



Do children need religious education? Discursive construction of children in talk shows by means of rhetorical questions

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Abstract

My objective in this article is to analyze the discursive work done by rhetorical questions in attributing to the child-pupil, as the central character of the debate regarding religious education in schools, several characteristics, needs, rights and obligations in a “taken for granted” manner and thus serving certain ideological claims. Using a discourse analysis approach, I have analyzed several Romanian talk-shows centered on religious education in schools. During these shows children were discursively attributed with traits that often serve to support and promote certain ideological positions. Thus, children have been described most of the time as being vulnerable, immature, tending to abuse rights and liberties if they have the occasion, lacking judgment, but capable to learn Revelation, needing religious education as the only way to develop properly morally and spiritually. However, practicing these discourses and “portraits” in such public arenas may easily become permanent uncritical ideological labels, discursively associated with the children and their age specificities. In my view this possibility is highly increased by the use of rhetorical questions which hide these assumptions and labels behind the cover of obviousness. Moreover, the discursive work done by rhetorical question for supporting various ideological claims is shown to vary according to the addresser’s target: an opposing interlocutor or the general audience.

Keywords

Rhetorical questions, discourse analysis, face work, religious education

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Introduction

Romania is one of the most religious European nations². Romanian media environment also reflects Romanians' high religiosity. There are television channels and shows entirely focused on religious and spiritual life. Furthermore, Christian-orthodox religion is often referred to as a component of Romanians' national and cultural identity. On the other hand, Romania as a state, being part of the European Union, is heading towards an occidental cultural model, also being a secular state, which, according to its Constitution, officially, doesn't have a state religion, being neutral to the 18 recognized religious cults and guarantees freedom of religion and conscience. Actually, on the basis of constitutional provisions (art. 29(5) of Constitution), the Romanian state supports religious cults. Thus, theoretically, at least, religious values and discourses shouldn't get and don't get into any sort of contradiction with the state secular characteristic or with the modernity values of the occidental world.

However, several reactions of some members and organizations of civil society³ have recently drawn attention on certain incompatibilities, which have led to heated public debates in the media environment and which have got to two distinct groups: one group pro-religiosity and the other, pro-secularity. The most important opposing debates took place within Romanian educational environment, having as main subjects of discussion: the compulsory character of religious education and the way of organizing its teaching process, the presence of orthodox icons in school classrooms, and the content of religious school books.

Participants to these debates have built and referred to different value systems that they put in opposition: history, culture, identity of the Romanian people vs. ownership of European values and rules; orthodoxy, spirituality vs. freedom of conscience and critical approach; secularism vs. religiosity and spirituality. Then, making use of certain ways of speaking as distinct repertoires and rhetorical strategies, they cast

² According to News Letters No.2 and No.5 published by the Romanian Group for the Study of Social Values of the Research Institute for Quality of Life, using data from the 2008 European Value Survey, Romania is one of the most religious European countries. In 2008 about half of the Romanians declared that they attend church at least once a month, and about 80% declared that they trust church. However a more recent survey made by a Romanian research institute (INSCOP) shows that the Romanians trust in church has decreased to 63%.

³ Non-governmental organizations such as: Romanian Secular-Humanist Association, Romanian Humanist Association, Solidarity for Freedom of Conscience actively advocate for secularism and against any form of religious indoctrination. Also two of the most vocal voices involved in public debates, advocating for secularism, liberty of conscience regarding religious matters are that of Emil Moise and Remus Cernea. The former became a notorious public figure after he initiated several legal notification against the display of religious symbols in public schools and against compulsory religious education. The latter is also a public figure that founded several non-governmental organizations that militated for freedom of thought and conscience in Romania as a democratic society in opposition to any form of religious impositions and indoctrination.

and summoned in these debates, institutions and characters to which they assigned different roles: schools and their role, parents' responsibilities, the state position, religion teachers' characteristics and behavior. An important character around which all other revolve and which I have deliberately omitted above, in order just to give it special attention in this study is *the child, the pupil* respectively, as subject of educational institutions. The child and his development are frequently referred to and used as moral discursive resources, meant to support the above mentioned ideological positions. Such as, in order to confer legitimacy for their claims the child-pupil is constructed discursively and casted as a central character, whose interests and development “should be” considered priorities and placed in the center of concerns, decisions, and politics.

Objectives of study

The general assumptions that guide my analysis are that of discourse analysis which look at “how language gets recruited ‘on site’ to enact specific social activities and social identities” (Gee, 2005, p.1), as always being “political” that means centered on social goods (Gee, 2005, p.1). Language in use becomes thus a tool to “design and build things” (Gee, 2005, p.11) performing therefore exact functions. As such part of my objectives here refers to the way characters (children – pupils) are created discursively, their way of being described serving the ideological positions of some groups that have authority over other groups (parents-children, teachers-children). At this level, my approach is also close to the critical discourse analysis, to the degree I’m interested in the way discourses do an ideological work (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 1997) and thus relations of power and dominance are enacted, confirmed, legitimated, reproduced or challenged (Van Dijk, 2015, p.467).

In such cases the opposing ideological parties involved make use of a wide range of discursive strategies and rhetorical devices. Interpretative repertoires are such tools that may support ideological claims representing: “recurrently used systems of terms used for characterizing and evaluating actions, events and other phenomena” (Potter and Wetherell, 1987: p.149); “building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena” and also a “restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion” (Wetherell and Potter, 1988: p.172).

Another device that actually constitute the focus of my research here is the rhetorical question. Rhetorical questions (RQ) represent one of the most efficient rhetorical means in support of ideological positions, in that they induce the taken for granted character of certain assumptions. Thus, discursively RQ generate an amount of argumentative gaps, hidden behind the obviousness and the undeniable, and which don't require additional argumentative support. Therefore, the way rhetorical questions are used in order to support opposing ideological positions is one of my main interests regarding this study.

Considering the above mentioned interests, the major objective of this article is to analyze the discursive-pragmatic work done by rhetorical questions in constructing discourses that describe the characteristics, needs, rights and obligations of the child-

pupil as a central character of the ideological debate on religious education in schools. The interactional arena, within which I will observe and analyze the aforementioned debate, is represented by a series of recent talk-shows, dedicated to this topic in Romania.

Talk-shows as semi-institutionalized arenas

Talk-shows are a type of much appreciated television shows and, therefore, frequently present in modern media consumption, having had an important expansion in recent years in Romania⁴. Talk-shows may be compared with an arena to which different persons are invited to take distinctive roles and identities in order to support opinions and positions with an ideological component, variable in intensity, and which have been more or less already presented in public space, and being relevant for that. This arena, by its own nature and objectives related to public expression and communication, represents an excellent opportunity to observe the way in which a series of arguments are articulated and used, acquiring form; specific repertoires are created and activated in relation to subjects of interest for different categories of public. These ones often offer syntheses of the public's main arguments, opinions and ideological positions regarding specific problems, exporting them back to the public afterwards. However, talk-shows rarely become spaces of disputes' settlement, of taking decisions, of reaching consensus (Schirm, 2009; Thornborrow, 2007). They are rather discursive and rhetorical spaces of confrontations, where specific identities and positions are negotiated on site and where "face-work" (Goffman, 1967) is often employed. Observed at a situated interactional level, talk-shows are spaces where, for positioning and face-work reasons, repertoires are invoked and/or discursively built, stories are told and certain characters are cast, which may be then exported again to the public space, contributing to discursive articulation of the repertoires of different ideologies, of their specific characters and narratives (micro-macro link). Therefore, talk-shows may be regarded as articulating spaces, structuring and synthesizing areas, being directly connected to the public as they are progressing, with well-established discussion topics and guests that have well defined roles.

According to Ilie (2001), talk-shows are semi-institutionalized areas. They have discursive characteristics of daily informal conversations, as well as a series of characteristics of institutional discourses, as far as pre-established roles exist, defined objectives and themes, as well as ongoing rules. Furthermore, discussions' scopes and themes are directed not only to guests, but are also designated to the public, which is, in fact, the main receiver of the message (Ilie, 2001; Thornborrow, 2007). The public character of a conversation may significantly modify the way rhetoric is produced and positions are negotiated. The focus on the public requires that discourse legitimacy must be connected to the public discourse and become an objective in itself, highly associated to face-keeping. Therefore, the semi-institutionalized character of the conversation

⁴ According to Zeca-Buzura (2015) the number of talk-shows having national coverage between 2001-2011 was of 18714, while between 2012-2014 the number increased to 47149.

together with public exposure are important factors for understanding the dynamics of the interaction in discursive terms.

The semi-institutionalized character also guarantees an important degree of freedom, making these discourses unpredictable (Ilie, 2001, p.225). Thus, identities and roles may vary, sometimes depending on local interests of the person who is speaking (a politician may suddenly call down the role of the father and he may continue using another repertoire and arguments), the subjects may depart significantly from what has been initially established as the discussion theme, the rules are permissive (not only once has happened that a moderator lost control of discussion). I would add that precisely this “liberty” allows the participants a relatively great room for discursive maneuver, situational and rhetorical discursive ingenuity (Toth, Rughinis, Huma, 2014). People may almost freely employ a variety of repertoires, identities, stories and characters, as well as use a variety of rhetorical strategies and devices so as to carry through discursive work. As I have already mentioned, the rhetorical device I'm focusing on here, is the rhetorical question used in talk-shows, because it may do a persuasion work, as well as a work of social construction and local support of ideological legitimacy.

Rhetorical questions as multifunctional argumentative and pragmatic devices

Rhetorical questions have benefitted mostly from the attention of linguists, researchers in the field of rhetorics and more recently pragmatics. Therefore, the way of defining and identifying its functions varies. Certain types of definitions highlight the semantic and syntactic character of rhetorical questions, underlining the fact that rhetorical questions are in fact affirmations in interrogative form: a frequently mentioned definition on this concept is that of Quirk et al. (1985, p.825) who hold that “a rhetorical question is interrogative in structure but displays a strong assertive force and generally does not expect an answer”. Similar definitions are given by Abrams (1999, p.271) who holds that “a rhetorical question is a sentence in the grammatical form of a question which is not asked in order to request information or to invite a reply, but to achieve a greater expressive force than a direct assertion” or by Richards & Schmidt (2010, p.500) for whom it represents “a forceful statement which has the form of a question but which does not expect an answer”.

However, Schirm (2009) draws attention on the fact that definitions similar to those mentioned don't refer to the pragmatic dimension. There are several other definitions related to social construction of conversation or monologue which refer to the functions and effects of rhetorical questions in interactional terms, which draw attention mainly on the discursive game they are making. In this regard, we can mention definitions such as those of Wales (2014), Ilie (1994), and Black (1992). Thus, Wales (2014, p.2) highlights the almost unquestionable aspect of these questions “which don't expect an answer since, they really assert something which is known to the addresser and cannot be denied (Wales, 2014, p.370)

Black (1992, p.2) gives a definition which emphasizes a pressure towards alignment: “A rhetorical question is asked for the persuasive effect of its asking. It solicits

assent to a proposition by a subtle shift of burden of proof. It is a question whose form baits and whose substance hooks, a declaration that solicits assent to a claim by tickling the auditor's social obligation to respond to an interrogative."

Ilie (1994, p.128) also offers a definition which highlights the pragmatic effects of rhetorical questions, defining them as "question used as a challenging statement to convey the addressers commitment to its implicit answer in order induce the addressees mental recognition of its obviousness and the acceptance, verbalized or non-verbalized, of its validity".

Although, the role of these questions can be depicted, explicitly and completely, only by having access to the interactional context in which they are used, here, the versatility of these questions as rhetorical devices being really relevant, a rather great variety of functions mainly performed by them has been already briefly discussed. Similarly to the definitions mentioned, part of these functions has strengthened the argumentative role of these questions, others emphasized pragmatic and perlocutionary aspects (see Austin (1999)), of some effects related to psychosocial level that these questions may produce, as well as effects of construction, maintenance, confrontation and negotiation, in terms of positions and social identities referred to within the discourse.

For the first category, that of rhetorical functions, authors such as Frank (1990), Wang (2014), Schirm (2009) start from an ascertainment according to which rhetorical questions appear mainly in confronting situations. Frank (1990, p. 737) assumes that the primary function of rhetorical questions is to persuade. She points out that rhetorical questions are used effectively to enable speaker to make stronger statements than those that are possible via simple assertions (1990, p.726). For Schirm (2009, p.157), argumentative questions (a category to which belong also rhetorical questions) role is to "maintain the dispute, that is, to explicitly or implicitly question the standpoint of the other participant and to express opposition to their statement" and uses it "because of its provocative nature". For Wang (2014, p.46) "rhetorical questions often occur in environments of disagreement. A rhetorical question is employed after the speaker has been attacked, blamed or accused by the hearer. In this environment, a rhetorical question is made use of to counterattack the hearer". Ilie (1999, pp.979-980) shows that "rhetorical questions in talk shows are mostly used to shape arguments and influence public opinion, partly by defending and/or attacking particular viewpoints, and partly by striving to reach shared agreement, rather than simply win a debate by imposing one particular viewpoint". Here Ilie (1999) refers already to the second category of functions, those of rather pragmatic nature.

Looking at the second category of functions, rhetorical questions are seen as responding to a social and discursive context which implies negotiation and questioning (denial) of certain local positions, alignment in relations to these positions and acquiring legitimacy of certain psychological and psycho-social effects targeted by these questions. Ilie (1994, pp. 59-60) shows that rhetorical questions have a multifunctional character and that an important function is that of "eliciting agreement from the addressee". Thus Ilie (1994; 128) sustains that "the main discursive function is to induce, reinforce, or alter

assumptions, beliefs, or ideas, of the addressee's mind" regarding its obviousness and validity, mentioning, in the same time, that "the addresser's actual purpose is to indirectly convey this commitment to the specific answer to the rhetorical question" (Ilie, 1994, p. 56).

These imply using these questions in order to manipulate or to challenge certain positions of power, ideologies or identities, as Ilie shows (1999) in her researches referring to political discourse or to that from courts.

Although he refers to argumentative properties, Kraus (2009) draws attention on the capacity of rhetorical questions to exert moral and psychological pressure on audience to accept them as obvious: "... the persuasive force of rhetorical questions, by way of various kinds of strategic maneuverings, will exert strong enough psychological or moral pressure on the audience to make them accept the implicit warrants without any protest or further request for argumentative backing" (Kraus, 2009, p.130). Even more, according to Kraus (2009), rhetorical questions may successfully participate in argumentum ad hominem, by which opponent's personal self-discredit is intended. Here it's emphasized the use of rhetorical questions as a device for employing face threatening movement. It's worth mentioning that there are also approaches which, on the contrary, show that rhetorical questions may be used to reduce the impact on the face of certain affirmations that may be rough. This is the case of Brown and Levinson (1978, p.228) who consider rhetorical questions as statements used to soften and such as to minimize face risk allowing for multiple interpretations of meaning and intent. The confronting or consensual type of interaction might play the crucial role in determining the way rhetorical questions are used, highlighting once more the versatility of these rhetorical devices.

Briefly summarizing several functional characteristics that I consider essential for the rhetorical questions and relevant for present analysis are: F1) statements (affirmations) as questions aiming at increasing the force and persuasion of the argument, F2) rendering the message as being implicit, exclusive and obvious, F3) together with the addresser's commitment to the position expressed, F4) containing a moral or psychological pressure directed toward the audience or the addressee, exerted in the context of the obvious and default nature of the affirmation envisaging an agreement or alignment to this position, F5) doing face-work either by 5.1) challenging locally summoned identities and positions and thus being face threatening, or by 5.2) minimizing the risk of losing face (mostly depending on the roles and nature of the relations between participants).

I will observe within the analysis below the way these functional characteristics are activated, focusing mainly on the components F2 and F4, and on their incidence on component F5. I consider that these components play an important role in discursive and rhetorical shaping of some specific ideological positions by their capacity to support a series of statements (affirmations) as being taken for granted, reasonable, obvious (F2) putting therefore an important pressure so as to be accepted (F4), at the risk of losing face (F5).

The issue of religious education in schools as a topic of talk-shows in Romania. Corpus of data

Romania has a mainly Christian-Orthodox population (about 87%). During the school year 1990-1991, Romanian Orthodox Church (ROC) and the Ministry of Education signed a protocol according to which religious education became part of curriculum in public schools.

In 1995, religion becomes a compulsory subject during the primary school education, after Education Law no. 84/1995 had been passed. But in 1997, a Government Emergency Ordinance (OUG. No. 36/1997) specifies that pupils may not attend the Religion classes, on the basis of a written request done by a parent or a legal guardian. In response to a notice of non-compliance with the constitution done by E.M., the Constitutional Court of Romania decided, on 12th November 2014, that the provisions of the Education Law No. 84/1995 and National Education Law No. 1/2001 which stipulate that, on a written request of a full-aged pupil, of parents or legal guardian, the pupil may not attend Religion classes, are unconstitutional. Therefore, “the parents who actually want to enroll their children for the Religion classes are the ones who must submit a request”. Although this decision led to heated discussions, it only brought back forward the issue of religious education, recurrent in public debates in Romania.

For this analysis to be done, three television broadcasts - talk-shows type - have been considered. All of them had the same moderator and the same debate theme, namely the issue of religious education in schools. The debates have been generated by the decision of the Constitutional Court of Romania of 12th November 2014, as a reaction to E. M.’s compliant notice, and lasted around an hour each.

The shows’ format supposed the presence of a moderator and of a number of guests within a television stage, an organized space with a round table around which guests had been placed. Guests had been chosen from both groups in order to have pro and con arguments referring to the obligatory character of religious education in schools.

For this analysis, the debates have been listened and transcribed entirely. Nevertheless, only fragments from the first two television shows (chronologically) have been selected. The selection criterion was the identification of fragments referring to children and including rhetorical questions. The last show, although relevant for the debate on religious education, for the type of arguments used and the position of each group, focused more on issues related to legislation and didn’t offer fragments corresponding to the established criteria. Given that the data are public, there are no restrictions regarding confidentiality or participants identities to the shows. On the other hand, real names are not relevant to be mentioned in the present analysis. For these reasons, I shall use initials of real names in transcripts.

The first show was a live television transmission on 26th of February 2015, having along with the moderator the following guests L.S. (a TV and radio entertainer and president of Parents’ Association for the Religion Class), M.H. (an actress), R.C. (a deputy, founder of the Romanian Humanist Association, aiming against religious indoctrination in

Romanian schools), IC (a priest), OT (a journalist, actor, PhD in theology, interested history of religions), AC (a journalist).

The second show was transmitted on the 1st of March 2015, and had the same moderator and as guests: C.B. (a Religion teacher), A.S. (an actress), R.C., R.M. (a Roman-Catholic sister, director of the St. Iosif College), D.B. (a journalist), F.M. (a psychologist), H.O. (president of the National Council of Pupils).

The third show, of the 5th of March, on the same theme had as guests: C.N. (a priest), E.A. (former minister of education), E. M. (a Philosophy teacher in elementary school, initiator of the notice that determined the decision of the Constitutional Court), G.G. (a journalist), G.I. (a Law teacher, former ombudsman).

An introduction on the positions and discourses in three television shows (talk-shows), dedicated to Religious education in Romanian schools

What I intend in this section is to make a brief general description of discourses, undertaken positions and main arguments, directly identified in the three analyzed shows, but that may be easily found in Romanian public debate on religious education in schools.

The issue of religious education in schools has been and still is an important subject of debate in Romania. For example, another incident that raised heated debates was a written notice submitted by the teacher Emil Moise, in 2006, to the National Council for Combating Discrimination. He was asking by this the removal of religious symbols from public schools. Although he initially received a favorable decision, a subsequent decision in 2008, issued by the High Court of Cassation and Justice (a top legal institution), sets that religious symbols in public schools are actually legal.

The television shows analyzed here were done as a media reaction to the decision of the Romanian Constitutional Court which established that children's default application for the Religion class is not constitutional, the parents having to submit a request. Although the show topic was centering directly on the Court's decision, the debates exceeded by far this issue. The last show of the three was the only one that focused mostly on this subject, this being due to the assumed identity of the guests: on the one hand, the first two main initiators and supporters of the CCR (the Romanian Constitutional Court) decision participated to, and, on the other hand, a Law teacher and former ombudsman. These discussions had a dominant legal character. On the contrary, during the first two shows, the main subject of discussions was not the Court decision, but the degree to which the religious education for children is more or less appropriate and what this should contain, its confessional and/or its optional character.

The debate supposed two opposing groups: one in favor of the importance of Religion as a school subject and the other which sustains the freedom of choice, development of a critical attitude and secularism. For reasons of simplicity only, without any other ideological hints, I shall name the first group pro-religious, and the second one, pro-secularism.

Broadly speaking, at a close study of the three debates, but not only (other media sources have been observed, as well as on-line publications and comments which confirmed the main types of arguments), the pro-religious group focusses its discourse on the following types of arguments: **AR1)** the confessional religious education is important for the children's harmonious moral and spiritual development; **AR2)** in-depth knowledge of one's own religion before other religions, so as to offer a comparative basis (mainly as a response to the proposal of replacing Religion taught in a confessional manner with comparative religion or with the history of religions); **AR3)** Religion is important as part of culture, history and national identity; **AR4)** children must be aware of God and Revelation because "there is something else apart from the material world". We have to notice that the guests from the clerical world never invoked arguments of the type **AR4**, whereas those from the secularist group broadly used this argument.

The pro-secularism group built its position on the following types of arguments: **AL1)** We have to be a modern country, secular, democratic which aligns to the norms and ideology of the European Union; **AL2)** Religion may be detrimental to children because it may indoctrinate them and diminish the critical spirit, sometimes it may lead to development problems; **AL3)** Parents must be allowed to freely choose and they must be provided with options if they don't choose the Religion classes; **AL4)** There appear phenomena of discrimination and marginalization of the children who don't want to attend the Religion classes.

Analysis and discussion

Hereinafter I shall present and analyze some fragments of these debates to actually observe the way rhetorical questions are used and their functions, in the context of adopting certain positions regarding the way children-pupils are and should be, as subjects of religious education.

I mention that, in order to offer a synthetic expression of the rhetorical and discursive work done by the addressers, I decided to attach a tag to each of the 7 fragments analyzed. These tags are the result of my own interpretation, and have not been suggested by the participants to the talk-show. They have been created by reasons of synthesizing and expressiveness, as well as to suggest a possible typology.

In a first text AC (a journalist) a guest of the 1st show sustains a position pro-religion and addresses to RC of the opposite group, giving arguments in favor of religious education as a compulsory subject in schools.

Fragment 1. If you are reasonable you'll see you are wrong...

AC: We have talked here very much about religion. I think we should have better talked about God because there is a difference between religion and God. Religion is a cold study of..., as far as I know, of... of some precepts, of a behavior, whereas when you are talking about God, you are already talking about belief, you are talking about man's revealing power, which is something else. It's as if you were talking about poetry. **Dear Remus, if we take it in the light of cold reason, do children or people really need poetry afterwards?**

RC: [Poetry inspires...]

AC: God also inspires, my dear...

RC: [He inspires ideas... creativity...]

AC: You should know that God does more than poetry

AC: I have heard Remus often saying, even now, just before I took the floor, that the History of Religions should be studied. Remus, you who are in favor of reasonable matters, you well know that Geometry is not studied... in Mathematics... is not studied; only Euclidian Geometry is studied before university. **Why aren't all geometries studied, all from the beginning, my friend, starting with the 5th grade, the 6th grade, when the Geometry study begins?** Because it's known that people are not wise enough. **Why isn't comparative literature studied? Why is Romanian literature studied?** Because people, people know, grown-ups know that children need to be grown. First to learn, to attach to a place and then they can see and have the option to judge, to compare. I could introduce God into your rational pattern with with with...the history of religions. The history of religions is eventually, if you want, as I told, a cold study, **but people need to believe too, are you aware of this?** [Till studying...]

RC: [it's debatable]

AC: Until coldly studying, the child should develop the sense of revelation, of believing, should see, feel something else, feel that there is something else in this world excepting ...the...the...the material things.

AC's argumentative objective is that of demonstrating that non-confessionally taught religion is not appropriate. From the rhetorical point of view, the argumentative pillars are: children should feel something else too, should learn revelation, develop a sense of revelation, of believing, that only confessionally taught religion can do; children are not "wise" enough to be able to understand and compare religions from a historical perspective.

As rhetorical strategies/devices, AC builds up rhetorical questions within certain analogies with other subjects or fields of study such as art (more exactly, poetry) or history and mathematics in order to obtain the approval for his demonstration step by step. The role of rhetorical questions comes here to emphasize the power of analogy built with other branches of study. The force of AC's argument resides in accepting the analogy between religion and art, built by means of rhetorical questions, as well as the analogy between the history of religions and comparative literature. RC tries to reject the analogy with poetry, not as a completely impossible comparison, but as an insufficient (poetry does something more, it inspires) one, allowing therefore the validity of the analogy.

From the pragmatic-discursive point of view, the series of rhetorical questions tries to establish a basis of reasonability, the acceptance of which will then lead to the acceptance of the argument that religion is necessary for children. The addressee (RC in this case) has two options: either to reject "reasonability" implied by the rhetorical questions, which may make him accountable as being unreasonable, or to accept the default answers and accept therefore the analogy which determines a weakness of his own position.

This pressure toward reasonability is increased discursively even more by using a colloquial tone, concessive, introduced by formulations such as: "Dear Remus...", "my

dear...” and by using some concessive particles/formulations such as: “you who is in favor of rational things...”. Thus AC is trying to show that the discourse is not an ideological one, but one built on reasonability, the rejection of which exposes the interlocutor to the risk of losing face, in terms of reasonability.

In other words, although the discourse aims at minimizing the risk of losing face, it contains the threat according to which rejecting the self the evident analogy suggested by rhetorical questions and therefore rejecting the alignment may lead to the risk of losing face. The defining functions F2, F4 and F5 are present in the previous fragment within this analogy. Accepting the analogy, on the basis of accepting the answers (F4) formulated as being self-evident lead, with the risk of losing face (F5.2), to the acceptance of the final conclusion, which is, in fact, opposed to the addressee, from ideological point of view: “Until coldly studying, the child should develop the sense of revelation, of believing”. Although this discourse is focusing on an interlocutor from the opposing group, it's not a direct attack, containing a conditional of reasonability such as: **“If you are reasonable and accept these common-sense arguments, you'll realize that you are wrong and that I'm right”**.

Children are brought into discussion in relation to the Religion class as main characters, being the receiver of these classes. The “reasonable” answers to the rhetorical questions, either those given explicitly by AC, or those implied suggest, without saying, children as not being wise enough, and capable of doing sophisticated cognitive comparisons, but, at the same time, appropriate receivers to feel, to believe, to understand the revelation, to see that there is something else apart from material things. The implied structure in terms why can children and what should therefore children do is the following: children can't make comparisons, and thus, they shouldn't study a form of the history of religions; but children can feel, therefore, they should be taught to feel, to believe, the revelation, that there is something else apart from the material things. Using the syntagma “something else apart from material things” does an important discursive work here by describing the risk for the children to see and learn only such “material” things which is of course not wanted.

In the second extract, MH (an actress) sustains a pro-religion discourse and has as direct interlocutor also (RC), as a representative of the opposite group.

Fragment 2. Your position is obviously wrong and blameable

MH: Tell me, Mr. Cernea, how a prayer could bother? It's a minor thing. To teach the child... not to steal, not to lie. Not to lie...even when he is alone..., since this doesn't mean he'sis....is...

LS: [Just a moment, Manuela, this doesn't mean...]

MH: Wait a moment. This doesn't mean that X is absolved, does it? Teaching him things...that the family is composed of a man and a woman, is this detrimental?

RC: [Nobody tells that...]

MH: We teach him that above all there is...Pardon?

RC: [Nobody tells that...]

MH: ...that above all is God the creator?

RC: [This is questionable]

MH: [*do we indoctrinate him if we tell this...?*]

LS: [*Manuela, children...*]

RC: [*There is this risk...*]

MH: Without a Religion class...wait a moment to finish my idea...without a Religion class where the child must know that above him there is something and that all...the ethics (morality) which he must go through life with, is not the ethics given by a constitution, because, you see what's happening...we are talking about concrete things...You, steal! Pay attention not to be seen by anyone! Scramble because you'll not succeed in life otherwise. This is what most of the parents teach their children, since we are living in a mad and ill country. And tell: You! You'll see how you can manage, slip out! But never tells: Love your classmate! If you have a poorer colleague, share your sandwich with him. Don't laugh at the one who may have a speaking disability. Andrei, don't laugh at that boy who has a disability when you are going...

Analyzing the discourse, the objectives of MH's argumentation, such as Religion classes are important, are built on the following premises: that the Religion class is harmless; that it doesn't indoctrinate; that during the Religion class, soul and morality things are learnt, which couldn't be acquired otherwise, by means of any other subject.

Rhetorical questions are used again in order to underline the irrefutable character of the demonstration. The tone is aggressive by the high tonality of the voice and verbal fluency, as well as by using, a provocative addressing formula, at the beginning of the discourse (“Tell me...”) that makes RC accountable, and as such constituting a perfect introduction for the following rhetorical question (**...how can a prayer be harmful?**). This introductory phrase strengthens the function of the rhetorical question by underlining once more that the answer to this question is so evident (function 2), that it can't be rejected by anyone, excepting someone who doesn't understand the ethical consequences.

Contrary to **Fragment 1**, here, rhetorical questions are not meant to obtain the addressee's alignment (with the risk of losing face), on the basis of reasonability criteria, but rather to disqualify from the very beginning the addressee's ideological position, starting from the premises that this one does not accept the moral character of consequences. Here RQ are no longer used as rhetorical persuasion devices addressed to the interlocutor, but as devices meant to attack discursively the opponent's ideological position. Alignment is no longer requested, instead it is demonstrated how blamable a position which contradicts a moral common-sense argument may be.

The blamable character of a position contrary to that implied by the rhetorical question is supported by a series of rhetorical questions (pysma). Although their validity is each time rejected by the addressee, MH goes on by a monologue. Thus becomes evident that the addressee is in fact the public (the audience), the discourse being a demonstrative one for the public and not one addressed to the interlocutor. After having “demonstrated” the lack of legitimacy of the opposing position, by means of rhetorical questions, showing that Religion can have only a positive role, MH continues with a discourse about the importance of Religion for children's moral education. In this case, rhetorical questions directly express a function of face threatening (**F5.1**) by appealing to some evident moral-axiological landmarks (**F2**), the moral pressure being put rather on

the audience than on the addressee (F4). This type of discourse directly questions the legitimacy of the opposing position, as missing a common-sense perception (demonstrated by RQ) and being morally blamable, which can be formulated as: **“Your position is obviously wrong and blamable and I shall prove it”**.

Indirectly, but by default, due to RQ, children are presented in the discursive landscape as being the unfortunate and immoral products of an imperfect education that extends in Romanian society. Children are taught “to slip out”, to manage, to steal if nobody can see them. Although society and parents are responsible for that, the children are illustrated by a series of negative examples, as characters who don't know to share, laugh at those with speaking disabilities, and laugh at the boy Andrei who has a disability, implying that they definitely need a religious education. By the phrase “Children must know...”, the necessity of religious education is underlined, because the lack of it has serious consequences.

Fragment 3. Your position is definitely wrong and blamable and I shall prove it

The following fragment has the same scope and argumentative structure, rhetorical questions performing the same functions. What is new, are additional features attached to children-pupils.

MH: **May I put a final question?** With this Sir present here, maybe he is still listening to me. We are talking about under-age child's rights, a child who is still under parents' comfort, who lives in parents' house, parents deciding what is good and what is wrong for him, since parents are parents.

OT: Parents have criminal-law liability until the child turns 18. It's important to tell that.

MH: The child of 13 years old may be held liable. ..A little girl ...to give an example,...a boy, it doesn't matter, comes, “Mother... “, “tomorrow”, “I've fallen in love”, “tomorrow I'm leaving and I shall have safe sex with that boy”. **What does a parent do then?** Or even worse, the child tells: “Mum, you know my friends use to smoke... “or “no matter what drugs they take, I shall take too, I have the right”. **What are you going to do? What are you going to do?** We are not talking about rights here. If someone has rights, he must have all the rights...

In this case, the aim of the argumentation is showing that children shouldn't have the right to choose if they attend or not the Religion classes and is based on the “implicit” assumption that the parent is the one who decides, because otherwise we'll “surely” face children with abnormal and “rude” behaviours. These children will abuse the rights they are given. As rhetorical devices, apart from rhetorical questions, there are narrative elements, meant to increase the dramatic effect.

As a discursive strategy, MH indicates a decisive irrefutable argumentation due to the rhetorical character of the question which announces it: *May I put a final question?* Then MH uses a series of rhetorical questions by which she strengthens the conclusion of some small stories and by which she presents as unquestionable (F2) the risks the parent is exposed to, if the child is given the right to choose. Rhetorical questions such as “What are you going to do?”, “What does the parent do?” introduced just after the stories are meant not only to suggest that the scenarios and the related risks presented are inherent

and credible (to demonstrate that is out of question), but any other opposing position which may have made possible these scenarios, namely the addressee (RC), is held morally guilty. We have again a maneuver of direct threat of the face (5.1), that builds as morally accountable any position which denies the “obvious” consequences (F2), the audience being again the target for approval and not the direct addressee (F4).

The self-evident answer implied by these questions supposes a certain agreement that these behaviors are unacceptable, and these are actually the results of giving the children the right to choose. Therefore, “children” presented here appear as rather negative characters, irresponsible, who abuse, by default, the right to choose, and develop some immoral behaviours, accompanied by “the lack of common-sense”.

Fragment 4. Wait a moment, it's obvious you are morally wrong and everybody can notice that

OH: Concerning schools in Romania, article 491 of Civil Code, paragraph 2, tells that, as you may know, and you, that the child who turns 14 has the right to freely choose his religion. As far as I know, pupils have never been asked what their opinion is. The applications have been given directly to parents, and they used to be told to submit the applications till the next day or two days later. Pupils don't know that they may be informed...Please...

Mod: Now, **this is a problem to ask the parents and not the children?** I knew we had to...

AC: Now, let's ask them, if they want to study, as someone here is telling, if they want to study Chemistry...

Mod: I'm sincerely telling you, even if my father gets upset, I would have never wanted to study Chemistry. Or...

MH: Neither me, neither me, neither me.

OH: Just a second...

Mod: Even today I have a headache when I'm thinking about Chemistry...

RC: It's not the same thing...

Mod: Chemistry was awful. I hated it and I'm still hating it...

In Fragment 4 we have a somewhat more interesting situation of using a rhetorical question in order to weaken a position previously provided.

In this case, what we have, is a reaction to a previous discourse, supported by rhetorical questions. Although it could be considered a question addressed by the moderator from a neutral stand point, in order to check the guests' attitude (argument eliciting (Ilie, 1999)), the introduction of the word “Now...”, at the beginning of the question with the final wording “I knew we had to...” indicates from the very beginning the intention to contest the position just expressed by OH and Mod's commitment to a default answer (it becomes an argumentative question, (Ilie, 1999)).

The rhetorical question does here a significant discursive work. On one hand, it aims at questioning the previously supported position by indicating a position contrary to it that is also framed discursively as the natural and reasonable one. Thus, what is defined initially as a problem, is then denied (by Mod) and defined as normality (F2). Moreover, this rhetorical question also performs the function of rallying the guests (F4) to a position

opposed to that previously provided. However, this is not a direct attack of the addressee or of his face, the moderator addressing the whole audience.

Regarding the image referring to children, the rhetorical question is really suggestive. It directly denies the children's right to choose their religion and states this to be the normal situation. The guests' reactions to this question confirm and complete this image, establishing as a legitimacy criterion for the denial of this the fact that they didn't have the right to choose either not to study the subjects they didn't like. Therefore, as a rhetorical artifice, an ironic similarity with Chemistry is built, which was not optional either. The irony built out of the rhetorical question plus the analogy of one of the guests supports the idea the children's right to choose is actually absurd.

Contrary to previous transcripts, in the following three examples, rhetorical questions don't have any longer the role of contesting the position of an ideological opponent in a direct manner and present, but that of supporting and strengthening in the end the power of one's own argument (statement) and of attacking the legitimacy of the opposing position in an abstract, general way. Thus, rhetorical questions don't have any longer an evident interactional component, directed to someone precisely, being rather argumentative aids. However, they keep the functions of amplifying the argument (statement), especially when the answer is offered, as well as that of expressing an ideological position as being self-evident.

Therefore, in the text below, OH. makes an inferential demonstration with the objective of showing that the child of 14 can choose his religion and has the legitimacy to do it. After having cited the text of the law supporting his idea, OH. introduces a rhetorical question so as to strengthen the statement. As in the previous examples, the rhetorical question comes here to state and increase the obviousness (F2), reasonable, logical character of the argument (statement). The option for religion is built and suggested as something minimal in relation to something else considered much more important, namely legal responsibility (F4).

Fragment 5. These are the arguments, you must agree with me since the conclusion is evident

OH: Regarding the child's decision, it is clearly stated in Civil Code, article 491, that parents guide the child; do not force them, as was told in the Thursday show. Parents guide the child to choose his religion, according to their own principles, but the child who has turned 14 has the right to freely choose his religion. Don't forget that, starting with 14, the child is criminally liable, if he has the power of discernment. **A pupil can't decide his religion, but can he be taken to court?** It's the pupil's right. Let the child decide. Let's promote...

This time the child is discursively built as a responsible entity as he is considered by the law-makers. The argument goes to: *It's natural that the child may choose a religion since he can be taken to court.*

Fragment 6. The others can't understand, these are the arguments, you must agree with me since the conclusion is obvious...

FM: Secondly, from the point of view of personality development, you were telling about 14 years, that liability comes after reaching 18 years is true from the point of view of the criminal law, but, but, social maturity, people psychologically have it after 25.

RC: But it doesn't have any connection with our subject...

FM: But it is very important.

Mod: Let him speak.

FM: I've apologized, I'm waiting...Yes? So, this is, if you want...a compliance with of at least the age of personality development. We are not yet mature enough, even spiritually yes, not to say cognitively or emotionally. But I would ask you now. Launching...I've launched earlier a problem, namely that many pupils, teachers and parents, yes and...I'm interested in the pupils. In theory, child is said to be the center of all educational concerns, but, from the point of view of the general curriculum, it focuses more on content, on teachers' help and so on. It's really important that the pupil be in the center of all educational concerns. **Let's make him mature. But how? Who can realize two aspects? Who can make the emotional maturity? Where? And secondly, how cultural identity is achieved?**

In this discourse the objective is to demonstrate that children are not mature enough for choosing religion, as well as that to acquire some cultural identity for which the Religion class is necessary. As an argumentative strategy, FM distinguishes among several types of maturity (cognitive, emotional, and spiritual) to demonstrate the nullity of the legal argument according to which children can chose their religion at 14 years old.

As a pragmatism-discursive strategy, at the beginning of this abstract, FM sets the interpretative repertoire for his discourse, situating himself apart, even from the beginning, from a possible juridical repertoire and uses a repertoire specific to psychological sciences. However, after having established a legitimate repertoire (scientific), in order to make the discursive connection with the Religion he subtly introduces in the discourse the concept of spiritual maturity as a distinct zone of personality development, on the same level with cognitive and emotional maturity, as well as the issues of cultural identity acquired through religion. In order to give additional legitimacy, he makes use of educational norms "the pupil in the center of all educational concerns" which he repeats and emphasizes by the wording: *it's very important*, to which he adds the focus on his own concern for the pupils. By doing so, he simultaneously builds the pupils as being immature, but important and, consequently needing maturity, granted by the educational system and especially by the Religion classes. The type of argumentation is the one meant to be rational, based on a scientific repertoire.

The rhetorical question from the end has the role of strengthening the argumentation and of putting some pressure on the audience (**F4**) so as to admit, through the answer obviously implied (rhetorical) (**F2**), that Religion is essential for personality development at emotional level, this time, as well as for cultural identity.

Thus, within the argument, strengthened in the end through the rhetorical question, FM builds pupils as being emotionally, socially, spiritually immature at 18 years old, even if at that age they are criminally liable, the Religion class being introduced as the

unique solution (implied by the rhetorical question) which can help the pupils develop and mature.

Fragment 7. The others' position is wrong and this is obvious. The arguments are these...

RC: Yes...for vulnerable children of tender years, who can take histories belonging to mythology as an absolute truth may be...they may be inoculated with these dogmas and they may become obedient members of a certain cult. I think that, in a free society, child's superior interest should be preferred and this child's superior interest means education, broad information, not narrow information, means development of a critical spirit and presence of ethics in school. Ethics is not studied in Romania. I proposed in Parliament that Ethics classes should be introduced. For the pupils who don't attend Religion classes, school doesn't offer options, these poor pupils have to stay in the corridor or I don't know where. The new educational law or the amendment to present educational law should provide alternatives to pupils who don't attend Religion classes. **We have CCR decision, what does it essentially tell?** Up to present, some children have been put pressure on; they have been forced to participate to the Religion class. The Court decision tells this. It is not fair to auto put someone's name there and to force him then to become the black sheep of the class, to ask not to ...not to...attend the Religion classes. Therefore, I think we have to put things in main frames, in frames functional in many other countries. Anywhere in Europe, there is no indoctrination, anywhere in Europe, other cults aren't denigrated, the Greek-Catholic cult or the neo-protestant cults by example.

In this last example, the rhetorical question comes in the end to strengthen the argument. Here the explicit objective of the argumentation is that of convincing the audience that children should be provided with alternatives when it comes to religious education. The main pillars of argumentation are the children presented as vulnerable to indoctrination, the necessity for the development of a critical spirit according to the western European ideology, the lack of alternatives for those who refuse to participate.

From the point of view of the discursive strategy, this time, the discourse starts by building children as vulnerable, easily indoctrinated, situation opposed by contrast to a free society. Thus, he continues by introducing an interpretative repertoire of a "civil society", built by using terms such as: free society, rights, critical spirit, broad information, alternatives. The register changes with the rhetorical question referring to CCR (Romanian Constitutional Court) decision. Here, the rhetorical question gives the opportunity to formulate a type of answer under the umbrella of the implicitness, but to which he answers in his own interpretative register. He makes use of it to transmit that children have been put pressures on, and the Constitutional Court decision came in this context. Using a rhetorical question he causally associates a judicial effect (CCR decision) to a negative social cause (children have been forced to attend Religion classes). In the end, he returns to the civil society repertoire to add ideological legitimacy. In this last example, the rhetorical question doesn't have a conclusive role, but an artifice role so as to introduce his own perspective as being evident and inherent (F2), thus forcing the

acceptance of the initial statement (F4), according to which children are exposed to discrimination.

Children are built here as being fragile and vulnerable, who can be easily inoculated with dogmas. Consequently, they must be protected from indoctrination, the scope of education being the development of a critical spirit. At the same time, there is an image of the youth who refuses to participate to religion classes that may become easily marginalized as „the black sheep of the class” and thus discriminated.

Final synthesis and concluding remarks

In this final section I will suggest a couple of possible typologies of discourses that revolves around and are supported by rhetorical questions along with their functionality. Also I will highlight further the children traits and some possible consequences of practicing these types of discourses.

Discourses directly addressed to the interlocutors and demonstrative discourses

Characteristics of the discourses focused on the addressee (fragments: 1, 2, 3, 4). We refer here to those discourses built around and by means of rhetorical questions, explicitly addressed to an interlocutor. This type of discourses usually starts by personally addressing the targeted interlocutor. However, due to the semi-institutionalized character, the moderator is the person who “gives the floor” and sets the time for intervention (chronically insufficient), these discourses resembling rather a monologue than a dialogue. On the other hand, the control is not complete, and thus, the addressee (many times the others as well) use to cut out and interrupt. Under these conditions, the discourse and the arguments have to be rapidly delivered, the tone should be emphatic, verbal flow rapid, the rhetorical questions being frequent and performing simultaneously several functions:

- argumentative functions through which invoked arguments are presented as evident (their demonstration being no longer necessary);
- discursive-pragmatic functions through which the addressee’s arguments and discursive position is contested, either on the basis of reasonability, of logical consistency, or on the basis of axiological legitimacy or of moral consequences, accomplishing either a direct (contesting reasonability) or indirect face threatening (asking for reasonability, otherwise...) act.

In these types of discourses, rhetorical questions tend to have a central place, being emphasized during the discourse due to a role they perform so well, namely that of discursive weapons. For the same reason, the way the pupil is referred to or built in relation to the Religion class is less explicit, the discourse aiming entirely at attacking an opposing ideological position. Nevertheless, here, rhetorical questions suggest a more profound level of implicitness and obviousness which cover larger argumentative gaps and, therefore, pupils are built using tougher ideological stakes, resulting in a higher impact.

Characteristics of the discourses focused more on general audience (fragments: 4, 5, 6, 7). Pupils here benefit from a broader construction, a more explicit one, to the degree to which, here, the role of rhetorical questions diminishes, their frequency is less, they have only the role of highlighting an already demonstrated position or of contesting the opposing ideological position in a more abstract way, without the fear of being interrupted (there are no longer actions of one's face threaten). For these reasons, the rhetorical question tends not to be repeated, and in the examples analyzed here tends to appear at the end of the discourse as an additional rhetorical support.

Discourses which contest/defend the logical consistency and discourses which contest/defend the morality of certain positions

A second classification of the analyzed discourses may be done according to the degree to which rhetorical questions contest or defend the logical consistency or the reasonability, in scientific or juridical terms, of a position (fragments: 1, 5, 6) or, on the contrary, whether is defended or attacked the content or moral consistency of ideological positions (fragments: 2, 3, 4, 7). Thus, in the first case, the one who is speaking tries to build a type of argumentation with a logical-inferential character (supported by a scientific or juridical repertoire), creating a discursive frame for arguments' reasonability, where rhetorical questions are used to suggest that the premises or conclusions of the argumentation are logically or scientifically unquestionable. In the second case, the discourse is based on building some morally legitimate criteria (expressed through a moralist repertoire, on the basis of which negative consequences on the moral level are appealed to), the default character of which is increased by means of rhetorical questions, to which the opposing position is held accountable.

Combining the above mentioned criteria, the following types of discourses supported by rhetorical questions can be identified:

Table 1. Types of discourses sustained by rhetorical questions according to: 1) the focus of the addresser (a certain addressee vs. general audience) and 2) the argumentation repertoire (logical reasonability vs. moralistic)

	Discourses focused on the addressee	Discourse focused on the general audience
Discourse with an inferential structure based on logical reasonability	Fragment 1 persuasive discourse for obtaining agreement through criteria of logical reasonability (analogy, in this case); the risk of losing face if implied reasonability, expressed through RQ, is rejected	Fragments 5, 6 monologue discourse type in which an inferential structure is built and the rhetorical question comes to underline the undeniable character of the conclusion and puts pressure on its acceptance
Discourse built on moral statements and argumentation	Fragment 2, 3 aggressive discourse for contesting the addressee's position taking into account criteria of moral legitimacy. The rhetorical question directly attacks the addressee.	Fragment 4, 7 discourse addressed to the audience, in which a series of moral values and consequences are invoked, supported through RQ (fragment 4) or using RQ so as to bring up an attack against the opposing position (fragment 7).

Portraits of children and consequences

Under the pressure of the obviousness and the default, either from the point of view of an inferential demonstration where reasonability is the norm, or of certain affirmations with a moral character, children-pupils are invoked in these talk-shows as central characters, subjects of Religious education. The pro-religious group (fragments 1, 2, 3, 4, 6) tends to build the children as being immature, incapable to decide, even immoral, but in the center of educational concerns and needing Religion classes: to develop a moral personality, to be aware of revelation, to be able to see the existence of spiritual things beyond material things, to know that there is somebody there.

On the other hand, the pro-secularism group discursively builds the children as being vulnerable to indoctrination, who may become dogmatic or members of some cults, as well as of being discriminated on religious criteria, being able to choose (at least after 14 years old) and having to be given this right, to be educated in a way favorable to the development of the critical spirit, to have access to broad information, to be provided with alternatives.

One may hold that no matter which group builds these portraits, children are casted as characters whose characteristics help support and promote some situated discursive positions, often performing only local conversational functions. However, practicing and repeating these discourses and portraits in such public arenas (talk-shows) may easily become permanent ideological labels, discursively related to children's' age. They may become therefore discursive resources extracted from various conversational areas, providing ready-made and self-evident, stereo-typed images, without questioning what implies some often claimed traits such as: vulnerability, spirituality, national identity or moral development.

All these constructions risk to become accepted implicitly and by default, due to the use of rhetorical questions and of the functions they perform so well, so as to achieve some local discursive and ideological objectives. The path of ideological discursive constructions is smoothed by rhetorical questions.

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