

To Antonio ZAMPOLLI

Bernard Quemada

The loss of Antonio Zampolli has dismayed all his friends and those who worked with him, as well as the whole community of researchers in Natural Language Processing. Their own debt adds up to that of his collaborators at the Institute of Computational Linguistics in Pisa, whom he accompanied and supported without respite. His personality and his actions have had international repercussions and they have deeply marked the multidisciplinary field of computational linguistics.

His qualities as a leader, acknowledged all over the world, should not hide the decisive role that he played in promoting computational philology and computational linguistics, at their early start in Europe. None but him has been as active in all the key steps of their development. Without measuring his effort, he and his collaborators have placed themselves at the *avant-garde* of the most innovative research directions, making every effort to respond positively to all requests, often at the expense of his own work. The achievements of his laboratory and the responsibilities that he successfully took on as the leader of several international associations, made of him a remarkable defender of the strategic stakes for Language Industries in the Information Society. He has been listened to and heard by his government and by the European authorities. Without him, many national and multilateral projects would not have been launched and ELRA, as we know it today, would not exist in its current form.

After Padre Busa, Zampolli appeared as a leader for promoting electronic text processing, taking particular care in developing and sharing knowledge and resources. In this respect, his trajectory speaks for itself. More than any other academics of his generation, he has experienced the scientific and technologic mutations that took place in half a century of progress and he mastered the corresponding knowledge in philology, linguistics and computer science. His analysis of the *Summa* in Gallarate, the use of statistical approaches for his PhD in the humanities, his participation to the Crusca's electronic corpora had made him familiar with the production of text data and the best technical solutions to design them. Indeed, he maintained a large number of fruitful contacts world-wide, especially across the Atlantic. As soon as he took on his first responsibilities, he grappled with the issue of the high costs of electronic resources: he recommended cooperation for data production; he promoted an exchange policy for reusing them; he also defended the wide dissemination of efficient standards. All those tracks remain today of primary importance.

His links with IBM in Pisa, and then his joining the CNUCE (National Academic Centre for Computation) where he benefited from powerful means, made him share the concrete and realistic point of view of engineers. He was the first one to teach computational linguistics in an Italian faculty of arts, while he has always considered industrial and strategic needs, which often escape the attention of specialists in humanities.

Without sparing his forces, he made of Pisa the main focus point in the Old World for what concerns applications of Natural Language Processing. The Summer Schools that he organised during the 70's, which gathered trainees and teachers from all over the world, were received with great success. The Conferences, where he used to invite the best specialists, have turned out to be milestones in the evolution of the domain; they have initiated meaningful innovations and gave a decisive momentum to the use of corpora and terminological data. Indefatigable missionary, he roamed the world as much to gather information as to disseminate it. In the numerous international meetings which he participated in, his interventions were never left unnoticed and he personally contributed to the creation

and the functioning of international bodies, at the head of which he took important responsibilities with competence and authority. The series of LREC conferences are the last events to which he attached his name. Their success, for which he was rightfully proud, proves the validity of the options which guided his activities in the past decades.

As a matter of fact, he was particularly talented in succeeding. As a genuine Italian, he combined a subtle spirit and a sense of geometry, two features which French people tend to oppose when defining personalities. As an engineer in linguistics and an ingenuous linguist, he had developed a rare ability in understanding the key points, in knowing the directions to take and in identifying the transformations which had to be conducted, without forgetting to mention the swiftness with which he was able to take advantage of favourable opportunities. All of this, with a lot of rashness in his personality, moderated by even more anxiety.

Beside this image of a specialist, we will keep alive in our mind the image of the sturdy climber, nostalgic for his dear « mountains »; the table companion who would read the hands of his neighbours with as much psychology as cleverness; the colleague who was able to liven up farewell evenings as no one else, with talent and energy. A strong and engaging personality, rich and contrasted or even contradictory, sometimes mature, sometimes childlike, self-assured or apprehensive, serious or humorous, but always a generous, loyal and faithful friend... It is our turn to keep him faithfully in our memories.

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