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## Wisdom and the Cultural Dimension of Appropriateness

**Abstract:** In any book on Communication we find rules or even maxims, guiding us in being efficient. The idea of this text is that there is no rule in communication. There can be just one acceptable principle and it says: “Be appropriate!”. People have to do what they have to do in different situations, in different contexts, in order to get their intentions through. A good starting point could be the phrase of Ivan Preston: Meanings are in people, not in messages. From there, all one needs is wisdom, and our approach is not more encouraging on defining that then defining appropriateness.

**Keywords:** appropriateness, wisdom, rules in communication

### 1. Introduction

The story begins with Paul H. Grice, an American logician who found out that classical, formal logical approach to phenomena such as language could fail explaining them. “Logicians are concerned – says Grice – with the formulation of very general patterns of valid inference” (Grice 1989, 22-40) (logical inference, I would say, not communicational one). He goes on, talking of logic and conversation, saying that “it will be possible to construct in terms of the formal devices a system of very general formulas, a considerable number of which can be regarded as, or are closely related to, patterns of inferences the expression of which involves some or all of the devices. Such a system may consist of a certain set of simple formulas [...] and an indefinite number of further formulas, many of which are less obviously acceptable and each of which can be shown to be acceptable if the members of the original set are acceptable”. Then, noticing that the “language serves many important purposes” and that “we can know perfectly well what an expression means (and so a fortiori that it is intelligible) without knowing its analysis”, he says that he has “to assume to a considerable extent an intuitive understanding of the meaning of say [...]”, which makes him consider that “there must be a place for an unsimplified, and so more or less unsystematic, logic of the natural counterparts of formal devices; this logic may be aided and guided by the simplified logic of the formal devices but cannot be supplanted by it” (Grice 1989, 22-40). So, trying to explain the way

our minds work in communication, Paul Grice came to the understanding of the fact that language in enunciation does not respond to frames of classical, formal logic and yet human society works, which makes us think that there has to be some logic in it. We do say, at times, “everybody knows” (like in the song by Leonard Cohen), but we know that everybody is not really the 7.2 or more billion people in the world. The enunciator knows it, the hearer knows it and they know of each other that they know it. But there is nothing unclear in an utterance like this. It produces the effect, whatever this effect should be.

And there is more: Grice paid attention also to the fact that we do not have to be explicit to the ultimate limit when using the language in communication. There is always something in what we actually say, called *implicature*, that triggers in the mind of our audience something different, the meaning of our enunciation. The mechanism would rely on two correlata: implicature (at the utterer) and inference (at the hearer).

But then Grice came to ask himself whether this can work in absence of any rule and the answer was “no!”. And he worked to set up a principle (the Cooperative Principle) he then refined into four maxims, “echoing Kant”, that is a maxim for each of the Kantian categories: Quantity, Quality, Relation and Manner. In the end, the idea seems to be very clear: when using the language in communication one has to be brief, to be clear, to be true. We should also bear in our minds the fact that nothing could ever top a maxim!

And yet!...

Let’s look to some examples I sorted out from different times and different places: London after the War, Bucharest a year ago and Spain in the 17-th century.

A Secretary of the Foreign Office asked the British diplomats to be communicative and talkative no matter what, when meeting with people at their respective jobs, but he added that whenever they feel they don’t understand the topic or they don’t like it, they should use an unclear, confusing discourse. And that worked and still works nowadays.

A lady MP once addressed her colleagues in the Romanian Parliament with a so-called discourse where there were phrases with no semantic connection between them, phrases with no connection with the topic under discussion and even phrases which were ill formed. After a while, she stopped and as the audience was applauding her, like robots, she revealed to them her idea of proving that nobody listens to the discourses in the Parliament.

In a book written in 17-th century Spain, Baltasar Gracián establishes a set of rules for heroes, princes, kings and the sort. Among other very valuable and very actual rules, he says that one cannot just go around telling the truth, because, he says, some of the truths are somebody else’s and some of them are our truths.

Examples could continue, but the point is there: we cannot have rules in communication saying that we should be clear, brief, true. All we can do is to be appropriate, to be adequate, to fit, to do the proper thing. If we were to remember the general truth behind the formula:

“In the practice of communication there is only one rule, namely: there are no rules”,

and we would still have a rule to suggest, more precisely: “Be appropriate!”. Although it is perhaps the most difficult to define, appropriateness remains the basic requirement for communication. Nevertheless, a rule must imply a clearly stated and clearly defined thing which is impossible in our case. Thus, the only option left is to speak of advice rather than rule.

During a conference held about two years ago<sup>1</sup>, Professor Jack Miller from the University of Toronto, Canada, discussed about wisdom, arguing it could be the basis for appropriateness. But since wisdom is not easily defined either, appropriateness is still as difficult to be caught in clear definitions as it has always been. But we have seen that what is difficult to define is also difficult to enforce as a rule. Therefore, the suggestion would be to consider it as a requirement or maybe as a permanently targeted subject, never fully achieved.

However, what can be said about appropriateness is that it manifests itself at several levels and it appears to be a complex subject for study. Appropriateness has a cultural dimension, a historical one and an empathic one (related to shared knowledge and to the experience of others); seen from another angle, it is social, psychological, and, from a third perspective, it implies a large amount of risk, caused by the inability to fully reconcile such numerous and different levels. From this latter perspective, we could say that appropriateness does not depend on the risk area (more or less assumed, calculated), but on that of the uncertainty. Appropriateness is also learned - paradoxically! - starting from a young age, within the family and then in school, within the society, and in any social practice. I say “paradoxically” because learning leads to knowledge, to the correct and clear understanding of things and, therefore, to determining the rules of action, which cannot be expected from this particular learning. Depending on landmarks as reference points against which one can position himself/herself in order to make sure that (s)he behaves appropriately is not an exercise with a pre-established end. Intersubjective interaction is full of surprises and can bear the risk of failed communication. Slowly, through the explicit presence in the public space and by adapting to the requirements of communication ethics in the interaction with the others, individuals can learn to behave increasingly appropriate, and can even become – by means of a spontaneous decision that correctly resolves a communication situation – a landmark for the community, which increases her/his chances of being perceived

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<sup>1</sup> The International Conference PHOENIX on education, organized by the “Transilvania” University of Braşov, September 22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> 2010, hosted at the Bran Villa.

as appropriate, since appropriateness can also be acknowledged by relating to models: thus, s/he who becomes a model sets a trend that will also be adopted by the others. We can also identify here a principle of the eternal pioneers, the Americans: *If you want to cope with the future, invent it!*

By communication – as Dominique Wolton says (Wolton 1997 a, 9-14) – one must understand more than the simple idea of transmission; one must understand the management of contradictory logics. In an open universe, where each individual has its own legitimacy to speak freely, communication is less about “conveying messages” and more related to ensuring a minimum of cohesion between views of the world which are necessarily heterogeneous. Communication means organizing the coexistence of logics that are, to a certain extent, competing and conflicting. In the same trend we can also mention Eliseo Veron (Veron 1997, 25-32), who states that every act of communication leads necessarily to a connection. If the connection already exists, then every speech act updates it (in one way or another). In other words, an act of communication means establishing a relation between “places” (of the transmitter and the receiver). A transmitter cannot communicate without positioning himself and without, simultaneously, positioning the receiver to which s/he addresses in relation to what s/he is saying. In the analysis of the enunciation, the speaker takes the transmitter’s place and the addressee takes the receiver’s place. This “positioning” by places can also be found in interpersonal communication (where the transmitter is personal), and in media communication (where the transmitter is institutional). The theoretical model that can be built from this is known as “the reading contract” (the term belongs to E. Veron). What he suggests to the receiver is not only content, but also a relationship. This suggestion takes form in the text through the enunciation device, which implies building discursive beings (the speaker and the recipient) and, on this basis, building a relationship between them (Cheveigné 1997, 95-106); as with any proposal, it is up to the receiver to accept it or not.

## **2. A few thoughts on wisdom**

What connection would there be between appropriateness and wisdom? How does the latter help in achieving the first? These are the issues we will try to reflect upon, thinking that the Canadian professor cited above was right.

Wisdom, as Jack Miller said, could be that part of divinity in each of us, that humble position that invites us – each of us, but not to the same level and not to the same extent at every time! - to reflect upon ourselves and the world around us, to ask ourselves about our correct positioning in relation to the world and to others, to analyse our deeds and events around us, to assess to what extent we did manage to have an appropriate behaviour in every situation we faced. A moment of introspection, a habit of keeping a diary of daily events, the sincere confession, as religious practice, the frequent participation in meetings of communication therapy circles and many other relatively similar activities can

constitute moments of self-analysis aimed at acquiring wisdom. Although it is known that wisdom is, before anything the one that makes us accept things as they are, it should not be seen as a lethargic state during which the individual no longer cares about anybody and anything anymore. It is rather the ability to distinguish between things one can change and things one does not have the power to change, which makes us understand that it is worth trying to change the things that can be changed. Accepting those things that are beyond our control is an advice for avoiding the waste of energy resources, required for purposes that can really be achieved, and for avoiding unnecessary irritation to a part of the community by adopting insurgent positions, with no chance of reaching a concrete ending.

At the level of practical interactions, wisdom implies, first of all, knowledge (as deep as possible) of the other, an understanding (as good as possible) of the interaction context or, if necessary, learning the parameters according to which the context is organized. Since the standard communication situations are becoming increasingly rare and less-standardised, reducing the entropy at the time when the concrete interaction situation is apprehended is always more difficult. Even with the institutionalization of standards, social statuses, roles and social sides, this difficulty remains and, with globalization, it acquires new dimensions and creates new challenges for the individual. However, by assuming the risk of failure, the individual, concerned with the idea of appropriate behaviour in communicating with others, will constantly analyse him/herself, will permanently learn and will always reason on the proper way to approach each communication situation faced. S/he will not succeed every time or perhaps sometimes s/he will fail to act in perfect agreement with the situation, but, from each event experienced, through introspection and reflection, s/he will learn valuable lessons for any possible similar situation in the future. These accumulations may be the basis for a wise approach to existence in general. The child is told from a very young age to behave “properly”; then the family and, later, the school and the society provides models for the child to structure his/her own behaviour in accordance with the requirements of the community culture s/he in which s/he lives. The most difficult thing refers, however, to teaching the child when, how and to what extent s/he should apply the rules acquired, which model to follow in a situation or another, what to avoid and what to ignore in all the experiences lived, concerning the topic of appropriateness. How to tell a child, for example, that there are also useless truths and some even harmful, when you've taught him that the best thing to do is to always tell the truth?! We know that “always” and “only” are limits to be always considered with ... wisdom: the world in which everyone always tells only the truth is a world where social existence is impossible. And then, who can say with certainty when it is appropriate to tell the truth and when it is more appropriate to avoid the disclosure of that truth? Or, looking from another perspective, who can state to be the holder of the truth and that the world cannot go on without that particular truth? Another problem lies in the question: How to teach the youth about

humility in a world where the tendency is to teach them how to become leaders, how to always be ahead of the others? American sociologists have concluded there are no more boundaries and that nowadays, all that young people want to learn is how to lead. Nobody learns how to be obedient anymore, or how to follow someone else/ others. In the end, the question is: how to prepare young people to renegotiate all truths, that renegotiation that pays the price for entering adult life? The painful relativization of the milestones set in early life will cost each of us a price inversely proportional to the extent to which our thinking will prove flexible. Abdicating the moral rules is not at all the solution; what we are left with is, therefore, the intelligent approach of our destiny, divided as frequently as possible by moments of reflection on what is happening around us and on our own positioning in relation to what is happening. Life experience, lived bravely, but with emphasis on the self, on the events and on the other, will always add something to wisdom. The secret is to pay attention to everything that is happening to us and, from every event, to extract something that deserves to stand as a subject for reflection. “Attentive to everything and to all” was Marin Sorescu’s formula. And reflective, should also be added.

Reality of existence shows that, in most cases, the individual acquires certain wisdom until middle age, which serves her/him to be appropriate in different situations s/he faces. Under the cultural pressure of the social-cultural environment s/he lives in, the individual acquires behavioural automatisms which facilitate her/his social development. We refer here to the daily rituals as well (cf. Goffman), and to what the sociology of interaction retains in chapters such as “social status” or “social roles”. Except for pathological cases, people transfer the coordination of certain routine actions to the subconscious area and manage effortlessly to live in the society they belong to, from the cultural point of view. In these conditions, “being appropriate” seems something easily achievable by anyone, but we know very well that this is not the case; we know that appropriateness requires an effort of attention and rapid context data processing. At the same time, cultural pressure is also the cause of prejudices and stereotypical thinking (Stoica and Berneagă 2008); and these are always difficult to hide beneath the mask of wisdom. However, wisdom is still the best mask for what Malcolm Gladwell called “thinking without thinking” (Gladwell 2005).

The problem gets even more complicated when the human being has to face the cultural pressures of an environment which is unknown to him/her, of an environment s/he must first discover and understand. The idea at the origin of these considerations on the concepts of *wisdom* and *appropriateness* (as they can be objectified in intercultural studies) was that of the “clashes” between ethnic groups at the cultural level; here, the concept of *culture* is also assumed as having the meaning proposed by Umberto Eco, namely, a distinct manner of using the signs. The perspective that can perhaps best highlight the cultural difference in interactions that occur between characters belonging to different cultures would be that of expectations. Being able to represent your interlocutor

to yourself as best as possible (with his/ her own expectations about the communicational interaction that you both committed to) is the key to successful communication. Certainly, the representation will only be “close” to reality and never perfect. The representations and meta-representations game will be the one to ensure – with the likelihood margin rationally accepted – a good appropriateness in communication. We understand why Professor Petre Botezatu saw politeness as “what I think you think I think about you”. As we said, an additional problem arises when actors belonging to different cultures interact; how can one imagine (that is, how can one represent) which are the expectations of an individual from another culture? Studying the respective culture? Studying the culture and the human type that particular individual would fit into? Conducting interethnic studies? Resorting to studies of sociology and social psychology? We chose the latter option, looking in fact for analysis tools. The base for the reflection on the “clash” between ethnic groups was reading of a collection of texts on true stories in which the cultural characteristic – or, rather, ethno-cultural one – of any national community, decides on the way to interact with members of another community, with another ethno-cultural characteristic. We refer here to the book called *Outliers. The Story of Success* by Malcolm Gladwell mentioned earlier. No doubt, Geert Hofstede's constructs, according to which nations (or rather “cultures”) can be classified, have guided the reading of Gladwell's book, sometimes even to his suggestion, explicitly present in a chapter of the text. It is not sure if the several criteria proposed by Hofstede are sufficient, but it is undeniable that they can serve for interesting classifications which, at their own turn, can support equally interesting interpretations of human behaviour and remarkable differences in comparing cultures. The pairs: masculinity / femininity, individualism / collectivism, as well as the positioning relating to *power distance* or to *uncertainty avoidance* are proven as valuable instruments. The wisdom acquired can make the observation of the data on Hofstede's criteria more difficult, but reactions prior to its manifestation remain to be studied, which may be the result of that thinking before the thinking. On the other hand, what is of interest in terms of the possible relationship between wisdom and appropriateness is rational, controlled behaviour, the one that the individual uses in the world in order to express him/herself. And at this level, we could consider that it is precisely the evanescence of the characteristics described by Hofstede's criteria that matters. Studying the world against these criteria, any individual can find his/ her own place in a cultural type, with its strengths and its weaknesses. Aware of these data about the culture the product of which s/he is, the individual will learn how to mask his/ her weaknesses and how to promote his/ her strengths, depending on the situation faced. Undoubtedly, the situations where the “time” agent is crucial still remain to be discussed: if the entire time at the disposal of one of the interlocutors in an intercultural situation is only sufficient for the “thinking before the thinking”, then wisdom cannot be speculated and inappropriateness is lurking.

### 3. Appropriateness

Most of the situations we can face in our social existence can be classified into rules, referring either to etiquette or protocol, summing up in the end into daily rituals. Starting from this assumption, we might think that learning - under the guidance of the family, at first, under the guidance of school and society, later on - is able to ensure the individual's ability to behave appropriately in any type of situation. As we have already written (Stoica 2004), the individual's institutionalized training in school does not aim at teaching her/him, for example, science, foreign languages, history etc., being rather aimed at one thing only, of an overwhelming importance and with a high degree of difficulty: to teach the child to communicate, in order to fit easily into the community, into the culture s/he has been born into and in which s/he is going to live. "The essence of the whole process is learning to conform to the conventions of the group in which the individual lives", argues the neurophysiologist John Zachary Young (Young 1971).

On the other hand, if we were to stop our attention only on the cultural dimension of appropriateness, wisdom – as detailed as it was described in the previous subchapter - would be sufficient for a social evolution with generally no major accidents. This would mean that the process of introspection and perpetual self-reporting to the world would be added to the learning process; more precisely, that process by which, as we were saying, wisdom is acquired. Family, school, church, and in many cases even society, teaches us the rules of the ethics of time and of the cultural space we live in, but only the *post factum* analysis of our experiences and the analysis of the manner of self-reporting to the world and to the events we have attended will let us know how appropriate we have been or which are the elements to which we should pay more attention to in the future. "People often share standards and expect one another to stick to them. In as far as they do, their society may be orderly", sociologist C. Wright Mills states (Mills 1959), briefly saying, similarly to one of his colleagues, Talcott Parsons, who connected everything to the idea of value, when contending that:

„An item in a shared symbolic system, which serves as a criterion or standard for selecting among the orientation alternatives which are intrinsically open in a given situation, may be called value... But from this motivational orientation of all the activities, taking into account the role of symbolic systems, it is necessary to point out a "value orientation" aspect. This does not concern the meaning of the state of affairs expected by the actor within the balance reward-punishment, but the very content of the selective standards. Thus, the concept "orientation towards value" becomes the logical device for formulating a central aspect in the articulation of cultural tradition within the action system" (Parsons 1951).

The difficulties are not so great when it comes to developments in the familiar space of the culture in which we were born. Although no one can give

any assurance on the success of appropriateness at any time, the fact that we understand the world from the perspective of our mother tongue – cf. the Worf-Sapir theory – enables us to capture the details of any communication situation faced in the context of the culture we belong to and to deal with it, in a convenient manner at least, regardless of the data we start out from. In a system of shared symbols, it is easier for us to find an element serving as a criterion to choose between several alternatives to direct our actions. This is the direction that the state of facts can have as expected by the actors of an interaction, but it can also be the content of the reference standards that we use as criteria for selection. This orientation of actions according to the value system becomes the logical tool in formulating a central aspect of the articulation of cultural traditions within the action systems. It all connects - it seems! – in the form of syllogisms such as “if ... then ...”. Only, we know it, the knowledge of values generally shared by the members of a culture does not always ensure avoidance of errors in communication, especially because of the hierarchy of those values which is not always arranged the same way: from individual to individual, the scale of values may change and these changes are more important than the values themselves (in the list) when it comes to finding differences between people. It would be easier to look for examples of these deviations in the stereotypes related to professions, this time. We would find artists, for instance, alike, with cross-cultural characteristics: they are sensitive, nonconformist, imaginative, slightly absent as regards their daily lives, tending to present a reality that only they perceive (while the others either do not perceive it or consider it often as being distorted) and this is valid regardless of their nationality: Germans, French, Russian or English. A German artist can easily be misunderstood even by his own countrymen. The same goes for the Russian artist and his Russian countrymen or the French artist for the French people. Without any doubt, in the list of values that s/he holds as selection criteria in choosing action options, the German artist will also have those values that make her/him recognizable as belonging to the German cultural space, but these will not be at the top of the list, what distinguishes her/him from her/ his countrymen.

In the end, knowledge of culture also refers to the possibility to interact according to the norms of the respective culture. Having a norm-oriented behaviour proves the ability to understand the expectations of others and their importance in accordance with the theory of action, especially in the active phase, that is, when you are in the role of the one initiating the action pursuing purposes. The difficulty reported by all sociologists who have dealt with the theory of action is given by the fact that expectations are not strictly determined by the shared symbolic system, but are rather subject to that double contingency given by the subjectivities entered into interaction. And we have here an order-related problem involving two aspects: the symbolic system order (the one that makes communication possible) and the order of the normative dimension of expectations (in a mutually oriented motivation). In time, standards become patterns of orientation towards values and provide the most important part of the

cultural tradition of the social system, as sociologists say (“with the normally acceptable degree of uncertainty”, we would add). Thus, things seem simple when we place the analysis in a single social-national system, which is inside the same culture.

Things are more complicated in intercultural communication, especially when the knowledge the speaker can use pertains more to the field of stereotypes and prejudices. Mutual representation of expectations, according to the communication situation, becomes risky for interlocutors coming from different cultural spaces and sometimes failing to have a deep knowledge of the interlocutor’s culture.

### **3.1. Observations on certain necessary evocations**

Starting from a number of practical observations and from readings that I have found exciting, I will try to draw attention to the cultural dimension of appropriateness, with inserts of interculturalism. I have chosen as a starting point an experience I had a few years ago.

It was during that time when PR teaching was in its early stages in our country and when specialized literature was scarce and not very well written. At the time, the tendency was to consider all PR practitioners from other countries experts, the only criterion being that of the (alleged) successes apparently compared to halos on their heads or - sometimes – their presence in academic environments as associates of universities in their native countries, where they gave lectures on the subject. We also had here in Iasi, a lecturer from Belgium. I turned into a direct observer of the phenomenon, with the intention to find out what “they” knew which we did not know. I will not comment here upon all the aspects of the cycle of conferences held by the Belgian and I choose to stop only on the manner in which he had chosen to present the particularities of different cultures with which a PR professional can interact if the organization s/he works for carries out an activity of international dimensions. The Germans, the Japanese, the British, the French, the Americans and others have been described one by one. I was listening to nothing more than a series of stereotypes, as they were perceived by the European collective mentality: the German is rigorous and rather surly, the Japanese is mysterious, distant and rather easily offended, the French is exuberant, the British is inhibited etc. What I found interesting was that at the end of each description, our lecturer did not forget to comment upon the “prototype” presented, saying “*But it is changing now*”. Taking out this formula as a common factor, we find that there is nothing left to remember, about the German, or the American... The lists of characteristics were cancelled by the final formulation and a safe approach of the discussion partner, whether Japanese or French, no longer seemed possible. Theory had armed our Belgian with the sets of stereotypes and prejudices that we all know, and practice was only adding a flat to each characteristic. But the flat was cancelling everything

and there was nothing left as basis for the analysis of an intercultural communication situation.

Specialized books appeared then in this field, always in a higher number, until they became all too numerous. Most of them consist of texts that seem to have been taken from lectures similar to the one mentioned here: a kind of “recipe making”, with no scientific foundation, leaving the reader with the feeling that the success of PR communication is provided by the simple application of the rules and that rules can be easily remembered, as they are nothing else but a repetition of the cultural stereotypes that the reader already knows. If you know exactly how the German is, you can always interact with an individual belonging to this culture, which guarantees the success of the communication. There is no risk of being inappropriate, manuals seem to say. There are clear rules and, if you apply them, you fall perfectly into the situation you have to deal with. If you know the rule and follow it precisely, you cannot fail: you will know what the interlocutor’s expectations are, regardless of the communication situation you have to deal with.

What a difference between the self-confident approaches of those who are only flirting with communication sciences and those established as landmarks by these sciences! What a distance between such approaches as the ones mentioned above and Roman Jakobson’s (Jakobson 1987) “stories” of the Russian soldiers surprised by the way in which the Bulgarians moved their head to mean “yes” or “no” or by that Russian actor who managed to say the same linguistic sequence in 40 different ways, each time saying something different, at an entrance exam to a famous theatre company in Moscow!

With this reference to Jakobson, let us move on to the readings.

### **3.2. Examples**

Passing to the readings, I will emphasize yet another distance: that between the approaches for which the Belgian mentioned above stands as a model and the ones we find in the story *The ethnic Theory of Plane Crashes* (Gladwell 2008), where tools such as those created by Geert Hofstede are cleverly used to explain the success/ failure of communication, verifiable in the ultimate effect of the communicational interaction. Where the “time” factor counts (see *above*), the lack of the minimum wisdom, to tell the participant to the act of communication what would be appropriate in the given circumstances, can be fatal. The story of the crew on a Colombian aircraft brings into question what Gladwell concentrated in the formula “being a good pilot and coming from a culture marked by a long distance from power is an unfortunate mix”. This must not lead to inferring that Gladwell suggests a repeal of the rules of interaction, as they are in different cultures. What he implies - and I think I correctly understood his intention, without being marked by the bitter search for supporters of the perspective I bring into question here - is that the human

individual must remain flexible, open to negotiation and compromise, for his/her own benefit and that of the others. This is not about “correcting” cultures where there is a long way to power, but about being appropriate to various communication situations between members of any culture. It is not at all related to any incitement to indiscipline and disregard for rules (especially in professions in the military field, such as the airline pilot); we run here the risk that, in extreme situations, to pay more attention to the shape of the speech and the communication contract, instead of adopting wiser and, therefore, more appropriate conducts. If, instead of euphemisms, the co-pilot had told directly, clearly and briefly that they were in danger of crashing due to lack of fuel, the commander would have had to react promptly, and there is data supporting the assumption that the plane could have been saved. But the co-pilot followed the rule specific to his culture for that typical communication situation and the aircraft crashed to the ground.

I will continue with a reading to which I always come back: *Human Nature: Fact and Fiction* (Headlam and McFadden 2006) from which, this time, I choose Chapter 9, *What science can and cannot tell us about human nature*, by Kenan Malik. The author starts from the worrisome observation imposed to him by the reality that, in the world of science, there is an increasing trend to deny the exceptional character of the human individual and to see people as something just a little more than sophisticated beasts. What torments Kenan Malik is the way in which sciences always give technical answers to philosophical questions, thus somehow reducing in intensity the calling to deep reflection and accepting the coexistence of perspectives. About this aspect, we find a quotation by Rob Foley who argued that the question “When did we become human beings?” appears as a direct question about the recording of the fossils (cf. Rob Foley, *Humans Before Humanity: An Evolutionary Perspective*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1995, pp. 17, 20, cited Kenan Malik, op. cit.). The concern for a most accurate dating of fossils with radioactive carbon passes before the concern of determining the criterion / criteria against which to establish the exact time when we can say that human beings “appeared” on Earth (language, culture, bipedal position, intelligence, ability to build tools etc.). The paradox for the reader is that the sciences’ success in understanding nature has led to problems in understanding human nature. Too much rigor dangerously simplifies the vision on the necessarily complex nature of the “new” citizen of the Earth, so difficult to put into patterns, who possesses - or, as Malik says, “we think it possesses” – a purpose and a rational action capacity, self-awareness and will. The human being is the only being unreleased from spells, if we take as a reference Max Weber’s saying according to which the success of science comes from the way in which it “disenchants” nature, releasing it from spells. The tension between the scientific naturalism and the exceptional character of human nature remains still unsolved, and the human being, as a social and historical being, endowed with self-awareness and ability to act rationally, remains the only being who can transform itself while also transforming the surrounding universe. But, I wonder,

is it necessary to change the world? The question also appears in the text I am referring to here, and in the theme of this study. Philosopher John Gray is quoted in Malik's text with a famous remark: "Those who are fighting to change the world are simply seeking consolation for a truth they are too weak to carry." In the text of the present study, the question appears as a meta-questioning about the place, time, context and the interlocutor, that make relevant such positioning. Let us not forget that the issue here refers to the adequacy of the speech to a given situation. Except for meetings or scientific publications, we will always wonder whether we ought to maintain supreme confidence in human reason, for example, when the interlocutor perceives such support as unacceptable human arrogance, whether to talk about human beings treating it as an animal (be it understood literally or metaphorically), since scientifically it is a plausible idea, but also culturally acceptable (in many cultures, most of them European). Read diachronically, the human history reveals important changes at ethical and moral level, which can create difficulties in representing the audience, in order to adequate the speech to the values against which it is claimed. However, without knowing its hierarchy of values and, consequently, its expectations, and desires, adequacy can only be approximate, with a high likelihood of risk.

Another example that can be given here is that of the writings of Ferdinand de Saussure already published in our country: his famous *Course on General Linguistics* and *Writings in General Linguistics* (2003). The speech appropriateness rule is applied - involuntarily, probably, and therefore with greater power for example - in that Saussure from the *Course* does not seem to resemble at all the one in the *Writings*. Reading the *Course in General Linguistics*, which, we mention once more, was published by two of his former students - Ch. Bally and A. Sechehaye, we remember the confident tone of the professor, just as the students, in their own turn remembered it. In the classroom, we suspect, Professor Ferdinand de Saussure wanted to present what was already clear to him, what had to remain in the students' mind as a basis for their training as specialists. We can thus explain the clarity of the *Course* and the way in which the ideas presented endured in time. This can also explain the influence of the *Course* on the researchers everywhere, in other words, the emergence of Saussurianism and the Saussurianists. This is how Oswald Ducrot's exclamation in the *Qu'est-ce que le structuralisme? I. Le structuralisme en linguistique* should be understood: "Enfin Saussure vint" (Ducrot 1968, 43).

We don't find the same Saussure in the *Writings in General Linguistics*. The researcher has scientific insights, not certainties; he must search for answers to questions that torment him, he is reluctant; for him, the solutions presented are even more working hypotheses waiting for confirmation in order to pass among the scientific truths. At the level of expression, the researcher can leave notes with unfinished phrases, with promises made to himself that he shall return to issues insufficiently clarified and with phrases that reveal a spirit tormented by uncertainties. How clear and simple it is said in the *Course* that language is form and not substance! In how much detail is this aspect discussed in the *Writings in*

*General Linguistics!* Similarly, issues such as: language as opposed to the value system, the linguistic sign and the word (about the latter we are told several times that “it is nothing”), about the sign and the meaning, about the distinction between *langue* and *parole*<sup>2</sup>, about synchrony and diachrony. It is so much discussed upon, since there is even more hesitation, because solid arguments are looked for, because there is... research. Sharing knowledge to your disciples, from the fullness of your accumulations, sharing something you consider firmly scientifically acknowledged, is not the same as trying to clarify your ideas, to check scientific insights. This complex character, Ferdinand de Saussure, reveals, almost 90 years after his death, a face that the *Course* had not showed us, although we suspected it. Thus, once the picture is completed, the image of the researcher-professor allows a better appreciation of Saussure's scientific personality. The confident tone of his publishers in the *Course* lectures reveals the professor's necessary lack of hesitations in the classroom. The apparent disorder of notes found in the garden of orange trees of his family residence in Geneva, the multitude of gaps, the hesitant tone and the insistent return on matters already listed (see *above*), reveal the researcher's necessary doubt, the care for the proper naming of objects he was working on, in other words, a Saussure possessed by a well-controlled fever, the scientific research fever. He was planning a book on general linguistics, considered necessary especially to show the linguist *what he does exactly*<sup>3</sup> and to show the role of the word as perturbing factor of the words' science. A book, unlike a course, gives the author the opportunity to describe his doubts as well, which is very useful for the development of a scientific field. He already had very many sheets, he had ideas...

Finally, here is an example of the style appropriate to communications in scientific writings. In the same *Human Nature. Fact and Fiction* mentioned above, the famous writer Ian McEwan signs the chapter on *Literature, science and human nature*, in which, among other things, he speaks about the perfectly appropriate formula by which the two authors of the first writings on genetics, Crick and Watson, announced their discovery to the scientific community. McEwan notes that, at the end of this short text – counting only about 1200 words – published in the *Nature* magazine, the conclusion strikes by its modesty of expression: “It has not escaped our notice that the specific pairing we have postulated immediately suggests a possible copying mechanism for the genetic material”. “It has not escaped our notice...”, this is the formula that seduced Ian McEwan. He finds it of an exceptional courtesy, for the double negation which also ensures transparency. Compared to what would have probably been natural

<sup>2</sup> We shall prefer the term in French, as the Romanian *vorbi* is nothing but a vague equivalent of the French term, and Saussure himself (through the publishers of the *Course*) advises us, should the language we use not make very clearly this distinction, to keep the dichotomy in French and to only make the semaseological effort.

<sup>3</sup> We meet Eugenio Coșeriu here, with the distinction between general linguistics (the one showing *how*) and philosophy of language (showing *what*).

(“Everyone, listen here! We have found the mechanism by which life on Earth multiplies and we are so excited we cannot even sleep”), the scientist’s formula is the type that establishes close contact, but not the kind that crosses the mind immediately. It was worth the effort of finding the appropriate speech to present a discovery to the world, a discovery that could have waited much longer before being unanimously accepted by the scientific world in the early ‘50s: genetics was born that year, in 1953.

## Conclusions

It wouldn’t be proper - or, in other words, it wouldn’t be appropriate – to let a text about appropriateness finish inappropriately, that is without a conclusion or even more. On the other hand, it would be just as inappropriate for a text to leave the impression of having addressed the issue comprehensively, especially since, as we have seen in the introduction, appropriateness takes different forms of expression and presents itself at various levels. Even so, I run the risk of disappointing as I have not presented a single example from the multitude of inadequacies in politics or the media. I will have to admit that I did not allow myself be tempted by the evidence and I preferred to look elsewhere, in areas of innocent subtleties, for the few examples I concluded this study with (which I see rather as an invitation to meditation), especially since I had planned to give examples of appropriateness, not of lack of appropriateness.

At least one conclusion can be inferred from the above: the fact that appropriateness is possible and, also, that it can account for the communicational project of a speaker/ writer. Ivan Preston's remark can serve us as a guide: meanings are in people, not in messages<sup>4</sup>.

As a target, appropriateness always remains a valid one. Achieving it can never be guaranteed, but the effort is worthwhile.

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<sup>4</sup> „Meanings are in people, not in messages” (in: „Understanding Communication Research Findings”, J. of Consumer Affairs, vol. 43, no. 1, 2009, pp. 170-173).

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