

Obituary

Antonio Zampolli 1937–2003

Antonio Zampolli died in a tragic fire in his home in Pisa on 22 August 2003. Zampolli had been a leading figure in the ALLC ever since the Association began. He was a member of the first committee and, having served several terms on the committee, in 1983 he became the Association's President and 'father-figure' and remained in that role until his untimely death.

Zampolli started his career as a research assistant on Father Busa's monumental project on the Index Thomisticus, and, although his career soon developed to concentrate more on computational linguistics, he never abandoned his interest and support of literary and humanities computing. He and his group in Pisa took a leading role in applying computational linguistics methodologies to humanities texts and he was one of very few people who could see the full implications of applying techniques such as morphological analysis, lemmatization, and retrieval using lexical databases to humanities source material. He was also fully aware of the limitations of these tools and he and his group continued to strive for better technologies.

He took every opportunity to promote the relevance of computational linguistics to literary and humanities computing. The convergence of the two was the subject of a plenary presentation by Zampolli and his colleague Nicoletta Calzolari at the conference on computing in the humanities organized by Ian Lancashire in Toronto in 1989. This paper was published in 1991 as 'Lexical databases and textual corpora: A trend of convergence between computational linguistics and literary and linguistic computing' in *Research in Humanities Computing 1* (Oxford University Press) and it contains numerous examples explaining the methodologies and their implications. It was perhaps unfortunate that this unveiling of groundbreaking work in a publication by a prestigious publisher did not attract the attention it deserved from a wider community but it coincided with the beginnings of the World Wide Web and a shift of attention away from the analysis of texts and towards electronic publication.

Overall the Pisa group always seemed to me to be ahead of everyone else in their intellectual thinking and their research. This was largely due to Zampolli and Calzolari who built up a smart team of people with a lot of intellectual curiosity and who were not afraid to admit that some avenue of research had not turned out as well as they had hoped and to backtrack and pursue something else. They were always full of good ideas. It is perhaps a pity that not so much of this was published as widely as it could have been and perhaps also that they were so far ahead of the pack that some people had difficulty understanding what they were doing.

I first met Zampolli at the conference on literary and linguistic computing organized by Roy Wisbey in Cambridge in March 1970. This was the first-ever conference on this theme in the United Kingdom and, although the ALLC was not formed until 1973, the conference brought together an international group who formed the nucleus of what has developed into today's international humanities computing community. At that time Zampolli's English was not good, but everyone there took note of the Italian Professor who sat on the front row and asked many interesting questions.

Zampolli became a full Professor of Mathematical Linguistics in the University of Pisa in 1977. Initially most of the activity of his research group took place in the computing centre CNUCE, but in 1978 he established a separate research centre, the Institute for Computational Linguistics or Istituto di Linguistica Computazionale (ILC). One of Zampolli's many talents was the ability to raise funds and over the years ILC grew to a group of about forty people with up to forty projects running at the same time. For most of this time they were accommodated in a house in the via della Faggiola close to the Leaning Tower in Pisa. They soon outgrew the house—I think I remember seeing seven desks in a room that would be expected to hold no more than two people—and a couple of years or so before his death they finally moved to a new research complex on the outskirts of the city.

Over the years I have participated in many meetings where Zampolli was present. He had a remarkable ability to see the immediate and future consequences of any course of action that was proposed. Even if his attention was mostly concentrated on the many faxes that arrived for him wherever he was, he would interject and give his opinion on what was likely to happen as a result of the course of action. This usually prevented a wrong decision from being made. He would often then propose something else which set the group off in a better direction. On the rare occasions when the topic of discussion was something that he knew little about he would listen hard and file away in his head what he had learnt for future reference. As I grew to know him well I began to appreciate his phenomenal memory. He was never very good at looking after his papers or his filofax (what he called his 'agenda'), but he seemed to be able to remember almost every conversation that he had ever held with anybody. This always helped him predict reactions to any proposed course of action.

Zampolli was largely responsible for the ALLC's participation in the Text Encoding Initiative. He attended the planning meeting organized by Nancy Ide in Poughkeepsie in November 1987. At the end of the meeting when the participants had decided to proceed with the initiative he offered to fund a steering group meeting in Pisa to make detailed plans. Michael Sperberg-McQueen, Nancy Ide, and I joined him for two days and we worked out a more detailed project structure and what we needed to do to apply for money to get started. The two Americans dealt with funding in the US while Zampolli somehow produced funds from various European budgets to support the European editor and European attendance at working groups. Without Zampolli's support the TEI would never have been a truly international initiative and would thus never have gained the widespread acceptability that it did.

Don Walker and Bob Amsler joined the TEI Steering Committee representing the Association for Computational Linguistics and the committee met three or four times a year until the TEI Guidelines were published in 1994. With his acute political skills Zampolli ensured that the net was spread as widely as possible when invitations to participate in the TEI Working Groups were sent out, but he also realized that we needed people who would be willing to work and ensured that we got them on board as well. These meetings were normally held in Chicago or Oxford, but we occasionally met in New Jersey where the ACL representatives were based. Zampolli was always a thoughtful guest when we began to meet in each other's homes and would invariably bring a bottle or two for the host.

Zampolli was also actively involved in the TEI's transition to a consortium, a model of funding which is much more common in North America than in Europe where there is normally more core funding for infrastructure. He understood the problems and once again gave good advice on how to set up and manage the consortium on an international basis.

As part of his efforts to raise awareness of humanities computing (and its need for funds) Zampolli persuaded the European Science Foundation to set up an Expert Group on Humanities and Computing. I represented literary computing on this group and we produced

one of the few volumes that has attempted to scope out the state of the art. Edited by Zampolli and Jean-Philippe Genet, this volume appeared in 1992. Written by members of the group, it covers history, archaeology, music, linguistics, and literature. Again it is a pity that not so much attention was paid to this volume but it also suffered because of the enormous impact made by the advent of the World Wide Web just at the time that it was published.

When I moved to the USA to become the first Director of the Center for Electronic Texts in the Humanities (CETH), Zampolli was an obvious choice for membership of the CETH Advisory Board. This group met once a year at Dunwalke, a country house owned by Princeton University in the west of New Jersey. Zampolli was also very supportive of this initiative and attended these meetings, often coming from Italy to spend only twenty-four hours in the United States. His advice was always as pertinent as it was welcome.

During my term as Chair of the ALLC, Zampolli was a source of invaluable support and advice. A phone call to Pisa would often track him down at a meeting somewhere else, but he would always respond with his characteristic foresight to whatever was being proposed and I knew that I could rely on his advice being sound. He understood well the need to engage interest from other European countries. Having a President as well-connected across most of Europe as Zampolli ensured broad representation with colleagues, funders, and research institutes.

In the last few years, Zampolli worked hard to initiate new developments in humanities computing. He soon realized the importance of libraries as the future custodians of electronic resources and was keen to investigate their procedures and processes and to find out how joint projects could be pursued. He was always aware of new programmes within the European Union and wanted to ensure that some of this funding came to ALLC-related activities. In April 1999, he invited Harold Short, David Robey, and myself to Pisa to map out some possible projects, beginning with an attempt to scope out the landscape in more detail and to identify areas for further research. In April 2002, he hosted a meeting of about twenty people in Pisa to plan a road map for humanities computing intended for initial presentation at the 2002 annual conference in Tübingen. That was the last time I saw him. Although he was suffering from double vision because of a bicycle accident he came to most of our two-day discussions in the Hotel Duomo in Pisa and was able to make his usual pertinent and farsighted contributions.

I have so far concentrated on Zampolli's contributions to our field, but his personality was such that he definitely fell into the 'once met, never forgotten' category. He enjoyed life to the full and his *joie de vivre* played a big role in making our community the friendly and supportive one that it is.

Memories of Zampolli abound. He loved the bustle of New York and especially the shopping where Tower Records and Timberland Shoes were always on the agenda. Many years ago he told me that he had done the Manhattan helicopter trip four times. He was at home in many other cities as well and wherever he was he always found the time to go sightseeing or to a concert.

He also loved the open country, especially mountains and spectacular scenery. Every summer he would go to his 'mountain house' in the Dolomites, where he would walk and work for two to three weeks. The annual ALLCACH conference has a reputation for good excursions and Zampolli always came on them, abandoning his faxes for a day or a half day. In the conference in Israel in 1988 (predating the joint ALLCACH conference) we went on a day trip to Masada and the Dead Sea. Zampolli wanted to experience attempting to swim in the Dead Sea but he had not been prepared, as he put it, with the right clothing. But this did not deter him. On the rest of the trip he carried on a detailed interrogation of the guide about all

the archaeological sites and areas that we were driving through. In Hungary in 1998, after a tour of a castle, we finished up at a wine tasting followed by dinner and a display of Hungarian dancing where Zampolli joined in. In Gothenburg in 1987, on the last evening a group of us ended up in the Liseberg funfair very late at night. Zampolli bought tickets for all of us to go on the dodgem cars and he made sure that his car bumped into all of us. In Glasgow in 2000, the group enjoyed a more leisurely walk on the West Highland Way before going to a distillery where Zampolli was able to indulge in something else that he liked very much.

Among Zampolli's many interests were hi-fi and music. His music tastes covered almost everything, and a trip to Oxford always included a visit to the used record store in the city centre where he would buy not one or two but a large pile of LPs. I often wondered whether he ever had the time to listen to them. A visit to our house in Oxford always entailed a walk round the garden in an attempt to attract the attention of our next-door neighbour, who was the owner of a hi-fi shop in Oxford and the author of a column in a well-known hi-fi magazine.

Zampolli was also a great sports fan. He seemed to know the personalities and scores of every sport that is played, except for American football and baseball which puzzled him as much as it did me. In his youth he had played ice hockey at a serious level and during visits to the USA he somehow always managed to acquire a ticket to any game he wanted to go to. He once watched a World Cup football match in our house and afterwards I regretted not making a recording of the sounds that emanated from him during it.

As a linguist he would attempt to dissect the text of any poster or billboard that attracted his attention and as his English got much better he became more intrigued by the differences between British and American English. American menus and the decision tree of ordering food in the United States particularly amused him, but he somehow always managed to end up with a dish that contained no onion (which he pronounced 'onion') or garlic to which he was allergic, and which was usually also something that was not on the menu at all.

With his passing, humanities computing has lost one of its greatest champions and one of its greatest research directors. It has also lost its greatest character. Zampolli combined vision, a vast knowledge of our field and related fields, enormous drive and energy, an ability to make things happen, and a personality that will never be forgotten.

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