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LANGUAGE AS AN OBJECT OF ETHICAL REFLECTION.  
A TURN TOWARDS THE ATTITUDE OF TAKING  
RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORDS

*In memory of the Rev. Prof. Michał Drożdż (1958-2023)*

1. PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Language is a system of signs and rules, and this Saussurean dichotomy has made it possible to clarify a range of linguistic concepts and to organize and objectify the research methods used in linguistics. Another indisputable fact is that it has paved the way for the further growth of structuralist knowledge of language. When we use language in relation to it, and in doing so follow the established standard of correctness including grammatical, spelling and punctuation rules, the information conveyed becomes comprehensible, which undoubtedly increases the threshold of communication performance.

However, the practice of using language suggests that structuralist knowledge of it is far from sufficient to build and consolidate a community. In the domain of interpersonal relations, which essentially determines

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the way of existence of a human being as a communal being,<sup>1</sup> the ability to distinguish between inflected and non-inflected parts of speech and apply them in relation to the above-mentioned rules is at most responsible for the quality of the pragmatic side of communication. However, when we start to think about what mainly determines the value of communities (family, professional, civic milieus, etc.) and by what criterion this value should be measured, then we must say that it depends primarily on the employment of morally-determined axiological rules in communication practice. The rules governing linguistic correctness may, of course, be conducive to building a community – however, as long as the agential function of language is not burdened with falsehoods or half-truths, flattery or demagoguery, unauthorized domination, mockery, blackmail, or finally the intention to persecute another person using words. Hence, the quality of interpersonal communication depends, in the first place, not on the employment of the rules of linguistic correctness, but on whether the language user is aware of their own dignity and the dignity of the person they are talking to, and allows this awareness to be recognized in specific speech acts. It must be clearly emphasized that awareness so understood is not a fixed element of human nature, i.e., it is not inborn but is achieved with the experience of responsible actions (including speech acts), during socialization, upbringing, and more precisely – with reference to the title of this publication - in the process of shaping the attitude of responsibility for words.

The aim of the article is to shed light on axiological education, which can contribute a lot to the knowledge of younger language users regarding this particular type of responsibility. An attempt will be made to deter-

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<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of moral philosophers point to the communal nature of people as an inherently human trait. Józef Tischner convincingly argues for it in many of his publications, explaining that integrated human development is founded in people being in the community, never outside it. The author once presented the experience of communal human nature as follows, “I don't know if it's ever happened to you that you...didn't talk to a person for a few days. I advise you to undertake such an exercise, it is very interesting. You can have a radio and hear a human voice; however, you do not then hear your own voice spoken to another person, nor their response. After a few days, a strange emptiness surrounds you. For the first hours, even days, you will rest. After a while you will start to feel uncomfortable. Things and events begin to lose their proper proportions. Murmurs become exaggerated. In the silence, the passage of a fly becomes noise. Sounds lose their natural proportions. And then the desire of human contact will come to surface in you” [Tischner 2008, 5].

mine the general conditions for forming an attitude of responsibility for words, taking into account theoretical findings in the field of ethical assessment of linguistic acts. The methodological basis for the considerations will be the contemporary theory of communication ethics, the selected issues of which will help answer the question of how young people should expand their cognitive horizon regarding the ethical aspects of communication and taking responsibility for it. It is assumed that the conclusions from the intended analysis will bring cognitive benefits not only to educators, but also to all those interested in the issues of language in action and its relation to moral values.

## 2. FROM THE THEORY OF COMMUNICATION ETHICS

The Polish theory of communication ethics has its source in the works of Jadwiga Puzynina, well established in scientific discourse; in the 1980s, the researcher analysed, among others, the issues of manipulation, falsehoods and truth in relation to the social and political experiences of Polish women and men at that time. During the years of oppressive communist rule, she did not hesitate to write about the essence and effects of the language of totalitarian power, including its unethical aspects. Puzynina's numerous publications [see among others 1981a, 1981b, 1982, 1986a, 1986b] revived theoretical reflection on the moral dimension of communication so strongly that in the following years, and especially after 1989, a research trend began to clearly emerge in Poland, which is now called the theory of communication ethics (also: ethics of speech). The foundations of this theory were defined some time ago by Anna Cegięła, who specified that it deals with "research, description and assessment of the ways of using language in its relation to the values adopted by society, and establishing standards for such use of words that contribute to the protection of these values" [Cegięła 2014, 9]. The author's findings help to understand the scope of this theory, its relations with other fields of knowledge in the humanities and, above all, the role of making language users aware of its synergistic function, which is responsible for building interpersonal relations. Cegięła starts from the rational assumption that language is a tool for shaping them and, based on the axioms of moral philosophy and findings of axiolinguistics, sociology and psychology of com-

munication, she goes on to create a model of ethical use of language, the principles of which lead to the understanding of the fact that a sense of moral harm can be caused not only by the use of specific words or expressions, but also by the way they are used as determined by the specific intention of the sender in the context and communication situation the sender creates [ibid., 10]. These principles undoubtedly refer to the category of responsibility for words, taken as the research question in this article, and are based on the perception of a person in their individual subjectivity, freedom and in their relation to truth understood as the opposite of falsehood, consistent with the concept of ethical personalism. They comprise: (1) the principle of preserving the personal dimension of people, (2) the principle of taking into account the complexity and multidimensionality of human nature, and (3) the principle of preserving and respecting human autonomy (sovereignty) [ibid., 53-59].

The first of these principles refers to the primacy of respect for human dignity in communication contact with the Other and, more broadly, in the way of formulating judgments about the Other in linguistic terms. It assumes that the Other should be referred to as a person with their inherent dignity, which precludes any attempts to objectify them through words, to reduce them to a useful function that they are to perform for strictly defined purposes. This principle would also be violated by linguistic acts consisting in telling untruths other than justified by the good of the Other, deliberately misleading them, manipulating them with falsehoods, half-truths or flattery for pre-intended gain (e.g. to influence their consumer decisions). A communication attitude of this kind is considered a form of instrumental treatment of a person, limiting their cognitive and active capabilities, which may lead to unsanctionedly taking control over them. In breach of the above-mentioned principle are also, among others, animal epithets uttered for discreditation, insulting words and gestures, all acts of discrimination (including on the grounds of age, origin, religion, gender identity) and the use of language aimed at defaming the Other. An overall conclusion may be made that the principle of preserving the personal dimension of people in the use of language is safeguarded by speaking to them and about them in a manner, which – following from the recognition of human subjectivity as an irreducible value [see Wojtyła 1988; cf. Spaemann 2001, 226, 291-305] and acceptance of the primacy of responsibility

for agential speech act – helps to meet the deliverables from the fact of our being human.

Going further, the principle of taking into account the complexity and multidimensionality of human nature reminds us of the rational postulate of a holistic and equal perception of each member of a community, whilst opposing the reduction of their value on the grounds of only one specific trait of their personality, a single act, an isolated sphere of their life or type of beliefs. This principle is derived from the experience of negative value judgements of a person from a perspective far from full knowledge about them, which may consequently lead to them losing self-esteem and self-acceptance. The meaning of the norm in question has its source in the recognition of the fact that one is not a bad person or worse than others when, for example, one listens to a certain radio station, places hope in God understood in one way or another, prefers one or another political party, etc. That someone among us is black or slant-eyed, disabled, different or weaker in a specific sphere of existence, cannot do what most can do, or maybe does not meet the changing canons of beauty, does not mean that they nurture their humanity only in this one dimension chosen by others for judgement, do not get distress, do not experience human emotions or do not have rights that everyone else enjoys. We nurture our humanity in multiple areas, not just one, and this is what this principle is a reminder of. Cegięła emphasizes that the linguistic manifestations of its violation are acts of labelling and stereotyping, which deprive a person of their individuality, leading to gradual marginalization and even exclusion.

The third of the above-mentioned standards refers to human freedom, for which, as Karol Wojtyła argued as early as in his pre-pontifical times, man was created [Wojtyła 2000, 144-49]. It assumes, therefore, a communication contact with the Other in which they are granted the right to make their own choices, to articulate their beliefs (including to change these without exposing themselves to a sense of loss of security), and the right to a different way of thinking, forming and professing their own system of values. This standard, based on the recognition of human autonomy in experiencing and evaluating reality, proclaims the primacy of the partnership relation in communication acts, which does not mean an imperative to identify oneself with the beliefs of the Other, if for specific reasons they cannot be accepted by the interlocutor. Such non-acceptance, however, should be communicated with respect for those who think differ-

ently and, above all, in accordance with the principles of fair and rational argumentation, i.e., one based on facts, on truth. The principle identified by the author therefore precludes aggressively imposing one's own distinct views and reasons on the Other or failure to respect their subjective nature on the grounds of their distinctiveness, as such an attitude usually leads to destabilization of the dialogue and, consequently, the experience of hostility.

The above review of the principles of ethical use of language clearly demonstrates that they are acceptable to all its users, regardless of religious background, with which common linguistic awareness often associates the concept of ethics. They originated in the needs of social life, their source is the rational human nature, and in this sense, they can unite people of different religious and secular views. What is also significant is that they cannot be denied by contemporary anthropology or other social sciences, which, having recognized the communal nature of man, promote standards of concurrence consistent with these principles, based on the broadly understood rule of inclusion [cf. Guzy-Steinke 2010; Balz, Benz and Kuhlmann 2012; Szafranek and Halicki 2016]. Noteworthy, moreover, the communication morality postulated under these principles is a component of fundamental human rights related to the protection of human dignity, privacy and personal rights. This means that linguistic acts consistent with its rules have their normative sources. These include generally applicable documents and legislation, among other the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 2007 Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the 1953 European Convention on Human Rights, the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Article 47) and finally the Criminal Code, which in its Articles 212 and 216 penalizes offences against good name in the form of violation of human dignity through speech-mediated defamation, insult or slander [cf. Andruszkiewicz 2015, 18-22]. Therefore, we can conclude that such speech acts that are contrary to the principle of mutual respect become not only an ethical and linguistic problem, but also a legal problem. This is because they often cause human harm to which the law must respond. Under the law, they are identified based on the self-awareness of the harmed person, their individual sensitivity and objective facts regarding the offender's communication acts. What is taken into account, among others, is the content of what the offender said, the tone of the statement, its meaning (it is analysed in rela-

tion to the conventions prevailing in the community to which the sender and the recipient belong) and the circumstances in which a communication situation happened [cf. Rozmarynowska 2018, 132-33]. Any harmful speech – such as, for example, one conveying a message of hate or consisting in restrictive communication of threats, causing anxiety in the recipient – goes beyond the articulation of an opinion and therefore loses the legal protection it would otherwise enjoy under freedom of speech. For the purposes of our considerations, we must note that it also loses protection in the moral dimension, which in turn assumes reference to relevant ethical criteria in its assessment. They are important in the sense that they help determine the degree of social harmfulness of specific language uses, determine their impact, especially on the awareness of its younger users – and more precisely, on the relationship between agency and responsibility that occurs in their communication attitudes – and, finally, determine, at the educational level, the standards for forming patterns of language contact that will meet basic ethical requirements.

Right away, a note must be made that there cannot be uniform criteria for the ethical assessment of linguistic acts, as statements perceived as immoral are articulated in various communication situations, in various forms (written or oral), online and offline, in specific contexts, in various modalities, and their senders may vary in terms of age and soundness of mind. All these aspects lead to the conclusion that each morally harmful act of language use should be assessed separately. There is no doubt, however, that for the purposes of developing socially desirable communication attitudes, including the attitude of responsibility for words, it is possible to distinguish general criteria for the ethical assessment of specific linguistic facts, or standards that will support young people in developing their faculty to distinguish good from evil in communication and strengthen their ability to respond with will to values. Let us try to set out these criteria in the next section of our considerations.

### 3. FORMING THE ATTITUDE OF TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR WORDS AS A CHALLENGE OF CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

When one explores the problem of forming the attitude of taking responsibility for words among younger language users, one should first

note that the need to pursue this goal is due to the imperative that they recognize the limits of freedom of speech, a right that, on the one hand, ensures that the principles of democracy work in a society's practice while, on the other, being at times abused to defend specific positions or ideas at the expense of other people (e.g. by deliberately spreading untruths, insidious manipulation, publicly attributing to someone something they did not do, intimidation, humiliation). These limits are set by the limitation clauses to human rights to freedom of speech, which emphasize that the exercise of freedom of speech not only may not violate the rights of other people to protection of their good name, but also may not aim to disturb public order and the system of moral principles adopted in society by means of speech [cf. Skwarzyński 2021, 264-65].

To form the attitude of taking responsibility for words no doubt means to influence human moral awareness, from which it originates. This particular type of responsibility crystallizes in a personal dimension; it develops in the mind of a person who is aware of the intentions of their speech acts and who directs them. On the one hand, it follows from their answerability to themselves, e.g., in relation to truth of which they are aware, and more broadly - in relation to their own conscience, and on the other, from their responding with will to moral values with a view to realizing these in communication contact with the Other. In the latter case, it is a responsibility "before the Other" and as such it already acquires a public dimension, i.e., its desired effects can be seen, although it remains connected with the voice of conscience of the one who takes it before the Other and because of the Other. There is no doubt that education towards the virtue of responsibility for words should take into account this complex structure since it assumes, on the one hand, an ethical reflection on communication facts chosen by the educator, access to which is provided, among others, through social media,<sup>2</sup> and, on the other, that this reflection has an influence on the moral awareness of the recipients of the educational process. When responsibility for words is formed in relation to knowledge of the communal nature of man and his call to seek truth, then his ability increases to personally will to use words with a sense of responsibility for them, to respond with will to values. We cannot help but recog-

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<sup>2</sup> An elaboration on the didactic use of various communication events and broader possibilities to reach the sources with a view to developing moral attitudes in the use of language can be found in my two other texts. See Żurawlew 2019a and 2019b.



nize that their realization in specific speech acts is also a form of the language user's answerability for values, taking the form of their protection. Finally, we cannot fail to recognize that when taken, this attitude speaks much good about themselves, as it is a sign of them fulfilling their humanity through their personal attitude to values revealed in their communication acts.

Which of these values are decisive to the responsible use of language results from the analysis presented above, which brings us closer to defining the subject matter of educational reflection. The main value to be covered by this reflection must undoubtedly be truth understood as the opposite of falsehood. In developing the attitude of taking responsibility for words, we cannot fail to raise the rational fact that words have the power of testimony: they either testify to truth, serving the good and growth of man, the one who utters them and the one to whom they are addressed, or they deny truth, leading to destabilization of the relational plane and thus to a gradual loss of trust, which is the foundation of the development of every community. It is therefore clear that responsibility for words is, among others, a derivative of our awareness encompassing the function of truth in building a community, in knowing the world and getting ourselves oriented in it. In guiding young people to communication maturity, we must recognize this function while taking into account the fact that taking responsibility for truth translates into the way the language user is perceived by those who listen to them. Communication practice suggests that the one who responds with their will to the value of truth is an internally free person and, in this way, builds their authority in the eyes of others, is perceived as a reliable person whom one can trust. An educator explicating the value of truth, understood here - let us emphasize once again - as the opposite of falsehood, should show this pragmatic aspect of its communication with the awareness that those who are under their educational influence undoubtedly aspire to be authority in the areas of their life destinies. After all, someone who causes harm by lying does not become an authority. In the process of forming responsibility for words, references should also be made to human experience, which suggests that falsehood takes intellectual effort, or more precisely, control over the fictitious context contrived. While truth takes care of its own conclusions, falsehood has no such privileges [see Antas 1999, 20-22], hence the need to constantly "watch out" in falsehood and consciously control its conse-

quences. The slightest semantic presupposition or paralinguistic elements inherent in insincere speech are certain to betray it, causing loss of trust. I think that the educational message of responsibility for words should be based on the experience of falsehood and its consequences. However, the basic source of reflection on these should remain human harm, often experienced painfully when a person is made an object through falsehood.

Another fundamental value that demonstrably derives from the theoretical findings on communication morality is human dignity, which, as already emphasized above, is subject to legal protection. Therefore, the educational explication of issues related to responsibility for words cannot fail to take into account a substantive consideration of the essence of human dignity. When considering it, one should undoubtedly refer to the previously mentioned legislation and other generally applicable documents and declarations that explain its seriousness and nature, but above all to the knowledge about it offered by the theory of personalism. The concept of human dignity developed in it is considered to be the best justified, also because the personalistic rationalization of the primacy of respect for every person is not accompanied by any functionalist or utilitarian conditions that contradict the truth about the person's subjectivity. A person has their dignity not because they are aware of it, perform important public functions, has achieved a certain level of excellence, or has a lot of money, but because they are a person, and more importantly, because they were conceived as a person. Of course, they deserve social recognition for their excellence, which often translates into financial reward or professional promotion, but both they and every Other, regardless of who the Other is, what they have, and what achievements they have contributed to the world, all deserve respect. This fact sets the rational direction of thinking about their subjectivity as an irreducible value, which, when translated into respect for human dignity, reveals man as a being who knows this dignity, is unique, experiences his own acts, emotions and sensations, and, finally, is placed highest in the hierarchy of beings [cf. Wojtyła 2000, 417-20]. The theory of communication ethics fundamentally defines any reduction of man by means of words to the level of an item serving specific utilitarian purposes as a moral offence, and demands respect for his dignity. It seems that the desired educational effects in developing the attitude of taking responsibility for words where this respect is to be mediated will be achieved by demonstrating the seriousness of the

subjectivity of every human being in relation to attempts to destroy humanity with tragic consequences. Both history and contemporary times reveal countless such attempts. Stripping people of their names and assigning them numbers in German extermination camps, as well as tactically calling the unprovoked war in Ukraine a “special military operation”, which in fact is a linguistic exponent of avoiding responsibility for the destroyed human life, can be both considered on educational grounds as examples that can be employed to simulate an “experience” of the value of human dignity. I think that the “experiential” aspect of influencing the moral awareness of young people in relation to anti-values for which there is no social consent will improve the intended impact. However, the course of education should be planned so as to integrate the experiential dimension with the previously mentioned substantive aspect, i.e., theoretical knowledge of human dignity. The combination of both dimensions will support ethical reasoning, which, by referring to the rationality of moral choices, will support the process of gradual internalization of the value of responsibility for words.

In this process, in addition to the explication of truth and human dignity, there must be cognitive reflection on the value of human freedom, the connection of which with generally understood responsibility is obvious (not only from the point of view of the concept of ethical personalism). The educator, who seeks to introduce young people to the experience of responsible language use should explain human freedom, among others, as an attribute of an act that manifests itself in a specific experience. Given the specific point of reference, the ethics of interpersonal communication, the educator will be mainly interested in speech acts, which is why, as has been previously emphasized, the subject matter of special consideration may be communication facts selected and evaluated against ethical criteria. Based on an analysis so profiled, the educator will be in a position, on the one hand, to explain the relation between human freedom and responsibility for the way words are used, and, on the other, to direct the attention of education recipients to the fact that speech acts have their consequences (from an ethical point of view, good or bad), and that it is through these acts that a person becomes a responsible or irresponsible user of language. Since the efficient cause of the consequences of specific behaviours as discussed by the educator is always the way in which the subject understands their freedom, it is advisable to direct the process of ethical

reasoning so that the recipients understand freedom as the opportunity to choose the good. This conclusion will come from reference to human experience, which teaches that man is free to the extent that he participates in what is good [cf. Tischner 1991, 211]. Forming responsibility for words thus translates into developing a sense of responsibility for the good of the communication community to which a person belongs and within which they exercise their freedom. Therefore, it should also be explained as a way of being in the community – as Józef Tischner would say, “a way of being according to reason” [Idem 2008, 30].

The above considerations allow us to distinguish two general criteria for the ethical evaluation of communication facts, which will support the process of forming responsibility for words.<sup>3</sup> When reflecting on a fact with the participants of such a process, one should undoubtedly assess whether the way language is used is directed towards or against another person, i.e., whether language is an exponent of respect for their dignity and sovereignty, or whether it deprives them of this respect through acts of discrimination, contemptuous, humiliating, vulgar, or finally intimidating speech, which conveys the message of hate. An important element of assessment against this criterion should be axiolinguistic reflection on the meaning of specific words. As Jadwiga Puzynina demonstrated, words may contain a component of negative evaluation not only in the conceptual sense, but also in the connotative sense, which is realized much more clearly in the context of the entire statement [cf. Puzynina 2014, 108-109]. An analysis of the context and, if possible, the consituation will undoubtedly play an important role, as acts of contempt or mockery may not be delivered directly, but in a contextually veiled way, with sarcastic insinuation, cynical allusion or insulting silence. In the first place, however, the assessment against this criterion should cover the consequences of the analysed communication facts, both for the individual, if communicated by the harmed person, and for society. In the former case, ethical insight into such consequences will make it possible to sensitize the recipients of education to specific human harm, to show the dimensions of evil that words

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<sup>3</sup> Certainly, there may be more criteria and these may be more detailed, structured, for instance, according to the division into different types of performative statements, or according to the degree of social harmfulness of specific speech behaviours. The point of this article, however, is to identify the most universal criteria for the purposes of axiological education.

can cause to the Other, and in the latter, to determine the degree of social harmfulness of acts through words, i.e., violation of moral principles approved by the community.

Another criterion will come from an analysis of a fact in relation to truth, save that assessment against such a standard is only possible when insincerity has been exposed. Again, in this case too it will be key to analyse its moral consequences, which may be not only individual, but also public. After all, if someone's falsehood affects members of a larger communication community and poses a threat to their freedom, then the range of its negative consequences necessarily increases. The more it leads to the objectification of people, the stronger it should morally disapproved. I think that in this case the educator should refer to the historical experiences of various totalitarianisms, including experiences of Polish society, which in the past times of communism suffered the consequences of government spreading disinformation on a large scale in order to treat people instrumentally, subjugate them and exercise control over them.

It is necessary to emphasize that the ethical qualification of communication facts selected by the educator has its subtle limits. Its vector should concern the consequences of a specific act and their reality, which means that a personal assessment of responsibility incurred by a person for their act should be excluded. In other words, each description of specific speech acts or attitudes against moral criteria must be delivered with ethical tact and prudence of judgment confirmed by authority. After all, developing an attitude of responsibility for words takes an attitude of authority, not of authoritarianism, and this should be kept in mind. The educator who undertakes this type of reflection, if they want to fruitfully develop the value discussed in this article, must act responsibly, i.e., by initiating a wise, benevolent and open discussion, without combining moral and disciplinary values in it, without contriving the truth about communication, but by co-discovering this truth through dialogue and – above all – by demonstrating the coherence between the message preached and the educator's own conduct. I believe that the quality of education they deliver depends primarily on the extent to which they are able to confirm their own authority with their acts and to distance themselves from moralizing discipline in favour of benevolent reflection based on both their knowledge and social experience of effective and responsible communication.

#### 4. FINAL REMARKS

The above considerations certainly do not exhaust all aspects of the problem raised, if only because it belongs to a broadly understood symbolic culture, which as such can never be described in its entirety. Responsibility for words comes first from within a person, to which only they have full access. However, since it has its public consequences, i.e., it is revealed by language users in the communication community, it is rationally justified to undertake educational reflection on it. This justification comes from the good of the community and, above all, from the axiological standards governing the community's growth, as specially highlighted in this article. We experience the consequences of irresponsibility for words in social, professional and often family life almost everywhere, which is why such reflections should be developed so that scholarly effort serves life practice, the existence and consolidation of communities as effectively as possible.

The observations made show that forming the attitude of taking responsibility for words should be understood primarily as a process accompanying a person's integrated growth and striving for communication maturity. On the one hand, it is to support growth of knowledge about the values that constitute the foundation of interpersonal relations, and on the other, to strengthen the social competences and moral awareness of those who, after completing education, will enter the space of social participation. The process itself is neither brief nor easy, as by linking the transfer of knowledge about values with an educational influence on moral awareness it always assumes a likelihood, not certainty, of outcomes. Its key advantage, however, is that, when pursued prudently and wisely, it will bring the listeners' trust and their cognitive enthusiasm, to trigger the natural desire of every person to participate in what is good. Only good comes from responsibility for words, which is why it is a socially desirable value and as such attracts attention from an educational perspective.

The reflections presented in this publication and expressed from this perspective demonstrate that the value of responsibility for words should be taught in relation to anti-values, i.e., all those negative uses of language that come in contradiction to the responsible use of it. The educational method proposed in the considerations assumes "experience" as the necessary vehicle for learning, being ethical reflection on speech events that result in human harm. As discussed, the criteria for their evaluation

are intended to serve the development of a sense of responsibility for words; therefore, in the educational process, it is necessary to exclude any use of these, which would serve specific *ad-hoc* purposes. Education aimed at forming moral awareness must always be about the good of man, therefore he himself must be its goal. From the point of view of the well-being of human community, one more aspect of education on responsibility for words should be taken into account, namely the educational reference to rationality. After all, responsibility for words is a quality of rationally thinking people who learn it, among others, through experience. It is only unfortunate that this experience sometimes happens to be one of evil or various contradictions. The Rev. prof. Michał Drożdż, to whose memory I dedicate this article, subtly warned against those in countless publications, helping draw conclusions from the fact that we are human. For the benefit of the message on the principles of educational ethics, let us have a brief quotation from his writings:

Man is able to act fully “humanly” if he is an internally integrated person and if he does not live in contradictions. One of the deepest contradictions in human life is the contradiction between an act and the truth of conscience, that is, personal belief in the value of the act itself. The trivialization of evil causes an internal contradiction between an act and the value and dignity of man, therefore the principle of “non-trivialization” of evil is one of the principles of educational ethics [Drożdż 2020, 308].

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**Language as an Object of Ethical Reflection.  
A Turn Towards the Attitude of Taking Responsibility for Words**

Abstract

The article focuses on the category of taking responsibility for words, which is explicated as both a component of the moral awareness of language users and a socially desirable attitude that promotes the building of a communication community. The above category was analysed in view of legal regulations and, most importantly, theo-



retical findings from the field of communication ethics. The author used the conceptual apparatus of this theory to determine the way in which responsibility for words can be formed in axiological education. It was defined by referring to the primacy of respect for the values such as human dignity, freedom and truth understood as the opposite of falsehood. The author concluded that the attitude of taking responsibility for words should be formed through the transmission of knowledge regarding these values, assuming that they can be “experienced” relative to examples of the negative use and abuse of language as opposed to its responsible use. Therefore, this article presents general criteria for the ethical evaluation of communication facts, indicating how they should be used for the purpose of forming the attitude that involves responding with will to the discussed values.

**Keywords:** responsibility for words; theory of communication ethics; human dignity and freedom; truth as the opposite of falsehood; axiological education

**Język jako przedmiot refleksji etycznej.  
Zwrot w stronę kształtowania postawy odpowiedzialności za słowa**

Abstrakt

Artykuł dotyczy kategorii odpowiedzialności za słowa, która eksplikowana jest zarówno jako składnik świadomości moralnej użytkowników języka, jak również jako społecznie pożądana postawa sprzyjająca budowaniu wspólnoty komunikacyjnej. Kategorię tę poddaje się analizie w relacji do uregulowań prawnych, przede wszystkim jednak w odniesieniu do ustaleń teoretycznych z obszaru etyki komunikacji. Autor, posługując się aparatem pojęciowym tej teorii, rozpoznaje sposób, w jaki odpowiedzialność za słowa może być kształtowana w edukacji aksjologicznej. Jest on określany poprzez odwołanie do prymatu szacunku wobec wartości ludzkiej godności, wolności oraz prawdy rozumianej jako przeciwieństwo kłamstwa. Autor dochodzi do wniosku, że kształtowanie postawy odpowiedzialności za słowa winno obejmować przekaz wiedzy dotyczącej tych wartości i zakładać ich „przeżycie” w relacji do przykładów negatywnych użycia języka, które przeczą odpowiedzialnemu posługiwaniu się nim. W związku z tym w publikacji przedstawia się ogólne kryteria etycznej waloryzacji faktów komunikacyjnych i wskazuje na to, jak winny być one wykorzystane z pożytkiem dla kształtowania postawy odpowiadania wolą na wspomniane wartości.

**Słowa kluczowe:** odpowiedzialność za słowa; teoria etyki komunikacji; godność i wolność człowieka; prawda jako przeciwieństwo kłamstwa; edukacja aksjologiczna

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