Language, reason
and education

Studies in honor of Eddo Rigotti

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Preface

This volume is an offering of esteem and gratitude for Eddo Rigotti, who celebrated his seventieth birthday on May 25th this year. Young students and friends from Switzerland, and less young from Italy, have been joined by a group of distinguished international scholars in the fields of argumentation, linguistics, psychology, semiotics and communication sciences at large. We hope that the book reflects such a generous and strong personality of a semiotician, a philosopher, a linguist, a specialist in argumentation studies.

Eddo's personality can be best understood if we consider his academic and scientific experience. He attended the high school in Trento, where he acquired an excellent knowledge in Classical languages and cultures. In those years, Greek and Latin, but also German and Russian became familiar to him before he was admitted to the Catholic University of the Sacred Heart in Milan, where he earned a M.A. degree in Philosophy with a thesis on Soviet semiotics. His first research program concerned the semiotic foundations of Russian and Soviet theoretical linguistics and the results were published between 1969 and 1974. The young Assistant professor was soon recognized as a specialist in the field. In 1980 he was promoted to Professor at the Calabria University and in 1981 went back to Milan. In the Nineties he was involved in the foundation of the Faculty of Communication Sciences at the "Università della Svizzera italiana" in Lugano, where he founded the Institute of Linguistics and Semiotics, later renamed Institute of Argumentation Linguistics and Semiotics. In 1996 he moved to Switzerland and in 2013 he became a Swiss citizen.

Already in the late Seventies his profound interest in the semiotic dimensions of language use brought about a decisive change in his research orientation. Reconsidering the traditional semiotic perspective, he criticized the then popular structuralist idea that signs and sign systems shape the world as we understand it and void the role of

experience in understanding reality. He turned his attention to discourse analysis and text linguistics. He investigated text grammar and functional syntax, but felt unsatisfied with the traditional descriptions that he found unable to explain the relation between the logical and the communicative components of discourse structure.

From his genuine pragmatic point of view, the old (but still wide-spread) idea that meaning can be attached to language units in a sort of zero-context could not be maintained. In Eddo's neo-Bühlerian view, meaning can be represented as the result of a sign exchange (*Zeichenaustausch*) between people sharing a common ground. A new analysis was needed to understand language use.

So, he developed an unified account of both the semantic and the pragmatic aspects of speech event, in which a particular logical symbolism is used to represent the hierarchical organization that links together the factors involved in a concrete instance of speech. This account would later be known as *Congruity Theory* – interestingly, a name that Rigotti did not invent but rather accepted, as the branding and marketing of theories was rather foreign to him. The account is based on the assumption that the elements (both linguistic and non-linguistic) of a speech event are organized by means of a pragmatic connective predicate that indicates which requirements each factor must meet to become one of its arguments. The pragmatic connective predicate is taken to represent the way reason works in everyday communication. Reason is a sort of "sixth sense" endowed with the abilities of all the five physical senses. Human communication is reasonable in that people can "see", "feel", "hear", "smell" and "taste" the world through words: reason is an *organon* – a tool that helps people discover the world. And *logos* is the name of language used by people acting according to reason.

Starting from the second half of the Nineties, his research has increasingly turned towards argumentation theory and practice. According to a Ciceronian definition dear to Eddo, *argumentum est ratio, quae rei dubiae facit fidem* (Cic. Top. 2, 7): arguments are then rational devices granting trustworthiness to an hitherto uncertain proposition. The possibility and nature of rational and reasonable persuasion opens a new chapter in Eddo's reflection on reason, language and communication.