppagne also demonstrated a strong commitment to the promotion of the regional languages in the French-speaking part of Belgium.¹

1 For a detailed biography of Doppagne’s life, see Delsemme (2004). For an overview of Doppagne’s work, see the bibliography of his publications in Piccavet (1980). To

Like many other Franco-Belgian Romance philologists (e.g. Fernand Desonay, Maurice Grevisse, Joseph Hanse, André Goosse, Louis Chalon alias Cléante or more recently Michel Francard), Doppagne published language columns, and this in both the audio-visual and the written media.² He began his career as a language columnist at the *Institut national de radiodiffusion (I.N.R.)* where he hosted, between 1955 and 1957, the weekly program “Parlons mieux”. From 1960 to 1987, Doppagne published in *Le Soir* every fortnight a column entitled “La chronique du langage”, in which he not only dealt with the diatopisms of the French language in usage in Belgium, but where he also addressed a fairly broad spectrum of aspects which most often concern difficulties of the French language in general and sometimes also questions surrounding its history and status.³ This diversity of subjects is also reflected in the organization of the articles themselves, where Doppagne often addresses several aspects at once. In addition, reviews of new dictionaries or of books on a wide variety of language issues also play a relatively important role in “La chronique du langage”. A number of texts emanating from this language column have been published in the journal *Langue et administration: une initiative en vue de la correction du langage*, of which Doppagne was the secretary general, and in anthologies, namely *Trois aspects du français contemporain* (1966) and *Le roseau vert. Chroniques de langage* (1985).⁴

Even if Doppagne generally follows a corrective purpose in “La chronique du langage” and even if he undoubtedly conveys conservative positions, he does not categorically refuse language change and expresses some reservations about excessive purism:

pay tribute to its former president, the Association Charles Plisnier has named its *Prix triennale Sciences humaines et Folklore* after Albert Doppagne.

- 2 For an overview of the Franco-Belgian tradition of language columns, see Meier (2019) and Patzelt (2015).
- 3 A comparative analysis of graduation theses making an inventory and analysing certain language columns published from 1960 to 1965 and from 1969 to 1979 in the Franco-Belgian press (Bourgeois, 1981; De Coster, 1981; Deroo, 1981; Piccavet, 1980; Poorters, 1982; Terryn, 1980) shows that Doppagne most often deals with lexical topics, followed by orthographic and phonetic issues as well as by morpho-syntactic matters. General socio-historical and stylistic aspects play only a secondary role.
- 4 Unlike Remysen's (2005) definition, which we follow in this article, Doppagne does not use the term *chronique* to refer to a set of articles (called *billets*) in which the usages speakers make of language are commented on. For Doppagne in contrast, the notion *chronique* refers to each article of which his column is composed.

On vous dira souvent encore: On ne dit pas ‘partir à Paris’, il faut dire ‘Partir *pour* Paris!’ Mon rôle n’est pas de jouer au puriste: un grand nombre de personnes disent *partir à*. . . Beaucoup d’écrivains emploient cette construction dans leurs œuvres; sans doute *Partir pour* est-elle la construction d’origine, la meilleure forme, mais on ne peut plus, aujourd’hui, lutter contre l’usage de *Partir à*. . . qui va se répandant de plus en plus. (DopChro,⁵ 20 February 1979)

This moderate conservatism in Doppagne’s discourse corresponds with those put forward by other language columnists who were part of the Franco-Belgian correction movement, such as Maurice Grevisse (see Schwarze, 1977). In “La chronique du langage”, Doppagne’s tone is conciliatory, even friendly, and he often includes in his articles “[des] interventions [. . .] destinées à [. . .] faire part [à ses lecteurs] de son étonnement ou de sa crainte, de ses sentiments d’indignation ou de joie” (Poorters, 1982: 126) which he experiences with regard to a given usage. Doppagne’s texts are also characterized by “l’humour et l’ironie qui pimentent souvent les considérations critiques ou normatives du chroniqueur” (Poorters, 1982: 126), which is, according to Paveau and Rosier (2008: 56), one of the recurring stylistic features of the rhetoric of purist discourse.

The aim of this article is to examine the use of the argument from authority in Doppagne’s “La chronique du langage”. The analysis that follows will focus on argumentative schemes in which Doppagne accepts or rejects a point of view on linguistic issues, not on the grounds of an examination of the conformity of the point of view with the linguistic facts themselves, but only according to the sources from which the columnist received the point of view. On the basis of a representative corpus of articles compiled for the purpose of the present research, we will identify the sources to which Doppagne refers and analyze the discursive strategies with which the columnist evokes the points of view coming from these sources. The analysis will show that the argument from authority constitutes an important element helping Doppagne to construct his own image as an epistemic authority having the ability and the right to reason on the truth value of the purported language issues.⁶

5 In this article, the texts published in Doppagne’s “La Chronique du langage” are identified by the acronym DopChro, followed by the date of publication of the single text. In the examples cited, underlining has been added to highlight the analysed passages.

6 Here we adopt the definition of epistemic authority initially proposed by Bochenski (1974). Also see Mondada (2013) for an extensive overview of the more recent research on epistemic authority in conversation analysis.

2. The argument from authority

In the rhetorical tradition, the argument from authority is defined as a form of reasoning “which uses the acts or opinions of a person or group of persons as a means of proof in support of a thesis” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca, 1970: 305). In this context, the functioning of any argument from authority is based on the reputation of the sources invoked, whose competence is generally recognized by the audience in a particular field of knowledge (see also Reboul, 1991; Martel and Laforest, 1995). Ducrot (1984) has broadened this definition and considers the argument from authority as a semantic and pragmatic strategy used by the speaker to increase the persuasive force of what he/she states by sharing the responsibility for his/her utterance with the sources he/she invokes, and this regardless of their prestige:⁷

[o]n utilise, à propos d'une proposition *P*, un argument d'autorité lorsqu'à la fois: 1) on indique que *P* a déjà été, est actuellement, ou pourrait être l'objet d'une assertion, 2) on présente ce fait comme donnant de la valeur à la proposition *P*, comme la renforçant, comme lui ajoutant un poids particulier (Ducrot, 1984: 150).

Following this definition, Ducrot distinguishes two types of argument from authority, namely reasoning from authority (*raisonnement par autorité*) and polyphonic authority (*autorité polyphonique*), depending on how the proposition *P* is invoked and thus on how the value of *P* is reinforced in the speaker's discourse. In the case of reasoning from authority, the speaker asserts that a source asserts *P* as for instance in *On m'a dit que Jean viendrait. Je pense donc qu'il va venir* (Ducrot, 1984: 159). The speaker thereby reinforces the credibility of the proposition *P* ('Jean viendra'), indicating that he/she believes *P* with more or less conviction ('Je pense qu'il va venir'). However, by asserting that *P* has already been said or could be said by a certain source, the speaker commits himself/herself only indirectly to what is asserted in *P* (see also Perrin, 2000: 86). In the case of polyphonic authority, in contrast, the speaker does not assert the assertions made by a source, but he/she only shows an assertion. In other words, the speaker pretends or plays that *P* was or is the object of an assertion, for instance by using the polyphonic marker *il paraît que* in the following example: *Il paraît qu'il va faire beau: nous devrions sortir* (Ducrot, 1984: 154). Polyphonic authority is thus anchored not at the rhetorical level of the discourse, but at the semantic level of the language, that is in the meaning

7 For a detailed discussion of the different definitions of the argument from authority, see Perrin (2000).

of certain words or expressions. As the speaker does not report the proposition *P* as it was actually asserted by a source but only simulates its assertion, he/she directly identifies with *P* ('Il va faire beau'), of which he/she thus guarantees the truthfulness. Hence, following Ducrot, polyphonic authority mainly reinforces the argumentative force of *P*, that is the conclusions that can be potentially drawn from *P* ('nous devrions sortir') (see also Perrin, 2000: 85).

In their *théorie scandinave de la polyphonie linguistique (ScaPoLine)*, Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004) adopt Ducrot's distinction between reasoning from authority and polyphonic authority. They argue that in both cases, the argument from authority is based on the principle that the speaker constructs discursive beings, that is images of the semantic entities figurating as sources of a point of view in his/her discourse, in order to make his/her affirmations and opinions more convincing (Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004: 133). The discursive beings invoked as authorities can be individual or collective thirds as well as images of the allocutor(s) and the speaker himself/herself.⁸ Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004: 133) postulate a correlation between the form of the images of these discursive beings and the two types of argument from authority. In this paper, we follow Nølke, Fløttum and Norén's approach to study the functioning of the argument from authority in Doppagne's language column because their theoretical framework allows us to examine both which discursive beings the language columnist invokes as authorities and how Doppagne verbalizes the argument from authority.

3. Analysis

The present analysis is qualitatively oriented and based on a corpus of 100 texts published in "La chronique du langage" between 1964 and 1981, which corresponds to approximately 15 % of the total number of articles in Doppagne's language column. Even though the corpus covers a period in which the columnist gradually turns towards a rather more descriptive approach to language issues, over the whole period under study his articles are characterized by an alternation between more or less prescriptive text passages with more or less descriptive text passages, in which Doppagne's corrective attitude is less explicit.⁹ Fifteen articles compiled for the present corpus are book or dictionary

8 See for example Nølke (2009, 2017) for a detailed typology of the different discursive beings, which are also sometimes called *discoursal beings* (Fløttum, Dahl and Kinn, 2006: 38).

9 Following Osthus (2018), the heuristic problem of the distinction between description and prescription in language columns is due to their ambiguous status between

reviews, and twenty-eight articles are followed by a *Boîte aux lettres*, that is a section similar to a letter box in which Doppagne answers questions readers had asked him, a service which he ended in 1970.

3.1. Thirds

The thirds most frequently cited by Doppagne to bolster his argumentation are reference books, that is dictionaries and grammars. The columnist regularly comments on his use of such books, which he presents as standard practice for supporting and properly founding his discourse: “Ouvrons donc nos dictionnaires pour ne pas nous avancer à la légère” (DopChro, 17 February 1965). Doppagne thus uses reference works to strengthen his statements' credibility and to enhance their persuasive force. Although these books' authority is generally implied in the columnist's argumentation, Doppagne also explicitly mentions that they serve as the proof leading him to a given conclusion, for example regarding the legitimacy of a lexical diatopism in usage in the Belgian variety of French¹⁰:

Le recours aux dictionnaires habituels tendrait à nous confirmer qu'il s'agit d'un emploi belge : en effet, ils ne font pas mention de la locution adverbiale *Par après*. Le Littré, dictionnaire plus que centenaire aujourd'hui, la signale, mais à l'article *Par*, simplement pour nous dire que cette locution a vieilli.

Voilà donc un premier point établi : il s'agit d'un archaïsme puisque Littré le considérait déjà comme tel il y a plus d'un siècle.

Deux autres ouvrages vont nous donner plus de précisions. Tout d'abord, dans la gamme des grands dictionnaires, le monumental *Trésor de la langue française* (en cours de publication et dont les sept premiers volumes ont paru) ; comme il s'agit d'un « Dictionnaire de la langue du XIX^e et du XX^e siècle (1789–1960) », nous ne pouvons nous attendre à des exemples de l'époque classique, mais la note que nous y trouvons est très précieuse : « *Vieux, inusité ou régional*. *Par après* (au lieu de l'adverbe employé seul). » (DopChro, 13 January 1981)

“vulgarisation scientifique et purisme, d'une part, et la normativité potentielle du discours linguistique à caractère scientifique lui-même d'autre part” (Osthus, 2018: 25).

10 In our corpus, Doppagne draws on these reference books 182 times, including 57 times (31.3 %) for an assessment of the legitimacy of a word or one of its senses, 51 times (28 %) for semantic information (e.g. the meaning of a little-known word), 30 times (16.5 %) for grammatical information (e.g. the gender of a word), 19 times (10.4 %) to assess the legitimacy of a pronunciation, 14 times (7.7 %) to provide historical data (e.g. the origin of a word) and 11 times (6 %) to be able to supply spelling-related information.

Insofar as Doppagne cites an entry from a dictionary (here, e.g., the *Trésor de la langue française*), his argumentation takes the shape of reasoning from authority. According to Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004: 133), this is generally the case of the discursive beings that constitute thirds, given that they are always presented as real-world entities that have genuinely asserted a given proposition. Reasoning from authority also includes cases where the speaker merely establishes a link of responsibility between a proposition and a third which is invoked as proof in support of this proposition (here, e.g., the *Littré*).

Aside from his *Boîte aux lettres*, Doppagne rarely refers to only one reference book to support his argumentation. Instead, he cites certain grammars (in particular Maurice Grevisse's *Le Bon usage*) and a myriad of dictionaries, ranging from general dictionaries published in France to rather specialized ones, such as Belgian corrective dictionaries or dictionaries of synonyms. While Doppagne primarily draws on the most recent editions of these works, he also makes reference to research he has done in older editions.¹¹ In doing so, he strives to highlight overlaps and discrepancies between different books and presents them as very heterogeneous works which, given that they have specific and distinct purposes, do not necessarily have to provide a satisfactory answer to every problem. In other words, a dictionary or grammar is not automatically an authority in itself, but rather lends variable support depending on the needs and contexts at hand: "On a vite dit: 'Ce mot, cette expression, ces mots ne sont pas au dictionnaire!'. Je réplique par une question: Quel dictionnaire?" (DopChro, 18 June 1969). Contrary to what Remysen (2013: 543) has observed for example in the case of Quebec columnist Étienne Blanchard, Doppagne is against the idea that reference books are all similar in value and interchangeable:

11 In our corpus, Doppagne mentions 45 different works, 9 of which are cited only once. The reference works that Doppagne deems essential "[p]our une bonne bibliothèque de base" (DopChro, 21 September 1966) include, in 1966, the *Grand Larousse encyclopédique* (1960–1964), the *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (1953–1964) by Paul Robert, the *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française* (1960) by Oscar Bloch and Walter von Wartburg, the *Nouveau dictionnaire étymologique et historique* (1964) by Albert Dauzat, Henri Mitterand and Jean Dubois, the *Dictionnaire des difficultés grammaticales et lexicologiques* by Joseph Hanse, *Le Bon usage* (1964) by Maurice Grevisse, the *Dictionnaire de la prononciation française* (1962) by Léon Warnant and the *Dictionnaire liégeois* (1933) by Jean Haust. For an exhaustive overview of reference books cited by Doppagne, see Bourgeois (1981), De Coster (1981), Deroo (1981), Piccavet (1980), Poorters (1982) and Terry (1980).

Si le substantiel [*sic*] *distanciation* est généralement admis dans les colonnes des dictionnaires récents, nous notons une réticence assez nette à l'endroit du verbe. C'est ainsi que nous observons que le *Lexis* (1976) et la dernière édition du *Petit Robert* (1977) donnent aussi bien *se distancier* que *distanciation*, mais que le *Grand Larousse de la langue française* (vol. 2, 1972) et le *Dictionnaire des mots nouveaux* (1971) citent tout à l'heure signalent le nom, mais pas le verbe. (DopChro, 7 March 1978)

Doppagne, aware of the fact that readers all too easily build up the authority of dictionaries and grammars in their imagination, contents himself with questioning their content and regularly noting their limitations. For instance, in one *Boîte aux lettres*, he answers that “[l]es meilleurs ouvrages ont leurs défaillances. Un dictionnaire, en particulier, a cette tâche ingrate d’informer sur tout; de là d’inévitables erreurs que des éditions successives se doivent d’éliminer” (DopChro, 29 November 1967). Challenging reference works, also a commonplace practice in other language columns (see for instance Meier (2019) for Belgium and Remysen (2013) and Tremblay-Desrochers (2014) for Quebec), also enables Doppagne to present himself as a philologist with a high degree of specialized knowledge in linguistic sciences, and in doing so, to project an authoritative voice. In the following example, this self-presentation takes the shape of polyphonic authority and can be seen in the use of the negation *ne . . . plus*, which is furthermore incorporated into an exclamative sentence that imitates a rather spoken style. According to Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004: 143), negation is a polyphonic marker that contributes to manifesting the discursive presence of the speaker, who can in this manner reposition himself with respect to others (in this case, with respect to the lexicographers of the *Nouveau petit Larousse*) by rejecting their statements (see also Fløttum, Dahl and Kinn, 2006: 251):

Pour répondre à un correspondant indigné, ou tout au moins inquiet, j'ouvre la dernière édition (qui vient de sortir de presse) du *Nouveau petit Larousse* (1969) au mot *Nigérien* et je lis : « Habitant du Niger ou du Nigeria ».

Alors là, vraiment, cela ne va plus ! Comment voulons-nous nous faire entendre clairement si les habitants de deux pays voisins mais bien distincts portent le même nom ? (DopChro, 27 November 1968)

Aside from the presumed inconsistencies he spots in the microstructure of book entries in terms of the formal and semantic characteristics of a given usage and the illustrative examples chosen, Doppagne sometimes takes issue with the descriptions he finds within these works, owing to his conservative if not puristic attitude. He frequently criticizes these works as being too quick to follow the usage and too open to incorporating neologisms. This way of his self-presenting as someone who has both the ability to analyze reference

works' content with regard to very recent linguistic changes, and the legitimacy to challenge the acceptance of these new usages, enables Doppagne to set forth his own language conceptions, and in so doing to establish his own epistemic authority. This observation echoes Remysen (2013: 538) in his discussion of Étienne Blanchard as someone who “se présente comme un arbitre, seule personne en mesure de bien interpréter ‘le’ dictionnaire”:

Dans cette évolution rapide de notre langue, je regrette vivement que les dictionnaires contemporains se montrent si pressés d'éliminer la locution *en sortir au profit de s'en sortir* qui, selon moi, en dit trop ou trop peu.¹²

Le *Dictionnaire du français contemporain* signale les deux expressions mais ne cite d'exemples que pour la plus évoluée : *s'en sortir*. (DopChro, 27 November 1968)

Besides reference books, Doppagne, albeit less often, introduces the voices of a group of people he usually invokes as proof to support his argumentation. This is the case of other language columnists (e.g. Maurice Grevisse and his *Problèmes de langage*¹³), academicians (e.g. Maurice Genevoix, Perpetual Secretary of the *Académie française*), linguists (e.g. Georges Gougenheim) and, to a lesser extent, representatives of secondary education, especially schoolteachers who had published grammars (e.g. René GeorGIN). These individuals are presented as “spécialiste[s] du français” (DopChro, 22 February 1967) and “grands savants” (DopChro, 24 August 1966) next to whom other speakers of French are merely “amateurs de grammaire, de langage et d'histoire de la langue” (DopChro, 22 February 1967). Doppagne thus sets up a rather rigid dichotomy between purported language experts and non-experts, the former of whom, in his view, work primarily in university and institutional contexts.¹⁴ In his column, Doppagne often introduces their points of view in the form of summaries of books or collections they have just published. In these reviews, the columnist not only relates their statements, but confirms them and regularly supplements them with his own observations. Doppagne thus uses these summaries in a reasoning from authority to give his own observations greater clout,

12 We will revisit self-allusion (for example, in this excerpt, the phrase *je regrette vivement que* and *selon moi*) as a clue of an argument from authority in Section 3.3.

13 The volumes *Problèmes de langage* (1961–1970) bring together articles from the language column “Propos sur la langue française” published by Grevisse in *La Libre Belgique* between 1955 and 1966 (see also Lieber, 1986, 1990).

14 For a critical discussion of the controversial distinction between language experts and non-experts and between linguists and non-linguists, see for example Visser (2018).

as in the example of his review of a book entitled *Français populaire* (1965) by the French linguist Pierre Guiraud:

Pierre Guiraud s'attache à dégager en dehors des règles de la grammaire savante et scolaire, les lois qui régissent le français.

Le français populaire, lentement mais sûrement, s'introduit dans le parler bourgeois et ce qui était une faute hier est admis ou toléré aujourd'hui, ce qui est une faute, aujourd'hui, ne le sera peut-être plus demain.

Signalons, à titre d'exemples, quelques tendances.

Pour le genre des substantifs, l'auteur décèle une orientation très nette à faire des féminins des substantifs qui commencent par une voyelle (*entrecôte*, d'abord masculin, a fini par imposer son genre féminin d'origine populaire ; voyez le cas du mot *athénée* en Belgique) ; même tendance vers le féminin pour les noms qui se terminent par un e muet ou même une consonne prononcée (*une grosse légume, de la belle ouvrage, de la bonne air. . .*).

L'attribut a tendance à rester invariable. Je l'ai noté souvent en Belgique et, en particulier, pour l'adjectif *sec* : *elle est sec* au lieu de *elle est sèche*. (DopChro, 19 January 1966)

Although Doppagne generally uses book reviews to promote the expertise of the cited authors and to express his agreement with their work, he also, when applicable, notes when his opinions go against some parts of the commented-upon texts, thus once again showcasing his own voice as an epistemic authority. For example, in the excerpt below, drawn from his review of the book *Les Mots trompeurs ou le délire verbal* (1970) by a language columnist for the French daily newspaper *Le Monde* named Robert Le Bidois, the argumentation takes the shape of polyphonic authority given that Doppagne's point of view is shown but not asserted. This showing manifests, first, in the use of the adversarial-concessive connector *mais*, a polyphonic marker (Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004: 144) by which the speaker indicates that he does not reject another person's point of view *per se*, but does not approve of it in all contexts (Fløttum, Dahl and Kinn, 2006: 247). Doppagne also uses the phrase *je pense que*, containing the verb of opinion *penser*, which Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004: 141) consider an indicator of polyphonic authority enabling the speaker to show his or her point of view on a matter that is actualized in a given situation. In the case cited below, Doppagne signals some openness to the use of the neologism *mixité*, primarily for reasons of communicative efficiency, in contrast with the language columnist from *Le Monde*, who tends to categorically reject it:

Robert Le Bidois se demande s'il était « vraiment nécessaire de fabriquer un substantif unique correspondant au groupe *école mixte* ».

Pour la langue courante, non ; mais pour la facilité des pédagogues et des théoriciens de l'enseignement, je pense que oui. *Mixité* correspond au besoin de conceptualisation

qui évite une périphrase concrète et trop longue. On aurait dû avoir « mixtité » : on a reculé devant l'excès de *T* peu harmonieux, et voilà comment un réflexe esthétique peut créer un monstre lexical, *mixité* ! Mais trouvera-t-on autre chose ? (DopChro, 24 November 1970)

For Doppagne, writers – authorities regularly invoked in Belgian language columns (see for instance Meier, 2019) and in Quebec language columns (see e.g. Remysen 2009) – play only a minor role, especially in comparison to reference books and the earlier-mentioned purported specialists of the French language. Whereas the columnist invokes a multitude of writers from all different eras to legitimize his statements based on a reasoning from authority, sometimes simply by taking up illustrative examples by classic authors that he finds in reference books, Doppagne refers to them much less than other Belgian columnists, most notably Grevisse (see e.g. Piccavet, 1980: 117).¹⁵ To the contrary, Doppagne enjoys regularly deconstructing the writers' role as linguistic models, showing his readers that authors do not always sufficiently master language rules – and not just contemporary writers, whom he considers all the more as vectors of overly familiar usage, but older authors as well. In fact, one can often observe the paradox of Doppagne invoking writers as authorities to support an argumentation that precisely serves, among other things, to challenge the prestige that some authors seem to enjoy in the language domain.

Le glissement analogique est parfois plus insidieux. *Agonir, verbe rare, est tellement voisin d'agoniser par sa forme, que de grands écrivains, Maupassant, par exemple, ont confondu l'imparfait d'agoniser avec celui d'agonir. Agoniser fait très régulièrement il agonisait; agonir, se conjugue comme finir et doit faire il agonissait tout comme il finissait.* (DopChro, 1 Novembre 1977)

Instead of evoking individual thirds, Doppagne sometimes also leverages collective thirds to reinforce his points of view. In other words, the columnist creates a link of responsibility between a proposition and a collective which stands as an authority and which is generally represented by the personal pronoun *on*. In this case, the columnist refers to an “unlimited” community (see Fløttum, Dahl and Kinn, 2006: 247) in which each French speaker appears

15 In our corpus, Doppagne cites 33 authors, 18 of whom are mentioned less than twice and only four, more than five times (Molière, La Fontaine, Jules Romain and Boileau). Among other things, Doppagne first and foremost makes reference to writers in providing etymological and semantic information.

capable, for example based on their personal experiences with the French language, to confirm the validity of Doppagne's argumentation. The columnist thus presents a "collectif hétérogène" (Nølke, 2017: 67) of which each member is potentially discernible and responsible for the evoked point of view. This in turn, rhetorically speaking, contributes to making Doppagne's assertions more convincing to his readers, whom the columnist can mobilize – with different degrees of directness – in his discourse (e.g. with the imperative *songez* in the following example):

En français, on ne le sait que trop, le problème des consonnes doubles est un point difficile. A qui n'arrive-t-il jamais de douter de l'orthographe de tel ou tel mot (songez à honneur, et honorer, à résonner et résonance, à consonne et consonance, etc.) ?

Faut-il croire à quelque tendance hallucinatoire en rapport avec la signification du mot pour rendre compte de fautes telles que le redoublement du T dans *éclatement* ? Avec deux T, évidemment, cela paraît plus expressif ! (DopChro, 21 July 1970)

3.2. Readers

Besides being addressed as part of an unlimited collective third, readers are also explicitly presented as authorities themselves. In these scenarios, the argumentation is based on Doppagne's non-dialogical interaction with the addressees of his texts,¹⁶ the premise being that the columnist convinces them of his views by getting them to state the opinions in question (see Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004: 137). This introduction of their voice is especially pronounced in contexts where Doppagne refers to correspondence he has received in the past. Insofar as the columnist reproduces, to varying degrees of exactitude, the assertions made by his readers in the past, the argumentation takes the shape of reasoning from authority. To bolster his point of view, Doppagne constructs an image of his readers as real-world beings, in other words, as people who, in keeping with Nølke (2017: 66), exist outside the article, outside the language column in which they are invoked as authorities. However, in the column, these readers always remain relatively anonymous and are very dispersed across time and space, as is typical of the communication situation in the written press (see Bell, 1991: 85). In the following example, Doppagne alludes to the reserved attitude many of

16 In the written press, writer-reader dialogues constitute a "mediated quasi-interaction" (Thompson, 1995: 84) in which readers are unable to intervene in the writing of articles and the writers do not have immediate access to readers' reactions to their texts (see Meier, 2017: 82).

his readers have witnessed when it comes to the use of a new formulation in correspondence. His aim is to justify his own negative assessment, which is, furthermore, supported by a reference to a professed specialist on the French language, René GeorGIN.

Que de fois n'avons-nous pas l'occasion de lire, surtout dans la correspondance commerciale, cette formule souvent initiale : *Suite à votre lettre du 15 courant, nous avons l'avantage de vous faire savoir que...*

Plusieurs de mes correspondants et lecteurs s'en inquiètent, à juste titre, et me demandent ce qu'il faut penser de cette façon d'écrire qui tend à se répandre.

Je ne serai pas le premier à me prononcer contre ce tour (*suite à*) qui menace de se tailler une place dans la liste des locutions prépositives. Mon honoré confrère René GeorGIN s'est plusieurs fois courroucé à ce sujet. (DopChro, 23 October 1969)

Doppagne also presents his readers as discursive beings with whom he interacts during the enunciative act, as he writes his articles. In this case, the argumentation is based on a link of responsibility between a point of view and the representation of the readership as a heterogeneous group of people who, consistent with Nølke (2017: 66), exist only in this specific enunciative situation. Insofar as Doppagne does not refer to concrete assertions made by his readers, but only simulates their opinions, for example with the parenthetical proposition *vous en conviendrez* in the example below, the argumentation takes the shape of polyphonic authority (see Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004: 138). Similar to collective thirds, Doppagne implies that his point of view is part of a common base of knowledge he shares with all his readers, and should therefore be credible and convincing.

A propos du terme *échidnés* qui, vous en conviendrez, n'est pas des plus courants, l'Académie, après l'avoir signalé comme nom masculin [*sic*] pluriel, et défini comme « Genre de mammifères de la famille des Edentés (...) dont le corps est couvert de piquants », ajoute judicieusement : « Il peut s'employer au singulier pour désigner tel ou tel animal de ce genre ». (DopChro, 7 August 1979)

Even if Doppagne sometimes invokes his readers as proof in support of a thesis, he does not necessarily regard them as legitimate authorities on language matters. To the contrary, as we have seen, his readers are considered “pauvres usagers” (DopChro, 26 May 1970) of the language, whose voices Doppagne mainly uses to carry some of the burden of responsibility for the content of his column. Taking readers' voices into account is thus primarily a discursive strategy employed by the columnist to boost the persuasive force of his statements.

3.3. Doppagne

As discussed earlier, Doppagne gives himself epistemic authority by regularly rejecting the statements of thirds, in particular those who enjoy some renown in language matters, for example reference works. To strengthen his image of authority, Doppagne also employs other discursive strategies, including the possibility of justifying his views based on the fact that he is their source. In other words, Doppagne constructs representations of himself as someone with epistemic authority by self-allusively basing himself on things he concretely said or thought in the past. Once more following on Nølke (2017: 63), it can be said that Doppagne creates an image of himself as a real-world being who speaks using the *je*¹⁷ and who is located outside the moment of enunciation. The argumentation then takes the shape of reasoning from authority (see Nølke, Fløttum and Norén, 2004: 140) in which the speaker duplicates himself (see Perrin, 2000: 99). In “La chronique du langage”, this self-allusion is especially pronounced in contexts where the columnist assigns himself the role of a language expert who implicitly assumes a high posture with respect to his readers, sharing with them his own lived experiences. For example, in the following excerpt, Doppagne presents himself as a privileged observer of the French language who is giving an account of his participation in conferences seeking to defend French and bringing together not only language experts, but also people from the political world. The strength and the credibility of the presented knowledge derives thus from the special character of Doppagne's epistemic access to this knowledge, which is based on a first-hand experience (along these lines see Pomerantz, 1984). Consistent with Perrin (2004: 104), the phrase *J'ai fait cette constatation qui ne m'a pas trop surpris* reveals self-allusion by the columnist, who creates a link of responsibility between himself and the observation that the pronunciation of the name of Senegalese president Senghor varies depending on the speaker's provenance. Furthermore, to give instruction on the “right” pronunciation, Doppagne can, using his privileged position, offer up first-hand information, thus putting into action a second argument of

17 If Doppagne most often uses the first person pronoun *je* to make himself visible in his articles, the columnist also uses the auctorial or humble *we* (*nous de modestie*), where he refers to himself by means of the plural. The first person pronoun *nous* is especially frequent in metatextual comments such as the following: “Malgré la perte de qualité que nous avons soulignée, la partie était bien gagnée pour le latin lorsque, de l'Est et du Nord, survinrent en masse des peuplades germaniques qui envahirent l'ancienne Gaule” (DopChro, 30 November 1966).

authority, this time hetero-allusive, when he bases himself on the words of the president's nephew:

La récente Biennale de la langue française a fourni maintes occasions de parler des pays francophones et des promoteurs du français dans certains pays d'Afrique. Rien d'étonnant qu'on ait fait allusion à Léopold Senghor, président du Sénégal.

J'ai fait cette constatation qui ne m'a pas trop surpris : les Français disaient tous, ou à peu près tous : *Singor*. Les Belges étaient à peu près unanimes pour prononcer *Sangor*!

Le hasard me servait à souhait : le président avait délégué son neveu à la Biennale et, au cours d'une réception, j'ai demandé à celui-ci comment son nom était prononcé au Sénégal, comment le président et sa famille disaient.

– Nous disons *Singor*, me fut-il répondu dans le meilleur des français. [. . .] Nous dirons donc *Singor* plutôt que *Sangor*. (DopChro, 19 November 1969)

Another role Doppagne regularly gives himself is that of a university professor vouching for the truthfulness of his assertions and opinions, that is presenting a professional status that provides him with some social renown and intellectual legitimacy with respect to his readership.¹⁸ In other words, Doppagne brings into play a form of shown authority (*autorité montrée*, see Plantin, 1996) which further reinforces his argumentation when he self-allusively refers to his experience. This can be seen in the following excerpt, where he invokes his many years of experience as a marker of student texts to conclude, via self-allusive reasoning from authority, that the written form of the voiceless alveolar sibilant [s] is often a source of difficulties. The underlined passage below condenses observations Doppagne made in the past and that he is now using to emphasize the credibility of his statement.

Il m'a été donné de corriger un assez grand nombre de dissertations de jeunes gens qui frappent à la porte des hautes écoles et, spécialement, d'une faculté des plus exigeantes quant à la qualité intellectuelle de ceux qu'elle admet.

J'en ai profité pour noter les fautes qui étaient le plus fréquemment commises, d'autres aussi qui me frappaient par leur caractère inattendu. [. . .]

Le français dispose d'un grand nombre de façons de traduire par écrit le son de la consonne sifflante S (S, SS, SC, C, Ç, T, X...) J'ai noté des fautes pour la figuration de ce phonème dans les mots suivants : *séance, absence, ascension, policé, danse, réticent* (les candidats avaient écrit : « *scéance, absence, ascenssion, polissé, dance, rétissent*).

Le groupe SC dans les mots *séance* et *absence* est une faute extrêmement fréquente et, une fois de plus, je voudrais la clouer au pilori en invitant le plus grand public à bien se

18 It is worth noting that Doppagne always signs off his column with the mention "Albert DOPPAGNE, Professeur à l'U.L.B.". However, Doppagne does not specify that he is not a professor of linguistics at the Université libre de Bruxelles but rather, as we have seen, holder of the Chair of European Arts and Traditions.

pénétrer de la bonne forme qui, par bonheur, est aussi la plus simple : *séance* comme *séant* et *soir*, *absence* comme *présence*. (DopChro, 25 January 1967)

Doppagne takes on a professorly role not only when presenting his point of view as coming from the real-world person he is outside his articles, but also when he builds up his image as someone who is writing texts for his column. To this end, Doppagne often uses propositions containing metalinguistic verbs by which he shows his readers that he is addressing an issue he has already discussed, but will now revisit: “Je l’ai dit bien des fois déjà, mais des lecteurs me demandent, et avec insistance, d’y revenir.” (DopChro, 27 October 1970). In keeping with Nølke, Fløttum and Norén (2004: 142), these metalinguistic propositions enable the speaker to indicate that he is certainly responsible for asserting a point of view in the past, but that he is now merely simulating the past assertion of this view at the time of enunciation. Insofar as the point of view is pointed to and not concretely asserted, the argumentation manifests as a form of polyphonic authority, as in the case of the two following examples:

La bonne prononciation d’abord, et je la répète : *frac* et non *frac*, *infarctus*. (DopChro, 25 January 1967)

Distinction sur laquelle j’ai insisté déjà : l’*acception* d’un mot, dans toute l’*acception* du terme ; mais d’autre part: l’*acceptation* d’un marché, l’*acceptation* de conditions particulières, le fait d’accepter. (DopChro, 24 January 1968)

These metalinguistic propositions belong to a rhetoric that is at once prescriptive and ameliorative, in a fashion typical of purist tradition (Paveau and Rosier, 2008: 57). It is in cultivating a discourse on his readers’ insufficient mastery of French that Doppagne gives himself the mandate of improving their knowledge by continually reviewing their purported weaknesses, sometimes adopting an intentionally didactic tone:

Bien des choses ont été dites que l’on me redemande encore . . . Répétons, répétons: c’est le principe de la plus saine des pédagogies. Et puisque c’est mon rôle de le faire, que c’est là ‘mon ouvrage’ [en tant que chroniqueur]. (DopChro, 8 October 1969)

Given this instructive aim, Doppagne’s column assumes a repetitive character insofar as significant circularity can be seen in his treatment of certain language questions that are of special importance to him. One of the most recurrent subjects is the pronunciation of the Belgian capital, Brussels, which Doppagne regularly discusses in the examined corpus (i.e. 22 December 1965, 20 July 1966 and 7 October 1981).¹⁹ In the example cited below, the columnist

19 In our corpus, the other recurrent themes are, for example, his condemnation of the frequent and stable use of the adverbial *par après* (‘par la suite, ensuite’) in the French

doubly presents himself as an epistemic authority. First, the metalinguistic expression *Je ne veux pas revenir sur ce point élémentaire* introduces an argument of polyphonic authority, indicating that the columnist refers to himself while implying that he has already on multiple occasions set forth his point of view about the “proper” pronunciation of Brussels. Second, the passage *j’ai pu remarquer ce détail dont je me suis préoccupé sans tarder* indicates that Doppagne self-allusively refers to concrete observations he made in the past outside the moment of writing his text, while listening to political speeches, thus setting up reasoning from authority (also see Perrin, 2000: 104). The excerpt shows how the two forms of argument from authority can complement each other and boost the persuasive effect of the columnist’s discourse.

Je ne veux pas revenir sur ce point élémentaire : la prononciation traditionnelle, unique et correcte est de dire « Bruxelles », comme on dit, en français, soixante, six, dix et coccyx, en donnant à la lettre X la valeur d’un ou de deux S. Personnellement, je ne prononcerai « Brukselles » que lorsque l’on dira « soiksante » !

Mais il y a autre chose. J’entendais, l’autre jour, des discours officiels prononcés par des autorités nationales et régionales et j’ai pu remarquer ce détail dont je me suis préoccupé sans tarder. Certaines personnes disent correctement Bruxelles en ne faisant pas entendre de son K mais, dans le même discours, parlent des Bruxellois en articulant volontairement et systématiquement un groupe de consonnes KS.
(DopChro, 7 October 1981)

4. Conclusion

In this article, we have seen that Albert Doppagne’s “La chronique du langage” features not only an argumentative dimension consisting of the simple transmission and comparison of different viewpoints on language issues, but also, in many cases, a pronounced argumentative aim insofar as the columnist openly and consciously expresses the need to adhere to the views he adopts on some of these matters.²⁰ To make this argumentative discourse credible and convincing, an important role is given to the argument from authority, which gives Doppagne’s articles a very polyphonic character typical of the language column genre. Although the columnist uses many sources to bolster his

in usage in Belgium (for example 21 September 1966, 26 May 1970, 8 February 1977 and 13 January 1981) and his criticism of the disappearance of the nasal [œ̃] in the French in usage in Paris (for example 30 March 1966, 15 January 1970 and 23 September 1980).

20 Regarding the distinction between argumentative dimension (*dimension argumentative*) and argumentative aim (*visée argumentative*), see Amossy (2000).

statements, not all are accorded the same prestige in Doppagne's articles, a fact that has repercussions on the functioning of the argument from authority. On the one hand, Doppagne invokes sources that he generally assigns little repute in language matters, including his readers, either to simply echo his personal views or to introduce and once more confirm obvious points and generalities that fall under a presumed common knowledge of the French language. On the other, Doppagne primarily bases his argumentation on thirds, such as reference books, purported language experts and, to a lesser extent, writers, whose competence in language matters the columnist recognizes only more or less. This practice enables Doppagne to disseminate specialized language knowledge and to discuss it in greater depth. Nevertheless, the use of these sources is ambiguous inasmuch as Doppagne does not refer to them without reservations, especially when it comes to reference books and writers, and the columnist retains the right to reject the positions of these thirds when they contradict his own knowledge and normative attitudes. Indeed, the columnist judges his views to be more important than those expressed by thirds, enabling him to present himself as a supreme epistemic authority who, as the ultimate recourse, bases himself self-allusively on his own past discourse as a professor and privileged observer of the language. In other words, the relation between the columnist's voice and the others' voices is hierarchical insofar as the columnist has always the dominant voice.

In this case study, it has also been shown that the *ScaPoLine* framework proves to be a useful device to detect the different discursive strategies used by Doppagne to verbalize the argument from authority in his language column, ranging from the explicit presence of the authorities invoked by bibliographical references and citations to their implicit representation by polyphonic markers such as metalinguistic constructions. Doppagne's discourse can thus be considered as a tight network structure of polyphonic interplays in which implicit authority manifestation is interwoven in the explicit one, both of which contribute to the construction of a metadiscourse on language which is conceived as a continuous dialogical process of displaying, contesting and negotiating the points of view of the different voices engaged in Doppagne's argumentation.

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