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POLEMICS. THEORETICAL DELIMITATIONS AND TEXTUAL DISCOURSE PRACTICES

Abstract: Polemics, a particular form of conflicting communication, indicates a verbal exchange, a group of at least two texts which are confronting and facing each other. Metaphorically, polemics is a verbal war and the constitutive discourses are marked by liveliness, by an aggressive character which differentiates them from debate, but also from fight, which degenerates and leads to the battle for self, the content being less important. In the case of scientific discourse, polemics is of a constructive nature, considering that any new scientific theory can launch a polemical debate within the intellectual area in which it occurred, that is why polemics can be also seen as a constitutive dimension of logos. It represents an internal dialogue, an interactional dimension, determining the co-presence of several voices in "conflict".

Any text or discourse registers, even if only virtually, in a relation to the other and functions as a hypothetical antagonist, that is why the polemical element could be construed as a virtual priority. Scientists are drawn into a "fight" for the search of truth, either with the aim to bring their contribution to the development of science, or to say the last word and obtain the supremacy in a field of knowledge. Polemics thus places us face to face with the most violent face of power: the irresistible force which determines us to defeat the other, to exercise a total control over him and to eliminate him, if necessary.

Keywords: communication, polemical discourse, scientific truth, argument, dialectics.

The scientific contestations have as main goal the revealing and emphasizing of the truth, that is why they manifest both at the level of words, as well as at the level of speech. The text itself can be contested in order to mark the lack of correctness of the used techniques, of the rules (phonetic, lexical, morphological etc.), of the examples, or para-textual components can be contested, such as titles. Thus, results a war of quills, a polemics composed of verbal exchanges, of assembles of at least two texts which are confronting and stand against one another. Characterized as "a type of conflicting communication" (Vlad, 2011, p. 197), polemics can manifest itself in different discourse genres, from everyday conversation and the media discourse to the novel, pamphlet, satire or scientific discourse, which confers it a cross-genre character. The different textual attestations of polemics determine its cross-genre character, but it constitutes itself in a true mechanism, a heterogeneous assembly which includes, virtually, laws, institutions, measures, philosophical sentences etc., a precise discourse strategic function, its own duration, a certain rhythm and different sanctions. The resulted device represents the combination of the relations of science and power. The places, temporality and ethos of the protagonists do not constitute simple "circumstances", but are an integral part of the polemic strategies, whose objective is to silence the opponent and to ridicule him at any cost.

The concept of ethos insists on the role of the perception of the speaker's personality in intercepting his discourse and on the persuasive force which results or not from this. The ethos can be seen either as an element exclusively manifested through discourse or as a background of discourse which conditions its perception, either determined by words or by an

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actual event. Its occurrence allows us to find how important the quality of the speaker, his characteristics, what he knows and presents are and how much the self-assertion for the legitimation of the word presupposes an enactment of the subject in the discourse. For example, the scholar Alexandru I. Philippide, outstanding personality of the School of Linguistics in Iasi, impressed by the accuracy of capturing the scientific truth and by the courage to take down the imposture and falseness encountered in people of culture. The opponents' elements of ethos, appealed to in his argumentations, are not emphasized to discredit Romanian or foreign linguists and to raise himself, but for the naming of immorality, illiteracy, vile human nature, specific to the "specialists" of his time, and, through this, their abolition. For example, the study *Un specialist roman la Lipsca* (*A Romanian Specialist in Leipzig*) comprises small elements of the portrait of the German linguist Gustav Weigand, realized by Alexandru I. Philippide: "[…] the professor from the civilized Leipzig wishes to enchain the free thought of a man because of personal vengeance, and surreptitiously, with letters and intrigues. A nicer behavior would not be possible. […] But Mr. Weigand swears at people and this made me fly off the handle. Harsh words such as *nerusinat, stupid* (*shameless, stupid)* flow from his mouth. […] Mr. Weigand should keep away as he would from fire from giving people epithets such as – I am ashamed that I must mention them – *stupid*, or *nerusinat*, or *mizerabil* (*stupid*, or *shameless*, or *despicable*)'' (Philippide, 1909, p. 159-160).

The specific of polemics consists in the nature of the verbal or textual exchange, aggressive component which its etymology supports: "a. belonging to polemics, regarding polemics; critical, combative; with character of controversy. // f. 1. contradictory discussion about a scientific, literary, political etc. theme. 2. A writing with polemic character [from French *polemique*, German *Polemisch*, *Polemik*]" (*Noul dictionar universal al limbii romane, (New Universal Dictionary of Romanian Language)* 2009). In this manner, it is generally marked by the special status of "small war or confrontation, simulacrum and substitute of war in a literal sense" (Declerq, Murat, Dangel, 2003, p. 390). Even if it can prove virulent, polemics remains a special and legitimate ritual which would surely allow some deviations and violent gestures, without the consequences exceeding, though, by far, the framework of polemic rivalry.

Polemics puts us face to face with the most violent face of power: the irresistible force which determines us to defeat the other, to exercise a total control over him and to eliminate him, if necessary, because polemics "is the style itself of assertion and existence of values" (George, 1980, p. 259). The issue of the polemic puts us, hence, in front of a harsh rhetoric by its finality, taking the power, but expert, since it holds a technique through which the one controlling it can dispose of people using words. Incapable to reach the truth and neither to know it in the word of the other, the speaker wishes to always be right, not because he is convinced of what he says, but because he considers that his interlocutor is not capable of being right and, in consequence, he is not worthy of being superior to him: "the content of truth of an enunciation and its validity in the eyes of the involved parties, as in the eyes of the auditor, are different things" (Schopenhauer, 2012, p. 22). Thus, the emptiest and most burning of passions, intellectual vanity, reduces the human reason to zero and reveals its stratagems for the promotion of the self and for the humiliation of the other. Linguistic theories formulated throughout time suffer changes, on one hand due to the evolution of the language and on the other hand due to the ignorance of those who issued them. Outraged that they have been contradicted, the latter turn to humiliating answers, insulting and offending, hiding the ignorance behind a false superiority or beyond a faulty language. For example, Gustav Weigand, on the cover of *Principles of language history* (1894), the paper of Alexandru I. Philippide notes assessments such as "prostie" (''stupidity''), "ridicol" (''ridicule'') or "fantastic", without offering any argument to support his assessments, although the reviews of the great men of the time (W. Meyer-Lubke, Hermann Suchier etc.)

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are full of praises, while Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu composes the article entitled *Philippidiotisme* (play on words *Philippide + idiotism).* In what regards the linguist from Iasi, Alexandru I. Philippide, he does not seek to demonstrate that he is always right, but to find the scientific truth, that is why he makes every effort to research, in order to reflect and only then to express a correct judgment, since *veritas est in puteo* (Democrit). He relies on the correctness of the judgment power with which he has formulated his hypotheses, taking into consideration that ”instruction potentiates the native powers of the mind” (Horatio). In the case of eristic, the situation is reverse: it is relevant who is right and not the truth.

The manifestation of this infinite eristic illustrates the reduction of debate to destabilization, attack and disqualification of the interlocutor. That is why the *ad hominem* argument is a major problem in the relations between polemics and rhetoric. Its qualification is, of course, depending on the adopted perspective. Within a normative perspective, the *ad hominem* argument is not clearly an argument, but the paradigm of fault in relation to a normed, ethical - logical practice of argumentation and controversy. It allows thus the browsing of the spectrum that reaches from the rational reply on the object (*ad rem*) to the reply (be it insult or taunt) that targets the exclusion of the person. The descriptive perspective of the *ad hominem* argument proposes a re-harmonization of the subjective evidence with the logical evidence. Regarding pathos, the indignation of the offended one is the one which seems to justify an *ad hominem* reply. The two dimensions, *ad rem*, respectively, *ad hominem*, indicate the impersonality and the personality of the polemist. Personal attack requires the correlated, although indirect, building of the opponent’s ethos. For example, Titu Maiorescu had a unique talent of discovering the weak points of the opponent and to avoid the essence of the debated issue. Having an admirable polemic skill, the member of “Junimea” attacked the errors of detail, of particular, which did not compose the problem itself, which is why he did not have polemics with opponents of his own rank, except Constantin Dobrogeanu-Gherea. Alexandru I. Philippide resorts to personal attack to justify information intentionally spread erroneously (“But then the thing is not so, but completely different. Mr. Puscariu writes today the Academy’s dictionary, because another did not wish to write it, and that other is me.”) (Philippide, 1908, p. 21), in order to emphasize the inconsistency between essence and appearance identified in the texts of certain linguists (the mistakes in Tiktin’s dictionary – Heimann Hariton Tiktin, *Rumanisch-deutsches Worterbuch*, I, A-C, Bukarest, 1895-1903 – are based on “the lack of information, the lack of examples, available to the author and which he seeks to hide beneath the appearances of a man, who doesn’t even know what to do with the multitude of material available to him. […] Namely Tiktin had no evidence, took one of the two of Hasdeu’s, without quoting Hasdeu, passed it as his own, just like he would have found it in the psalter of Dosoteiu, edition of the Academy, but he forgot that Hasdeu quotes after leafs and he quotes after pages or after the psalm number, and he was caught with …. *furatura (theft),* because this is called *furatura, plagiat (theft, plagiarism).*” (Philippide, 1907, p. 48-50), in order to point with his finger at the lie (“the lecturer will say that, if Mr. Hasdeu arrived with the reading at page 119, he must have read the previous 118 pages. Oh well, the lecturer is wrong. Mr. Hasdeu did not read Sievers, nor any other authors written with care in the bibliographical note and quoted when here when there. Mr. Hasdeu knows nothing of the physiology of sounds.”) (Philippide, 1907, p. 74).

The subjective dimension of polemic is grasped by its enrollment in a context of violence and passion, of pathos, of affective intensity, being dictated by emotional pulsations and affects, by the strong and explicit presence of the enunciator in the enunciation, because ”the human intellect is not a dry light, but upon it will and affects pour down” (Schopenhauer, 2012, p. 93). The emotional engagement of the speakers is also found in other discourse forms and interactions, that is why it does not represent a defining value of polemics. The authors make from the discourse construction of emotion a characteristic trait of the polemic

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discourse, even if it is not properly defining and neither is it sufficient to make the distinction between polemics and other similar discourse genres. Polemics is a discourse which, on one hand, attacks a target and disqualifies it an, on the other hand, is accompanied by a strong emotional engagement of the speaker. This classification of polemics as ”discourse of passion” (Kerbrat-Orecchioni, 1980, p. 21) receives and declarative critique: the polemic discourse is characterized by a very strong presence of the enunciator in the enunciation, which is noticeable, for example, by the wide use of terms which depend on an affective or axiological vocabulary. Passion constitutes consequently a *modus operandi* of the polemical discourse. It is dominated by the expression of certain emotions such as anger and indignation, in the detriment of a genuine polemical competence: ”pathos is a necessary fuel in order to awake the passions of the *third*, who will be called to rebellion, to indignation, to contempt, without any demonstration having been made to him in order for him to reach a clear personal judgment” (Garand, 1998, p. 216). We understand, in this way, that the critical discourse abounds in elements of expressiveness, characteristic of the text with the origin in the states of mind of the speaking subject. The linguistic text reflects the reaction of the emitter towards the subject of discussion and the relation in which it is with the esthetic dimension of the language. Thus, one of the functions of the text is the expressive one, because is outlines the perspective of intellectual and affective individuality, but also of the manifestation of the emitter. The combination in the syntagmatic plan of the text, as an operation of written and oral communication, also outlines the attitude of the emitter, since ”who talks communicates and communicates himself” (Tudor Vianu): categorical information, respectively, indignation (”Impossible!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 25)), irony, through the use of the adjectival attribute found in inversion, ”fine” (”smooth”) (”Ce fine observatii! (”What smooth observations!”) <<muldare>> dupa <<caldare>>!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 10)), capturing and contemptuous rejection of the words of Gustav Weigand (“God forbid!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 38)), contempt (“A mockery and nothing else!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 64), decision and rejection by the use of the negative adverb “no” in exclamatory form (“No!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 35) or by anti-phrase (“Mr. Weigand has a fine sense for languages!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 64), “Mr. Weigand loves the Romanian people! Behold a happiness! […] As if he were Napoleon the emperor!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 158). The maximum degree of expressiveness of the message is reached by the use of the affective interjection “vai” (“oh, dear!”): ”Oh dear, what trouble! To get in the dogma of the primary school children in a grammatical analysis discussion with an university professor from Leipzig!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 60). With the use of the volitional interjection ”ia” (“now”), Philippide urges to a certain attitude, of revealing the truth: “Now let’s sit and talk for a little while!” (Philippide, 1909, p. 5).

Polemic is also characterized by unpredictability, because we never know where it will lead, but the supreme stake of its development is finding out the truth: “Polemics must be carried out for the affirmation of a truth which the ones engaged in it must consider, irrespective of their ability or clumsiness with which any one of them supports it” (George, 1980, p. 5). Seen as a form of idea dialectic, for the critic Alexandru George, polemics is meant to reveal the truth: “opponents are actually expressions of a process of mandatory scission of a truth, in which each of the parties must subject itself to the need to reveal it, getting over the personal hubris, of circumstance.” (George, 1980, p. 270). Thus, in the case of a scientific polemics between two scholars, the question of a winner and of a loser should not arise, since their goal is to reveal to the readers, whether capable or unknowing, the fairness and truthfulness of the debated information. If in Titu Maiorescu, the mentor of the “Junimea” society, polemics represents an intellectual parade, erudition and sophisticated expression, in ALexandru I. Philippide we notice the clumsiness of expression, and the texts abound in scientific information, becoming hard to browse and understand. In Philippide, all

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is veridical, thought, calculated and without intuition: "Clear mind, superior intelligence, researcher with an amazing patience and work power, for him nothing seems hard or impossible, when it comes to solving any philological issue. […] Very few are those who embody with such eagerness the love for the scientific truth, and fewer even are those who solve, in an incontestable and axiomatic manner, the hard issues in such an ample field and so less seriously exploited, especially in our country, as the one of philology" (Dafin, 1927, p. 96). For that matter, Philippide himself confesses: "No other use exists besides the truth. Hence […] all your work, all your endeavors are thrown in the wind, so long as the lie, the taste to show yourself more than you really are, would cloud your mind with its hazes. Amaze by result, don't be fake, nor a liar, here is the target to which you should head for before all" (Philippide, 1892, p. 153). The discrepancies that determine scholars not to agree with each other sometimes regard the reality cutout performed by the other, because "often, the talent of the one who discusses can be a form of deception of reality" (George, 1980, p. 61). Each scientist proclaims himself the holder of the truth, except that, looking diachronically, any truth has its own time, and the notion called into question becomes, thus, relative ("Truth does not enter entirely in any opinion. An opinion can only contain part of the truth.") (Wald, 1986, p. 71) and we come to address the same question such as Pontius Pilate: "Quid est veritas?"

The dialogued character of polemics is based on an internal, virtual interaction with an adverse discourse, integrated by the speaker in his own discourse with the purpose of contesting it. The construction of the verb "to polemize" is interesting, since it presupposes the formation of a discourse eminently based on dialogue: "to polemize with". Thus it makes two voices co-exist in his discourse, which demonstrates the existence of a particular polyphony case: "dialogued polyphony" (Vlad, 2011, p. 197). In a confrontation between scientists, an adverse scientific discourse is evoked in a critical form in order to assess it negatively based on scientific criteria. A scientific polemical discourse determines the interaction of two antagonistic positionings manifested within the same disciplinary field, because the premise of any victory is confrontation. An example in this sense is the dissension between Alexandru I. Philippide and Tiktin regarding the explanation of the terms "cersui" and "cersut": "The forms that he does not agree with for any reason, are explained as typographical errors, errors of the type setter, or as *obscure (dunkel)*. […] The verbs *cer (ask)* and *cersec (beg)* are two different verbs. […] This is what Tiktin does. I don't know what for, but he imagined that the forms *cersui, cersut* belong to the verb *cer (ask)* and not to the verb *cersec (beg)*, and the verb *cersesc (beg)* with its forms *cersii, cersit* he imagined as being formed only in the 20th century, as a neologism. Being so, […], here is the way in which he gets rid of them: <<it is a mistake of the type setter; they are *obscure* (dunkel!).>> This manner of treating the material of a language *à la cavalière*, is rare!" (Philippide, 1907, p. 47-48). Within the polemical discourse, the interlocutors are possible opponents. Polemical exchanges in which the content is determinant are dominated by a tension more or less strong, by the delimitation of the positions and by attack procedures. Polemics strongly involves its interlocutors firstly as humans, and relies on the personification of the word.

Denials are to a certain extent invalidations justified by arguments. Less concise, a denial will present furthermore the arguments which establish the validity of the justification. Invalidation and denial can accuse, implying the lack of intellectual capabilities and of the moral qualities, which would have allowed valid and precise appreciations: "If the opponent doesn't give a direct answer to a question or an argument invoked by you, but avoids the answer by another question or by an indirect answer, or even hijacks the debate with an enunciation that is not at all to the point, than this is the uncontestable proof that we have touched a nerve" (Schopenhauer, 2012, p. 87). That is why, maybe, some scientists prefer to use *argumentum ad verecundiam:* "If we don't know what to oppose to the arguments expose by the opponent, than it is better that we declare ourselves, with fine irony, incompetent. […]

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With this we insinuate, towards the auditors who respect us, that in the middle would be pure ineptitudes. […] This stratagem must only be used when we are sure that the public has much more consideration for us than for the opponent. […] This stratagem represents the validation of <<our own authority>>, and namely not by invoking a veritable argument, but in an extremely malicious manner" (Schopenhauer, 2012, p. 87). This is the example of Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, the author of the article *Philippidiotisme*, respons to the critiques brought by Alexandru I. Philippide in science. Far from explaining the accuses of the linguist from Iasi with arguments supported by meticulous examples, Hasdeu composes a short article, invoking his scientific authority and offending his opponent: "D. Philippide frets his head – I am not saying his mind – with the even more insipid desire to swallow me whole alive with a single bite, although he is not admitted in a Sanatorium, being for now detained at the two magazines." (Hasdeu, 1897, p. 205). Or, in another case, Alexandru I. Philippide criticizes Sextil Puscariu, using the anti-phrase regarding his own person: "Because Mr. Puscariu is the man *of reality and measure*, it comes naturally that I have neither the sense of reality, or the sense of measure. I believe that this is the place to remind Mr. Iorga of two things: 1. It is not good when somebody interferes where he does not know, 2. It is not good when somebody talks about the rope in the house of a hanged man." (Philippide, 1908, p. 21)

Arthur Schopenhauer considers that in order to infirm a thesis, one can either use two manner, or two methods: the manners *ad rem* (it is proven that the enunciation does not correspond to the objective truth) and *ad hominem* or *ex concessis* (it is shown that the enunciation does not correspond to other arguments or concessions of the opponent, meaning of the subjective and relative truth) and the methods of "direct invalidation" (the thesis is attacked in its grounds) and of "indirect invalidation" type (the consequences of the thesis are combated).

Polemical exchanges can occur as a tentative to symbolically eliminate the other, but they necessarily occur between the speakers who consider themselves complete in a field of activity: "The premise is that the previous speakers are relatively equal regarding the degree of instruction and spiritual performances. If one of them has shortcomings regarding instruction, than the bitterness he will feel, becoming aware of this, will motivate him to react in bad faith, through tricks, and be boor." (Schopenhauer, 2012, p. 98-99)

During the fight, one finds out answers and points of view which form a network of discourses and counter-discourses, following a temporality, a progress, but also own supports, for the revealing of the truth: "If we accept that within a confrontation one must follow the truth and not the plausible, the pro and counter arguments regarding a thesis judged after their quantum of truth, not after the ability, brilliance and even beauty of the lawyer approach of one of the opponents." (George, 1973, p. 270) For linguists, for example, the persuasive force of speech is no dependent on the beauty of the expression, but on the truth expressed, because "persuasion is obtained by clarifying and distinguishing ideas, and not by adorning the speech." (Wald, 1986, p. 64) Just that, sometimes, this sway of opponents and supporters outlines an interlacing of antagonistic theses involved in a reciprocal polarization and dichotomy action which targets the discrediting of the opponent. In a conflicting state, the differences are accentuated and concentrated in antagonistic positions. This is accompanied by procedures of violent disqualifying of the persons who have different perspectives.

The analysis of the polemical discourse, with its tensions and conflicting side, allows a better understanding of polemics, a war of ethos in which the *subject* is seeking more to prove his superiority over the *anti-subject*, than to convince his opponent to change his mind. The orientation of the discourse and of the interaction of the speakers towards the producing of different judgments of polemics warrants the presence of a communication form. Thus, what was able to be identified as polemical action, defined by the presence of an attack produced towards a third person, by a participant in the debates against another does not go unnoticed.

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The judgment of polemics, before all, takes the form of a sanction: the one that judges suffers the consequences of a polemical action (or the one defending an assaulted target), is outraged and contests its validity or opportunity. However, it is possible that this judgment of polemic takes the shape of a capitalization: in this case it is the logic of the spectacular of the polemical fact, a *third* participant manifesting a certain amusement and understanding the subject of the dispute.

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