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VERBAL GIFTEDNESS AND RESPONSIBILITY IN SPEECH: RHETORICAL AND HOMILETIC DIMENSIONS

Summary.

In contemporary educational contexts, verbal giftedness is often reduced to linguistic proficiency, fluency, or rhetorical effectiveness, while its ethical and meaning-oriented dimensions remain insufficiently examined. Specifically, this article proposes a reconceptualization of verbal giftedness through the prism of responsibility in speech, which, following the theoretical frameworks of R. Sternberg and J. Habermas, is understood as an intrinsic criterion of mature verbal development rather than merely an external moral supplement. Drawing on contemporary theories of giftedness and talent development, rhetorical theory, and homiletic-hermeneutic approaches, the study conceptualizes verbal giftedness as a multidimensional capacity integrating cognitive structure, discursive competence, and ethical accountability. The analysis demonstrates that mature verbal giftedness emerges not merely through expressive ability, but through ordered thinking, interpretative fidelity, and awareness of the social and ethical consequences of speech. Rhetoric and homiletics are examined as complementary models of responsible speech: rhetoric disciplines verbal expression through argumentation, coherence, and audience orientation, while homiletics emphasizes interpretative responsibility, contextual sensitivity, and answerability to meaning. On this basis, the article proposes an integrative model of verbal giftedness in which responsibility in speech functions both as the medium of realization and as the criterion of maturity. Consequently, the findings have significant implications for gifted education, suggesting – in the light of the concepts developed by J. Renzulli, D. Kuhn, and D. Dai – a shift from performance-oriented assessments toward pedagogical practices that cultivate structured thinking, interpretative discipline, and ethical awareness in communication.

Keywords: *verbal giftedness; responsible speech; rhetoric; homiletics; meaning making; discourse competence; ethical dimensions of communication; gifted education.*

In contemporary educational contexts, verbal giftedness is increasingly interpreted primarily in terms of technical language proficiency, fluency of expression, or rhetorical effectiveness, while substantially less attention is paid to responsibility in speech as a moral and meaning-oriented dimension of verbal talent [8; 27; 37]. Such a reduction narrows the understanding of verbal capacity and obscures its deeper core: the ability for deliberate meaning-making, interpretation, and accountable influence of language on others [17; 35; 36].

Across both classical and modern perspectives, rhetoric has never been understood merely as the art of stylistically polished or persuasive speech. Rather, its foundation lies in the discipline of ordered thinking – clarity, logical coherence, and intentionality that precede verbal articulation [2; 30; 39]. From this standpoint, rhetorical speech emerges as the outcome of an internal cognitive process in which meaning is structured prior to language and subsequently expressed in an appropriate verbal form, particularly in complex communicative situations [4; 6; 9].

Within this framework, speech cannot be regarded as an autonomous technique. Instead, it functions as a public and accountable extension of thought [18; 41; 42]. The capacity to think in a structured, coherent,

and intellectually disciplined manner (rather than impulsively or chaotically) constitutes a central dimension of verbal giftedness. Such giftedness presupposes not only mastery of linguistic resources, but also a developed internal culture of thinking: the ability to organize meanings, critically examine them, and orient expression ethically [15; 16; 35]. Accordingly, speech appears not as a spontaneous emotional reaction or a purely technical skill, but as the result of a reflective and responsible internal process [16; 17; 22].

This distinction becomes particularly salient when rhetorical and homiletic approaches to speech are considered in parallel. Rhetoric focuses on argumentative structure, coherence, and audience-oriented persuasion [2; 27; 39], whereas homiletics offers a model of responsible speech grounded in interpretative fidelity to texts, sensitivity to the listener's context, and awareness of the ethical consequences of the speech act [25; 28; 33]. Integrating these perspectives makes it possible to conceptualize verbal giftedness as a holistic capacity that extends beyond verbal performance to include disciplined thinking, interpretation, and responsibility for meaning [3; 10; 36].

Accordingly, the aim of this article is to conceptualize verbal giftedness through the lens of responsibility in speech and to examine rhetorical and homiletic dimensions as complementary frameworks for its development. The article provides a theoretical analysis of verbal giftedness, explicates the ethical and meaning-oriented dimension of rhetorical discourse, and proposes an integrative approach to understanding responsibility in language use within educational contexts [8; 17; 37].

Rhetorical Dimension of Responsible Speech. Within the framework of verbal giftedness as a cognitively and ethically grounded capacity, rhetoric emerges not merely as a technique of effective speaking, but as a discipline that structures thinking, shapes meaning, and regulates the responsible use of language in public and educational contexts [2; 6; 7]. From its classical origins to contemporary reinterpretations, rhetoric has consistently addressed the question of how thought becomes speech and under what conditions verbal expression can be considered both effective and legitimate [29; 30].

In classical rhetoric, the relationship between thought and speech is foundational. Aristotle defined rhetoric not as ornamentation or eloquence for its own sake, but as the capacity to discern the available means of persuasion in each situation [2]. This definition places rhetorical activity within the domain of practical reasoning, where persuasion depends on understanding the structure of arguments, the nature of the subject matter, and the disposition of the audience [29; 39]. Crucially, rhetorical competence presupposes ordered thinking: persuasion cannot occur without prior intellectual clarification of the issue at hand [2; 30]. In this

sense, rhetoric is inseparable from cognition, and verbal expression becomes the outward manifestation of an internally structured process of reasoning [17; 42].

Subsequent rhetorical traditions reinforced this connection between verbal skill and intellectual discipline. Quintilian's conception of the vir bonus dicendi peritus emphasizes that rhetorical excellence is inseparable from moral character and responsibility [30]. The ideal speaker is not simply skilled in speech, but ethically oriented, capable of aligning persuasive power with integrity [7]. This classical insight remains highly relevant to contemporary discussions of verbal giftedness: rhetorical talent divorced from responsibility risks becoming manipulative, whereas rhetorical maturity integrates expressive ability with ethical restraint and accountability [17; 29].

Modern rhetorical theory has further developed these insights by situating rhetoric within broader communicative and educational frameworks. Rather than viewing rhetoric as a set of stylistic devices, contemporary approaches emphasize its role in shaping argumentation, discourse coherence, and audience engagement [6; 7]. Rhetorical competence is understood as the ability to organize complex ideas, select appropriate argumentative strategies, and adapt discourse to specific contexts without distorting meaning [17; 29]. This aligns closely with contemporary understandings of verbal giftedness as discursive competence rather than surface fluency [41; 42].

A central concept linking rhetoric and responsible speech is the structure of argumentation. Classical and modern theories like underscore that persuasive discourse must be grounded in reasons, evidence, and warrants, rather than in emotional manipulation or rhetorical force alone [29; 39]. Toulmin's model of argumentation highlights the internal logic of claims and supports, reinforcing the idea that responsible rhetoric requires transparency of reasoning and accountability for one's assertions [39]. In educational settings, rhetorical competence thus becomes a means of cultivating disciplined thinking, enabling individuals to articulate positions that can be critically examined rather than merely accepted [22; 23].

The audience-oriented nature of rhetoric further deepens its ethical dimension. In the tradition of the New Rhetoric, persuasion is understood as an engagement with the audience's shared values, assumptions, and interpretive frameworks, rather than as coercion or dominance [29]. From this perspective, rhetorical responsibility involves attentiveness to the audience's capacity for understanding and judgment [17]. Speech that overwhelms, obscures, or manipulates undermines the very communicative conditions that rhetoric seeks to establish [7; 17]. For verbally gifted individuals, this implies that maturity is reflected not in rhetorical brilliance alone, but in the capacity to communicate meaningfully and respectfully within a shared rational space [36].

Educational rhetoric highlights the formative role of responsible speech. In teaching and mentoring contexts, rhetorical choices shape not only comprehension but also the intellectual habits of learners [9; 23]. Clear structuring of ideas, careful definition of terms, and transparent reasoning model forms of thinking that students may internalize [4; 22]. From this standpoint, rhetoric functions as a pedagogical practice that cultivates verbal giftedness by fostering order, coherence, and ethical awareness in discourse [8; 31]. The responsibility of speech here extends beyond correctness or persuasiveness to include the responsibility to form others' thinking [17].

Contemporary discussions of rhetoric increasingly intersect with concerns about discourse ethics and communicative responsibility in pluralistic societies. As public communication becomes more fragmented and emotionally charged, the distinction between persuasive effectiveness and responsible discourse grows more urgent [7; 17]. Rhetorical giftedness, when detached from ethical orientation, may amplify polarization or misinformation. Conversely, rhetoric grounded in responsibility seeks to sustain dialogue, promote understanding, and preserve the integrity of meaning [17; 29].

From the standpoint of verbal giftedness, rhetoric provides a concrete framework for understanding how cognitive potential becomes socially and ethically situated speech. It offers tools for organizing thought, articulating arguments, and engaging audiences, while simultaneously imposing internal constraints that guard against manipulation and distortion [29; 39]. In this way, rhetoric does not merely enhance verbal effectiveness; it disciplines verbal power [7; 30].

Thus, the rhetorical dimension of responsible speech reveals an essential aspect of mature verbal giftedness: the capacity to align expressive ability with intellectual clarity and ethical accountability [17; 35]. Rhetoric, understood as the art of ordered thinking expressed through language, serves as a mediating discipline between cognitive potential and social responsibility [2; 39]. It prepares the ground for forms of speech in which meaning is not only conveyed effectively but also borne responsibly – an orientation that finds further articulation in homiletic and hermeneutic traditions of speech [10; 25].

Homiletic Dimension of Responsible Speech. While rhetoric provides a framework for structuring thought and articulating persuasive discourse, homiletics offers a distinctive model of responsible speech grounded in interpretative fidelity, attentiveness to context, and ethical restraint in the act of speaking [1; 24; 25; 33]. In contemporary academic discourse, homiletics may be approached not only as a confessional or ecclesial discipline, but as a reflective practice of meaning mediation, where speech is shaped by responsibility to a source text, a listening audience, and the transformative potential of language itself [28; 38].

At its core, homiletic speech is inseparable from interpretation. Unlike rhetorical discourse, which may originate primarily from the speaker's position or argument [6; 29], homiletic discourse emerges from engagement with a source text or tradition that serves as a normative reference point and requires interpretative fidelity [28; 33]. Such an interpretative orientation foregrounds a key dimension of responsible speech: the obligation to remain faithful to meaning rather than to rhetorical effect [10; 32]. In this sense, homiletics provides a counterbalance to purely instrumental views of language by emphasizing that speech is accountable not only for its impact, but also for its truthfulness and interpretative integrity [17; 38].

Hermeneutic theory has long emphasized that interpretation is not a mechanical transfer of meaning, but a dialogical process shaped by historical, cultural, and existential horizons [10; 32]. Homiletic practice embodies this insight by requiring the speaker to navigate between the world of the text and the lived experience of the audience [24; 25; 28]. This mediation demands a high level of cognitive and discursive sensitivity: the speaker must discern central meanings, avoid reduction or distortion, and articulate interpretation in a way that remains intelligible and relevant without betraying the integrity of the source [33; 38]. Such interpretative responsibility aligns closely with contemporary understandings of mature verbal giftedness as a capacity for disciplined meaning-making rather than expressive spontaneity [36; 37].

A defining characteristic of homiletic speech is its orientation toward the listener as a moral and interpretative subject rather than a passive recipient. Unlike persuasive rhetoric that may prioritize effectiveness or agreement [29], homiletics presupposes respect for the listener's freedom of understanding and response [1; 25]. This orientation resonates with dialogical theories of language, where speech is understood as an encounter rather than a unilateral act [3]. Responsible homiletic speech seeks not to overwhelm or manipulate, but to open a space for reflection, recognition, and personal appropriation of meaning [26; 34]. In this respect, the ethical dimension of homiletics is embedded in its communicative posture [17].

The practice of homiletics also foregrounds limits as a constitutive element of responsible speech. The speaker operates within boundaries imposed by the text, tradition, and communal context, which function not as constraints on creativity but as safeguards against arbitrary interpretation and rhetorical excess [28; 38]. These limits cultivate humility and attentiveness, qualities that distinguish mature verbal expression from mere eloquence [25; 33]. From the perspective of verbal giftedness, such self-limitation reflects a high level of metacognitive control and ethical awareness: the ability to restrain verbal power in service of meaning [16; 36].

In educational and formative contexts, homiletic speech exemplifies a model of verbal responsibility that is particularly relevant to the development of gifted individuals. It demonstrates how advanced verbal abilities can be integrated with interpretative discipline, contextual sensitivity, and ethical intentionality [1; 24]. Rather than rewarding originality at any cost, homiletics values fidelity, coherence, and responsiveness to the listener's horizon of understanding [33; 38]. This orientation challenges reductionist notions of giftedness that equate verbal excellence with novelty or performative brilliance [8; 37].

Contemporary homiletic theory increasingly engages with broader questions of language, power, and responsibility in public discourse. Scholars emphasize that speech acts have formative and transformative effects, shaping not only understanding but also identity and communal orientation [1; 25; 34]. In this light, homiletic responsibility extends beyond accuracy of interpretation to include awareness of how language constructs reality and influences collective imagination [17; 32].

From a hermeneutic standpoint, homiletic speech can be understood as a practice of "answerability" to meaning. The speaker does not merely transmit information but responds to a claim made by the text and addresses it to others with care and discernment [10; 32]. This notion of answerability underscores a key insight for the study of verbal giftedness: advanced verbal capacity is fully realized only when it is exercised in relation to something beyond the speaker's immediate intentions – whether a text, a tradition, or a shared horizon of meaning [36; 38].

In this respect, homiletics complements rhetoric by introducing an additional axis of responsibility: responsibility not only for how speech persuades, but for how it interprets and represents meaning [25; 28]. Together, rhetoric and homiletics articulate two interrelated dimensions of responsible speech. Rhetoric disciplines verbal expression through ordered thinking and argumentation [2; 39], while homiletics disciplines it through interpretative fidelity and ethical attentiveness to the other [3; 10; 25]. Both dimensions converge in an understanding of verbal giftedness as a mature capacity to think, speak, and interpret responsibly within complex communicative contexts [36; 37].

Integrative Model of Verbal Giftedness and Responsible Speech. The preceding analysis of contemporary giftedness research, rhetorical theory, and homiletic-hermeneutic approaches allows for the formulation of an integrative model of verbal giftedness grounded in responsible speech [8; 37]. This model conceptualizes verbal giftedness not as a set of isolated abilities, but as a dynamic configuration of cognitive, discursive, and ethical dimensions that unfold through ordered thinking, meaningful articulation, and interpretative accountability [12; 14; 15; 35; 36].

At the cognitive level, verbal giftedness presupposes the capacity for structured thinking and meaning formation. Contemporary giftedness theories consistently emphasize that advanced verbal abilities are inseparable from higher-order cognitive processes, including abstraction, argumentation, and metacognitive control [14; 15; 37]. In the proposed model, thinking is not treated as a preliminary stage that precedes speech and then disappears; rather, it remains internally present within verbal expression as its organizing principle [9; 42]. Speech quality is thus directly dependent on the clarity, coherence, and intentionality of the thought that underlies it [4; 22].

The discursive dimension of the model builds on rhetorical theory, which understands speech as a practice of ordered articulation oriented toward an audience. Rhetoric provides the structural mechanisms through which thought is transformed into communicable meaning: argumentation, coherence, audience awareness, and contextual adaptation [2; 6; 29; 39]. Within this framework, verbal giftedness manifests as the ability to sustain meaningful discourse without reducing communication to persuasion or stylistic effect [7; 17]. Responsible speech, from a rhetorical perspective, is characterized by transparency of reasoning, proportionality of means, and respect for the listener's capacity for judgment [17; 39].

The ethical dimension of verbal giftedness becomes explicit through the homiletic-hermeneutic perspective. Homiletics introduces a model of speech that is accountable to meaning beyond the speaker's immediate intentions – whether grounded in a text, a tradition, or a shared interpretative horizon. This dimension foregrounds interpretative fidelity, restraint, and answerability as constitutive elements of responsible speech [3; 10; 25; 32]. Within the integrative model, ethical responsibility is not an external norm imposed on verbal ability, but an internal criterion of its maturity [35; 37]. Verbal giftedness reaches its highest form when expressive power is accompanied by the willingness to be constrained by meaning, context, and the presence of the other [17; 38].

These three dimensions – cognitive, discursive, and ethical – are not sequential stages but interdependent components of a single system [8; 37]. The model conceptualizes verbal giftedness as emerging at the intersection of (1) the ability to think in structured and meaningful ways, (2) the capacity to articulate those meanings through coherent and audience-sensitive discourse, and (3) the readiness to assume responsibility for the interpretative and social consequences of speech [17; 36]. The absence or underdevelopment of any one-dimension results in an imbalanced form of verbal expression: cognitively rich but communicatively ineffective, rhetorically impressive but ethically fragile, or ethically oriented but insufficiently articulated [27; 37].

A central contribution of this integrative model lies in its treatment of responsibility as a developmental marker rather than a moral addendum. Drawing on developmental models of giftedness, responsibility in speech can be understood as a criterion that differentiates early verbal potential from mature verbal talent [13; 35; 37]. As individuals move from demonstrating verbal ability to exercising verbal influence in educational, social, or leadership contexts, the demands placed on their speech shift accordingly [27; 36]. At advanced levels, verbal giftedness is evaluated not only by originality or effectiveness, but by the capacity to sustain meaning, foster understanding, and preserve communicative trust [17; 29].

From an educational perspective, the integrative model has important implications for the identification and development of verbal giftedness. It suggests that educational practices should move beyond rewarding verbal fluency or performative brilliance and instead cultivate structured thinking, interpretative discipline, and ethical awareness in communication [8; 23; 31]. Rhetorical and homiletic approaches, when under-stood in non-confessional and pedagogically reflective terms, provide valuable frameworks for developing these capacities [1; 25; 33]. They offer structured practices through which verbally gifted learners can learn to order their thoughts, articulate arguments responsibly, and engage others without distorting meaning [17; 28; 39].

In this sense, the proposed model reframes verbal giftedness as a form of intellectual and ethical maturity rather than as a purely expressive talent [36; 37]. Responsible speech emerges as both the medium and the measure of verbal giftedness: it is through responsible speech that cognitive potential becomes socially meaningful, and it is by responsibility that verbal excellence is ultimately evaluated [17; 35].

This article set out to reconceptualize verbal giftedness by moving beyond its reduction to linguistic proficiency or rhetorical effectiveness and by foreg-rounding responsibility in speech as a core criterion of maturity [27; 37]. Drawing on contemporary giftedness research, rhetorical theory, and homiletic-hermeneutic approaches, the study proposed an integrative framework that situates verbal giftedness at the intersection of cognitive, discursive, and ethical dimensions [8; 35; 36].

The analysis of contemporary research on giftedness demonstrated that verbal giftedness cannot be adequately described solely in terms of verbal ability or expressive fluency. Developmental and integrative models of giftedness emphasize that early verbal potential must be transformed through contextual, motivational, and ethical factors to become mature verbal talent [12; 31; 37]. Within this perspective, responsibility in speech emerges as a developmental marker that distinguishes advanced verbal competence from surface-level verbal perfor-mance [27; 36].

The rhetorical dimension of the study highlighted the role of ordered thinking, argumentation, and audience-oriented discourse in shaping responsible speech. Rhetoric was conceptualized not as an art of stylistic persuasion, but as a discipline that disciplines verbal power by requiring coherence, transparency of reasoning, and respect for the listener's capacity for judgment [2; 17; 29; 39]. From this standpoint, rhetorical competence contributes to verbal giftedness by enabling individuals to articulate meaning in ways that are intellectually rigorous and communicatively legitimate [6; 7].

The homiletic dimension further deepened this understanding by introducing interpretative fidelity, restraint, and answerability to meaning as essential components of responsible speech. Approached as a reflective model of meaning mediation rather than a confessional practice, homiletics provided a conceptual lens through which verbal giftedness could be understood as the capacity to speak responsibly in relation to a source text, a tradition, and a listening audience [24; 25; 28; 33]. This perspective emphasized that ethical responsibility in speech is not external to verbal competence but constitutes its internal measure of maturity [10; 17].

Based on these analyses, the article proposed an integrative model of verbal giftedness that unites cognitive structure, discursive articulation, and ethical responsibility into a single dynamic system [11–13; 37]. In this model, responsible speech functions both as the medium through which verbal giftedness is realized and as the criterion by which its maturity is evaluated [35; 36]. The absence or imbalance of any of these dimensions results in forms of verbal expression that are cognitively rich but communicatively ineffective, rhetorically impressive but ethically fragile, or ethically oriented but insufficiently articulated [37; 42].

The findings of this study have several implications for the field of gifted education. First, they suggest the need to reconsider identification and assessment practices that prioritize verbal fluency or performance without attending to structure of thought and responsibility of meaning [8; 27]. Second, they point to the pedagogical value of rhetorical and homiletic approaches, understood in non-confessional and educational terms, as frameworks for cultivating mature verbal giftedness [23; 25]. Such approaches can support the development of structured thinking, interpretative discipline, and ethical awareness in communication, particularly in educational contexts that aim to prepare gifted individuals for socially responsible leadership and discourse [17; 36].

Finally, this integrative perspective opens avenues for further research on verbal giftedness as a form of intellectual and ethical maturity. Future studies may explore empirical indicators of responsible speech, investigate pedagogical interventions that foster discursive responsibility, or examine how verbal

giftedness develops in complex communicative domains such as education, public leadership, and intercultural mediation [8; 40]. By framing responsibility not as a moral supplement but as an intrinsic dimension of verbal giftedness, this study contributes to a more comprehensive and humanly grounded understanding of gifted communication [35; 37].

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ВЕРБАЛЬНА ОБДАРОВАНІСТЬ І ВІДПОВІДАЛЬНІСТЬ У МОВЛЕННІ: РИТОРИЧНІ І ГОМІЛЕТИЧНІ ВИМІРИ

Анотація.

У сучасних освітніх контекстах вербальна обдарованість часто обмежується лише мовленнєвою майстерністю, флюїдністю чи риторичною ефективністю, тоді як її етичні та смислові аспекти залишаються недостатньо вивченими. У статті запропоновано новий підхід до концептуалізації вербальної обдарованості через призму відповідальності в мовленні, яку в межах наукових поглядів Р. Стернберга та Ю. Габермаса розглянуто як внутрішній критерій зрілості мовного розвитку, а не як зовнішнє моральне доповнення. Зокрема, спираючись на сучасні теорії обдарованості та розвитку талантів, риторичну теорію і гомілетико-герменевтичний підхід, дослідження пропонує розглядати вербальну обдарованість як багатовимірну здатність, що інтегрує когнітивну структуру, дискурсивну компетентність та етичну відповідальність. У процесі аналізу доведено, що зріла вербальна обдарованість розвивається не лише через експресивні здібності, а й через упорядковане мислення, точність інтерпретації та усвідомлення соціальних і етичних наслідків мовлення. Окрім того, риторика та гомілетика розглядаються як взаємодоповнювальні моделі відповідального мовлення: риторика дисциплінує вербальну виразність через аргументацію, когерентність та орієнтацію на аудиторію, тоді як гомілетика підкреслює інтерпретаційну відповідальність, чутливість до контексту та відповідальність за зміст. На цій основі стаття пропонує інтегративну модель вербальної обдарованості, в якій відповідальність у мовленні виступає як середовище реалізації і критерій зрілості. Результати дослідження мають значення для освіти обдарованих дітей, пропонуючи – у руслі концепцій Дж. Рензуллі, Д. Куна та Д. Дая – зміщення фокусу з оцінки результатів на педагогічні практики, які сприяють розвитку структурованого мислення, дисципліни інтерпретації та етичної свідомості в комунікації.

Ключові слова: вербальна обдарованість; відповідальність у мовленні; риторика; гомілетика; смислотворення; дискурсивна компетентність; етичні виміри комунікації; освіта обдарованих.