Introduction

Words are often used to describe reality, to refer to objects, and to communicate feelings, desires, and emotions. Words can be powerful. They can move us, they can frighten us, and they can lead us to action. Words have been described as tools and weapons, as signs and masks. Words have been described as instruments having the force of creating and changing reality. They have been investigated with regard to their semantic structures, their co-occurrences, and their syntactic combinations. Even so, we rarely realize that words can be arguments. In this book we show how they can be moves that guide us toward judgment or action and function as speech acts that allow certain replies and prevent others. In everyday communications we hardly consider that complex forms of reasoning lie under their uses, and that these forms of reasoning are interwoven with meaning presumptions and dialogical games. In our words we can conceal an implicit change of our interlocutor's knowledge or a silent alteration of his system of values. These are powerful effects, but they typically go unnoticed.

When Chesterton claimed in one of his famous paradoxical quotes that "Impartiality is a pompous name for indifference, which is an elegant name for ignorance" (Chesterton, *The Speaker*, 15 December 1900), he did much more than simply describe impartiality. He condensed an attack on a commonly accepted and widely praised implication in a definition, an argument reversing the shared hierarchy of values. When politicians refuse to define 'terrorism' or 'torture,' or when they use words like 'peace' and 'hostilities' with new definitions, they cannot be accused of distorting reality or telling lies. They are simply performing a much more powerful action – changing the rules of the game of discourse. When science and knowledge are used "to provide long words to cover the errors of the rich" (Chesterton, *Heretics*, 88), they are employed to provide instruments for forcing the hearer to accept actions, thereby allowing the speaker to avoid commitment or justification of a kind that might normally be required. Words employed in this way are clever dialectical moves, implicit arguments

that not only escape the normal burden to provide reasons for a conclusion, but at the same time lead the hearer to a value judgment or a decision and implicitly modify his possible reactions.

The argumentative and dialectical structures of words emerge in so-called emotive words. Words like 'ignorance,' 'indifference,' 'peace,' or 'terrorism' are emotive in the sense that they are used to elicit emotions or change our evaluation of reality. In the *Brains Trust* program on BBC Radio, Bertrand Russell gave three examples of emotive conjugations:

> I am firm, you are obstinate, he is a pig-headed fool.
> I am righteously indignant, you are annoyed, he is making a fuss over nothing.
> I have reconsidered the matter, you have changed your mind, he has gone back on his word.

This format mimics the form of a grammatical conjugation of an irregular verb to illustrate the natural tendency to use emotive language to label one's own point of view on a controversial matter in a different way from views attributed to others, especially those who take opposing views. This way of using emotively loaded language is highly familiar to all of us. We use it all the time without reflecting very deeply on what we are doing.

These examples are meant to be humorous to make a point, but they dramatically reveal the power of a very common argumentation maneuver of using emotive language to subtly glide over the need to offer support for a claim you are making that implies that, on some issue being discussed, you are right and your opponents are wrong. One problem with the use of this kind of tactic, from a logical point of view, is that it covers up that an argument is being put forward that depends on using words in an argumentative way, words that are likely to be vague and undefined and whose meanings are very much at issue. This way of proceeding can be hard to combat, for its proponent has seemed to have established that she is in the right in only a few slick words, while the respondent has to struggle to question or counteract the argument by getting into difficult territory. He has to start talking about meanings of words and definitions and about emotive language, easily risking seeming to be picky or even incoherent.

The seriousness of this kind of tactic when it is used in argumentation on things we really care about becomes readily evident in the abortion dispute, where one side chooses the term 'pro-life' to define its position while the other side chooses the term 'pro-choice.' How can anybody be against choice? How can anybody be against life? These are fundamental values, especially in a setting of democratic deliberations.

The pro-life side defines 'abortion' as the deliberate killing of a human being, equivalent to the crime of murder. For example, according to a quotation from Pope John Paul II's encyclical letter on the value and inviolability of human life (Mazilu 2011: 1212), the Second Vatican Council defines

abortion, together with infanticide, as an "unspeakable crime": "[P]rocured abortion is the deliberate and direct killing, by whatever means it is carried out, of a human being in the initial phase of his or her existence, extending from conception to birth." By classifying the action of an abortion under this category, this definition of abortion has attached to it a conclusion drawn by inference that abortion is wrong.

In contrast, the pro-choice definition of an abortion describes the embryo, a newly fertilized ovum, or fetus that is removed as a clump of tissues that is a product of conception and definitely not a baby, that is, a human being. To support this definition, a distinction is drawn between a potential human being and a real human being, where the embryo, newly fertilized ovum, or fetus (however you describe it) is classified as only a potential human being (Mazilu 2011: 1216). The opposition between this pro-choice definition and the pro-life one can be specified clearly. On this definition, we can no longer classify what is removed during the procedure of an abortion as a human being, since it is only a clump of cells that may have the potential to be a human being but is not a *real* human being. By classifying the action of an abortion under this different category, the pro-choice definition of abortion cancels the conclusion drawn by inference that abortion is wrong.

The abortion dispute has become so polarized and stylized as a public debate in recent years that those of us who are not so strongly committed to one side or the other in a dogmatic way can easily recognize that some funny business is going on when these key terms are being defined in a one-sided way to support the claims of opposing advocacy groups. But the same phenomenon is more widely present in everyday conversational arguments where many of us are more likely to be deceived by it. Indeed, for practitioners of advocating a cause, this method of strategic maneuvering using emotive language and persuasive definitions is an important rhetorical skill (Zarefsky 2006). For example, conservatives like to exploit popular prejudice by using the loaded term 'bureaucracy' when they argue for reducing spending on government agencies. Once the audience accepts the equation of government and bureaucracy, the case for reducing bureaucracy by cutting taxes becomes more acceptable. This rhetorical tactic is described in Debatepedia:[1]

> Who could complain if Republicans want to reduce these "armies of bureaucrats"? Everyone knows that we would all be better off with less bureaucracy and fewer bureaucrats in our lives. So when conservatives want to make shrinking government sound attractive, they say they are cutting 'bureaucracy' – not 'programs'. Most people value government programs – especially in the areas of education, health and the environment – and do not want to see them reduced; but everyone hates

[1] http://debatepedia.idebate.org/en/index.php/Debate:_Big_government (accessed on 11 October 2011).

bureaucracy. Using the term 'bureaucracy' in this way is a rhetorical sleight-of-hand that obscures the real costs of cutting back on government programs.

Politicians, and indeed anyone engaged in advocacy argumentation in the marketplace, learn to be nimble in the use of emotive language in order to gain advantages over their opponents, while realizing that these opponents will use the very same tactics to try to get the best of them. Both sides become skilled in building their arguments on premises containing emotive language that has a positive spin accepted by the majority of the stakeholders that need to be convinced to move action forward.

In this book we show how such a use of emotive language and persuasive definitions is an argumentation tactic of strategic maneuvering in virtually every argument that takes place in conversational argumentation on matters we routinely discuss and argue about in politics, law, and other matters of national and international importance. We provide many examples of such arguments that reveal the scope and special characteristics of the tactic as a form of argumentation. Based on our analyses of these examples we build a theory that can be applied to these and many other common examples of verbal argumentation. We provide a theoretical understanding of how these linguistic mechanisms work to be used to deal with and counteract these clever tactics of the artfull employment of emotive language.

1

When Words Are Emotive

Some words are powerful. 'War,' 'peace,' 'death,' 'terrorist,' and 'security' are but a few of the innumerable terms that we read or hear every day, and these words clearly lead us to draw a judgment, or feel uncomfortable with, or be attracted by a certain situation. When we encounter words of this kind, we do not simply interpret the message. We do not simply acquire new information. We do not simply modify our systems of belief. We feel an emotion toward what the word is depicting. We fear a war. We are afraid of terrorists. We desire peace. We love children. These words are emotive because they trigger our emotions. They influence the way we regard the reality they represent. They affect our decisions concerning their referents. The emotive power of these words can make them extremely effective instruments to direct and encourage certain attitudes and choices. But at the same time, the very emotions that they evoke make them subtle tools to manipulate the other's decisions and feelings. Names can be used to conceal reality instead of representing it, to distort the facts instead of describing them, and to omit qualities and particulars instead of depicting them. Names have meanings that can be changed and modified, so that they can be used to classify what they otherwise could not mean. Their definitions can be altered and the emotions they carry directed toward new objects. For these reasons, ever since the ancient studies on rhetoric, emotive words have been regarded as crucial instruments for persuasion and manipulation. The first step to understand what lies beneath them is to analyze how they are used and the effects they can cause.

1. Triggering Emotions by Defining Reality

In the ancient tradition, rhetoricians, dialecticians, and philosophers noticed how the use of emotive words was an extremely effective rhetorical strategy. They investigated the different possible uses and effects according to the contexts of use and classified them as fallacies or rhetorical tactics. This ancient

concern with the uses and abuses of emotive language is even more important to the study of public discourse than it was then. Orwell (1949), in his book *1984*, pointed out how words can hide and change reality, and bring people to accept and even support an otherwise unacceptable situation. The Ministry for Internal Security, in charge of social control and repression, was called the Ministry of Love; in the political campaigns war was called peace, freedom slavery, and ignorance strength (Orwell 1949: 10). The uses of loaded language have been investigated in modern studies of emotive language, as we will see in this chapter, showing how they can be strategic or deceitful and highlighting their relationship with meaning and reference.

1.1. *The Aristotelian Tradition*

The power of emotive words can be shown in several discourse contexts. However, it is in legal discussions that its effects can be clearly ascertained, and its abusive uses detected by referring to precise rules and procedures. It is from legal argumentation that it is possible to draw one of the first detailed analyses of emotive words. In his *Rhetoric*, when describing the apparent enthymemes, or fallacious techniques, Aristotle treats a rhetorical strategy called *amplificatio* (see Calboli Montefusco 2004), or "indignant language" (*Rhetoric*, 1401b, 3–7):

> We do this when we paint a highly-coloured picture of the situation without having proved the facts of it: if the defendant does so, he produces an impression of his innocence; and if the prosecutor does, he produces an impression of the defendant's guilt.

This technique is also used nowadays in courts, especially in criminal cases, where the emotions of the jury can be appealed to elicit a specific judgment. A famous case is the following (*Ivey v. State*, 113 Ga. 1062, 1901; emphasis added):

> CASE 1
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> [...] solicitor-general, in his address to the the jury, used the following language: "Gentlemen of the jury, I want you to stand by me and help me break up this **vile den**;" and "Gentlemen of the jury, if you could go over this town and see the good mothers whose **pillows have been wet with tears over their boys who have been intoxicated by the acts of this woman**."

This speech clearly arouses the jury's emotions. Words such as 'vile den' are used to denigrate the defendant and his witnesses; a tragic picture is drawn using terms depicting suffering ('tears,' 'pillows') and outrageous actions committed against the innocent ('boys,' 'intoxicated'). The prosecutor focused his closing statement on the effects of the defendant's actions, and the character and poor reliability of the opposing party. He amplifies the effects of the accused's crime, but the very responsibility of the crime was the actual

point at stake in the trial; he attacks the witnesses' and defendant's characters without previously proving their unreliability. The prosecutor uses indignant language to "substantially prejudice the defendant or serve no purpose other than to inflame the jury" (*People v. Terry,* 460 N.E.2d 746, 1984).

As Grimaldi (1988) and Calboli Montefusco (2004) put it, amplification needs to be considered as an argument, that is, a conclusion backed by a set of implicit premises. The use of emotive language in the aforementioned case is aimed at eliciting a value judgment – that the defendant's crime was horrible and that he and his witnesses are unreliable. However, this value judgment hides a set of implicit assumptions. A crime is horrible if it is particularly violent, or unmotivated, or cruel, and so on. But first, a defendant's crime can be outrageous only if he committed it, and a witness's testimony can be unreliable only if there is a reason to believe it. Both assumptions are not stated; they are taken for granted even though they are not shared by the interlocutor. In this fashion, the emotions aroused are not based on facts (the defendant's responsibility for the crime, the false declarations of the witnesses) that have been previously accepted, shared, or at least proven. On the contrary, they are triggered by events that the speaker sets up. Emotions can therefore conceal facts not accepted or not acceptable by the interlocutor.

Aristotle noticed that the use of words has a twofold dimension. On the one hand, the use of a word needs to be grounded on facts, or rather a shared representation of the state of affairs that needs to be classified in a certain fashion. For instance, if a person is called a 'criminal,' he must have committed a crime. On the other hand, words have a shared meaning, and such a meaning is the ground for our classification of reality. For instance, we can classify a person as a 'murderer' because we proceed from the fact he willingly killed a man, and from the definition of murder as the "willful killing of a human being." In Aristotle's view, naming is a process of reasoning, as he explains in the chapter of the *Rhetoric* dedicated to the *topoi*, used to draw reasonable conclusion. The speakers, by "making definitions and grasping the essence of a thing, draw syllogistic conclusions about the subject they are discussing" (*Rhetoric*, 1398a 25–26). Aristotle gives the following example (*Rhetoric*, 1398a 23–24):

CASE 2

And [another is] the reason Socrates gave for refusing to visit Archelaus: for he said *hybris* was just as much an inability on the part of those benefited to return a favor as [it was the retaliation by] those harmed.

In this case, the problem is to classify Socrates' action as 'insolent' (or rather "aimed at shaming the victim"). Aristotle shows that Socrates' reasoning proceeds from the meaning of *hybris*, from the fundamental characteristic of "failing to requite benefits or injuries." Since Socrates suffered an injury, he did not want to be considered as insolent, and therefore requited the

insult received. In this case, the use of the emotive word (in Greek society, an extremely serious offense against honor; see Fisher, 1992) is based on a commonly shared definition and a premise left implicit (Socrates was offended by Archelaus).

Aristotle clarified the fundamental relationships between the definition of a word and its use, and between the use of an emotive word and its dialogical effect. He highlighted the reasoning dimension of classifying reality, pointing out how it can be made explicit to strengthen the classification, or be distorted to inappropriately name a state of affairs. In discussing apparent enthymemes, Aristotle showed how the inappropriate use of a word was also the result of faulty reasoning. For instance, he provided the example of Paris, who was called 'high-minded' because (*Rhetoric*, 1401b 20–22):

CASE 3

[…] in the *Alexander* [the claim] that [Paris] was "high-minded"; for looking down on the society of the multitude he passed his time by himself on Mount Ida. [The argument is] that because the high-minded have this quality, he, too, should be thought high-minded.

In this case, instead of proceeding from the meaning, and therefore the definition, of "to be high minded" the speaker uses characteristics that are usually associated with high minded people. This type of reasoning is a form of affirming the consequent: since high minded people usually despise society and live by themselves, a person behaving in this fashion is high-minded.

Aristotle therefore emphasized the reasoning dimension of emotive words. They are described as forms of implicit arguments, because they are grounded on a classificatory reasoning and lead to a further conclusion, usually a value judgment. For these reasons, the use of emotive words can be deceptive because they are grounded on premises left implicit but not shared by the hearer. On the one hand, the speaker can take for granted facts that have not been proven or accepted (the defendant is named a "*horrible* criminal" without being proven to have committed the crime he is charged with). On the other hand, he can distort the definition on which he is grounding his classification, or advancing a weak conclusion, based on a defective pattern of reasoning (a man is called high-minded because he behaves as high-minded people usually do). This approach was later developed in the Latin tradition, where the two dimensions of emotive words, the classification of reality (which can be called the predicative dimension) and the emotive reaction they trigger, were investigated in Cornificius', Cicero's, and Quintilian's rhetorical works.

1.2 *Emotive Words and Definitions in the Latin Tradition*

In the Latin rhetorical tradition, the investigation of the predicative dimension of emotive words was strictly related to definition. In the

Rhetorica ad Herennium, Cornificius distinguishes between two strategies: the inappropriate use of an emotive word, hiding or altering the facts on which its predication rests, and the redefinition of a concept, which will be used later to support a classification. These two moves based on the meaning and the effects of words were treated under two separate stages of the ancient subdivision of argumentative discussions. In the Latin rhetorical tradition, the structure of legal (and ordinary) controversies was analyzed by means of a four-step process called *stasis* (Heath 1994; Braet 1987; Marsh 2005). These four levels of inquiry, corresponding to four types of issues or questions that can be raised and dealt with in a discussion, were the *conjectura* (question of fact), *finis* (question of definition), *qualitas* (question of quality or rather qualification), and *translatio* (question of jurisdiction, or procedure) (see Barwick 1965: 96, Ciceronis, *De Inventione*, 10–11). After establishing the *facts* (e.g., the defendant killed the victim using a knife), the problem is to name them, that is, to *define* reality. For instance, was the killing murder or manslaughter? Depending on the definitions of the crimes, and the concepts thereof, the classification may be different (Ranney 2005: 118). For instance, in some definitions the killing needs to be intentional; in others, it is only sufficient that the homicide caused intentional harm from which unintentional death resulted (*R. v. Buzzanga and Durocher* 49 C.C.C. (2d) 369, Ont. C.A. 1979). If manslaughter is the "unlawful killing of a human being without malice or premeditation, either express or implied," depending on how 'malice' is defined, a homicide can be immediately classified as murder, or may be subject to controversies. Is the use of a weapon a definitional characteristic of malice? Once facts have been named, they can be qualified. The seriousness of a crime can be mitigated, or aggravated, by the circumstances. Finally, the procedure is assessed. Is the jurisdiction the right one? Is the judge competent? The statuses of definition and qualification are the sources of two different strategies of uses of emotive words: redefinition and amplification, or rather, persuading by altering the meaning and altering the facts.

1.2.1. Emotive Redefinitions – Hiding the Meaning As seen previously, the classification, or naming, of a fragment of reality is grounded on a particular definition of the word used. However, in Quintilian's view, definitions are instruments that serve a particular purpose, and therefore should be chosen according to one's communicative goal (*Institutio Oratoria*, VII, 3, 20, 21):

> On the other hand, we shall ensure the right definition, if we first make up our minds what it is precisely that we desire to effect: for, this done, we shall be able to suit our words to serve our purpose.

A definition, from this perspective, is an extremely effective instrument for a speaker to achieve his goal in a discussion or to prevent the other party

from achieving his own. A definition can be broadened or narrowed, so that the name can be applied to certain facts (Tellegen-Couperus 2003: 175). For instance, consider the following case (*Institutio Oratoria*, VII, 3, 21–22):

DEFINITION OF 'SACRILEGE'

A man who has stolen private money from a temple is accused of sacrilege. [...] It is therefore debated whether the act constitutes sacrilege. The accuser employs this term on the ground that the money was stolen from a temple: the accused denies that the act is sacrilege, on the ground that the money stolen was private property, but admits that it is theft. The prosecutor will therefore give the following definition: "It is sacrilege to steal anything from a sacred place." The accused will reply with another definition: "It is sacrilege to steal something sacred."

In this case, the definition of 'sacrilege' was at stake. This concept was controversial at the time. The narrow, legal definition[1] (stealing something sacred from a sacred place) conflicted with a commonly accepted broader meaning (stealing from a sacred place) (see Schaff 1894: 2094). In this case, the prosecutor chose to use the commonly shared meaning in order to classify the deeds as a more contemptuous crime than simple theft.

The principle that Quintilian applied to legal discussions was previously described by Cicero as a strategy of rhetorical reasoning. Cicero underscored how, by changing the definition of a word's commonly positively or negatively understood value, it is possible to modify the value judgment of the subject matter of the predication. For instance, by redefining wisdom, it is possible to deny that great philosophers are wise (*De Inventione*, I, 90):

CASE 4

That man cannot be wise who neglects money. But Socrates neglected money; therefore he was not wise.

In this case the way the word 'wise' is used is altered, so that it can be shown not to apply to Socrates or other people who neglected money. The redefining of concepts can be used for two purposes. On the one hand, by redefining it is possible to broaden or narrow the application of an emotive word to include or exclude some states of affairs. On the other hand, a concept can be redefined with emotive words in order to support a specific value judgment. An example of the first strategy is the following (*De Inventione*, I, 91):

CASE 5

He is seditious who is a bad and useless citizen.

[1] Sacrilege. Enclyclopaedia Britannica. http://www.theodora.com/encyclopedia/s/sacrilege.html (retrieved on 03 June 2011).