

## Designing Effective Policies for Politically Correct: a Rhetorical/Pragmatic Model of Total Speech Situation – Prof.ssa Piazza

Language is at the root of our social and political communities. A relatively recent manifestation of the importance we assign to it is the growing interest in verbal violence and “hate speech” on the one hand, and the policies of political correctness on the other (from now on, we will refer to the entire field with the label “PC”). These policies are justifiably considered critical for peaceful coexistence in our civilized societies. However, they are also affected by drawbacks that are widely addressed in the literature.

The main drawbacks are two: its focus on purely verbal aspects, which draws attention away from material conditions and other objective grounds for conflicts; its purely normative approach, which is detrimental for freedom of speech and prevents rational discussion and interpersonal negotiation. Moreover, PC policies can hardly be effective to the extent that they fail to be perceived as coming from an impartial rational authority: but as a matter of fact, they tend to appear as a form of ideological positioning, and as such they cause large effects of counter-positioning.

These are serious faults for which academy has to take responsibility, both in developing an adequate theoretical model and in spreading it over society. By addressing these criticisms and capitalizing on them, we aim to build a theoretical model that allows designing more effective PC policies.

As far as PC policies are concerned, our working hypothesis is that the emphasis should be shifted i) from state action to the scale of intermediate institutions, ii) from normative regulation to open rational discussion, and iii) from a purely linguistic to a wider symbolic approach - meaning by this a consideration of how word use is embedded within social regularities, individual emotions and ideological positioning.

Our claim is that effective design of such policies requires the development of an appropriate theoretical model. As Austin (1962) discovered, performative uses of language have the power to create social reality but only within certain constraints. However, the analysis of those constraints - that are critical for the efficacy of both offensive speeches and PC policies - has been little addressed in the literature. We intend to fill this gap by providing a model of what Austin called the “total speech situation”. To this effect, we must first put into question the postmodern idea that speeches have unconstrained constructive power and defend instead the existence of a world that is independent from speeches.

The model we intend to construct lies at the intersection between pragmatics and rhetoric. Classical rhetoric is especially well suited to analyze the intertwining of linguistic and extra-linguistic components of speeches. First, it includes in them as a constituent part not only the speaker but also the hearer and the entire audience. Second, rhetoric has provided a reflection on how language/rationality (logos) is intimately related to personal character (ethos) and emotions (pathos). Against this background, we can not only analyze fruitfully the notions of performative and speech act, but also develop a more effective model for rational discussion of sensitive social issues - with rationality conceived as reciprocal assessment and reasoned balance between passions, interests and points of view.

Specifically, the analysis of ethos will be based on the assumption that personal identity is at the same time a factor and a result of social dynamics. Identity is essentially formed through social positioning, a crucial stage of which is the construction of the ideological self from adolescence on. The rational management of ideological identities critically requires consideration of emotional factors (pathos), with special attention to the intimate relation between them and the formation of ideological coalitions and social stereotypes. Finally, a fruitful conception of logos requires developing a model of “rhetorical citizenship”, also thanks to close consideration of the debate between deliberative and agonistic views of democracy.

The project has also practical goals. First, it aims to explore existing experiences in the management of conflicts and form an academic network on these issues, also in order to promote the debate about the results of current PC policies in Europe. To this purpose, we already have an agreement with the

Universities of Bruxelles and Copenhagen. Second, the project aims to design more effective educational activities and regulations, and to test their implementation in high schools.