MIGRATION
LETTERS

The role of family relationships in migration decisions: a reconstruction based on implicit starting points in migrants' justifications

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Abstract

This article integrates the discourse analytical approach of Argumentation theory in the study of international migration, with the aim to study the role of family relationships in migration decisions for international migrants. Argumentation theory studies dialogical exchanges in which participants give reasons to justify their standpoints. In this perspective, interviews with migrants are considered as dialogical exchanges, in which migrants provide accounts of their crucial migration decisions by giving justificatory reasons. By reconstructing these reasons, implicit starting points emerge, in particular endoxa, i.e. participants' personal values and beliefs that are at the basis of their decisions. The reconstruction of implicit endoxa allows a nuanced access to the role of family relationships within migrants' accounts of their decisions.

Keywords: International migration; discourse; argumentation; Endoxa; intimate relationships.

Introduction: studying the *reasons* behind migration strategies

Qualitative micro-approaches to migration permit to focus on individual migrants' stories and *migration strategies* (Eade 2007) and offer a holistic approach to the complexity of aspects involved in individual trajectories (Olwig 2007; Gordon 2008; Conway and Leonard 2014; Erel 2009; De Abreu, O'Sullivan-Lago and Hale 2012). These approaches make it possible to see migration trajectories as depending on migrants' individual and nuanced decisions, as based on *reasons* (goals, desires), going beyond the identification of possible external causes that determine migration[1]. One of the aspects that profits from this kind of approach is the role of *family relationships*. It is well-known from the literature on the new economics of (labour) migration that decisions are made

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[1] If it is true that human decision-making is always constrained by external causes, it is also true that - at least in most cases – migrants also make their own decisions as part of their trajectories, based on the alternatives that they have; in this sense, it is important to focus on how they reconstruct the reasons of their move, including their objectives. This is particularly true for *voluntary* migration; *forced* migration is certainly more constrained by definition, although, in principle, some room for decision-making might remain at least in some cases. In this paper, however, as the discussed data concern voluntary migrants, the focus will be on this form of migration.

"not just by individuals, but also by households and sometimes communities" (Van Hear 2010: 35); however, understanding what different roles family might play and how these roles emerge in the migrants' decision-making processes, requires a more nuanced approach. In fact, family represents sometimes a reason to stay, sometimes a reason to leave; the spectrum of family roles can only be understood by embracing a fine-grained qualitative analysis of the reasons constructed by migrants for their decisions.

This contribution proposes to integrate qualitative micro-approaches to migrants' trajectories with a discursive analysis based on Argumentation theory. An argumentative approach is crucial to unravel the reasons behind migrants' decisions and their implicit starting points (*endoxa*). This paper shows that one can analyse migrants' discursively constructed accounts of family relationships from how they emerge from the justificatory arguments that migrants give when they reconstruct their decisions within in-depth interviews. In argumentation, reason-giving is seen as part of a process of discussion between different interlocutors, as a response to an explicit or projected difference of opinion (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1984). In a research interview, migrants give reasons in front of an interviewer and report reasons they had been giving to themselves or other absent interlocutors (Billig 1996; Greco 2016).

Data and methods: in-depth qualitative interviews to reconstruct migrants' narratives

The data considered in this paper were collected within the project "Migrants in transition: An argumentative perspective"[2]. Data were collected via in-depth qualitative interviews, as it is common in qualitative approaches to migration (Davies and Dwyer 2007). More specifically, the theoretical framework that underlies interviews conducted in this project was taken from sociocultural psychology (Zittoun 2009). Within this perspective, it is important to identify *ruptures* that individuals live, and to study subsequent *transition* processes through which individuals learn to make sense of the rupture and adapt to a new situation by enabling a process of developmental change (Zittoun 2006).

In this project, interviews were conducted with migrant women with children, selected as an *extreme case* (Flyvbjerg 2001: 78-79) of individuals who might have lived ruptures[3]. In fact, migration may involve different ruptures (Kadianaki

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[2] In 2010-2011, 29 interviews have been conducted with migrant women with children in the broader London area. Some of these women fall into the category of expats' wives (Gordon 2008). Others had been moving for reasons linked to their own work or education. Some of them already had a family when they moved to the UK, while some only started a family later. The type of participants selected is particularly apt for studying migrants who made an explicit decision to leave their home country and move abroad.

[3] In Flyvbjerg's (2001: 78) terms, "The *extreme cases* can be well suited for getting a point across in an especially dramatic way" (emphasis in the original).

2010; Hale and De Abreu 2010; Lutz 2013). As noted by De Abreu, O'Sullivan-Lago and Hale (2012: 130), "migration precipitates a re-evaluation of the individual's self-concept, and consequently, identity positions need to shift and adjust" (see also Gillespie, Kadianaki and O'Sullivan-Lago 2012). Mothering in a foreign land may also be seen as a potential source of ruptures (cf. Tummala-Narra 2004, Sigad and Eisikovits 2009).

Because they are migrants *and* mothers, participants to this study count as a possible extreme case, as they are likely to have experienced significant moments of decision-making concerning important ruptures: for example, most of them had to reflect on their decision to expatriate, leaving part of the family behind and raising their children in a foreign land. Also, mothers are a representative case of how families might participate in decisions on migration, because they have to account for their choices in relation to the future of their whole family. This said, however, the rupture of migration and the consequent decision-making process is likely to be present in other categories of migrants; therefore, this paper introduces a method that is applicable to other sets of data.

This project studied the participants' inner dialogue around these crucial decisions (Greco Morasso 2013, Greco 2015, 2016). In comparison to other approaches to ruptures or to migration trajectories, taking into account argumentation permits to focus on the reasons given by migrants for their choices and reconstruct their – partially implicit – starting points, including values, goals and assumptions (called *endoxa*[4]).

Specifically, this paper will focus on *pragmatic argumentation* (or *means-end argumentation*), namely argumentation that connects an action to its goal. In pragmatic argumentation, a decision is justified as it responds to an important goal. In the considered data, it can be expected that all participants will justify their decisions based on specific goals that they were determined to reach. An argumentative analysis of pragmatic argumentation permits to identify the *material starting points* and in particular *endoxa* that are part of the arguers' (implicit) assumptions and values (Greco 2015). In the case of pragmatic

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[4] *Endoxon* (plur. *endoxa*) is an ancient Greek term used by Aristotle as a technical term and reinterpreted within the Argumentum Model of Topics (AMT) for the analysis of arguments (see the discussion in Greco 2015, 2016). For Aristotle, an endoxon is a statement that is accepted as a starting point of a discussion because it is in the common opinion (*doxa*) of the majority of the participants to an argumentative discussion or by the "most important" of them. In the AMT, endoxa are the (factual or evaluative) statements that work as (often implicit) cultural and contextual starting points of argumentation. If, for example, it is 7:30 pm and someone says "You cannot go shopping now, because supermarkets will be closed", this is an acceptable argumentation on most weekdays in Lugano (but not everywhere). In order to accept this argumentation, my interlocutor will need to share the starting point "supermarkets close at 7 pm in Lugano" as a factual endoxon. In the case of migrants' interviews, participants reconstruct their decisions ex-post; in this sense, they construct the accounts of their decisions by constructing the arguments that were persuasive *to them* (not to other people), as they are not trying to persuade someone else. Therefore, in the case of this project, endoxa will reveal how migrants construct their worldviews, values and goals.

argumentation, endoxa include the *goals* of migrants' decisions; and these goals might include a variety of roles of family relationships.

Endoxa and the role(s) of family in migration decisions

The following extracts were selected as they were representative of different roles that family relationships play in migrants' decisions[5]. The first extract is taken from an interview to Mary[6] – a South-African mother of two who had been living in London for about five years at that time (September 2010). At the beginning of the interview, Mary answers to a general question asked by the interviewer about her story. This question includes an inquiry into the reasons why she has moved to the UK. She replies with a detailed explanation of a series of reasons behind her choice. A physiotherapist who has moved to the UK with her husband and a son, Mary had been working long hours in South Africa and she found it hard to balance work and family life. In extract 1, Mary explains that migrating to the UK has meant being able to realize her dreams: starting her own practice as a physiotherapist and still devoting more time to her family, as well as having a second child.

Extract 1[7]

Mary	1	All right ehm: I'm from Cape Town and: I'm physiotherapist (.) and: when we were still living
	2	in Cape Town I already had my son he was born in South Africa (.) I eh: bought my own
	3	practice when I was eighteen years old (.) and obviously when you're then self-employed and (.)
	4	owning your practice you (.) work (.) long hours (.) and (.) you know the family life just wasn't
	5	what I wanted and also (.) you know the opportunity for us to you know have more more
	6	children (.) you know I: said to my husband you know when I'm ( ) I ( ) to take time off (.) and
	7	that was PARTLY (.) you know a reason for us to come my husband and I were in the UK (.)
	8	without children in ninety-eight and ninety-nine just for one year (.) and: and that possibly chose
	9	the UK 'cause it was familiar
I	10	You're both from South Africa
Mary	11	We both are South African (.) I was still registered here to work so it was easy to come here (.)
	12	and I from my previous experience knew that (.) you know even though this certain aspects are
	13	not the same as back home (.) with the (.) visa or (.) that sort of thing ehm (.) they're only
	14	potentially better (.) so I could eh: (.) I think obviously (.) we ca- we came over I was working
	15	for some when we first came but with the intention that (.) I was gonna have another child which
	16	I did (.) and I've been ( ) down to part-time I work three days a week and now I'm actually
	17	working for myself (.) so:: sort of the long-term goal took a while to get it (.) ah but certainly this
	18	type of life encompasses (.) a little bit of ( ) you know and that what ( ) supportive for me was
	19	that spending more life with my family I wanted to work part-time I didn't want to (.) be
	20	working full-time financially struggling and not even seeing my child because somebody was
	21	looking after him and I was getting home at seven o'clock at night so:

[…]

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[5] This means that these short extracts have been selected within the interviews because they show the role that family relationships play within migrants' pragmatic argumentation. Because the scope of the "Migrants in transition" project was broader than the study of family relationships, the interviews also included types of argumentation other than those based on relationships; also, there were non-argumentative parts.

[6] This name, as well as the other participants' names mentioned in this paper, has been changed for reasons of privacy. All identifying information has been removed.

[7] Numeration is relative to each single excerpt. "I" indicates the interviewer's interventions; the interviewer was the principal investigator within this project.

Mary	22	And: (.) you know this would be progressing and moving forward far more than would
	23	have in South Africa as well[8]
I	24	So I mean you came here for a desire for a: for your family basically
Mary	25	That's right (.) also (.) well no there's a (.) sort of ( ) a lot of reasons but certainly
	26	that's PART of it eh (.) and to a lesser degree ah (.) and for other South Africans it
	27	might have been to a greater degree but for us to a lesser degree was the (.) so fact that
	28	we wanted to open the doors for our children (.) because travelling with a South
	29	African passport is very limiting ehm (.) and: you: feel like a criminal (.) when you
	30	pass through the immigration (*laughing*)

Extract 1 shows the complexity of a migrant's decision, as Mary advances different pragmatic *arguments*[9] in support of her implicit *standpoint*[10], which might be reconstructed as: "It has been reasonable to move to the UK". At first (lines 2-7 and then again 15-21), Mary introduces a comparative advantage of living in the UK. Her first argument is that the decision to move to the UK was reasonable because family life is better in the UK. This argument is in turn supported by a subordinative argument[11], which qualifies what "better family life" means: family life is better in the UK because there it has been possible for Mary to have other children and work part-time (and this would have been impossible in South Africa).

Moving to reconstruct implicit premises, the endoxon in the first argument can be formulated as: "For us, an important goal is to live a better life than in South Africa". This endoxon is associated with a factual premise, which is explicitly told by Mary during the interview (turns 3-6), namely that life in the UK is better than it was in South Africa. Now, if one takes into account a general principle of pragmatic argumentation, namely that "a decision is reasonable if it allows to fulfil an important goal"; this principle, combined with the endoxon and factual premise, brings to the conclusion that moving to the UK was reasonable for Mary and her family. The endoxon grounds the decision in

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[8] For reasons of space, I deleted a portion of text in which Mary elaborates more on how her career and her husband's prospects have been flourishing in the UK. When she says "this would be progressing and moving forward far more than would have in South Africa as well" at lines 24-25, she is referring to their careers.

[9] In terms of Argumentation theory, arguments correspond to the justificatory reasons constructed in Mary's discourse as a motivation for her choice to leave South Africa and go to the UK.

[10] Implicit endoxa in participant's pragmatic argumentation is the specific focus of this paper; therefore, in the analysis, this is the only aspect that I will be discussing. The extracts are very rich segments of interaction and, as such, they also include a lot of other aspects that could potentially be relevant to understand how participants describe their decisions. To cite but one, I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer, who raised the issue of the importance of *mitigation* and *disclaimers* or *prolepsis* (see Xenitidou and Greco Morasso 2014) in participants' accounts of the reasons for their migration. In extract 1, for example, Mary explicitly defines a hierarchy of reasons. Within this hierarchy, those reasons that have to do with a better family life are prioritized, whilst Mary mitigates her fourth argument, namely access to a UK Passport (see "there are a lot of reasons but certainly that's PART of it", lines 25-26; "and to a lesser degree" (line 26, repeated in line 27) and the mention of "feeling like a criminal" at the border control in lines 29-30). Mitigation is also present to some extent in the following extracts; the analysis of these aspects, as said, is beyond the scope of the present paper; but it would add to the understanding of how participants reconstruct their choices a posteriori.

[11] Subordinative arguments are arguments that back up other arguments.

Mary's personal views and reveals what the important goals are for Mary and her family.

The endoxon of the subordinative argument described above might be formulated as: "An ideal family life enables spending time with your children as well as having as many children as you wish, without being constrained by financial conditions". This endoxon allows us to specify what Mary means under "better family life": having more than one child and not needing to work long hours to survive. Notably, both endoxa contain a reference to Mary's family: in this sense, migration is constructed as a means to reach a goal that has to do with a better family life. It is important to say that these endoxa are specific to Mary and her family; other families might have different goals or a different idea of what it means to have a good family life, as it will become clear in the extracts below. Methodologically, the reconstruction of endoxa permits a fine-grained view of the goals of *each individual migrant* and of her interpretation of what family life is.

Family relationships are also present in an argument advances at lines 22-23, whose endoxon can be reconstructed as "having a better career than in South Africa is an important goal for both Mary and her husband". Likewise, lines 25-30 also include an argument focused on family relationships, in this case children (endoxon: "making life easier for children is an important goal").

In Extract 2, Rathindra from India answers to the interviewer's question (lines 1 and 3) and explains why she wants to go back to India at some point. Rathindra moved to London to study. Later, she got married and had a child. In turn 1, the interviewer elaborates on a previous statement by Rathindra and asks her to confirm that she wishes to go back to India on the long run.

Extract 2

I	1	So you: on the long run you [want to go back
Rathindra	2	[want to go back yes
I	3	And may I ask you WHY for that
Rathindra	4	Mmh (.) quite a few reasons actually one is that (.) while I like it here (.)
	5	because I DO have lots of friends I have some family also and I think London is
	6	a very multicultural city so I really enjoy that (.) h but I do feel homesick (.) I: so
	7	there's some something I feel about India I want to go back to India (.) I also
	8	have a huge family there in the sense of (.) uncles aunts cousins and I want my
	9	daughter to enjoy that I want my daughter to grow up (.) with everyone rather
	10	than grow up alone here ( )

Rathindra justifies her intention to go back to India before her daughter reaches school age[12]. This argumentation is based on an opposition between London

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[12] I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer who made this point.

and India. At the beginning of her answer (lines 4-6), Rahtindra gives reasons why she is happy in London (she says – emphatically – that she has a lot of friends and some family; and that London is very multicultural and she enjoys that). All these positive aspects could be seen as a prolepsis (or disclaimer), i.e. an anticipation of a possible objection from the interviewer (cf. Xenitidou and Greco Morasso 2014). As opposed to this positive construction of London, then Rathindra gives reasons to go back to India that are constructed as more important: she says that she feels homesick (line 6) and wants to go back in order for her and her daughter to enjoy her "huge" family (lines 8-10)[13]. The endoxon implicitly evoked by Rathindra includes the fact that enjoying a broad family is important both for her and her daughter, who should not "grow up alone" (line 10). In the following of the interview, Rathindra pictures the scenario of her daughter growing up without company: "…but always here she would not have she'll have friends but she will not have family around her (.) so: when she comes back I know she will be (.) on her own (.) she'll have to (.) be on her own (.) and: amuse herself on her own (.) whereas in India she would have company". Notably, Rathindra's daughter currently lives together with her father and mother: she is said to be alone because she does not have her broader family around. This endoxon reveals Rathindra's own view of family relationships, which includes not only her husband and daughter but also her extended family.

Extract 3 presents the case of Amanda, who moved to the UK more than 20 years earlier in order to find a job. She is a mother of four, recently separated from her husband, and she is now considering the possibility to go back to her village in Ireland. One of the reasons for this move would be joining her parents and her siblings, who have all remained in the village. More specifically, childcare is one of the reasons why she would like to go back to her hometown (lines 8-9); but she also wants to help her ageing parents (lines 5-6). In this sense, her endoxa include inter-generational relationships.

Extract 3

Amanda	1	Ah so: eh my parents are relatively old as well (.) so I'm partly looking at the fact that
	2	(.) they will need help as they get older so: (.) and I don't have any family here so I'm
	3	here with four children on my own so ( ) it makes sense instead of having a mortgage
	4	here and juggling childcare (.) I can go to Ireland and have no mortgage (.) have no
	5	childcare wouldn't
I	6	Yes=

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[13] In a different perspective, as Xenitidou and Greco Morasso (2014) show, parental positioning (talking as parent) and talking about children might also be a way to voice strong views. In this specific case, saying that one wants to leave the country where she has been welcome might be seen as a strong view that needs mitigation. In this perspective, Rathindra would first say that she likes it in London and then mobilize talk about her daughter to disclaim why she still wants to go back. For the purposes of this paper, in any case, Rathindra's endoxa as mobilized in the interview show the high importance she attributes to her extended family as a value that her daughter should not be missing.

Amanda	7	=be easier↑
I	8	You have still family apart [from
Amanda	9	[All my family is there (.) my sisters yeah (.) my brother are all married and they've all stayed within (.) the village

In some cases, migration seems to be motivated by the wish to move away from a relationship. This might be because a relationship is acknowledged as negative (extract 4) or even just because detachment is seen as a cure to restore a relationship that is not going well (extract 5).

Extract 4

Kate	1	( ) ah (.) so I came here to: basically to work ah it
	2	was a last minute I was in a relationship which I just thought wasn't really going
	3	anywhere and I decided (.) it was easier to leave the country than to leave the
	4	relationship
I	5	Ah okay
Kate	6	Yes so I d- made the decision two months previous ah previously to leaving and you
	7	know I told (.) told to a lot of people that I was going so that I would feel forced to go
	8	yeah yeah and my sister already came over (.) about a year beforehand (.) ah: so she ( )
	9	most of my friends as I said had done it already had this experience before (.) and they
	10	were already back to New Zealand (.) a lot of them were married ( ) and I decided to
	11	yeah so

Kate is a mother of two from New Zealand. Originally, she moved to London as a temporary arrangement; then she changed her migration strategy when she married a man of English descent. As made clear in extract 4, moving was a means to break a relationship that she deemed negative but still was unable to break while staying in New Zealand (lines 3-4). This pragmatic argumentation involves an endoxon that can be formulated as "breaking a negative relationship is an important goal" and migration is seen as a means to achieve this goal. In this sense, there is a conscious strategy of enabling a geographical rupture to achieve another rupture in the sphere of family relationships.

In extract 5, a migration decision is made in order to (temporarily) break a difficult relationship; but this is done in order to restore such relationship.

Extract 5

Agatha	1	[…] but the MAIN reason was really (.) learn English (.) and running away from home
	2	*(laughing)* because I was quite a rebellious child and my mum specially my mum she
	3	couldn't handle me so (.) I: said to myself I had enough I just wanna go somewhere (.)
	4	and I knew (.) it's gonna be England or America so: [that was the reason I came

[…]

Agatha	5	and: so it was quite (.) I guess (.) a relief for her as well because (.) as she said to me
	6	you know you're black sheep of the family they thought eh: everywhere I went it was a
	7	trouble (.) you know so (.) that's why I came here and and my relationship gradually
	8	improved (.) and you know she's my best friend now (.) but but I think
	9	that is (.) being mature as well though:

Agatha uses migration as a means to allow herself to detach from a family relationship, namely the relationship with her mother (lines 1-3; 5-7). This is not because the relation is negative per se; only, Agatha needed to detach from her mother who "couldn't handle" her (line 3) but now is her "best friend" (line 8). In this case, migration is reconstructed as a means to restore a difficult relationship by means of detachment; the endoxon ("restoring a positive relationship that is in a moment of difficulty is an important goal") reveals a positive view of family relationships and, especially, of the relationship between mother and child. The detachment enabled by migration is seen as a possible cure for a temporarily negative status of this relationship.

Discussion and conclusions

Pragmatic argumentation is central to decision-making processes, especially in the case of crucial decisions that involve ruptures, such as leaving one's country to settle abroad. By closely analysing material starting points – in particular the endoxa implicitly evoked in migrant mothers' pragmatic argumentation – it has been possible to retrace quite different roles of family relationships. As argued in section 2, endoxa include the basic knowledge and value assumptions of participants, thus revealing their worldview, goals, and their concrete starting points in their decisions. Table 2 proposes a synoptic view of the findings, including the participants, the type of decision and, most importantly, how family relationships were part of the goals, as emerged from the endoxa. In this complex and variegated picture, whilst migration is seen as a means to achieve important goals, family relationships emerge as part of the participant's goals in different ways: one might decide to leave for giving a better life to her children, or to restore a damaged relationship with her parents. Sometimes, migration can represent an inter-generational project, as in the case of Rathindra, who wants to go back to India in order to give her daughter the possibility to enjoy her extended family, including cousins and grandparents; or in the case of Amanda, who wants to help her ageing parents whilst receiving help for childcare.

Table 1: Synoptic table of pragmatic argumentation in which different roles of family relationships emerge

Participant	Type of migration decision	Goals that include family relationship (as it appears in the endoxa)
Mary	Moving to the UK	Having a better family life, having more children. Making children's life easier by getting UK citizenship
Rathindra	Going back to India	Enjoying family. Letting her daughter enjoy family and not grow up alone
Amanda	Going back to Ireland	Helping ageing parents. Being helped with childcare
Kate	Moving to the UK	Breaking a relationship that was not going anywhere and was otherwise difficult to break
Agatha	Moving to the UK	Detaching from a relationship that was difficult. Restoring that relationship

Analysing pragmatic argumentation shows that migration can be seen as a means for different goals and these goals concern not only the person but also her family. It could be argued that family relationships are of utmost importance in the specific case of migrant women with children; in this sense, the presence of endoxa including families might potentially be higher than in other types of participants. This said, the main aim of this paper has been to introduce a method, which could potentially be extended to other categories of migrants. In fact, the argumentative reconstruction of endoxa has proven important to get a fine-grained view of the different goals within migrants' trajectories, starting from the accounts they give in their discourse.

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Transcription conventions

Sign	Explanation
Eh:	Lengthening of preceding vowel is indicated by colons
A::nd	Longer lengthening of preceding vowel
(.)	Pause of one second or less
(3)	Pause of more than one second (the duration in seconds is indicated)
↑	Rising intonation (questions)
/	Slightly rising intonation (suspension)
↓	Falling intonation (exclamations)
YOU SHOULD	Majuscules indicate emphasis
(looking at T)	Relevant non-verbal elements and actions are indicated in italic inter brackets
[…]	Omitted from transcription
( )	Inaudible/incomprehensible