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# Rhetoric appropriateness in view of contemporary media communication and journalism[1]

Any attempt at presenting selected aspects of rhetoric appropriateness within the context of contemporary media practice requires the researcher to refer to its origins in antiquity, though with the reservation that the theory which originated in an old and significantly different culture is not easy to organise either in terms of its meanings or its terminology and translation[2]. However, as Jan D. Müller noticed aptly: "[…] alongside any discussion and analysis of appropriateness and a search for their theoretical foundations, we study the nature of successful speech"[3], which is why the issue is worth discussing and studying in contemporary times as well.

The etymological sources of what ancient Greeks referred to as τὸ πρέπον (*tó prépon*) and Latin authors as *aptum* or *decorum*[4], and which in Polish came to be known to as "stosowność" (appropriateness)[5], indicate directions of semantic

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[2] The level of complexity of the matter is clearly visible in the first sentence of the entry "decorum" included in the German-language "Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik": "The rhetoric of antiquity under the notion of *decorum* understood tactfulness, appropriateness or the suitability of rhetoric **expression and conduct** (*decorum vitae*)" (I. Rutherford, L.G., "Decorum" [entry], in: "Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik", G. Ueding et al. (eds.), Vol. 2, Wissenschaftsverlag De Gruyter, Tübingen 1994, col. 423; trans. into Polish and emphasis: M.W.].

[3] J.D. Müller, "Decorum. Konzepte von Angemessenheit in der Theorie der Rhetorik von den Sophisten bis zur Renaissance", Berlin–Boston 2011, p. 1 [translated into English from Polish].

[4] In Greek in the context of appropriateness, the following terms were also used: τὸ οἴκειον (tó oikeion), τό προσῆκον (tó proshḗkon), αρμόττον (harmótton), in Latin – *accomodatum*, *decens*, *prioprium*. Some instances in other languages include: in German – *Angemessenes*, *Schickliches*, *Konvenienz*; in English – *appropriateness*, *propriety*, *fittingness*; in French – *bienséance*, *convenance*, *decoré*; in Italian – *decòro*, *convenienza*.

[5] Old Polish developed several counterparts of the ancient *prépon-decorum* used in different contexts: *przystojność* (acceptance), *obyczajność* (morality), *foremność* (well-formedness), *wdzięczność* (gracefulness), *piękność* (beauty), *miara* (measure), *coś godnego i słusznego* (something worthy and just), and *sposobność* (convenience).

evolution: from perception-based and mechanical to aesthetic and ethical meaning. Rhetors in antiquity already considered that notion to include much: tactfulness, appropriateness, and suitability of expression and conduct[6]. Their perspective included not only the speaker and his words, but also the listeners, the themes, and the form of expression as well as the whole communication situation. As Teresa Michałowska has noted, the appropriateness which was the foundation of the theory of three styles in antiquity (and later in the Middle Ages) had three semantic interpretations: one referring to the principle of beauty, one functioning based on philosophical anthropology, and one in rhetoric and poetics[7].

The ancient "spirit of measure and fittingness" shaped the notion of appropriateness as an expression of harmony, compliance, norm, predictability, accuracy, and its core-based nature. However, the following centuries of mainly literary and artistic study led to a blurring (though not elimination) of the borderlines between the models and their creative modifications. The legitimisation of the departures from that which is classical, tried and close to the ideal is why today's appropriateness is mostly associated with morality and proper language use, while its normative nature is difficult to grasp or even considered as dysfunctional.

Speech, being a special type of human activity, has been perceived by the ancients to remain in close relation with thought and the object to which it applied ("The matter itself imposes words"). That realisation has required theoreticians of rhetoric to seek the most adequate means to communicate the nature of things through words – as they are used for illustrating them, they must fit them closely, and be appropriate for them. Thus formed the *res – verba* coherence principle or the suitability of things/ideas and words which from the rhetorical point of view translates to a whole set of phenomena combining two zones of text development: *inventio* and *elocutio*. Though much later (i.e. in the Middle Ages) the sense of that fading of the coherence led to the establishment of the issue of the duality of the form and content in a work of art, it constituted a virtually uncontested principle in antiquity. It was associated with a conviction that the natural order requires one to seek the proper language for a previously defined (correctly) state of things and that the creator (orator) must be aware of the errors he can make at that stage of working on the text. The supremacy (or rather antecedence) of *inventio* over *elocutio* thus resulted in considering, first of all, what violates the adequacy of *rerum* and *verborum*, and only later which words, expressions, and major expression units best communicate the author's intentions. Therefore, one could assume that rhetorical appropriateness has its deepest roots in the cultural and moral knowledge of what can be evaluated as improper

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[6] Vide: I. Rutherford, L.G., op. cit., col. 423.
[7] T. Michałowska, "Średniowieczna teoria literatury w Polsce. Rekonesans", Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2007, pp. 249–251.

or linguistically inadequate to the discussed problem – inappropriateness defines the notion of what is appropriate.

Just like any other principles of rhetorical practice, the appropriate/inappropriate classification was also shaped together with the principles of community life, and it became codified as the morality which defined the rhythm of personal and public contacts solidified[8]. And just as rhetoric can be viewed as a tool for solving conflicts[9], so can appropriateness help increase the clarity of interpersonal relations within a community of individuals. Its nature is expressed in identifying that which in the mental-psychological zone favours coherence and cooperation between the members of the community, and that which disorganises it and produces a sense of individual harm[10]. The unavoidable result of that realisation was, in antiquity, the search for the "golden mean", a balance between the concessions made for the community and the sense of individual satisfaction. Therefore, the balancing of the benefits and losses depended both on external (the system and manner of ruling, political conflicts, economic crises, and the development or decrepitude of the arts and sciences) and internal factors (human abilities to realise and fulfil one's own needs) remained in constant flux. That property became characteristic also for appropriateness perceived rhetorically[11].

That perspective coincides with another issue important for the theory of expression:. functionality. Three tasks fulfilled in a text/speech (*movere*, *docere*, *delectare*) should be categorised depending on the significance of the problem and the most general goal, but in such a way that by bringing forward one of the functions, the significance of the others is not diminished[12]. Thus a proper projection of appearance had to consist in aligning the thinking about the "matter of

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[8] Cf. T. Kostkiewiczowa, "Myśl literacka polskiego oświecenia (zarys problemów badawczych)", in: "Oświeceni o literaturze. Wypowiedzi pisarzy polskich 1740–1800", T. Kostkiewiczowa, Z. Goliński (eds.), Warsaw 1993, p. 12.

[9] Vide: M. Meyer, M.M. Carrilho, B. Timmermans, "Historia retoryki od Greków do dziś", M. Meyer (ed.), transl. by Z. Baran, Warsaw 2010, p. 20.

[10] A proof of that might be found in the moral principles preceding the emergence of the Greek moral philosophy, available today only for partial reconstruction from the maxims of the poets from the 7th and 6th centuries BC and the so-called Seven Sages of Greece. According to Giovanni Reale, even the oldest cogitations of "[…] the norm of a *just measure*, *mean status and mean measure* appeared quite distinctively as an attitude for wise life and happiness", and the most significant later maxims included, e.g.: "Moderation is best", "Nothing in excess", "Engage in appropriate matters", and "Know the right moment" (G. Reale, "Myśl starożytna", transl. by E.I. Zieliński, Wydawnictwo Katolickiego Uniwersytetu Lubelskiego, Lublin 2003, pp. 84–85) [translated into English from Polish].

[11] Bernhard Asmuth noted that "Due to its relativity, appropriateness seems almost not more defined than goodness or beauty as its acuteness is determined by the ever-changing answer to the question 'What would be appropriate?' and the factors initiating a given behaviour." (cf. B. Asmuth, "Angemessenheit" [entry], in: "Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik", op. cit., Vol. 1, Tübingen, col. 580) [translated into English from Polish].

[12] Vide: M. Korolko, "Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny", 2nd edition amended, Wiedza Powszechna, Warsaw 1998, pp. 49–51.

the issue" with such a linguistic formation (including the sound layer) so as to create the best possible path towards a successful influence on the listeners. That would also mean a choice and the proper "filling out" of the speech outline for consecutive parts to be coherent and clear, which contributed to evoking trust in the reason, composure, and emotional sensitivity of the speaker[13]. That concept of "combining in a whole"[14] made observing of appropriateness one of the most universal principles of the rhetoric of antiquity[15]. The later evolution of teaching and the practice of rhetoric has led to bringing forward the rules by sacrificing the principles (leading to the identification in the descriptions of the theory of internal and external *decorum*), and a gradual limitation of their application in the area of utility writings. That direction of the transformations enables one to apply appropriateness also to media as to knowledge on the construction of public messages in a useful manner – so that the factors, such as the sender (author), receiver, and the communication situation, in the largest degree aid the fulfilment of the goal for which the message is being produced.

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[13] Vide: E. Ulčinaitė, "Teoria retoryczna w Polsce i na Litwie w XVII wieku. Próba rekonstrukcji schematu retorycznego", Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wroclaw 1984, p. 75.

[14] Cf. J.Z. Lichański, "Retoryka od średniowiecza do baroku. Teoria i praktyka", Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 1992, p. 210.

[15] A good illustration of that is offered by the relations between the components of speech which should remain harmonious to maintain the so-called internal *prépon*: the main object and the inventiveness, the inventiveness and elocution, the disposition and the inventiveness or elocution, the pronunciation and the inventiveness or elocution, and between the parts of a speech (introduction, the story, argumentation, conclusion) (H. Lausberg, "Retoryka literacka. Podstawy wiedzy o literaturze", trans., editing and introduction: A. Gorzkowski, Homini, Bydgoszcz 2002, pp. 538–539). J.D. Müller, the author of an extensive study entitled "Decorum. Koncepcja stosowności w teorii retoryki od sofistów do renesansu", indicated how extensive an understanding of appropriateness was offered in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*. Aristotle's discussion was, indeed, focussed on linguistic issues, however, appropriateness was also applied to the emotionality associated with the presentation of the character in the speech and the influence of the character of the speaker on the audience, which influenced the general impression evoked by the speech (vide J.D. Müller, op. cit., p. 80). The author noticed that although the issue of appropriateness did not occupy a focal point of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*, it kept reappearing in various expressions as a regulatory principle (ibid., p. 84). A similarly broad consideration was identified by B. Asmuth, the author of the "Angemessenheit" (appropriateness) entry in the previously mentioned German dictionary. As he indicated that the "super-rule" (or at least a "timeless principle of classical writings") already operating in antiquity referred to not only verbal expressions, but also to the general quality of social behaviour, he even posited that one could understand it as a type of biological adaptation principle, i.e. the ability of a living organism to adapt to changing conditions in order to survive (B. Asmuth, op. cit., col. 579). Further remarks of the researcher were even more significant. He stated that appropriateness embodies the area of values between ethics and aesthetics. The vicinity of ethics is expressed in the application of appropriateness to positive behaviour while appropriateness itself, together with its sanctions devoid of any legal force, introduces people to the zone of morality. With beauty, then, appropriateness shares the ability to be pleasing, and the focus on harmony (vide J. Styka, "Kategoria stosowności (decorum) w rzymskiej teorii literackiej", *Prace Komisji Filologii Klasycznej* 1995, Issue 23, R. Turasiewicz (ed.), p. 85).

One result of the discussed approach is the ambiguous status of the notion of *appropriateness* which can be observed today in studies devoted to *ars bene dicendi*. In the work by Mirosław Korolko entitled "Sztuka retoryki. Przewodnik encyklopedyczny", and fundamental for Polish researchers, it is defined both in the context of the most important rules of rhetoric ("the principle […] defines the correct and useful rhetorical choices"[16]), and of the stylistic values of expression ("Appropriateness in rhetorical stylistics constitutes a fundamental rhetorical principle made concrete for the dimensions of the language"[17]); it also appears when one considers the ethical dimension of the essence of persuasion (in relation to the virtue of moderation)[18]. Thus an identical term is used for the principle and its concretisation within the limits of the stylistics. Jerzy Ziomek in "Retoryka opisowa" indicates that, in historical-literary practice, the term *decorum* meaning "an appropriate adequacy of the style […] to the selected case material" but which also applies to the speaker herself/himself is used more often than *appropriateness*[19]. Yet, those remarks are preceded by an indication of another dependence: "The fact of adapting the material to the topic – that is equivalent to *decorum* (or *aptum*) […]", which clearly directs the understanding of appropriateness as a universal notion which enters the scope of inventiveness, disposition, and elocution, but which also reaches further – to the external circumstances of rhetorical activities.

The indicated imperfection of the division has its sources in the particular ancient comprehension of the relationship between the language and the speaker: the language – a carrier of persuasion and a cognitive tool, was an attribute of the speaker – a person deemed responsible in relation to the listeners for the results of his oral craft. In that respect, appropriateness as a rhetorical principle was an expression of an attitude and, at the same time, it could acquire its own particular (i.e. describable and perfectible through practice and emulation) expression in the form of the approach to a topic, the lexis used, and the structure of the utterance. It was sufficiently justified to establish a precise borderline between them for the purpose of theoretical description. However, as long as one can accept the identity of the Greek *aptum* (*decorum*) without any special reservations, appropriateness must be viewed differently. Both stylistic and – to a lesser extent – structural connotations of *prépon – aptum* (*decorum*) seem strong enough to be associated with the appropriateness of expression and the strictly rhetorically perceived design of a public appearance (work). Yet, appropriateness suggests the principle of perception, sensing, and thinking with a more universal character, a ubiquitous

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[16] M. Korolko, op. cit., p. 54.
[17] Ibid., p. 104. It should be stated that in this part of the work, one will find a *de facto* specification of the **principle** of appropriateness.
[18] Ibid., p. 40.
[19] J. Ziomek, "Retoryka opisowa", 2nd edition amended, Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, Wroclaw 2000, p. 78.

*mask* that people place on every design of verbal activity, a condition of harmonious combination of aesthetic, ethical, and persuasive values. *Prépon – aptum* (*decorum*) would thus refer to the procedure of observing the rule, identifying the pattern in which one should express selected content, while appropriateness – to the general attitude of humans, their way of perceiving themselves in relation to others with whom they are to be joined in the act of communication. Therefore, it seems justified to observe more consistently and systematically the naming traditions, the presence of which was identified in the quote from J. Ziomek, and note that in the historical-literary practice the Latin term is used more often than its Polish counterpart[20]. The division into:

– *prépon/aptum* (*decorum*) – a historical-literary division which refers to maintaining coherence between the method of speaking and the topic, predictable requirements and expectations of the listener/reader, as well as the demonstrated attitude of the speaker/author, and

– appropriateness – a general principle of rhetorical communication resulting from moral norms and the requirements of the communication environment applicable at a given time,

does not ensure absolute precision for the notion's division, yet it enables one to maintain a different perspective. In such an understanding, appropriateness would require a broader, more "communication-centred" view, which would consider the malleability of human relations modified by the communication conditions. *Decorum* would then remain, to a larger extent, a term which referred to harmonisation devices used in the past, which were applied in the widely considered writings and fine arts. Thus the language of rhetorical description could also include a more pronounced separation of the terminology associated with the universal rhetorical principle (appropriateness) from the narrower term located within the area of stylistic elocution (*decorum/aptum*).

When considering contemporary rhetoric, mass messages in particular, the need to use the term with a broader scope, which at the same time is less immersed in any normative discussions, becomes visible. I believe that only in such a case is it possible to use it efficiently to diagnose contemporary media phenomena and the process of communication while considering their multi-dimensional persuasiveness.

By considering the traditional understanding of the rhetorical principle of appropriateness, one can offer several remarks on its media study and journalism-based perspectives:

1) The most important factor determining the rhetorical model of appropriateness is the mass nature of media communication in the conditions of freedom of speech, a democratic system of power, and economic liberalisation.

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[20] Ibid., p. 79.

In the past, appropriateness visible in the language layer constituted the first barrier for the permissibility of a wider communication circulation and a possible reason for eliminating it, while the function of organising verbal contacts (the ability to use the language in specific situations and towards a specific end) was related strictly to authority, tradition, and the definition of the rules which applied to the community's life. Today, the violation of the rule of linguistic tact is a method for emerging, and maintaining one's presence in social (media) circulation, which is strictly related to such markers of media-transmitted communication as: tabloidisation, infotainment, and the absolute supremacy of the pace of delivering a message.

However, the understanding of appropriateness in the media as linguistic-formal-thematic core patterns (one could say: technique-based understanding) narrows the perception of the issue as it only emphasises the result of the blurring of the lines between the genres and the tendencies towards polifunctional expressions and means of communication[21], as well as the ever increasingly common permissibility of behaviour which was recently prohibited or unwelcome in the public sphere (e.g. acts of offending, quarrels, talking negatively about the dead) which the media communicate and indirectly legitimise. Only by viewing appropriateness as a universal principle, can one express the holistic approach to the act of communication fulfilled in the public sphere and which combines two entities: the author-creator and the viewer-reader/listener, not just the sender and the mass receiver understood in institutional terms. That perspective enables a better identification of the possibilities and threats associated with cultural and economic changes, such as globalisation, the development of the goods and services market, digitalisation, commercialisation, and media convergence. That also indicates the futility of any discussions based on comparing that which is (or is not) appropriate in communications or media, modelled according to various hierarchies of values: autotelic (e.g. the so-called quality press), and instrumental (e.g. tabloids). In the case of the latter, it would be difficult to talk about a subjective approach to the receiver, though that type of media places a particular emphasis on defining ethical limits showing what is permissible and what is prohibited[22]. It is accompanied by a solely functional approach to the problem of technique-based coherence of form and content enabling one to combine factography and emotionality, and information with evaluation and interpretation. Therefore, thinking about appropriateness

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[21] That does not only apply to technical possibilities which in recent years have been transformed, e.g. the cellular phone into a multimedia device, but also to the hybrid media formats – one example of that is the NaTemat.pl website launched in February 2012, which cannot be clearly defined as solely an information, commentary or blog platform (cf. "NaTemat.pl", *Press* 2012, Issue 4, p. 18).

[22] Vide: "Rozmowa dnia – 18 lipca", with J. Wasilewski interviewer A. Głąb, 2011, http://www.sdp.pl/wywiady/4327,rozmowa-dnia-18-lipca,1315604197 [accessed on: 24.05.2017].

contributes to consolidating the difference of a superior significance between journalism and deontological media which must be assigned requirements, and between journalism and quasi-journalism or teleological quasi-media which are the only available and accepted (or not) media offer.

Outside the area of the analysis, one should also place journalism which fulfils the formula of provocative revealing and evaluation of facts, aimed *a priori* at specific institutions or worldview attitudes[23] as it requires one to apply the principle of intentional transgression of defined markers of media appropriateness (appropriateness in the media).

2) The continued presence of disputes regarding the appropriateness of public behaviour to a lesser extent proves their standard-building potential and to a larger extent the functional approach – of senders, those who participate in the reported events, and message receivers – to media communication, which inevitably results in a significant over-representation of messages the content of which refers to instances of inappropriateness.

Rhetorical tactlessness can, in fact, be used as a factor which draws people's attention, and generates new messages usually regarding a specific person – which is the focus of both journalists and public figures. By referring to an event, a commentator gains, first of all, a chance to emerge as a judge who decides what is or is not acceptable to say/do publicly, and, secondly, an opportunity to present oneself as a person with higher sensitivity ready to defend the generally applicable rules of morality. The receiver, on the other hand, utilising her/his life experience rather than specialist knowledge, interprets a message in the context of her/his own feelings evoked by the reported event in combination with the commentator's opinions. Thus the instances of inappropriateness constitute a topic for discussion, confrontation, emotional stimulation, and offer a very high opinion-building potential – i.e. they perfectly fulfil the requirements of contemporary media communication.

Regardless of the natural differences in evaluating the phenomena of public life from the perspective of the appropriateness of those who engage in it, those which clearly transgress the accepted standards (e.g. offending the memory of the dead) are met with rapid and strong criticism, emphasising the importance of observing them for the identity and the strength of community bonds. At the same time, the

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[23] An example of that is the *NIE* weekly about which Nina Kraśko concluded: "[…] the main rhetorical device of *NIE* is 'to reveal'. Saying aloud that which was supposed to be hidden, of which everyone knows but the principles of good manners require one to cover with silence" (N. Kraśko, "*NIE*, czyli poza granicami przyzwoitości", in: "Cudze problemy. O ważności tego, co nieważne. Analiza dyskursu publicznego w Polsce", M. Czyżewski, K. Dunin, A. Piotrowski (eds.), Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warsaw 2010, p. 214). The "revealing" ought to be considered widely – as an act of providing knowledge on not necessarily widely known instances of bending or violating the law, and doing that in an emphatically evaluative manner stressing its detrimental influence and the disgrace of the originator.

unanimous nature of such an evaluation, present in the commentaries, does not foster a deeper discussion, rather expanding it to include other aspects of the event, thus not helping one to understand why a specific behaviour in a specific situation should be considered inappropriate. If, however, the evaluator justifies her/his view, she/he specifies a set of values important for her/him indirectly indicating the axiological foundations of the understanding of the appropriateness principle.

That offers an interesting evolution of the "protective umbrella"[24] effect, and the manner of talking in the media about dead public figures – from respecting the traditional principle to searching for justification for its violation. It indicates the developing phenomenon of a stronger association of reliability with the negative rather than positive aspects of the reported event. The founding of the discussed patterns of behaviour in tradition seems to advance their perception as unwritten rules, the deeper, or a different, justification of which either cannot be currently indicated or remains in conflict with satisfying other needs. Therefore, surpassing the conventional becomes acceptable, especially if it is accompanied by justification of the pursuit of the truth or defence against turning facts which form collective memory into myth. It seems that the understanding of the requirements of moral appropriateness can, paradoxically, amplify the acceptance of its infringement or violation – based on the assumption that only a serious reason can justify such a clear violation of expressive convention limitations. In media communication circumstances, that inclines one to assign reliability to those details of the message (facts, opinions) the presence of which is in a given situation a manifestation of inappropriateness because, e.g. it offers a negative evaluation of the character of an event. It must be noted that such a type of credulity (of gullibility, if you will) is fostered by a lack of knowledge among the receivers regarding the methods of manipulation that is used via the messages.

The petrification influence of the discussed principle within the mutual relationship between the form and content of a message competes with a tendency (resulting from the discussed cultural and economic changes) to constantly experiment with the media offer which draws the largest group of receivers. Thus conflicts between the traditionally and the innovatively focussed media users are mainly a result of people's habits and expectations formed through their individual sensibility and the operations of legal norms which regulate the permissibility of specific content in the mass media circulation. Even though today one can often

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[24] The *protective umbrella* is erected over people who have suffered from some calamity, e.g. in their personal lives. Moral rules demand not only sympathy but also approaching them with increased tolerance, or leniency even, considering their situation of disturbed emotional balance. Their violation of certain limits, e.g. in the form of withdrawal, irritability, and neglecting others is in such a case interpreted as permissible or even psychologically justified. Furthermore, community bonds demand covering such people with care and support, especially by people from their closest circle.

have the impression that those factors have a limited influence of the decisions of the senders, one cannot assume that they will cease to fulfil their control and prevention function. The discomfort associated with the experience of the sense of inappropriateness when in contact with messages, efficiently indisposes one towards them as it is associated with a sense of obscurity, and a lack of clear order and interpretative precision as well as, in the case of content inappropriateness, questioning the meanings and the values accepted by the receiver which are based on moral principles and community morality. However, a negative reaction of the reader/listener/viewer, which could stimulate the senders, requires the former to maintain constant readiness to verify the quality of the messages.

3) The appropriateness principle is associated with the difficult task of the receiver's understanding of her/his role in the world of the media, and its various consequences. At the same time, she/he is a user of the media which are her/his universal *window onto the world*, a decision-maker within the political sphere, and a consumer of various expectations, thus constituting the main point of reference for designing the form and the content of a message. The applicable rules of constructing messages based on maximising the receiver's emotional engagement and stimulating her/his interest constitute a norm which requires the receiver to remain ready to come into contact with them, even in a situation when their content and/or form could violate her/his personal sensitivity. That is a result of the communicational practice's break off from the traditional principle assigned to the responsibility of maintaining appropriateness of the message by the sender (creator)[25].

The receiver could also be manipulated due to her/his insufficiently developed ability to code and decode messages which express the content indirectly or even suggesting contrary meanings. In such instances, a proper interpretation is possible based on the form of the message or the accompanying commentary, which can introduce special expectations regarding the rules governing the official and the private areas of human activity, which in turn results in an instability of one's preferences in terms of appropriateness.

One particularly important matter is the receiver's attitude towards instances of inappropriateness specific for messages which offer a high level of elicitation through emotional stimulation, emphasising conflicts, and opinion building. The inappropriateness of a public behaviour may be intentional, it can serve the for-

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[25] I omitted the responsibility associated with the applicable legal regulations, e.g. the 2005 Resolution of the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) (regarding the evaluation of programmes or other content which might possess a negative influence on the proper physical, mental, and moral development of minors, and programmes or other content designated for a specific age group of minors, the application of graphic symbols and forms of expression; J. of L. No. 130 Item 1089 dated 15 July 2005). The attitude of respecting the receiver's sensitivity is also supposed to be shaped by journalistic deontological documents (e.g. the Code of Journalistic Conduct of the Polish Journalists' Association, the Journalistic Code of Conduct), though they constitute an expression of laudable intentions rather than professional practice.

mation of a specific image, and the achievement of long-term goals[26]. Therefore, it constitutes a well-calculated strategy (of tactlessness) – it is difficult to state that people who use it are embarrassed as they utilise it to increase their influence on the receivers of the message (e.g. listeners or viewers) rather than those whom they directly address, thus posing as being uncompromising, bold, ready to face the accusation of their lack of proper manners to defend their values and principles (e.g. their opposition towards the allegedly detrimental activities of their political opponents). The tools utilised by this strategy can include: irony, allusion, derision, displaying contempt or disdain, some forms of impertinent behaviour or vilification, seeming gaffes, insinuating questions or suggestions challenging the opponent's morality, which may be used for masking the personal attack as well as to undermine the value and the significance of the convictions which should constitute the foundation of a discussion[27]. At the same time, the goal is to, as Mirosław Karwat states, "Instead of using a whole range of weapons, […] insult the opponent through offensive behaviour which, however, remains within the acceptable 'limits of decency' and is not perceived as aggressive, though its intentions can be mean"[28]. The witnesses to such a behaviour usually display visible disapproval and express strong critical opinions being embarrassed and helpless in the face of the aggressor's cynicism, which does not mean they entail more severe consequences, e.g. exclusion from the group of public figures and people active in the media[29]. In the case of inappropriateness resulting from a gaffe (rhetorical inappropriateness), there exists a kind of a symmetry of reactions. All

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[26] Cf. E. Goffman, "Zachowanie w miejscach publicznych. O społecznej organizacji zgromadzeń", editing, foreword to the Polish edition by G. Woroniecka, transl. by O. Siara, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2008, p. 238 and the following.

[27] Cf. the conventional modes of insulting described by Mirosław Karwat (ibid., "O złośliwej dyskredytacji. Manipulowanie wizerunkiem przeciwnika", Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2006, pp. 297–307.

[28] Ibid., p. 301. "[…] linguistic behaviour formally remaining within the area of politeness yet fulfilling the function of insults" was described by S. Kowalski using the example of a debate in the Sejm (Polish lower chamber of the parliament) (ibid., "O sejmowej antyetykiecie", in: "Zmiany w publicznych zwyczajach językowych", J. Bralczyk, K. Mosiołek-Kłosińska (eds.), Rada Języka Polskiego przy Prezydium PAN, Warsaw 2001]. By referring to them as "self-labels", he emphasised the fact that he differentiated them both from ordinary labels, the label of rudeness, specific for, e.g. drivers and prisoners, and from "anti-behaviour" (ibid., p. 86). He posited that the basic tool of a self-label is irony in its many forms.

[29] When discussing the linguistic mechanism of "tactless speech" as one of the signs of aggressive linguistic behaviour disturbing public order (violating the communication or emotional sphere of a group of people), Maria Peisert noted: "It is such a type of linguistic activity which infringes ethical, cultural or linguistic taboo in such a way that both the victim and the observer, the third party to the discourse, experience the related psychological discomfort. However, it is sometimes the case that it is only experienced by the observer as the receiver participates in such an activity sending signals of acceptance (e.g. laughter)" (M. Peisert, "Formy i funkcje agresji werbalnej. Próba typologii", Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wroclaw 2004, p. 150).

participants in an event experience an empathy-derived feeling of embarrassment and compassion, the originator can also experience shame resulting from an unintended self-discrediting, while the comments are more discreet.

Once a person knows those differences, she/he cannot consider the manifestations of the strategy of the lack of tact as an example of only a lapse in rhetorical appropriateness but a proof of verbal aggression, and a socially destructive attitude. At the same time, it indicates the important role of firm opposition against using it as a phenomenon undermining the sense of people's own value, and the principle of respecting someone's reputation not only threatens individuals but also reduce the trust in community bonds. That is because a scenario is possible in which anyone can be slandered publicly, encumbered with imputation, and forced to prove her/his innocence in the public eye while the originator bears no consequences whatsoever. In a mediatised world, the actual possibility of public unbridled slandering or passing over with silence of a possible sentencing of the originator contribute to the general belittling of the instances of public unethical or at least inappropriate behaviour, or quite the contrary: to the increase in verbal aggression used as a defence method or as a pre-emptive strike. The silent acceptance of those consequences means the destruction of the culture of inter-personal relations.

Therefore, the main problem is the amplification of the realisation that the availability, and the readability of a message (though not necessarily its proper interpretation) do not entail a minimisation of the receiver activity. On the contrary – they require from her/him the ability to create independently, remain careful about accepting the methods of using the offer prepared by the senders, and an accurate identification of her/his own needs.

The appropriateness principle does, in fact, indicate certain criteria which can become a basis for classifying specific messages as those which do or do not meet the requirements of rhetorical tact, yet it does not enable one to define an *a priori* applicable borderline between appropriateness and inappropriateness in contemporary media[30]. The issue remains difficult to solve. Any discussion about the cases of "crossing yet another line" boils down to condemning the manifestations of unacceptable behaviour or statements about the impossibility of a change in, or the elimination of, certain phenomena (e.g. the excessive use of sensational and gossip themes in tabloids). At the same time, the element of a personal sense of appropriateness plays in them such an important role that to arrive at an agreement regarding a specific case is not always possible. Therefore, it seems that any attempt at defining that which is (im)permissible in terms of the form and content of media messages will only offer a conventional and

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[30] Cf. E. Szczęsna, "Grzeczność zobowiązuje, niegrzeczność prowokuje – o grzeczności i stosowności w reklamie", in: "Formy i normy stosowności. Tom poświęcony literaturze okolicznościowej i użytkowej", *Napis*, series 10, Wydawnictwo DiG, Warsaw 2004, p. 307.

temporary nature, while the possible categorisation solutions may result from only the applicable legal regulations[31].

In fact, there are no inaccessible areas for inappropriateness. It also applies to the elite – acclaimed journalists and opinion-making media. The non-formalised division into that which is appropriate and that which is inappropriate thus proves the existence of a mutual dynamic influence between the creators and the addressees of the messages, and the users' responsible participation in media content circulation.

The above observations lead to a conclusion that, based on diverse media messages, it is difficult to model personal sensitivity to rhetorical tact. Nor is it facilitated by the attitude of many public figures present in the media who treat their public appearances solely as an opportunity to enforce their reasons and evaluations. Therefore, it seems that the settlement of any doubts and dilemmas associated with appropriateness ought to be founded on a good upbringing-based social stance and a system of values, i.e. maturity achieved regardless of the influence of the media.

The ambivalent perception of appropriateness in the media context must be considered as a phenomenon. On the one hand, its presence, appreciated and required, enables one to expect that the chaotic absorption of infotainment will not dominate the mediatised reality, and it will still include conditions for the formation of a responsible receiver attitude based on efficient and engaged critical use of the messages. On the other, though – particularly in its practical dimension – appropriateness has become almost its own distorted reflection in the name of outdated standards which impose conventionality, hampering expressiveness, and blurring the image of ongoing events.

Maybe that is the attitude, of combining opposites, towards the changing media and their specific nature, that is suggested by the phenomenon of appropriateness? An attitude perfectly described by Wiesław Godzic: "The one thing that is left for us to do in the rushing and chaotic world is to maintain moderation (i.e. restrain one's emotions when it is needed or when it is expected of one), and learn to interpret human behaviour in the cultural and communication context"[32].

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[31] A more radical position was offered by Ann M. Gill and Karen Whedbee who posited that the sense of appropriateness is an inherent ability, and it cannot be understood by studying abstract rules (A.M. Gill, K. Whedbee, "Retoryka", in: "Dyskurs jako struktura i process", T.A. van Dijk (ed.), selection and trans. G. Grochowski, T. Dobrzyńska (ed. of Polish translation), Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warsaw 2001, p. 184.

[32] W. Godzic, "Chamstwu mówimy 'nie!' – i 'kto to mówi'", in: "Internetowa kultura obrażania?," K. Krejtz (ed.), 2012, p. 11, http://www.komentujnieobrazaj.pl/kno/ko-raport.pdf [accessed on: 24.05.2017].

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Monika Worsowicz

**Rhetoric appropriateness in view of contemporary media communication and journalism**

(Summary)

In the article, I present deliberations on the theme of the rhetorical category of appropriateness in the context of its original sources and contemporary media practice. Upon presenting the theory formed in line with the understanding developed in antiquity, I accept as a functional division for the purpose of the discussion the *prépon/aptum* (*decorum*) division, i.e. into the historical and literary notion, and appropriateness as a general principle of rhetorical communication to subsequently present a discussion organised on the basis of three theses: 1) The major factor defining the rhetorical model of appropriateness is the mass nature of media communication in the presence of freedom of speech, a democratic system of authority, and economic liberalism; 2) The on-going presence of disputes regarding the appropriateness of public behaviour is a manifestation not as much of its norm-building potential as of the functional approach – of senders, participants of the reported events, and message receivers – towards media communication, which inevitably results in a distinct over-representation of messages the content of which applies to the manifestations of inappropriateness; 3) The appropriateness principle is associated with the difficult task for the receiver to understand her/his role in the world of the media, and its various consequences.

I posit that the principle does, in fact, indicate certain criteria which can become a basis for classifying specific messages as those which do or do not meet the requirements of rhetorical tact, yet it does not enable one to define an *a priori* applicable borderline between appropriateness and inappropriateness in contemporary media. Therefore, it seems that the settlement of any doubts and dilemmas associated with appropriateness ought to be founded on a good upbringing-based social stance and a system of values, i.e. maturity achieved regardless of the influence of the media.

Keywords: rhetoric, prépon/aptum, decorum.