On the ‘Reasonableness’ of Discourse: Peirce and the Rhetoric of Speech Genres

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Abstract
In this paper we propose to focus on so-called speech genres, traditionally understood as a set of tacit instructions broadly constraining the form and content of our discursive productions. More specifically, and according to Peirce’s categorial scheme, we suggest speech genres can be considered as ‘thirds’, or purposeful and general ‘laws’ overdetermining speech and its regularities. As such, the study of their semiotic mechanisms would fall within the sphere of Peirce’s ‘speculative rhetoric’, one of the three branches of his semeiotics. Overall, following Lyne, we suggest that any speech genre relates to three kinds of rhetorical ‘habits’—habits of representation, habits of objectification, and habits of interpretation—which explain a sense of ‘reasonableness’ permeating any discursive practice in society. We suggest that the task of discursive rhetorics should be to delineate, for given cultural communities, the productive and interpretive norms and mechanisms which govern the determination of discourse and elicit an intended interpretation on the interpreter’s side.

Keywords: Charles S. Peirce, speech genres, rhetoric, discourse analysis, purpose, situation communication, habits

1. Introduction
In his study of Peirce’s philosophy of religion, Raposa (1989, p. 145) writes that “it is certainly true that [his] semiotic has provided the creative stimulus for many contemporary developments in philosophy and literary theory. [...] But his objective idealism and synechism have not tended to be incorporated into this modern work. They have not, in any important way, shaped the contemporary perspective on semiotic [...]”
More specifically, Raposa adds that it is not “to be denied that his semiotic can, to a
great extent, be lifted from its metaphysical underpinnings and employed for various
contemporary purposes. In doing so, however, it must be admitted that this theory loses
a good deal of its original power”. Fully agreeing with this view, we also believe that
Peirce’s “metaphysical underpinnings”, from the most abstract cosmologic reflections
down to the most determinate phenomenological technicalities, constitute a powerful and
systematic common backbone for both ‘natural’ and ‘cultural’ inquiries into the world that
we, as scientists, all strive to comprehend.

More specifically in this paper, and in accordance with the view defended above,
we propose to show how select aspects of Peirce’s philosophy (mainly, his conceptions
of ‘laws’, ‘habits’, and ‘thirdness’) can be relevant for scholars whose scientific task
consists in observing, describing and explaining discursive practices of our everyday
life, and the so-called ‘speech genres’ in particular. As we stated elsewhere, “largely
relying on Saussurean structuralism in Continental Europe, (French) discourse analysts
have never evoked Charles Sanders Peirce’s theory of semiosis to shed light on
discursive mechanisms at play in the production and interpretation of oral or written
texts” (Gaspard, 2015, p. 551). As a case study, with this lack of acknowledgement in
mind, this paper attempts to make sense of this specific notion of speech genre within a
Peircean theoretical framework. More particularly, we will suggest that an understanding
of speech-generic mechanisms falls within the realm of what Peirce defined as the third
branch of his general theory of signs, i.e. ‘speculative rhetoric’.

2. Purposeful Laws and Explanation

In scientific affairs, the will to inquire may derive from a feeling of ‘reasonableness’ that
one can experience in our everyday life: witnessing the fall of a stone or the crash of a
stock market, we cannot but suggest that some phenomena must ultimately be intelligible,
waiting to be explained. Interpreting Peirce’s philosophy of science, however, de Waal
(2013, p. 145) observes that “clearly not everything demands an explanation. […] An
explanation becomes possible only when there is a definite relation between things,
that is, where there is thirdness”, whose universe, according to Peirce’s metaphysical
architectonic, comprises laws, or “everything whose Being consists in active power
to establish connections between different objects” (EP2:435 [1908]). Therefore, in
accordance with this scheme, “to ‘explain’ is to state the general law or principle that
governs a particular phenomenon” (Raposa, 1989, p. 42).

In typical scientific practice, this ‘general principle’ is first hypothesized (or abducted
in Peirce’s vocabulary), before being inductively confirmed if future events, theoretically
and a priori deduced from a virtual acceptance of this hypothetical governing principle, are
actually observed in subsequent controlled experiments. Understood in this fashion, a law is
thus a “prognostic generalization of observations” (EP2:68 [1901]), entailing the fulfillment
of predictions: under particular circumstances to which it applies, the newly discovered law
not only governs observed, *actual* phenomena but will also govern possible, *future* events, so that, covering virtual cases not yet instantiated, its “reality transcends the actuality of any finite collection of experienced instances” (Raposa, 1989, p. 33).

Moreover, Peirce characterized any natural or social law as being *purposeful* general principles, the result of habit-taking processes: “the synecologist will not admit that physical and psychical phenomena are entirely distinct [...] but will insist that all phenomena are of one character, though some are more mental and spontaneous, others more material and regular. Still, all alike present that mixture of freedom and constraint, which [...] makes them to be teleological, or purposive” (EP2:2 [1893]). It is indeed important to stress that not every active law operative in both nature and society is as crystallized as gravity, for instance. According to Peirce, laws are the result of ongoing evolution and “it follows that no law is absolute. That is, we must suppose that the phenomena themselves involve departures from law analogous to errors of observation” (CP 6.101 [1902]).

3. ‘Explaining’ Speech?

Now, in the case of *speech*, we suggest that a similar feeling of ‘reasonableness’ can also result from an observation of the discursive regularities one can detect in corpora of oral or written texts (*e.g.* medical interviews, political debates, kitchen recipes, etc.) produced in similar communication situations. Scanning the obituary pages of a newspaper, we may be struck by the relative homogeneity between each particular text in the column. As such, the texts do constitute a matter for observation (*i.e.* they are the results of speech *acts*) that is no more different than the one experienced by the physicist witnessing the successive and regular drops of particular stones: both observed regularities call for a general principle which would explain their realization. In both cases then, the issue at stake is the confirmation that the observed phenomena are the actualized cases of a hypothesized law.

As regards this example, the particular texts in an obituary column conform to the general law expected of what is defined as an “obituary”. As a general principle, it is represented in the following conditional statement: *if* a particular text is of the kind of an obituary, *then* it *would* “look like” *x* and *z* and this, independently of whether a particular text is actualized or not. As mentioned above, the *reality* of an obituary is enjoyed in its capacity to govern all its actual and future (and thus only possible) textual determinations. If an interpreter’s subsequent observations confirm this original *would-be*, it means that he has guessed the right general principle governing the formation of the given text. However, if an interpreter realizes as he reads that a particular obituary doesn’t include the ‘adequate’ semiotic constructs expected of an obituary, he might doubt whether he is facing a *real* obituary and will adjust his belief accordingly: “the essence of belief is expectation, and when the expectations generated by a given belief are disappointed, doubt arises in the mind of the believer. That is to say, old habits of thought are disrupted when in a specific situation the inferences to which they give rise yield conclusions that fail to describe the actual resulting events” (Raposa, 1989, p. 85). In this case, his
expectations having been disrupted or not triggered, the interpreter might just as well face another type of speech genre, with another kind of purpose.

4. Speech Genres as General Principles

Taking the above into account, we suggest that the so-called speech genres are nothing but general ‘governing principles’ constraining the actualization of any particular (oral or written) text in society. Accordingly, speech genres can be considered as laws, or habits, to which particular oral or written texts more or less conform. From this point of view, the observed discursive regularities we referred to above would thus “highlight the relatively regulated, non-random nature of most of our discursive practices, epitomise the necessary constrained creativity of meaning-making and, more interestingly, confirm the influence of [speech genres] overdetermining (always relatively) the content and form of utterances” (Gaspard, in press). Indeed, discourse theorists of the French School of Discourse Analysis, following the path of Foucault, Pêcheux, Lacan, among other post-structuralists, stressed that we were not entirely ‘masters of our speech’; if idiosyncratic differences persist, we would always speak with the ‘words of others’. In the very same vein, Lyne (1981, p. 207) suggested that the “assumption is that these [conventionalized meaning] structures are publicly constructed and accessible in principle, and not just matters of individual psychology. Each of us finds himself in a world of already-established signifiers, although each of us is for historical and cultural reasons ‘positioned’ in a slightly different way within this complex network”. That is why “what is at issue […] is not the subjective associations that may happen to be psychologically connected to someone’s mind, but the conventionalized forms of signification that induce people to make certain inferences” (ibidem, p. 206), which would have to be studied historically, and for each sociocultural community.

Interpreting Peirce, Short (2007, p. 155) writes that “any, if not all instances, of purposeful behaviour have dual bases: a general rule (instinct, habit, custom, thought) and an occasion for applying that rule”. In the case of speech genres then, it is the specific communication situation that constitutes this “occasion for applying the rule” one expects to see actualized, as “a general formula applicable to particular cases” (EP2:250 [1903]), always according to the particular purpose at stake. In the case of the obituaries, the occasional circumstance would be the actual death of a person and the general purpose at stake would be to publicly inform of 1) the death of the person, 2) the identity of the mourners, 3) the date and time of the burial, and 4) the location where it is possible to pay homage. Because all obituaries, as law-abiding textual phenomena, will more or less state those same expected details in accordance with their very purpose, it is consequently not surprising to detect discursive regularities in a corpus composed of a large selection of them.

As speech genres are always linked with a particular purposeful context, they are inherently normative in mediating the rightfulness of utterances according to the intended
communicative ends, and his predictable patterns could thus be conceived as the results of culture-bound rhetorical habits constraining the production of speech: “No a priori systems—the rules of language, semantics, or logic—can fully determine how [...] signs will count, since that depends upon knowing the signifying practices of a culture, of groups and individuals within [a] culture, and, to some extent, the situation in which the signs are employed” (Lyne, 1981, p. 203). In accordance with Peirce’s classification of the semiotic sciences, we suggest that studying the logic of speech-generic mechanisms would touch upon what Peirce defined as ‘speculative rhetoric’.

5. A ‘Rhetoric’ of Speech Genres

In so far as his semeiotics is considered as a general and normative science of signs, it can be divided into ‘speculative grammar’, ‘logical critic’, and ‘speculative rhetoric’. Each branch of semeiotics focuses on each of the three logical relations inherent to any semiosis that are at the basis of the famous ten-fold classification of signs: if grammar studies the signs in (their monadic) relation to themselves and critic studies the signs in (their dyadic) relation to their objects, rhetoric concerns the signs in (their triadic) relation to their interpretants. Accordingly, rhetoric focuses on the production and interpretation of signs in so far as they are intended to achieve a specific purpose. The achievement of the purpose can be said to be successful if the expected interpretants have been actualized through the interpreter’s self-controlled conduct, be it thought or action, and correspond to the intended end. Since every sign is purposeful, any speech act does have a rhetorical (or perlocutionary) aspect since it always intends to influence the listener’s or reader’s conduct (see, e.g., Chauviré (1995, pp. 147-152) for a Peircean reading of speech act theory); in any case, the general purpose of any speech act is thus to be ‘successful’, at the very least: “asserting a proposition aims to the truth of this proposition, wishing aims to the realization of the wish, reasoning aims to the validity [of the reasoning], etc.” (ibidem, p. 154).

Applied to linguistic signs, Peirce writes that rhetoric “ought to be the doctrine of the adaptation of the forms of expression of a [piece of] writing to the accomplishment of its purpose” (cited by Colapietro (2007, p. 17)). Accordingly, Colapietro (2007, p. 28) considers that this adaptation “requires us to ascertain, in the first place, the appropriate or defining purpose of a particular piece of writing”, in some determinate circumstances, so that “considerations of the forms of expression in this light cannot be limited to consideration of the means of communication, but must extend to ends themselves”. In an unpublished manuscript (MS. 777) cited by Lyne (1980, p. 167), Peirce also suggests that “every question of rhetoric turns upon the question of to what sort of reader is the writing addressed; and that is the reason why to writing of different purposes different codes of rules are applicable” (our emphasis). In the same vein, in “Ideas, Stray or Stolen, about Scientific Writing”, Peirce writes that “to a good many persons of literary culture it has hitherto seemed that there was little or no room in scientific writings for any other rule of rhetoric than that of expressing oneself in the simplest and directest manner, and
that to talk of the style of a scientific communication was somewhat like talking of the moral character of a fish” (EP2:325 [1904]). Yet, “looking a little beneath, we surprise the severest sciences doing homage to rules of expression as stringent and strange as any of those by which the excellence of compositions in Chinese or in Urdu is judged. A proposition of geometry, a definition of a botanical species, a description of a crystal or of a telescopic nebula is subjected to a mandatory form of statement that is artificial in the extreme” (ibidem, p. 326—our emphasis).

Now, in envisioning a particular speech, every utterer must have a vague idea 1) of the purpose of his speech and 2) of the corresponding mandatory laws he or she has to actualize in accordance with the given purpose. We believe that speech genres constitute such mandatory constraints necessary to “rendering signs effective” (EP2:326 [1904]). Any purposeful use of linguistic signs consequently relies on acquired and self-controlled rhetorical habits that are precisely those activated by a given speech genre, always according to specific situation communications. In this light, we could understand speech genres as purposeful rhetorical apparatuses specifically designed to elicit particular interpretants on the listener or the reader’s side, and it is in that very sense that they are precisely rhetorical: if a speech genre is a (more or less) complex semiotic arrangement always referring to a given general object, it is also, and always, intended to determine an oriented interpretation, whether thought or action. It is in this sense that we might also interpret Peirce when he claims that “a purpose is precisely the interpretant of a symbol” (EP2:308 [1904]). Defined as such, speech genres could also be framed as “methodeutic” apparatuses, another term Peirce used to characterize a narrower conception of rhetoric in the scientific context, then understood as a method whose aim is to reach the truth.

For Peirce, even a simple asserted proposition, with no apparent objective, is intended to be accepted as true by the interpreter, with all the social and practical consequences if otherwise:

For an act of assertion supposes that, a proposition being formulated, a person performs an act which renders him liable to the penalties of the social law (or, at any rate, those of the moral law) in case it should not be true, unless he has a definite and sufficient excuse; and an act of assent is an act of the mind by which one endeavors to impress the meanings of the proposition upon his disposition, so that it shall govern his conduct, including thought under conduct, this habit being ready to be broken in case reasons should appear for breaking it (EP2:278 [1903]).

As such, a simple asserted proposition, never logically self-sufficient without its interpretants, is thus always embedded in a purposeful given speech genre (or may itself be the actualization of a given speech genre). If it is possible to envisage a study of the logic of propositions in themselves (i.e. speculative grammar), any study of their empirical actualization (as speech acts) must necessarily take into account the ‘discursive practice’ they are embedded in, that is, the laws governing their instantiation, or the acts of assertion, promise, denial, etc. actualizing them (i.e. speculative rhetoric).
6. Habits of Representation, Objectification, and Interpretation

When analyzing textual productions, discursivists should concentrate on highlighting those acting habits constraining the actualization of particular (oral or written) texts under scrutiny, focusing on their function in determining (expected) interpretants. More broadly conceived, as we mentioned, speech genres are rhetorical and habitual apparatuses aimed at determining adequate interpretants, that is, in accordance with an original intended purpose. Now, resulting from a cumulative and collective experience in representing objects according to given ends, the common rhetorical habits, just like each branch of semiotics, could also be related to each of the three logical relations of any sign process: sign-in-itself, sign-to-object, sign-to-interpretant. Lyne (1980) thus suggests that they “may be described as habits of objectification, habits of representation, and habits of interpretation”, in considering that rhetoric “[maps] out the terrain of Thirdness in human affairs – the habits of interpretation and application that determine the efficacy of signs” (ibidem, p. 164). Those three kinds of habits interrelate with each other in speech genres, understood rhetorically as a system of laws relating triadically, according to a specific purpose, 1) to the semiotic material in itself, 2) to the objects it is intended to represent, and 3) to the interpretants it is intended to determine.

6.1 Habits of representation

Lyne (1980, p. 165) suggests that this category “concerns the rhetorical function of representamens”. This is the problematic of style proper, but not understood as the writing characteristics of a single author, as in literary studies, but as the collective forms of expression related to a given speech genre. Again, in the case of an obituary, there are indeed ‘habits of representation’ constraining the kinds of signs allowed to represent the various propositions at play: it is indeed acknowledged that the fact that X died shall not be represented as “Mr. X kicked the bucket” but as “Mr. X passed away”, for instance; among the linguistic options available, the utterer must precisely select the appropriate signs, according to the cultural conventions of the community. For instance, in the following passage, Peirce distinguishes between an assertion and its possible modalities which are considered as “rhetorical functions”:

The distinction between an assertion and an interrogatory sentence is of secondary importance. An assertion has its modality, or measure of assurance, and a question generally involves as part of it an assertion of emphatically low modality. In addition to that, it is intended to stimulate the hearer to make an answer [our emphasis]. This is a rhetorical function [our emphasis] which needs no special grammatical form. If in wandering about the country, I wish to inquire the way to town, I can perfectly do so by assertion, without drawing upon the interrogative form of syntax. Thus I may say, “This road leads, perhaps, to the city. I wish to know what you think about it.” The most suitable way of expressing a question would, from a logical point of view, seem to be by an interjection: “This road leads, perhaps, to the city, eh?” (CP 4.57 [1893])
In this case, we do have a distinction between the logical proposition and its possible representations, which can be in the interrogative form. In the same vein, Peirce wrote in “Of Reasoning in General” that speculative rhetoric was the “art of putting propositions into effective forms” (EP2:19 [1895]). On an applied level, this first branch of rhetoric would thus analyze which habits of representation might characterize a given speech genre in itself and make it recognizable as such, therefore determining its corresponding immediate interpretants.

6.2 Habits of objectification

As we have suggested, applying a speech genre depends on a specific communicative purpose triggering a specific representation of a given dynamic object. In the case of a deceased person, for instance, multiple ‘objectifications’ are possible, related to different purposes, triggering different speech genres in each case: a press article, an obituary, a poem, a joke, etc. In this sense, Lyne (1980, p. 165) writes that this “category would examine the way the ‘objects’ of human interest are taken up. Under it would be studied the forms that are given to feelings, resolves, and knowledge. […] One task of speculative rhetoric is to study the patterns by which experience is publicly objectified”. Accordingly, in the case of an obituary, not everything can be predicated of a deceased person: for instance, we cannot, in general, imagine a particular text referring to a mistress with whom the deceased person might have had a relationship. Any speech genre generally constrains what can be said of a deceased person if the purpose is to inform of the death; there has got to be elementary objectal properties (a particular ‘slicing’ of the real) the utterer has to include in his or her text in order for it to be recognized as actualizing an obituary. On an applied level, this second branch of rhetoric would thus analyze which habits of objectification might characterize a given speech genre, therefore determining its corresponding dynamic interpretants.

6.3 Habits of interpretation

Finally, Lyne (1980, p. 166) writes that “the last [category] studies the interpretive process, including the psychological bases upon which signs enter human thought and behavior. This category must take account of Peirce’s theory of interpretants”. In short, those habits of objectification and representation serve the purely rhetorical purpose of determining the expected interpretants ‘in the interpreter’s mind’; in doing so, they form the basis of habits of interpretation that are known to be activated. Just as rhetoric relies on grammar and critic, in rhetoric itself, habits of interpretation rely on habits of representation and habits of objectification, the ultimate purpose of rhetoric being the analysis of this latest stage related to the determination of interpretants. In the case of obituaries, according to the specific purpose at play, the utterer thus actualizes the specific speech genre, relying on corresponding habits of objectification and representation, in order to determine the corresponding habits of interpretation, be it thought or action: “Mr. X kicked the bucket” and “Mr. X passed away” will not indeed convey the same meaning,
that is, will not be interpreted similarly by the common interpreter. On an applied level, this third branch of rhetoric would thus analyze which habits of interpretation might characterize a given speech genre, therefore determining its corresponding final interpretants.

7. Speech Genres as Arguments

In consequence, any oral or written individual text (i.e. a given set of propositions), insofar as it actualizes a given speech genre, may thus be interpreted as an argument, a symbol, and a legisign, according to Peirce’s terminology. First, in being laws that enjoy the intrinsic power of being meaningful in their replicated signs (i.e. tokens), texts are specific instantiated legisigns, or general types, characterized by an original indeterminacy allowing them to be replicated in a given actual or future context; a particular obituary, the recognition of which is the result of an abductive inference, is thus an icon of its type, interpreted as such: “It is recognized that the phenomena are like, i.e. constitute an Icon of, a replica of a general conception, or Symbol” (EP2:287 [1903]). In the same vein, “we speak of writing or pronouncing the word ‘man’; but it is only a replica, or embodiment of the word, that is pronounced or written. The word itself has no existence, although it has a real being, consisting in the fact that existents will conform to it” (EP2:274 [1903]). Second, in being legisigns representing their object by way of a habit, texts are symbols: a complete text, as a macrosign composed of individual linguistic propositions, constitutes, and is interpreted, as an entire symbol whose object is thus represented according to the rules needed to interpret all the meaningful speech acts that compose its constituents: “A symbol is a sign which would lose the character which renders it a sign if there were no interpretant. Such is any utterance of speech which signifies what it does only by virtue of its being understood to have that signification” (CP 2.304 [1902]). Third, in being interpreted as symbols whose interpretants are necessarily determined by habit, they are also arguments: each text is an argument in that it is interpreted as a ‘sign of law’ whose habit-bound conclusive interpretant (i.e. the actualized expected conduct, be it thought or action, on the interpreter’s side) also represents it as such. A text is indeed more than an ordered succession of informative propositions: it always intends to determine its interpretation, which is the fundamental semiotic process that Peirce characterized as ‘rhetoric’. It is because any given text, as a replica of its speech genre, is an argument, a symbol, and a legisign, that a given speech is necessarily experienced as manifesting a sense of ‘reasonableness’. As rhetorical apparatuses, speech genres have been gradually conventionalized as signs whose raison d’être consists in governing both their actualization and their interpretation, so that “if speech genres did not exist and we had not mastered them, if we had to originate them during the speech process and construct each utterance at will for the first time, speech communication would be almost impossible” (Bakhtin, 1986 [1952-1953], p. 79).
8. Conclusion

If rhetoric proper has sometimes been narrowly conceived as the study of ‘style’ or as the study of ‘persuasive discourse’ only, we recognize that Peirce’s rhetorical assumptions are conceived in a much broader way, which does justice to the complexity of the speech genres that concern us here: each sign process is rhetorical, from the single simple asserted proposition to the complex political platform. We suggest that speech genres can be conceived as purposeful laws or habits waiting to be applied in given circumstances; actualizing a specific genre requires ‘an occasion to apply the rule’ and the mastering of the corresponding rhetorical habits related to the three logical relations of any semiosis (habits of representation, of objectification, and of interpretation). Only when taking those aspects into account can we comprehend rhetoric’s task of ascertaining “the laws by which in every scientific intelligence one sign gives birth to another, and especially one thought brings forth another” (CP 2.229 [1897]). It is besides equally important to bear in mind that (extra-linguistic) visual and auditory signs, belonging to the contextual circumstances of enunciation, as well as the universe of discourse on which a large part of our speech practices rely, make up part of the communication situation and are also, therefore, subject to their own rhetoric.

If discursive variations are indeed (and necessarily) detectable in our innumerable contextualized discursive productions11, we can nevertheless sense a ‘reasonableness’ permeating each one of them, guided as they are by the corresponding speech genre to which they conform. In this sense, Colapietro (2007, p. 30) suggests that such “self-conscious artifice of contrivance, often of a seemingly extreme or exaggerated form, is inevitably the result of conscientiously subjecting one’s discourse to such communally enforced norms and ideals”. On our side, we suggest that speech genres embody, for each purposeful situation communication, those anticipated “norms and ideals”, as general principles or laws, that must be actualized given the specific purposes at play. The task of ‘local’, or specific, discursive rhetorics would be to delineate the productive and interpretive norms and ideals of given communities, for a given space and a given time, whose raison d’être is to govern the determination of discourse, and elicit an intended interpretation on the interpreter’s side.

Notes

1 Of course, experimenting with the crash of a stock market is not exactly the same as experimenting with the fall of a stone: this raises important questions about what can count as an experiment in the various sciences.

2 Peirce thus early asked “How magical it is that by examining a part of a class we can know what is true of the whole class, and by study of the past we can know the future; in short, that we can know what we have not experienced?” (EP2:75 [1869]).

3 Lyne (1981, p. 205) considers that “one of the variables determining how we interpret speech acts is our sense of the options from which they are selected”.

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4 Peirce broadly considered logic, defined as the “science of controlled thought” (EP2:272 [1903]), as a semeiotics.


6 Peirce considers thought to be a kind of self-controlled conduct.

7 It is striking how those lines resemble those of Bakhtin (1986 [1952-1953], p. 80), highlighting the existence of constraints formatting speech: “[…] a speaker is given not only mandatory forms of the national language (lexical composition and grammatical structure), but also forms of utterances that are mandatory, that is, speech genres. […] Speech genres are much more changeable, flexible, and plastic than language forms are, but they have a normative significance for the speaking individuum, and they are not created by him but are given to him. Therefore, the single utterance, with all its individuality and creativity, can in no way be regarded as a completely free combination of forms of language […].”

8 For instance, Johansen (1993, p. 282), who concentrated on the links between Aristotle’s classic rhetoric and Peirce’s conception, broadly considered that “[the] ways in which an utterer tries to control the interpretation of the sign, and thereby the interpreter’s concept of the object, brings us right into the heart of rhetoric” (our emphasis). Moreover, because “[it] is, however, impossible for any sign to obtain absolute command of codes and context, and consequently a certain unpredictability is always inherent in the process of human communication [, certain] means exist, however, that may be used to reduce this unpredictability, and rhetoric is precisely the study of how to reduce the unpredictability of communication by controlling message and context […]” (Johansen, 1993, p. 281).

9 “[There ought, at any rate to be […] a science to which should be referable the fundamental principles of everything like rhetoric, - a speculative rhetoric, the science of the essential conditions under which a sign may determine an interpretant sign of itself and of whatever it signifies, or may, as a sign bring about a physical result” (EP2:326 [1904]) (our emphasis).

10 Lyne (1981, p. 205) considers that “one of the variables determining how we interpret speech acts is our sense of the options from which they are selected”.

11 “If we can assume that new ways of [speech] acting emerge as language and culture change, then it would be a mistake to suppose that every act exemplifies any particular ‘type’ for which we have clearly coded antecedents. Rhetorical acts usually take some of their purport from antecedent forms, but these forms (and the type-token relationships) are constantly evolving” (Lyne, 1981, p. 206) (our emphasis).

References


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