

# **Explorations of Identity and Communication**

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## Introduction

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“Identity” and “communication” are undoubtedly more than fashionable buzzwords: testifying to the existence of underlying obsessions, they are very much present in common parlance, albeit sometimes in an unclear manner. Indeed, both concepts are also values, which are likely to elicit an affective, emotional or ethical response and not just an intellectual one. One could even call them building blocks of modern civilization (more or less visible and more or more recognized as such), quintessential to our everyday life and to the encyclopedia of concepts we use in order to make sense of our surroundings.

The “experience of modernity” throws us in a never-ending “struggle to make ourselves at home in a constantly changing world” (Berman 1988: 6) while “the postmodern politics of recognition” runs the risk of “boxing individuals into identity scripts” which are “far too narrow” (Sell 2000: 10-11). The emergence of modern identity depended, to a certain extent, on an “ethics of inarticulacy” (Taylor 1989: 53). A way of mitigating the hardships generated by both globalization and neo-tribalism is precisely the effort of articulating and mediating similar and different identities in the process of interpersonal and / or intercultural communication. Human communication is almost never just transmission of messages or the delivery of an informational “package”; instead, we should see it as a combination of *content* and *relation* (Watzlawick *et al.* 1967: 54), the latter being a form of *metacommunication*: “Every communication has a content and a relationship aspect such that the latter classifies the former and is therefore meta-communication” (*ibidem*). The role of phatic communication in maintaining the social fabric is also an indication that the relation is sometimes more important than the content *per se*. According to Malinowski, *phatic communion* is “language used in free, aimless, social intercourse” (1972: 142).

The scholarship regarding these two compelling notions highlighted in the title is undeniably huge and diverse but also overwhelming and confusing, because of the many ramifications, in quite divergent fields, engendered by their systematic theorization. The papers in this volume coagulate two main directions, given, on one hand, by the sociological approach, appropriate to the analysis of texts in such domains as journalism, mainstream media, social media and political discourse, and,

on the other hand, by the literary-critical approach, which is itself pluralistic, heterogeneous and inclined to borrow methods and principles from various sciences, including the ones grouped in the first direction, more sociologically-inclined.

Literary communication can be conceptualized on a continuum with other, more “mundane” forms of human interaction, considering that “literary writing and reading are viewed as uses of language which amount to interpersonal activity” (Sell 2000: 2). Also, the dialogue that is literature is “a kind of give-and-take which has both ethical entailments and communal consequences” (Sell 2011: 10). As the recent trends in literary criticism tend to demystify literature and describe it primarily as a type of discourse among others or as part of culture in general, the alliance between the two orientations is all the more felicitous. In a complementary perspective, literariness or the specificity of literature is still to be defined in a satisfactory manner by literary theory, but many insights from traditional or modern approaches to literature can prove useful for the description of media discourse, which also resorts to indirect and ambiguous communication and even has its own poetics and rhetoric.<sup>1</sup>

In the previous volumes based on the proceedings of CIC conference, the editors stressed that identity was a “hyper-theorized term” which “has come to express nowadays a rather diffuse, fluid, contradictory set of characteristics, instead of stable, homogeneous and independent meanings” (Parpală 2017: 1). Identity is also a “dominant ontological term”, while “the global community has changed the rigid semantics of individual and collective ways of being, accentuating their ambiguity and forms of expression” (Loveday & Parpală 2016: 1). The complementarity between the key-notions “identity” and “communication” is embedded in the inextricable relationship between “subjectivity” and “alterity” (or “self” and “otherness”). Language itself is the proof of this pervasive dialectics:

Consciousness of self is only possible if it is experienced by contrast. I use *I* only when I am speaking to someone who will be a *you* in my address. It is this condition of dialogue that is constitutive of *person* [...]. Many notions in linguistics, perhaps even in psychology, will appear in a different light if one reestablishes them within the framework of discourse. This is language in so far as it is taken over by the man who is speaking and within the condition of intersubjectivity, which alone makes linguistic communication possible (Benveniste 1971: 224, 230).

Dialogism is essential to subjectivity, but also to language and discourse, which, “for the individual consciousness, lies on the borderline between oneself and the other. The word in language is half someone else’s” (Bakhtin 1981: 293). In *Problems of Dostoyesky’s Poetics*, Bakhtin talks about

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<sup>1</sup> According to Robert T. Craig (1999) communication should be approached as a *field*, by taking into account seven “traditions” of communication theory: rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, sociopsychological, sociocultural, and critical.

The dialogic nature of consciousness. The dialogic nature of human life itself. The single adequate form for verbally expressing authentic human life is the open-ended dialogue. Life by its very nature is dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse, and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life, into the world symposium (Bakhtin 1984: 293).

Dialogue is thus universal; indeed, ontological, as the psychological and cognitive research has confirmed (Ferryhough 1996; Salgado & Hermans 2005; Salgado & Clegg 2011). In a similar vein, Ivana Markova (2005) connects dialogicality with social representations and social cognition. It is proven that dialogical solving of problems is more efficient than individual ones (Trognon *et al.* 2011). Also, the theory of mirror neurons, along with developments in neurophysiology and brain imagining reinforce the idea that humans prefer conversations instead of a monologue, even though the latter allows them to carefully prepare and organize the arguments in advance:

The role of empathy is clearly important in our preference for conversations. It is also possible, however, that evolution has selected certain mechanisms in our brain according to which the construction of meaning is much easier in a conversation than in a monologue. One of these mechanisms may be the ontological priority of representations (Iacoboni 2011: 9).

So, we can safely establish that dialogue and communication are natural and innate to the human psyche. They are also vital for the process of self-expression and self-understanding as well as for the negotiation of identities. Moreover, in human societies, communication is a form of ritual, and “a symbolic process whereby reality is produced, maintained, repaired, and transformed” (Carey 1989: 21-23). Even reading a newspaper is seen

less as sending or gaining information and more as attending a mass, a situation in which nothing new is learned but in which a particular view of the world is portrayed and confirmed. News reading, and writing, is a ritual act and moreover a dramatic one (*ibidem*: 20).

At the same time, we cannot help but notice that mutual comprehension is in fact rather difficult and rare, especially among persons and groups with different backgrounds, world-views and value-systems. Along with successful communicational strategies, the scholarship often needs to account for the many dysfunctions and pathologies involved in communication. Sometimes, communication is “systematically distorted” (Habermas 1970). By the same token, authentic communication is not necessarily consensual and it may involve a polemical drive. Yuri Lotman goes as far as to assert that “misunderstanding

(conversation in non-identical languages)” is “as valuable a meaning-generating mechanism as understanding” (Lotman 2009: XXIII). The differences, the idiosyncrasies of each separate identity are as important as the similar points or the common denominator of the conversation.

The present volume is a selection of papers presented at the tenth edition of the International Conference *Comparativism, Identity, Communication* (CIC2017), hosted by the Faculty of Letters from the University of Craiova. The collection of articles proposes an inter-disciplinary investigation of cultural issues pertaining to “identity” and “communication”.

The selected articles come from established scholars and young researchers who work in Bulgaria, Hungary, Indonesia, Iraq, Iran, Romania and Spain / the U.S.A. Both original and well informed, the 18 contributions offer fresh perspectives on the crucial issues discussed above, by shedding new light on the complexity and ambiguities of identity and communication, as well as on their concrete manifestations in several cultural areas.

The volume is divided into two sections: the first part deals mainly with literature (with only one of the contributions focusing on language in relation to cultural specificity); the second part includes papers which study aspects of media and culture in general.

Bushra MK Khudhair AlMuttairi is a PhD candidate at The University of Bucharest and is affiliated with University of Babylon, Iraq. Her article is entitled *The Winds of Change. Conceptual Metaphors with Arab Women Writers from the Middle East* and studies three prose fictions by Arab women writers from the standpoint of cognitive theory. The three texts come from Syria, Palestine, and Egypt: Ulfat al-Idilbi’s *The Breeze of Youth*, Samiya At’ut’s *The Collapse of Barriers* and Salwa Bakr’s *The Beginning*. The traditional worldview is here contrasted with the progressive mindset, the latter being open to configuring new social roles for women. One can therefore notice, in these contemporary instances of Arab women’s literature, a heightened interest in female autonomy and responsibility within the public sphere. The deep grammar of literary texts becomes more visible and intelligible with the help of the cognitive approach, which is able to build a repertoire of conceptual metaphors associated with female identity.

Bassim Hussein Al Nawashi, a doctoral student at The West University of Timișoara, writes about *The Quest for Self-knowledge in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman*. While most readings of Miller’s famous play often bring into discussion “the American dream”, Hussein chooses to focus on the problem of self-knowledge as related to the central issue of identity. Daydreaming, introspection and painful, bitter self-analysis are vehicles for the gradual awakening of Willy Loman, of Biff and the other characters. The sense of self is almost impossible to obtain except in the matrix of the familial unit, where the sons receive false values from the father and are able to achieve autonomy only when it is almost too late. Miller’s American tragedy cuts deep into the infinite intricacies of modern identity and interpersonal relations.

In *Returning from Diaspora, Exile and the Loss of Identity in Inaam Kachachi's The American Granddaughter*, Falih Mahdi Jabur AL-Zamili, a doctoral student at the University of Craiova, analyzes a novel by Iraqi journalist and writer (who is based in Paris) Inaam Kachachi. *Al-Hafeeda Al-Amrikyia. The American Granddaughter* (2010), a fictional work about the post-war situation of Irak, is an occasion for the author of the article to tackle crucial problems like identity, exile, diaspora and nostalgia, from the perspective of cultural anthropology, postcolonial studies and other disciplines. Literary contributions by exiled Iraqi authors who reinvented themselves as Arab-American authors do a great deal to inform the general public about the tragedy of the Iraqi people while also working to dispel a number of stereotypes concerning the Middle East. Zeina, Kachachi's protagonist is an American translator from Arabic and has all the data to be a mediator between the two cultures. Unfortunately, she is rejected by both parties which are engaged in conflict, being perceived as a "spokeperson for the enemy" by the Americans and as a traitor by the Iraqis. Intercultural issues intersect with problems of gender, given that the plight of women affected by the war appears in a different light once discussed in a Western framework, which is often feminist by default.

*American Exceptionalism and Political Fear in Margaret Atwood's Utopias* by Adela Catană, from the Military Technical Academy Bucharest, is a timely contribution, due to the recent resurgence to public attention of the Canadian author's *Handmaid's Tale*, in the wake of Donald Trump's winning of the presidential election. Atwood coined the term *ustopias*, which is a combination of *utopias* and *dystopias*. *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *The MaddAddam Trilogy* (2003, 2009, 2013) are the texts Catană focuses on, by bringing into attention Atwood's originality on the background of various forms of science-fiction, fantasy or "speculative fiction". Atwood deconstructs the myth of American exceptionalism and connects political fear with the rise of various totalitarianisms. The political nightmare described in *The Handmaid's Tale* has puritanical origins and exploits several Biblical passages in a sinister way, but history has shown that repression and torture can very well coexist not just with religious fanaticism, but with systems based on secular/ atheistic and "enlightened" values.

Mădălina Deaconu, a Reader at Titu Maiorescu University, in Bucharest, is the author of *The Duality of Knowledge in Lucian Blaga's Poetry. A Cognitive Linguistics Approach*. In this paper, Deaconu explores the problem of mystery in Lucian Blaga's philosophy and poetry, using the cognitive theory of conceptual metaphors and blending (Lakoff and Johnson, Mark Turner, Peter Stockwell) as a framework for a more up-to-date understanding of the Romanian modernist's theoretical contribution as well as his literary achievement. Blaga was a very important interwar writer who, apart from his literary output, has devised a complex philosophical system dealing with issues of knowledge (where a special place is given to the notion of *mystery*) and of cultural specificity. The cognitive approach proposed by Mădălina Deaconu is all the more appropriate as Blaga himself had elaborated an original theory of metaphor (in the treatise *The Genesis of Metaphor*)

which anticipates, in many respects, some of the tenets of cognitivism. If the “duality of knowledge” refers to the two types of cognition described by Blaga (paradisiacal and luciferic), there is also a duality of the metaphor (plasticizing and revelatory), which deserves to be reassessed through the filter of the conceptual metaphor theory, as Deaconu does in this paper.

Zlatina Dimova from Trakia University, in Bulgaria, studies the *Ethnopsycholinguistic Aspects of Bulgarian and Slavonic-Based Cognitive Models of the World*. Here, *cognitive model* has a looser meaning than in the previous paper: it refers to worldview, mindset or collective *Weltanschauung*. The author resorts to *lacuna theory*, borrowed from Russian ethnopsycholinguistics, which maintains that there are semantic gaps in intercultural communication, due to the difficulty of understanding a foreign culture. Dimova is interested in ideas, in the psychic and temperamental traits but also in the values shared by the Slavic populations (Bulgarian and Russian, in particular). Influences work in both directions, but they are often intertwined with more problematic tendencies towards dominance of one culture over the other and also towards cultural appropriation.

Mohammed Naser Hassoon, a PhD candidate at the University of Craiova, is the author of the next contribution, *Herman Melville's Ishmael and Ishmael: Moby-Dick in Islamic and Arabic Eyes*. Hassoon tackles the problem of the “Arab Melville”, starting from the connection between language and culture, along with that between modernity and traditional legends. Myths and legends present interest for the modern writer due to their potential of capturing the depth of the human heart (here, in the guise of the watery world and the sea monster). Ishmael, Abraham’s rejected offspring (a character from the *Bible* but also present in the *Quran*), who is the narrator’s persona and “voice”, becomes the symbol of division between people on the criterion of ethnic belonging (Jews vs non-Jews) and religion (Christians vs pagans). Conversely, Melville does not shy away from religious syncretism (in the person of Queequeg, a Polynesian who worships an African idol and keeps the Ramadan). In the textual maze of this encyclopedic novel, references to Islam are scarce, the author shows, and should be analyzed in connection to orientalism. However, the main argument of the paper is about the challenges faced by the translator of the novel into Arabic. For instance, the famous incipit, “Call me Ishmael”, is rendered in a less concise form in Arabic but it thus acquires interesting supplementary connotations.

Ghufran Abd Hussein, also a doctoral student at the University of Craiova, is the author of *The Iceberg Theory: Hemingway's Journalistic Technique*. She starts by placing the American writer in his historical and cultural context, providing a detailed timeline of his life and literary activity. Journalism was the writer’s apprenticeship and, of course, there were mutual influences from his two main activities, that of a fiction writer and that of a newsman. Hemingway’s journalistic strategy has to do with brevity and concentration, and is part of his “iceberg theory”, explained in several writings, such as *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), or in the unpublished essay *The Art of the Short Story*. The iceberg principle also has an

interesting relation with the allusive method and other indirect forms of communication. The image created in the reader's mind by this iceberg metaphor suggests that there are hidden depths to Hemingway's minimalist aesthetics.

Emilia Parpală, Emeritus Professor at the University of Craiova, signs the article *Parentheses and Dialogization. Discursive Levels in Romanian Postmodern Poetry*, where one can find unexpected things about the communicative resources of this otherwise humble graphic sign. On the level of literariness, parentheses are necessarily more than mere appendages. As a dialogizing factor in the diction of postmodern poetry, parentheses have important effects on the pragmatic, the intra-discursive and interdiscursive levels. The grammatical function of parentheses needs to be distinguished from the pragmatic one. The purported monophony of the poetic genre (in Bakhtin's interpretation) is qualified with the help of Rabatel, Jenny and other scholars in the field of enunciation theory. In Romanian postmodern poems (Danilov, Ghiu, Iova, Leahu, Mincu, Nimigean, Stoiciu, Urmanov), parenthetical insertions generate polyphony, enunciative retardation and complex communicational engagements with the readership. Along with the original typology of the parenthetical use within the corpus, the chapter also shows in detail how this metatextual peculiarity contributes to the idiosyncratic profile of postmodernist discourse as opposed to the modernist one.

The next article, by Carmen Popescu, a senior lecturer, PhD, at the University of Craiova, *Aspects of the Parodic Discourse in Romanian Contemporary Poetry*, works on a corpus similar to that studied by Emilia Parpală, addressing the communicational dimension of literary intertextuality, in particular, parody. This genre (or, perhaps, device, according to other theories) is a form of engaging with the literary canons and traditions but also with literariness itself. Hence, the metalinguistic and metaliterary dimension of the parodic palimpsest as emphasized by a selection of texts from postmodern poetry in Romanian. Along with reviewing various theories regarding the ontology of the parodic discourse, the author brings into attention, through close reading of texts, a series of sophisticated dialogic strategies employed by the writers Magda Cârneci, Augustin Pop, Aurelian Dumitrașcu and Alexandru Mușina.

Laura Monica Rădulescu, who is working on her PhD at the University of Bucharest, is the author of *The Alienation of the Female Figure: Denial of Subjectivity in The Fall of the House of Usher by Edgar Allan Poe*. The article revisits Poe's gothic stories and poetry by pointing out the gendered nature of literary representations present in his texts. Poe's typically romantic cult of the dead (or dying) woman reveals, at closer inspection, some very disturbing effects of the "othering" of women by the male gaze and the male discourse. Feminist criticism provides the author with the appropriate framework for analyzing a fictional world where women are presented as disempowered, mostly ill, lacking agency, devoid of a personal voice, and, eventually, demonized. The shocking violence and incredible cruelty displayed by the male protagonist towards the females in his life suggest a deep-seated fear and need to be reevaluated from a psychoanalytic perspective: Lady

Madeline Roderick is both a victim and the perpetrator of a gruesome revenge over her brother; the two characters, who are twins, also seem to represent “twin” aspects of the same tortured and split self.

*W. B. Yeats's Use of Irish Mythology and Folklore in Order to Preserve Irish Identity* is the title of the article proposed by Thabit Shihab Ahmed Ahmed, a doctoral student at the University of Craiova. Yeats's engagement with Irish tradition is very complex and nuanced. In the context of the Irish revival, his interest in mythology and folklore was justified by his aim to contribute to the preservation of national identity under colonial conditions. At the same time, the Celtic heritage needs to be exploited for his extraordinary artistic potential. Although a modernist (or at least a close precursor of this movement), Yeats was often critical towards the alienating effects of modern urban civilization. Thabit Ahmed analyzed here essays like *The Literary Movement in Ireland* and *The Celtic Element in Literature* but also the poems *The Wanderings of Oisín*, *The Stolen Child*, and *Leda and the Swan*. In these texts, the celebrated Anglo-Irish writer depicts a positive image of Irish folklore as a source of inspiration for modern literature, while also integrating this local tradition into the larger framework of *Weltliteratur* (usually epitomized by references to Homer and Greek mythology). Thus, the national and the transnational are inextricable elements, in the perspective of modernist poetics.

May H. Srayisah is a doctoral student at the University of Craiova; her article deals with *Identity and Ethics in Jane Austen's Emma*, bringing a new outlook on one of the most admired and loved British novelists of all times. Austen's undeniable charm has a lot to do with the way she depicts romantic relationships leading to marriage. But recent studies have shown that her fictional world is much more complex than just the marriage plot and the comedy of manners (both, features which have ensured her a rightful place in the literary canon). The psychological dimension is, of course, of utmost importance. However, the ethical framework can provide a more useful and complete approach to Jane Austen's realistic but at the same time open-ended narrative world. Austen's moral casuistry is not explicit or didactic but subtle and needs to be brought to light by critical exegesis. Virtue ethics is tantamount to building a sense of identity and the exceptionally gifted writer that was Jane Austen knows very well how to describe self-knowledge which results from the interaction with others. The protagonists in *Emma* or *Pride and Prejudice* acquire a considerable amount of humility and self-awareness in the process of interpersonal communication.

The second part of the book deals with broader cultural issues, from politics and the democratic process to the various forms of media (print, social media, online promotional materials and the internet in general).

Alireza Abdollahinezhad from University of Allameh Tabataba'i, Tehran, Iran is the author of *Social Media and Iran's 2017 Presidential Election. A Study of the Correlation between Instagram and Telegram Popularity and Students' Political Participation*. This contribution is based on a sociological research about the role of social media in political (and especially electoral) participation. Despite the harsh