

## EDITORIAL

**(Paper-)Beings: in search of (cultural) identities?**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century, characterized by continuous change, exchange and interchange, by negotiations, transactions and renegotiations, by conflict and crisis, raises the complex problem of communication, of the user of language and of the receiver's power to understand and interpret a message as intended by the sender.

Under such circumstances, syntagms such as 'diversity within unity', 'you can make all the difference', 'intercultural communication', 'transcultural networking', or paradigms like 'to europenize', 'to americanize' and 'to globalize' have become the space of problematic concepts and notions belonging to a *border discourse* envisaging both present cultural dilemmas and challenging searches for and in the future.

Since crossing a country's borders is the distinctive sign of a social phenomenon with strong cultural effects upon the beings inhabiting any time and any space, since such an act is a growing characteristic of this decade, the question of identity has emerged with greater force and has turned into a European and global issue.

It is impossible to pin down all the problems rising to the surface of this changing world – be it real or fictitious – but some of them are worth being highlighted as they send back to the power of language to communicate human needs against a flexible cultural background. Thus, taking into consideration the wide span of time and space which culture envisages in this European (and global) world and the fact that any existence is structured on the intricate *presentness* of memories (making up one's past), present experiences and hopes (a type of future launched from the present), we consider that:

- the crossing of borders, being a give-and-take process, reorganizes discourse around *multi-* and *trans-* prefixed paradigms (multiculturality, transculturality, multcentred,

multilinguistic etc.), around cultural challenges (the power to integrate, to adapt oneself to the requirements imposed by another culture) and around the resistance to change;

- a being's examining both him/herself and the other from at least a double perspective gives rise to a clashing situation between the two and the cultural milieu: from an *inside* perspective, which tends to vanish (his/her own once solid background) and from an *outside* one, which seems the more menacing, the less known it is (the new *habitat* which is unstable, sometimes not responding immediately to somebody's expectations and hopes);
- *crossing borders* may also envisage a new type of dialogue, that between language and other fields of activity, or between multiple domains of thought, which implicitly leads to a new type of communication: the transcultural communication which brings experience into theory and vice versa, thus enabling a diversity of sources of knowledge, a developing of creative faculties and a raising of awareness concerning the differences in patterns of thought and of discursive style;
- *crossing borders* marks the time of constructing multiple cultural identities of one's self, creates the space for possible symmetrical actions and allows the stable cultivation of a sense of respect for the diversity of other cultural identities by negotiating and renegotiating such identities or by finding solutions for conflict and crises;
- the pivotal discursive syntagm is *together with* rather than *doing something for somebody else*, which presupposes a new attitude towards the others (previously considered as marginalized outsiders characterized by discourses of fear, suspicion, misunderstanding);
- the relation thought – language – culture are viewed and *managed* in terms of accumulation of a *cultural capital* and *quantitative profit-sharing*;
- *crossing borders* also involves the limits of language using in shaping cultural identities (paraphrasing Ludvig Wittgenstein, we are what we can express through language, meaning that one's world is the world of one's language, rendered through

- linguistic games (Arsith, 2005<sup>1</sup>), or ‘mapped’ in conceptual metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980<sup>2</sup>);
- the (re)shaping of cultural identities through discourses of limits, crossing borders, managing give-and-take processes, linguistic games, cultural profit and loss, multicultural and transcultural competences, should also take into account, on equal terms, the makers and receivers of messages, the spatio-temporal frame of specific types of communication and the specific (cultural) stylistic patterns rendering thought/intended purpose.

The papers in this volume tackle with diverse aspects of the issues mentioned above, each of them, using either a diachronic or a synchronic perspective, revealing *how the crossing of borders* is the discursive space of a paper-being’s shaping its (cultural) identities.

Doina Cmeciu  
Ștefan Avădanei

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<sup>1</sup> Arsith, M. (2005): *Limbaș, comunicare și realitate (Language, Communication and Reality)*, “Ștefan Lupașcu” PH, Iași.

<sup>2</sup> Lakoff, G. and Johnson, M. (1980): *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago University Press, Chicago and London.