

## INTRODUCTION. MULTIMODAL DIMENSIONS OF IDENTITY IN CULTURE, SOCIETY, AND THE ARTS

**Maria-Ionela Neagu** 

*Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești, Romania*

The concept of identity has been approached from multiple perspectives, as the self always relates to everything and everybody that surrounds it, getting adjusted by every experience it passes through, in a continuous attempt to gain self-apprehension and to recover its sense of belonging. Place, time, emotions, culture are only a few of the factors that impact upon the self, reconfiguring it, as a result of the “troubled condition of the individual, displaced and oscillating between cultures” (Dobrinescu 2017: 156).

It is the quest for personal identity, against the background of social relations, that urges the individual to accept or to reject some configurations and representations of his/her self. This personal-social dichotomy has received scholarly attention, engendering numerous theories that aim to integrate the eclectic nature of identity into a coherent picture. Nevertheless, identity should rather be viewed in its own making, as a process, emerging from constant and fluctuating identities (Hall 1997) and leading to permanent or volatile identity fragments (Norris 2011). As Lawler (2014) argues, despite having a stable core embedding both sameness and difference at the same time, identity is produced in the flow of social relationships. Moreover, as Simon (2004) would add, identity is not only socially constructed and negotiated, but also represented and conceptualised at a cognitive level. Thus, identity pertains to the individual’s own perception of him/herself, to the way s/he wants to be perceived by the others, and to the feedback s/he receives throughout the social interactions. Therefore, the individual will get the complete picture of his/her identity once s/he manages to bind “untold and repressed stories” and “the actual stories the subject can take up to and hold as constitutive of his personal identity” (Ricoeur 1984: 74).

The contributions in this special issue surpass the boundaries imposed by the Self-Other dichotomy that pervades scholarly research, pinpointing to the multifaceted nature of identity. Its versatility is clearly reflected in the semiotic resources people use to express their identity. Regardless of whether they have it acknowledged by the others or not, they adopt different “stylistic resources” resulting into social semiotic manifestations that best reflect their identity. In Van Leeuwen’s (2022: 2) words: “...not only stable but also hybrid and conflicted or confused identities manifest themselves through different uses of shape, colour, texture, timbre and movement” that are “socially and culturally valued and regulated”. Such signifiers of identity distinguish or, on the contrary, unite different categories of people.

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“Différance is the systematic play of differences, of the traces of differences, of the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other”, as Derrida (1981: 27) explains it. And he goes on saying that “Differences are the effects of transformations...”. Identity production is such a transformation that results into manifest, perceptible difference.

Broadly speaking, the contributions in this special issue highlight the sociolinguistic significance of the personal, the relational, and the collective sense of self, as outlined by a variety of genres, such as postmodern autobiographies, film adaptations, essays, novels and short stories, linguistic usage guidebooks, the discourse of education focused on the teaching of stylistic devices, and political cartoons. As surveyed by numerous studies (e.g. Hecht 1993, Brewer and Gardner 1996, Jenkins 2008), the three perspectives on identity pinpoint either to the psychological approaches that mainly focus on the individual and group membership level, or to the interactional approaches that delve into the interpersonal level of identity construction and negotiation, emphasising its sociopragmatic dimensions, such as identity positioning and (mis)management of face (Spencer-Oatey 2007) or the dialogic nature of identity (Feller 2014).

This special issue of the *Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education* proceeds with Tidita Abdurrahmani’s (Bedër University College, Tirana, Albania) contribution entitled “*Otherness and contemporaneity of identities in black female autobiography at the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century*”. Drawing on a couple of feminist studies by Teresa de Lauretis (1986) or Simone de Beauvoir (1973), as well as on the postmodernist view of alterity as propounded by Gergen (1993) and Vegas-González (2001), the study provides an insightful analysis of the multiplicity and specificity of the ethnic self as revealed by two autobiographical writings, namely: *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* by Audre Lorde and *Bone Black: Memories of Girlhood* by bell hooks. Aware of their matrilineal heritage, the protagonists find the power to acknowledge the conflictual selves or even the Otherness within themselves. Thus, it is argued that a key aspect of the postmodern Self is the continuous pursuit of wholeness and the reconciliation of its fragmented nature.

In his contribution, Franck Colotte (Université Clermont Auvergne, France) explores the transfer of meaning and ideology from Balzac’s novel *Illusions perdues* to Xavier Giannoli’s film *Lost Illusions*. These shattered illusions belong to the young man from the provinces, Lucien Chardon, who is mesmerised, challenged, and finally defeated by the Parisian mirage in his quest for social recognition. Scholars often debate the extent to which an adaptation should remain faithful to the source material. Some adaptations aim for a high degree of fidelity, closely mirroring the original work, while others embrace transformation, interpreting the source in new and innovative ways. Frank Colotte delves into the techniques employed by Xavier Giannoli to structure the Balzacian narrative and to engage the viewers. By focusing the film on the central portion of the novel, which details Lucien’s time in Paris, and shifting the plot into the background while highlighting the interactions among characters, Giannoli effectively immerses the audience in the ruthless world

of the press, outlining economic and social struggles, along with the relentless pursuit of social success.

The study conducted by Anca Dobrinescu (Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești, Romania) critically explores Virginia Woolf's multimodal techniques that she employs in her essay *Three Guineas*, including drawing, painting, photography, along with the literary ones, to demonstrate how the interplay of text and image enhances the impact and memorability of the conveyed message, thereby fostering a lasting effect on the reader. The article not only validates Woolf's masterful experimentation across artistic boundaries, but also underscores her acute awareness of contemporary social issues, such as gender disparities, education, and war, all of which are explored as (dis)connections between the Public and the Private.

"Otherness from a Chinese Perspective and Mo Yan's *Hallucinatory Realism*" is an expository piece of writing, aimed at conveying the author's preoccupations with the unnecessarily rigid understanding of "Otherness", especially in the context of Chinese literary theory. Marius Virgil Florea (Shanghai International Studies University, China) creates a correlation between historical, cultural and geopolitical perspectives and their impact on literature in the perceived chasm of East and West. The paper starts with a detailed account of the rise and development of realism in China, a movement focused on topics such as society, morals, economy, and history. In order to highlight the connection between Chinese and Western literature, the author chooses to examine the Chinese critical reception of Nobel Prize laureate Mo Yan, whose work has elicited polarized interpretations. Mo Yan's style, characterised by a combination of magic realism, modernist elements and influences from both traditional Chinese literature and Western literature, led to two divergent critical opinions, one viewing his work as a continuation of the great Chinese literary tradition with minimal foreign influence, and the other characterising it as an imitation of Western literature. Nevertheless, as Marius Virgil Florea points out, Mo Yan's work serves as the most effective means to challenge the enduring myth of the incompatibility between West and East, demonstrating that the two cultures can coexist and mutually influence one another without contradiction.

Loredana Netedu's (Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești, Romania) contribution represents an excellent study of decoding the meaning in contemporary Romanian comic strips by means of a diligent semiotic analysis. Even though the extant literature refers to it in various terms, such as "hybrid genre" (Kaindl 2004), "graphic art" (Inge 1990), or "visual narrative" (Eisner 2008), all studies acknowledge the multimodal nature of the genre, with its dramatic qualities underscored by the dynamic action and the character-driven message delivery. The corpus consists of the comic strips produced by *HAC!* magazine, representing the reconstruction of one of the traditional Romanian fairy tale written by Ion Creangă, namely *Povestea lui Harap Alb* (*The Story of the White Moor*). Thus, *HAC!* stands for *Harap Alb continuă* (*The White Moor Continues*) and involves the transposition of the source text into a successful piece of fanfiction and a metacomic. The research shows how traditional Romanian values can be revived and brought to the attention

of both the young and the old generations by using a modern and attractive form of communication, in which the visual and the verbal narratives intertwine. The analysis and interpretation of the data is thoroughly and vividly presented, while the rewriting of canonic texts is clearly explained.

Advocating a sociolinguistic perspective complemented by Fillmore's (1975) frame semantics and Langacker's (1990) profile/base theory, Adina Oana Nicolae (Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești) investigates a small corpus of nominal pairs employed in British and American English, selected from several usage guidebooks. The study highlights the semantic differences that emerge between apparently synonymous lexical items, which, although profiling a shared concept, convey distinct meanings shaped by the cognitive framing influenced by cultural, social, or legal contexts. The analysis accounts for the way in which seemingly equivalent nominal phrases belonging to British and American English give prominence to various features of the same object or action, leading to their different conceptualisation and implicitly to different interpretations, as a result of the background knowledge they activate in the human cognitive domain. Therefore, such an approach to dialectal variation also underscores the mental images speakers project via the lexical choices they make, thereby revealing a wide range of ideas and experiences that shape our communication and the way we present ourselves to others.

In their joint contribution, Irena Shehu (Bedër University College, Tirana, Albania) and Enkeleda Jata (Agricultural University of Tirana, Albania) argue that stylistic devices such as zeugma, puns, and oxymoron, combined with artistic elements like humour and media, contribute to the multimodal construction of identity in the classroom by engaging students emotionally and intellectually. These devices help create a learning environment where students not only develop language skills but they also express their identities. The integration of these elements allows students to relate new information to their own experiences, facilitating deeper connections with the content and fostering a sense of belonging in the classroom. This aligns with the broader theme of identity construction, as the multimodal approach enriches the learners' self-expression and engagement.

In her study, Ágnes Virág (Institute of Fine Arts and Art Theory, Eszterházy Károly Catholic University, Eger, Hungary) examines the visual representation of corruption in political cartoons, with a focus on metaphorical depiction of the European Union and the figure of the Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán. While research on corruption imagery remains limited, political cartoons frequently employ source domains such as poison, disease, and natural disasters to illustrate its destructive nature. A dataset of 57 Hungarian and 15 international cartoons was analysed, with 25 Hungarian and 14 international illustrations from 2012-2023 selected for their emphasis on corruption. The analysis reveals that Hungarian cartoons often depict Brussels, EU politicians, and the European People's Party metonymically, portraying them as corrupt or threatening entities. In contrast, international cartoons tend to use official EU symbols such as the stars on a blue background, euro signs, and the EU flag. Key metaphors highlight that the EU is

frequently represented as a human figure, appearing as a doctor, lion tamer, enemy, investor, or banker, depending on the cartoon's political stance. While Hungarian illustrations emphasise a power struggle between Orbán and the EU, international cartoons focus more on financial themes, portraying the EU as a treasury or bank whose primary role is distributing or withholding funds. Through the analysis of these visual and narrative techniques, the study highlights how political cartoons reinforce ideological perspectives on corruption and European politics.

This special issue concludes with a book review by Jana Béréšová (Trnava University, Slovakia) on Maria-Ionela Neagu's (2020) edited volume *Voyage and Emotions across Genres* (Berlin: Peter Lang). While the first part of the volume – Voyage across Literary Studies – delves into the insightful journeys experienced by various characters, as depicted by Jonathan Swift, Sandra Cisneros, Flaubert, or Petronius, the second part of the volume – Space and Emotions. A Discursive Approach – adopts a cognitive, psychological, and/or educational perspective in order to explore a wide range of emotions that pervade the intercultural space.

On account of the aforementioned, situated at the crossroads of cultural studies, sociolinguistics, and cognitive linguistics, all studies featured in the current special issue contribute original research on the multifaceted aspects of identity, construed and negotiated in the discursive space of literary texts, films, comic art, and political cartoons.

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