VOICES OF TRANSITION

Philology, Identity, and Cultural Encounters

Editors:
Speranța Sofia Milancovici
Laura-Rebeca Stiegelbauer

Presa Universitară Clujeană

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EDITORS
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Prof. Ph.D. Habil. Gabriel Bărbuleț
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Technical University of Cluj-Napoca, North University Center, Faculty of Letters, Baia Mare, Romania

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Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai
Presa Universitară Clujeană
Director: Codruţa Săcelean
Str. B.P. Hasdeu nr. 51
400371 Cluj-Napoca, România
Tel.: (+40) 744 687 884
E-mail: editura@ubbcluj.ro
editura.ubbcluj.ro | libraria.ubbcluj.ro

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Preface

Voices of Transition: Philology, Identity and Cultural Encounters brings together contributions that examine how change is experienced, represented, negotiated, and remembered through language, texts, cultural practices, institutions, and public discourse. The volume begins from a simple but far-reaching premise: transition is never only a matter of political events, institutional reform, technological innovation, or historical rupture. It also takes place in words, narratives, acts of translation, educational practices, memories, professional roles, and forms of collective self-understanding.

The title, *Voices of Transition*, reflects our interest in the many forms through which individuals, communities, and institutions articulate change. Some of the voices gathered here are literary and memorial. Others emerge from translation and multilingual communication, from educational settings, digital environments, political discourse, medical encounters, media representation, or debates on democratic resilience and security. They belong to writers, students, teachers, translators, interpreters, researchers, public representatives, and communities whose identities have been shaped by historical experience, linguistic contact, displacement, cultural exchange, and social transformation.

The volume does not treat transition as a single, uniform process. Rather, it approaches transition as a plural and layered condition. It may involve movement between languages, as in translation, terminology work, foreign-language learning, English-medium instruction, and medical interpretation. It may be connected with memory and cultural identity, as in literary representations of dictatorship, minority experience, communist childhood, oral tradition, regional belonging, and the international circulation of cultural figures. It may also concern educational institutions and professional identities, particularly in contexts marked by digitalisation, generative artificial intelligence, internationalisation, online collaboration, curricular reform, and changing forms of literacy. Finally, transition may unfold in public life, where political language, democratic communication, information threats, public trust, and security culture shape the ways in which societies interpret uncertainty and respond to change.

This broad understanding of transition is consistent with the interdisciplinary orientation of the volume. Philology remains central to the collection, not as a narrowly delimited field, but as a disciplined attentiveness to language, textual form, historical context, semantic nuance, translation, and the circulation of meaning. Such

attentiveness is necessary when language moves between cultures, when historical memory is reconstructed in literary form, when professional communities negotiate new vocabularies, or when public institutions name and respond to emerging social and political challenges. The contributions in this volume demonstrate that philological inquiry can remain closely connected to contemporary cultural, educational, technological, and civic questions.

The volume is organised into four parts, each of which addresses a particular field in which transition becomes visible.

Part I, **Voices of Language, Translation and Cultural Mediation**, examines language as a space of encounter, negotiation, and professional responsibility. The contributions explore translation as a philological and cultural practice, specialised translation in digital environments, terminology as a bridge to multilingual academic participation, and medical interpretation as a form of linguistic and cultural mediation. Taken together, these studies show that language is not merely a tool for transferring information. It is also a medium through which expertise, belonging, trust, and cultural difference are negotiated.

Part II, **Voices of Literary Memory, Tradition and Cultural Identity**, focuses on literature, memory, material culture, oral traditions, regional representations, and media identity. The chapters address Bessarabian poetry and cultural resistance, Herta Müller's writing in the Romanian-German context, the sensory and material reconstruction of communist childhood in Ioana Nicolaie's prose, the construction of Banat identity in the speeches of Sever Bocu, women's cultural narratives and oral traditions, the international media representation of Romanian musical artists, and the relation between literary self-fashioning and digital public identity. This part brings together diverse literary and cultural objects, yet all of them are connected by a concern with the ways memory and representation shape both individual and collective identities.

Part III, **Voices of Educational and Professional Transformation**, brings into focus the changing conditions of teaching, learning, professional agency, and intercultural participation. Its contributions address Romanian as a foreign language, English-medium instruction in Computer Science, Collaborative Online International Learning, generative artificial intelligence and teacher identity, emoji-based communication and digital literacy, the professional identity of teachers in changing curricular contexts, and comparative approaches to early childhood education. The chapters illustrate the fact that educational transition involves more than the adoption of new tools or methods. It requires the ongoing redefinition of authority, authorship, communication, autonomy, expertise, and responsibility.

Part IV, **Voices of Public Discourse, Democracy and Security**, examines communication in its broader institutional and political dimensions. The contributions engage with non-verbal communication in everyday and healthcare

contexts, the development of scientific research in post-communist Romania, alterity and creativity in Moldovan political discourse, political agency in the European Union, the changing terminology of information threats, and the relationship between identity, security culture, and strategic vulnerability in Romania. This final part broadens the volume's perspective from personal and professional forms of transition to questions of democratic communication, institutional trust, social cohesion, and security.

The arrangement of the volume is deliberate. It moves from language and mediation to memory and cultural identity, from education and professional transformation to public discourse and security. Yet the parts should not be understood as separate compartments. Translation, for example, is also a matter of identity and cultural encounter. Literary memory has implications for public culture and collective belonging. Education is inseparable from language, technology, professional ethics, and institutional change. Political and security discourse depends upon language, historical memory, identity, and the capacity to recognise and interpret cultural difference. The boundaries between these fields are therefore productive rather than rigid.

The contributors represent a range of academic institutions, disciplinary traditions, methodological approaches, and cultural contexts. Their work includes close reading, historical-literary analysis, discourse analysis, terminology studies, qualitative research, corpus-assisted analysis, comparative pedagogy, conceptual inquiry, and institutional analysis. This diversity is one of the volume's principal strengths. It does not seek to reduce complex processes of transition to a single theoretical model. Instead, it creates a space in which different research traditions can illuminate related questions from distinct but complementary perspectives.

We are grateful to all contributors for their scholarly engagement with the theme of the volume, for their willingness to revise and refine their work, and for the care with which they have approached the relationship between their individual research topics and the wider intellectual horizon of the collection. We also acknowledge the anonymous reviewers and colleagues whose observations have contributed to the clarification and improvement of the manuscripts. Their critical attention has been essential in ensuring the academic quality and thematic coherence of this volume.

Our sincere thanks also go to Presa Universitară Clujeană for its support of scholarly work in the humanities and social sciences and for making possible the publication of this collective volume. We appreciate the publisher's commitment to academic dialogue, rigorous editorial standards, and the circulation of research that brings together established and emerging voices.

The present volume does not offer a final definition of transition. Nor does it assume that change necessarily results in progress, loss, rupture, or renewal. The

studies collected here show instead that transition is interpreted differently according to historical context, cultural position, disciplinary perspective, and lived experience. It may involve uncertainty and fragmentation, but also creativity, learning, adaptation, resistance, and the formation of new forms of belonging.

We hope that *Voices of Transition: Philology, Identity and Cultural Encounters* will invite readers to consider transition not only as an event that happens to societies and individuals, but also as a process through which they speak, remember, translate, teach, represent, negotiate, and imagine themselves anew.

The Editors

PART I.
VOICES OF LANGUAGE, TRANSLATION AND CULTURAL MEDIATION

Between Languages and Cultures: Translation, Philology, and Negotiating Identities

Raul PAȘCALĂU

University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara

Abstract. *This article examines translation as a philological and cultural practice through which identities are not merely transmitted but continually negotiated. Moving beyond models that treat translation as the transfer of stable meaning between autonomous languages, it argues that translated discourse emerges from historically situated encounters among linguistic forms, textual traditions, institutions, and readers. The research combines conceptual analysis with comparative micro-readings of culturally marked expressions, forms of address, idioms, and untranslatable or only partially translatable terms. Drawing on translation studies, philology, sociolinguistics, and postcolonial theory, it revisits the relation between close linguistic attention and the broader cultural politics of representation. Emphasis is placed on the translator's mediation between familiarity and alterity, on domestication and foreignization as context-dependent strategies, and on the ethical implications of lexical and stylistic choices. The article proposes "negotiated identity" as a useful framework for understanding translation: identities in translation are neither preserved intact nor freely reinvented, but reconfigured under constraints imposed by language history, genre, power, and reception. Philological attentiveness, therefore, remains essential to culturally responsible translation.*

Keywords: translation; philology; cultural identity; linguistic alterity; intercultural mediation; domestication and foreignization; multilingualism

1. Introduction

Translation is often described through the apparently simple image of movement: a text, meaning, or message passes from one language into another. The metaphor is useful, but it can also conceal the complexity of what changes during that passage. Languages do not function as transparent containers holding equivalent units of meaning. They are historical formations whose vocabulary, grammatical preferences, genres, registers, and conventions have developed within communities.

When a text crosses a linguistic boundary, it consequently enters a new network of associations. Its voices may acquire different social accents; its cultural references may become opaque or unexpectedly familiar; and its representation of people and communities may be intensified, softened, displaced, or reframed. Translation is therefore not only a linguistic operation. It is also an encounter between cultural histories and a practice through which identities are represented and renegotiated.

This understanding has become central to modern Translation Studies. The discipline's development beyond narrow linguistic models has emphasized that translation is embedded in cultural systems, institutions, ideologies, and relations of power (Bassnett, 2014; Lefevere, 1992). The so-called cultural turn did not make language irrelevant. On the contrary, it made linguistic details more consequential by showing that apparently small choices can participate in larger cultural narratives. A pronoun may encode hierarchy or intimacy; a form of address may signal age, gender, class, or institutional authority; an idiom may invoke a collective memory; and a borrowed word may mark either cosmopolitan openness or social exclusion. Such features demonstrate why translation requires both linguistic precision and cultural interpretation.

Philology offers an important perspective on this problem. In its broadest sense, philology combines close attention to language with the historical study of texts and their transmission. Although the term has sometimes been associated with an older disciplinary order, its central habits remain highly relevant to translation: comparison of forms, sensitivity to semantic change, attention to textual variants, and awareness that words accumulate histories. A philological approach resists the temptation to treat the source text as a collection of detachable propositions. It asks how meaning is produced by wording, historical usage, genre, intertextuality, and the material or institutional conditions of textual circulation.

This article brings translation and philology into dialogue through the concept of negotiated identity. Its central claim is that translation does not simply preserve an already completed cultural identity, nor does it necessarily replace one identity with another. Rather, identity is negotiated through a series of constrained choices made at linguistic, textual, and cultural levels. These choices concern what is made explicit, what remains foreign, what is normalized, what is annotated, which register is selected, and which differences are allowed to remain perceptible. The translator participates in this negotiation but does not control it absolutely. Authors, textual traditions, publishers, genres, readers, and unequal relations between languages all shape the possibilities of the translated text.

Three questions guide the discussion. First, how can philological attention to linguistic history enrich contemporary accounts of translation and cultural identity? Second, through which textual mechanisms do translation negotiate identity rather than merely transfer information? Third, how can translators balance intelligibility

with respect for linguistic and cultural alterity? The argument is theoretical and interpretive rather than corpus statistical. It synthesizes major approaches in Translation Studies and cultural theory and uses comparative micro-examples to clarify recurrent problems involving address, idiom, culturally dense vocabulary, multilingualism, and stylistic voice.

The discussion proceeds from the relation between translation and philology to theories of identity and cultural mediation. It then examines the translator's position between domestication and foreignization, before turning to concrete linguistic sites where identity becomes visible. The final section considers ethics and the contemporary multilingual environment. The purpose is not to prescribe a single ideal translation strategy. Instead, it is to argue for a historically informed, context-sensitive practice in which linguistic decisions are understood as acts of cultural representation.

2. Translation and Philology: Recovering the History within Language

The relationship between translation and philology is older than the institutional separation of the disciplines. Translators of religious, classical, legal, and literary texts have long confronted problems that are recognizably philological: uncertain readings, semantic shifts, obsolete constructions, competing manuscripts, allusions, and culturally specific terminology. Even where textual criticism is not required, translation depends on judgments about what words meant in a particular period and how they functioned within a particular genre. Translation is thus inseparable from historical interpretation whenever the source text belongs to a linguistic world different from that of its translator and readers.

Modern accounts of Translation Studies often begin by revisiting the problem of equivalence. Bassnett (2014) shows that the history of translation theory repeatedly returns to tensions between word and sense, literalness and freedom, fidelity and adaptation. These oppositions remain useful as historical markers, but contemporary scholarship has complicated them by asking what counts as a meaningful unit and who defines fidelity. A formally close translation can be culturally misleading, while a linguistically freer translation may reproduce a pragmatic effect with greater accuracy. The question is therefore not whether a translator changes the text, change is unavoidable, but which relations are preserved, transformed, or newly created.

Philological reasoning helps answer this question because it treats lexical meaning as layered rather than static. Consider a word that has a contemporary everyday sense but also carries archaic, religious, legal, or political resonances in the source culture. A dictionary equivalent may reproduce the denotative core while erasing those historical associations. Conversely, selecting an archaic target-language word may exaggerate historical distance if the source expression was ordinary for its

original audience. The translator must reconstruct not only what a word can mean but what it was doing at a particular moment.

This reconstruction is especially important for identity terms. Names for social groups, regions, ethnic communities, political institutions, and forms of belonging frequently change over time. Their translations may also have independent histories in the receiving culture. A term that appears neutral in one period can later become marked, contested, or offensive. A philological approach therefore asks two historical questions simultaneously: what was the source term's position in its own linguistic environment, and what histories are activated by the proposed target term? Translation occurs between these histories rather than between abstract dictionary entries.

The same principle applies to syntax and style. Long periodic sentences, parataxis, formulaic repetition, honorifics, or deliberately nonstandard grammar may function as markers of education, region, or social position. Normalizing them into a prestigious target-language standard can make the translation smoother while altering characterization. Venuti's critique of fluency is relevant here because fluent translation can conceal the cultural and linguistic work involved in producing apparent transparency (Venuti, 1995). Yet foreignness cannot be preserved simply by producing awkward prose. Awkwardness in the target language may create meanings that the source did not possess. Philological attention therefore needs to be paired with stylistic judgment.

A renewed philology is particularly valuable because it discourages decontextualized cultural explanation. Translators sometimes approach culturally specific words as if each belonged to a stable inventory of national characteristics. Philology instead reveals variation, borrowing, semantic conflict, and historical change. Languages have always been porous. Their lexicons preserve traces of migration, conquest, trade, religion, administration, scholarship, and popular culture. To translate a culturally marked term is therefore often to translate an already hybrid history.

This point also challenges a simplistic opposition between "source culture" and "target culture." Both are internally diverse and historically layered. The source text may contain dialects, foreign words, quotations, archaisms, professional jargon, or the speech of minority communities. Its language may dramatize cultural contact before translation begins. A philologically informed translator notices these internal differences and asks how they can be represented without flattening them into a single standardized voice.

Philology consequently contributes an ethics of attention. Its characteristic slowness, the willingness to examine a form, compare usages, and resist premature equivalence, can counter the pressure to make every difference immediately consumable. This does not require antiquarianism. Digital corpora, historical dictionaries, searchable archives, and parallel-text databases have expanded the

philologist's resources. What matters is the interpretive principle: linguistic form has a history, and that history participates in meaning. Translation that takes this seriously is better equipped to represent identities as dynamic and internally differentiated rather than as fixed cultural labels.

3. Identity as a Translational Process

Identity is a difficult concept partly because it names both continuity and change. Individuals and communities understand themselves through relatively durable narratives, yet those narratives are repeatedly revised in response to new circumstances. Language plays a central role in this process because identities are named, narrated, performed, recognized, and contested through discourse. Translation intensifies this dynamic by placing such discourse before readers who may not share the linguistic and cultural assumptions on which it originally depended.

Cultural theory has challenged essentialist views of identity as a fixed inheritance. Hall (1990) distinguishes between conceptions of cultural identity grounded in shared continuity and conceptions that emphasize becoming, positioning, and historical difference. The second perspective is especially productive for translation. If identity is partly produced through representation, then translation becomes one of the sites at which representation is reorganized. The translated text does not merely describe an identity for a new audience; through lexical selection, framing, genre, and style, it helps constitute the form in which that identity becomes legible.

Bhabha's (1994) account of cultural difference and hybridity further complicates the assumption that cultures meet as complete and self-contained entities. His emphasis on in-between spaces and negotiation suggests that cultural meaning is generated at boundaries as well as within established traditions. Translation can be understood as one such boundary practice. The translator works in a space where meanings must be rearticulated, and where neither source nor target categories remain entirely untouched. This does not mean that translation automatically produces harmonious hybridity. Negotiation can expose asymmetry, misunderstanding, exclusion, and unequal authority. The "in-between" is a site of possibility but also of conflict.

The concept of negotiated identity proposed here builds on these insights while retaining a strong textual focus. It refers to the way translated discourse reconfigures signals of belonging, difference, social position, and cultural memory under the constraints of another language. Negotiation occurs because several demands coexist. A translation must normally be intelligible to its intended readers; it must establish a defensible relation to the source; it must operate within target-language genres and publishing conventions; and it must decide how much linguistic or cultural difference to retain. These demands cannot always be satisfied simultaneously.

Personal identity is negotiated in translation through voice. A speaker's vocabulary, rhythm, politeness strategies, hesitations, and code-switching contribute to the impression of a person. If those features are standardized, the translated speaker may appear more educated, more socially dominant, less regional, or less emotionally marked than in the source. Conversely, an attempt to reproduce difference through an existing target-language dialect can impose an unintended social geography. Translating a rural dialect from one country into a rural dialect associated with a particular region in another country may create false equivalences of class, history, or stereotype.

Collective identity is negotiated through cultural naming. Place names, institutional titles, foods, clothing, religious practices, historical events, and forms of kinship often require choices between translation, borrowing, explanation, and adaptation. Each choice positions the reader differently. Borrowing may preserve the source term's visibility but leave some readers without access to its significance. Explanation may increase access but turn an ordinary source-culture reference into an ethnographic object. Substitution may produce immediate recognition while erasing difference. There is no universally correct solution because the cultural function of the item depends on genre and context.

Translation also affects the identity of literary and intellectual traditions. The selection of works for translation influences which foreign authors become representative of a culture. Lefevere (1992) describes translation as a form of rewriting shaped by poetics and ideology, while Venuti (1998) emphasizes translation's role in forming cultural identities. Receiving culture encounters foreign literature through selective pathways: publishers, translators, critics, educational institutions, and markets determine what is translated and how it is framed. As a result, a national literature can become known abroad through a narrow set of themes, political oppression, folklore, exoticism, modernism, trauma, or dissidence, even when its internal diversity is much greater.

The translator's own identity also enters the process, though not in the simplistic sense that every translation is a direct expression of personal biography. Translators possess linguistic repertoires, aesthetic preferences, ideological assumptions, professional norms, and forms of cultural knowledge. Their position affects what they notice and which solutions appear natural. Reflexivity is therefore important. The translator needs to ask not only "What does this mean?" but also "Why does this solution seem obvious to me, and what cultural assumptions does it carry?"

Negotiation, in this framework, is neither betrayal nor compromise in a negative sense. It is the normal condition of translation. The useful distinction is between negotiation that acknowledges its constraints and negotiation that hides them. A culturally responsible translation makes deliberate choices about differences and can account for them. This may occur in the translated prose itself or through paratexts

such as a preface, note, glossary, or translator's commentary. The goal is not to burden every text with explanation, but to recognize that translation always positions identities for new readers.

4. Domestication, Foreignization, and the Visibility of Difference

Few conceptual pairs in contemporary Translation Studies have been as influential as domestication and foreignization. Venuti (1995) uses the distinction to criticize translation practices that privilege fluent, idiomatic target-language prose to the point that the foreign text's linguistic and cultural difference becomes difficult to perceive. In Anglophone contexts, he associates this fluency with the translator's invisibility and with domestic cultural values that can assimilate foreign writing. Foreignizing strategies, by contrast, seek to register difference and resist complete assimilation.

The distinction is valuable because it makes translation strategy culturally and politically visible. It reminds readers that ease is not neutral. A translation that "reads as if it were originally written" in the target language may be aesthetically successful, but the ideal can also encourage the removal of unfamiliar syntax, culturally specific references, repetitions, or rhetorical patterns. The foreign text is then welcomed on condition that it adopts domestic habits. Translation becomes a form of hospitality whose guest is expected to become indistinguishable from the host.

At the same time, domestication and foreignization should not be treated as rigid alternatives. Most translations combine them, and their effects depend on context. Retaining a source-language word can foreignize the text, but if that word has already become fashionable in the target culture, it may no longer create meaningful resistance. Conversely, translating a term with a familiar target expression can sometimes preserve a social function more effectively than lexical borrowing. Strategy must therefore be evaluated at several levels: lexical, syntactic, stylistic, paratextual, and institutional.

A simple example is the translation of food. Retaining the original name of a dish preserves cultural specificity, particularly when the food has no close target-culture equivalent. Yet a narrative crowded with unexplained culinary terms may distance readers in ways absent from the source, where the same words are ordinary. Adding an explanation inside the text can solve the informational problem but change narrative perspective by making characters explain their own everyday world for outsiders. A glossary or unobtrusive contextual cue may sometimes offer a better balance. The relevant question is not whether foreignness should be preserved in the abstract, but how the source text organizes familiarity and difference for its own readers.

Forms of address present a similar challenge. Many languages grammatically distinguish formal and informal second-person pronouns, while contemporary English generally does not. Translating both forms as "you" removes a recurrent signal of social distance. The translator may compensate through titles, modal verbs, lexical choices, or shifts in sentence structure. No single English item replaces the distinction, but the relationship can be reconstructed across a stretch of discourse. This illustrates why translation is not a sequence of word-for-word substitutions. Social identity may be distributed across multiple linguistic features.

Foreignization also has an ethical dimension when the source text represents marginalized or minority voices. Standardizing non-dominant speech can erase sociolinguistic difference but reproducing it through a stigmatized target-language variety can create new stereotypes. For example, assigning a recognizable ethnic dialect in English to speakers whose source-language difference has a completely different history risks relocating them into the racial and class structures of the target culture. The translator must sometimes invent a subtler pattern of markedness rather than select an existing dialect wholesale.

The same caution applies to archaism. A historical text may contain language that was contemporary at the time of composition but now appears old to modern source-language readers. A translation can reproduce that historical distance through moderately archaic diction. Yet excessive archaism may turn a socially varied source into a uniformly antique performance. Philological knowledge helps determine which features are historically marked and which merely belong to the ordinary language of an earlier period.

These examples suggest that the visibility of difference should be calibrated rather than maximized. A translation that constantly announces its foreignness can become as reductive as one that erases it. The aim is to recreate meaningful patterns of proximity and distance. Some elements should feel ordinary, some strange, and some unstable. Identity is negotiated precisely through these shifting relations. The translator's task is not to preserve a fixed quantity of foreignness but to interpret where difference matters and to find target-language resources capable of making that difference perceptible.

5. Linguistic Sites of Identity Negotiation

The abstract relation between translation and identity becomes clearest at specific points in language. Pronouns, names, idioms, culturally dense terms, code-switching, and register all carry information about speakers and communities. Examining these sites shows how philological and cultural analysis can inform practical translation decisions.

5.1 Forms of Address and Social Relations

Address systems encode social relationships differently across languages. Distinctions of formality, plurality, kinship, professional rank, age, and gender may be grammatically obligatory in one language and optional in another. Romanian, French, German, Spanish, Italian, and many other European languages maintain contrasts between familiar and polite forms of second-person address, though their actual use varies by period and community. English largely relies on a single pronoun, "you," and therefore often expresses equivalent distinctions lexically or pragmatically.

Suppose a dialogue moves from formal to informal address at a decisive emotional moment. A direct English translation may lose the change completely. The translator must then identify the function of the shift: intimacy, condescension, solidarity, anger, or a renegotiation of hierarchy. Compensation can occur through first names, titles, contractions, sentence length, politeness formulas, or explicit narration. What matters is not preserving the pronoun as an isolated grammatical object but preserving the social event enacted through it.

Philological context is essential because norms of address change historically. A form that now sounds ceremonious may once have been routine. Translators of older texts must avoid projecting contemporary sociolinguistic values backward. Historical dictionaries, letters, parallel literary works, and etiquette manuals can help reconstruct the pragmatic force of address. This is a good example of philology serving identity: accurate interpretation of linguistic history enables a more precise representation of social relations.

5.2 Names, Place Names, and Cultural Belonging

Proper names appear resistant to translation because they ostensibly identify rather than describe. In practice, their treatment is culturally variable. Historical figures may have conventional translated names; cities can have exonyms; fictional names may contain semantic or comic effects; and personal names can signal ethnicity, religion, region, generation, or class. Decisions about transliteration also matter when languages use different writing systems.

Keeping a name unchanged may seem neutral, but orthographic conventions can still position it for the target reader. Diacritics may be preserved or removed; order may be reversed; patronymics may be omitted; titles may be translated. Each choice affects cultural visibility. The growing technical ease of representing diacritics has weakened one historical justification for their omission, making accurate spelling an increasingly important form of respect for linguistic identity.

Place names are especially revealing because they can encode contested histories. A city may have several names associated with different languages, states, or communities. Selecting one can imply a historical or political perspective even when

the translator intends only convenience. Responsible translation therefore requires attention to temporal setting, speaker perspective, and established target-language usage. In a historical narrative, the name appropriate to the period or community may differ from the contemporary international form.

5.3 Idioms, Proverbs, and Cultural Memory

Idioms and proverbs pose a familiar problem: literal translation may be semantically obscure, while replacement with a target-language proverb can erase imagery and cultural associations. The translator must decide which dimension is most important in context. If a proverb functions primarily as conversational wisdom, a target proverb with a similar pragmatic force may work well. If its imagery is thematically linked to the surrounding text, substitution can damage coherence.

Proverbs also participate in cultural memory. They are recognizable because speakers have encountered them repeatedly in families, schools, media, and literature. Their familiarity can characterize a speaker as traditional, ironic, rural, educated, or deliberately proverbial. A target-language equivalent may reproduce familiarity but attach the character to a different cultural archive. A literal or semi-literal rendering may preserve imagery but lose the sense of quotation. Sometimes a hybrid solution is preferable: retain the distinctive image while shaping the syntax so that it sounds proverb-like in the target language.

This problem demonstrates why "equivalence" needs to be specified. Equivalence of proposition, image, social recognition, rhythm, and cultural association are not identical. Translators choose among them according to the text's priorities. The choice becomes an act of identity negotiation because it determines whether the speaker sounds culturally particular, universally proverbial, or simply unusual.

5.4 Culturally Dense and Partially Untranslatable Words

Public discussions of translation often celebrate "untranslatable" words, terms said to express emotions or cultural concepts for which other languages have no equivalent. Such claims can be illuminating, but they can also romanticize languages as sealed containers of unique national experience. Few words are untranslatable in the sense that their meanings cannot be explained. The real issue is economy and semantic packaging: one language may lexicalize a distinction that other expresses through a phrase, context, or combination of words.

Philological analysis can prevent exoticization. A culturally dense word may have changed meaning, developed ironic uses, entered from another language, or be common only in particular regions or generations. Treating it as the timeless essence of a culture mistakes a lexical item for an anthropological fact. The translator should

investigate usage before deciding whether borrowing, paraphrase, contextual translation, or a note is appropriate.

Borrowing can be powerful when the term itself matters as a cultural object. It invites readers to encounter a new word and acknowledges that the target language need not absorb every difference immediately. Yet borrowing also changes the reading experience. A familiar source word becomes visibly foreign. The translator must therefore ask whether this increased markedness serves the text. In some genres, ethnography, memoir, historical fiction, philosophical writing, it may. In fast-paced dialogue, repeated unexplained borrowing may distort voice.

5.5 Register, dialect, and social positioning

Register is one of the most consequential sites of identity because readers infer social information from how characters or narrators speak. Formality, slang, technical vocabulary, regionalisms, grammatical nonstandardness, and discourse markers all contribute to social positioning. Translation can easily alter these signals. A translator who focuses only on propositional meaning may unintentionally raise or lower a speaker's status.

Dialect presents the hardest cases because linguistic varieties are embedded in local histories. There is rarely a socially equivalent dialect across cultures. Mapping one regional variety directly onto another can produce comic or ideological effects absent from the source. A safer strategy may involve selective nonstandard features that mark difference without identifying the speaker with a specific target-language community. The precise solution depends on whether the source dialect signals geography, class, ethnicity, intimacy, resistance to standardization, or several of these simultaneously.

The translator should also distinguish between authorial representation and sociolinguistic reality. Literary dialect is already stylized. It selects certain features to create an effect for source readers. Translation therefore translates a representation of speech, not raw speech itself. Close reading should identify the density and distribution of marked features before reproducing them. If only occasional lexical items mark a character in the source, a heavily phonetic target dialect would overtranslate identity.

5.6 Code-Switching and Multilingual Texts

Multilingual writing makes the negotiation of identity explicit. Characters may switch languages to signal intimacy, secrecy, authority, education, migration, or emotional attachment. Authors may leave passages untranslated, trusting some readers and excluding others. Translation can disrupt this architecture if the target language coincides with one of the languages used inside the source.

Imagine a novel primarily written in Romanian that occasionally shifts into English to mark cosmopolitan speech. In an English translation, those shifts disappear unless another strategy is devised. Typography, metalinguistic cues, selective retention of Romanian, or changes in register may partially reconstruct the contrast. None is identical to the original mechanism. The translator must translate not only sentences but the multilingual structure of the work.

Code-switching also challenges the idea of a single-source language. Many contemporary texts emerge from multilingual communities in which borrowing and mixing are normal rather than exceptional. Translation theory that assumes pure language A and language B can misdescribe such texts. A philological perspective, attentive to contact and borrowing, is better suited to them. It recognizes that linguistic identities are often constituted through mixture and that translation may be occurring inside the source text before the professional translator begins.

6. Translation, Power, and the Ethics of Representation

Translation takes place within unequal relations between languages. Some languages possess large publishing markets, global institutional support, extensive digital resources, and strong visibility in education and media. Others circulate within smaller communities or have histories of political marginalization. These differences influence what is translated into which languages, under what conditions, and with what expectations. Identity negotiation in translation therefore has an institutional as well as textual dimension.

Venuti (1998) argues that translation can contribute to the formation of cultural identities by selecting and rewriting foreign texts according to domestic values. This insight shifts attention from isolated translation errors to patterns of representation. If publishers repeatedly select works that confirm familiar stereotypes about a culture, even individual competent translations may collectively narrow that culture's image. The issue is not that translation should present a statistically representative sample of another society; literature has no such obligation. Rather, translators, editors, and critics should remain aware that selection and framing have cumulative effects.

Paratext is one site where such framing occurs. Titles, cover copy, introductions, footnotes, glossaries, and marketing categories can position a translated work as exotic, universal, political, folkloric, or representative. A translator may preserve complexity in the text while a publisher's framing reduces the work to a familiar cultural narrative. Translation ethics must therefore extend beyond sentence-level fidelity to the conditions of presentation and reception.

Postcolonial translation scholarship has been particularly attentive to these power relations. Niranjana (1992) demonstrates how translation historically

participated in colonial knowledge production, while Spivak (1993) stresses the importance of attending to rhetoric and the intimate texture of language rather than treating Third World texts as transparent information. Their work reminds translators that benevolent intentions do not eliminate asymmetry. Translating marginalized voices for dominant-language audiences can increase access while also subjecting those voices to new expectations of readability and explanation.

An ethical response does not require refusing translation. It requires greater attentiveness to who is made legible to whom and on what terms. The demand that a translated text explain every cultural reference can imply that the target reader's lack of knowledge must always be accommodated, while source-culture readers routinely navigate texts containing unexplained references. Strategic opacity can therefore have value. Allowing readers to infer, research, or temporarily remain uncertain can preserve a more equal relation to the foreign text.

At the same time, opacity should not become a badge of ethical superiority. Deliberately obscure translation can exclude readers unnecessarily and may misrepresent a source text that was clear and accessible. Ethical translation is not measured by difficulty. The relevant principle is proportionality: preserve difficulty where difficulty is meaningful, and preserve accessibility where accessibility is meaningful. This requires close attention to the source text's own distribution of knowledge.

Translator visibility can support such accountability. A translator's preface or note can explain significant strategic choices without turning the translation into a scholarly edition. Visibility also acknowledges that the translated text has been produced by an interpreting agent. Yet the form of visibility should suit the genre. In a children's book, stage performance, or popular novel, extensive commentary may be inappropriate. Ethical practice is not a single format but a willingness to recognize mediation.

The ethics of identity representation also includes uncertainty. Translators sometimes face terms whose social implications they cannot confidently determine. Consultation with specialists, community members, authors, or other translators may be necessary. Philological ethic values evidence over intuition and makes room for revision. This is particularly important when translating historically sensitive identities or speech associated with minority communities.

Ultimately, translation ethics concerns relations rather than rules. It asks how the translated text relates to the source, to the communities represented, to target readers, and to the institutions that circulate it. Negotiated identity is ethical when these relations are approached with informed attention and when the translator resists both effortless assimilation and performative exoticism.

7. Philological Method in Contemporary Translation Practice

If philology is to contribute to contemporary translation, it must function as a method rather than a nostalgic disciplinary label. Such a method can be organized around several forms of attention: lexical history, textual context, intertextuality, sociolinguistic variation, and reception. These forms of attention are compatible with modern digital tools and can strengthen both scholarly and professional translation.

Lexical history begins with the recognition that dictionaries provide evidence, not final answers. Historical dictionaries, corpora, digitized newspapers, and databases can reveal when a word entered a language, which social groups used it, and what collocations surrounded it. This matters when a source term has several possible target equivalents with different historical tones. The translator can compare not only definitions but usage environments.

Textual context extends beyond the immediate sentence. Repetition, motifs, parallel constructions, and lexical networks often determine translation choices. A word that seems ordinary in one passage may acquire thematic significance through recurrence. Translating each occurrence independently can destroy such patterns. A philological translator tracks them and decides when consistency is meaningful and when variation is required.

Intertextuality is equally important. Quotations, biblical echoes, proverbial formulas, political slogans, and literary allusions connect a text to prior discourse. Target cultures may already possess canonical translations of some of these materials. Reusing an established wording can activate the relevant intertext; translating anew may conceal it. Conversely, a canonical target translation may belong to a different historical register and create unintended effects. The translator needs to identify the source of the echo and evaluate its status for both readerships.

Sociolinguistic research helps interpret identity markers. Corpora and descriptive studies can clarify how forms of address, slang, honorifics, or regional features function. This is especially valuable when the translator's own linguistic intuition comes from a different generation, region, or social group. Translation competence includes knowing when intuition is insufficient.

Reception completes the method because meanings change when texts enter new contexts. Reviews, previous translations, educational uses, and publishing histories reveal how a foreign author or culture has already been constructed in the target language. A new translation can reinforce or challenge those patterns. Awareness of reception allows translators to understand their work as part of an ongoing history rather than an isolated transfer.

This method also encourages documentation. Translators working on complex texts benefit from maintaining glossaries, decision logs, lists of recurrent terms, and notes on historical usage. Such records support consistency while preserving the

reasoning behind exceptions. They are particularly useful in collaborative translation and revision.

Technology can accelerate these practices but cannot replace interpretation. Machine translation and generative language technologies can propose fluent alternatives, identify patterns, and assist with terminology (Pașcalău et al., 2026). Their fluency, however, can conceal cultural flattening. Systems trained on large datasets tend to reproduce dominant patterns and may normalize marked language. Human philological judgment remains necessary to determine whether a fluent output has preserved the social and historical work performed by the source.

The contemporary translator is therefore not choosing between traditional scholarship and technological efficiency. The more productive model combines them. Searchable resources make historical comparison faster, while philological habits ensure that speed does not become superficiality. In this sense, philology is not opposed to modern translation practice; it supplies a critical discipline for using modern tools responsibly.

8. A Model of Negotiated Identity in Translation

The preceding discussion can be synthesized into a model of negotiated identity built around four interacting dimensions: linguistic form, cultural memory, social positioning, and reception. These dimensions are analytical rather than separate in practice. A single translation choice can affect all four.

Linguistic form includes vocabulary, grammar, rhythm, register, and textual patterning. It is the most immediate material of translation. Cultural memory includes historical associations, intertexts, institutions, rituals, and shared narratives activated by language. Social positioning concerns how discourse marks relationships among speakers and groups: status, intimacy, region, generation, profession, ethnicity, gender, and other forms of belonging. Reception concerns the target audience and the institutional environment in which the translation circulates.

A translator negotiating identity can ask four corresponding questions. What formal feature is doing significant work here? Which cultural histories or associations do it activate? How does it position the speaker, narrator, or community? What will happen to these effects when the text enters the target environment? These questions do not produce an automatic solution, but they make the decision more accountable.

Consider a fictional character who uses an old-fashioned regional form of address associated with a particular social world. At the formal level, the feature is a marked expression. At the level of cultural memory, it may evoke a historical period or local tradition. Socially, it may position the character by age, region, or class. In reception, a literal borrowing may be unintelligible, while a target dialect equivalent

may impose the wrong geography. The translator might choose a mildly archaic, non-region-specific expression and reinforce the regional identity elsewhere through contextual cues. This is negotiation: no single feature is perfectly preserved, but the cluster of effects is reconstructed.

The model also explains why translation choices should be assessed cumulatively. One domesticating decision may be harmless; hundreds can erase the text's cultural texture. One borrowed term may enrich the target text; excessive borrowing can transform ordinary source discourse into exotic display. Translators should therefore evaluate patterns across the whole work.

Negotiated identity is also relational. The source identity is not treated as a sacred essence that can be transported intact. Nor is the target culture imagined as a homogeneous destination. Both contain internal differences, and the translated text establishes a new relation among them. This relation may enable recognition without sameness: readers can understand a voice while still perceiving that its categories, histories, and linguistic habits are not entirely their own.

Such recognition is an important humanistic function of translation. Translation expands access precisely because languages are different, but its value diminishes if access requires the erasure of difference. Philology contributes by identifying where difference is historically and textually meaningful. Cultural theory contributes by showing how representation participates in identity and power. Translation practice brings these insights together in concrete decisions.

The model is intentionally flexible because genres require different balances. Legal translation prioritizes terminological and institutional precision; poetry foregrounds sound, rhythm, ambiguity, and intertext; subtitling operates under severe spatial and temporal constraints; literary prose may allow more room for stylistic compensation; museum or heritage translation must often mediate condensed cultural information for international audiences. Negotiated identity is not a formula but a framework for asking better questions across these contexts.

9. Conclusions

Translation takes place between languages, but it also takes place between histories, social positions, textual traditions, and expectations of readership. To describe it only as transfer is therefore insufficient. The translated text is a site where cultural identities become newly legible and, in becoming legible, are inevitably reconfigured. This article has proposed the concept of negotiated identity to describe that process.

The argument emphasized the continuing relevance of philology. Close attention to lexical history, textual patterning, intertextuality, and sociolinguistic

context provides a necessary counterweight to approaches that speak of culture only at a broad conceptual level. Cultural identity is not represented by themes alone. It is encoded in pronouns, names, idioms, registers, repetitions, borrowings, and shifts between languages. These small linguistic forms carry large histories.

At the same time, philological accuracy cannot by itself resolve the ethical and cultural problems of translation. Translators operate within institutions and unequal relations between languages. Their choices participate in patterns of selection, framing, domestication, and representation. Venuti's critique of transparent fluency, Bhabha's account of cultural negotiation, and scholarship on rewriting and postcolonial translation all demonstrate that translation has consequences beyond linguistic correctness.

The opposition between domestication and foreignization remains useful when treated as a continuum of context-dependent strategies rather than a moral binary. A responsible translation may domesticate one feature to preserve pragmatic force while foreignizing another to retain cultural specificity. What matters is whether the overall pattern reconstructs meaningful relations of familiarity and difference. Neither total assimilation nor maximal strangeness is an adequate universal goal.

The concept of negotiated identity also changes how fidelity can be understood. Fidelity is not simply sameness of words or even sameness of propositional content. It can involve fidelity to social relations, historical resonance, stylistic differences, multilingual structure, or patterns of cultural knowledge. These forms of fidelity sometimes conflict. Translation is the practice of judging among them.

In a period characterized by migration, multilingual media, rapid technological translation, and intensified contact among cultures, such judgment is increasingly important. Automated systems can produce remarkable fluency, but fluency alone cannot determine which differences matter. Philological attention and cultural reflexivity remain indispensable because they ask what histories a word carries, whose voice a stylistic choice constructs, and what kind of encounter a translation creates.

Between languages and cultures, identity is neither simply preserved nor lost. It is negotiated. The translator's responsibility is to make that negotiation informed, attentive, and proportionate: to create access without if everything must become familiar, and to preserve difference without turning it into spectacle. Translation at its strongest allows readers to encounter another linguistic world not as an inaccessible other and not as a disguised version of themselves, but as a voice that can be understood while still retaining the traces of its own history.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Editorial Support

Generative AI tools, including ChatGPT were employed to support linguistic refinement, the development of scripts for quantitative analysis, and manuscript formatting. As the author, I personally reviewed and validated all data, analyses,

interpretations, references, and textual content, retaining full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final version of the manuscript

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Strategies of Cultural (Re)Mediation in Specialized Translation. From Terminological Tradition to Digital Practices

Dumitra-Mădălina PANTEA

University of Oradea

Abstract. *This paper proposes an examination of specialized translation as a privileged space for cultural (re)mediation at the intersection of terminological tradition and contemporary digital practices. Drawing on examples from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) texts in fields such as healthcare, the study investigates how translators negotiate the tension between established terminological conventions and the increasingly multimodal, dynamic nature of specialized discourse in the digital age. The theoretical framework combines insights from translation studies, cultural studies, and terminology management, with a particular focus on the translator's role as an intercultural mediator rather than a mere linguistic encoder.*

Keywords*:* **s**pecialized translation, cultural mediation, terminology, digital practices, multimodal resources, intercultural competence, translator training

1. Introduction

Specialized translation has undergone a substantial reconfiguration in recent decades, moving beyond a model centered predominantly on terminological transfer and entering a stage in which digital practices, multimodal resources, and intercultural negotiation profoundly shape professional activity (Pym, 2010). This evolution reflects wider changes in professional communication, including the globalization of expert discourse, the rapid circulation of institutional and disciplinary texts, and the integration of AI-supported environments into translation workflows (Bowker & Ciro, 2019; Chan, 2024).

Within this context, the specialized translator no longer acts merely as a linguistic encoder or terminological transfer agent. The translator increasingly functions as an expert mediator who must preserve conceptual exactness while simultaneously adapting discourse to the cultural, institutional, and technological

expectations of target audiences (Katan & Taibi, 2021). Terminology remains foundational, but it is now embedded in broader processes of meaning negotiation that include genre awareness, multimodal presentation, audience design, and the critical use of digital resources (Cabré, 1999).

The present paper follows this transition from terminological tradition to digital practices and argues that cultural (re)mediation offers a productive framework for understanding the contemporary profile of specialized translation. The argument develops across several axes: the evolving relationship between terminological stability and cultural adaptation; the role of multimodality and paratext in digital environments (Al Mudarra, 2025); the integration of CAT tools, terminology management systems, and AI (Moorkens, 2025; Ahmed et al., 2025); and the pedagogical implications of these developments for translator education (Petts et al., 2024).

By focusing on cultural (re)mediation, the paper seeks to highlight how specialized translation is increasingly defined by hybrid forms of practice in which terminological consistency, intercultural competence, and digital literacy operate as mutually reinforcing dimensions of professional expertise (Olohan, 2021). In doing so, it situates specialized translation at the intersection of discourse, technology, and culture, rather than within a narrowly linguistic or purely terminological paradigm.

2. Terminological Tradition and Cultural (Re)Mediation

The classical model of specialized translation emphasized terminological stability, conceptual precision, and disciplinary coherence, often within relatively homogeneous professional communities (Cabré, 1999). Such priorities remain indispensable, especially in legal, technical, medical, and institutional communication, where inaccurate translation may distort knowledge, disrupt procedures, or generate serious interpretive consequences (Abdurakhmanova, 2025). In these contexts, terminological errors can undermine trust, compromise safety, or jeopardize legal validity.

However, many specialized texts are not culturally neutral. They are embedded in local systems of expertise, administrative practice, professional ritual, and institutional memory (Katan & Taibi, 2021). Terms frequently carry legal, social, or procedural meanings that exceed dictionary equivalence and require interpretation within broader communicative frames. Court documents, for instance, presuppose specific procedural structures; healthcare guidelines reflect national health systems and local standards of care; technical documentation often enacts particular organizational cultures (Abdal, 2022).

For this reason, cultural (re)mediation becomes central to specialized translation. Rather than treating culture as marginal or external to disciplinary

discourse, current research shows that cultural considerations permeate the transfer of terminology itself, especially in domains where institutional practices differ across language communities (Le, 2024). Translators must negotiate not only what a term denotes, but also how it functions socially and pragmatically in the target setting (Pym, 2010).

This often means identifying strategies that preserve conceptual integrity while ensuring usability, intelligibility, and institutional appropriateness. Localization, adaptation, descriptive equivalence, explicitation, and cultural substitution emerge as major procedures in this regard, their value lying in the fact that they respond to communicative purpose rather than merely formal similarity (Babayev, 2025).

Research on official and institutional documents further indicates that mixed procedures, such as couplet strategies combining transfer or borrowing with explanation, are particularly productive when the source concept must remain visible but cannot be understood without contextual support (Syafran et al., 2024). The persistence of such hybrid procedures demonstrates that specialized translation cannot be reduced to lexical substitution: it is a situated practice in which precision and mediation are interdependent.

3. Culture-Bound Terms Across Specialized Domains

Culture-bound terms are especially visible in legal and administrative translation, where institutional concepts often have no direct counterpart in another system (Wang, 2024). Concepts relating to court procedures, administrative hierarchies, or specific legal instruments may be deeply embedded in one national tradition and unknown in another, even when systems are broadly comparable. In such cases, translation becomes a matter of pragmatic alignment rather than simple equivalence, requiring translators to decide whether to borrow, adapt, approximate, or explicate.

A similar issue appears in technical and organizational communication, where professional procedures are embedded in local standards, work cultures, and disciplinary routines (Hasior, 2024). Manuals, safety protocols, and internal guidelines reflect both technical requirements and organizational expectations about behaviour, accountability, and professional identity. Translators must often reconcile standardized terminology with variable practices of use, documentation, and reader expectation, particularly when texts are repurposed for cross-border projects or multilingual organizations (Edel, 2024).

In educational, semi-specialized, and public-facing communication, the challenge intensifies because texts may address mixed audiences with uneven disciplinary competence. Patient information leaflets, public health campaigns, or

informational websites aimed at both professionals and laypersons combine technical content with explanatory and persuasive functions. Here, explanatory adaptation and strategic simplification can improve access without necessarily compromising conceptual validity, provided that essential distinctions are maintained and oversimplification is avoided (Natasya, 2025).

The translation of healthcare-related discourse is particularly revealing, since it often combines technical terminology with public information, institutional instructions, and culturally grounded understandings of body, treatment, or care. Such texts require both terminological discipline and sociocultural sensitivity: translators must decide how to handle references to local healthcare practices, food cultures, or institutional frameworks that may be unfamiliar to target readers. Where no direct equivalent exists, creative mediation involving explanations, analogies, or restructured information becomes crucial (Gheorghiu, 2025).

These examples show that cultural (re)mediation should not be seen as a secondary operation applied only when problems occur. It is an ordinary condition of specialized translation whenever texts circulate between communities structured by different institutions, values, and communicative conventions (Katan & Taibi, 2021). By foregrounding this dimension, specialized translation can be reconceptualized as an arena in which disciplinary discourse and cultural diversity meet, rather than as an isolated technical operation.

4. Multimodality, Paratext, and Digital Environments

Another decisive shift in specialized translation concerns the multimodal character of contemporary communication. Specialized texts increasingly appear on websites, interfaces, online guidelines, e-learning platforms, mobile resources, and digital repositories, where meaning is distributed across language, layout, image, design, navigation, and interactive elements (Al Mudarra, 2025). In such environments, the visual and spatial organization of information actively shapes comprehension and reception.

This development affects translation strategies in important ways. It is no longer sufficient to transfer verbal content accurately if the translated text does not function coherently within the semiotic environment in which it is presented. Terminological accuracy may be undermined if headings, labels, buttons, icons, or navigation structures remain untranslated, inconsistently translated, or poorly adapted to target user expectations. Multimodal coherence thus becomes a key dimension of quality in specialized translation (Petts et al., 2024).

Research in audiovisual translation illustrates this clearly. In subtitling and related formats, strategies such as retention, omission, specification, substitution, and

generalization are not merely responses to technical constraints; they are procedures through which cultural meaning is selectively preserved, condensed, or recontextualized for new audiences (Prasastri, 2024). Subtitles must respect spatial and temporal limits, but they also play a crucial role in negotiating cultural references, idioms, humour, and pragmatic nuance across languages.

Paratextual translation is equally significant. Titles, glosses, captions, menu labels, metadata, notes, and interface cues can guide reception and frame interpretation before the main text is even processed (Al Mudarra, 2025). In digital environments, these elements often influence searchability, accessibility, and user navigation, thereby shaping who encounters a text and how it is read. Translators working in such contexts must therefore attend to the communicative force of paratexts, not only to their literal wording.

For specialized translation, this means that cultural (re)mediation increasingly operates across multiple semiotic layers. A well-translated text must be terminologically sound, visually coherent, pragmatically accessible, and functionally integrated into its platform or publication environment (Olohan, 2021). When expert knowledge is presented through infographics, step-by-step interfaces, or interactive tutorials, translators need to consider how language, image, and interaction jointly construct meaning and how cultural expectations shape the interpretation of these multimodal cues.

5. Digital Tools and Terminology Management

Digitalization has transformed terminology work itself. CAT tools, terminology management systems, digital glossaries, translation memories, and searchable corpora allow translators to maintain consistency, retrieve domain-specific information rapidly, and manage recurring forms of specialized expression more efficiently than in earlier stages of the profession (Edel, 2024). These tools reduce repetitive labour, support large-scale projects, and facilitate version control across multilingual documentation.

Such resources also facilitate collaboration among translators, revisers, educators, and subject specialists. As a result, specialized translation increasingly depends on networked forms of professional practice in which terminology is curated, updated, and reused through digital infrastructures (Hasior, 2024). Digital terminology management helps ensure coherence across projects and institutions, especially where multilingual communication is continuous rather than occasional.

At the same time, technology does not remove the need for interpretive judgment. Terminology tools can support consistency, but they cannot by themselves determine whether a term is pragmatically suitable, culturally acceptable, or rhetorically effective in a given context (Cabré, 1999). A translation memory may reproduce previous solutions, yet those solutions may not fit new audiences, genres, or platforms. Consequently, digital tools function best as support mechanisms rather than autonomous authorities.

The most productive use of digital tools therefore lies in combining automation with critical selection. Translators benefit from rapid retrieval and pattern recognition, yet they must continue to evaluate the relevance, currency, and contextual fit of terminological resources (Gheorghiu, 2025). This hybrid model is particularly important in specialized domains where conceptual nuance and institutional variation remain high. It allows technology to enhance efficiency while preserving the translator's role as final decision-maker.

6. Machine Translation, AI, and Limits of Automation

The recent expansion of machine translation and generative AI has intensified debates about the future of specialized translation. Systems such as ChatGPT, Google Translate, and DeepL can process large amounts of text quickly and often provide workable first drafts or basic terminological correspondences (Ahmed et al., 2025). Their speed and accessibility make them attractive in educational, institutional, and commercial environments under pressure to produce multilingual content rapidly.

However, current research repeatedly shows that such systems remain less reliable when texts involve idiomatic density, institutional nuance, paratextual constraints, or culturally loaded concepts (Babayev, 2025). These are precisely the areas where specialized translation often requires the greatest precision. When the target text must align with a particular legal system, healthcare framework, or professional culture, automation may generate plausible but misleading solutions.

Human translators still outperform automated systems in contextual adaptation, discursive consistency, rhetorical calibration, and the management of subtle value-laden choices (Vieira, 2023). Their superiority is especially visible in legal, literary, audiovisual, and culturally sensitive material, but the same principle applies to many specialized texts where institutional framing is crucial. Human expertise remains indispensable whenever translation decisions require accountability, explanation, or negotiation (Moorkens, 2025).

The limitations of AI are not only technical. They are also ethical and epistemic. Concerns about data provenance, opacity, bias, misinformation, and unequal digital access complicate the uncritical adoption of automated solutions in professional

settings (Chan, 2024). A translator who relies heavily on AI without critical evaluation may reproduce hidden biases or introduce errors that are difficult to detect precisely because they appear fluent and authoritative.

Consequently, hybrid practice again appears to be the most viable model. AI can assist with drafting, retrieval, or pattern detection, but responsibility for adequacy, ethics, and cultural accountability remains with the human translator (Bowker & Ciro, 2019). Rather than replacing translators, digital tools and AI reconfigure the skills they need, placing greater emphasis on critical literacy, post-editing competence, and reflective decision-making.

7. Pedagogy and Professional Development

These transformations have direct implications for translator education. If specialized translation now requires competence in terminology, cultural mediation, multimodality, and digital tools, then training must move beyond a narrow equivalence-based model (Katan & Taibi, 2021). Students must learn not only how to identify appropriate terminological solutions, but also how to evaluate context, audience, medium, and communicative purpose.

Current scholarship emphasizes the value of interdisciplinary curricula, collaborative projects, and stronger links between academic training and workplace realities (Petts et al., 2024). Students need guided exposure to real translation problems that combine domain knowledge with technological and intercultural challenges. This is particularly important in ESP-oriented contexts, where translation intersects with professional communication, knowledge transfer, and subject-specific literacy (Natasya, 2025).

At the same time, pedagogical innovation should not mean technological enthusiasm without reflection. Training must cultivate critical judgment, ethical awareness, and the ability to justify choices made under conditions of digital abundance and automated suggestion (Olohan, 2021). Hands-on work with terminology translation, multimodal material, post-editing, and contextual adaptation appears especially relevant for preparing students to work in contemporary professional settings.

In this sense, translator education should support the emergence of a professional identity grounded not only in linguistic proficiency, but also in cultural intelligence and technological discernment (Le, 2024). The translator of the digital age must be able to work across platforms, interpret institutional expectations, and manage the interface between human expertise and machine assistance.

8. Discussion

Taken together, the developments examined above suggest that specialized translation is best understood today as a field of negotiated expertise. It remains rooted in terminological discipline (Cabré, 1999), yet it now unfolds within complex communicative ecologies shaped by digital media, multimodality, and culturally diverse readerships. This situation does not invalidate traditional models of specialized translation; rather, it expands them by showing that terminology functions within broader circuits of meaning.

Cultural (re)mediation offers a particularly useful concept for capturing this transformation because it links terminology to context, translation strategy to audience design, and professional workflow to ethical responsibility (Katan & Taibi, 2021; Pym, 2010). From this perspective, the specialized translator appears as a professional who manages competing demands: conceptual precision and accessibility, standardization and adaptation, automation and human judgment, speed and responsibility.

The translator's mediating role is therefore not reduced by digitalization. It is intensified. The more abundant the resources and the faster the workflows, the more necessary it becomes to interpret, select, evaluate, and justify. Specialized translation in the digital era thus depends not on the disappearance of human agency, but on its redefinition within technologically augmented environments.

9. Conclusion

The transition from terminological tradition to digital practice does not signal a break with the past, but a redefinition of specialized translation around broader forms of mediation. Terminology remains central, yet its professional value increasingly depends on intercultural competence, multimodal awareness, and critical engagement with technology.

Specialized translators are now required to ensure not only the accurate transfer of expert knowledge, but also its functional circulation across institutional, cultural, and digital contexts. Their work involves not simply rendering terms, but shaping the conditions under which specialized discourse becomes meaningful and usable for diverse audiences.

For research, this means that further studies should continue to explore how strategies of cultural (re)mediation operate across domains, genres, and language pairs, especially under the impact of AI-driven environments. For pedagogy, it means that training should integrate terminology, culture, and technology as mutually constitutive rather than separate areas of competence.

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Terminology in Transition: From Bilingual Veterinary Lexicography to Multilingual Academic Participation

Corina Georgeta BARNA

University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, Romania

Abstract. *International students entering Romanian life-sciences programmes move simultaneously into a new language, an unfamiliar academic culture and an emerging professional community. This article examines how specialised terminology may mediate that transition by connecting knowledge already available through French, English and Latin with Romanian disciplinary communication. The documentary corpus comprises a French-Romanian veterinary dictionary, 28 lexical tables from a 14-chapter Romanian-for-life-sciences coursebook, and 103 complete French-English-Romanian records from an author-curated working lexicon. Normalised edit similarity was used descriptively to distinguish high, partial and low formal overlap; quantitative distributions were then interpreted through qualitative analysis of grammatical and phraseological recontextualisation. The dictionary contained 1,378 bilingual entries, whereas the coursebook comprised 698 pedagogical occurrences representing 373 distinct Romanian-French pairs. Formal transparency remained prominent through the lexical and disciplinary phases but declined sharply in chapters devoted to academic writing and oral professional interaction. On this basis, the article develops a four-stage model of terminology-mediated transition: cross-linguistic recognition, linguistic appropriation, disciplinary action and academic participation. Terminology is consequently understood not as an end-stage vocabulary list, but as an organising bridge between multilingual resources, disciplinary practice and the possibility of academic belonging.*

Keywords: language transition; multilingual higher education; Romanian for specific purposes; terminology; professional identity; cross-linguistic transparency

1. Introduction

Transition is a defining condition of international higher education. Students who begin a degree in another country do not merely change location or instructional

language. They encounter unfamiliar institutional routines, patterns of interaction, academic genres and ways of presenting disciplinary knowledge. In life-sciences programmes, this transition is particularly complex because language learning proceeds alongside entry into highly specialised conceptual and professional worlds. An international student may already understand the biology of a cell, the physiology of an organ or the logic of a laboratory protocol, yet remain unable to recognise a Romanian instruction, formulate a question during practical work or explain a procedure to a local colleague. The issue is therefore not simply the acquisition of a new vocabulary. It is the transformation of existing disciplinary knowledge into situated communicative participation.

Romanian offers both opportunities and difficulties in this process. Its Romance heritage and the international circulation of Greek- and Latin-derived scientific forms create visible correspondences with French and, to a lesser extent, English. Terms such as *proteină*, *bacterie*, *virus*, *biologie*, *laborator* and *microscop* may be recognised before the learner has acquired much Romanian grammar. This initial familiarity can reduce the perceived distance between the learner and the new language. Nevertheless, recognition is not equivalent to command. Learners must still acquire pronunciation, diacritics, gender, plural formation, the postposed definite article, verbal morphology, collocation and the phraseological conventions used to describe methods, qualify results and interact professionally. Terms can open the door to disciplinary discourse, but they do not by themselves teach learners how to act within it.

Terminology studies have traditionally explained the relationships among objects, concepts, definitions and designations (Cabré, 1999; International Organization for Standardization [ISO], 2022; Sager, 1990). Communicative and sociocognitive approaches subsequently emphasised that terms also vary across settings, genres, user groups and purposes (Cabré Castellví, 2003; Temmerman, 2000). This development is important for language education. A bilingual dictionary records equivalence and grammatical information, whereas a coursebook must select, sequence, recycle and place terms in actions and genres. The movement from a reference resource to a pedagogical resource is thus a transition in the function of terminology itself: a designation becomes a scaffold for participation.

The present study investigates that transition through three connected resources developed for French-speaking and multilingual users of Romanian life-sciences discourse: the *Dictionnaire français-roumain de terminologie vétérinaire* (Barna, 2022), the coursebook *Le roumain pour les sciences de la vie* (Barna, 2026a), and an author-curated French-English-Romanian working lexicon (Barna, 2026b). The study does not evaluate learner attainment and does not claim that terminological transparency automatically produces academic belonging. Instead, it analyses the linguistic and pedagogical affordances constructed by these materials and the points at which lexical similarity ceases to be sufficient.

The research objective is to explain how specialised terminology changes when it moves from bilingual lexicographic representation to a staged curriculum for Romanian academic and professional communication. Three questions guide the analysis:

1. How does the lexical profile change between the bilingual veterinary dictionary and the Romanian-for-life-sciences coursebook?
2. What patterns of high, partial and low formal overlap emerge across Romanian, French and English, and where are the limits of transparency most visible?
3. How can the observed progression be modelled as a pathway from cross-linguistic recognition to disciplinary and academic participation?

The contribution is both empirical and pedagogical. Empirically, the study follows the same specialised knowledge across lexicographic, curricular and trilingual resources rather than treating their word lists as interchangeable. Pedagogically, it identifies the point at which formal similarity stops carrying the principal burden and learners require Romanian morphology, procedural phraseology and genre-specific language. The encounter among Romanian, French, English and Latin is therefore approached not as competition between discrete linguistic systems, but as a repertoire that can be mobilised on entry to a new academic community. The central argument is that terminology mediates transition only when transparent forms are converted systematically into accurate linguistic production, disciplinary action and a socially meaningful academic voice.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Terminology as Conceptual and Communicative Resource

Terminology is concerned with the designations through which specialised concepts are represented, organised and communicated. Classical terminology work placed particular emphasis on concept systems, definitions, designation and standardisation. These concerns remain essential in veterinary medicine, food safety, biology and related domains, where ambiguity may have practical, regulatory or clinical consequences. ISO 704:2022, for example, describes terminology work through relationships among objects, concepts, definitions and designations and sets out principles for compiling terminologies across scientific and professional fields (ISO, 2022). Sager (1990) similarly presents terminology as an interdisciplinary activity that joins knowledge organisation, linguistic representation and information processing.

For pedagogy, however, a term cannot be treated as an isolated label. Cabré's communicative theory conceptualises terms as lexical units that acquire terminological value in specialised communicative situations (Cabré, 1999; Cabré Castellví, 2003). Their behaviour depends on discourse, participants, purposes and degrees of

specialisation. Temmerman's (2000) sociocognitive approach further challenges the assumption that every category can be captured by a rigid necessary-and-sufficient definition. Frame-based terminology likewise situates specialised units in structured conceptual relations and uses corpus evidence to recover their syntactic, semantic and pragmatic behaviour (Faber, 2012). Across these approaches, specialised knowledge is dynamic: categories may have prototypical structures, and terms circulate among researchers, practitioners, regulators and non-specialists.

Veterinary communication makes this circulation especially visible. The same professional may move between scientific internationalisms, species-specific vocabulary, regulatory terminology and ordinary words used with animal owners. A lexicographic resource must document equivalence; a pedagogical resource must decide which forms learners need first and what they need to do with them. The bilingual veterinary corpus used here originated in contrastive work on convergences and divergences between French and Romanian terminology (Barna, 2006). It also extends a longer pedagogical concern with the progressive teaching of agro-food terminology through disciplinary source texts and collaboration between language and subject specialists (Abraham-Barna & Abraham-Barna, 2013). The later curricular transformation changes the organising question. Instead of asking only, 'What is the Romanian equivalent of this French designation?', the coursebook asks which linguistic resources allow a learner to recognise, pronounce, inflect and use that designation in a laboratory, classroom, presentation or professional exchange.

This distinction separates terminological reference from terminological mediation. Reference provides access to a lexical or conceptual inventory. Mediation reorganises that inventory around a learner, a task and a transition. A term such as *membrană celulară* can be presented as the equivalent of French *membrane cellulaire*, but pedagogical mediation also connects it with gender, article use, plural forms, descriptive clauses and a communicative purpose such as comparing plant and animal cells. The term thereby enters a sequence linking conceptual recognition with linguistic action.

2.2 Cross-Linguistic Transparency and Plurilingual Transfer

Plurilingual competence is not the sum of several perfectly separated monolingual competences. It is a flexible repertoire in which knowledge of one language can support interpretation and action in another (Coste et al., 2009; Council of Europe, 2020). Piccardo (2013) argues for curriculum design that activates relationships among languages rather than suppressing them. In specialised education, this position is particularly relevant because scientific vocabulary already crosses linguistic borders through Latin and Greek roots, international nomenclatures, abbreviations and shared disciplinary genres.

Cross-linguistic similarity can facilitate initial comprehension, especially when learners perceive cognates and formally related words (Otwinowska, 2015; Ringbom, 2007). A French-speaking learner can readily associate *bactérie* with Romanian *bacterie*, while an English-speaking learner may recognise Romanian *pancreas* or *antibiogramă* through English *pancreas* and *antibiogram*. Such correspondences make existing knowledge visible and can accelerate lexical access. At the same time, formal distance is graded rather than categorical. Levenshtein-based research on European cognates demonstrates the usefulness of treating orthographic similarity as a continuum, while also distinguishing this computational relation from learner processing (Schepens et al., 2012).

The pedagogical value of similarity nevertheless depends on awareness. Formal resemblance may be overlooked, overgeneralised or mistaken for full equivalence. Otwinowska (2015) stresses that cognate recognition and activation require more than the existence of related forms, while Ringbom (2007) distinguishes the relative ease of receptive transfer from the more demanding process of productive learning. A learner may understand *proteină* when reading but still omit the final vowel, misplace the stress, avoid the required article or use an inappropriate phrase around it. Vocabulary learning therefore involves form, meaning and use, including collocation and grammatical behaviour (Nation, 2013).

In this article, *transparency* refers to observable formal overlap between designations after a declared normalisation procedure. It does not claim etymological cognacy, psycholinguistic recognition or semantic equivalence. This restriction is important because string resemblance is only one source of transfer. English *anthrax* and Romanian *antrax* provide a close formal bridge where French uses *fièvre charbonneuse*. Conversely, Romanian *boala limbii albastre*, French *fièvre catarrhale ovine* and English *bluetongue* refer to the same animal disease through substantially different lexicalisations. A genuinely plurilingual curriculum must therefore use whichever part of the learner's repertoire offers support while explicitly teaching the items for which no transparent bridge is available.

2.3 Academic socialisation, participation and identity

Academic discourse socialisation is a dynamic process through which newcomers learn the linguistic practices, genres, expectations and identities of academic communities (Duff, 2010). It cannot be reduced to grammatical accuracy. Learners observe models, receive feedback, adopt or negotiate conventions and gradually acquire the capacity to speak and write as participants in a field. Because academic discourse both represents disciplinary knowledge and constructs relations among participants, its conventions are inseparable from disciplinary communities and purposes (Hyland, 2009). Recurrent multiword expressions are especially

relevant: their distributions and functions vary by discipline, and control of them helps writers produce recognisably disciplinary texts (Hyland, 2008). Academic literacies research similarly treats reading and writing as situated practices shaped by institutional expectations, disciplinary cultures and relations of identity and power (Lea & Street, 1998).

The concept of legitimate peripheral participation helps explain why terminology can matter during this process. Newcomers enter communities of practice through partial but meaningful participation rather than waiting until they possess complete expertise (Lave & Wenger, 1991). An international veterinary student who can identify an anatomical structure, follow a laboratory instruction or ask a relevant question in Romanian is already participating, even if the utterance remains linguistically limited. Such participation can support an emerging sense of professional legitimacy.

Identity in language learning concerns the relationship between learners' investments, positions and imagined possibilities (Norton, 2013). A deficit-oriented curriculum may position an international student primarily as someone who does not know Romanian. A terminology-mediated curriculum can begin from a different premise: the learner already possesses conceptual and multilingual resources that can be recognised and extended. This repositioning does not eliminate the effort required to learn Romanian. It changes the starting identity from linguistic outsider to emerging disciplinary participant.

Belonging cannot be inferred from a list of cognates, and it is not measured in the present study. The materials can, however, construct pathways towards participation by allowing students to connect prior expertise with local academic practices. The relevant transition is thus simultaneously linguistic, disciplinary and cultural. Learners move from recognising familiar concepts to appropriating Romanian forms, from naming objects to carrying out procedures, and from reproducing phrases to contributing a professional or academic voice.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Educational Context and Source Materials

The study is situated in Romanian language education for international students in the life sciences. These learners may study veterinary medicine, agriculture, biology, food science, environmental protection or related subjects through Romanian, French or English. Romanian functions both as the language of the surrounding society and, to varying degrees, as a language of academic, laboratory and professional interaction. This combination creates a cultural as well as a linguistic transition, particularly for veterinary students who must negotiate classroom

conventions, practical work and contact with Romanian speakers alongside the demands of a professional degree (Barna, 2026c). The coursebook analysed here was designed for progression from CEFR A1 to B1 and is organised into six parts and 14 chapters (Barna, 2026a).

The first four chapters establish linguistic foundations through pronunciation, noun and article systems, laboratory verbs, numbers, measurements and units. Chapters 5-12 move through cell biology, genetics, human and veterinary anatomy, clinical veterinary communication, chemistry, biochemistry, ecology, biodiversity, international organisations and global health. Chapters 13 and 14 address scientific reading and writing, oral communication and professional contexts. Each chapter combines short contextualised texts, learning objectives, lexical tables, focused grammatical explanation and tasks. This architecture enables comparison between terminology used as a lexical entry and terminology embedded in a staged pedagogical sequence.

Three data sources were used. First, the published French-Romanian veterinary dictionary provided the reference corpus (Barna, 2022). Its pages contain French and Romanian designations together with grammatical categories. Second, the 28 bilingual lexical tables in the 14-chapter coursebook provided the pedagogical corpus (Barna, 2026a). Third, an author-curated French-English-Romanian working lexicon provided a smaller trilingual comparison (Barna, 2026b). This file contained 409 French-English records, of which 103 also contained a Romanian designation. No missing Romanian equivalents were inferred or automatically translated; only complete triplets were analysed.

Table 1 keeps these resources analytically distinct. The dictionary represents terminological range, the coursebook records pedagogical selection and recycling, and the working lexicon tests whether French and English offer the same formal route into Romanian. Their counts should therefore not be pooled: each component answers a different part of the research questions.

Table 1. Composition and analytical role of the documentary corpus

Component	Language configuration	Analytical units	Role in the study
Veterinary dictionary	French-Romanian	1,378 bilingual entries	Reference inventory and grammatical description
Life-sciences coursebook	Romanian-French, with Latin roots or notes where relevant	698 pedagogical occurrences; 373 distinct pairs; 370 Romanian types	Selection, recycling and recontextualisation across 14 chapters

Component	Language configuration	Analytical units	Role in the study
Working lexicon	French-English-Romanian	103 complete triplets; 85 lexical triplets after separating 18 symbols or regulatory forms	Comparison of French and English bridging potential

Note. Counts refer to records with both required designations present. The documentary corpus contains no learner-produced or personal data.

The asymmetry in scale is methodologically useful rather than accidental. Corpus design is governed by fitness for purpose, and specialised pedagogical corpora may be comparatively small when their provenance, units of analysis and interpretive function are explicit (Bowker & Pearson, 2002; McEnery & Hardie, 2012). Here, the large bilingual inventory establishes the reference profile, whereas the smaller coursebook and trilingual components reveal selection, sequencing and alternative bridging potential.

3.2 Corpus Preparation

The dictionary tables were extracted and checked for the presence of French designation, French grammatical category, Romanian designation and Romanian grammatical category. This yielded 1,378 complete bilingual records. The coursebook was processed by following the document order, recording the current chapter heading and extracting the Romanian and French columns from all lexical tables containing at least 20 rows. The resulting pedagogical corpus comprised 698 occurrences. Deduplication by normalised Romanian-French pair produced 373 distinct pairs and 370 distinct Romanian types. The difference between pair and type counts reflects a small number of Romanian forms linked to more than one French rendering.

Occurrences and types were both retained because they answer different questions. Type counts represent lexical range, whereas occurrence counts show pedagogical recycling. Of the 373 distinct coursebook pairs, 266 occurred more than once and 107 occurred once. The mean was 1.87 occurrences per pair, with repeated anchors including *proteină*, *celulă*, *specie*, *vaccin*, *bacterie* and *microscop*. Repetition was interpreted as curricular salience rather than corpus noise. This interpretation is modest: repeated encounters can support the development of several dimensions of word knowledge, but frequency alone does not demonstrate learning (Webb, 2007).

For the trilingual comparison, the 103 complete records were separated into 18 standardised symbols, abbreviations or regulatory forms and 85 lexical triplets.

Items such as PCR, ELISA, UHT and numbered EU regulations are important components of specialised communication, but their formal identity is produced by standardisation rather than ordinary lexical transfer. Reporting them separately prevented them from artificially inflating estimates of cross-linguistic similarity.

3.3 Formal-Overlap Coding and Qualitative Analysis

The quantitative stage used normalised Levenshtein similarity, derived from edit distance (Levenshtein, 1966) and used in cross-linguistic research to model graded formal proximity (Schepens et al., 2012). Each designation was converted to lower case; diacritics were removed for the similarity calculation; parenthetical clarifications were omitted; punctuation was converted to spaces; and repeated spaces were collapsed. Similarity was calculated as one minus the Levenshtein distance divided by the length of the longer normalised string. The score therefore ranged from 0, indicating no character overlap under this procedure, to 1, indicating formal identity.

Three descriptive bands were established before interpretation: high overlap at 0.75 or above, partial overlap from 0.50 to 0.7499, and low overlap below 0.50. These thresholds are analytical heuristics. They do not classify etymological cognates and should not be read as measured probabilities of learner recognition. Multiword order, grammatical markers and translation choices can reduce a score even when parts of a phrase are related. This sensitivity is useful for the present purpose because the study investigates the transition from isolated terms to grammatically and pragmatically complete expressions.

For the 85 non-symbolic trilingual records, five bridge patterns were coded: high convergence across Romanian, French and English; a French bridge, where Romanian-French overlap was high but Romanian-English overlap was not; an English bridge with the reverse pattern; a partial bridge, where at least one comparison reached 0.50 but neither reached 0.75; and low formal overlap in both comparisons.

Quantitative distributions were followed by qualitative examination of representative items, chapter functions and recurrent linguistic demands. The analysis considered diacritics, multiword structure, gender and article behaviour, verbal action, academic phraseology and interactional formulae. The 14 chapters were also grouped into three curricular phases: linguistic foundations (Chapters 1-4), disciplinary sciences (Chapters 5-12), and academic or professional participation (Chapters 13-14). All percentages are descriptive and rounded to one decimal place. Because the materials contain no human participants or personal data, institutional ethics approval was not required for this documentary analysis.

4. Results

4.1 From Lexicographic Inventory to Pedagogical Selection

The dictionary and coursebook are not simply long and short versions of the same list. The dictionary contained 1,378 French-Romanian entries, while the coursebook contained 373 distinct pairs. Only 66 coursebook pairs appeared in exactly the same normalised French-Romanian form in the dictionary, representing 17.7% of the coursebook inventory. Sixty-nine coursebook pairs shared the French designation with a dictionary entry and 71 shared the Romanian designation. Consequently, 307 coursebook pairs were not exact reproductions of dictionary pairs.

This limited overlap reflects a functional transition. The dictionary is centred on veterinary terminology and records a wide range of clinical, pathological, anatomical and technical designations. The coursebook extends beyond veterinary reference to the foundational language of laboratory work, measurements, cell biology, genetics, environmental science, academic writing and oral interaction. It also reorganises terms according to what learners must do at successive CEFR levels. A lexicographic resource can include *vaccin*, *vaisseau* or *zoonose* as alphabetically retrievable entries. A pedagogical resource must connect *vaccin* with species, procedures and public-health contexts; distinguish *vas* from related anatomical structures; and place *zoonoză* in explanatory and institutional discourse.

The coursebook also uses repetition strategically. Whereas the dictionary records each French-Romanian pair once, 266 of the 373 coursebook pairs recur. *Proteină* appears eight times, *specie* six times, *celulă* six times and *vaccin* five times in the extracted lexical tables. Repetition connects foundational chapters with increasingly specialised contexts. The learner first encounters *celulă* as a recognisable scientific word and later meets it in phrases such as *membrană celulară*, *respirație celulară*, *celulă procariotă* and *celulă eucariotă*. These encounters cannot be taken as evidence of acquisition without learner data; they do show how the curriculum distributes opportunities to enrich form, meaning and use (Webb, 2007). The transition is therefore not merely from fewer to more terms, but from an isolated designation to a network of conceptual and phraseological relations.

4.2 Transparency across the Dictionary and Coursebook

The dictionary contained a substantial transparent core. Of its 1,378 entries, 687 (49.9%) showed high Romanian-French formal overlap, 406 (29.5%) partial overlap and 285 (20.7%) low overlap. Examples of high overlap include *vaccin*/*vaccin*, *virus*/*virus*, *acidoză*/*acidose* and *adenom*/*adénome*. Low-overlap cases often involved ordinary-language or species-specific designations, such as French *vache* and Romanian *vacă*, or lexical choices without a visible shared root.

The coursebook's 373 distinct pairs displayed a more balanced distribution: 140 (37.5%) high, 111 (29.8%) partial and 122 (32.7%) low. At occurrence level, however, high-overlap items accounted for 289 of 698 occurrences (41.4%), partial items for 211 (30.2%) and low-overlap items for 198 (28.4%). Figure 1 makes the comparison on a common 100% scale; the counts printed within the segments preserve the different denominators. The distinction between distinct pairs and occurrences is essential. Distinct pairs describe the breadth of the teaching inventory, whereas occurrences show the exposure created by recycling.

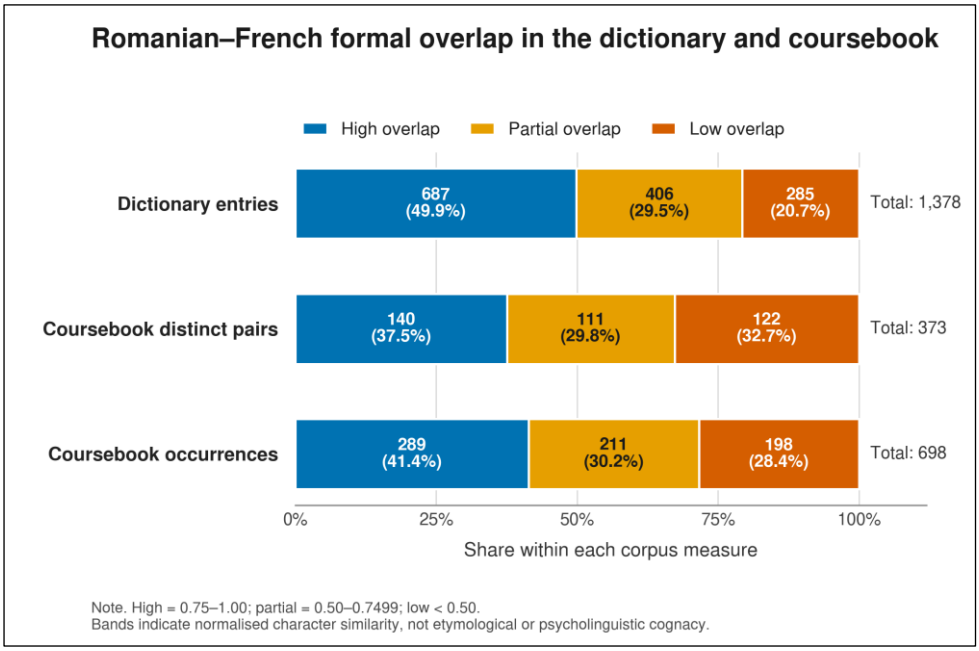

Figure 1. Romanian-French formal overlap in the dictionary and coursebook.

The first bar shows that almost half of the reference dictionary occupies the high-overlap band. In the coursebook, that share falls by 12.4 percentage points when distinct pairs are counted, and the low-overlap share rises by 12.0 points. Yet the occurrence bar shifts back towards transparency: high-overlap items constitute 41.4% of all appearances, compared with 37.5% of distinct pairs. This four-point difference is consistent with the deliberate recycling of a recognisable scientific core. By contrast, the partial band remains strikingly stable at roughly 30% in all three measures. Figure 1 therefore captures two simultaneous curricular decisions: transparent items are revisited, while the lexical range expands to include formally distant action words and academic expressions.

The pattern complicates any claim that specialised language is uniformly transparent. Scientific nouns provide many entry points, but a usable curriculum cannot consist only of them. Chapter 2, which focuses on nouns, gender and article, contains 76.0% high-overlap occurrences. Forms such as *membrană/membrane*, *mitocondrie/mitochondrie*, *organism/organisme* and *substanță/substance* offer immediate lexical support. Chapter 3, devoted to laboratory verbs, contains no item in the high band: *a observa/observer* and *a prepara/préparer* are only partially similar after the Romanian infinitive marker is included, while *a amesteca/mélanger*, *a adăuga/ajouter*, *a pune/mettre* and *a încălzi/chauffer* show low overlap. Naming a laboratory object may therefore be transparent even when acting upon it is not. The bands in Figure 1 remain descriptions of normalised character similarity-not evidence of etymological cognacy or of learner recognition.

4.3 Curricular Progression from Recognition to Participation

Grouping the chapters into curricular phases reveals a clearer transition. In Chapters 1-4, 47.5% of occurrences showed high overlap, 26.8% partial overlap and 25.8% low overlap. Chapters 5-12 retained almost the same proportion of high-overlap items (47.2%) while increasing partial overlap to 35.0% and reducing low overlap to 17.8%. This disciplinary phase builds on international scientific vocabulary while expanding multiword concepts and domain-specific distinctions.

The final phase changes the profile sharply. In Chapters 13 and 14, only 6.0% of occurrences reached the high band, while 76.0% fell into the low band. The change does not indicate that academic communication is conceptually less international. Rather, complete rhetorical and interactional sequences are formally less transferable than individual terms. Romanian *metodologie* and French *méthodologie* are highly similar, but Romanian *studiul de față* and French *la présente étude* are not. Likewise, *rezultate/résultats* is transparent, whereas *Rezultatele principale arată că...* and *Les résultats principaux montrent que...* require knowledge of inflection, syntax and phraseology.

Table 2 tests whether that noun-verb contrast persists across the wider curricular architecture. By calculating percentages within each phase, it compares phases of unequal size without allowing the 400 occurrences in Chapters 5-12 to dominate the profile.

Table 2. Formal-overlap profile across the three curricular phases

Curricular phase	Chapters	High overlap	Partial overlap	Low overlap	Occurrences
Linguistic foundations	1-4	94 (47.5%)	53 (26.8%)	51 (25.8%)	198

Curricular phase	Chapters	High overlap	Partial overlap	Low overlap	Occurrences
Disciplinary sciences	5-12	189 (47.2%)	140 (35.0%)	71 (17.8%)	400
Academic and professional participation	13-14	6 (6.0%)	18 (18.0%)	76 (76.0%)	100

Note. Percentages are calculated within each curricular phase.

The table reveals continuity before rupture. High-overlap items remain virtually unchanged between the linguistic foundations (47.5%) and disciplinary sciences (47.2%); the disciplinary phase is therefore not a departure from transparency but an elaboration of it through more partial forms and multiword distinctions. The decisive change occurs in the final 100 occurrences: the high band contracts to 6.0%, while the low band reaches 76.0%. Because these are within-phase proportions, the result cannot be attributed simply to the smaller size of the final phase.

Chapter 13 illustrates an intermediate transition. Section labels and research nouns retain visible international structure: *metodologie/méthodologie*, *rezultate/résultats*, *concluzii/conclusions* and *obiectiv/objectif*. However, the chapter also introduces hedging, evidence and citation sequences such as *studiile sugerează că*, *conform datelor*, *s-a demonstrat că*, *prin urmare* and *sunt necesare cercetări viitoare*. These units cannot be produced by recognising a shared root. They require control of clause structure, impersonal constructions and discourse relations.

Chapter 14 completes this movement by presenting formulae for oral academic and professional participation: *Astăzi vă prezint...*, *Aș dori să întreb...*, *Dacă am înțeles bine...*, *Vă mulțumesc pentru atenție* and *Este important de menționat că...*. Ninety-six per cent of its extracted occurrences fell into the low-overlap band and none reached the high band. The chapter therefore functions as a useful counterweight to the transparency hypothesis. The learner's scientific knowledge may support the content of a presentation, but interactional agency depends on phrases that must be learned as Romanian communicative resources.

4.4 French and English as Complementary Bridges

The 85 non-symbolic trilingual records show that French and English do not provide identical support. Mean Romanian-French similarity was 0.630, compared with 0.401 for Romanian-English; the respective medians were 0.714 and 0.250. Forty records (47.1%) showed high Romanian-French overlap, while 18 (21.2%) showed high Romanian-English overlap. These values reflect the Romance relationship between

Romanian and French and the selection of veterinary and life-sciences items in the working lexicon. They should not be generalised to entire languages or learner populations.

Bridge-pattern coding identified 25 French-bridge items (29.4%), 15 high-convergence items (17.6%), three English-bridge items (3.5%), 26 partial bridges (30.6%) and 16 low-overlap items (18.8%). French-bridge examples include *vaccin polyvalent/multivalent vaccine/vaccin polivalent*, *indice de prolificité/prolificacy index/indice de prolificitate* and *comportement stéréotypé/stereotypic behaviour/comportament stereotip*. In these cases, French and Romanian share an order and visible morphology that English does not.

English can nevertheless offer the stronger route for particular concepts. French *fièvre charbonneuse*, English *anthrax* and Romanian *antrax* form an English bridge. The same is true of French *ponction abdominale*, English *abdominocentesis* and Romanian *abdominocenteză*. High convergence occurs with items such as French *pancréas*, English *pancreas* and Romanian *pancreas*, or *antibiogramme/antibiogram/antibiogramă*. Low-overlap triplets include *croquettes/kibble/hrană uscată* and *fièvre catarrhale ovine/bluetongue/boala limbii albastre*.

Table 3 separates five patterns that would be obscured by the mean similarity scores alone. It asks not only which language is closer to Romanian on average, but also where either language provides a distinctly stronger bridge and where neither does.

Table 3. Bridge patterns in the 85 non-symbolic trilingual records

Bridge pattern	Definition	n	%
High convergence	Romanian reaches high overlap with both French and English	15	17.6
French bridge	High Romanian-French overlap only	25	29.4
English bridge	High Romanian-English overlap only	3	3.5
Partial bridge	At least one comparison is partial, neither is high	26	30.6
Low formal overlap	Both comparisons are below 0.50	16	18.8

Note. Eighteen standardised symbols, abbreviations or regulatory forms were analysed separately and are not included in this table.

The largest category is not the French bridge but the partial bridge (30.6%), followed closely by French-only high overlap (29.4%). High convergence across all three languages accounts for a further 17.6%. Conversely, the three English-bridge

cases are few but analytically important: they demonstrate why an individual learner's full repertoire is more useful than a fixed mediating-language hierarchy. The 16 low-overlap records identify the concepts for which form-based transfer offers little assistance and direct teaching carries the greater burden.

These results support a repertoire-based pedagogy. French should not be treated as the exclusive mediating language simply because it offers more frequent formal proximity in this corpus. English, Latin nomenclature and standardised scientific forms provide complementary access. The instructional task is to make learners aware of the strongest available bridge for a given concept and then direct attention to the Romanian form required for local communication.

4.5 The Limits of Transparency: Diacritics, Morphology and Phraseology

Formal accessibility coexists with systematic linguistic demands. Romanian diacritics occurred in 634 of the 1,378 dictionary entries (46.0%) and in 158 of the 370 distinct Romanian coursebook types (42.7%). The similarity procedure removed diacritics in order to compare forms, but learners cannot remove them in actual communication. The contrast between *s* and *ș*, *t* and *ț*, or *a* and *ă* affects spelling and pronunciation. Forms such as *știință*, *țesut*, *eprubetă*, *soluție* and *protecție* demonstrate why visual familiarity must be followed by explicit orthographic and phonological work.

Grammatical appropriation poses a second limit. Romanian terms enter a system of masculine, feminine and neuter gender, plural morphology, agreement and postposed definite articles. Recognising *proteină* through French *protéine* does not automatically provide *o proteină*, *proteina*, *proteine* or *proteinele*. Similarly, *celulă* must be integrated into patterns such as *o celulă*, *celula*, *celule* and *celulele*. The coursebook responds by placing transparent terms inside the noun and article system rather than presenting cognates as already learned.

Multiword structure provides a third limit and, simultaneously, evidence of pedagogical recontextualisation. Multiword Romanian designations represented 24.9% of dictionary entries but 41.6% of distinct coursebook types. The denominators are not identical, so the figures should be compared cautiously; nevertheless, the difference is consistent with the coursebook's communicative purpose. It moves from single labels towards phrases such as *membrană celulară*, *respirație celulară*, *analiză statistică*, *dezvoltare durabilă* and *rezultate semnificative*. At the final stage, the unit of learning becomes a clause or interactional sequence rather than a term.

The evidence therefore supports a qualified account of transparency. Shared scientific forms reduce the cost of entry and provide conceptual anchors. They do not remove the need to acquire the Romanian linguistic system, action vocabulary or discourse conventions. A pedagogy that stops at recognition would leave learners able

to identify technical nouns but unable to follow instructions, manage an interaction or formulate a disciplinary claim.

5. Discussion

5.1 A Four-Stage Model of Terminology-Mediated Transition

Taken together, the three empirical results establish a coherent progression. Figure 1 shows that the coursebook retains and recycles a transparent lexical core; Table 2 shows that this core remains available through the disciplinary phase but recedes when full academic and professional utterances become the unit of teaching; and Table 3 shows that learners may reach Romanian through different parts of their multilingual repertoire. These findings support the four-stage model in Figure 2.

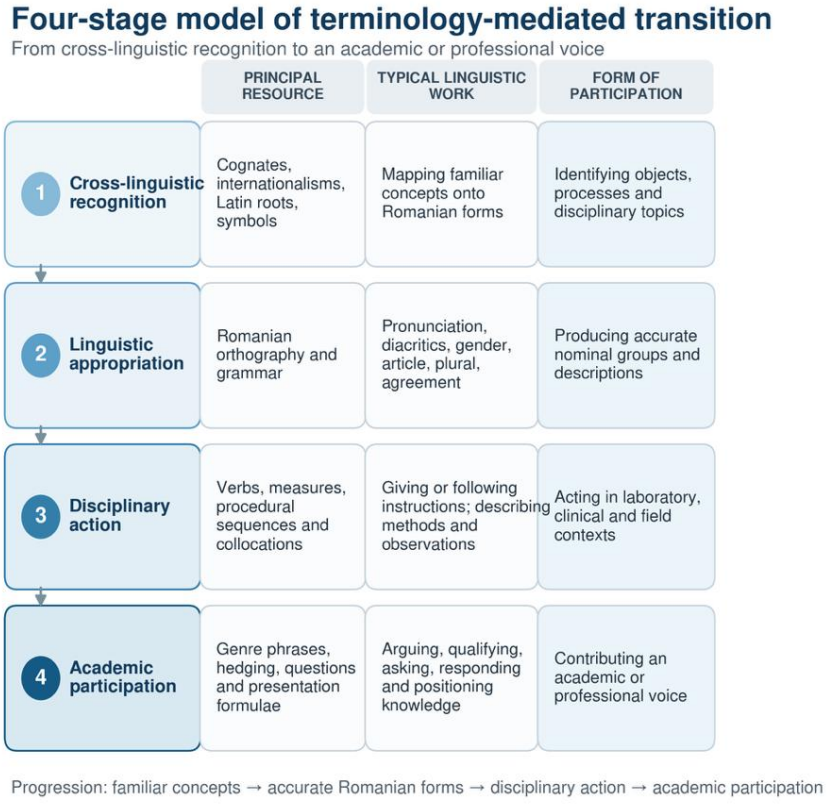

Figure 2. Four-stage model of terminology-mediated transition

Figure 2 should be read from left to right within each stage and cumulatively from top to bottom. The horizontal relation connects a linguistic resource with the

work required to make it usable and with the participation that it affords. The vertical arrows indicate development, but not a fixed proficiency ladder. Learners may return to pronunciation when meeting a new term, draw on cognates during advanced reading or require interactional formulae early in a clinical encounter. The model identifies a shift in the principal pedagogical burden rather than four sealed levels.

Stage 1 activates the learner's existing repertoire. The high-overlap scientific core allows rapid recognition and signals that the new language is not entirely unfamiliar. This stage has motivational as well as cognitive value because it validates knowledge already acquired through French, English, Latin or prior disciplinary study. In the coursebook, the repeated presence of *proteină*, *celulă*, *bacterie* and *microscop* creates stable anchors across chapters. These repetitions provide opportunities for enriched encounters, although their effect on learning remains an empirical question (Webb, 2007).

Stage 2 converts familiarity into ownership of Romanian form. Learners attend to pronunciation, diacritics, gender, article placement, plural and agreement. This is the stage at which apparently small differences become professionally consequential. Writing *stiinta* instead of *știința* or recognising *membrană* without being able to form *membrana celulară* reveals the gap between approximate comprehension and responsible academic production. Explicit contrast remains useful, but Romanian grammar becomes the organising system.

Stage 3 links terms with action. The shift observed in the laboratory-verb chapter shows that procedural language is less transparent than the noun inventory. Learners need *a măsura*, *a amesteca*, *a adăuga*, *a eticheta*, *a depozita* and *a încălzi* in order to participate in practical activities. Measures, imperatives, passives and sequence markers allow them to interpret and produce protocols. Terminology here becomes phraseology: knowledge of an object is joined to what can be done with it, under what conditions and with what result.

Stage 4 concerns academic and professional voice. The steep rise in low-overlap units in Chapters 13 and 14 is not a pedagogical weakness; it is evidence that the curriculum has moved beyond lexical access. Learners must introduce a topic, formulate an objective, report a result, acknowledge a limitation, ask for clarification and respond to questions. These functions position them as interlocutors. They can no longer rely mainly on shared roots because participation is carried by grammar, stance and interactional convention. The emphasis on recurrent phrases is consistent with evidence that lexical bundles help constitute disciplinary discourse rather than merely decorating it (Hyland, 2008).

The model reframes terminology as curriculum-generating rather than supplementary. Instead of adding a glossary after a general-language syllabus, instructors can begin with conceptually central terms, identify their transparent and

opaque features, attach the grammar required to use them, and extend them into disciplinary actions and genres. This sequence consolidates the corpus findings: Figure 1 supplies the recognisable entry points, Table 2 locates the curricular shift towards phraseology, Table 3 keeps mediation plurilingual, and Figure 2 converts those relations into a teachable architecture. The movement is from term to phrase, from phrase to action and from action to voice.

5.2 Transition, Cultural Encounter and Emerging Professional Identity

The encounter represented in these materials is philological because it concerns relations among language forms, conceptual histories and disciplinary designations. It is also cultural because language shapes how learners enter local practices. Romanian becomes more than the surrounding vernacular when it is used to address a laboratory technician, interpret an institutional instruction, discuss animal health with a local owner or present findings to Romanian colleagues. Each act connects the international student's prior academic trajectory with a new community. This interpretation also situates the present corpus analysis within the author's wider account of Romanian teaching for international veterinary students as negotiation between academic cultures rather than the delivery of decontextualised language forms (Barna, 2026c).

Terminological transparency can soften this encounter by making continuity visible. A student who recognises *mitocondrie*, *ecosistem* or *antibiogramă* discovers that disciplinary knowledge travels across languages. This continuity can counter the experience of being reduced to a beginner. The learner remains a knowledgeable student of the life sciences while becoming a novice user of Romanian. Such a position is compatible with Norton's (2013) account of identity as negotiated through investment and access to valued practices.

At the same time, the low-overlap material prevents an idealised narrative of effortless Romance-language transfer. Words such as *câine*, *pisică*, *țesut* and *știință*, verbs such as *a pune* and *a încălzi*, and expressions such as *Dacă am înțeles bine...* must be acquired on Romanian terms. This opacity is not a barrier to cultural encounter but part of it. Learners meet ways of categorising, addressing and positioning that cannot be derived automatically from French or English.

Academic belonging should consequently be understood as a possible outcome of participation, not as a direct effect of lexical resemblance. The documentary corpus can show that the curriculum offers opportunities to recognise, appropriate, act and speak. It cannot demonstrate how individual students experience these opportunities. That question requires learner narratives, classroom observation or longitudinal

evidence. The present analysis provides the linguistic and curricular model on which such empirical work can build.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

Five implications follow from the results. First, terminological selection should combine conceptual centrality with a transparency profile. Highly transparent terms can provide early momentum, but opaque everyday words and action verbs should not be postponed simply because they require more teaching. Figure 1 and the noun-verb contrast show why a balanced syllabus must include both.

Second, cognate awareness should be taught explicitly. Learners can compare Romanian, French, English and Latin forms, identify recurring correspondences and decide which language offers the strongest bridge. Table 3 demonstrates that this bridge is item-specific: French predominates, but English and shared international forms remain useful, while almost one fifth of the lexical triplets offer little form-based support. Such comparison should therefore mark cases where the bridge is weak or misleading. A multilingual table is pedagogically useful only when it directs attention rather than inviting passive recognition.

Third, each central term should be linked to a grammatical and phraseological frame. For a noun, this may include gender, definite and indefinite forms, plural, adjective agreement and a recurrent collocation. For a verb, it may include the infinitive, imperative, passive or impersonal construction used in a protocol. This approach prevents specialised vocabulary and grammar from becoming separate curricular tracks.

Fourth, disciplinary action should enter the curriculum early. Learners need to measure, mix, label, observe, compare and report. Task sequences can begin with receptive recognition and move towards the production of short instructions, laboratory notes, case descriptions and explanations. The transition from *reactiv* to *a adăuga reactivul* is pedagogically more significant than learning another isolated noun.

Fifth, academic formulae should be treated as essential specialised language. Table 2 shows that the move into academic and professional participation is precisely where transparent forms become least sufficient. Phrases for presenting objectives, qualifying claims, acknowledging limitations and asking questions enable learners to participate in seminars and professional exchanges; their patterned and disciplinary nature warrants explicit attention (Hyland, 2008, 2009). They also support intercultural communication because they make local interactional expectations visible. Terminology-based pedagogy reaches its purpose when students can use disciplinary concepts to enter a conversation, not merely translate a list.

6. Limitations, Reflexivity and Data Availability

The study has several limitations. Normalised edit similarity measures formal resemblance, not etymology, semantic equivalence, pronunciation or actual learner recognition. The thresholds were selected for descriptive comparison and require psycholinguistic validation before they can be interpreted as learning difficulty. Multiword translations may receive low scores because of word order and grammatical expansion even when individual elements are related.

The coursebook is oriented primarily towards francophone learners, and the trilingual analysis was restricted to 103 complete records. The remaining 306 French-English records lacked a Romanian field and were not imputed. The English-bridge findings are therefore exploratory. In addition, the three resources were produced or curated by the same author. This continuity makes it possible to trace the transformation of an established research programme, but it also creates a reflexive limitation: selection and interpretation are not independent of the pedagogical model being examined.

No learner texts, assessments or interviews were included. The findings concern documentary affordances and curricular architecture rather than learning gains, identity change or experienced belonging. Future research should test the four-stage model with learners from different linguistic backgrounds and should examine whether explicit awareness of transparency improves accurate production and participation over time.

The published dictionary is openly accessible through the publisher's catalogue. The coursebook is identifiable through its e-ISBN, and the author-curated trilingual dataset and derived coding can be made available by the author for scholarly verification, subject to final editorial preparation.

Declaration on AI-assisted Editorial Support

Generative AI tools: ChatGPT and Jenni AI were used to assist with language editing, quantitative coding scripts and manuscript formatting. The author reviewed and verified all data, interpretations, citations and wording and assumes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

7. Conclusion

This study has examined terminology in transition across three related documentary resources: a bilingual veterinary dictionary, a Romanian-for-life-sciences coursebook and a smaller trilingual working lexicon. The analysis shows that the pedagogical resource does not merely reduce the lexicographic inventory. It selects, broadens, repeats and recontextualises terminology according to a progression from

linguistic foundations to disciplinary science and finally to academic and professional participation.

The results confirm the importance of cross-linguistic transparency while defining its limits. Almost half of the dictionary entries showed high Romanian-French formal overlap, and transparent items remained prominent through the disciplinary chapters. French provided the strongest formal bridge in the trilingual subset, while English offered complementary access for particular concepts. Yet the academic and professional chapters were dominated by low-overlap phrases. The closer the curriculum moved to action, stance and interaction, the less learners could depend on isolated cognates.

The four-stage model proposed here-cross-linguistic recognition, linguistic appropriation, disciplinary action and academic participation-captures this movement. It positions terminology as a starting architecture for specialised language education rather than an appendix to it. Shared scientific forms allow students to approach Romanian through knowledge they already possess. Orthography and grammar turn recognition into accurate Romanian expression. Verbs and collocations enable practical action. Genre and interactional formulae allow learners to contribute a disciplinary voice.

This transition also has an identity dimension. International students need not suspend their existing scientific identities while learning the local language. A plurilingual pedagogy can acknowledge them as emerging professionals whose conceptual resources already cross linguistic boundaries. At the same time, meaningful participation requires engagement with the distinctive forms and conventions of Romanian. Terminology becomes a cultural mediator precisely because it joins continuity with difference: it reveals what languages share, makes visible what must still be learned, and provides a route from linguistic outsiderhood towards situated academic participation.

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From Cultural Encounters to Professionalization: Identity and Mediation in Medical Interpretation

Elena Laura VULPOIU

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *Globalization drives medical progress through research and cooperation, but it also exacerbates economic inequalities and the shortage of healthcare personnel, as many specialists migrate to economically developed regions. This demographic shift brings patients from diverse backgrounds and countries into healthcare systems, creating language barriers and cultural differences that require the involvement of cultural mediators to prevent fatal medical errors. Thus, a translator in this field needs not only linguistic knowledge but also cultural knowledge, given that in many cases cultural differences can lead to misinterpretations.*

Keywords: globalization, health, patients, culture, mediator/translator

1. Introduction

The impact of globalization and digitization on the healthcare sector is twofold and deeply complex, as this phenomenon has facilitated significant advances in scientific research, accelerated the global exchange of medical expertise, and strengthened international cooperation among relevant organizations.

On the other hand, however, globalization has exacerbated preexisting economic and social inequalities. This imbalance limits equitable access to innovative treatments, essential pharmaceutical resources, and medical specialists for a large portion of the population.

Furthermore, in parallel with the migration of medical personnel, the process of globalization has catalyzed massive migration flows of the general population from regions with low levels of economic development to countries that offer superior labor market opportunities and a high standard of living. Although the initial intention of many migrants was temporary relocation, strictly motivated by immediate financial prospects or the desire to accumulate capital, the contemporary sociological reality indicates a clear trend toward permanent settlement. This is manifested through the

formation of new families, the integration of children into local education systems, or the reunification of existing families in their adopted countries.

However, as migrant communities grow, public hospitals and clinics face a new reality: managing a patient population characterized by great cultural and linguistic diversity.

Effective communication is the first step toward safe, high-quality healthcare. In current medical practice, where terminological precision is of vital importance, any error in semantic interpretation or any subtle misunderstanding can have severe or even fatal consequences for the patient.

Foreign patients who do not have sufficient knowledge of the host country's language often go through traumatic experiences within the healthcare system. The difficulties begin as early as the triage or scheduling phase and intensify during the medical history interview. A patient who cannot accurately describe the location, intensity, nature, or history of pain drastically limits the physician's ability to make a correct differential diagnosis. Furthermore, language barriers prevent the collection of a complete medical history, including crucial information about drug allergies, hereditary conditions, or previous treatments.

Furthermore, medical language employs highly specialized and abstract terminology. Its complexity can hinder the understanding of clinical concepts even among native speakers who lack specialized training. For a foreign national, terms such as "insufficiency," "malignancy," "metastasis," or the complex regimens for administering cancer or cardiac treatments become completely incomprehensible. This profound information asymmetry generates anxiety, distrust of the medical profession, and an acute sense of social alienation.

Thus, specialized studies show that patients with limited language skills are at a much higher risk of suffering from medication errors, misdiagnoses, or delays in receiving appropriate treatment. The lack of clear communication frequently leads to non-compliance with treatment regimens, as patients do not understand how, when, and for how long they should take their prescribed medications. Furthermore, these patients are more prone to repeated hospitalizations and excessive use of emergency services, to the detriment of preventive medicine.

A common but extremely dangerous practice in hospitals is the use of family members (often minor children) or unqualified administrative staff as ad hoc interpreters. Although well-intentioned, these individuals are unfamiliar with medical terminology and tend to omit, alter, or censor clinical information for cultural reasons or out of a desire to shield their relative from a grim diagnosis. This informal approach violates medical confidentiality and increases the likelihood of serious medical errors.

In this globalized healthcare landscape, an urgent and imperative need has emerged to professionally integrate translators, medical interpreters, and cultural mediators into multidisciplinary hospital teams. These specialists do not merely

translate words from one language to another; rather, they serve as true epistemic and cultural bridges between the Western world of scientific medicine and the foreign patient's belief system.

Thus, professional medical interpreting requires dual competencies: an impeccable command of clinical jargon and a deep sensitivity to cultural nuances. Certain cultures express physical or psychological suffering through specific metaphors, which, when translated literally, completely lose their clinically relevant meaning. Therefore, the cultural mediator's role is to decode these messages and ensure a climate of psychological safety. Only by systematically recognizing and addressing language barriers can patient safety be guaranteed, medical malpractice reduced, and clinical performance indicators optimized.

2. Theories of Translation in the Medical Field

The healthcare environment is subject to a complex and ongoing process of communication, interaction, and dialogue among various sectors-such as laboratories, hospitals, and patients-where participants from diverse backgrounds and cultures collaborate toward different goals. At the same time, it is one of the fields undergoing rapid and continuous evolution, driven by new discoveries-both technological and medical-and, by extension, linguistic ones.

On the other hand, every human being acquires knowledge throughout their life, primarily through symbols. This knowledge and these symbols influence our methods of communication and are what create culture and diversity, as Friedman (2011) states:

> *The conception of human beings as most fundamentally "symbolic animals" interposing systems of signs or systems of expression between themselves and the world then becomes the guiding philosophical motif for elucidating the corresponding conditions of possibility for the "fact of culture" in all of its richness and diversity.*

The circulation of scientific information occurs primarily through translation, a process that can result in distortions caused by linguistic and cultural particularities, as well as an expansion of the body of knowledge through the diversification of analytical perspectives. In this context, the "mediation" paradigm is considered superior to that of simple transposition, as it recognizes the active role of the translator, who, through their subjective intervention and the infusion of their own expertise, reconfigures the source text. This view is supported by Linell (2009), who emphasizes the cognitive and transformative involvement of the mediator in the act of knowledge transfer:

> *Our understandings of the world come to us in a necessarily mediated form, never "immediately," at least not in an absolute sense of being entirely unaffected by the capacities and limitations of the cognising subject. It seems reasonable to distinguish between basically three or four (interrelated) types of mediation. Note, however, that we take "mediation" to mean co-constitutive mediation, that is the mediating means (resources, apparatuses) are not merely "neutral" vehicles for supporting the interaction (or causal relation) between some pre-existing entities, such as objects in the world and mental concepts.*

Recontextualizing and reformulating medicine and health leads us to analyze culture in two different, though often complementary, ways. On the one hand, culture is understood as a set of values, beliefs, and customs shared by a specific national, ethnic, or linguistic group; on the other hand, it is necessary to view culture through the lens of the same values mentioned above, but shared by communities with well-defined areas of expertise, such as healthcare professionals, patients, and researchers, within the same national, ethnic, or linguistic group. Thus, the translation process is influenced by several needs, according to Montalt-Resurrecció & González Davies (2007):

> *It is a process of recontextualisation and reformulation of specialised terms aiming at making the concepts they designate relevant to and understandable by a lay audience. This process is motivated by specific cognitive, social and communicative needs, and takes place as part of a broader process of recontextualisation and reformulation of discourse.*

The role of the translator-mediator in the medical field goes beyond simple language translation, serving as a vital bridge for ensuring human rights. In the context of global migration, language barriers can block access to essential medical services. This phenomenon transforms the communication specialist into a guardian of equity and patient safety. Managing medical terminology within the European context adds a high level of complexity to this profession. Healthcare systems use a vast network of synonyms, clinical jargon, and regionalisms. Their literal translation is often impossible or dangerous. The mediator must accurately decode cultural and scientific nuances to prevent errors in diagnosis or treatment. A minor misunderstanding can have fatal consequences, which imposes an immense ethical responsibility. In addition to linguistic competence, these professionals serve as active agents of social inclusion. In marginalized communities, reluctance or fear of accessing the healthcare system is exacerbated by functional illiteracy or distrust of authorities. The translator-mediator mitigates these vulnerabilities. Through empathy and a deep understanding of the social context, they combat exclusion and facilitate the integration of disadvantaged individuals. The language mediator does not merely translate words, but translates cultures and vulnerabilities. Their presence in hospitals transforms the medical

process from a rigid bureaucratic procedure into an accessible, humane, and universally available service.

However, within this cultural, social, and linguistic context, other questions arise: *Is a translator merely a translator, or is he or she also a mediator? Can a translator be bilingual, or does he or she need specific training to perform this work?*

To clarify these uncertainties, it is imperative that we analyze the theories and experiments that define the distinction between bilingual and professional competence. On the one hand, Harris and Sherwood (1978) support the hypothesis that translation is an innate process, identifying an affinity for translation, a vast memory, and mastery of lexicology as its essential pillars. In contrast, Gile (1997) demonstrates that this process requires a much broader spectrum of qualities and knowledge. His research emphasizes that foreign language acquisition is a complex cognitive process, mediated by different brain regions that govern specific aspects of language.

As Tomassello (2001) and Deuchar & Vihman (2005) point out, children acquire linguistic knowledge through contact with their environment and society; however, at a young age, their vocabulary is usually quite limited. However, in addition to the innate ability to speak different languages, a more complex process is necessary to enrich their knowledge base. According to Karmiloff-Smith (2001), this process is based on proceduralization, explanation, and social feedback. In line with this approach, Paradis (1998) states: "The bilingual mental lexicon may be thought of as single storage device, where items are tagged from different perspectives such as register, grammatical features, and also language membership."

Gile (1997) notes that, although bilingual children rely on memory and can act as ad hoc interpreters without specialized training, professional status requires rigorous training. Furthermore, Ericsson (1996) argues that expertise in this field requires a vast body of knowledge, strategies for efficient problem-solving, and a complex repertoire of behavioral procedures that only a specialist can master.

All of these concepts were developed through experiments conducted in various fields (medicine, sports), demonstrating that skills are not innate but rather the result of many hours of practice, and that basic abilities limit the level of achievement that individuals can reach. At the same time, the traditional view of skill acquisition, as represented by Anderson (1982) and Fitts & Posner (1967), is based on observing individuals performing everyday activities (writing, driving) and on the improvement of their skills through practice.

On the other hand, research conducted by Dilleger (1989, 1994), in which he compared the performance of professional interpreters with that of bilinguals, did not reveal any significant qualitative differences, as both groups exhibited similar performance patterns. However, the professionals demonstrated superior quantitative efficiency, translating 70% more utterances. Although Dilleger argues that the essence

of a good interpreter lies in the ability to process discourse in both languages, his study cannot establish a causal relationship; interpreting transcends simple translation, involving complex mechanisms of memory and distributive attention. In this regard, data provided by authors such as Gerver, Longley, Long, and Lambert (1984) confirm that translation is not an automated process, but one mediated by mental representations that exert varying degrees of control over performance.

To support the distinction between experts and bilinguals, Ericsson (2000:196) argues that a specialist's peak performance does not depend solely on training and practice. He introduces intrinsic motivation, the desire to surpass oneself, and experience gained through deliberate practice into the equation for success as essential pillars of excellence:

> *The key challenge for aspiring expert performers is to avoid the arrested development associated with automaticity and to acquire cognitive skills to support their continued learning and improvement. The expert performer actively counteracts the tendencies towards automaticity by actively acquiring and refining cognitive mechanisms to support continued learning and improvement.*

Although bilingualism is considered the basis of translation-or rather, the foundation of professional translation-according to Toury (1986), translation competence does not develop automatically as a function of bilingualism. Thus, in agreement with Toury, Wills (1976) describes translation competence as a combination of three fundamental sub-competences in translation:

- Receptive competence in the source language.
- Productive competence in the target language.
- The ability to transfer messages between the linguistic and textual systems of the source and target cultures.

A synthesis of theoretical perspectives on bilingualism and professional competencies demonstrates that translation is a complex and dynamic process that is constantly adapting to societal changes. In the medical field, effective communication goes beyond grammatical accuracy, as both patients and healthcare professionals often come from diverse cultural backgrounds. In such a context, information flows through verbal and nonverbal channels-gestures, glances, or body language-transforming the translator's role from that of a mere conveyor of words to an interpreter of the values and cultural contexts specific to the interlocutors.

Hospitals are dynamic environments where daily interactions are marked by concern for health, but also by linguistic anxiety stemming from the difficulty of communicating effectively. This picture is further shaped by each participant's unique cultural background. Although cultural diversity is a source of social enrichment, in a medical context it can create barriers, as differing non-linguistic interpretations tend to complicate the process of translation and mutual understanding.

The act of communication goes beyond the purely linguistic sphere, as it is almost always accompanied by subtle elements such as paralinguistics and kinesics. This interdependence confirms Poyatos's (1994) hypothesis regarding the three-part basic structure of communication: an inseparable reality consisting of the verbal, paralinguistic, and kinesic dimensions, where sounds and gestures merge to generate meaning.

Therefore, communicative competence in an intercultural context requires not only mastery of the linguistic code but also the accurate decoding of the nonverbal dimension specific to each culture. Since isolated words convey only a partial message, an integrated approach to language and culture is imperative. This holistic perspective ensures the accurate transmission and reception of messages, preventing distortions of meaning.

An analysis of the behavior of migrant populations highlights the importance of cultural competence in medical and social mediation. Successful integration depends on the accurate interpretation of the gestures, traditions, and family structures specific to each community.

In Chinese culture, nonverbal and verbal interaction follows strict rules of respect. Avoiding direct eye contact is a sign of politeness and deference toward authority figures or doctors. In the West, this behavior is often misinterpreted as evasiveness, insincerity, or a lack of interest. Furthermore, certain hygiene practices can cause significant tension: Spiritual purification: Spitting in public spaces is traditionally associated with the removal of impurities from the body. Social stigma: In host countries, this gesture is perceived as a serious violation of hygiene standards. Indirect refusal: The reluctance to say "no" directly stems from a desire to save face and avoid conflict. In a medical setting, this ambiguity can lead to uninformed consent or noncompliance with prescribed treatments. Social Structure and Etiquette in Moroccan Culture Moroccan cultural identity is deeply rooted in Islamic values and a patriarchal structure, where the family is the central pillar of society.

The traditional social structure is governed by the central pillar of family authority, which dictates norms of behavior and the hierarchy of decision-making. This authority manifests itself through two fundamental dimensions:

- Respect for elders, given that they play a decisive role in critical moments. Major medical decisions are not made individually but collectively. The advice and approval of elders always take precedence over personal preferences.
- Gender roles, as social relationships follow a clear hierarchy. Men act as official leaders and representatives of the family in the outside world. At the same time, there is a gradual empowerment of women, who are expanding their influence in the public sphere. Understanding this dynamic is essential for mediators. The

success of a treatment depends directly on the proper involvement of family leaders in the communication process.

Communication etiquette in this community involves clear rules: Extensive greetings: Polite exchanges must include detailed inquiries about the health and well-being of the extended family. Omitting them is considered rude. For example, regarding nonverbal norms, the right hand is used exclusively for eating, greeting, and offering objects, as it carries a religious significance of purity. The left hand is considered impure.

As for public displays of affection, they are strictly restricted. It is socially acceptable only between people of the same sex, in the form of prolonged handshakes or friendly hugs. Given these cultural specificities, without competent mediation, these differences can compromise medical care and social integration. The mediator not only translates words but also conveys the cultural context behind them. They explain to the Western physician why a Chinese patient nods in agreement even though they did not understand the treatment, or why a Moroccan patient prefers a female physician and requests the presence of her husband or an elderly family member during the consultation. Through this decoding, the mediator prevents diagnostic errors and combats social marginalization.

These cultural characteristics are a source of enrichment, but they can also create barriers in interactions in public spaces, particularly in the hospital setting. In this context, the role of the translator-mediator becomes crucial: their linguistic competence must be complemented by a deep understanding of cultural values and customs. These are the essential pillars for building a constructive and empathetic dialogue between healthcare professionals and patients, facilitating an effective therapeutic process for both parties.

Beyond linguistic and cultural barriers, the patient's socioprofessional profile and level of education are determining factors in the dynamics of medical interaction. As Angelelli (2008) points out, the interpreter-and, by extension, the translator-is the one who deciphers the reference frames of the interlocutors, possessing the tools necessary to bridge cognitive gaps in intercultural contexts. Thus, the mediator's role extends beyond the realm of literal translation; he or she becomes an agent of social intervention (Sales, 2005), with the interpreting process being merely one component of a broader effort to facilitate dialogue:

> *Así, el mediador tiene que tener siempre presentes un cierto número de datos de la sociedad y la cultura a la que pertenece el interlocutor inmigrante: estructura familiar y de parentesco, religión, y, por ejemplo, en ámbitos sanitarios, su percepción de lo que es salud y enfermedad y la representación del cuerpo en su cultura. Es decir, que quien media necesita poseer una formación (continua) en cuanto a aspectos culturales de los grupos con los que trabaja, documentándose de forma contrastada y especializada.*

Therefore, contemporary society is facing constant migration dynamics, which requires adapting and updating administrative tools to ensure an adequate integration process for new members of the community, as well as effective communication in all areas of activity, particularly in the medical field, where a single second or a single wrong word can mean the difference between life and death.

3. Conclusion

Thus, in the contemporary context of intercultural and interlinguistic communication, the role of the mediator or translator goes beyond the simple transposition from one language to another. They become active agents in the strategic selection, filtering, and adaptation of information, with the fundamental goal of facilitating clear, accurate, and effective understanding between parties who do not share the same linguistic or cultural code. In this process, rigorous terminological selection is an absolute requirement; the haphazard use of concepts or the use of ambiguous structures can lead to major communication breakdowns, with severe implications for the outcome of the interaction. For this reason, tailoring discourse to the recipient's level of understanding-as well as to their cultural, psychological, and physiological characteristics-is not merely a stylistic device, but an ethical and functional necessity.

This responsibility takes on critical dimensions in the medical field. Here, the highly specialized and often impenetrable language of clinicians directly intersects with the patient's emotional vulnerability, anxiety, and suffering. At this point of tension, the interpreter no longer functions as a mere neutral conduit but as a guarantor of the safety of the medical procedure. Their professional competence and ethical commitment become the pillars upon which a solid therapeutic relationship, based on mutual trust, is built. To serve as a true bridge between medical staff and the patient, the interpreter must possess exceptional communication skills. Beyond the semantic interpretation of words, they are tasked with decoding nonverbal language, gestures, micro-expressions, and the underlying cultural macro-context, transforming interpretation from a linguistic exercise into a vital tool for ensuring universal and equitable access to healthcare.

Ultimately, Bates's (1984:30) assertion that "without context, words and actions have no meaning" accurately summarizes the entire paradigm of our analysis. Extending this view, we can assert that the most relevant, complex, and dynamic context is the individual himself, viewed through the lens of the uniqueness of his life experience, values, and identity. A deep understanding of this fact reshapes the status of the translator-mediator: they cease to be a mere peripheral or invisible intermediary and become the fundamental bridge that connects human diversity, smooths out

cultural rough edges, and harmonizes differences, transforming otherness into a space for dialogue and healing.

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PART II.
VOICES OF LITERARY MEMORY, TRADITION AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

Historical-Cultural Coordinates of the Resurrection of Tradition in the 1960s Bessarabian Poetry

Victoria VÎNTU, Viorica CAZAC

SUMPh „Nicolae Testemitanu"

Abstract. *This study explores how post-war Bessarabian poetry reactivated tradition to build a discourse of identity and aesthetic resistance against Soviet ideological pressure. Within the framework of cultural homogenization and denationalization enforced in the Prut-Dniester region, literature assumed the role of an affective and moral archive for the community. Focusing on the 1960s generation of poets (Grigore Vieru, Dumitru Matcovschi, Liviu Damian), this paper identifies and interprets their distinct ways of resistance. Through historical-literary and hermeneutical analysis, the research reveals the subversion inherent in lyrical expression and traces the evolutionary trajectory of Bessarabian poetry-from an inner refuge to a messianic dimension-that paved the way for the National Renaissance of the late 1980s. The article offers an integrative perspective on how the recovery of tradition functioned as an ontological act and a premise for the aesthetic modernization of Bessarabian lyricism. Ultimately, the paper demonstrates that re-embedding poetry in the folkloric stylistic matrix and in the paradigm of Eminescu's lyrics was not a mere decorative gesture, but a form of Aesopic language that transformed lyrical creation into a vital manifestation of national identity.*

Keywords: poetry, tradition, history, subversion, national identity.

1. Introduction

Analysing the revival of tradition in post-war Bessarabian lyric poetry requires a preliminary clarification of the conceptual framework, as these terms functioned in the Prut-Dniester region not merely as aesthetic categories, but primarily as vectors of existential and identity resistance. The literary phenomenon in the Soviet space was deeply marked by communist ideology and by the principles of socialist realism, which sought to construct the model of a new society. Proletkult principles severely compromised literary production, enforcing a uniformity of style, genre, and expression driven by political mandates. This reality marked the literary landscape of

Eastern Europe. The pressure of state power was not an isolated case, but reflected a pan-Eastern phenomenon, visible throughout the entire area of Soviet influence. Writers such as Alexander Tvardovski in the Soviet Union, Czesław Miłosz or Tadeusz Borowski in communist Poland, or Milan Kundera in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s, also went through stages of alignment or direct negotiation with the directives of socialist realism. However, beyond the formal regimentation of the first post-war decade, Bessarabian writers, in parallel with the attitude of resistance through culture observed in other authors from the Eastern Bloc, gradually began to look for cracks in the dogmatic armor, identifying in the recourse to folklore and the mythical vein a subtle way of saving the national spirit. Tradition thus no longer appears as a residue of the past dismantled by socialist realism, but becomes a mechanism for restoring the organic connection with the Romanian cultural space.

The decisive break with ideological dogmatism occurs with the affirmation of the sixties generation. Poets of this generation, such as Grigore Vieru, Liviu Damian, Anatol Codru, and Pavel Boțu, reintroduced folkloric motifs, ancestral myths, and community values into the aesthetic discourse, transforming tradition into a vehicle for reclaiming collective memory.

Thus, the resurrection of tradition becomes a subversive act of reaffirming the linguistic and cultural identity, a protective reaction against uprooting. The revaluation of archetypes and the classical model reconfigures the Bessarabian poetic imaginary, transforming the ancestral heritage from a passive memory into an active instrument for restoring historical and spiritual continuity.

2. The historical and cultural framework of post-war Bessarabia

An accurate understanding of post-war Bessarabian literature requires a thorough examination of its political, social, and cultural context-a period that marks one of the most painful chapters in Moldova's history. The territory was divided between the Moldavian SSR and the Ukrainian SSR, the latter taking over within its own borders both the former Bugeac, as well as Northern Bukovina and the Herța region, where Mihai Eminescu's high school city and then one of the great Romanian interwar universities — Cernăuți were also located. Romanians in the USSR were thus divided, categorized under different ethnonyms: those in Northern Bukovina and the Hertsa region were designated as Romanians, whereas those in the Moldavian SSR and the former Transnistrian Moldavian Republic were classified as Moldovans. To these dramatic conditions for the Romanians integrated through military occupation in the U.S.S.R. (disputed by Romania by participating alongside Germany in the anti-Soviet war, 1941-1944, without a chance), the U.S.S.R. added the condition of a camp,

prohibiting entry and exit to the Moldavian S.S.R. and interrupting any contact with the mother country, Romania. The post-war Soviet propaganda carried out a strange Romanian-phobic campaign, Romania being placed alongside Germany and, in fact, the entire West among the fierce enemies of the peaceful Soviet people.

The first post-war decade is marked by the annihilation of national spirituality by all available means.

> *"For the totalitarian regime, non-value and mediocrity have always been a literary policy, a component of a broader strategy of strangling the spirit (...). Supporting non-values, institutionalizing them by introducing them into curricula and textbooks, by awarding prizes, granting honorary positions and titles, by creating, with the convergent help of several bodies, a privileged status, is part of the same, unique action of annihilating creative initiative." (Țurcanu, 1996, p. 15).*

These measures were accompanied by others, such as, for example, the rewriting of the history of the Romanians between the Prut and the Dniester rivers, taking into account the historiography and political interests of Moscow, a point of view in which the tsarist state became a saving protector, and the Romanian state a multinational, imperialist and oppressive factor. This new historiography was a powerful anti-Romanian propaganda factor for the mentality of Romanians between the Prut and the Dniester. At the same time, educational institutions in occupied Moldova enforced Russian as the primary language of instruction, glorified Russian history, and issued low-prestige diplomas to local university graduates. Consequently, Moldovan students were compelled to pursue higher education elsewhere in the USSR to obtain competitive degrees.

The introduction of Cyrillic letters for writing the Romanian language, its title as the "Moldovan language," the presentation of its profile and history from a Slavic point of view, the teaching of a "Moldovan" literary and cultural history, with personalities of Romanian literature, depicted truncated, represent aspects of an acculturation program conceived by Soviet politicians, to detach the Romanian people from the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic and its intellectuals from the Romanian culture that had its strong development west of the Prut (Vîntu, 2017, p.52).

Literature produced in occupied Moldova was subject to political dictates, restricted to themes that aligned with official ideological doctrine. Improvised scholars representing the new Moldavian historiography often entered into polemics with those from Romania, to demonstrate the different character of the Romanian language from the "Moldovan language," the Slavic foundation of Bessarabia, as well as the invasive character of the Romanian administration between 1918 and 1940, when Bessarabia, lost in 1812 by Ottoman diplomacy, had become an integral part of Greater Romania. The second Soviet occupation of Bessarabia, which began in 1944, followed

an earlier one (1812-1918), which had provided ample opportunity for the acculturation process targeting the region's Romanian culture to succeed.

In this era of socialist reform, literature was officially conceived as a vehicle for transmitting the party's ideological principles, with the resulting distortions being particularly evident in poetry. "It was a time when any symbol, any metaphor, any allusion to any deep meaning of the artistic detail or detail absolutely inherent in the creative process, were turned on all sides, lest they hide ideas, attitudes, or ideologically dangerous urges" (Ciocanu, 1990, p.27).

The situation was exacerbated by the mass deportations of the native intelligentsia, replaced by people from Moscow, not only unresponsive to the calls of Romanian spirituality, but even hostile to it. The ordeal continued until 1953, the year that marked the end of Stalinism and the beginning of a relative political and social relaxation.

The incremental emancipation from Soviet ideological influence was largely propelled by a succession of reforms. A new generation emerged-one eager for novelty and freedom of thought and expression. Thanks to the dedicated efforts of these optimistic young intellectuals, sweeping changes became possible, most notably in the realm of culture.

This period saw a surge in publishing activity: book production rose, folklore collections were published, and key publications like *Octombrie* (1956) and *Cultura* (1965) were launched. Meanwhile, writer George Meniuc took the helm of the literary journal *Nistru*.

Researcher A. Bantoş invokes the confession of the director and cultural figure Ion Ungureanu with reference to the resettlement of literature and culture east of the Prut on the path of normality: "The appearance of the weekly Cultura Moldovei (1956) was the sign of new times. The shadow of the terrifying tyrant from the Kremlin was thinning under the fading sun of the Khrushchev thaw. The world dared to lift its eyes from the ground, casting off fear to face the raw truth ahead. A long-lasting lesson, because fear does not heal in a day or two. Some still carry it in their souls today. At that time, we dared to remember that we are all Romanians, that we speak the same language; the editorial staff even addressed the patriarch of Romanian literature, Mihail Sadoveanu, to bless the new publication, which did happen (the facsimile in Latin script published by the newspaper came to us; let's put it on the icon, not another one!)." (Bantoș, 2010, p.216). Mihai Cimpoi highlighted the same thing in his study "Bessarabia under the Star of Exile": "Under the sensitive gaps of Romanian culture in post-war Bessarabia, one can glimpse the huge constructive and recuperative efforts in the search for and recovery of the lost identity" (Cimpoi, 1994, p. 211).

It is worth mentioning the editing of the classics of Romanian literature (divided, however, into Romanian — Coşbuc, Caragiale and Moldovan — Eminescu, Creangă, Alecsandri). The process started in 1951 and became a reference point for the

subsequent evolution of Bessarabian literature. Although the politics of the time imposed an artificial and ideological demarcation between the authors designated as "Moldovan" and "Romanian" — a method by which the regime tried to invent a distinct linguistic identity —, direct access to Eminescu's text, to Caragiale's humor, or to Creangă's parables directly contradicted official party line. This editorial initiative reintroduced the rich lexical heritage of the Romanian language into active use, reestablished the organic connection with the common cultural heritage, and created the foundations on which the movement of resistance through culture and national emancipation of the Generation of '60 from Bessarabia could later be built.

That same year, a conference hosted by the Academy of Sciences of Moldova brought together scholars from Moldova, Moscow, and Leningrad. Through meticulous scientific rigor, they demonstrated the Latin origins of the language, directly refuting earlier pseudo-scientific claims of a Slavic descent. The event marked a historical turning point and a proof of intellectual dignity, argumentatively crushing the Soviet dogma of "Moldo-Slavism" that was trying to uproot the Romanian identity from the space between the Prut and the Dniester. Through the rigor of the linguistic, dialectological and historical analyses presented by the participants, the conference restored the indisputable scientific truth: the language spoken by the indigenous population is a Romance language, structured on a lexical background and a grammar of Latin origin. The direct involvement and support of authorities in Moscow and Leningrad not only provided essential institutional cover against local ideological reprisals, but also definitively delegitimized propaganda theses lacking philological support. The outcomes of this academic conference marked a pivotal symbolic triumph for the Chișinău intelligentsia, providing the theoretical framework that underwrote future efforts to reclaim cultural memory, advance language rights, and restore national consciousness.

The unleashing and opening of other horizons of knowledge and cultural communication characteristic of the sixties culminated, at the university level, with the inauguration, in 1964, of the Faculty of Foreign Languages within the State University, and later also at the "Ion Creangă" Pedagogical Institute and the "Alecu Russo" University in Bălți. From then on, the rigorous and systematized study of foreign languages and literatures in Moldova between the Prut and the Dniester follows, a study that undoubtedly leaves its mark on the cultural landscape and on the receptivity of the reader at that time.

Marking a decisive triumph for post-war Bessarabian culture, the cinematic adaptation of Ion Druță's *The Last Month of Autumn* took home the first prize at the International Youth Film Festival. Directed by Vadim Derbenyov, with a screenplay authored by Ion Druță himself and a memorable performance by Valeriu Cupcea as the father, the film transcended the rigid bounds of Socialist Realism. Instead, it delivered a deeply human cinematic parable centered on traditional village life,

collective memory, and the continuity of the nation. The distinction obtained at Cannes (in the section dedicated to youth in 1966) not only legitimized the aesthetic value of Druță's work, but also demonstrated that the Bessarabian spiritual vein possesses a universal dimension, capable of moving and communicating beyond the Iron Curtain. This recognition provided the artistic community in Chișinău with a huge boost of confidence, proving that rural authenticity, identity sensitivity, and existential truth can defeat the propaganda clichés of the era.

V. Coroban's contribution to the process of the resurrection of the native culture is undeniable. In this context, it is worth mentioning the issue of national specificity launched at the end of the 1950s. Breaking the rigid ideological patterns of the post-war Soviet proto-chronism, Vasile Coroban established himself as a fundamental catalyst of aesthetic emancipation and spiritual rebirth in the Bessarabian space. The formulation and debate of the issue of national specificity at the end of the 1950s — in a political climate marked by the timid Khrushchevite thaw — represented an act of intellectual courage and a true theoretical turning point. Reopening this strand of research allowed Coroban to affirm the artistic value of native literature relative to global models, while simultaneously forging a framework to safeguard local identity against forced Russification and ideological conformity. The re-circulation of concepts related to self-awareness and literary tradition allowed new generations of writers to overcome the imperatives of socialist realism and to re-found their artistic discourse on the foundations of national authenticity. Thus, through philological rigor and historical vision, his approach functioned as a bridge between the classical cultural heritage and aesthetic modernity.

All these events had a positive impact on the subsequent evolution of literature. They signify a first step towards the discovery of the artistic as the foundation of literature, of aesthetic value, previously undermined by dogmatic precepts.

3. Typologies of Authors and Representative Lyrical Expressions

Although still bearing the imprints of dogma, the art of the word will gradually open new horizons, orienting itself towards cultivating the creative spirit, towards expanding the thematic area, towards discovering new literary forms and models. Evidence of the artistic revival during the post-war period can be seen in V. Vasilache's novel *Povestea cu cocoșul roșu* (*The Story of the Red Rooster*), a striking allegory that introduced a novel perception of reality. The work is qualified as "one of the most interesting novels of all that Bessarabian literature has produced", placing it within the canon of local literature alongside Vasile Beșleagă's *Zbor frânt* (*Broken Flight*) and Aureliu Busuioc's *Singur în fața dragostei* (*Alone in front of love*).

A point of reference in the history of Bessarabian literature is the essays of George Meniuc. Beyond their undeniable aesthetic value, these works serve as a vital

documentary source, opening new perspectives on the artistic creed of Bessarabian writers. The author creates a memorable metaphorical definition of art: "There is an old and instructive belief, that if you find the beast-grass, an enchanted grass, incredibly rare, hidden from the eyes of ordinary people, you gain the full power to open with its thread any padlock, any latch, any shackles, and in the end to penetrate the most locked fortresses and discover treasures and wonders kept secret." (Meniuc, 1967, p. 45). This enchanted grass symbolizes the power of poetry to rise above any ideological restrictions, realizing its true purpose — to define the spiritual vein of a people.

The path to the self of lyricism was full of twists and sacrifices. Coming out of anonymity becomes a pressing necessity. No longer a mere observer, the lyrical self actively seeks to analyze, define, and cultivate its own identity. The lyrical voice of the 1960s, particularly in the latter half of the decade, turns inward, prioritizing the deciphering of its own internal universe over the external world. "Discovering the self-awareness of Bessarabian literature means (re)discovering the beauties and expressive power of the Romanian language, of the maternal verb, inseparable from the maternal green (Liviu Damian wrote a poem inspired by this association)" (Cimpoi, 1996, p. 89). Sixties poetry exudes a breath of innocent emotion lived at the limit. The universe is viewed through the eyes of a child. He admires and falls in love with everything that surrounds him, the critic claims. Ultimately, this phenomenon establishes a specific poetic creed. In Grigore Vieru's poetry, as the researcher observed, an aesthetic of moral support is cultivated, which is offered to him by the earth, nature, the sky and their beauties, mother and motherhood.

If in Gr. Vieru's lyrics the emotional intensity of lyrical expression is emphasized, Liviu Damian's poetry is considered rationalist. We also insisted on this aspect of poetic art with a detailed analysis of the aesthetics of the author's poetry *Sânt verb (I am a verb)*. Demanding and often relentless, L. Damian structures his discourse in brief statements of dramatic truths, sometimes paradoxical, with which, despite the defining mioritic spirituality, we cannot resign ourselves. In this role, he captivates us in works like *Centaur* and *Hârtia* (*Paper*), while continuing to initiate the reader into the mysteries of poetry in *Nesomn* (*Sleeplessness*). Restlessness, non-resignation are states that express an internal conflict amplified by multiple existential questions. The artist's spiritual struggle derives from the awareness of his exceptional condition. The poet's messianic persona is clearly delineated: *Nu sunt în stare să vă spun /De ce și atunci când pierd câștig. /Fără mantauă ies la frig. /Glumesc și dinții mi-i adun*. (*I am not able to tell you/ Why even when I lose I win./ Without a coat I go out into the cold. / I joke, and I pick my teeth*).

Therefore, the poet subtly conveys a veiled sense of rebellion through metaphorical expressions of unsettling depth. The irony, nuanced in a hilarious, playful way, alternates perfectly with rhetorical interrogation. These, together with the shocking expression ("I'm sick of futile confrontations..."), bring L. Damian's poetic vision closer to Arghezi's. Modernist, realistic, romantic, and avant-garde aspects are perfectly intertwined in his lyrics. The volume leaves the impression of a strange

amalgam of rocks and alluvium, of spiritual deposits that have not yet known the necessary dissolutions and are presented with their raw structure. For this reason, the titles themselves remain fluid rather than definitive, emerging through unexpected conceptual projections such as *Rostogol* (*Rolling*), *Cuminte lemn* (*Gentle Wood*), *Nesomn* (*Sleeplessness*), *Baladă într-o ureche* (*Ballad in One Ear*), *Autobus -13* (*Bus -13*), *Altcineva* (*Someone Else*), and *Pierd bumbii* (*Losing Buttons*).

Acclaimed by critics as a forerunner of modernism in Bessarabian literature, Liviu Damian distinguished himself through a rigorous pursuit of formal perfection, realized in a meticulously crafted artistic expression. The poet clearly stands out in the galaxy of the sixties by cultivating an intellectualized lyrical formula. In the era when local poetry was taking the first steps towards liberation from the pressure of socialist cliché, the author knew how to combine the existential philosophy of Blaga's origin, the sarcasm of Arghezi, the romanticism of Eminescu, and the profound exploration of the verb in the manner of Stănescu.

Moreover, such stylistic syncretism reflects a strategy synchronous with the broader trends of Eastern European literature during the Thaw. Similarly to writers from the non-Russian Soviet space (such as Cingiz Aitmatov) or to Polish poets of moral resistance (such as Zbigniew Herbert), Liviu Damian resorts to an Aesopian language and the synthesis of great cultural models to elude ideological uniformity. By reclaiming the mature canonical models of Romanian literature and merging them with modern inquiry, the Bessarabian poet transforms the creative act into a form of aesthetic subversion, reaffirming national identity while aligning the text with wider European poetic paradigms.

P. Boțu is appreciated for the subtle fusion of the art of the observer with that of the thinker. A. Codru is recognized for his lyrical discourse marked by a feverish search for origins and an assumed metaphor of spiritual resistance, bringing to Bessarabian literature an impetuous vision, with balladic accents and ontological depths. It is worth noting, however, that the language barriers were overcome only in the poetry of the 70s, a period in which the lyricism manages to shake off the rigidity of clichés of the wooden language, recovering the expressiveness, fluency, and refinement of the Romanian literary language. Gh. Vodă stands out from his congeners through the ballad of expression, through the ethical ardor that defines the meaning of his creation. D. Matcovschi's poetry also presents similar connotations. M. Cimpoi pays special attention to a fundamental characteristic of his poetry: an ethical, just, deontological pathos that is largely due to the bloodline with folklore, *like the most representative Bessarabian poets, configuring an ethical and aesthetic program that involves the cult of roots, origins, soil, house, threshold and hearth* (Cimpoi, 1994, p. 101). For V. Teleucă's work, the sympathetic willingness to embrace the spectacle of the world and the romantic thirst for impressions are characteristic, in the critic's view. The

correlation between balladry and romanticism in the poetics of the 1960s provided a compelling premise for investigating the defining traits of the decade's artistic output.

These poetic strategies demonstrate that the post-war Bessarabian literary landscape was not a sterile ideological monolith, but a rich terrain of aesthetic experimentation, in which the emergence of artistic individuality signaled a profound departure from dogmatic conformism toward a poetry rooted in existential inquiry and authentic identity.

4. Forms of The Resurrection of Tradition in Poetic Discourse

The post-Soviet literary era represents a long period of rehabilitation, after decades of existence and constraints in a totalitarian regime. The awakening consciousness of freedom unfolded hand in hand with new interpretive horizons, casting fresh light on the literary phenomenon of the 1960s. Writers increasingly tend to leave the closed space of the communist utopia. Freedom of thought manifests itself together with that of speech. Both literary and critical discourses no longer respond to dogmatic rigors, but express thoughts and attitudes in a natural, relaxed manner, devoid of pathos. The rigid language specific to Proletcultist literature is abandoned in favor of free, objective and reasoned expression. Viewing the sixties through the distance of history, the post-Soviet exegete engages with the period from an elevated vantage point bestowed by the most exacting of critics, and the supreme arbiter, time itself.

The means of survival that writers resort to are different, becoming more efficient and more eloquent with each decade. The rhetorical excess, the exaggerated pathos of the expression specific to the 1950s are gradually replaced by an inward turn and the individualization of artistic expression. Writers initiate a process of liquidating creative restrictions and expanding poetic territories. The romantic pathos that contaminates the lyrics of this era represents a form of manifestation of freedom, a way to discover generally human, universal values.

Analyzing the forms of 1960s lyrical discourse, literary critic Al. Burlacu highlights Anatol Codru's modern poetic vision through his restoration of the epic and reinterpretation of myth. The researcher observes that "in the Prut-Dniester space, the appeal to the ballad has polemical reasons" (Burlacu, 2020, p. 118). As such, the ballad serves as an aesthetic response to the epic-lyric poems of proletcultist literature penned by writers like Andrei Lupan or Emilian Bucov. While proletcultist discourse subordinated narrative to ideological propaganda-building the myth of the "new man" and glorifying the socialist present-Codru's ballad narrative becomes a space of cultural resistance. The 1960s poet deconstructs the triumphalist paraphernalia of socialist realism, replacing ideological platitudes with a poetics of historical depth, in which myth is recharged with tragic, existential valence, and language reclaims its expressiveness and metaphorical freedom. The leitmotif of Anatol Codru's poetry is

the stone-a symbol of that which is stable, unchanging, steadfast, and even divine. This is particularly evident in the case of stones with unusual shapes, which are interpreted as dwellings of supernatural beings or as humans transformed into rock. The volumes *Îndărătnicia pietrei* (*The Stubbornness of Stone*, 1967), *Portret în piatră* (*Portrait in Stone*, 1978), and *Piatra de citire* (*The Reading Stone*, 1980) highlight an expressive body of poetry with a profoundly subversive message. Through this mineral motif, the author constructs a space of moral resistance against historical vicissitudes and ideological pressure. The stone ceases to be a mere inanimate element of the landscape, becoming instead a metaphor for ancestral memory-a repository of an unwavering identity that refuses both assimilation and erosion.

The poetry of the 1960s generation offers a plurality of perspectives shaped by the socio-political and cultural framework of the totalitarian regime. Understanding the aesthetic program and lyrical stance of this era is essential for analyzing efforts to restore ethical and aesthetic values. The growing interest in folklore and the veneration of classical literature provided an opportunity to break away from dominant socialist themes. Reclaiming themes and motifs of folkloric origin — such as *longing* (L. Deleanu), *the village* (N. Costenco), *the ancestral home* (Gr. Vieru, D. Matcovschi), or *the well* and *the spring* (A. Lupan, V. Teleucă) — became a vital necessity, marking the first signs of a revival in Bessarabian poetry. From these imagery patterns, artists constructed a value system that sustained them both existentially and creatively.

In this context, tradition ceases to be a passive repository of archaic forms, becoming an existential paradigm and a moral refuge in which the Romanian language and the rural imaginary form the core of anti-ideological resistance. In post-war literature, tradition becomes the essential artistic framework to which all lyrical texts relate. Standing apart from the political imperatives of the era, Bessarabian authors retained a fundamentally lyrical disposition, leaning toward folkloric modes, delicate tonalities, and retrospective contemplation. Consequently, these poets sought to captivate and enchant, with a true drive for formal experimentation emerging prominently only in the late 1960s.

The covenant with the earth is emblematic of this poem. One of the suggested connotations is the ethnic continuity of our people. Shifting the focus from the universe of poetry to that of lyrical prose, we prove the aforementioned with a quote from *Horodiște* by I. Druță: *...eu deseori m-am întors și-am căutat a înțelege ce i-a făcut pe părinții mei să lase satul de baștină și să se mute? Firește, pământul*. (*I often turned around and sought to understand what made my parents leave their native village and move? Of course, the earth).* The earth signifies not merely an intimacy with history and national character. It goes beyond the physical dimension, functioning as an identity anchor that fixes the collective destiny. Roots embedded in the earth guarantee not only biological survival, but also the perpetuation of a moral and spiritual code transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, the covenant with the land is transfigured into an act of fidelity to

the nation's memory, where the ancestral hearth becomes the only space capable of conferring meaning, stability, and resistance in the face of ideological alienation.

We find multiple works focused on the idea of "support" combined with that of aspirations, concepts that potentiate and complement each other. An entire cycle from Grigore Vieru's volume *Numele tău* (*Your Name*) bears the title *Sprijin* (*Support*). For I. Bolduma, the earth, although close, is no less mysterious than the celestial bodies: *Pământul — soare stins în mâini — / L-am prins din stoluri mari de stele... (The earth — extinguished sun in my hands — / I caught it from large flocks of stars...*). L. Deleanu also does not recognize another "covenant" more important and more resistant in time than the one with one's own roots: *Rădăcina își poate lepăda tulpina, / Dar de pământ / O țin verigi de legământ*. (*The root can cast off its stem, / But to the earth / I hold it with covenant links).*

An organic source of inspiration is the native village. A timeless, sacred space, it becomes a refuge for the artist troubled by uncertainties (a characteristic feature of the Bessarabian poet of that period). The native village represents both a stylistic matrix and a vital wellspring of inspiration; far exceeding a simple geographical frame, it transforms into an *axis mundi* for the creative consciousness.

Its fundamental dimension derives from the ability to preserve ancient orders, being stopped by the alert and desacralized rhythm of the modern world. Within this mythic perimeter of origins, time abandons its linear trajectory for a cyclical pulse, dictated by the turning seasons, a sacred communion with the earth, and the weight of tradition. For the Bessarabian poet of the time, obsessed with the search for his own identity, the return — whether physical or merely imaginary – to the hearth becomes an act of inner therapy. In the midst of the rural community, the artist recalibrates his sensitivity and finds the moral balance weakened by turmoil.

This mystical relationship to the native space is directly reflected in the metaphorical register of poetry. Fundamental themes such as the parental home, longing, the fertile land, or the graves of the ancestors become symbols of cultural and spiritual resistance. In the work of emblematic representatives such as Grigore Vieru, Nicolae Dabija, or Ion Vatamanu, the village is sublimated into a sanctuary of absolute purity, where the nation's memory gives meaning to the present and offers a shield against alienation.

5. Conclusions

The article demonstrates that the revival of tradition in Bessarabian poetry from the 1950s cannot be reduced to a simple stylistic exercise. In a space subjected to pressures of uprooting and ideological uniformity, the reorientation towards the ancestral roots constituted a profound act of existential and identity resistance. The phenomenon involves two defining aspects.

1. Cultural and social impact. In the absence of free expression and in a desacralized political environment, 1960s poetry assumed the mission of spiritual purification through sacrifice. Lyric poetry functioned as a true prayer, becoming a space of spiritual refuge, of perpetuation of the Romanian language. This coagulation of national consciousness through the poetic text kept the community spirit alive and directly prepared the ground for the emancipation movements and sociopolitical events of 1989.
2. The aesthetic dimension and the relationship with modernity. The analysis proves that the recourse to tradition was not an obstacle to the connection of Bessarabian lyric poetry to modernity. On the contrary, traditional symbols, folkloric archetypes, and historical myths were reinvested with new metaphorical meanings, offering the poetic discourse substance, authenticity, and metaphysical depth.

   The study highlights the internal mechanisms through which the aesthetic and the political intersected, showing how traditional forms were transformed into subversive instruments of cultural survival. By reevaluating the historical-cultural coordinates of the sixties generation, the work confirms that the resurrection of tradition was the driving force that re-established the spiritual continuity between the Prut and the Dniester, restoring Bessarabian poetry to its value, dignity, and constitutive function as a pillar of identity.

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Language, Memory and Identity in Transition: Herta Müller's German-Language Literature in the Romanian Context

Anemarie ARSENIE

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *This article examines the relationship between language, memory, and identity in Herta Müller's German-language literature within the Romanian and Romanian-German historical context. Through a comparative close reading of Nadirs, The Land of Green Plums, and The Hunger Angel, it explores how different experiences of transition reshape individual and collective forms of belonging. The analysis traces a movement from the contested minority identity and anti-idyllic representation of the Banat Swabian village in Nadirs, through surveillance, fear, and fractured subjectivity under communist dictatorship in The Land of Green Plums, to deportation, traumatic memory, and the transmission of historical experience in The Hunger Angel. Particular attention is given to the changing functions of language as a medium of belonging, resistance, survival, and remembrance. The article argues that Müller does not represent transition as a movement towards a new, stable identity. Instead, identity emerges through continuing negotiations between languages, cultural affiliations, home and displacement, speech and silence, and individual and collective memory. Müller's writing thus transforms historical and cultural rupture into a literary space in which unsettled forms of belonging can be articulated and critically reconsidered.*

Keywords: Herta Müller; identity; memory; language; Romanian-German literature; dictatorship; displacement

1. Introduction

Processes of political and cultural transition rarely affect only institutions, borders, or public structures. They also reshape the ways in which individuals understand their past, articulate belonging, and negotiate their position between different linguistic and cultural environments. Literature is particularly sensitive to such processes because it can preserve experiences that official narratives suppress

while simultaneously transforming them through language and memory. In the work of Herta Müller, these dimensions are closely interconnected. Born in 1953 into the German-speaking Banat Swabian minority in Romania, Müller developed a literary language marked by the coexistence of German and Romanian cultural contexts and by her experience of life under the communist dictatorship. Her writing repeatedly engages with dictatorship, persecution, migration, displacement, and memory, while resisting an exclusively national categorisation (Haines & Marven, 2013). The Romanian language and Romanian cultural environment are also significant components of her literary imagination, complicating any simple classification of her work as either German or Romanian literature (Drace-Francis, 2013).

This position between languages, histories, and cultural affiliations makes Müller's writing particularly relevant to questions of identity in transition. Her German-language literature emerges from a Romanian context in which minority belonging could provide a sense of cultural continuity while also generating experiences of distance and exclusion. At the same time, communist dictatorship profoundly affected both private and public forms of self-expression. Müller's literary engagement with Romania therefore cannot be reduced to the representation of a particular historical period. Her texts reveal how political violence enters everyday life, language, memory, and perceptions of the self. Research on her Romanian novels has demonstrated how the mechanisms of totalitarian power penetrate individual subjectivity and produce a pervasive "world of anxiety" in which personal autonomy becomes increasingly precarious (Eke, 2013). Likewise, Müller's relationship with Romanian language and culture has been shown to constitute an important dimension of her poetics rather than merely a biographical background (Drace-Francis, 2013).

Against this background, the present article examines three works that represent different stages and forms of Müller's literary engagement with Romanian-German experience: *Niederungen (Nadirs*, 1982), *Herztier* (The Land of Green Plums, 1994), and *Atemschaukel* (*The Hunger Angel*, 2009). The analysis focuses on these German-language works, while the established English titles are used throughout the article for the convenience of an international readership. Quotations are taken from the published English translations listed in the References. This selection makes it possible to trace a movement from the representation of Banat Swabian village life and minority belonging in Nadirs, through the experience of surveillance, fear, and threatened subjectivity under dictatorship in *The Land of Green Plums*, to the literary reconstruction of deportation and traumatic memory in *The Hunger Angel*. The publication history of Nadirs itself illustrates the intersection between literature and political conditions: after its Romanian publication by Kriterion in 1982, the collection appeared in a modified West German edition with Rotbuch in 1984, while its

circulation and reception became objects of interest to the Romanian secret police (Glajar, 2023). Read together, the three works allow identity to be approached not as a fixed category but as something repeatedly renegotiated through language, historical rupture, memory, and displacement.

The central research question is therefore: **How does Herta Müller's German-language writing negotiate changing forms of identity, memory, and belonging across the Romanian-German minority experience, communist dictatorship, and the transgenerational remembrance of displacement?**

The article argues that Müller's use of German gradually exceeds its function as a marker of minority affiliation and becomes a literary space in which fractured identities and contested memories can be articulated across political, historical, and cultural boundaries. This does not imply a simple linear development from Romanian-German minority literature towards a transnational literature. Rather, the three texts preserve different and sometimes contradictory forms of belonging, estrangement, and remembrance.

Methodologically, the study employs comparative close reading and contextual textual analysis. It examines recurring representations of language, memory, belonging, fear, displacement, and identity in the three primary texts and relates them to their Romanian-German historical and cultural contexts. The analysis refers to the German original titles when relevant, while quotations are taken from the published English translations listed in the References. It draws on scholarship on Müller's poetics, Romanian cultural background, dictatorship, and memory while maintaining a distinction between contextual evidence and the interpretations developed through the readings themselves. The objective is not to provide an exhaustive account of Müller's oeuvre, but to identify how three texts written at different moments transform experiences rooted in Romania into changing literary configurations of identity and memory.

In this sense, Müller's writing provides a particularly productive case for understanding literature as a medium of transition. The transitions examined here are simultaneously political, linguistic, cultural, and mnemonic: between minority and majority cultures, dictatorship and its aftermath, remembered and inherited experience, Romania and Germany, and local history and transnational memory. By analysing these intersections, the article contributes to the broader concern of *Voices of Transition: Philology, Identity and Cultural Encounters* with the ways in which literature mediates transformation and participates in the construction, destabilisation, and renegotiation of cultural identity.

2. Language, Memory and Identity in Transition: Theoretical Framework

The concepts of language, memory, and identity are closely interconnected in Herta Müller's writing. Rather than functioning as separate thematic categories, they repeatedly intersect in representations of belonging, exclusion, political repression, and displacement. For the purposes of the present study, identity is therefore understood not as a stable or self-contained condition but as a process shaped by cultural affiliation, historical experience, linguistic environment, and the individual's relationship to collective narratives. This perspective is particularly productive in Müller's case, since her writing emerges from an environment characterised by the coexistence of Romanian, standard German, and Banat Swabian linguistic and cultural influences. As Doris Mironescu observes, Müller's work resists the idea of a single cultural identity and instead exposes the difficulties involved in defining the individual either exclusively through collective belonging or independently of it (Mironescu, 2015).

Language plays a decisive role in this negotiation of identity. In Müller's work, German cannot be regarded merely as the language in which Romanian experiences are subsequently narrated. Her literary imagination develops within a multilingual environment in which different languages offer different ways of perceiving and organising reality. The interaction between Romanian and German therefore has consequences for both literary expression and cultural positioning. Mironescu (2015) identifies Müller's recurrent engagement with Romanian language and culture as central to her treatment of identity and describes language as an instrument of cognition within an interstitial cultural position. This linguistic in-betweenness is especially significant because it destabilises the assumption that linguistic belonging necessarily corresponds to a single national or cultural identity.

Memory constitutes a second central dimension of this process. Müller's texts repeatedly return to experiences that cannot be contained within a continuous and coherent account of the past. Remembering is fragmentary, selective, and shaped by the circumstances from which the past is recalled. This feature is particularly important in literary representations of dictatorship and political violence, where individual memory intersects with public narratives, silence, and contested histories. Mitroiu (2019) argues that Müller's engagement with communist Romania proceeds through fragmented life narratives rather than through a linear reconstruction of the past. Literature thus becomes a medium through which personal and collective experiences can be revisited and reorganised without being reduced to a single authoritative narrative.

This becomes particularly evident in The Hunger Angel, where the relationship between individual experience and inherited memory changes fundamentally. Unlike the experiences of dictatorship represented in other parts of Müller's work, the

deportation of Romanian Germans to Soviet labour camps was not part of Müller's own lived experience. The novel developed substantially from the memories of the poet Oskar Pastior and from Müller's engagement with the experiences of other deportees. Haines (2013) consequently reads *The Hunger Angel* as a form of "soft memory": a contested and still unstable cultural memory situated at the intersection of Romanian remembrance, the history of the Soviet Gulag, and debates surrounding Germans as victims. The novel transforms remembered testimony into literary form while also representing the continuing effects of deportation on survivors and subsequent generations (Haines, 2013). More recent research similarly interprets the novel as participating in the memorialisation of Romanian-German Gulag victims and in the transmission of personal and collective trauma beyond the generation that directly experienced deportation (Holden, 2021).

Within this framework, transition should not be understood solely as a chronological movement from one political system or historical period to another. In Müller's writing, transition also occurs between languages, cultural affiliations, forms of memory, and positions of belonging. A person may remain linguistically connected to a minority community while becoming estranged from its values; political exile may provide geographical distance without eliminating the remembered presence of dictatorship; and experiences belonging to an earlier generation may enter later cultural memory through testimony and literary reconstruction. Identity in transition therefore describes a condition in which belonging is continually produced, challenged, and reformulated rather than simply exchanged for another stable identity.

The comparative readings that follow use these interrelated concepts as analytical categories rather than as rigid theoretical classifications. Language is examined as a medium of perception, belonging, and resistance; memory as a fragmented negotiation between personal experience, collective history, and literary reconstruction; and identity as a relational process affected by minority status, dictatorship, migration, and inherited histories. This framework makes it possible to read *Nadirs*, *The Land of Green Plums*, and *The Hunger Angel* not as three isolated representations of Romanian-German experience, but as different literary configurations of identity under conditions of historical and cultural transition.

3. German-Language Writing in the Romanian Context

Herta Müller's German-language writing cannot be adequately understood without considering the particular cultural and historical position of German-speaking communities in Romania. The Banat Swabians, among whom Müller grew up, developed forms of cultural belonging that combined a German linguistic identity

with a geographically and historically Romanian context. Their sense of Germanness was neither culturally homogeneous nor detached from the political transformations of the region. Historical research has shown that Banat Swabian identity was itself repeatedly reformulated in response to changing political circumstances and competing notions of regional, ethnic, and national belonging (Wendt, 2021). This historical complexity is important for Müller's literature, in which belonging to a German-speaking minority is rarely represented as a secure or uncomplicated source of identity.

Müller's literary position is particularly significant because it challenges a conventional correspondence between language, nation, and literature. Although German is the principal language of her literary work, the Romanian environment in which her linguistic consciousness developed remained an important component of her poetics. Drace-Francis (2013) demonstrates that Müller's relationship with Romanian culture extends beyond biographical circumstance and includes her reflections on the Romanian language, possible Romanian literary influences, and later experiments with Romanian-language collage. Her German writing therefore emerged not in linguistic isolation but within a multilingual cultural environment. The interaction of German and Romanian complicates attempts to assign her work exclusively to a single national literary tradition.

This intermediary position was shared more broadly by German-language writers in Romania. Discussions of Romanian-German literature have repeatedly raised the question of whether literary affiliation should primarily be determined by language, ethnicity, geographical location, or cultural context. Radu Pavel Gheo (2015) describes the position of German-language writers from Romania as culturally ambiguous precisely because their work occupies an intermediate space between German and Romanian cultures. Such ambiguity is not merely terminological. It points to a broader problem of belonging that becomes central in Müller's work: linguistic affiliation does not automatically produce cultural identification, just as geographical belonging does not guarantee an uncomplicated relationship with the surrounding political or social community.

The communist period intensified these tensions. German-language literary production existed within the institutional and ideological structures of the Romanian socialist state, while younger writers increasingly challenged both political conformity and conservative expectations within the minority community. The literary environment associated with the Aktionsgruppe Banat, which emerged in Timișoara in the early 1970s, sought to test the limits of the authoritarian system while engaging critically with contemporary literary and cultural debates (Bauer, 2012). Its influence

extended beyond its formal membership and formed part of the German-language literary milieu from which Müller's early writing emerged; the confrontation between critical literary expression and state surveillance was therefore an important element of this context (Bauer, 2012; Glajar, 2023).

This background is particularly important because Müller's critique operates in more than one direction. Her work confronts the coercive structures of communist dictatorship, but it also subjects the German-speaking minority community to critical scrutiny. The village world that provides the setting for much of *Nadirs*, for example, is not constructed as an idealised homeland preserved through language and tradition. Instead, inherited forms of belonging are exposed to critical examination. Predoiu (2017) shows how Müller's early prose dismantles idealised notions of Heimat and exposes restrictive communal norms that shape the child narrator's experience. Consequently, minority identity in her work cannot simply be opposed to the Romanian communist state as a protected alternative identity. Both authoritarian political structures and restrictive communal expectations can limit individual autonomy.

The Romanian context of Müller's German-language literature should therefore be understood as a space of intersecting rather than separate cultural forces. German functions as a language of childhood and minority belonging, while Romanian enters Müller's linguistic imagination through the social environment in which she lived and through modes of perception that later became important to her writing (Drace-Francis, 2013). At the same time, dictatorship transformed language into a politically charged domain in which speech, silence, conformity, and resistance acquired immediate consequences. These overlapping conditions help explain why Müller's literary identities remain unstable: they are formed between languages, minority traditions, political coercion, historical guilt, and experiences of displacement.

This historical and linguistic background provides the necessary context for the three works examined in the following sections. *Nadirs* turns towards the enclosed world of Banat Swabian village life and destabilises the idea of minority belonging as cultural security. *The Land of Green Plums* shifts the focus towards the effects of dictatorship and surveillance on individual relationships and subjectivity, while *The Hunger Angel* reaches further into the history of Romanian Germans by reconstructing the experience and memory of post-war deportation. Across these texts, the Romanian context does not function merely as a setting. It constitutes a cultural and historical field within which language, memory, and identity are continually negotiated.

4. *Nadirs*: Language, Minority Identity and the Memory of Origin

Nadirs occupies a foundational position in Herta Müller's literary exploration of identity because it turns towards the social, linguistic, and familial environment from which her writing emerged. Rooted in the Banat Swabian village world, the collection nevertheless refuses to transform this environment into a nostalgic image of cultural origin. Family, religion, work, tradition, and communal life do not provide the child narrator with an uncomplicated sense of security. Instead, familiar spaces are repeatedly associated with prohibition, violence, silence, and rigid behavioural expectations. The village thus becomes an anti-idyllic space in which cultural belonging and individual estrangement coexist. Predoiu (2017) likewise reads Müller's early prose as a dismantling of idealised Heimat and communal normality.

This tension is central to the construction of identity in *Nadirs*. The child belongs to the community through family, language, customs, and everyday routines, yet these forms of proximity repeatedly produce alienation rather than emotional security. Predoiu (2017) identifies the relationship between the unnamed girl and her village environment as one of profound estrangement and emphasises that the child simultaneously resists and internalises the behavioural patterns of the community. The contradiction is crucial: identity cannot simply be understood as either acceptance or rejection of origin. Even resistance develops within structures that have already shaped the individual.

Müller's representation of childhood makes this instability visible through a highly sensory mode of perception. At the beginning of the title story, apparently ordinary experiences are transformed into bodily sensations: "I bake sand pies, I grind bricks into red paprika, I scrape the skin off my wrists" (Müller, 1999, p. 11). The image brings play, domestic activity, colour, and physical injury into an unsettling proximity. Childhood is therefore not reconstructed as a protected sphere outside the conflicts of the adult world. The body itself becomes a surface upon which the surrounding environment is experienced. Such images disrupt any nostalgic reconstruction of origin and establish from the beginning that remembering the village also means remembering vulnerability.

Language is deeply involved in this process. German connects Müller to the Banat Swabian minority, but her literary German cannot simply be equated with an intact ethnic identity. Her linguistic imagination developed in an environment in which Banat Swabian dialect, standard German, and Romanian existed alongside one another. Drace-Francis (2013) demonstrates that Müller's relationship with Romanian language and culture became an important element of her poetics, while Mironescu (2015) interprets this linguistic and cultural in-betweenness as fundamental to the instability of identity in her work. German therefore functions simultaneously as a

language of origin and as the medium through which the limitations of that origin can be exposed.

The connection between language and resistance becomes still clearer in Müller's later reflections on her early writing. Predoiu (2017) shows that Müller retrospectively associates the origins of her literary practice with resistance to an imposed identity, the Banat Swabian village, and a childhood characterised by enforced silence. Predoiu consequently situates Niederungen within a critical tradition of Anti-Heimatliteratur, in which idealised notions of homeland, nature, and communal belonging are systematically dismantled. This retrospective perspective is particularly significant for Nadirs: writing in the language of the minority does not necessarily confirm minority identity. It can become a means of questioning the forms of identity that the community itself attempts to prescribe.

The material environment performs a similar function. Bodies, clothing, domestic objects, animals, and landscapes repeatedly cease to be neutral components of everyday life. They acquire an intensity that exposes the tensions concealed beneath familiar routines. This technique is particularly visible in "Rotten Pears," where the child narrator encounters adult sexuality through sounds and objects rather than through explanatory adult language: "The bed creaks. The pillow breathes loudly. The blanket's long thrusts come quickly" (Müller, 1999, p. 80). The transformation of the bed, pillow, and blanket into apparently animate participants conveys an experience the child can perceive but cannot fully conceptualise. Language does not explain the adult world; instead, metaphor and personification reproduce the child's partial and disturbing encounter with it.

Memory functions in an equally ambivalent manner. The remembered village does not emerge as a lost homeland restored through nostalgia. Instead, childhood returns through bodily sensations, family conflict, objects, sounds, fear, and discontinuous images. Such fragmentation corresponds to the broader structure of memory identified in Müller's writing by Mitroiu (2019), where the past reappears through discontinuous life narratives rather than through a stable chronological reconstruction. In Nadirs, this mode of remembering undermines collective narratives of cultural continuity. Memory does not restore the village as an intact origin; it subjects that origin to critical scrutiny.

The publication history of *Niederungen* adds another dimension to this instability. The collection first appeared with Kriterion in Bucharest in 1982 and subsequently in a modified West German version with Rotbuch in 1984. Glajar's (2023) archival research demonstrates that this history is more complicated than the frequently repeated opposition between a simply "censored" Romanian edition and

an "uncensored" Western one. At the same time, the Securitate's attention to Müller and to the reception of her writing reveals the politically controlled environment within which her early literary work circulated (Glajar, 2023). The movement of the text between Romanian and West German publication contexts therefore parallels, at the level of literary circulation, the tensions of cultural positioning represented within the work itself.

Within the comparative framework of this article, *Nadirs* represents the first configuration of identity in transition. Its central transition is not yet primarily geographical but occurs within the space of origin: between belonging and estrangement, inherited norms and individual perception, linguistic affiliation and cultural resistance, collective memory and critical remembrance. Müller does not resolve these oppositions by replacing one stable identity with another. Instead, the unstable space between them becomes productive for literary self-positioning. This critical distance from inherited belonging prepares the ground for *The Land of Green Plums*, where the pressures already visible within family and community are transformed into a more explicitly political struggle over language, surveillance, fear, friendship, and individual autonomy.

5. *The Land of Green Plums*: Dictatorship, Fear and Fractured Identity

If *Nadirs* locates the first crisis of identity within the structures of family, minority community, and cultural origin, *The Land of Green Plums* transfers this instability into the explicitly political space of communist Romania. Here, belonging is no longer threatened primarily by restrictive communal traditions but by a dictatorship that penetrates everyday life and gradually alters the relationship between language, friendship, the body, and the self. The novel follows an unnamed female narrator and her friends Edgar, Kurt, and Georg, whose lives become increasingly defined by surveillance, interrogation, fear, and the desire to escape. As Eke (2013) argues, Müller's representation of dictatorship is particularly concerned with the way authoritarian power enters individual consciousness and produces a pervasive "world of anxiety." Political oppression is therefore represented not only through institutions of control but through its capacity to reshape ordinary perception.

This connection between political power and private existence is established at the very beginning of the novel. Edgar describes a condition in which neither speech nor silence provides protection: "The words in our mouths do as much damage as our feet on the grass. But so do our silences" (Müller, 1998, p. 1). The apparent paradox is fundamental to Müller's representation of dictatorship. Speaking may expose the

individual to danger, yet silence cannot provide genuine freedom either. Language has already been transformed by the political environment before any explicit interrogation takes place. The characters must constantly calculate what can be said, what must remain unspoken, and how their words might be interpreted by others.

Fear consequently becomes not an exceptional reaction to particular acts of repression but an ordinary mode of existence. Edgar's description is uncompromising: "in this country, we had to walk, eat, sleep, and love in fear" (Müller, 1998, p. 2). The sequence is significant because it places fear alongside the most elementary activities of human life. Dictatorship does not remain outside the individual as a political structure; it enters movement, nourishment, sleep, intimacy, and ultimately self-perception. This helps explain why identity in the novel becomes fractured. The characters cannot simply distinguish between an authentic private self and an externally imposed political reality, since the latter has already penetrated the former.

Müller repeatedly represents this penetration through apparently ordinary spaces. The university dormitory, for example, contains a loudspeaker through which workers' choruses are broadcast, and one of the students remarks: "The loudspeakers see and hear everything we do" (Müller, 1998, p. 5). Whether or not the statement is literally true is less important than the consciousness it reveals. Surveillance has become internalised to the extent that an object designed to transmit sound is imagined as possessing both eyes and ears. The distinction between being watched and believing oneself to be watched begins to disappear. Power becomes effective precisely because its presence no longer needs to be continuously visible.

At the same time, *The Land of Green Plums* does not portray its protagonists solely as isolated victims. Friendship provides a fragile counter-space to the structures of dictatorship. Edgar, Kurt, Georg, and the narrator meet because they are afraid; they write poems, take photographs, exchange thoughts, and preserve forms of knowledge that official discourse seeks to control. Literature itself becomes part of this fragile resistance: Edgar and Georg hide their poetry, while Kurt secretly photographs buses transporting prisoners. These activities do not overthrow the dictatorship, but they preserve the capacity to perceive and name realities that authoritarian discourse would prefer to conceal.

Yet Müller refuses to idealise solidarity. Fear also damages the relationships that offer protection from it. The narrator observes:

"Because we were afraid, Edgar, Kurt, Georg, and I met every day. We sat together at a table, but our fear stayed locked within each of our heads" (Müller, 1998, p. 74).

The formulation captures the central contradiction of friendship under dictatorship. Fear brings the characters together but simultaneously remains radically individual. They laugh in order to conceal it from one another; they insult each other

to create distance; intimacy itself becomes painful because each person knows precisely where the others are vulnerable. Müller thus avoids a simple opposition between oppressive state and harmonious private community. Political fear enters friendship and changes its emotional vocabulary.

Language once again registers this transformation. The friends invent insults built around their Swabian identity — "Swabian forgetfulness," "Swabian impatience," "Swabian penny-pinching" — and use them to wound one another and temporarily produce distance (Müller, 1998, p. 74). Minority identity, which in Nadirs already appeared as an unstable form of belonging, is here turned into linguistic material for both intimacy and aggression. The repeated adjective "Swabian" does not function as a secure ethnic label. It becomes mobile, ironic, and hostile, demonstrating how identities under pressure can be simultaneously shared and rejected.

The green plum motif similarly connects private memory, political violence, and compromised identity. The narrator watches young guards fill their pockets with unripe plums and explains that "Plumsucker" is a term for "upstarts, opportunists, sycophants, and people who stepped over dead bodies without remorse"; even the dictator is described by the term (Müller, 1998, p. 50). The image is particularly powerful because the green plums also belong to the narrator's childhood memory. Earlier, the father warns the child that eating them will cause death, while his own past as an SS man remains buried in silence. The same object therefore moves between family memory and state violence. What appears to be an ordinary fruit becomes a condensed image of authority, guilt, fear, desire, and moral corruption.

The novel's treatment of identity is therefore inseparable from its treatment of language. Under dictatorship, the protagonists cannot rely on public language because official discourse is compromised, yet private language is also vulnerable to surveillance, misunderstanding, and fear. Speech may expose them; silence may isolate them. Nevertheless, language remains one of the few spaces in which they can preserve forms of individual perception. Poetry, private jokes, coded expressions, and shared memories create temporary alternatives to the language of political conformity. The opening paradox-words are dangerous, but silence is dangerous too-thus remains unresolved throughout the novel.

The Land of Green Plums therefore represents transition less as liberation from one political space into another than as a continuing struggle to preserve a self under conditions designed to penetrate it. Language becomes both evidence of this penetration and one of the means by which it can be resisted. Friendship offers solidarity while revealing the psychological damage caused by fear. Memory connects personal history with political violence rather than separating them. Identity, finally, survives not as an intact essence but as a fragile and continually renegotiated position between speech and silence, belonging and exile, intimacy and distrust. This movement prepares the transition to The Hunger Angel, where Müller turns from

directly remembered dictatorship towards the reconstruction and transmission of an earlier historical trauma.

6. *The Hunger Angel*: Language, Trauma and Transgenerational Memory

While *The Land of Green Plums* explores the effects of dictatorship on individuals who experience political repression directly, *The Hunger Angel* shifts the perspective towards an earlier historical trauma: the deportation of ethnic Germans from Romania to Soviet forced-labour camps after the Second World War. The novel is narrated by Leopold Auberg, a seventeen-year-old Transylvanian Saxon who is deported in January 1945 and spends five years in a Soviet labour camp. His retrospective narration, however, makes clear that the experience does not end with his physical return. Camp life continues within memory, language, bodily habits, and the narrator's relationship to himself. Transition in The Hunger Angel therefore takes on a particularly complex meaning: it describes not only the geographical movement from Romania to the Soviet Union and back, but also the transformation of identity through trauma and the impossibility of completely returning to the person one was before deportation.

The novel establishes this instability of identity immediately. Before his deportation, Leopold already experiences his hometown as a space of surveillance and concealment. Because his homosexual encounters could lead to imprisonment and disgrace, leaving initially appears to offer the possibility of anonymity. He admits that he "wanted to go to a place that didn't know who I was" (Müller, 2012, p. 4). This sentence is crucial for understanding the novel's concept of belonging. Even before the camp, home is not presented as an uncomplicated place of security. Leopold is caught between his private identity, the expectations of his family, the conservative environment of the Transylvanian Saxon community, and the threat of the state. Deportation is therefore preceded by another form of estrangement: the desire to escape from an environment in which the self cannot openly exist.

The historical catastrophe radically changes the meaning of this desire. What Leopold initially imagines as departure becomes forced displacement, and the anonymity he seeks becomes the systematic destruction of individuality. During the journey eastward, he observes that in the overcrowded cattle car "you lose the traits that make you distinct" (Müller, 2012, p. 9). The camp intensifies this process. Names are supplemented and effectively displaced by numbers, and the prisoners are required to remember that they are "not private individuals but numbered laborers" (Müller, 2012, p. 14). Identity is reduced to usefulness within a system of forced labour. The individual body is no longer primarily a bearer of biography, intimacy, or social belonging; it becomes an instrument whose value depends upon its capacity to work.

This transformation is particularly visible in the novel's treatment of hunger. Hunger is not merely one physical experience among others. It reorganises Leopold's entire perception of the world. Müller gives this condition a metaphorical figure: the "hunger angel". The narrator explains that chronic hunger gradually occupies thought itself until "you no longer have a brain inside your head, only the hunger echo" (Müller, 2012, p. 12). The metaphor transforms an invisible physiological condition into a permanent companion that possesses agency, direction, and power. Hunger is simultaneously inside and outside the self. It belongs to Leopold's body, yet it confronts him as something foreign that controls him.

The heart-shovel performs a similar function. In the camp, the ordinary tool of forced labour becomes a symbolic structure through which Leopold understands his relationship to work, hunger, and survival. The equation is brutally simple: "1 shovel load = 1 gram bread" (Müller, 2012, p. 76). Labour is translated into food and food into continued existence. Yet the relationship between person and object is reversed. Leopold remarks that he would like the shovel to be his tool, "But the shovel is the master, and I am the tool" (Müller, 2012, p. 76). The formulation illustrates the dehumanising logic of forced labour: the human subject becomes instrumental, while the object acquires authority. At the same time, Leopold deliberately learns to accept the shovel because concentrating on work can temporarily distract him from hunger. Survival therefore requires forms of adaptation that complicate any clear distinction between resistance and submission.

Language plays an equally important role in this struggle. As in *The Land of Green Plums*, ordinary vocabulary is transformed under extreme political conditions. In the camp, words acquire meanings that could not have existed outside it. Food words become "hunger words"; objects become carriers of memory; Russian commands are heard through fear rather than understood semantically. The narrator explains that hunger words "make up a map", but instead of geographical countries this map consists of remembered foods (Müller, 2012, p. 148). Such words feed the imagination without feeding the body. Even when prisoners speak collectively about food, hunger remains individual: "Everyone eats his words by himself although we're all eating together" (Müller, 2012, p. 149). Language simultaneously creates community and exposes its limits. The prisoners can share words, recipes, memories, and fantasies, but they cannot literally share another person's hunger.

This is especially evident in the relationship between memory and material objects. Long after his return, Leopold remains haunted by the physical world of the camp. He describes sleepless nights during which he attempts to remember objects from his imprisonment: "For sixty years now, at night I try to recall the objects from the camp" (Müller, 2012, p. 15). These objects do not remain passive components of recollection. They "attack" him and threaten to transport him mentally back to the camp. Memory therefore reverses the logic of deportation. In 1945 Leopold was

physically transported away from home; decades later remembered objects threaten to deport him back into the past. The camp has become a portable space carried within consciousness.

The suitcase motif reinforces this connection between displacement and memory. The novel begins with two related formulations: "All that I have I carry on me. / Or: All that is mine I carry with me" (Müller, 2012, p. 3). Initially, the suitcase contains borrowed clothes and objects supplied by relatives for the journey. After the camp, however, the metaphorical suitcase contains memory itself. Leopold calls the sleepless night "a suitcase made of black leather" lodged inside his forehead. The external luggage of deportation has become internal luggage. This transformation is fundamental to the novel's representation of transition: geographical movement ends, but psychological displacement continues.

The same applies to silence. Leopold's sexuality had already forced him into concealment before his deportation, while the camp produces an additional layer of unspeakable experience. Looking back, he states: "I carry silent baggage. I have packed myself into silence so deeply and for so long that I can never unpack myself using words" (Müller, 2012, p. 5). The suitcase metaphor now merges with language itself. Silence is something carried, packed, and internalised. Even speaking does not completely undo it; as Leopold continues, "When I speak, I only pack myself a little differently" (Müller, 2012, p. 5). This is one of the novel's clearest statements about the difficulty of narrating trauma. Testimony cannot simply remove silence. It can rearrange the experience, give it another form, and make parts of it communicable, but it cannot restore an undamaged relationship between experience and language.

Nevertheless, language also possesses a life-preserving force. Before Leopold is taken away, his grandmother tells him: "I KNOW YOU'LL COME BACK" (Müller, 2012, p. 7). The sentence accompanies him to the camp and becomes, in his retrospective formulation, "the heart-shovel's accomplice and the hunger angel's adversary". Because he ultimately survives, he concludes that "a sentence like that keeps you alive" (Müller, 2012, p. 7). Language therefore occupies an ambivalent position throughout the novel. Words can carry shame, commands, ideological violence, and memories that cannot be escaped, but they can also preserve attachment and provide an internal counterforce against destruction.

The return from the camp consequently cannot be understood as a simple restoration of home. Leopold survives physically, but survival creates its own form of displacement. Sixty years later, hunger continues to structure his behaviour: "ever since I came back from the camp, I have been eating against starvation" (Müller, 2012, p. 12). The past is therefore not past in any straightforward sense. The body continues to react to a deprivation that has long ended. Trauma collapses chronological distance, making the camp present within everyday acts such as eating, sleeping, remembering, and speaking.

In this respect, *The Hunger Angel* extends the pattern already visible in *Nadirs* and *The Land of Green Plums*. In all three works, home fails to function as a stable place of belonging. In *Nadirs*, the minority village is both origin and confinement. In *The Land of Green Plums*, dictatorship contaminates private and public spaces with surveillance and fear. In *The Hunger Angel*, deportation produces an even more radical form of displacement in which the individual carries the lost and traumatic spaces within himself long after physical movement has ended. The progression from one work to the next therefore reveals increasingly complex forms of transition: from alienation within one's community, through political persecution, to the internalisation of historical trauma.

At the same time, *The Hunger Angel* introduces another dimension that is essential to Müller's later engagement with memory: the literary reconstruction of experiences that are not simply identical with her own biography. The novel transforms historical testimony into literary language and thereby raises the question of how traumatic experiences can be transmitted beyond those who directly endured them. The text does not attempt to reproduce the camp through documentary language alone. Instead, it creates a metaphorical vocabulary-the hunger angel, the heart-shovel, the breath-swing, the night-suitcase-through which bodily and psychological experiences become communicable without being reduced to abstract historical information. In this sense, memory becomes transgenerational not because experience itself can be transferred intact, but because language can create forms through which later generations approach what they did not personally experience.

The Hunger Angel ultimately presents survival as a transition without a clear endpoint. Leopold returns from the Soviet camp, but the camp returns with him. Hunger survives in eating, forced labour in bodily memory, deportation in the suitcase lodged inside his head, and fear in his relationship to language and identity. The self that returns is therefore neither the seventeen-year-old who departed nor an entirely new person detached from that past. It is a self constituted through the continuous negotiation between before and after, memory and forgetting, speech and silence, home and displacement.

7. Comparative Discussion: Language, Memory and Changing Forms of Identity

The comparative reading of *Nadirs*, *The Land of Green Plums*, and *The Hunger Angel reveals* a striking continuity in Herta Müller's treatment of identity, but also a significant transformation in the historical and cultural conditions through which identity is articulated. Across all three works, belonging is unstable. Family, minority community, homeland, political society, and even language itself fail to provide an entirely secure foundation for the individual. What changes is the source and scale of

this instability. *Nadirs* locates it primarily within the Banat Swabian community and the structures of childhood; *The Land of Green Plums* places it within the pervasive mechanisms of communist dictatorship; and *The Hunger Angel* extends it into displacement, traumatic memory, and the literary transmission of an earlier historical catastrophe. Taken together, the texts suggest that transition in Müller's work does not lead towards the recovery of a coherent identity. Rather, identity is continually constituted through negotiations between belonging and estrangement, speech and silence, memory and historical rupture.

7.5 Three Configurations of Transition

The comparison allows the three works to be understood as distinct but interconnected configurations of transition:

Work	Dominant form of transition	Central pressure on identity	Function of language	Form of memory
Nadirs	From inherited belonging towards critical distance	Family and minority community	Belonging and critique	Childhood and communal memory
The Land of Green Plums	From private identity towards politically fractured subjectivity	Dictatorship and surveillance	Danger, resistance, coded communication	Political and traumatic memory
The Hunger Angel	From displacement towards enduring internal exile	Deportation, forced labour and trauma	Survival and articulation of the unspeakable	Survivor and transmitted memory

This structure should not be interpreted as a strictly linear evolution in Müller's oeuvre. The categories overlap, and later works repeatedly return to problems already present in earlier ones. Nevertheless, the comparison demonstrates an increasing historical expansion. *Nadirs* begins within the microcosm of family and village; *The Land of Green Plums* opens this space towards the mechanisms of the communist state; *The Hunger Angel* reaches backwards into the post-war deportation of Romanian Germans and forwards into the continuing cultural transmission of traumatic memory. Müller's writing thereby connects individual perception with increasingly extensive historical structures.

The same expansion occurs in the concept of identity. Initially, the question concerns how an individual can belong to a community whose norms she rejects. It subsequently becomes the question of how individual autonomy can survive within dictatorship, and finally how a self can continue after extreme displacement and dehumanisation. What remains constant is Müller's refusal to imagine identity as an untouched inner core. Historical experience enters the body, language, relationships, and memory. Identity is consequently relational and vulnerable, but it is not entirely

passive: perception, linguistic invention, remembrance, friendship, and narration continually create spaces in which imposed definitions can be challenged.

This comparative perspective provides an answer to the central research question of the present article. Müller's German-language writing negotiates changing forms of identity, memory, and belonging not by resolving the tensions between Romanian and German cultural contexts, minority and majority, home and exile, or past and present, but by making these tensions constitutive of literary identity. German gradually exceeds its role as the language of an ethnic minority and becomes a literary medium capable of articulating experiences that cross linguistic, political, geographical, and generational boundaries. This does not erase the specifically Romanian and Romanian-German histories from which the texts emerge. On the contrary, their transnational significance depends precisely on the preservation of those historical particularities.

The three works consequently give a particularly concrete meaning to the idea of voices of transition. Müller's voices speak from positions that are never entirely settled: from inside a minority community and against some of its conventions; from within dictatorship and against its language; from after deportation while remaining psychologically connected to the camp; and from one generation towards experiences belonging to another. Transition is therefore not merely the historical background against which these narratives unfold. It is embedded in their language, structures of memory, and representations of the self. Müller's literature suggests that identity after historical rupture may not consist in overcoming instability but in finding forms of language capable of inhabiting it.

8. Conclusion

This article has examined how Herta Müller's German-language writing negotiates changing forms of identity, memory, and belonging across the Romanian-German minority experience, communist dictatorship, and the remembrance of displacement. Through a comparative reading of *Nadirs, The Land of Green Plums*, and *The Hunger Angel*, it has argued that transition in Müller's work cannot be understood simply as movement from one geographical, political, or cultural condition to another. Rather, transition becomes a persistent condition of the self. Language, memory, and identity are repeatedly reshaped by experiences of estrangement, repression, migration, and historical trauma.

The comparison consequently reveals a movement from memory of origin, through memory of political repression, towards the literary transmission of historical trauma. A corresponding transformation occurs in language. German begins as a contested language of minority belonging, becomes a space of resistance to ideological

control, and ultimately serves as a medium through which experiences of displacement and trauma can be made communicable. This development does not detach Müller's writing from its Romanian context. On the contrary, Romanian language, history, dictatorship, minority relations, and the experiences of Romanian Germans remain essential to the literary world from which these texts emerge. What changes is the capacity of this historically situated German-language writing to articulate experiences that cross national and generational boundaries.

The central research question can therefore be answered as follows: Müller negotiates identity not by reconciling competing forms of belonging, but by transforming the tensions between them into a literary principle. Her protagonists and narrators exist between minority and majority cultures, German and Romanian linguistic environments, home and displacement, speech and silence, individual memory and collective history. None of these oppositions is finally resolved. Identity emerges instead through the continuous negotiation of their contradictions.

This finding also complicates the notion of transition itself. Political transition may change borders, governments, or possibilities of movement, but it does not automatically end the effects of historical violence. Leaving the village does not erase the structures acquired there; escaping dictatorship does not eliminate fear; returning from deportation does not mean leaving the camp behind. Müller's texts thus shift attention from transition as an identifiable historical moment towards the afterlives of transition: the ways in which historical ruptures continue to inhabit language, memory, bodies, and relationships.

Within the framework of Voices of Transition, Müller's writing therefore demonstrates how literature can give form to identities that remain unsettled by history. Its significance lies not in offering a final reconciliation between Romanian and German, past and present, belonging and exile, but in preserving the difficult space between them. Across the three works, language does not repair historical rupture, and memory does not restore an intact past. Literature nevertheless makes these fractures speak. In doing so, Müller transforms transition from a passage between fixed identities into a condition through which identity itself is continually remembered, questioned, and rewritten.

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Reconstructing the Past through Objects and Sensory Experiences: Identity Development in Ioana Nicolaie's *Tot înainte*

Mădălina CRIȘAN

"1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania

Abstract. *The study analyses Ioana Nicolaie's novel* Tot înainte *through the lens of objects and gustatory, olfactory, tactile, and visual experiences, highlighting their formative dimension in the protagonist's development. Remembrance is supported by the complementarity between the material and sensory perception, with the past being reactivated at both cognitive and sensory levels. The analysis also brings to the fore particularities of the socio-cultural context, including the scarcity of food products and the difficulty of obtaining them. Methodologically, the study adopts a close reading approach, articulated through an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that encompasses perspectives from memory studies, sensory perception studies, and material culture. The analysis reveals that material objects transcend their utilitarian function, being invested with formative and identity-related meanings, while sensory experiences contribute to the reconstruction of familial and social experiences from the past. Memory selectively reconstructs fragments from the character's childhood and adolescence, thus supporting the work's character as a Bildungsroman.*

Keywords: functional memory, multisensoriality, communism, material objects, identity, Bildungsroman, reactivation of the past.

1. Introduction

Tot înainte (Nicolaie, 2021) continues the story of the family depicted in *Pelinul negru* and *Cartea Reghinei*. The novel displays the defining features of a Bildungsroman, reconstructing the stages of initiation undergone by Arsenia, the character-narrator, whose development is traced from the age of five to the tenth grade, in December 1989, when she entered the workforce.

2. Reconstructing the Past through Objects and Sensory Experiences

The past is recalled through objects and olfactory, gustatory, tactile, and visual perceptions. Thus, the past is reactivated at both the cognitive and sensory levels. In the process of reconstructing the past, memory selects those elements that have acquired significance and contributed to the shaping of the character's identity. It does not retrieve the past in its entirety; rather, "memory proceeds selectively," and "the selected elements must be formed in a particular manner to become an object of memory" (Erll, 2011, p. 145). Moreover, the reactivation of the past involves a "creative and constructive process. It is not enough to pick up isolated data of our past experience; we must really re-collect them, we must organize and synthesize them, and assemble them into a focus of thought" (Cassirer, 1944, as cited in Erll, 2011, p. 145).

The novel *Tot înainte* is permeated by objects of memory that reveal their formative dimensions, contributing to the shaping of Arsenia's identity.

Suffering from "black hepatitis", Bulța Arsenia is admitted to hospital, where she receives a pair of "Donald pajamas", the first element selected by memory in the process of reconstructing the past: "As for me, how lucky I am to have come to the hospital, I've made friends with the Donalds, and I'll never let them go. We don't have a television, because electricity hasn't even reached our house. That's why I didn't know these ducks before. But now I know them, I spin them around by their tufts and they quack so loudly that the ladies could hear them" (Nicolaie, p. 12).

For Arsenia, the "Donald pajamas" are not merely an item of clothing, but a mediating object. Raised in a rural world engulfed by the darkness of communism, without television or electricity, Arsenia comes into contact, through the American cartoon characters, with a colourful world, and the barriers of everyday reality are thus broken down.

Cornelia's doll is an object that transcends its purely ludic function, while the recollection of this encounter is also perceived at the sensory level, through visual and tactile particularities:

> *"I only like Cornelia; she came in the same ambulance as me. She has a doll unlike any I have ever seen. You can dress her, take off her little shoes and put them back on, smooth down her ruffled dress. And her eyelashes, long and curled, can be seen best when you lay her on her back and her eyes, as if by magic, close. (...) When she puts her to bed, I cannot stop myself from secretly touching her white hair. It is stiff, like fishing line. But what wonderful curls she has! I would never have known such a thing existed if I hadn't thrown up my guts and been brought to the hospital. Lucky I got jaundice" (p. 12-13).*

The act of recollection takes place through what has been felt, seen, or heard (Aristotle, 1972). Moreover, without referring to the psychoanalytic approach to this concept, the doll can be perceived as a "transitional object" (Winnicott, 2005, p. 4), being invested with affective and formative value. Due to the presence of these objects, the experience of hospitalization becomes an experience of knowledge and of the character's cognitive appetite, while the doll, for instance, serves as a link between Arsenia's inner experience and the unknown that she discovers with fascination. Viewed from another perspective, the doll also highlights distinctive features of femininity, thus revealing the formative dimensions of this object.

The Mickey Mouse handkerchief represents another object that enables an encounter with Western cultural otherness, similarly to the "Donald pajamas":

> *"The day before the great celebration, I found a handkerchief by the side of the potholed road, all puddles and mud. (...) Since my Donald pajamas, from a terribly distant life, I could not remember having had anything so colourful. If you unfolded it, in its snow-white world, a little piece of a cartoon lived there, cheerful as could be. (...) But not Mickey Mouse, because he could be found in only one place in Văralia, in Bistrița County, in the country of Romania: on the handkerchief I had found and now kept folded in my pocket" (p. 90-91).*

Transcending its utilitarian function, the handkerchief bears the signs of a colourful, fascinating world, and Arsenia immediately invests it with affective value, thus turning it into a medium of memory:

> *"A medium of memory exists when people think it does. As soon as it is perceived and used as such, a medium turns into a medium of memory. (...) In this way, everyday objects and even elements of the natural world can become media of memory" (Erll, 2011, p. 125).*

Found in the mud, the handkerchief brings the promise of an escape from the grey world of communism and an evanescent joy, given that Voichița, Arsenia's best friend, does not keep her promise to return the handkerchief and, when she does, plunges it into "the deepest mud." Thus, Arsenia learns "how a Mickey Mouse can gobble up your friendship." (p. 90)

For the character-narrator, jeans constitute an object embodying the desire to escape from a world of repetitive, imposed slogans that promoted quasi-equality, as well as a means of asserting identity:

> *"How young and beautiful Comrade Daniela was! (...) she wore jeans. I had never seen them before; I had heard that they existed, only they were made in other countries, which you had no way of reaching because they would shoot you at every border. When I grow up, I want to be Comrade Daniela. I want to have neat, rounded fingernails and smooth*

skin too, and trousers in this very clear shade of blue, and a light shirt, with a red sweater, the kind they don't make at our factory, and long hair cut straight across the forehead, and a tape recorder with this rhythmic music that can make you take flight" (p. 59-60).

The studies conducted by Breda Luthar and Maruša Pušnik and by Tomasz Frasoński are illuminating in this respect, as jeans are associated with freedom and, for Arsenia, materialize the first sign of emancipation.

Viewed from another angle, the quoted passage is representative of Svetlana Boym's perspective on reflective nostalgia in relation to the retrospective reconstruction of childhood. Boym distinguishes between restorative nostalgia, which involves the recovery of the past, and reflective nostalgia, which does not seek the complete recovery of the past but is oriented towards the valorisation of details and fragments: "It loves details, not symbols. (...) reflective nostalgia cherishes shattered fragments of memory" (Boym, 2001). Thus, it can be concluded that the figure of "Comrade Daniela" is outlined through a multitude of details presented as fragments of an experience reactivated through memory. Objects, colours, sounds, and the prospect of projecting a different identity are what memory selects, rather than totalitarian thought, making evident from a reflective perspective on an experience from the past.

"'It's not so bad in the West; you're closer to freedom. You can feel it, like a cool breeze blowing over a huge sheet of cellophane. If you know it exists, it's better, because in secret you make plans to look for a railway bridge yourself, to find a boat, to build strong arms so that you can cross the Mureș even when the currents pull you under like a rag.

For now, she was happy that she had managed to get her first pair of real sneakers, brought from beyond. Leather. Branded. With Velcro. Like no one in Văralia had ever seen before." (p. 227).

A relevant theoretical foundation for the way in which memory selects different objects in the process of reconstructing the past is Aleida Assmann's distinction between storage memory and functional memory: "Functional memory is highly selective and only gives presence to a fraction of memory's contents. (...) Storage memory, on the other hand, is the 'amorphous mass' of unused and unincorporated memories that surround the functional memory like a halo" (2011, p. 125). Consequently, storage memory encompasses the totality of contents from the past, without exerting an influence on identity formation, whereas functional memory is selective, with certain fragments being invested with perspective and relevance for identity formation (2011, p. 127). In Ioana Nicolaie's novel, the "real sneakers, brought from beyond" or Comrade Daniela's jeans are objects that reactivate emotional states,

condense the communist past, and form part of a triadic configuration: mnemonic, symbolic, and identity-related.

> *"I don't throw myself at it like the others; I pick it up carefully; I have never had anything more beautiful. A book of my own, with letters, with drawings (...) I'm going to take good care of it (...) I run my hand over the primer, pressing page after page against my palm, so that all the writing and illustrations pass through my skin and reach my heart, because that is where affection lies, and then I jump for joy" (p. 35).*

Like the other objects, the primer is endowed with affective dimensions and contributes to the shaping of Arsenia's identity. In terms of the character-narrator's relationship with this object, which exceeds its pragmatic function, the analytical perspective proposed by Bill Brown proves relevant: "The story of objects asserting themselves as things, then, is the story of a changed relation to the human subject and thus the story of how the thing really names less an object than a particular subject-object relation" (2001, p. 4). More than any other symbolic object representative of the character's development, the primer emerges as a key point in Arsenia's initiatory trajectory, her interaction with it also being perceived at the sensory level. In conclusion, the primer is not merely a book for Arsenia, but the key to the universe of knowledge and to her development, an object that has fully realized its identity-related attribute, if we consider Ioana Nicolaie's professional trajectory and the Melior Libraries.

In consonance with the primer, which is circumscribed to Arsenia's identity development, is the raspberry-picking episode:

> *"God, it won't be long before I start the fifth grade, and I need everything, from a tracksuit to sports shoes, from a fountain pen and pencil case to notebooks and covers for them (...) I also need a uniform (...) I'm going to pick raspberries as skilfully as I can, I'm going to climb the steepest slope, I won't care about the blackberry bushes scraping my ankles, thorns everywhere, I'll jump over logs until I reach a patch full of fruit" (p. 147).*

Arsenia's involvement in this activity, motivated by her desire to obtain the items necessary for the beginning of the school year, can be interpreted through the theoretical framework proposed by William A. Corsaro (1992), who argues that theories of children's social development should move away from individualistic models that view social development as the child's internalization of adult skills and knowledge. He considers the appropriate interpretive perspective to be one that views development as a "productive-reproductive process," in which the child participates in the "creative production of social order," reproduces, extends, and joins the adult world (pp. 161, 175). The perspective proposed by Corsaro — "This process of

interpretive reproduction enables children to become a part of adult culture — that is, to contribute to its reproduction and extension" (p. 160) — is relevant in Arsenia's case, since she actively participates in the construction of her own world, while the raspberry-picking episode acquires an initiatory dimension, as the journey undertaken alongside her father and the effort she makes have a specific purpose: "Thirty-five! Exactly. Today you earned your first money, thirty-five lei, almost like a grown-up" (p. 149).

Thus, from the object that arouses the child's interest in the universe of knowledge to her active participation in the educational process, a stage in Arsenia's initiation can be identified, an aspect that validates the work's character as a Bildungsroman.

Situated within the same category of identity-related objects, Arsenia's first photograph represents the beginning of her existence "as other: a tortuous dissociation of consciousness from identity" (Barthes, 2009, p. 18).

> *"My first photograph. I can hardly contain my joy because now that I'm in the first grade, Comrade Photographer from the resort is going to come to our school, the one who looks like a man but takes photographs worth framing. (...) Whatever anyone might say a photograph is the absolute truth. If you're ugly, no one will be able to hide your ugliness. But if you're beautiful in it, you'll be beside yourself with joy when you go home. The photograph with its serrated edges contains the whole of Class 1B, big and small, girls and boys, Spaimoc, the stupid and the clever, and Comrade Teacher, who didn't just leave us to our own devices but carefully arranged us in the best possible order" (p. 46, 51).*

The photograph preserves Arsenia's status as a pupil in communist Romania: "We all have to be in uniform. Otherwise, how can we prove that we are the most beautiful class?" (p. 46). Following the analytical perspective of literary theorist Roland Barthes, the photograph encapsulates the subject within a historical context, transforming it into an object: "The Photograph (the one I intend) represents that very subtle moment when, to tell the truth, I am neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object (...)" (2009, p. 19). For Arsenia, this moment has an ontological dimension and confirms her new identity, namely that of a first-grade pupil. With the introduction of the Kodak camera in 1888 by George Eastman, photography became "the family's primary instrument of self-knowledge and representation — the means by which family memory would be continued and, perpetuated, by which the family's story would henceforth be told" (Hirsch, 1997, pp. 6-7). Starting from the principles of family photography formulated by Marianne Hirsch, these also become relevant in the case of the school photograph in the quoted passage, retaining their functions of self-knowledge and representation while also acquiring a social function (Bourdieu, 1990). The arrangement of the pupils in a

particular order carries the connotations of a solemn moment, observing certain conventions and illustrating the idea of unity and belonging: "It took Comrade Teacher a while to arrange us in four rows, so that we could all be seen" (p. 52). Thus, the photograph becomes "an object of collective and quasi-ceremonial contemplation" (Bourdieu, p. 26, 1990).

> *"'Where are you? my mother asked me a week later, when I brought her my first photograph.*
>
> *`I think I'm here! Except I can't see myself at all.*
>
> *The children in the back can hardly be seen, but their mothers would still find them immediately. But not ugly me (...) As for my first photograph, this one, in which I have no face at all, after a while, after a day or a year, or perhaps fifteen, it became like the dirt on a pair of shoes that you can never clean properly" (p. 53-54).*

Although initially perceived as an identity-related object, the first photograph subverts this dimension, positioning itself at the opposite pole, and Arsenia, instead of "seeing herself" on paper, experiences a marginalization of the self rather than its materialization, as she had desired, thus illustrating Roland Barthes's perspective:

> *"I would like, in short, my image (...) always to coincide with my 'self' (profound, as is known); but it is the contrary that must be said: 'myself' never coincides with my image" (2009, p. 17).*

> *"'Come on, take the bicycle, my aunt says that morning! You'll get there in no time on the Pegas.*
>
> *I can hardly contain my happiness. I jump into the saddle, pedal as fast as I can, I fly, I am nothing but joy, I have never had a bicycle, nor will I ever have one, no matter how much I may want one, no matter how many Cutezătorii competitions I may enter (...)" (p. 134).*

The appearance of the Pegas bicycle in the discourse of memory is hardly surprising, given that it is an object specific to childhood during the communist period, associated with the desire for escape, liberation, and autonomy, illustrated in the quoted passage through the metaphor of "flight." The bicycle is "the freedom machine" (Macy & Wanggren, 2015) and, from the moment of its emergence, "offered direct contact with speed and mechanism alongside a rich sensory experience" (Brogan, 2022, p. 12). Moreover, in relation to this object, time and space change their dimensions, while the fullness of the moment is experienced at both the cognitive and sensory levels. In relation to the analytical model proposed by Una Brogan, the bicycle is an object through which people are offered the possibility of overcoming social barriers, an aspect that also applies to Arsenia. However, it should be argued that, in this case, what is configured is a temporary overcoming of the restrictive norms

specific to the communist era, a phenomenon of which the character is aware. Nevertheless, with the maturity inherent in a child growing up in communist Romania, she chooses to enjoy the present and what this object can offer her, namely "freedom, mobility, and the liberating promise of modernity" (Withers & Shea, 2016, p. 3), without overlooking a future sealed by the same social position.

Up to this point, the analytical approach has focused on objects that transcend their utilitarian character and acquire affective and identity-related dimensions; from this point onward, it will focus on the sensory modalities that play an important role in reconstructing the past.

The episode of Marcel Proust's madeleine, evoked in the first volume of *In Search of Lost Time*, would later be analyzed by researchers as the "Proustian madeleine effect" or the "Proustian phenomenon," addressing the connection established between sensory perception and memory.

In Marcel Proust's case, the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea on a winter day triggers the mechanism of involuntary memory, as he recalls moments from his childhood in Combray, when his aunt Léonie would give him, on Sunday mornings, a madeleine dipped in tea. It is not the visual, but the gustatory and olfactory that reactivate the past, reconstructing moments from it:

> *"But at the very instant when the mouthful of tea mixed with cake crumbs touched my palate, I quivered, attentive to the extraordinary thing that was happening inside me. A delicious pleasure had invaded me, isolated me, without my having any notion as to its cause. (...) I drink a second mouthful, in which I find nothing more than in the first, a third that gives me a little less than the second. (...) And suddenly the memory appeared. That taste was the taste of the little piece of madeleine which on Sunday mornings at Combray (...), my aunt Léonie would give me after dipping it in her infusion of tea or lime blossom. The sight of the little madeleine had not reminded me of anything before I tasted it;" (Proust, 2002, p. 45, 47).*

Starting from the exemplification of the "Proustian phenomenon," David E. Sutton (2001) examines the anthropology of the senses and the relationship between food and memory, also incorporating Paul Stoller's theory according to which bodily movements, smells, tastes, sounds, and sensibilities "are potent conveyors of meaning and memory" (as cited in Sutton, p. 14). Sutton considers that food's memory power derives in part from synesthesia, which entails an intersection of experiences originating in different sensory registers (for example, taste, smell, and hearing) and provides that experience of "returning to the whole," a phenomenon analyzed by James Fernandez (as cited in Sutton). Sutton subscribes to Fernandez's theory of "returning to the whole" (1986, *Persuasions and Performances: The Play of Tropes in Culture*), which involves "a 'mutual tuning-in' based on shared sensory experiences

that are explicitly synesthetic (crossing sensory domains)" (2001, p. 76), multisensoriality having the capacity to reconstruct contexts from the past, since memory stores exteroceptive sensations. Within this theoretical framework, David Howes's analytical perspective is also relevant, as he defines multisensory anthropology at the beginning of his article: "The senses are made, not given. Multisensory anthropology focuses on the variable boundaries, differential elaboration, and many different ways of combining the senses across (and within) cultures" (2019, p. 17). Sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch should not be treated individually; rather, everything should be viewed through the lens of their intersection, since "The memory of one sense is stored in another: that of tactility in sound, of hearing in taste, of sight in sound" (as cited in Sutton, p. 99), while the socio-cultural context is also important.

In accordance with the approach theorized by Howes, the description of sherbet provides an intersensory perception: "We didn't even know such a thing existed. Sherbet. That's exactly what Dad brought us. A jar with a kind of jam that isn't jam, because it's firm and pink, you can almost cut it with a spoon, and then you can't get it off your teeth because of how sticky and delicious it becomes" (p. 38). The visual, tactile, and gustatory act together rather than independently, thus generating a memorable experience.

Among the vicissitudes of life specific to the communist era was also the sporadic availability of food. In relation to the same theoretical paradigm concerning the relationship between sensory perception and the socio-cultural framework, the episode of the first encounter with a slice of orange is illustrative in this respect: "I take it; I don't know what an orange is. The long slice wrapped in its thin skin gives off a smell unlike any other. Its softness spreads into my fingers; I mustn't squeeze it or the juice will come out. I shelter it in my fist, and only after a while do I dare bring it to my mouth. I bite, just a tiny bit at first, enough to find out what this fruit is like. Then I take another little bite, as little as possible, biting more air than orange, so that the taste will last as long as possible, so that it will not fade away. (...) the orange still lasts, one tiny piece and then another, because another ten years will pass before, after the Revolution, I will see a whole orange" (p. 68-69). First, the olfactory, then the tactile, and finally the gustatory, which the girl prolongs through small bites, contributes to a multisensory perception that succeeds in configuring a memorable experience. Therefore, sensory memory preserves, in an interconnected manner, the imprints of the socio-cultural context.

Liviu Chelcea discusses the scarcity specific to the communist era in the article *The Culture of Shortage during State-Socialism: Consumption Practices in a Romanian Village in the 1980s*. The rationing of foods such as bread, sugar, biscuits, and sweets was a characteristic of the period, these being consumed "on special situations such as

Christmas, New Year`s Eve, Easter, on birthdays, family visits and so on. (...) the sweets that were quite scarce at the time" (2002, p. 34). While Chelcea's article approaches rationing from an adult perspective, in *Tot înainte*, socio-economic scarcity is seen through the eyes of a child: "You never know whether the bread will come; someone is always waiting for it (...) Hunger had begun, food was rationed, you waited for bread in endless queues, I for one never saw it, and meat came rarely and was sold under the counter, so Mum only managed to buy it three or four times a year. (...)" (p. 71, 108). Also eloquent in this respect is the episode in which sugar becomes a dessert for the siblings gathered around the table: "When we get home, the first thing I do is empty half a kilogram of sugar onto a plate. I drip a little water over it; it binds slightly, almost like cream. We scoop it up with polenta, because we only have bread for the evening meal" (p. 195).

Chelcea (2002, p. 20) considers that, in the context of state socialism, the intrinsic scarcity of certain products or objects generates meanings different from those they would have had in a context of abundance, thus acquiring the characteristics of gifts or rarities. Consequently, the jam-filled pastry is "the best thing on earth" (p. 50), while sweets such as biscuits, chocolate, or candies enrich the sensory universe of childhood: "But there is nothing better than milk candies or those coated in cocoa" (p. 99). Aspects concerning scarcity, the difficulty of obtaining these products, and their consumption in small quantities are documented by Liviu Chelcea in his study, in the accounts of people who experienced the unfavourable circumstances of that period.

Another manifestation of sensory experience that stands out in the character's memory is the discovery of a chocolate-covered hazelnut: "For the first time in my life, I was eating a hazelnut covered in chocolate. I didn't even know such a thing existed. I chewed it endlessly, no longer feeling the cold" (p. 219), an instance that deserves to be analysed from the perspective of flavour memory. Mojet and Köster (2016), starting from the idea that smell, taste, texture, temperature, and pain contribute to the perception and memory of food flavour, emphasize that flavour memory is particularly connected to the circumstances in which the flavour was perceived and is oriented towards the detection of novelty and change. The sensory novelty is consciously perceived by Arsenia, while savouring the hazelnut is remembered together with the disappointment of being unable to participate in handball practice. The hazelnut chewed "endlessly" configures Arsenia's experience at the sensory, attentional, and bodily levels, a hypothesis that converges with Richard J. Stevenson's (2012) theoretical model concerning the role of attention in flavor perception, with taste having the capacity to capture attention: "the salience of the olfactory and oral events seem to compete to capture attention, and where the oral events are more salient, as is

often the case, attention will be directed toward events in the mouth at the expense of events at the nose" (p. 4), an aspect also notable in Arsenia's case, as the gustatory captures her attention at the expense of the cold.

A final dimension of sensory experience is crystallized through the olfactory stimuli induced by the honey received from her father: "A jar full of honey (...) the bag smells of home, smells of the bus, smells a little of Dad too" (p. 26). This episode can also be interpreted through the observations proposed by Herz and Schooler (2002), based on their research, which emphasize that memories reactivated through smell are distinguished by their emotional potency and display a particular emotional intensity compared with other memories reactivated through different stimuli (p. 23). They subsequently focus their attention on childhood, when a significant proportion of smells are associated with emotional events and "are able to trigger Proustian recall because so many experiences are new and meaningful during this stage of life" (p. 23-24). In consonance with the autobiographical elements reactivated in the case of the French novelist by the taste of the madeleine dipped in tea — "immediately the old gray house on the street (...), and with the house the town, from morning to night and in all weathers, the Square, where they sent me before lunch, the streets where I went on errands, the paths we took if the weather was fine" (Proust, 2002, pp. 47-48) — in Arsenia's case, too, this dimension of affective memory is evident in the triadic sequence home-bus-father, but it is stimulated by olfactory perception, which reveals its intensity. This time, the results of the study proposed by Herz and Schooler are also confirmed in Arsenia's case: "olfactory cues can significantly increase the emotional intensity of autobiographical recollections relative to verbal or visual cues" (p. 28). The conclusions of the aforementioned study reinforce the idea that olfactory perception contributes significantly to the reactivation of memories, as opposed to visual perception, while the participants in Herz and Schooler's study "were significantly more likely to feel 'brought back' than those who were given a visual cue" (p. 30). In *Tot înainte*, the smell of the bag brings the home and the image of the father back to life, while the past is reactivated through sensory experience.

The analysis of the novel *Tot înainte*, through the lens of objects that transcend their utilitarian role and of sensory experiences, reveals that these have acquired significance in the formation of the character's identity. Objects preserve emotionally charged, familial, and social experiences, contributing to the reconstruction of the past. Likewise, taste, olfactory, tactile, and visual perceptions contribute to the reactivation of the past, bringing back both individual experiences and specific features of the socio-cultural context, including the scarcity of food products and the difficulty of obtaining them. The past is reactivated at both the cognitive and sensory levels. Memory selects experiences from the familial, educational, and social spheres, in which the character assumed different roles and went through essential stages in her

development, thus supporting the initiatory dimension of the novel. Situated at the confluence of the material and the sensory, memory does not recover the past in its entirety, but rather "proceeds selectively" (Erll, 2011).

3. Conclusions

Taking all these aspects into consideration, the recollection of moments from childhood and adolescence is supported by the complementarity between the material and sensory perception. The reconstruction of the past does not entail its exhaustive recovery, but rather a selection of representative fragments, while objects and sensory experiences become vectors of meaning due to their emergence throughout the protagonist's developmental trajectory. The hospital, school, family, and the socio-cultural context marked by restrictive conditions are spaces in which the character discovers herself and goes through essential stages in her development, with memory correlating them with objects or sensory registers that operate as landmarks in the main character's initiatory trajectory.

Declaration on AI-assisted Editorial Support

During the preparation of this work, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist in identifying potentially relevant academic literature and translating author-written passages from Romanian into English, without intentionally altering their original meaning or arguments. All suggested academic sources were located, consulted, and evaluated by the author. The research objectives, theoretical framework, textual analysis, interpretations, and conclusions are the author's own intellectual contributions. After using this AI tool, the author has reviewed and verified the final manuscript and assumes full responsibility for the content of the published article.

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"First Comes the University, Then the Reason of the Cannon": Sever Bocu and the Image as a Weapon in a Province in Transition, 1918 to 1940

Bogdan Mihai DASCĂLU

"Titu Maiorescu" Institute of Banat Studies, Romanian Academy, Timișoara Branch

Abstract. *This article examines how a regional self-image is deliberately manufactured during a political transition. Its corpus is the collected speeches of Sever Bocu (1874 to 1951), journalist, delegate to the Paris Peace Conference and Minister of the Banat, published as* Drumuri și răscruci *(2024). Between 1918 and 1940 the Banat passed from Hungarian administration into Greater Romania and was, in 1919, partitioned between Romania and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, a transition that unmade the frame within which the province had described itself. Working within the imagological tradition of Dyserinck and Leerssen, and with a set of distinctions between image, stereotype, hetero-image, allo-image, retro-image and ipso-image, I show that Bocu does not record a Banat consciousness but convenes it: he enumerates it in four numbered articles, grounds it in a loss rather than a possession, annexes the hostile images others hold of his region, and builds institutions expressly as producers of image. The case yields four findings for the study of transition: the codification of an auto-image into a statute, the identity constituted through absence, the annexation of the retro-image, and the autonomisation of an ethnic sign from its referent.*

Keywords: imagology; transition; regional identity; the Banat; retro-image; self-image; interwar Romania

1. Transition as an Imagological Problem

A transition is usually described in the vocabulary of institutions: borders move, administrations are replaced, schools change their language of instruction. What such descriptions leave out is the work communities must perform on their images of themselves and of their neighbours once the frame within which those images made sense has been withdrawn. An auto-image formed in opposition to a dominant power does not survive unchanged the disappearance of that power, and a hetero-image built

around a neighbour does not survive unchanged the moment that neighbour becomes a fellow citizen, or is placed on the far side of a new border. Transition is not only an administrative event. It is an imagological event, and it can be studied as such. Identity, as Hall (1996) has argued, is not a settled property but a relation that has to be produced again and again, and a transition is the moment at which that production becomes visible.

The province I am concerned with here offers an unusually concentrated case. Between 1918 and 1920 the Banat, a region between the Danube, the Tisza, the Mureș and the Carpathians, ceased to be an outlying territory of the Hungarian half of the Dual Monarchy and became a western province of Greater Romania; and almost immediately, in 1919, it was divided, the larger eastern part going to Romania, the western part to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Within two years the same population passed from being a minority under a foreign administration to being the titular majority of a national state, and simultaneously acquired a border that cut through its own kinship networks. The two movements pulled in opposite directions: the first invited a triumphant self-image, the second imposed a wounded one. What a community does with such a contradiction is precisely the kind of question this volume asks.

The historiography of Greater Romania has established the framework within which the question must be placed. Livezeanu (1995) has shown that the unification of 1918 was followed by a decade in which the new provinces, the Banat among them, resisted centralisation and defended regional cultural prerogatives largely through cultural institutions: schools, universities, churches, associations. Neumann (2019) has described the long formation of the Banat as a region of mixed population in which no single ethnic group could think of itself in isolation. What has not been described is the mechanism by which one of the protagonists of that decade produced, deliberately and with full awareness of what he was doing, the images through which the province was to recognize itself. That protagonist is Sever Bocu, and this article is a study of his image production. My purpose is neither biographical nor political. It is to establish, on a single well documented corpus, how images behave when the ground beneath them moves: which are abandoned, which are inverted, which are annexed from the adversary, and which are manufactured by an act of institutional will. I argue that Bocu offers, without having read a line of imagological theory, one of the clearest interwar demonstrations that images are not descriptions of a reality but instruments for acting upon it, and that a community in transition defends itself with images before it defends itself with arguments.

2. Corpus, Terms and Method

The corpus is a single volume: Sever Bocu, *Drumuri și răscruci. Discursuri*, edited by Ioan David and Doru Sinaci, with a preface by Crișu Dascălu (Bocu, 2024). It gathers speeches, lectures, commemorative addresses, inaugural allocutions and graveside orations delivered over roughly twenty five years, together with an editorial introduction by I. D. Suciu which reproduces further fragments from Bocu's articles and parliamentary interventions. All page references below are to this edition, and all translations from Romanian are my own.

Three features of the corpus determine the method. First, these are not diaries, memoirs or letters, that is, they do not belong to the border literature I have worked on elsewhere, in which the image is a solitary notation. They are spoken texts, delivered to an identifiable audience, in an identifiable place, on an identifiable date: at Cenad at midnight before the exhumed bones of Eftimie Murgu, at Becicherecu Mic before twenty thousand peasants, in the former hall of the counts of Timiș. The methodological consequence must be stated at the outset: an image produced in a speech is never a private observation but a public proposal. It is addressed to someone, asks something of that someone, and expects an immediate confirmation, often an audible one.

Second, the speaker is not a writer describing but a politician building. He does not observe that a Banat consciousness exists; he convenes it, names it, enumerates its attributes and requires it to exist. For this reason the imagology of the corpus is not merely implicit, as it is in almost all memorial material of the period. It is at times explicit. In 1940, arguing for a metropolitan see at Timișoara, Bocu declares: "I do not believe in an 'objectivity' of history. As a science, history does not belong to the exact sciences. Man is subjective to such a degree that when he steps out of subjectivism he is no longer himself" (Bocu, 2024, p. 506). I know of no clearer formulation, in the Romanian material of the period, of the premise our discipline requires.

Third, the volume is a deposit and not a system. The speeches were delivered across a quarter of a century, in circumstances ranging from the festive to the funerary to the polemical, and treating them as a system, which I am obliged to do in order to comment on them, attributes to them a coherence the author did not pursue. I signal this at the outset because methodological honesty requires one to state not only what one has found but also what one has added by the mere fact of looking.

The terminology follows the tradition founded by Dyserinck (1966) and consolidated by Leerssen (2007, 2016) in the survey he edited with Beller (Beller & Leerssen, 2007), with the refinements I have proposed elsewhere (Dascălu, 2024a, 2024b, 2024c). I distinguish, first, between image and stereotype: the image is individual, situated, charged with the subjectivity of the perceiver, whereas the stereotype is a collective product whose apparent objectivity derives precisely from its

supra-individual character. Within the field of images I distinguish the auto-image, which a group forms of itself; the hetero-image, which it forms of another; the allo-image, in which one other forms an image of a second other and the observer merely records the transaction; the retro-image, in which the other accredits an image of us; and the ipso-image, in which the self presents its own image without reference to any alterity whatever, a category for which the material obliged me to propose a separate term. By imagotype I understand a generalisation raised to the rank of a defining trait.

3. An auto-Image that Gives Itself a Name

There is in this volume a page which I would not hesitate to call the most complete act of explicit auto-imagology produced in interwar Romanian culture. It is the passage of 1934 in which Bocu defines what he calls *bănățenism*, Banat-ness: "In us, the people of the Banat, there exist two consciousnesses, one national and one of the Banat, or perhaps two aspects of the same consciousness which merge into and complete one another" (Bocu, 2024, pp. 51-52). What follows is remarkable in its form: an enumeration in four numbered points, set out as in a statute. First, an organic feeling of Romanian unity; second, an inherent attachment to the dynasty; third, a tolerance towards the cohabiting nations with whom, as he puts it, we have built a civilisation here; and fourth, "a feeling of privation which the other Romanians cannot have to the same degree, since they have not left, as we have, relatives, brothers, sisters, beyond unjust borders" (p. 52). At the end of the enumeration comes the conclusion: "This, in my opinion, is Banat-ness."

Here the form is the argument. An author who enumerates his auto-image in four numbered points has left the regime of the image and entered that of the definition: he no longer describes what he feels, he codifies what is to be felt. This is an auto-image in the process of becoming a stereotype, and the operation is visible in the act: a sum of personal images is being proposed as a collective norm. Whether the proposal succeeded is a question for the cultural history of the province; that it was made, the text proves it.

The fourth criterion is not a possession but a wound. The auto-image of the Banat rests, in its final article, not on something the group has but on something the group has lost. This is a structure I have rarely encountered and which deserves a name: an identity constituted through absence. It is the specific imagological signature of a partitioned region, the point at which the transition of 1919 enters the self-definition of the group as a permanent constituent rather than as a remembered event. The conclusion Bocu draws from it has the same paradoxical form: "What separates us is a surplus of Romanianism, a Romanianism more pronounced, more elevated, more uncompromising, which is imposed upon us" (p. 52). Separation is thus effected

by an excess of what is held in common, which is logically a contradiction and imagologically a solution. Only in this way can a regional auto-image claim difference and belonging at the same time, that is, answer the accusation, always present in the subtext, that regionalism is a form of separatism.

That the accusation was present, and that he felt it, is proved by his reaction: "Does this harm our unity? It has been thought so, and the regionalist idea has been presented as an idea hostile to the idea of unity. Evidently a heresy" (p. 45). The formula with which he defends himself, "we seek unity in variety, our variety being a part, and indeed a brilliant part, of Romanian unity" (p. 465), is the most economical resolution of that dilemma produced by anyone in interwar Romania. It is worth noticing what has happened here in terms of transition. Under the old regime, regional distinctiveness required no defence, because the adversary was external and the region's Romanian character was itself the contested claim. Under the new one, the same distinctiveness becomes suspect, and the auto-image must be rebuilt so as to be simultaneously particular and loyal. The content of the image barely changes; its argumentative function changes entirely.

4. Measure, or the Mechanics of an Auto-Imagotype

If I had to extract from this volume a single auto-imagotype, it would be measure. The formula is well known in the region and circulates to this day, but few notice its construction, which is of an almost suspect elegance. Banat-ness manifests itself, Bocu writes, "through that sense of measure specific to the Banat which is given to us by our artistic temperament, or perhaps through that artistic temperament which is given to us by our sense of measure" (Bocu, 2024, pp. 51-52).

The sentence is circular and its author knows it. That "or perhaps" is the signature of a man who sees his own reasoning closing into a circle and who prefers to leave the circle open rather than falsify it. Measure produces art, art produces measure, and which of the two is the cause remains undecided. We have here one of the few pages in Romanian literature in which an auto-image is stated and, in the same gesture, relativised by its own author. This is what I would call an awareness of the gap: the distance between representation and reality is not concealed but signalled through a syntactic hesitation. It matters methodologically, because it shows that explicit imagology does not entail naivety about images. From this derive the other determinations of the Banat auto-image in the volume, and all of them are aesthetic before they are moral or political: "this Banat is a homeland of the arts, a land of style, of harmonies, of inspiration, of artistic intuition" (p. 480); art, "which elsewhere is perhaps a luxury, is with us a necessity of the first order" (p. 480); "in the Banat other flowers grow. Our *doina* sounds different, and even in our churches we psalmodise

God in other harmonies" (p. 464). The culmination of the series is a sentence I consider anthological for our discipline: "It is interesting that in the Banat the first element of revolt is not the stomach but taste" (pp. 480-481). An entire collective imagotype is condensed here into an inversion of hierarchy: where the explanatory tradition of the age expected hunger, the author puts taste. The statement need not be true to be an image, and it is one with a considerable power of induction, that is, with the capacity to absorb contradictory traits without visible strain.

The same power of induction is visible in the way the auto-image absorbs its exceptions. Traian Lalescu, the mathematician, is a departure from the rule, and is therefore explained by the rule: "By what caprice of nature did this mind arise, with such clear positivist determinations, in a world of dreamers, of singers, of poets, of which Banat society was composed?" (p. 80). The explanation offered, that some Roman legionary breaks through in him after a wait of two thousand years, does not contradict the system but extends it in depth, as far as Rome. The exception does not break the imagotype; it adds a root to it. Imagogenesis always takes place within a pre-existing stereotype, which we may confirm or deny but to which we are obliged to relate.

It should be said, finally, that the aesthetic auto-image has in this volume a reverse side which the author does not conceal: "Political and even cultural opportunism issued from our very opulence and economic well-being" (p. 36). The same wealth that produces the *doina* produces opportunism; the same artistic temperament that gives measure gives passivity. I do not know many interwar Romanian auto-images that state, in the same text, their own price.

5. Alterity Next Door

Imagology derives from the opposition between identity and alterity, but legitimate hesitations begin when one tries to accredit a parallel between that opposition and the opposition between here and there, according to which here would be identitary and there alteritary. The parallel holds only for the stereotype, that is, for the collective image elaborated at a distance. It no longer holds for the image, which presupposes the presence of the self on the spot.

The Banat material tests this parallel more radically still, because here alterity is not at the end of a journey but in the neighbouring village, in the left choir stall of the church, in the school across the road and sometimes in one's own family. Bocu describes a province in which Romanians, Serbs, Swabians, Hungarians and Aromanians live within a few square kilometres of one another, and the structure this cohabitation produces is not a binary opposition but a cascade in which each is in turn self and other. His own formula states it without circumlocution: "There was an era of

trialism, of cultural influences in the Banat, of Germanisation, of Serbianisation, of Magyarisation" (Bocu, 2024, p. 167).

The consequence is an unusual density of allo-images, that is, of situations in which one other establishes an image of a second other and the author merely records it: what the Serbs thought of the Hungarians, what Count Mensdorf-Pouilly reported to the Habsburgs about the Banat, what Joseph II wrote to his mother about the Romanians. These passages are, imagologically, the most valuable part of the file, because in them representations circulate between third parties while the author, who is not a party to the transaction, can record them with a precision he would not command if he were himself the target. The most productive of the volume's oppositions, however, is not that between Romanian and foreigner but that between Romanian and Romanian, more precisely between the man of the Banat and the man of Transylvania: "In Transylvania the character of the resistance was revolutionary, heroic, plebeian; with us it was authoritative, aristocratic, diplomatic" (p. 199). Six adjectives, three on each side, arranged in opposed pairs. It is a perfect antinomy and, like any perfect antinomy, it betrays imagological thinking in its purest state, that in which what is one's own is delimited from what is foreign. What is remarkable is that the foreign half is occupied by fellow nationals: the structure is identical to that of an ethnic hetero-image, the affective content entirely different.

From this follows an observation I consider important for the study of transitions. When alterity is internal, the image becomes reversible: depending on the position of the reader, it can be read as praise or as reproach. "The moderates" is, in Bocu's text, an "epithet-title thrown at the men of the Banat" by the Transylvanian press (p. 199), that is, a retro-image, an image the other accredits about us. His reaction is not denial but assumption: the men of the Banat deserved it, he says, to the extent that the Banat allied itself on a genuinely distinct political plane, with its own strategy, its own tactics, its own economic and psychic structure (p. 199). What was an accusation becomes, by a simple change of sign, a self-portrait. This is one of the most elegant operations of axiological recuperation I have encountered, and it deserves to be named as such: the retro-image is not contested but annexed.

The opposition does not remain stable, however. It dissolves under external pressure, and it re-forms as soon as the pressure ceases. This oscillation is the most honest imagological observation in the whole volume, because it describes not a trait but a mechanism: internal alterity is a function of the intensity of external alterity. The closer the enemy, the more brotherly the neighbour. It is also, I would add, the mechanism that explains why the transition of 1918 was followed so rapidly by regionalist friction. The external pressure which had held the internal differences in suspension was removed at the very moment the differences acquired, for the first time, an institutional arena in which to be expressed.

6. The Serbian Century, or Alterity Turned into Identity

The densest chapter of this file is the one Bocu calls, in a happy formula, the Serbian century. His thesis is stated once, in a 1934 lecture on Lipova, and deserves to be quoted at length because it is, properly speaking, an imagological programme:

> *"The soul of the Banat will not be understood without a knowledge of this past, which is a different one, without a knowledge of the Serbian century, which will leave entirely distinct imprints, will create another type of history, other tragic heroes, or will develop certain qualities, of suppleness, which are lacking elsewhere, qualities of diplomats, of leaders, of chiefs" (Bocu, 2024, p. 233).*

What is asserted here is that an alterity endured for a century does not remain external but is deposited within identity in the form of qualities. Banat suppleness, that diplomatic aptitude by which he explains Șaguna, the Mocioni family and Babeș, is in this reading a deposit left by Serbian pressure, as a layer of limestone is a deposit left by water. We have here, formulated by a man who had not read a line of imagology, one of the most exact descriptions of the process our discipline studies under the name of imagogenesis through prolonged contact.

The demonstration continues on liturgical ground, where no one would have thought to look for it. "How could his popular art not be influenced by liturgical chant, which the man of the Banat can savour only in his own church. To his ears, to his soul, a service heard in Transylvania or in the Old Kingdom will seem foreign, dissonant, inharmonious" (p. 233). And the proof is furnished by administrative fact: bishops originating in Transylvania "had to overcome great difficulties in order to make themselves supple to the taste, to the genius, of the Banat and Arad region. Not one of them was able to impose his own taste; all of them accepted, dictatorially, the taste of this place" (pp. 233-234). The adverb repays attention: the taste of this place was accepted dictatorially. The community does not negotiate its imagotype; it imposes it on those who come to lead it. An element of alteritary provenance, reworked until unrecognisable, comes to be felt as identitary and, more than that, as normative. "We took something else from the Serbian century: a wealth of ritual, of ceremony," Bocu acknowledges, adding, with a generosity that does him credit, that our church owes its richness in great part to the wealthy Serbian families who were here (p. 239). What had been an instrument of domination has become an inherited patrimony; what had been foreign is today defended as our own.

Without this acknowledgement the chapter would have remained a simple indictment, and the indictment is certainly not absent: the sees become factories of priests who ordain for money, and from that epoch there remain "those endings in *ici*

of Romanian family names, which were meant to confuse origins" (p. 232). The gravest of the formulations is the theological one: "To be Orthodox meant to be Serbian; to desert Serbianism meant to fall into heresy and schism" (p. 94). This is the description of a perfect trap, in which confessional and ethnic identity are superimposed in such a way that any movement in one is punished in the other. The way out of the trap is made, significantly, by fire: at Lipova the Slavonic books from the left choir stall are carried into the churchyard and burned, and Bocu, who witnessed the scene as a child, names it exactly: "this auto-da-fé of Illyrism" (p. 484). The whole sequence closes, finally, in a regime of balance which few of his contemporaries would have accepted. "With the Serbs we are united by a common past of struggle, and I shall not deny it, there is one point that separates us: the unjust border between us" (p. 39). And the guilty party is not the Serbs but the arbiters: the allies, he writes, threw the border between the feet of the secular understanding between our two peoples. A man who had lost half his province at Paris, and who figures in every textbook as the Banat irredentist, refuses to transfer to his neighbour a guilt he attributes to the arbitrators. This is one of the rare cases in which a transition experienced as an injustice does not generate a new hostile hetero-image but directs the grievance at an abstract third party, and the reason, I suggest, is that the Serbian alterity had been interiorised for a century and could no longer be expelled without amputating the auto-image itself.

7. The Swabians: A Hetero-Image in Two Tenses

The most instructive page of applied imagology in the whole volume is, in my judgment, the one on the German colonisation. It has a two-part structure, and the two parts do not cancel one another but coexist.

In the first, the judgment of the author speaks, and it is the judgment of a man of 1930: the colonisation was a good thing. "Lipova, and in general our nation, derives from this fact more benefits, in my opinion, than disadvantages" (Bocu, 2024, p. 318). There follows an inventory of the benefits, made without economy: roads rebuilt, marshes drained, insalubrious plains turned into a granary of Europe, Romanians taught the crafts and stock-breeding, and, above all, "to this we owe our urbanism" (p. 319). In the second part, however, collective memory speaks, and it says something quite different. "Evidently our ancestors looked upon these guests with mistrust, with growing hatreds and mockeries, with epithets in which the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resounded like impotent explosions" (p. 319). And there follows the list, which I consider one of the most valuable pieces in this file: *Neamț cotofleanț*, *Fleandure*, *Kranfuteri*, *Vândrălăi*. The author also supplies the etymologies, *cotofleanț* from Otto-

Franz, *fleandură* from Flanders, which means that he knows perfectly well what he has in front of him: not insults, but the lexical sediment of a hetero-image.

The text then proves the survival of an image beyond the disappearance of its motive. The epithets, Bocu tells us, were applied in his childhood not only to Germans but also to Romanians dressed in black clothes; and there follows the anecdote of the candidate who speaks for two hours in a Romanian village near Timișoara and receives, as his only answer, the question: "But you, what sort of *fleandură* are you?" (pp. 319-320). Here, with an economy of means a novelist would envy, it is demonstrated that an ethnic stereotype, once constituted, detaches itself from its ethnic referent and migrates onto anyone who displays the external sign, the black coat, that is, foreignness of class rather than of nation. This is exactly what we call the autonomisation of the sign with respect to its referent, and the example deserves a place in any anthology of the discipline. I would add that it is also a lesson about transitions: what survives a change of regime is not the content of the image but its form, which remains available for new contents. Two final movements deserve notice. The first is the author's judgment upon his own ancestors: "Let us forgive our ancestors those small malices. They were their sole and innocent revenge for the many injustices they suffered" (p. 320). The insult is explained sociologically, as the safety valve of impotence, which is once again a theoretical position, and a correct one. The second is the image of the colonists' arrival, transmitted by an old man around 1800: "They came in caravans, each family accompanied by a little dog tied behind the cart; they came with children on their backs and a few potatoes in their pockets" (p. 320). The contrast with the present is marked in a single sentence: "But these *vândrălăi* present today the image of the richest peasant in Europe. We do not say this out of envy" (p. 320). The same quotation marks which three lines above carried contempt now carry admiration. I have not encountered, in Romanian material, a clearer demonstration that the value of a cliché lies not in the cliché but in the intonation of the one who takes it up again.

I add that the German hetero-image has in this volume a third layer, contemporary and openly hostile, belonging to the political competition of the 1930s. The coexistence of the three layers in the same author is itself an imagological fact: on the same page, in the same year, the Swabian is the civilising master, the richest peasant of Europe and the political adversary. This is not inconsistency; it is the normal structure of a system of imagotypes, which can attach to one and the same trait a connotation now positive, now negative, without experiencing the contradiction.

8. Retro-Images at the Tribunal of the Transition

By retro-image I have always understood the situation in which an other accredits an image about us or about a reality that belongs to us. The present volume is unusually rich in these, and the richness is explained by the author's biography: a man who stood at Paris in 1919 before those who were deciding the fate of his province had the opportunity to see what his own community looked like from outside. The first and most painful is the report of Count Mensdorf-Pouilly, sent by the emperor to establish whether the Banat could administer itself: "Count Mensdorf-Pouilly made a report that the Banat does not have enough intellectuals to be able to administer itself. Pouilly's finding touched Andrei Mocioni painfully, the more painfully because he alone knew how much truth there was in that assertion" (Bocu, 2024, p. 214). We have here, in three lines, the entire phenomenology of the unbearable retro-image: it wounds not because it is false but because it is partly true, and the person it targets is the only one who knows how much. The response Mocioni gave, converting his own revenues into a budget for public instruction and creating, in ten years, more than a hundred families of intellectuals, is the finest example I know of a retro-image combated not by argument but by the abolition of its referent.

The second concerns the Peace Conference itself, and it bears on an absence. The Serbian case, Bocu observes, was built upon the historical existence of Serbian bishoprics in the province, whereas the Romanians appeared without institutions of their own and therefore without proof of their own existence: "Our Serbian co-religionist succeeded in mutilating the Banat on the basis of their bishoprics" (p. 507); historical forms create right, and we appeared there without historical rights, like newcomers. Before the arbiters, existence had to be demonstrated through institutions, and whoever had no institutions did not exist. From this, the entire subsequent campaign for a metropolitan see and a university acquires a sense we would otherwise miss: it is not merely ecclesiastical or educational policy, but the deliberate production of imagological evidence for a future tribunal. Here, more clearly than anywhere else in the corpus, one sees a transition being anticipated, with images manufactured now for an arbitration expected later.

The third is internal and the most bitter. "We were reproached in Greater Romania, sometimes in the form of parliamentary altercations, that we had the mentality of slaves, of the oppressed. I protested vehemently. I never had that feeling. In essence, oppression is nothing but a self-abandonment. One may be oppressed in a free state and free in a state of the oppressed" (p. 502). Bocu's answer is not a denial but an overturning of the definition. And it is worth noting where the reproach comes from: not from the former oppressor but from the new fellow citizens. The transition has not abolished the retro-image; it has changed its author. A community that had spent decades constructing an auto-image of resistance discovers, on entering the

national state, that the same history which was its title of honour has become, in the eyes of the centre, evidence of a servile disposition. This is perhaps the most important lesson the corpus offers: images do not travel across a change of regime unchanged, because the audience that evaluates them has been replaced.

9. Institutions as Producers of Image

I come now to what seems to me Bocu's most original contribution, involuntary but real, to our discipline. It consists in his having understood, and said, that institutions do not serve only the purposes they are built to serve, but that they produce image, and that the image produced has, in the long run, an efficacy superior to the function. He is describing, in his own vocabulary, the machinery through which communities are imagined (Anderson, 2006).

The thesis is stated in the opening paragraph of his lecture on the Western University, and its formulation is brutal enough to surprise: "A university is founded for reasons of state. An idea of defence or of conquest, pacific, of intellectual and spiritual penetration, lies at its base, a kind of imperialism, moral at first, which nevertheless precedes the political one, almost necessarily, logically. First comes the university, then comes the reason of the cannon. It has always been so" (Bocu, 2024, p. 267). I do not discuss here whether the thesis is true. I observe only that the man who states it is speaking, in the same text, of his own province and his own project, which means that he deliberately assumes the status of a producer of moral imperialism. Few politicians are that candid.

The demonstration is then conducted with a rigour that surprised me. Czernowitz is explained as a counter-university, created not in order to teach but in order to halt an imaginary exodus towards Iași (p. 268), and the future Timișoara is defined by analogy: "The university of Timișoara is the Romanian counter-fort facing Belgrade and Szeged. The metropolitan see is the spiritual lighthouse, the university the intellectual lighthouse, destined to pierce across the borders, into all Romanian souls" (pp. 277-278). The two metaphors, the counter-fort and the lighthouse, cover exactly the two imagological functions an institution can have: the defence of the auto-image and its projection upon the other.

In the same order must be read everything Bocu says about statues, and he says a great deal, since he raised several. "No, statues live. A statue is a defeat inflicted on the law of death and a prolongation of a mission not yet accomplished" (p. 111). The most spectacular document of this conception is the inscription he placed on the cross of Dimitrie Țichindeal at Becicherecu Mic, which does not commemorate a dead man but issues an order to future generations: "Let this monument stand as an unshaken watch at the borders, here still unachieved, of the Romanian Land, a pillar of fire from

which the Țichindealian flame shall be eternally rekindled towards all generations that might waver, grow slack or falter, forgetting the injustice of 1919" (p. 97). And in the speech delivered a year later at the same monument the equivalence is explicit and, moreover, borrowed: "You are for us what the statue of Strasbourg in the Place de la Concorde in Paris was for Alsace-Lorraine" (p. 105). An imagologist cannot ask for more: the author names his own iconographic model and, with it, the political function of the image he is installing.

It should be observed how the necessity of the metropolitan see is argued, because the argument is entirely imagological and the author knows it. Historical existence is not demonstrated through documents but deduced from instinctual necessity: "We therefore have no particular need of historians in order to know whether or not there was a Romanian metropolitan see in the Banat. It is enough to know that we existed, and if we existed, then the instinct of defence certainly existed too" (p. 506). The reasoning is circular and, as history, unusable. As imagology it is a first-rate document, because it shows how a community defeated on the ground of proof reconstructs its right on the ground of self-evidence. The sentence that closes the demonstration, "nothing is more elastic than the probative power of historical evidence" (p. 506), is in any case a truth few professional historians say aloud.

10. The Ipso-Image of Decline

A separate term, ipso-image, is required for those situations, by no means rare, in which the self presents its own image independently of any attitude towards alterity. The present volume offers this category an abundance of material, and the material is concentrated precisely in the years after the transition.

Its most frequent form is comparison with oneself, the measuring of the present against an idealised past of one's own. "Men lived here in incomparably harder circumstances, and yet this province weighed far more in the balance than we weigh today, after two decades of life in freedom. They show us, better than anything else, our decadence" (Bocu, 2024, p. 214). Alterity does not appear in this reasoning at all: the term of comparison is internal, and the result is negative. We have here the purest form of critical ipso-image in the interwar Romanian material known to me.

It returns in every register: ecclesiastical, "in vain have we built a pompous church, the living church is in decline" (p. 492); political, the single front so laboriously won being, from the moment of the Union, "thrown into the museum of outworn things" (p. 203); generational, and here with the greatest affective charge, "how happy we young men were then, in the shadow of the old. Today we have made even age a pretext for division" (p. 503). The final formula is a quotation no Romanian reader needs to have explained: "And we, we the epigones."

A man who in his youth had lived under a foreign administration arrives in old age in a state of his own and finds that the self-image of his community has degraded. The explanation he gives is of a boldness that deserves emphasis: it is not oppression that produces mediocrity, but its absence. "We may have been oppressed then, but we were together" (pp. 502-503). This is the least comfortable thesis in the whole volume, and the author does not shrink from it. It presupposes that a collective auto-image requires, in order to maintain itself at a high level, a hostile alterity, which means, in the terms of our discipline, that identity cannot be defined except through alterity, and that once alterity weakens, identity disintegrates into particularisms. I do not claim the thesis is true. I claim that it is formulated with a lucidity few of his contemporaries possessed, and that, for the study of transitions, it names a mechanism whose effects are visible far beyond this province: the disappearance of an external adversary is not experienced as a relief by the images that were organised around him, but as a subsidence.

There exists in the volume the positive form of the ipso-image as well, and it wears the face of an expectation. On our sky, Bocu says, the star of Romania shines in full magnitude, and we still await the star of the Banat, which has not yet appeared and which will come with certainty (pp. 486-487). The province is described not by what it is but by what it is to be, and the role of the cultural institution is redefined accordingly: that of the *Astra* is not popularisation and levelling but "vertical rather than horizontal, of differentiation rather than equalisation, of selecting, creating and stimulating talents" (p. 503). The position is elitist, but it follows rigorously from the aesthetic auto-image described above: a province that defines itself through talent needs institutions that produce talents, not institutions that distribute the alphabet.

11. Conclusions

A file must also state what is not in it. Three absences deserve mention. First, there is no awareness of the relativity of the author's own position when others are at issue: Bocu dismantles with verve the images others hold of the men of the Banat, but never asks whether his images of Serbs, Hungarians or Swabians deserve the same treatment. This asymmetry explains why implicit imagology remains, however rich, raw material rather than a finished product. Second, there is no distinction between image and stereotype: the proverbial thrift of the Swabian and the individual portrait of a man the author knew personally stand in the same volume, sometimes on the same page, on the same plane of reality. Third, the measuring rod is never discussed, only applied. This is the price paid by any explicit imagology produced by a man of action: it gains in precision what it loses in scruple.

What, then, does this corpus teach about images in transition? I would summarise it in four findings.

First, transition provokes the codification of auto-images. So long as a group is defined from outside, its self-image can remain diffuse. The moment it must present itself before a new arbiter, whether the Peace Conference or the parliament of the national state, the image is enumerated, numbered and turned into a statute. Bocu's four articles of Banat-ness are the clearest interwar example I know.

Second, a partitioned region builds its identity through absence. The decisive criterion of the auto-image is not a possession but a loss, and that loss is placed in a permanent constitutive position rather than in memory. The structure deserves systematic study in other partitioned regions of the same period.

Third, the retro-image can be annexed. Confronted with an image accredited by others, a community in transition does not necessarily deny it. It may take it over, change its sign and wear it as a self-portrait, as happened with the epithet of the moderates. This is a distinct and, I would argue, an under-described strategy, and it is a strategy available only in transition, when the identity of the accusing party is itself in flux.

Fourth, what survives a transition is the form of the image and not its content. The Swabian epithets outlive their referent and migrate onto anyone wearing a black coat. The reproach of servility outlives the empire and is reissued by the new capital. The form is durable; the content is exchangeable. This is, I believe, the most transferable finding of the present study, and it can be tested on any corpus produced at the meeting point of two regimes.

Sever Bocu was not an imagologist and would have had no reason to wish to be one. He was a politician who understood, earlier and more clearly than his contemporaries, that a province is defended not only with juridical arguments and treaties but also with images, and who set about producing them systematically: statues, a metropolitan see, a university, a newspaper, a cultural association, reburials, inscriptions, formulas. The volume examined here is the archive of that production. If I had to retain from it a single sentence, it would not be one of the programmatic ones, but the sentence spoken at Oravița in 1938, before a hall of provincials who were being reproached in Bucharest with having the soul of subjects: "In essence, oppression is nothing but a self-abandonment. One may be oppressed in a free state and free in a state of the oppressed." The man who spoke it died twelve years later in a prison, in a state that declared itself free. I draw no conclusion from this, since a biography does not validate a thesis. I observe only that a man is very rarely given the opportunity to verify on his own skin the best of his sentences, and that this verification, cruel as it is, belongs to the file as well.

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Lives and Texts: Linguistic Transitions from Tradition to Personal Narratives and Cultural Identity

Simona OLARU-POȘIAR

"Victor Babeș" University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Timișoara
"C-CLASC" Centre of Applied Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies

Abstract. *Parallel to historic records of the lives of women, the paper intends to contribute to the research of linguistics, extending the boundaries of written language, exploring the transition and evolution of oral traditions and scant records of implied subtexts, legible poems into personal narratives. This overlap is proposed as a means for the inclusion of ancient and historic female figures to contemporary gender discourse. We shall go on exemplifying the role of independent women, women philosophers, poets, advisers. The paper is a reflection that proves that conventional rules can be rephrased existentially and in writing. In this paper we explore the work, and personal narratives of individual women who consciously attempted to go beyond themselves. They were trained or self-trained and became wisdom holders, creators of cultural identity for their time and communities. The language they generated and left behind has discernible subtext of focused inner journey and in that way, offers a particular form of sharable communication.*

Keywords: traditions, wisdom training, women's history, linguistics, transition, personal narratives, cultural identity

1. Introduction

Oral traditions exist almost as a parallel to, and in some world views a lesser relative of literature, and the written word. Complementing the historical records of the lives of the women honoured here, the paper intends to contribute to research by extending the critical boundaries of written language to include reflections prompted by oral traditions and by considering cultural signifiers as well as scant records and embedded glimmers of implied subtexts.

The purpose of this paper is to analyse discernible oral traditions and to examine women's history beyond written documents. The research will look at different renderings of women representations throughout history:

2. Tarantella Women – History Written in Songs

Traditions of healing dance *Tarantella Pizzica* and *Egyptian Zar* held by women for women for a thousand years is offered here as a point of reflection on rare traditional societal and community roles for independent women.

Almost forgotten, **Hypatia of Alexandria** was a woman philosopher who attempted to hold plurality and inclusiveness of thought against fundamentalist theocratic expansion. Her relationship to written and orally transmitted text is explored throughout the paper.

Alongside her, other examples that were previously mentioned in my research include Vittoria Colonna, poet, politically wise, adviser to many contemporaries and unfairly idealized by Michelangelo.

Russian born, Vienna and Paris educated, European intellectual and proto-feminist, later in life inspired and trained in a Hindu Sufi tradition that required no conversion, Irina Tweedie became a role model of independence and freethinking for younger generations. Her writings are in English and German. In regards to the latter two, I addressed in previous published articles.

Oral traditions offer an extension, and overlap to meagre textual references. This overlap is proposed as a means for including ancient and historic people in contemporary gender discourse. The example of Tarantella dances, described in the following paragraphs is offered as a starting point for inclusion of oral traditions and will be discussed in the section of the paper that follows this introduction.

Three forms of Tarantella dances are known: *Tarantella de Cor, that* is a courting dance for couples, often danced at weddings and public celebrations. *Tarantella Scherma*, a martial or duelling dance for men, danced at county fairs, festivals and animal markets. *Tarantella Pizzica*, the healing dance most often performed by women for women in secluded and private settings. The Tarantella dance traditions were totally woven into daily life, the cycle of seasons, work and rest, and celebrations in southern Italy.

Healing singing and dance of the *Tarantella Pizzica* and its intention and practice are very similar to the Egyptian ritual healing dance *Zar* also performed under the same name in Mesopotamia at the borders of Iraq and Iran. The comparable dances go by the name of *Jarjabous* in Algeria and *Stimbali* in Tunisia. In Morocco, they are performed by the tribe of the *Gnavas*, who claim Ethiopia as their country of origin. In southern Italy *Tarantella Pizzica* has distinct folklore and trading tradition hypothetically reaching back to Goddess worship that was absorbed into the

Dionysian festivals and Pan rituals of Magna Graecia and the Greater Mediterranean region.

These introductory paragraphs unveil the multi layered, widespread practice, particularly among women that was passed down with specific instructions and ancestral memories without ever being written down.

The other interest of this paper that is really brought into the reflections on ancient texts, is its vitality implied by the subtexts. Prehistoric text fragments are often analysed as glyphs rather than considered acts of vibrant cultures that do not depend on text but on cultivated memory. Naturally any approach to the subtext is an extreme guess but also as a declared open hypothesis, acknowledging elements of oral tradition and discovery of a similar or identical motive in another culture or location may open the understanding and appreciation of the linguistic context of the ancient.

The art and culture of theatre is bound with the relationship of text and subtext. Russian actor and director Stanislavsky developed a system for understanding and applying subtext. A playwright crafts the text and it is only a verbal diagram, an approximation of the performance, it becomes a play when an actor incorporates the unspoken parts and the palpable emotions, the subtext. Stanislavsky pointed out that if there is not profound, inspired subtext, audiences would stay home and read the play and not go to the theatre.

The contemporary advertising industry knows this and makes sure half of the advertisements' messages are communicated by gesture and body language, with more than a quarter by *spoken* language volume and intentionality and a small amount by text. These invasive technics have eroded cultural sensitivities for the nuances of subtext.

In this paper we explore work, and personal narratives of individual women who consciously attempted to go beyond themselves. They were trained or self-trained and became *wisdom holders* for their time and communities. The language they generated and left behind has discernible subtext of focused inner journey and in that way, offers a particular form of sharable communication.

In Judith Duerk's book *Circle of Stones – Woman's Journey to Herself,* the opening chapter is titled: *The universal importance of woman's tears*. In it she writes: "No she must be allowed to cry. It is only when woman can experience her tears in the moment that she can also experience her true, deep feeling values in the moment" (Duerk, 1989, p. 3).

J. Duerk continues the introduction to the second chapter with these words:

> *How might your life have been different if there had been a place for you? A place for you to go . . . [J. Duerk uses the devise of three dots with spaces between] a place of women, to help you learn the ways of woman . . . a place where you were nurtured from an ancient flow sustaining you and steadying you as you sought to become yourself. A place of woman to help you find and trust the ancient flow already there within yourself . . . waiting to be released (Duerk, 1989, p. 4).*

3. Antecedents, Goddess Traditions and Greek Dionysian Rituals

Healing singing and dance of the *Tarantella Pizzica* and *Egyptian Zar* held by women for women for a thousand years is offered here as rare, obliquely recorded instances of continuity, verbal, non-verbal processes with a gender specific place in the community. Also, the training and practice of the Tarantella/Zar's lead musician offers a point of reflection on traditional societal and community roles for independent women.

Regional similarities, antecedents and shared motives are briefly explored here to give context to the healing dances and roles for women.

In Attica of Ancient Greece, Dionysus was worshipped at the Eleusinian mysteries with Persephone and Demeter, under the name of Iacchos, as brother or male counterpart of Persephone. The motive is similar to the earlier Sumerian legend of the Passion of Inanna for Dumuzi. Sumerian Inanna, goddess of lands with greater population density, falls in love and forms a deep relationship with Dumuzi (Tammuz), a shepherd from the wild, mostly untamed and more sparsely populated Caucasus. Feeling unsupported in her underworld trials, Inanna sends Dumuzi to the underworld as punishment, only to regret and lament her decision. Inanna pleads with the gods for Dumuzi's release from the underworld. The gods consent on the condition that he has to live half the year as gatekeeper of the underworld during the barren months of the hot summer, and the other half on earth with Innana. The mythic motive of exile and return and women's bereavement and revival is shared in the stories of Isis and Osiris, Innana and Dumuzi, Dionysius and Persephone. These stories also cover the geography of the healing dances this paper is exploring as orally transmitted, chanted and sung traditions as histories of and for women.

Sacred offerings were brought to the grave of Dionysus at Delphi. In every second or third year (historians differ on this), and after spending an interval in the lower world, Dionysus is born anew. Women who were celebrating the feast invoked the newborn god. During their celebrations, they dressed in animal skins and carried poles called "*thyrsi*" which were entwined with ivy and topped with pinecones.

It is commonly accepted that the grave of Dionysus was at Delphi in the innermost shrine of the temple of Apollo.

The women-only part of Dionysian festivals proceeded from the grave of Dionysus in the innermost sanctuary of Apollo to the neighbouring mountain of Parnassus. Amid the mountain at night women and girls held festivals celebrating the extinction and resurrection of the deity, around the time of the shortest day of the year. The rites, intended to express the excess of grief and joy at the death and reappearance of the god, were wild. The women who performed them were hence known by the expressive names of Bacchae, Maenads, and Thyides. They wandered through woods and mountains, their flowing locks crowned with ivy or snakes, brandishing wands

and torches, accompanied by the sounds of drums and the notes of the flute, with "wild" dances, and "insane" cries of jubilation. As a god of the earth Dionysus belongs, like Persephone, to the world below as well as to the world above. The death of vegetation in the winter was represented as the flight of the god into hiding from the sentence of his enemies, but he returns again from obscurity, or rises from the dead, to new life and activity. Tarantella/Zar music, process and trained skills of the lead singer offer this kind of regeneration to every woman in need either in crisis or in a search for her roots and self.

4. Italian Tarantella Pizzica, Egyptian Zar

In looking for traces of discernable training and transmission of knowledge, the paper explores traditions and cultural phenomenon that happened in intimate and protected places often temporally adopted within a home or communal spaces. Beyond archaeological fragments of daily life and survival, we focus on the activities, gatherings and festivals led and performed for and by women.

Since these events were only carried out among the women, written documentary evidence is barely existent. What does exist are similar oral traditions to those even practiced today in some parts of North Africa, Eastern Mediterranean including Southern Italy and Asia Minor on the border of Iraq and Iran. There are two forms from this family of traditions that had more ethno-musicological and anthropological research than the others, they are the healing dances of Egyptian Zar and Southern Italian Tarantella.

S. D. Paich, in his work *Magna Graeca/Tarantella* wrote about possible relationships between the southern Italian dance Tarantella, particularly the Pizzica type, and the Dionysian festivals and Pan worship of Magna Graecia and parallel dance ceremonies in the Greater Mediterranean region. In the article S. D. Paich quotes Antoine Furetière's description of Tarantella in Dictionnaire Universel of 1690 [Furetière uses rationalist convention for humans as man, that historically obscured therapeutic Tarantella Pizzica as gender specific, women's process.] (Paich, 2005, pp. 35-36):

> *Tarantula, small venomous insect or spider found in the Kingdom of Naples, whose sting makes [wo]men very drowsy, & often unconscious, & can also be fatal to them. The tarantula is so called after Taranto, a town in Apulia where they are to be found in great numbers. Many people believe that the tarantula's venom changes in quality from day to day, or from hour to hour, for it induces great diversity of passions in those who are stung: some sing, others laugh, others weep, others again cry out unceasingly; some sleep whilst others are unable to sleep; some vomit, or sweat, or tremble; others fall into continual terrors, or into frenzies, rages & furies. [....] In some cases, this illness can last for 40or 50*

years. It has been said since time immemorial that music can cure the tarantula's poison, since it awakens the spirits of the afflicted persons, which require agitation. (Furetière, 1690)

Karol Harding in her article "The Zar Revisited" wrote in 1996 for Crescent Moon magazine:

The Zar ritual is cathartic experience which functions for women in these cultures as effectively as does psychotherapy in western culture. It involves several aspects which all contribute to its success as therapy: The patient is the centre of attention, and receives the help and concern of her friends and relatives. Her experience and feelings are recognized as valid. As Dance Therapist Claire Schmais explains, 'it is community based, followers and members are not sent away to be cured…. It creates sense of community while it heals, embracing the individual within a community. (Harding, 1996, pp. 9-10)

Karol Harding's description of the Zar leader with her knowledge, harmonizing abilities, understanding of repression and means of relief, paints a picture of a highly trained experienced person leading deeply structured process:

Rituals are used to create the setting. They have specific players and roles: a leader, a drum corps, a 'patient' and participants. These rituals include an altar, the smell of incense, and costumes. Songs are chanted and drums play trance-like rhythms. The Zar provides a multi-sensory experience with sights, sounds and smells. The ritual sharing of food creates communion in all cultures and times. Thus, it is important to understand these rituals in the context of the total experience. (Harding, 1996, pp. 9-10)

These types of dance ceremonies for women were organized to facilitate, share, hold and express anguish, loss and maltreatment. For example, at times of Crusades behind war lines, widows, orphaned girls and bereft future brides created a bonding experience. For thousands of years they taught each other rigorous techniques that found their way into or came from any of these places: Ancient Egypt, Prehistoric Danube Culture, Pagan Greece, Byzantine Balkans, Catholic Southern Italy, Zoroastrian and Islamic Persia, Ottoman Anatolia, Islamic North Africa and Medieval Spain.

Ethnomusicologist Hassan Jouad, in his Les Aissawa de Fes – Trance Ritual describes the Aissawa Brotherhoods therapeutic trance dance:

…it should be pointed out that the practice of the ecstatic dance is not reserved for the sole followers of the [Aissawa] brotherhood. It is open to all, to anyone who suffers. Here, people with few resources, the elderly, the physically handicapped find, with the help of others, the occasion to be completely receptive towards themselves in all legitimacy. (Jouad, 1994, p. 4)

S. D. Paich in his paper *Magna Graeca/Tarantella* (Paich, 2005) talks about an ad hoc or deeply established charitable institution that provides for the ceremony's expenses and of course for the ceremony's leader. This oblique in some communities or clear-cut charity provides modes of living for the dedicated women who hold tradition and knowledge. This is an age-old practice, almost a common law institution, of a pastoral role for women. Sometimes unspoken vows of "poverty" and service are taken — as if to insure that the practices of dance ceremonies will be selfless and directed to the well-being of the community and to the person who is in a process of healing. This was by no means a public office and it was not outwardly accepted in all the societies where it was practiced. Nevertheless, whether open, discrete or covert, it existed under all types of circumstances for thousands of years.

The language of the songs varies tremendously and the well-trained Tarantella /Zar singer will have a vast repertoire. In her training the origin of the song, its rhythms, melodic potential as well as language of song's lyrics will be discussed and imparted though repetition of the oral transition learning process. The case histories of some responses to certain types and specific songs are part of the training. What gets cultivated is intuition, the capacity to sense the unique disposition of a woman in need and deeply internalize appropriate songs. The initially open explorations with the person in need are carried out until the song is found, then the phases of the therapeutic process began. As this conference addresses the issues of language a brief analyses of one fragment, the middle section of the song much beloved by people of the region, the *Tarantella di Gargano* is included. In the community setting the song is sung often by a young man. It is almost a troubadour's devotional song to his beloved lady. It honours her and demonstrates passion and devotion. In the therapeutic context it potentially offers deep respect and resonance to the person in need. Just as the text song in the Southern Italian dialect with word repetition, extended vowels and passionate subtext is an example of a well-constructed verbally/sung piece that communicates within an elusive "syntax" of deep emotions. Against the driving rhythm of Tarantella, the complementary and more undulating rhythm of words offers an immediacy of response, layered, archaically contrapuntal relationship.

5. Context of Hypatia of Alexandria Philosophic and Mentoring Role

Almost forgotten, Hypatia, was a woman philosopher who attempted to hold plurality and inclusiveness of thought against fundamentalist theocratic worldly expansions. Her relationship to written and orally transmitted text is explored, and relevant to the cultural identity of the chapter, as part of a Sophianic process. Hypatia contributed, continued and belongs to the philosophical traditions of Pythagoras and Plato. She stands on the cusp of orally imparted knowledge and written records.

Although associated with the great Alexandrian library, she was consistent with the Platonic tradition as it endured a thousand years before and after her life as its teacher.

C. M. Woodhouse in his book on the renowned fourteenth century Byzantine teacher of Platonism, Georgius, who inspired Cosimo Medici to open the Platonic Academy in Florence that went underground in Athens and elsewhere for almost a thousand years. C. M. Woodhouse writes about the philosophy omissions that were left out from Gemistus Pletho excerpts and summaries: "In the higher studies, especially philosophy, he preferred oral teaching. He [Gemistus Pletho] liked to emphasize that Plato and the Pythagoreans distrusted the written word as the means of communicating their most important ideas." (Woodhouse, 1986)

Even contemporary music training through *master classes* acknowledges the difference between what is written and what is experienced, then remembered and integrated through the body.

In the case of Hypatia, she integrated the direct teachings, expanded on the received knowledge and communicated insights orally in the form of daily discourses and one to one teaching. Not only by sheer geography but also by inclination and commitment, Hypatia was close to ancient Egyptian sources that informed Platonic/ Pythagorean thought.

Pythagoras was mentioned in Diogenius Laërtius' *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* containing biographies of the Greek philosophers written approximately in the first half of the third century AD. W. van den Dungeon tells us that Diogenius Laërtius writes:

Pythagoras *entered the Egyptian temples and learned the secrets of their gods*. This is a remarkable testimony. The Egyptian gods were hidden from sight. Nobody, except Pharaoh and his appointed priests, could enter the "holy of holies" and face the deity. There was no communication between the deities and humans, for gods communicate only with gods.

The deeply researched observations and hard work of W. van den Dungeon are honored here. It helps understand in part the lack of philosophical texts of Hypatia. W. van den Dungeon's writing is in the realm of examining written records and not relying on them completely, but augmenting them through a methodology for or maybe with an interest in assessing oral traditions as possible sources of and parallel to the written word if at all available. It is burgeoning research, a collection of instances and overviews of which the work of W. van den Dungeon is an example. W. van den Dungeon writes: "In spite of these historical uncertainties, the contribution of Pythagorism to Western culture has been significant and therefore justifies the effort, however inadequate, to depict what its teachings may have been. […] What could Pythagoras have learned from the priest of Memphis and Thebes?"

Unity of the divine: the absolute is One and Millions, invisible by nature and manifest in nature's forms:

Harmony of opposites: all fundamental oppositions are bridged by a harmonic "third" [Tetracord]

The sacrality of "10": Pharaoh, "son of Re", completes [*a significant grouping of nine deities*] the Ennead + 1 = "10"

Geometrical solutions to practical problems [related to, equated and generated from] the magic of symbols: sacred script and ritual speech [that] have powers beyond their physical form

Rule of silence: The Egyptian gods and their priests were out of sight and hidden – silence was gold (Wim van den Dungen, 2010)

These quotes are here to help understand the complexity of issues of written language, diversity of cultures and gender roles surrounding Hypatia as a practicing philosophy teacher equal to her lineage's predecessors. Here the role, existence and the community's contribution of the Tarantella / Zar singer opened the context and understanding of the presence and influence of strong, independent women as keepers of living succession of restated and lived wisdom.

Michael A. B. Deakin in the paper *The Primary Sources for the Life and Work of Hypatia of Alexandria* generously makes available his historic and bibliographic research result and thoughts. His paper's introduction opens with these concepts:

> *Historians need to say of the past events they recount not only what happened but also* how we know it. *This latter question is usually answered by references to* sources, *that is to say earlier accounts of the matter in hand. [...] Primary sources can however require interpretation and assessment; this is the role of a good secondary source. (Deakin, 1995, p. 63)*

M. A. B. Deakin continues by pointing to the discipline of primary sources recognition and gathering in a culture where written record has a precedent before any other. He articulates what a primary source is:

> *Finally, it should be said that works of fiction (whether the fiction is intentional or not!) are not historical sources at all. Regrettably much of what is readily available on Hypatia derives from fictional, rather than historical, sources. [...] The life of Hypatia of Alexandria depends on a small amount of primary material, and anything going outside that is either fiction or speculation and in a good account should be flagged as such.*

Respecting and taking notice of M. A. B. Deakin's exposition, this paper *Lives and Text* is interested in both primary material and later interpretive instances. A comparative cultural research responding to the theme and issues of *Languages, Cultures and Gender* if clearly marked, the two strands of Hypatia's heritage can be evaluated and reflected upon as mini case studies.

6. Primary Descriptive Source from S. Scholasticus

Among the primary sources pointed out by M. A. B. Deakin is the life work of the Byzantine author Socrates Scholasticus. In his *The Ecclesiastical Histories* written in the fourth century AD he gives account of Hypatia:

There was a woman at Alexandria named Hypatia, daughter of the philosopher Teon, who made such attainments in literature and science, as to far surpass all the philosophers of her own time. Having succeeded to the school of Plato and Plotinus, she explained the principles of philosophy to her auditors, many of whom came from a distance to receive her instructions.

On account of the self-possession and ease of manner, which she had acquired in consequence of the cultivation of her mind, she not infrequently appeared in public in presence of the magistrates. Neither did she feel abashed in coming to an assembly of men. For all men on account of her extraordinary dignity and virtue admired her the more. (Socrates Scholasticus, *The Ecclesiastical Histories,* Alexandria Journal 2, Alexandria Society, Hypatia/ Scholasticus http://www.cosmopolis.com/alexandria/hypatia-bio-socrates.html — extract accessed 2/16/2026)

S. Scholasticus continues with the description of her gruesome political murder by the theocratic Christian Regime exemplified by the Alexandrian Bishop, Cyril, who strategically provoked and incited a mob that in great numbers apprehended and brutally destroyed the defenceless philosopher. S. Scholasticus concludes his difficult and graphic description with these words:

> *This affair brought not the least opprobrium, not only upon Cyril, but also upon the whole Alexandrian church. And surely nothing can be farther from the spirit of Christianity than the allowance of massacres, fights, and transactions of that sort. This happened in the month of March during Lent, in the fourth year of Cyril's episcopate, under the tenth consulate of Honorius, and the sixth of Theodosius.*

However, brief the documentary strength of this statement has ramification as suppressed history and a source for deep response in the culture of the twentieth century feminist movement.

7. The Letters of Synesius to Hypatia as Models of Philosophic Partnership

In the contemporary evaluation of ancient and classical thinkers, the model of difference, originality and development towards post Renaissance objectivized values will be emphasized. This approach is often classified as scientific, as if outside the human observer. In the history of western culture, the fact Plato never appeared as a character in any of his dialogs is overlooked and bits and pieces of ideas are separated

from the context of dialogs and presented as independent self-standing ideas. This approach implied that Plato was a more rudimentary predecessor of articulations and elaborations found in works of Kant and Hegel. In this type of analysis, writing has precedent rather than the elusive shared cultural context of the language of exchange and partnership. In a certain undogmatic way, it could be said that all ideas presented by the characters of Plato's dialogs are the totality of his thoughts and engagements. M. A. B. Deakin in his disciplined and needed contribution of pointing to few primary sources on Hypatia, helps us glimpse her life's work through the *paradigm of partnership* forwarded tentatively as an interpretation model in this paper. This modality is particularly evident in M. A. B. Deakin's description and bibliographic research on Synesius letters:

> *Although little if any of Hypatia's own work survives, we do have a large volume of extant material from the hand of her best-known pupil, Synesius of Cyrene. Synesius is a figure much studied in his own right as an intermediary between the Christian and pagan worlds of his day. [...] He was, in his Christianity, very much a neoplatonist at a time when this was seen as a rival philosophy. (Deakin, 1995)*

This and subsequent quotes may help provide a sense the interactions of orally transmitted, assimilated and remembered knowledge annotated and communicated using written word, in this case in the form of letters, an inter-personal medium in itself. The relational aspect and genuine deep connection to the living teacher grounds the abstractions and theoretical aspects into palpable experiences leading to articulation and expression. M. A. B. Deakin continues:

> *Because Synesius was Hypatia's best-known pupil and because so much of his writing survives, this is the best place to begin if we wish to catch some echo of Hypatia's own thought. This is even more the case when we reflect that Hypatia is Synesius' only known teacher and he almost palpably worshipped the ground on which she trod.*

The interweaving of oral, remembered and written language and teacher-student unity in this paper could be contemplated as a *philosophic monad* of the ancient and non-European worlds. Several Tarantella women in informal conversations with the author of this paper some 40 years ago always referred to their mostly woman teachers as holders of knowledge sometimes almost as if they were knowledge itself. In the case of Synesius his palpable inclusion, his direct or implied connection to Hypatia's ideas, demonstrates relational aspects of Platonic and Neo-Platonic language and abstractions.

M. A. B. Deakin points to the subject matter of the Synesius - Hypatia exchanges:

> *Especially relevant are letters from Synesius to Hypatia. Some 6 and a fragment survive. [... It] is a major work, especially useful for the reconstruction of Hypatia's philosophical beliefs. It, in effect, asks Hypatia to "referee" two works of philosophy, his Dion and De Insomniis. (Deakin, 1995)*

The former is a philosophical exegesis and the latter (which incidentally had a great medieval vogue) an attempt at a scientific theory of dreams. As both works are with us today, the inference is that Hypatia "passed" them. Another significant theme that points to teacher — student flow is a letter concerning the astronomical instrument *Astrolabe*, about this M. A. B. Deakin writes:

De Dono Astrolabii, the covering letter written to accompany the gift of an astrolabe to an official with whom Synesius wished to curry favours. *De Dono Astrolabii* is thus a letter [... that] claims that Synesius himself designed the instrument but with help from Hypatia; it is seen as an important document in the history of astronomy.

In matters of the Astrolabe's invention, the boundaries of authorship are blurred not unlike some mathematical treatises and editions of Euclid and Ptolemy carried out by Teon and Hypatia as father and daughter and teacher and student. The close collaborative character of their work carries over to Synesius and Hypatia's ease and the collaborative flow of making and designing together. This kind of process and its accompanying language are different from modern concepts of intellectual property and valuing an inventor as a single individual, a patent holder. The example here of Astrolabe making belongs to a culture of learning and inventing together. It seems that this ease and flow are characteristics of Hypatia as Philosopher /Mathematician and Teacher/ Collaborator. In the general discourse of language, culture and gender the Synesius - Hypatia documented exchanges offer a *relational paradigm* for reflecting on the diversity of approaches in understanding assimilation and dissemination of ideas.

8. Conclusion

On a closing reflection on the examples chosen, the prove that conventional rules can be rephrased existentially and in writing. The findings suggest that the approach formulated in this research for the deconstruction and reorganization of knowledge components in ancient texts displays significant features, including multi-granularity, cross-document applicability, refinement, diverse perspectives, enhanced efficiency, and scalability, indicating its potential utility in the domain of knowledge services for ancient texts.

This paper serves, as mentioned in the beginning, as a reflection demonstrating that traditional rules can be articulated in existential terms and through written expression. In this study, we examined the contributions and personal stories of women who intentionally sought to transcend their own limitations. Whether through

formal training or self-education, these women emerged as bearers of wisdom for their respective eras and communities. The language they produced and bequeathed contains a noticeable subtext that reflects a concentrated inner journey, thereby providing a unique mode of communicable experience and cultural identity. The shift from traditional storytelling to personal narratives and cultural identity represents a significant linguistic and cultural evolution. This process encompasses the transition of narratives from oral traditions to written forms, where oral narratives are marked by formulaic repetition and collective authorship, whereas written narratives tend to emphasize fixed structures and intricate plot development. Such a transformation alters cultural identity, authority, and the societal roles of storytelling. Personal narratives are essential in the processes of transmitting, reconstructing, and transforming traditions, as narrators reinterpret and refresh traditional components through their individual life experiences. This interaction between tradition and personal narratives is vital for comprehending the depth and continuity of elements of tradition and the ever-evolving nature of cultural identity.

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Identity in Transit: Romanian Musical Artists in International Media Discourse

Andrea PETERLICEAN

Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences, Târgu Mureș

Abstract. *As artists circulate across national and cultural borders, their identities do not simply travel unchanged. They are selected, contextualised, and reframed for new audiences. This study examines how Romanian musical artists are made culturally legible in international media discourse through the contrasting cases of three artists, representing different trajectories of international visibility. Drawing on a qualitative corpus of international media profiles, interviews, reviews, and institutional materials, the study investigates the discursive functions assumed by Romanian origin and national identification. Attention is paid to genre categorisation, biographical selection, recognition anchors, international comparison, and the interaction between journalistic framing and artist self-positioning. Building on approaches to representation, media framing, and discursive identity construction, the paper uses cultural legibility to describe the processes through which artists become intelligible to new audiences and proposes identity in transit to conceptualise the transformations produced through such mediation. The comparison suggests that transnational visibility does not erase national identity but reorganises its meanings and discursive functions across different conditions of international recognition.*

Keywords: cultural identity; media discourse; cultural legibility; media framing; Romanian popular music; transnational identity

1. Introduction

The international circulation of popular music involves more than the movement of songs, performers, and cultural products across national borders. It also entails the circulation of identities. When artists enter media environments beyond their primary national context, they encounter new audiences for whom their cultural background, artistic trajectory, and public persona may be only partially familiar or entirely unknown. International media therefore do not simply increase an artist's

visibility; through processes of selection, categorisation, contextualisation, comparison, and evaluation, they participate in making that artist intelligible within new cultural frameworks. In this sense, international visibility is simultaneously a process of cultural mediation.

Such processes are particularly relevant to contemporary understandings of identity as dynamic, relational, and contextually produced rather than fixed or internally coherent. Hall (1996) conceptualises identities as positions continuously constituted within representation, while Bucholtz and Hall (2005) emphasise the relational and interactional emergence of identity in discourse. From this perspective, the movement of an artist across cultural and media contexts cannot be understood as the straightforward transfer of an already completed identity from one national space to another. What travels is repeatedly selected, interpreted, and repositioned.

Media discourse plays an important role in this process. Framing foregrounds particular aspects of perceived reality while rendering others less salient (Entman, 1993). In international cultural journalism, this selection becomes highly relevant because media must frequently introduce artists to audiences who lack the contextual knowledge available within the artists' domestic cultural environments. Nationality, biography, genre labels, career achievements, comparisons with internationally recognisable performers, and narratives of authenticity or difference may consequently function as resources through which an unfamiliar artist becomes culturally intelligible. Yet the relevance of these resources cannot be assumed to remain constant. National origin may operate as a defining category in one context, as biographical information in another, and as a selectively mobilised identity resource elsewhere.

We examine these processes through the international media representation of three Romanian musical artists: INNA, Alexandra Stan, and Alexandra Căpitănescu. The cases were selected not simply because all three have achieved visibility beyond Romania, but because they represent contrasting conditions of international recognition. INNA offers the case of an artist whose transnational career has developed over an extended period and whose public persona has become established across multiple international markets. Alexandra Stan represents a different trajectory, in which international recognisability has remained closely associated with the global circulation of the breakthrough hit *Mr. Saxobeat*. Alexandra Căpitănescu, by contrast, provides an opportunity to examine international identity construction at a comparatively early stage, intensified by the explicitly national framework of Romania's participation in the Eurovision Song Contest 2026. The comparison therefore does not presuppose a linear progression from national to global identity. Instead, it examines different conditions under which artistic identities enter and circulate within international media discourse.

To account for this process, the article employs the concept of cultural legibility to describe the discursive work through which an artist is rendered recognisable and interpretable to audiences beyond their primary national context. Cultural legibility may be produced through nationality marking, genre categorisation, biographical selection, recognition anchors, international comparison, evaluative framing, and other forms of contextualisation. Importantly, artists are not treated as passive objects of this mediation. Interviews and other dialogic media forms provide opportunities for performers to align with, resist, complicate, or reframe the identities offered to them by journalists and media institutions.

The article proposes identity in transit as a complementary concept for understanding the transformations associated with movement between cultural and discursive spaces. Transit does not imply that national identity is progressively abandoned in favour of a homogeneous global identity. Rather, it draws attention to the selective reconfiguration that may occur as culturally situated identities circulate through different systems of representation. Elements of identity can be foregrounded, backgrounded, recontextualised, or invested with new meanings according to media context, audience expectations, and conditions of international recognition. Transition, in this sense, is not simply a chronological movement from local artist to international celebrity; it is an ongoing discursive process through which public identity is negotiated across cultural encounters.

The study addresses three research questions: (1) How do international media make Romanian musical artists culturally legible to audiences beyond their primary national context? (2) What discursive functions does Romanian national identity assume in representations of artists with different trajectories of international visibility? (3) How do media framing and artist self-positioning interact in the construction of transnational public identities?

By comparing three configurations of international visibility, the study contributes to research on media representation and cultural identity while offering a discourse-based account of transition as cultural mediation. Rather than asking whether Romanian artists retain or lose a stable national identity as they become internationally visible, it investigates when, how, and for what purposes Romanian-ness becomes meaningful in international media discourse. This focus connects directly with the broader concern of identities that are constructed, negotiated, and represented under conditions of social and cultural transformation.

2. Representation, Framing and Cultural Legibility

The international circulation of artists raises questions not only about cultural mobility but also about representation. An artist entering a new media environment

becomes available to audiences through particular descriptions, classifications, narratives, and comparisons. These representational practices do not simply reproduce an already complete public identity. Rather, they participate in determining which aspects of that identity become salient and how they are interpreted within a particular cultural context. Representation is therefore central to understanding how artistic identities acquire meaning as they move across national and media spaces.

Hall's work provides an important starting point. Representation is not a transparent reflection of an independently existing reality but a meaning-producing practice embedded in cultural systems (Hall, 1997). Identity consequently cannot be reduced to a stable essence that representation subsequently communicates. Hall (1996) instead emphasises the constructed and positional character of identities: they are formed within discourse and remain subject to historical and cultural processes of differentiation and transformation. Such an understanding is particularly productive for the study of internationally circulating artists. Although nationality, biography, musical style, and professional trajectory provide relatively stable biographical coordinates, their significance may change considerably as they are selected and reorganised within different representational contexts.

This perspective also helps avoid treating national identity as an attribute whose presence or absence can simply be measured. The fact that an international media text identifies a performer as Romanian does not in itself establish the meaning of that categorisation. Nationality may function as geographical orientation, an explanation of unfamiliarity, a marker of difference, a narrative component of international success, or a symbolic resource claimed by the artist. Its significance depends on the discursive relations in which the category occurs. The present study consequently asks not merely whether Romania is mentioned, but what discursive work Romanian identification performs in particular representations.

A complementary perspective is provided by Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) sociocultural linguistic approach to identity. Their framework conceptualises identity as an outcome of linguistic and other semiotic practices rather than their pre-existing source and stresses its relational and interactionally negotiated character. Identity may emerge through explicit labels, styles, and stances, but also through relations of similarity and difference, authenticity and artifice, and authority and delegitimation. Identity can be shaped simultaneously through self-positioning and through the perceptions and representations of others.

This distinction is particularly relevant to media interviews. International media representation cannot be understood exclusively as something journalists do to artists. Interviews create dialogic spaces in which externally proposed identity categories may be accepted, resisted, redirected, or complicated. A journalist may foreground Romanian origin, for example, while the artist may reposition the discussion around European belonging, musical identity, professional achievement, or personal

experience. Conversely, artists themselves may mobilise national identity even where the journalistic frame does not initially privilege it. The relationship between media-assigned identity and artist-articulated identity therefore becomes an important component of the analysis.

Media framing provides a further analytical dimension. Entman (1993) conceptualises framing in terms of selection and salience: aspects of perceived reality are selected and made more prominent in ways that encourage particular understandings. Although developed primarily within communication research, this principle is useful for analysing cultural journalism because no media representation can reproduce the entirety of an artist's biography, career, cultural background, and artistic practice. International profiles, interviews, and reviews necessarily select.

Such selection is especially consequential when the represented artist is relatively unfamiliar to the anticipated audience. A profile may foreground nationality; another may select an unusual biographical detail; a review may categorise a performance through a familiar musical genre; an interviewer may recall an earlier hit; another text may compare an unfamiliar performer with a globally recognisable artist. Each choice establishes a particular interpretative route into the artist's identity. Framing therefore intersects with cultural mediation: it helps determine through what already available categories new cultural subjects become understandable.

Transnational media scholarship similarly demonstrates that media participate in the production and negotiation of identities across spatial and cultural boundaries rather than functioning merely as neutral channels between them. Although Georgiou's (2006) analysis concerns diasporic rather than celebrity identities, her account of media as significant sites in the construction of identities across transnational spaces provides a useful point of departure for examining cultural subjects whose public identities circulate beyond their primary national contexts.

Building on these perspectives, the present study uses cultural legibility as an analytical concept describing the discursive processes through which an artist is rendered recognisable and interpretable to an audience for whom that artist cannot be assumed to be culturally familiar. The concept does not imply that an artist possesses an inherently illegible identity prior to international mediation. Rather, legibility is relational: what requires explanation, contextualisation, or comparison depends on the assumed knowledge of a particular audience.

Cultural legibility may be produced through categorisation, contextualisation, comparison, biographical selection, evaluation, and recognition anchors. These strategies build on the understanding of representation as a meaning-producing practice (Hall, 1997), framing as a process of selection and salience (Entman, 1993), and linguistic framing as the activation of interpretative structures through which information acquires meaning (Wehling, 2017). In international media discourse, such processes position artists through nationality or genre, supply necessary cultural

context, connect unfamiliar performers to recognisable references, select memorable biographical details, establish significance, and provide familiar points of entry such as a major hit, competition, collaboration, or distinctive personal feature.

A recognition anchor distinguishes immediate recognisability from the broader process of cultural legibility. A globally successful song may identify an artist without exhausting the subsequent construction of that artist's identity; similarly, Eurovision may identify a performer as a national representative while leaving genre, biography, and artistic persona open to further mediation.

Thus, the article proposes identity in transit to describe the broader representational consequence of these processes. The term refers here to the selective reconfiguration of culturally situated public identities as they circulate through media addressed to audiences beyond their primary national context. Transit should not be understood as a linear trajectory in which national identification is progressively replaced by global identity. Nor does it presuppose that mediation necessarily distorts an authentic original identity. Rather, it foregrounds the possibility that different dimensions of identity acquire different degrees of salience and different discursive functions across cultural contexts.

Taken together, these perspectives provide complementary rather than interchangeable levels of analysis. Representation concerns the production of meaning around the artist (Hall, 1997); framing draws attention to the selection and salience of particular identity resources (Entman, 1993) and to the interpretative structures through which such selections become meaningful (Wehling, 2017); relational approaches to identity illuminate the negotiation between externally assigned and self-articulated positions (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005); and transnational media scholarship situates these processes within cultural circulation across spatial boundaries (Georgiou, 2006). Building on this intersection, the present study uses cultural legibility, recognition anchors, and identity in transit as analytical concepts for examining how internationally circulating artists are made recognisable, interpretable, and negotiable across media contexts.

3. Corpus and Method

This study adopts a qualitative comparative approach to the international media representation of INNA, Alexandra Stan, and Alexandra Căpitănescu. The cases were selected not simply as a representative sample of Romanian music. Their analytical value lies in the different conditions under which they have acquired international visibility: sustained transnational recognition, breakthrough-based recognition, and emerging international recognition respectively. The comparison

consequently examines contrasting configurations of recognition rather than proposing a chronological model of Romanian musical internationalisation.

The working corpus was constructed from international interviews, profiles, reviews, news features, and institutional media presentations produced for audiences outside the artists' primary Romanian media context. The broader research file contains eight candidate texts for each artist. The present analysis draws only on materials whose wording and provenance were rechecked and which are included in the final reference list. The corpus is therefore purposive rather than numerically balanced, consistent with the study's qualitative emphasis on close reading rather than frequency-based generalisation.

Texts were selected according to four principal criteria: they originated from a non-Romanian media organisation or an international media institution; they contained substantive representation or discussion of the artist rather than merely recording chart positions, release information, or competition results; they provided sufficient discursive material for qualitative analysis; and they contributed to diversity in publication period, geographical context, or media genre. Romanian reports reproducing or summarising foreign reactions, fan-generated materials, and brief promotional notices lacking substantive representational content were excluded from the analytical evidence used here.

The sampling strategy was adapted to the different career trajectories. INNA's material includes earlier and later stages of her international career in order to examine whether the discursive function of Romanian origin changes once transnational recognition becomes established. The Alexandra Stan material covers representations following the international breakthrough of *Mr. Saxobeat* and later retrospective interviews, allowing the analysis to test whether the song continues to operate as a recognition anchor. Alexandra Căpitănescu's material is concentrated around Eurovision 2026 and is organised around entry, mediation, and reception, enabling observation of international identity construction during an emerging phase of transnational visibility.

Because international media circulation is intrinsically multilingual, the corpus is not restricted to English-language material. Relevant texts and their translations into English are included where they provide substantive evidence. Analytical attention is paid to original wording, particularly where nationality labels, evaluative expressions, genre categories, metaphors, or culturally significant formulations are involved.

The material was examined through qualitative discourse-analytic reading informed by the theoretical perspectives on representation, framing, and identity outlined above. Coding identified recurrent representational strategies concerning nationality and cultural location, artistic and genre categorisation, international comparison, biographical selection, narratives of success, authenticity and difference, cultural contextualisation, evaluation, recognition anchors, voice positioning, and

transnational positioning. The coding categories are heuristic rather than quantitative: their purpose is to ensure systematic comparison while preserving attention to context and pragmatic function. Table 1 summarises the analytical dimensions used to guide the comparative reading. Nationality marking received more differentiated analysis because simply counting references to Romania would obscure their different functions. References were therefore examined according to whether Romania operated primarily as origin, identification, cultural context, national representation, evaluative frame, or a resource for artist self-positioning. The analysis similarly distinguished between media-assigned identity and artist-articulated identity. In interview material, particular attention was paid to whether artists aligned with, resisted, reframed, complicated, or proactively repositioned identities made available by journalists' questions and introductory frames.

Comparison was conducted both within and across cases. Within-case analysis identified recurrent patterns and changes in the representation of each artist. Cross-case analysis subsequently examined similarities and differences in the mechanisms through which international media established recognition, cultural legibility, and transnational positioning. The purpose was to investigate how different conditions of international visibility activate different representational resources. The resulting analysis is interpretative and exploratory rather than statistically generalisable.

Table 1. Analytical dimensions used in corpus analysis

Analytical dimension	Principal question
Nationality and cultural location	When does Romanian origin become relevant, and what function does it perform?
Categorisation and genre	Through which cultural or musical categories is the artist positioned?
Recognition anchors	What prior achievement, event, work, or feature establishes recognisability?
Biography	Which aspects of personal and professional identity are selected?
Comparison	Which familiar artists, genres, or cultural references facilitate interpretation?
Evaluation	How are success, originality, authenticity, difference, or controversy constructed?
Voice and self-positioning	Does the artist align with, resist, complicate, or reframe the media representation?
Transnational positioning	How is the relationship between national location and international visibility constructed?

Source: Author's analytical framework.

4. Making the Artist Legible

International media encounters with artists who are not fully familiar to their audiences require discursive orientation. Names alone may not provide sufficient recognition; journalists therefore position performers through nationality, musical genre, previous achievements, biographical information, or comparison with already recognisable cultural figures. Across the three cases, these strategies are present in different combinations. What varies is not simply the amount of contextual information supplied but the kind of cultural knowledge that international media appear to assume their audiences possess. Cultural legibility is therefore relational: it emerges from the interaction between what is presumed to be unfamiliar and the categories through which that unfamiliarity can be reduced.

Early international coverage of INNA provides a particularly visible example. A 2010 French profile introduces her as a Romanian singer and immediately connects her with the success of *Hot* in France and other international markets. It also places her alongside Edward Maya, presenting the two performers as evidence of a Romanian presence within international dance music (Cadet, 2010). Nationality here does more than provide biographical information: it contributes to the novelty through which the artist is introduced. The media text constructs a recognisable package: Romanian origin, dance genre, chart success, and an already circulating Romanian comparison, through which an unfamiliar name can be positioned.

The relationship becomes more explicit in a French interview from the same period, where the journalist frames INNA's career as a movement from Romania towards wider European recognition. The question constructs international success through an implicit spatial distinction between Romanian origin and wider European recognition; INNA immediately reframes that relationship by insisting that Romania is itself an integral part of Europe. The same national label thus becomes both a journalistic explanation and an artist-controlled resource of European belonging.

Alexandra Stan's international legibility is organised less exclusively around geographical movement and more strongly around a recognisable cultural object: *Mr. Saxobeat*. A 2014 interview in Spain's LOS40 introduces Stan by recalling the enormous impact of the song, then constructs the interview around absence, return, and the possibility of reconnecting with audiences (Dalmau, 2014). Stan herself acknowledges the exceptional scale of the song's success while presenting the intervening period as one of artistic development and rediscovery. *Mr. Saxobeat* therefore operates as what this study terms a recognition anchor: a previously circulating cultural object through which the artist can be rapidly reidentified.

The distinction between recognition and legibility is useful here. The song answers the immediate question of who Alexandra Stan is for an international audience; the interview must then perform additional discursive work to explain who

she has become. Recognition based on an earlier achievement can coexist with the need to reconstruct a changing artistic identity. Indeed, the stronger the anchor, the more visible the tension between recognisability and development becomes: the media benefit from returning to the familiar hit, while the artist benefits from using that familiarity as an entry point into a broader account of her subsequent work.

Alexandra Căpitănescu presents a substantially different configuration. At the point of Eurovision 2026, no single internationally established recognition anchor could be assumed. Her official Eurovision biography consequently assembles several forms of legibility simultaneously. She is presented through prior national competition success, songwriting and recording activity, performance experience, and a striking academic biography: she is a Master's student in physics who intends to specialise as a medical physicist (European Broadcasting Union, 2026). The selection of physics is revealing because it does not explain the sonic structure of Choke Me. Its value is differentiating. The unexpected conjunction of physics and performance provides a compact narrative through which an unfamiliar artist becomes memorable.

Eurovision itself supplies another powerful category. Căpitănescu enters international media discourse not merely as an individual Romanian musician but as Romania's representative. Nationality therefore has an institutional function that differs from the early INNA coverage. In INNA's case, Romanian origin helps explain the perceived unusualness of an international breakthrough; in Căpitănescu's case, national identification is structurally embedded in the communicative event. Eurovision converts the performer into a national representative before international media begin interpreting her individual artistic identity.

Genre and comparison supply additional layers of legibility. In its post-contest selection of notable performances, the Associated Press characterised Căpitănescu's *Choke Me* as "nu-metal pop" and evoked Lady Gaga as a comparative reference (Associated Press, 2026). Such choices do more than classify the performance; they relate unfamiliar material to already available cultural knowledge. As Wehling (2017) argues, frames organise information through interpretative structures that shape understanding. In this sense, genre labels and familiar cultural comparisons can function as forms of cultural shorthand: they position a comparatively unfamiliar performer within recognisable aesthetic coordinates and thereby contribute to her cultural legibility.

The comparison suggests that international legibility is not produced through a single stable mechanism. For early INNA, national origin and cross-border success are prominent resources. For Stan, a globally circulating song supplies an efficient recognition anchor. For Alexandra Căpitănescu, whose international public persona was still being assembled during Eurovision 2026, several resources operate simultaneously: national representation, prior competition success, distinctive biography, genre categorisation, and the song itself. What matters is not merely

whether an artist is new or established but what forms of prior cultural knowledge international media can reasonably presuppose.

5. Biography, Recognition, Authenticity

If categorisation and comparison help international audiences locate an artist within familiar cultural coordinates, biographical framing performs a related but distinct function. Media profiles and interviews rarely reproduce an artist's biography neutrally or comprehensively. They select particular moments, experiences, achievements, and personal characteristics and organise them into narratives capable of explaining not only who the performer is but also why that performer should matter. Across the three cases, biography consequently operates as a resource through which international visibility is converted into a recognisable public persona.

For INNA, the dominant biographical narrative is increasingly one of duration and transnational achievement. A 2025 Czech interview introduces her through familiar hits before discussing her European tour, artistic development, collaborations, university experience, and the longevity of a career extending over fifteen years (Štipčáková, 2025). When asked whether international fame had always been an ambition, INNA explains that she had dreamed of performing but had not imagined an international career on this scale. The effect differs from early representations centred on the unexpected emergence of a Romanian performer onto European charts. In later coverage, longevity itself supplies legitimacy.

This becomes particularly visible in Spanish coverage. In 2025, LOS40 describes INNA as Romania's most international artist before moving quickly to new music, a Barcelona performance, collaborations, social media, and her use of Spanish (Corredoira Gallego, 2025). The national descriptor remains present, but the persona constructed around it is not primarily that of a Romanian newcomer entering an unfamiliar market. Romanian origin and transnational celebrity coexist within the same representation. Biography thus helps produce continuity between origin and mobility rather than requiring one to replace the other.

Alexandra Stan's international biography is organised differently. Here, *Mr. Saxobeat* repeatedly functions not merely as evidence of success but as the turning point around which the career story becomes narratable. The 2014 LOS40 interview reintroduces Stan by returning to the global impact of the song before constructing her later career through a narrative of absence, return, and artistic rediscovery (Dalmau, 2014). The song therefore supplies both a recognition anchor and a narrative threshold: there is a career before Mr. Saxobeat and an international career made legible through it.

The durability of this structure is visible more than a decade later. A 2025 Bulgarian interview again places *Mr. Saxobeat* at the centre of Stan's international

recognition, even while the conversation broadens to Bulgarian family roots, musical experimentation, and the conditions faced by a Romanian singer in the international industry (Metodieva, 2025). The anchor persists, but the meanings attached to it expand. Rather than being merely a reminder of a past hit, it becomes a point from which questions of mobility, cultural proximity, technological change, and artistic continuity can be discussed.

Căpitănescu's case illustrates yet another use of biography. Because her international persona was comparatively unfamiliar at the point of Eurovision 2026, biography performs not primarily retrospective consolidation but differentiation. The official Eurovision profile foregrounds the unusual combination of artistic experience and Master's-level studies in physics (European Broadcasting Union, 2026). Academic training in physics does not explain her musical style, but it makes the performer narratively distinctive. The international audience is offered a compact contrast-physics and music, analytical training and emotional performance-from which a memorable persona can be constructed.

The contrast among the three artists therefore suggests three dominant, rather than mutually exclusive, biographical functions. For INNA, biography increasingly operates as legitimation, consolidating an established transnational persona through longevity and accumulated achievement. For Stan, it functions as narrative organisation, structuring the career around a recognisable turning point while allowing subsequent identity to be narrated as development beyond that breakthrough. For Căpitănescu, biography operates primarily as differentiation, providing memorable identity coordinates before international familiarity has become established. These are not rigid categories but comparative tendencies that help explain why apparently similar biographical information performs different discursive work across different trajectories of international visibility.

Biography also matters because it creates a site where authenticity can be negotiated. International profiles often seek continuity between personal history and artistic persona: where the artist comes from, what she has experienced, and what kind of music she performs are arranged as if they formed a coherent explanatory sequence. Artists can selectively authenticate these connections while refusing others. The resulting public identity is therefore neither wholly externally imposed nor wholly self-authored; it emerges from negotiation between recognition and self-positioning.

6. Nationality and Cultural Location

The international representation of Romanian artists might appear to invite a straightforward analysis of national identity: one could ask whether performers are identified as Romanian and how frequently their country of origin is mentioned. The

corpus suggests, however, that the presence of a national label is less revealing than its discursive function. Romania does not mean the same thing every time it appears. It may locate an artist geographically, explain the perceived unusualness of international success, establish cultural difference, provide affiliation, or position a performer as an explicit representative of the nation. Conversely, Romanian identity may remain present while becoming increasingly peripheral to the explanation of who the artist is.

Early French coverage of INNA provides a clear example of nationality functioning as an explanatory frame. The 2010 Charts in France profile foregrounds her Romanian origin while presenting the international success of Hot and situating her beside Edward Maya (Cadet, 2010). Romania functions as more than geographical information: it contributes to the perceived novelty of the success. In the interview material from the same period, the framing becomes dialogic when INNA challenges an implied separation between Romania and Europe. The journalist constructs a trajectory from Romanian origin towards European arrival; the artist reformulates that trajectory as circulation within Europe.

The difference is subtle but consequential. In the first formulation, Romania risks functioning as a peripheral point from which the artist moves towards a European cultural centre. In INNA's response, Romanian and European identity are not mutually exclusive positions. The exchange illustrates the relational character of identity described by Bucholtz and Hall (2005): Romanian becomes meaningful partly because it is placed in relation to European, and the artist changes that relation from distance to inclusion. She can therefore resist a centre-periphery implication while retaining Romanian origin as meaningful within a narrative of achievement.

Alexandra Stan's case reveals a different configuration. International recognition is strongly mediated by *Mr. Saxobeat*, meaning that Romanian origin competes with an already powerful achievement-based recognition anchor. Yet later discourse can reactivate nationality when it becomes relevant to a particular narrative. In a 2025 interview by Bulgarian broadcaster NOVA, Stan is explicitly asked whether she encountered challenges as a Romanian singer in the international music industry. She acknowledges that international connection was more difficult at the beginning of her career but she resists interpreting these difficulties straightforwardly as a consequence of Romania's peripheral or comparatively smaller-country status, redirecting the explanation towards historical changes in connectivity and social media (Metodieva, 2025). The exchange is revealing because the interviewer makes nationality analytically available while Stan modifies the explanation attached to it. The offered narrative could have been one of peripheral national origin, structural disadvantage, and success despite marginality. Stan redirects the causal explanation towards historical changes in media infrastructure and connectivity. Romanian origin remains part of the story, but it does not become its sole explanatory principle.

The Bulgarian context also introduces another complication: national identity is not necessarily singular. The interview foregrounds Stan's Bulgarian family roots while locating her geographically through the Black Sea region. The result is a layered form of cultural positioning in which Romanian national identification coexists with regional and familial connections. Particular international contexts can therefore activate different dimensions of proximity. Cultural legibility in Bulgaria may be produced partly through regional connection rather than national difference.

Alexandra Căpitănescu's case differs more fundamentally because Eurovision institutionalises nationality. International coverage does not merely identify her as Romanian: she enters the communicative event as Romania's representative. Eurovoix introduces Alexandra Căpitănescu and her band explicitly through that role and simultaneously gives them space to discuss their formation, preparation for Vienna, and desire to revive rock music in Romania (Vecic, 2026). National identification is therefore not an optional journalistic framing strategy comparable to calling INNA a Romanian dance singer. It is built into the institutional structure of Eurovision itself.

This produces an important distinction between origin and representation. INNA and Stan can be internationally discussed as artists from Romania. Căpitănescu, within Eurovision discourse, performs for Romania. Origin locates an individual biography; representation establishes a relationship among artist, nation, institution, and international audience. At the same time, the band's own discourse shows that national representation need not exhaust artistic identity. Romania operates simultaneously at two scales: externally, the artist is the country's Eurovision representative; internally, Romania is imagined as a musical environment within which the band seeks to intervene.

Eurovision thus complicates any simple opposition between national and transnational identity. It is inherently transnational while simultaneously intensifying national categorisation. Alexandra Căpitănescu becomes internationally visible precisely because she represents Romania; transnational mobility is produced through, rather than despite, national identification. In this case, national and international positioning are not opposite ends of a continuum but mutually constitutive dimensions of the same event.

Across the three cases, Romanian-ness operates variously as origin, explanation, cultural location, representation, affiliation, and self-positioning. These functions are situational rather than artist-specific: the same performer may move among them according to context. Increased international visibility therefore need not diminish national identification; it may instead alter the discursive work nationality performs, while institutional contexts such as Eurovision can intensify national identification at moments of maximum international exposure.

7. Media Voice and Artist Self-Positioning

The analysis thus far has emphasised how international media select and organise identity resources. Yet treating performers exclusively as represented objects would reproduce an overly one-directional model of mediation. Interviews in particular reveal public identity as dialogically constructed: journalists propose categories, narratives, and interpretations, while artists may accept, resist, redirect, elaborate, or strategically appropriate them.

Bucholtz and Hall's (2005) emphasis on relationality and interaction is useful here because identity emerges not only through explicit self-description but through positioning between self and other. In the present material, journalistic questions are therefore analytically significant in their own right. They establish assumptions about what requires explanation and what kinds of identity are relevant before the artist answers.

INNA's early French interview provides the clearest instance of resistance followed by reframing. The journalist's movement from Romania towards Europe makes a geographical distinction available; INNA refuses that distinction by repositioning Romania within Europe. She does not reject Romanian identity but changes the relational structure in which it has been placed. The exchange reveals competing cultural maps: one makes international success legible through movement from a relatively peripheral point towards a larger European space, while the other reconstructs the same movement as circulation within a space to which the artist already belongs.

Stan similarly complicates media frames. *Mr. Saxobeat* repeatedly provides the initial recognition narrative, yet her responses allow the achievement to be repositioned as part of a longer career rather than as its complete definition. The artist can therefore appropriate the recognition anchor: what begins as a journalistic strategy for identifying her becomes a resource through which she narrates professional history. In the Bulgarian interview, faced with a question that potentially explains international difficulty through Romanian origin, Stan introduces technological change, connectivity, and social media as alternative explanatory factors (Metodieva, 2025).

Alexandra Căpitănescu's Eurovision discourse displays another form of negotiation because artist voice operates within an institutional context where national representation cannot simply be discarded. The artist is formally positioned as Romania's representative. Agency therefore emerges through the meanings attached to that role: discussion of musical style, band identity, and the desire to strengthen rock within Romania allows national representation to coexist with a more specific artistic position (Vecic, 2026).

Across the cases, five recurrent relationships between media framing and artist voice can be distinguished provisionally: alignment, resistance, reframing,

complexification, and self-positioning. Artists may accept a frame, contest its assumptions, redirect its interpretation, introduce additional identity dimensions, or proactively construct an alternative point of identification. These relationships prevent cultural legibility from being understood as a unilateral translation performed by international media.

Legibility is co-produced, although not necessarily under conditions of equal discursive power. Journalists and institutions control headlines, introductions, questions, editing, and contextualisation; performers nevertheless retain resources for negotiating how the categories made available to them are interpreted. Identity in transit consequently emerges from the interaction between being represented and representing oneself. Movement across cultural borders creates not merely new audiences but new situations of positioning in which established aspects of identity can acquire altered meanings.

8. Identity In Transit: Reconfiguring the National and the Transnational

The comparative analysis suggests that the three artists cannot be placed convincingly on a simple scale running from Romanian to international. Such a model would assume that national and transnational identities occupy opposing positions and that increasing international visibility progressively weakens national identification. The corpus instead points towards a process of reconfiguration.

The three cases reveal distinct configurations of reorganisation. For INNA, established international familiarity reduces the explanatory work nationality must perform without eliminating Romanian origin as biography and cultural location. For Stan, transition is organised around the continuing recognisability of *Mr. Saxobeat*, which functions simultaneously as a resource and as a point from which subsequent artistic identity must be differentiated. Căpitănescu enters international discourse differently: Eurovision constructs her simultaneously as Romanian representative, competition winner, rock-oriented performer, singer of *Choke Me*, physics student, and internationally evaluated newcomer. She therefore enters transnational circulation already occupying multiple overlapping positions.

These differences suggest that cultural legibility is contingent upon conditions of recognition. An internationally established performer may function increasingly as her own recognition anchor. An artist associated with a globally familiar cultural product may continue to be mediated through that object. An emerging performer may require a denser constellation of nationality, biography, genre, institutional context, and comparison. The relationship can be conceptualised not as a universal sequence but as a recurring set of processes: selection, categorisation, anchoring, negotiation, cultural legibility, and reconfiguration.

The sequence is not necessarily chronological, nor does cultural legibility represent a final state. New media contexts can reactivate old identity categories, create new recognition anchors, or make previously peripheral aspects of biography salient again. This is where identity in transit becomes most useful. Transit refers not simply to geographical movement and not only to career transition. It describes the condition in which identity becomes subject to repeated discursive reorganisation as it circulates between audiences, institutions, languages, cultural expectations, and media genres.

Nationality exemplifies this reorganisation particularly clearly. Romanian-ness may explain perceived difference, provide cultural location or affiliation, operate as a recognition cue, or be institutionally intensified through national representation. Its significance lies not in whether it survives internationalisation but in the changing functions it assumes across communicative contexts.

The most important transition is therefore not necessarily from Romanian to international but from one organisation of identity meanings to another. Cultural legibility describes the representational work through which this reorganisation becomes possible; identity in transit describes the resulting condition of continually reconfigured public identity. Recognition anchors, biography, genre, nationality, comparison, and evaluation are resources through which that work is performed.

The three cases further suggest that international media should be understood as sites of cultural encounter rather than simply channels of cultural transmission. Hall's approach to representation reminds us that meanings are produced through representational practices rather than merely carried by them (Hall, 1997). The relational model proposed by Bucholtz and Hall (2005) similarly allows identity to be understood as emerging through positioning among self, other, and broader ideological structures. International cultural journalism therefore participates in cultural mediation: it selects what requires explanation, chooses available comparisons, decides which contextual information matters, and makes culturally situated subjects intelligible within another interpretative environment. Table 2 synthesises the principal comparative patterns identified across the three cases.

Cultural legibility also avoids treating unfamiliarity as a deficit located in either artist or audience. Legibility is relational: the amount and kind of contextualisation required depend on what a particular media environment can assume its audience already knows. The three artists therefore represent not stages on the same road but different configurations of cultural transit.

Table 2. Comparative patterns of cultural legibility

Dimension	INNA	Alexandra Stan	Alexandra Căpitănescu
International condition	Sustained transnational visibility	Breakthrough-based recognition	Emerging visibility through Eurovision
Dominant recognition resource	Established persona and accumulated hits	Mr. Saxobeat	Multiple anchors: Eurovision, Choke Me, biography
Dominant biographical function	Legitimation	Narrative organisation	Differentiation
Romania most often functions as	Origin / cultural location	Origin selectively reactivated	Institutional representation
Typical mediation problem	Reframing centre-periphery assumptions	Moving beyond a durable hit anchor	Making an unfamiliar artist rapidly legible
Identity-in-transit pattern	Reorganisation of an established persona	Renegotiation of recognition and development	Simultaneous construction across overlapping frames

Source: Author's synthesis of the qualitative analysis.

9. Conclusion

The comparative analysis of INNA, Alexandra Stan, and Alexandra Căpitănescu demonstrates that international media visibility does not produce a uniform transformation of national into transnational identity. Instead, different trajectories of recognition activate different strategies of cultural legibility. INNA's established international persona increasingly permits recognition through accumulated career visibility; Stan remains strongly mediated through the durable recognition anchor of *Mr. Saxobeat*; and Căpitănescu's emerging international identity is constructed through a denser combination of national representation, biography, genre, competition history, and comparison.

Romanian identity consequently performs no single function across the corpus. It may establish origin, explain perceived difference, locate an artist culturally, provide regional affiliation, operate as institutional representation, or become a resource for self-positioning. Artists themselves can accept, resist, reframe, or complicate these meanings. Transnational visibility therefore does not erase national identification but changes the conditions under which it becomes meaningful.

The findings challenge a linear understanding of transition in which national identity gradually gives way to transnational identity. Internationalisation and national identification are not necessarily inversely related. Eurovision provides the clearest example: international visibility may be intensified precisely through national

representation. Elsewhere, transnational familiarity may reduce the explanatory necessity of nationality without eliminating its availability as a cultural resource. What changes is not simply the visibility of national identity but the discursive work it is called upon to perform.

Cultural legibility identifies the representational processes through which artists become recognisable and interpretable to differently situated audiences. Recognition anchors, categorisation, biography, comparison, and nationality provide different points of entry into public identity, while interview discourse shows that such processes are not entirely controlled by media institutions. Artists participate in negotiating their own legibility through alignment, resistance, reframing, complexification, and self-positioning.

Identity in transit, in turn, conceptualises public identity as repeatedly reorganised across cultural and media contexts. Identity in transit is not the movement away from Romanian identity but the changing organisation of its meanings. The concept therefore shifts attention from an assumed opposition between national and transnational identity towards the processes through which identity resources are selected, foregrounded, backgrounded, combined, and reinterpreted as cultural subjects circulate.

This understanding connects the study to broader questions of transition and cultural encounter. International media do not merely transmit artists across borders; they participate in making them culturally recognisable, narratively meaningful, and publicly negotiable. Transition, from this perspective, is not simply movement between geographical or cultural locations but an ongoing process of mediated identity construction.

The study is exploratory and does not support statistical generalisation to Romanian pop music as a whole. Its comparative vocabulary can, however, be tested on larger corpora, other cultural industries, and different national contexts. Future research combining discourse analysis with audience reception or larger multilingual datasets could further examine how cultural legibility and identity in transit operate across forms of international cultural mediation.

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Generative AI tool ChatGPT was used for suggesting structure and formatting of manuscript sections, and comparing methodological options. The author reviewed and verified all data, interpretations, citations and wording and assumes full responsibility for the final manuscript.

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Narrating the Self in Transition: *The Great Gatsby*, Social Media, and the Construction of Public Identity

Marinela COJOCARIU

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *This article examines public identity as a narrative and performative construction by placing F. Scott Fitzgerald's* The Great Gatsby *in dialogue with theories of representation and contemporary scholarship on social-media self-presentation. It asks how the mechanisms through which Jay Gatsby produces a socially legible persona anticipate, while also differing from, the practices through which public identity is curated in networked media. Methodologically, the study combines close reading with an interdisciplinary conceptual framework drawn from Stuart Hall's anti-essentialist account of identity, Erving Goffman's dramaturgical model of self-presentation, Paul Ricoeur's theory of narrative identity, and research on context collapse, imagined audiences, and online exhibition. The analysis argues that Gatsby's name, biography, gestures, possessions, parties, and management of visibility form a media system through which identity is authored and circulated. Yet the novel also shows that public identity is never controlled by the self alone: gossip, class codes, competing narratives, and retrospective narration continually rewrite Gatsby. Social media intensify this condition by making self-presentation persistent, searchable, quantifiable, and exposed to heterogeneous audiences. Reading Gatsby through this contemporary lens reveals a significant continuity across media forms: public identity emerges relationally, through the unstable negotiation between self-narration and social recognition. The transition from literary reputation to digital visibility therefore changes the scale and infrastructure of identity construction without eliminating its narrative foundations.*

Keywords: public identity; *The Great Gatsby*; self-presentation; narrative identity; social media; representation; transition

1. Introduction: Public Identity as a Narrative Problem

Identity is often spoken of as though it precedes representation: first there is a self, and afterwards that self is expressed in language, clothing, images, stories, or media. Yet both literary representation and contemporary media culture complicate

this sequence. Public identity is not merely an inner truth made visible. It is also produced through the forms in which a person becomes intelligible to others. Names, stories, gestures, possessions, photographs, rumours, affiliations, styles of speech, and patterns of visibility all contribute to the social legibility of a person. What is recognized publicly as an identity is therefore neither wholly private nor wholly self-authored. It emerges in the encounter between self-presentation and interpretation.

This problem is central to F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925/2021). Jay Gatsby is among the most memorable figures of American literary self-invention precisely because his identity is constructed through multiple representational channels. He changes his name; revises his origins; adopts a carefully managed manner; acquires a mansion, clothes, cars, and an elaborate social setting; stages parties at which he is both host and strangely elusive object of attention; circulates stories about himself; and becomes the subject of stories circulated by others. Gatsby is not simply a man who possesses a secret past. He is a public persona produced through a tension between biography, spectacle, rumour, performance, material signs, and the gaze of an audience.

That tension makes the novel particularly productive for a volume concerned with transition, identity, and cultural transformation. The present article reads Gatsby's construction of public identity alongside contemporary scholarship on social-media self-presentation. The purpose is not to claim that Gatsby is a proto-influencer or that a 1925 novel somehow predicts particular digital platforms. Such analogies flatten historical difference. Rather, the comparison identifies a deeper continuity in the cultural logic of public identity: selves become publicly meaningful through narrative and performance, but the media through which those performances circulate alter who can see them, how long they persist, how they are evaluated, and how much control the individual retains over them.

The central research question is therefore: How do the narrative and performative mechanisms through which Jay Gatsby constructs a public identity illuminate the contemporary transition from socially circulated reputation to digitally mediated self-presentation? A related question concerns agency: to what extent can a public identity be authored by the person whose identity is at stake, and at what point does it become a collaborative or contested cultural product?

The article uses qualitative close reading rather than empirical social-media data. The primary literary corpus is *The Great Gatsby*, with particular attention to Gatsby's renaming, biographical self-fashioning, parties, material display, rumour, and Nick Carraway's retrospective reconstruction of him. The literary analysis is placed in dialogue with an interdisciplinary theoretical framework: Hall's (1996) anti-essentialist understanding of identification; Goffman's (2009) dramaturgical account of impression management; Ricoeur's (1992) distinction between forms of personal continuity and his account of narrative identity; and media scholarship on online

exhibition, imagined audiences, context collapse, and micro-celebrity (Hogan, 2010; Marwick & boyd, 2011a, 2011b). This framework permits a comparison not of technologies as such but of representational structures.

The argument proceeds in four stages. First, it establishes public identity as relational, narrative, and performative rather than as the transparent expression of a stable essence. Second, it examines Gatsby as an author of his own persona, showing how name, story, gesture, consumption, and controlled visibility operate together. Third, it considers the failure of that authorship: Gatsby's identity is appropriated by gossip, class judgment, competing narratives, and finally by Nick's narration. Fourth, it turns to social media, where the older dynamics of reputation and performance are transformed by persistence, audience collapse, curation, and quantification. The transition from literary reputation to digital visibility, the article concludes, is not a movement from authentic identity to artificial identity. It is a transition between different infrastructures for making identity public.

2. Identity, Representation, Performance, and Narrative

A useful starting point is Stuart Hall's insistence that identity should not be understood as an integral, original, and unified core simply awaiting discovery. Hall (1996) treats identification as a process: contingent, incomplete, and constituted within discourse. Identity in this account is not infinitely malleable, nor does representation create persons out of nothing. Rather, identities are formed within available systems of meaning, history, difference, and power. The question is therefore not only "Who is this person?" but "Through which discourses can this person become recognizable, and by whom?"

This distinction matters for Gatsby. His reinvention is frequently described as self-creation, but the term can suggest an autonomy the novel repeatedly denies him. Gatsby does not invent the signs of success, masculinity, refinement, romance, or social legitimacy that he performs. Those signs already exist. His project is to inhabit them convincingly. The materials of his identity are culturally supplied: the gentleman's speech, the mansion, the shirts, the car, the Oxford story, the war record, the parties, the carefully narrated past. His apparent individuality is assembled from a social vocabulary of aspiration.

Goffman's (2009) dramaturgical model provides a second conceptual bridge. In social interaction, individuals manage impressions before audiences. They rely on settings, appearances, manners, teams, routines, and forms of information control. The theatrical metaphor is especially useful for Gatsby because Fitzgerald repeatedly organizes social life as spectacle. Gatsby's house is a setting; his parties are performances; his guests are audiences and participants; his smile and speech are elements of manner;

his possessions become props. The distinction between front stage and backstage also illuminates the novel's fascination with access. Gatsby is publicly visible yet personally difficult to locate. Many guests enter his space without knowing him. The mystery behind the performance becomes part of the performance's value.

At the same time, Goffman's model should not be reduced to the claim that all self-presentation is dishonest. Performance is not necessarily the opposite of authenticity. Social selves require forms. A professor, host, friend, lover, applicant, politician, or online user presents different dimensions of self under different conditions. The analytical question is how these presentations are organized and what happens when audiences dispute them. Gatsby's tragedy does not result simply from "pretending." Tom and Daisy also inhabit socially coded roles, and their identities are no less dependent on class performance because their performance appears effortless. What distinguishes Gatsby is that the labour of identity construction becomes visible.

Ricoeur's (1992) account of narrative identity adds a temporal dimension. Personal identity involves continuity across change, but such continuity cannot be explained only through sameness. Narrative configures heterogeneous events into a meaningful sequence. The self can therefore be understood partly through the stories that connect past actions, present positions, promises, memories, and projected futures. This is particularly relevant to Gatsby because his identity is oriented simultaneously backward and forward. He rewrites James Gatz as a past that can be overcome while organizing his present around the recovery of Daisy and an imagined restoration of an earlier moment. His self is a narrative project whose coherence depends on making incompatible times appear continuous.

These three approaches converge on a crucial point: public identity is relational. It depends upon recognition. One may announce a name, display a status, narrate a biography, or adopt a role, but the identity becomes public only insofar as others interpret, accept, reject, repeat, or modify it. This relational dimension is also central to social-media research. Hogan (2010), extending Goffman, argues that online self-presentation cannot be understood only as live performance. Social-media profiles also function as exhibitions composed of persistent artifacts such as photographs, posts, lists, and updates. Marwick and boyd (2011a) show that networked users orient themselves toward an "imagined audience," while the actual audience may be larger and more heterogeneous. Public identity thus develops within a feedback system: the subject presents; audiences interpret; platforms preserve and redistribute; subsequent presentation responds to anticipated interpretation.

Seen from this perspective, Gatsby offers not an obsolete model of identity but a literary laboratory for examining its construction. The novel makes visible a process that digital media later render technically explicit: identity is curated, circulated, searched for, discussed, and evaluated through signs.

3. Jay Gatsby and the Authorship of a Public Persona

3.1 Renaming the Self

The most radical element of Gatsby's self-fashioning occurs before the novel's principal action. James Gatz becomes Jay Gatsby. Fitzgerald's narrator presents the change not as a casual alias but as part of a larger imaginative conception of the self (Fitzgerald, 1925/2021, Chapter 6). Renaming matters because a name is both intimate and public. It identifies a person while also providing the sign under which stories about that person circulate.

The transition from Gatz to Gatsby is therefore an act of narrative editing. It attempts to place a boundary between an unwanted origin and a desired future. Yet the new name cannot erase history; it creates a problem of continuity. Who is the "same" person across these identities? Ricoeur's narrative approach helps explain why Gatsby requires more than a name. A renamed self needs a story capable of joining disparate moments. Gatsby consequently constructs a biography that gives his present status an apparently coherent past.

His account of himself contains recognizable credentials: family background, education, travel, war service, inheritance, cultivated experience. The point is not that every element is false. Fitzgerald deliberately complicates the distinction between fabrication and truth. Gatsby's war record, for example, cannot simply be dismissed as invention. More important is the narrative function of the details. They are selected and arranged to produce legibility. Gatsby tells a life that explains the person he wishes to be seen as.

This is one reason the novel remains relevant to contemporary public identity. Social-media profiles similarly rely on selection rather than total disclosure. A profile is not normally a complete record of a life; it is an arrangement of signs judged appropriate to an audience. The act of selection does not automatically make the result false. It makes it rhetorical. Gatsby's biography is rhetorical in this sense: it seeks recognition.

3.2 Gesture, Voice, and the Embodied Performance of Status

Gatsby's persona is not constructed by biography alone. It is embodied. Nick repeatedly attends to his smile, phrases, manner, posture, clothing, and peculiar combination of confidence and uncertainty. Gatsby's recurrent "old sport" is especially revealing. Language functions as a social marker. The phrase is not merely semantic; it performs affiliation with a class style that Gatsby has learned to reproduce.

Duffy (2011) reads Gatsby's class identity explicitly through performance, arguing that his gestures and acquisitions form an attempted assimilation into the leisure class. This emphasis is useful because it shifts attention from wealth as

possession to wealth as communication. Gatsby's problem is not simply acquiring money. Money must become readable as status. The distinction between West Egg and East Egg indicates that economic capital does not automatically translate into inherited social legitimacy. Gatsby can purchase many of the signs of the elite without controlling the rules by which those signs are interpreted.

This gap between possession and recognition is fundamental to public identity. A performance succeeds only within a community of interpretation. Tom Buchanan's authority derives partly from the fact that his class position appears unperformed. Gatsby's visible effort can therefore be used against him. The carefully cultivated phrase, spectacular house, conspicuous car, and enormous parties can signify success to one audience and vulgarity to another. Identity signs do not contain stable meanings; they are socially decoded.

Hall's (1996) approach is particularly helpful here. Gatsby attempts to occupy an identity position available within American narratives of self-making, but that position intersects with another discourse: inherited class. The American promise of reinvention encounters the social policing of authenticity. Gatsby can perform the successful man, yet Tom can redescribe that performance as counterfeit. Public identity becomes a struggle over which narrative will dominate.

3.3 Possessions as Media

Gatsby's house, car, clothes, library, pool, and parties are often treated as symbols of materialism. They are that, but they also function as media of self-representation. They transmit a story about their owner. The mansion announces scale; the car announces visibility and mobility; the library announces cultivation; the shirts convert wealth into tactile spectacle; the parties transform private property into public communication.

Norris (2018) situates Gatsby's performance within the consumer culture of the 1920s and argues that the novel destabilizes the distinction between authentic aristocratic identity and Gatsby's supposedly inauthentic imitation. This is important for the present argument because public identity depends upon material signs while simultaneously disavowing that dependence. Tom's status appears to emanate naturally from who he is; Gatsby's status appears manufactured because the means of manufacture are conspicuous. Yet both identities rely on social conventions that attach meaning to houses, accents, education, clothing, leisure, ancestry, and consumption.

The parties offer the clearest example. They create publicity before Gatsby establishes intimacy. Hundreds of people can consume the Gatsby environment without knowing Gatsby. His identity becomes ambient: music, lights, food, cars, rumours, architecture, abundance. In contemporary vocabulary, one might call this an

identity ecology. Gatsby is represented not through a single statement but through a coordinated field of signs.

Yet the ecology escapes its designer. Guests speculate that Gatsby killed a man or acted as a German spy (Fitzgerald, 1925/2021, Chapters 3-4). The very absence that makes him fascinating also creates a vacuum into which narratives rush. Publicity does not guarantee control over public identity. Indeed, increased visibility may generate increased interpretive instability.

3.4 Visibility, Scarcity, and Mystery

Gatsby's management of visibility is paradoxical. He creates events designed to attract crowds, but he does not behave like a conventional celebrity host. Nick initially struggles to identify him. Gatsby's partial withdrawal produces scarcity within abundance: everything associated with him is spectacularly visible except the man himself.

This structure resembles, at a conceptual rather than technological level, the relationship between visibility and intimacy examined in scholarship on celebrity practice. Marwick and boyd (2011b) show that social media can create the appearance of backstage access, allowing public figures to cultivate intimacy through apparently personal communication. Gatsby operates in the reverse direction: his "backstage" is withheld. But both structures demonstrate that public identity depends on managing the boundary between what audiences can and cannot access.

Mystery is therefore not external to Gatsby's persona; it becomes one of its components. The unknown generates attention. His guests collectively author versions of the missing story. The process illustrates an important principle that becomes more pronounced in digital culture: information gaps do not remain empty in highly visible environments. They invite speculation, inference, gossip, and collaborative narration.

4. The Limits of Self-Authorship: Rumour, Class, and Nick's Narrative

If Gatsby were solely the author of his identity, the novel would be a story of successful self-branding. Instead, Fitzgerald makes the instability of public identity central to the plot. Gatsby produces signs, but other characters control many of their meanings. His identity is continually rewritten.

Rumour is the first counter-author. Before Nick receives Gatsby's account of his past, he encounters multiple versions of Gatsby through other people. These versions are not minor atmospheric details. They establish that a public person can become narratively detached from the biological individual. "Gatsby" circulates independently of Gatsby. His name becomes a container for collective fantasy.

The second counter-author is class. Gatsby's performance is judged within a social hierarchy whose criteria he cannot unilaterally change. His material success allows him to approximate the appearance of elite life, but East Egg can interpret the approximation as evidence of exclusion. Duffy (2011) emphasizes the fragility of Gatsby's class performance, while Norris (2018) complicates the language of authenticity by showing that the aristocratic identity against which Gatsby is judged is itself dependent on signs and reproductions. Together these readings reveal the politics of recognition: dominant groups possess greater power to define which performances count as natural and which are exposed as imitation.

Tom's investigation of Gatsby is therefore more than personal jealousy. It is an act of identity policing. He produces a counter-narrative that relocates Gatsby from romantic self-made gentleman to criminal social intruder. Gatsby's carefully organized signs are redescribed. Once the frame changes, the same wealth that supported his prestige becomes evidence against legitimacy.

The third and most powerful counter-author is Nick Carraway. Everything the reader knows about Gatsby is mediated by Nick's retrospective narration. This creates an important methodological caution. There is no unfiltered Gatsby available to the reader against which all representations can be measured. Even scenes in which Gatsby speaks for himself are selected, contextualized, and interpreted by Nick. The novel thus formally enacts the relational nature of identity.

Nick's role becomes particularly significant after Gatsby's death. Public attention evaporates. The crowds disappear. The social network created by the parties proves shallow. Nick attempts to contact people, reconstruct loyalties, arrange the funeral, and finally tell the story. The Gatsby who survives culturally is therefore not simply the Gatsby who designed himself. He is the Gatsby narrated by Nick.

This shift reveals a tension between self-narration and memorial narration. While alive, Gatsby tries to control the story of his origins and future. After death, narrative authority passes decisively to another person. Nick converts the socially ambiguous Gatsby into a symbolic figure connected to desire, hope, time, and the American imagination. The public identity that achieves literary permanence is thus posthumously curated.

Ricoeur's narrative theory clarifies what is at stake. Narrative identity does not merely catalogue events; it configures them. Nick gives Gatsby's life a shape. He selects beginnings, revelations, contrasts, and an ending. The famous retrospective movement of the novel turns a man's incomplete self-invention into a story about historical and existential longing. Public identity is therefore constructed twice: first within the fictional world through Gatsby's performances and others' responses, and second through the narrator's act of literary representation.

This double construction is crucial to the comparison with media. Digital public identity is likewise produced not only by what users publish about themselves but by

what others post, tag, quote, screenshot, search, recommend, rank, or remember. The analogy should not be overstated: Nick is a crafted literary narrator, not an algorithmic feed. Yet both cases undermine the fantasy of sovereign self-authorship. Once identity enters circulation, its subject becomes only one participant in its construction.

5. From Social Reputation to Networked Public Identity

The transition to digital media changes the infrastructure of public identity. It does not invent self-presentation, audience management, reputation, or selective disclosure. Goffman's work predates social networking by decades, and Gatsby predates Goffman. What networked media change are the conditions under which these older processes occur.

Hogan (2010) identifies one of the most important differences by distinguishing performances from exhibitions. Face-to-face interaction is situational and ephemeral; social-media content often persists as an assemblage of artifacts. A profile can be viewed when its owner is absent. Posts and images can be reordered, resurfaced, searched, or redistributed. The self becomes not only something performed before an audience but something exhibited through an archive.

Gatsby already has an exhibitionary dimension. His mansion, possessions, and parties remain available as signs beyond any individual conversation. His library can be inspected; his car can be seen; his house can be approached; his guests can report what they have witnessed. Yet digital media dramatically increase persistence and portability. Online artifacts can travel beyond their original setting with little connection to the intention that produced them.

This shift matters because self-presentation has traditionally depended on audience segregation. Goffman (2009) describes social performances as organized for particular settings and audiences. Networked media often weaken those boundaries. Marwick and boyd (2011a) use the concept of context collapse to describe the convergence of multiple audiences that would otherwise remain separate. A user may address friends, relatives, colleagues, strangers, and professional contacts through the same platform, while imagining a more limited audience than the actual one.

Gil-Lopez and Shen's (2018) empirical study of Facebook users adds useful evidence. Examining longitudinal behavioural data from 6,378 users, they found relationships between network size and heterogeneity and the linguistic styles and emotional content of status updates. Their findings support the broader argument that online self-presentation is shaped by the structure of the audience, not simply by an individual's desire for expression. Public identity is adapted to anticipated reception.

Gatsby's problem can be reread through this lens. His performances are addressed to different audiences that do not interpret them uniformly. Daisy is the

privileged imagined audience behind much of the spectacle: the parties are public, but their deepest purpose is oriented toward one desired spectator. Other guests, however, consume the same performance differently. To them Gatsby may be a celebrity, curiosity, host, criminal, mystery, or source of entertainment. Tom reads the performance as class trespass. Nick reads it first with scepticism and later with sympathy. Gatsby's public signs therefore undergo a form of contextual instability long before digital context collapse gives that instability a technical infrastructure.

The comparison reveals a continuity: the intended audience and the actual audience are rarely identical. But digital platforms intensify the mismatch. A post designed for one interpretive community can be encountered by another; old material can meet new audiences; private-seeming speech can become public; ironic or contextual language can be detached from its original frame. The resulting identity may diverge sharply from the identity the user intended to present.

6. Curation, Authenticity, and the Problem of the "Real" Self

Discussions of social media frequently contrast curated identity with a supposedly authentic offline self. Gatsby appears to invite a similar opposition: James Gatz is "real," Jay Gatsby is fabricated. Yet the novel and the theoretical framework used here both make that binary inadequate.

First, James Gatz is not a pure pre-social essence. The young Gatz already imagines possibilities for himself through cultural narratives of success and transformation. Second, Gatsby's invented persona contains real achievements, desires, memories, and commitments. Third, the inherited identities of characters such as Tom are also socially constructed, even when their construction is less visible. The question is therefore not whether identity is constructed but how, under what constraints, and with what consequences.

Hall's (1996) anti-essentialism helps avoid treating construction as falsification. Identity is produced through positioning and representation. Goffman (2009) similarly shows that social life requires impression management. Online curation should therefore not automatically be interpreted as deception. Choosing a photograph, deciding what to disclose, adjusting language for an audience, or maintaining a professional profile can be ordinary forms of social competence.

At the same time, construction can become strategic, commercialized, or coercive. Marwick and boyd (2011a) note that audience management may overlap with micro-celebrity and personal branding, practices in which the self is treated strategically for public consumption. Their study of celebrity practice further shows that apparent intimacy and backstage access can themselves be performed (Marwick & boyd, 2011b). Authenticity thus becomes not the absence of mediation but a recognizable style of mediation.

This observation casts new light on Gatsby. His failure is often explained as the exposure of a false identity. But the more disturbing possibility is that social legitimacy depends on whose constructed identity is permitted to appear natural. Gatsby's signs are vulnerable because audiences can see the labour behind them. Tom's privilege is powerful partly because it does not need to announce itself as performance.

Norris's (2018) reading is valuable here: consumer reproduction undermines the metaphysical confidence with which aristocratic identity claims originality while dismissing Gatsby as copy. If the signs of status are reproducible, authenticity becomes a political judgment rather than a simple property. The person with authority to label another as fake gains power over public identity.

Digital culture magnifies this struggle. "Authenticity" is simultaneously an ethical expectation, an aesthetic style, and, in influencer culture, a marketable resource. Users may be expected to appear spontaneous while carefully managing visibility. Public figures can stage intimacy; ordinary users can cultivate professional brands; platforms encourage measurable reactions that reward some forms of self-display over others. The distinction between front stage and backstage becomes unstable because the backstage can itself be converted into content.

Gatsby's mansion offers a useful literary analogue. What appears to be private property becomes a public stage. Domestic space is transformed into spectacle, and the host's personal desire is embedded within a large-scale social event. Contemporary media similarly turn domains once coded as private — bedrooms, meals, relationships, grief, exercise, family life — into possible public artifacts. The transformation does not mean that privacy disappears, but it changes the boundary work through which privacy is maintained.

7. Quantification, Algorithmic Visibility, and a New Stage of Transition

There is, however, a point at which the Gatsby analogy reaches its limit, and that limit is analytically productive. Gatsby's reputation is mediated by people, institutions, objects, and social structures, but not by computational systems that continuously rank visibility. Contemporary public identity increasingly develops within platforms whose architectures influence what is seen, remembered, and amplified.

This article does not undertake an algorithm audit, and therefore it does not claim to explain the technical operation of particular recommendation systems. Conceptually, however, digital identity differs from Gatsby's world in at least three ways: persistence, quantification, and infrastructural mediation.

Persistence means that identity artifacts can remain available beyond the situation in which they were produced. Hogan's (2010) exhibition model captures this

shift from transient performance toward curated displays. A statement can become part of an archive against which later identity claims are assessed. The past is no longer remembered only through human recollection; it may remain materially retrievable.

Quantification means that public response is frequently translated into visible metrics: counts of followers, likes, shares, views, comments, or other forms of engagement. Gatsby's parties certainly provide informal metrics — crowds, cars, invitations, gossip, social reach — but digital platforms formalize and display such measurements. Public identity can consequently become entangled with numerical evidence of attention. Visibility is not merely experienced; it is counted.

Infrastructural mediation means that neither the subject nor the audience fully controls circulation. Platform design, searchability, recommendation, moderation, interface conventions, and data practices shape encounters between identity artifacts and audiences. The public self is therefore co-produced not only by self and society but by technical systems.

This development extends rather than abolishes the relational model of identity. If Gatsby's public persona is constructed among self-narration, material signs, gossip, class judgment, and Nick's retrospective story, the digital public persona is constructed among self-presentation, audience response, stored artifacts, platform affordances, and automated distribution. In both cases identity is negotiated. The difference lies in the speed, scale, persistence, and partial automation of the negotiation.

The notion of transition is thus central rather than decorative. We are not moving from a period in which identity was stable to one in which it is constructed. Literature demonstrates that identity was already narratively and socially constructed. Nor are we moving simply from privacy to publicity. Gatsby's world is saturated with surveillance, gossip, reputation, newspapers, spectacle, and social judgment. The transition is instead from predominantly situational and socially circulated forms of public identity toward persistent, searchable, measurable, and infrastructurally mediated forms.

8. Literature as a Critical Vocabulary for Media Identity

Why use a literary text to analyse a problem often approached through communication or media studies? The answer lies in literature's capacity to represent simultaneously the interior desire for self-coherence and the external processes that disrupt it.

The Great Gatsby allows readers to inhabit the contradiction between Gatsby's dream of self-authorship and the social multiplicity of his identity. To himself, he is the protagonist of a coherent transformation. To Daisy, he is a recovered possibility inseparable from the past. To Tom, he is an impostor and threat. To partygoers, he is

rumour. To Nick, he becomes a figure of extraordinary hope. None of these identities alone exhausts him, yet none can simply be dismissed as irrelevant. Public identity exists in the field between them.

Literary form makes this especially visible because the reader receives Gatsby through layers of mediation. Nick's narration is not an obstacle to the "real" Gatsby that interpretation should remove. It is part of the novel's argument about knowing persons. The reader is placed in a structurally similar position to the social audience: dependent on selected signs, stories, testimony, and retrospective framing.

This insight can correct a common simplification in discussions of digital identity. The problem of social media is not merely that people "show only the best parts of themselves." All public identity is selective. The more significant questions are: Who selects? Which forms of selection are culturally rewarded? Which audiences are imagined? Which audiences actually arrive? Which representations persist? Who can contest them? Which institutions or infrastructures amplify one version over another?

Gatsby's story also warns against treating visibility as recognition. He is extremely visible and poorly known. His parties produce attention without durable attachment. After his death, the scale of his social world collapses with startling speed. This distinction has obvious relevance to networked media, where large audiences can coexist with weak relational ties. Yet the novel's value is not that it supplies a moral lesson about superficiality. Rather, it separates two processes that contemporary discourse often confuses: being seen and being recognized.

Recognition implies interpretation within a relationship or social framework. Visibility merely makes signs available. Gatsby devotes enormous resources to visibility because he hopes it will produce a particular recognition from Daisy. The failure of that conversion is one of the novel's deepest structural ironies. Digital media similarly make visibility measurable, but metrics cannot by themselves establish what a person means to an audience or whether the identity presented has been accepted in the intended way.

Literature therefore contributes a critical vocabulary for understanding media identity because it preserves ambiguity. A profile can be studied as data; a post can be coded; audience behaviour can be measured. Literary narrative asks a complementary question: what does it feel like to seek coherence in a social world that continually interprets the self otherwise? Gatsby's answer is tragic because he attempts to force time, desire, and social recognition into a single story.

9. Conclusion: Identity in Transition

Reading *The Great Gatsby* alongside theories of representation, performance, narrative identity, and social-media self-presentation reveals that the construction of public identity is neither a uniquely digital phenomenon nor merely an individual act of invention. Public identity emerges through a negotiation among self-narration, culturally available signs, audiences, institutions, and media.

Gatsby constructs himself through a new name, revised biography, cultivated speech, gestures, possessions, architecture, parties, and strategic visibility. These practices make him legible within a cultural narrative of American self-making. Yet the novel simultaneously demonstrates the limits of self-authorship. Rumour supplies alternative biographies; class power determines which signs count as legitimate; Tom imposes a hostile counter-narrative; Daisy refuses the temporal story Gatsby needs her to confirm; and Nick ultimately becomes the narrator through whom Gatsby survives. The public Gatsby is therefore never Gatsby's property alone.

Contemporary social media intensify this relational condition. Goffman's situational performance is supplemented by what Hogan (2010) calls exhibition: persistent collections of identity artifacts. Marwick and boyd's (2011a) imagined audience and context collapse show how public communication escapes neat audience boundaries, while their work on celebrity practice demonstrates that even apparent backstage intimacy can become a public technique (Marwick & boyd, 2011b). Empirical research further indicates that the size and heterogeneity of online networks shape patterns of self-presentation (Gil-Lopez & Shen, 2018). The digital public self is consequently curated but not sovereign.

The transition examined here should therefore be understood as a transformation in the infrastructure of identity rather than the invention of constructed identity itself. Fitzgerald's novel already depicts identity as performed, narrated, consumed, judged, and circulated. Digital media make these processes more persistent, searchable, quantifiable, and dependent on technical systems. They alter the scale and temporality of public identity while preserving its fundamental dependence on recognition.

This perspective also changes the meaning of authenticity. The relevant opposition is not between a "real" private self and a "fake" public self. Every public identity requires mediation. A more productive distinction concerns power: who has the resources to construct a persuasive persona, who has the authority to declare an identity authentic or fraudulent, whose counter-narratives circulate, and which media systems determine visibility. Gatsby's tragedy lies partly in believing that sufficient control over signs can secure control over meaning.

Nearly a century after Fitzgerald's novel, the fantasy of self-authorship has become both more available and more precarious. Individuals possess unprecedented

tools for publishing versions of themselves, yet those versions enter environments in which audiences, archives, metrics, and infrastructures continually recontextualize them. The public self is increasingly editable but never finally edited. In this sense, Gatsby's impossible desire to make identity and time obey a single narrative remains culturally resonant. The media have changed; the struggle between the story one tells about oneself and the stories through which others recognize that self has not.

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PART III.
VOICES OF EDUCATIONAL AND PROFESSIONAL TRANSFORMATION

From Form to Function: Teaching Romanian as a Foreign Language at B1 level

Roxana Silvia MORARU

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *This article aims to analyse how the linguistic structures and grammatical component of Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) are acquired, reproduced and used as building blocks in the acquisition of immediate communicative competence. The transformation of linguistic and grammatical knowledge (form) into syntactic and functional language (function) requires an integrated and progressive approach within a supportive environment, defined by academic rigor, but at the same time, yet one that also encourages empathy, mutual respect and the development of spontaneous, authentic and intercultural communication competence. The ability to communicate effectively is highlighted in the process of teaching RLS at level B1, where the learner is motivated by achieving a well-defined goal: that of becoming an independent user, demonstrating spontaneity, creativity and adaptability, using linguistic resources in relevant contemporary contexts.*

Keywords: transformation, linguistic and grammatical knowledge, integrated approach, communicative competence, development.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly interconnected world, the acquisition of a foreign language is regarded as one of the fundamental objectives for both professional and personal development. This complex and long-term process goes beyond the linguistic component, turning into an invaluable tool for social, cultural and educational integration. As international academic mobility continues to intensify, Romania is becoming a multicultural space that is distinguished by a personalised educational offer, adapted to the contemporary needs of students. Within this context, the Romanian language enjoys an increasingly wide recognition, amplifying its visibility and practical relevance. Undoubtedly, Romania's contemporary status as a "host country" (Milancovici, 2026: 163) is becoming increasingly well-defined. Teaching Romanian as a foreign language (RFL) must target two important directions, namely:

the particularities of the language and the socio-cultural and linguistic profile of the learner. In the contemporary era, the only certainty remains change; consequently, one of the most important challenges that arises in the process of teaching Romanian as a foreign language is that of acquiring communicative competence. In other words, the teaching curriculum must facilitate the transformation of lexical-grammatical knowledge into a resource for communication.

2. The Language Learning Process — Contextualization of Linguistic and Grammatical Structures

Familiarity with grammatical rules, vocabulary items and syntactic structure is an essential and indispensable stage in the process of acquiring Romanian as a foreign language, but knowledge must be targeted, have a well-defined purpose, namely to gradually develop the ability to communicate effectively. This issue becomes particularly relevant at the intermediate level (B1), where students must use the acquired knowledge effectively and appropriately in real communication situations, which involve not just a simple reproduction of linguistic and grammatical resources. In order to become independent users, students must demonstrate spontaneity, creativity and adaptability, using linguistic resources in relevant contemporary contexts.

The transition from form to function represents an important and indispensable stage, in the process of teaching and acquiring Romanian as a foreign language. In this context, form and function acquire new dimensions. It is appropriate to establish an association between form and function, one that does not promote a separated approach to the grammatical and the communicative components but rather demonstrates their interdependent relationship. Form provides meaning and structure, while function contextualizes the linguistic form, giving it relevance and purpose. A new challenge is thus emerging at the academic level, which consists in transforming linguistic and grammatical knowledge (form) into syntactic and functional language (function).

The existing literature on teaching Romanian as a foreign language includes studies related to the acquisition of vocabulary and grammatical norms, frequently occurring errors, intercultural and pragmatic competence. To date, these research directions have been addressed primarily as separate areas of inquiry. Therefore, an integrated approach is necessary to argue the complexity and importance of the "need of the developing foreign language communicative competence" (Fisenko, Belous, Vukolova, Sycheva, 2021: 2), which can be fulfilled only through a distinct approach to the lexical-grammatical component.

This article aims to analyse the process through which the linguistic resource is transformed into a functional language, favouring direct, contextualised and

intercultural interaction. The transition from form to function involves a comprehensive development process that encompasses not only the ways in which learners acquire the language but also the design of the teaching activities in such a way that contextualisation occurs as naturally as possible.

Throughout this article, we will answer the following questions: 1) How do we define the transition from form to function in the process of teaching Romanian as a foreign language at B1 level? 2) What are the challenges and limitations that arise in this process of contextualisation?

First, the student must possess three attributes to engage in the process of learning Romanian as a foreign language: openness, motivation and purpose. It is natural that the teaching-learning process takes place in a favourable framework, defined by academic rigor, but at the same time, yet one that also encourages empathy, mutual respect and the development of intercultural competence. Accessing and understanding the "linguistic culture" (Fisenko, Belous, Vukolova, Sycheva, 2021: 3) of another people undoubtedly involves overcoming intercultural barriers in terms of the use of lexicon and grammatical norms, to communicate spontaneously, efficiently and independently (at B1 level). According to the CEFRL grid, the independent user B1: can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc.; can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken; can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest; can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes & ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. On the secondary level, there are also the barriers of physical/cultural space and the inner space — of the subconscious — where the fear of making mistakes, of not performing at the targeted level, or of not achieving the intended goal inevitably arises.

The first stage in the process of transforming the linguistic form into a communication resource is the development of competences. Teaching Romanian as a foreign language requires a progressive and integrated approach, in which the curricular contents are structured in a logical and coherent sequence. Communicative competence is preceded both by the accumulation of a portfolio of knowledge that will facilitate the subsequent development of linguistic competence, and by the formation of grammatical competence. Approached simultaneously and gradually, the two types of competences facilitate the efficient use of the Romanian language in spontaneous communication situations.

A relevant bibliographic example in this regard is the Romanian Language Handbook for Foreign Students in the Preparatory Year, Level A1-A2, 3rd edition added and revised by the authors Cristina-Valentina Dafinoiu and Laura-Elena Pascale, which, contrary to the title, contains the necessary and fundamental notions to reach the B1 level, due to the structure that is distinguished by coherence and logical order, but

also by the diversity and relevance of the topics addressed. In the first place, students are familiarized with the Romanian alphabet and basic lexical-grammatical items, namely a series of nouns that are part of the fundamental vocabulary, regarded as relevant examples for the diacritics of the Romanian language, as well as for the sound groups: *student, facultate, dimineață, floare, pâine, ouă, geam, cinci, bine, ocupat*. The words carrying cultural valences cannot go unnoticed either: *Romania*, *Romanian*, *Bucharest*, *Andrei*, *Cristina*, *Constanța*, which favours the approach to the cultural universe of the Romanian language. An interesting and interactive exercise is the one in which pairs of simple words (paronyms) are read — *doi/voi*, *când/gând*, *țară/vară*, *peste/veste*.

Starting from the first learning unit, the teaching approach is focused on developing skills. Oral communication is practiced through reading activities, through which the competence of receiving the oral message is implicitly formed as other colleagues also participate indirectly. The latter is also reinforced through dictation exercises, which favor written expression. Learning through the association between word and image also proves to be particularly useful, a universal tool for sustainable learning at any age, regardless of the context (personal, academic or professional). This learning strategy is an example of good practices and an integrated approach, a premise for developing communication skills.

Expanding one's vocabulary begins with the reception and reproduction of the most important phrases in Romanian — and, in fact, in any language — since without them, no form of communication or interaction is possible. Greetings facilitate the start of any conversation, regardless of the cultural context of the native or non-native speaker. In other words, students are introduced to simple statements that serve as icebreakers. If we analyse the second learning unit in the textbook written by Dafinoiu and Pascale (2015), one will notice that the first part contextualises the linguistic resource, using the same progressive approach that was previously mentioned. This time, students are given a short text on a topic of interest, designed to help them to get to know each other and learn more about their new classmates in the academic environment. Whereas nouns were previously discussed, one can now observe the association between nouns and verbs, which form simple affirmative, negative or interrogative sentences, integrating the conjugation of the most important verb —the verb "to be" in the communication situation: *Eu sunt Irina Popescu; Voi cine sunteți; Nu, nu este din Moscova.* The first communication situations are contextualised through these simple questions and answers (name, nationality and country of origin) which form the basis of self-introduction.

For a non-native speaker, the Romanian language presents a high degree of difficulty due to the specific linguistic particularities that are identified in the grammatical component: the noun – gender identification and plural formation, the topic of the sentence (word order), the syntax of the sentence (Suciu, 2017: 1). For this very reason, the teaching-learning process must promote an integrated and step-by-step

approach, structured in logical stages. The organisation of grammatical content must correspond to the level of linguistic competence of the learners. Starting from nouns and verbs, students manage to identify simple sentences in the supporting texts they receive, reproduce them, and finally formulate their own statements. As previously mentioned, linguistic and grammatical competence are approached in an integrated manner, which means that the student benefits from the simultaneous development of both. As learners expand their vocabulary, nouns are analysed in relation to pronouns, adjectives or numerals, which help them to individualize the communication situation to the specific context.

The introductory contexts presented in the first four units are closely connected to immediate personal experience: description of a classroom, notions related to time — days of the week, months of the year, seasons, weather. The student acquires basic grammatical notions: gender and number of the noun, personal pronouns, present tense of the verb, prepositions of time and place, cardinal numerals.

Unit 5 — *În Constanța* — is a transitional unit, which highlights the simultaneous evolution of the communication situation and the grammatical component. It emphasises the importance of using the linguistic resource in communication contexts that capitalise on the learners' existing knowledge through various tasks — describing an image, restoring the natural order of words in a developed sentence, multiple-choice text comprehension questions and using antonyms as a tool for vocabulary development. The most noticeable part of this unit is the production of a short description of the learner's hometown. The learner moves from structural exercises, such as imitation and substitution (Suciu, 2017: 1) to functional ones, applying the accumulated knowledge in a thematic and personal context, with a descriptive function. Leisure activities facilitate the transition from description to interaction. The process of acquiring Romanian as a foreign language is of course accompanied, deliberately, by reviews to consolidate linguistic and grammatical knowledge. This fact increases the learner's chances of using them spontaneously in everyday communication contexts.

To facilitate the development of immediate communication skills, prepositions of time and place, numerals, interrogative pronouns, definite and indefinite articles, and adjectives are progressively introduced. The progressive approach to grammar is not limited to the accumulation of concepts; it integrates grammatical structures that promote both oral and written communication while diversifying the topics.

Starting with Unit 7 of the textbook we have been analysing, one can observe the evolution of the topics, which are focused on action and interaction, specifically on addressing everyday situations, daily or weekly routines, academic and leisure activities, shopping, places in the city, eating at a restaurant, personal interests (hobbies), trips and plans, description of family members, friends, respectively the home, visit to the doctor. The proposed grammatical structures increase the

complexity of communication. Initially, the students were introduced to the fundamental morphological categories. Subsequently, they move from simply identifying the noun to using it during social interactions through the Accusative, Genitive and Dative cases. The Accusative case is used to define interpersonal relationships and describe experiences or everyday activities. The use of stressed and unstressed forms of pronouns in the Accusative implicitly leads to the acquisition of communicative competence. The Genitive case is associated with possessive pronouns and is used functionally in specific contexts such as personal identity, home, family or interpersonal relationships. In other words, the student will be able to express possession. Among the cases, the Dative case is intentionally addressed last, given its complexity, which serves as a relevant example for the transformation of form into communicative function. The Dative case involves the progressive approach of the syntactic function, the pronominal form, the relationship and position towards the verb, and then of its integration into the communication context.

Since the simplest communication situation includes the subject and the predicate (noun and verb), verb tenses require an integrated and progressive approach, which must be aligned with the proposed topic. The conjugation of verbs in the present tense is followed by the use of the past tense (in Romanian *perfect compus*) — to recount past actions and experiences, — and the future tense to express intentions and plans for the near or distant future. The communicative function of these tenses is intermediate in nature, reinforced by the subjunctive and conditional-optative moods, which are highly relevant for developing communicative competence at the B1 level. With the help of these two verbal moods, learners can express their preferences, desires, dreams, or simply emphasise certain needs, recommendations or obligations.

Within this framework of conceptual grammar, the evolution of form in the presence of a theme is significant through the association of grammatical structures with context. The form is adapted and contextualised, receiving a communicative function to communicate effectively in everyday situations. The "communicative approach" (Fisenko, Belous, Vukolova, Sycheva, 2021: 3) has certain limitations. The main problem that learners face in the process of acquiring Romanian as a foreign language at level B1 is the spontaneous choice and use of lexical or grammatical forms depending on the communication situation. In this regard, four important directions stand out: verb tenses, means of enriching vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and politeness formulas as an integral part of the intercultural component. Within this framework of conceptual grammar, the evolution of form in the presence of a theme is notable by associating the grammatical structure with a thematic context. Then the form is adapted and contextualised, receiving a communicative function in order to communicate effectively in everyday situations.

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Romanian as a foreign language at level B1 is the spontaneous choice and use of lexical or grammatical forms depending on the communication situation. In this sense, we distinguish four important directions: verb tenses, means of enriching vocabulary, idiomatic expressions and politeness formulas as an integral part of the intercultural component. Compound tenses pose difficulties because they feature auxiliary verbs in their structure, and learners do not always manage to use the tense according to the communication situation (present, past or future actions). Also, moving from basic vocabulary to integrating synonyms, antonyms or homonyms in oral and written communication is difficult because it depends entirely on the context. Idiomatic expressions and polite formulas have intercultural connotations, that do not always have direct equivalents in the learners' mother tongue.

3. Conclusions

The grammatical structure provides a necessary foundation for developing communicative competence, but practice must be linked to the use of language in communication situations. The need to combine the exercises with short conversational situations is not debatable. In the process of acquiring Romanian as a foreign language at B1 level, the transformation of lexical and grammatical knowledge into a resource for communication is imperative and indispensable. Starting from basic lexical-grammatical structures such as greeting formulas, noun or verb, learners acquire and practice communicative competence, namely the use of functional language. Some relevant examples in which the vocabulary and grammar are addressed simultaneously include: nouns and adjectives for self-introduction, physical and moral portraits, descriptions of family, home, friends or interpersonal relationships; verbs for expressing daily routines, preferences or habits: Dative pronouns for likes and dislikes; numerals for expressing age, date, time, frequency of certain actions or for shopping; prepositions and conjunctions for personalizing and arguing answers.

In conclusion, teaching the Romanian language as a foreign language can be regarded "as both an educational and a civic transition" (Milancovici, 2026: 165).

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Voicing Transition in English-Medium Computer Science: A Corpus-Assisted Analysis of Student-Reported Affordances and Frictions

Alina REȘCEANU

University of Craiova

Abstract. *English-medium instruction (EMI) is often discussed either as a linguistic difficulty or as an international opportunity. In this study, we look at how these two sides appear together in the voices of undergraduate Computer Science students and how they describe this educational transition. The data consist of open-ended questionnaire responses from 108 students enrolled in an EMI Computer Science programme at the University of Craiova. The analysis combines word-frequency, recurrent-phrase and concordance analysis with qualitative multi-label coding. The three groups of answers contain 86, 81 and 80 responses respectively. Almost half of the answers about challenges report no difficulty or minor difficulty, but there are answers pointing to problems which concern technical terminology, expressing complex ideas, moving between Romanian and English and communication with teachers and colleagues. The answers about academic and professional belonging have a different emphasis: students speak about access to knowledge, international participation, confidence, communication and career opportunities. The use of spatial expressions such as "doors," "gate," "circle," "larger" and "bigger" present English as a way of entering wider academic and professional spaces. The findings suggest that the main transition is not simply from Romanian to English, but from learning English to using it as a language of study and professional life.*

Keywords: English-medium instruction, student voice, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, computer science, affordances, linguistic frictions.

1. Introduction

English-medium instruction (EMI) is now well established in universities outside English-speaking countries. It is generally understood as the use of English to teach academic subjects other than English itself (Dearden, 2015), although EMI includes different multilingual settings (Smit, 2023). Its growth is linked to

internationalisation, wider access to scholarship and preparation for study and work across national borders. In Europe, Wingrove et al. (2026) identify 24,043 English-taught programmes in 2023/2024, with engineering, technology and computer science among the most represented fields. For students, however, EMI also means learning and showing complex disciplinary knowledge through another language. So opportunity and linguistic difficulty remain closely connected.

Recent research has repeatedly shown both sides of this experience. In a systematic review of 83 higher-education studies, Macaro et al. (2018) found that students and teachers often recognise the benefits, and sometimes the apparent inevitability, of EMI while also reporting concerns about proficiency, participation and content learning. The later review by Rose et al. (2026), covering 196 empirical studies published between 2016 and 2023, confirms that the field has grown considerably but that language-related difficulties do not affect all skills equally. Receptive skills and vocabulary often show relatively positive results, whereas productive skills remain less consistent. Academic writing and the move from first-language instruction to EMI also continue to create difficulties. This makes it important to distinguish between understanding English-medium content and using English confidently to explain, discuss and write about disciplinary knowledge.

This distinction is especially relevant in computer science. Many students meet English before entering an EMI degree through programming languages, software interfaces, documentation, online tutorials, developer communities and digital media. For them, university EMI may feel less like a first encounter with English and more like a formal continuation of language practices already common in the field. Students may therefore describe EMI as accessible or easy while still mentioning very specific difficulties when they translate terminology, explain complex ideas, speak in public, understand different accents or show their knowledge in assessment. At the same time, they may describe English as giving access to information, communities and careers even when they do not believe that the programme has changed them personally.

The Romanian context provides a useful setting in which to examine this tension. Our research at the University of Craiova has connected EMI with institutional internationalisation, mobility and academic visibility (Reșceanu et al., 2021). A subsequent study on the same English-taught Computer Science programme has addressed foreign-language proficiency and the opportunities and limitations of studying specialised content through English (Reșceanu et al., 2023). One of our later research found that student and staff motivation involves both language-related and instrumental considerations, including access to knowledge and anticipated professional opportunities (Reșceanu et al., 2025).

In this study, we make use of the open-ended answers from a questionnaire administered to students in the English-taught Computer Science programme at the

University of Craiova in the academic year of 2025-2026. We previously analysed other questionnaire sections, as well as the answers targeted here, to discuss language, identity and the global self (Reșceanu et al., 2026). However, the aim of this study is different, since we focus on how students describe EMI as a transition: where they have difficulties, what English allows them to do and which recurring words appear in their accounts. We also use the term 'affordance' for the possibilities students believe English gives them in an EMI environment: access to research, communication with people from other countries, professional mobility or greater confidence in using the language of their field. This follows the work in EMI, where opportunities become meaningful through what learners notice and can do with them (Jiang & Zhang, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). 'Friction' is used as a descriptive term for moments of effort or mismatch between what students know and what they can comfortably express through English. The two ideas are not opposites; one response can describe both difficulty and opportunity.

To keep the students' own language at the centre, the study uses a corpus-assisted approach. Corpus-assisted discourse analysis combines quantitative information, such as repeated words and phrases, with close reading of the contexts in which they occur (Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013). This is useful for short questionnaire answer, where repeated wording across many answers can reveal a broader pattern. Corpus methods help us see what recurs, while close reading helps us understand what those recurring forms mean in individual responses.

The study addresses three research questions:

RQ1. What kinds of linguistic, interactional and institutional frictions do Computer Science students report in their EMI experience?

RQ2. What affordances do students associate with English in relation to academic and professional participation?

RQ3. What recurrent lexical and phraseological patterns characterise the contrast between reported frictions and affordances?

We focus on the wording of the students' open-ended responses and treat their language as a source of evidence, rather than using individual comments only to illustrate the survey results. In this Computer Science context, the main transition is not simply a shift from Romanian to English. Instead, English takes on a new role: it moves from being a language learned at school or used informally online to becoming a language through which students study, discuss specialised knowledge, communicate within their field and imagine their future academic and professional lives.

2. Conceptual Background

The growth of EMI has produced extensive research on student outcomes, language difficulties, teaching and internationalisation. Smit (2023) stresses that EMI is a broad term covering many educational settings, participants and language practices. The ROAD-MAPPING framework developed by Dafouz and Smit (2020) makes the same point by relating English-medium education to internationalisation, academic disciplines, language management, participants, practices and institutional processes. EMI therefore cannot be described as uniformly beneficial or difficult. Its effects depend on students' previous experience with English, the language demands of the discipline, institutional support and the ways communication actually takes place in particular classrooms.

One distinction that appears frequently in EMI research is the difference between understanding and producing academic language. Students may be able to follow lectures, read documentation or understand specialised texts while finding it harder to speak at length, formulate a complex explanation or write in an academic style. Altay et al. (2021), for example, show that English proficiency is related to the language difficulties experienced by EMI students and that the pattern also varies by discipline. Garner's (2024) review similarly shows that students use a range of language-learning strategies to manage these demands. These findings suggest that the question is not simply whether students 'know enough English'. It is more useful to ask which activities create difficulty and what linguistic resources students use to deal with them.

This differentiation is especially relevant in science and engineering contexts. Technical terminology may be highly accessible in English because students already meet it in international documentation and online resources, while other tasks remain demanding. Research in the University of Craiova Computer Science programme has similarly shown that relatively strong foreign-language proficiency can coexist with reported difficulties and limitations linked to studying disciplinary content through English (Reșceanu et al., 2023). A student may know the English name of an algorithm yet be less comfortable explaining its operation spontaneously in a presentation. Another may understand an English term immediately but be uncertain about its Romanian equivalent. This means that students' use of English is closely connected to how they understand and communicate specialised knowledge, not simply to how proficient they are in the language.

EMI is also associated with perceived benefits beyond language learning, including access to research, international communication, mobility and employment. Sahan and Şahan (2024) show that engineering students and alumni associate EMI with linguistic and professional advantages, while cautioning that English does not automatically produce better career outcomes. In the Romanian Computer Science

context, Reșceanu et al. (2025) similarly identify professional opportunity, access to international knowledge and language development as motivational dimensions. Patiño-Santos et al. (2024) further show how students in internationalised higher education position themselves in relation to discourses of becoming "global", with agency and material conditions shaping this positioning. That is why in this study we examine perceived possibilities rather than assuming that every opportunity associated with English will objectively materialise.

The idea of affordance is useful because it describes what students see as possible without treating those possibilities as guaranteed. Jiang and Zhang (2019) examined students' perceptions of English-learning affordances in an EMI classroom and showed that learner agency matters: an opportunity becomes useful only when the learner notices it and can act on it. Kim et al. (2022) likewise discuss social and environmental affordances for communication through English as a lingua franca in an international EMI university. English is therefore not simply 'an advantage'. Students connect it with concrete possibilities such as reading more academic material, speaking with people from other countries and entering professional networks. Whether these possibilities become real depends on the student and the wider context.

Possibilities and difficulties can also appear together. Chang (2021) shows that language-sensitive practices in EMI classrooms can support comprehension and participation, but can also raise questions about time, teacher expertise and responsibility for language support. The same environment may therefore make one kind of participation easier while making another more demanding. In this article, affordance and friction are treated as connected descriptive categories rather than as opposite judgements about EMI. A response can contain both. A student may, for example, say that English makes it harder to sound natural or authentic, but also describe the experience as a source of growth, confidence or a broader academic perspective.

A focus on student voice is especially useful because universities often describe EMI through internationalisation and employability, whereas students experience it in concrete situations: following a lecturer, finding a technical term, answering an exam question, giving a presentation or reading a paper. Language-biography research shows that students do not simply absorb institutional ideas about becoming international or 'global'; they negotiate them through experience (Patiño-Santos et al., 2024). Thus, the analysis of open-ended answers allow these experiences to appear in students' own words. But short answers can also create a problem for the analysis, since a response such as "No challenges" may seem to say little alone, while repeated words across many answers may be missed in thematic reading.

We chose corpus-assisted discourse analysis because it helps us address this problem by bringing counting and interpretation together. It uses frequency lists, recurring word combinations and concordances, but these are read alongside the full

contexts in which the words occur (Baker et al., 2008; Partington et al., 2013). The purpose is not to replace close reading with numbers. Rather, the numbers point to patterns that deserve closer attention. Here the method allows us to compare the language of answers about challenges with the language of answers about academic and professional belonging. It also shows whether expressions such as "opened doors," "larger community" or "complex ideas" are isolated phrases or part of a wider pattern in the students' responses.

Transition is considered at two levels. Institutionally, students study and are assessed in English at a Romanian university where EMI is part of internationalisation (Reșceanu et al., 2021). In their language use, English moves from a school subject or digital resource towards a medium for technical knowledge, academic communication and professional participation. Related findings from the same survey show that English is associated with a stronger sense of connection to the international academic world, while students continue to value Romanian language and cultural belonging (Reșceanu et al., 2026). For students who had already used English extensively before university, this change may develop gradually rather than feel like a sudden shift. A corpus-assisted analysis helps identify the recurring difficulties and opportunities described in their responses without making identity the main focus of the discussion.

3. Methodology

3.1 Context and Participants

The data analysed here come from *The Linguistic Identity and English-Medium Instruction Survey*, administered to undergraduate students enrolled in the English-taught Computer Science programme at the Faculty of Automation, Computers and Electronics, University of Craiova during 2025-2026 academic year. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. The full sample consisted of 108 students: 90 male students, 15 female students and three participants who preferred not to state their gender. The mean age was 20.6 years. All participants reported Romanian as their first language, and most had studied English for an average of 11.2 years before the survey.

We use only the three open-ended items relevant to students' accounts of EMI:

1. How has studying your subject in English changed your sense of identity (if at all)?

2. What challenges have you faced regarding language and identity in an EMI environment?

3. In what ways has English influenced your sense of belonging in the academic or professional world?

The raw spreadsheet contains 86 non-empty responses to Question 1, 81 to Question 2 and 80 to Question 3. Question 1 is used in the present study mainly as

contextual evidence for the degree to which EMI is experienced as normalised or transitional. The core analyses of friction and affordance focus on Questions 2 and 3 respectively.

3.2 Corpus preparation

The responses were exported from the spreadsheet and treated as three small subcorpora corresponding to the three open-ended questions. Each participant retained an anonymous respondent identifier (P001-P108) so that responses across questions could be traced without using personal information. Empty cells were excluded. The texts were otherwise preserved as submitted, including non-standard spelling and punctuation. Romanian responses were retained in the dataset and translated into English when cited in the discussion.

For computational analysis, the texts were lowercased and tokenised using a simple word-based regular-expression procedure. No spelling correction was applied before counting, since correction could erase features of the students' original writing. The resulting corpus contained 3,584 word tokens: 1,264 in Question 1, 1,039 in Question 2 and 1,281 in Question 3. Table 1 summarises the corpus composition.

The corpus was then organised and coded in Microsoft Excel. We carried out multi-label coding manually, allowing individual responses to be assigned to more than one thematic category where appropriate. Then, we performed a corpus-assisted analysis with Python scripts, which were used to calculate word frequencies, identify recurrent two- and three-word phrases. We also examined the contexts in which the selected words and expressions occurred.

Table 1. Corpus composition

Subcorpus	Non-empty responses	Word tokens	Mean words/response
Question 1: identity change	86	1,264	14.7
Question 2: challenges/frictions	81	1,039	12.8
Question 3: belonging/affordances	80	1,281	16.0
Total	251	3,584	-

We have to acknowledge the fact that the corpus is small by the standards of corpus linguistics, so the frequency results are used descriptively rather than as evidence of population-level statistical generalisation. Raw frequencies are accompanied by normalised frequencies per 1,000 tokens where useful. The purpose of the digital analysis is to identify recurring patterns and direct qualitative interpretation, not to convert open-ended responses into a large-scale predictive model.

3.3 Analytical Procedure

The analysis was carried out in three stages. First, word frequencies and repeated two-word sequences were calculated for each group of answers. We gave particular attention to forms that appeared often and were relevant to the research questions. Every occurrence was then read in its full response because frequency alone does not show how a word is used. For example, "world" may simply occur in "professional world," but elsewhere it may form part of a wider spatial image such as "a bigger world".

Second, the answers to Questions 2 and 3 were coded qualitatively, with more than one code allowed for each response. Many students mention several aspects of their experience in one answer. A student may refer to technical terminology and accent or to career opportunities and access to research. For Question 2, the categories were: no/minimal challenge; lexical/terminological; expressive/productive; interactional/phonological; cross-linguistic/voice; and institutional/assessment. For Question 3, they were: global/belonging; career/opportunity; knowledge/resources; communication/collaboration; confidence/inclusion; no/limited or normalised influence; and critical/constraint. Since one response could receive several codes, the percentages do not add up to 100%.

In the third stage, the numerical and qualitative evidence was read together. Category frequencies were compared with recurrent words, two-word combinations and representative quotations. The codes were not meant to replace the students' language with researcher-created labels. They simply organised the material and made it easier to return to the full responses and compare different ways of expressing similar experiences. The analysis therefore moves between counting and close reading: patterns guide interpretation, while the original contexts show what those patterns mean in the students' own accounts.

The same open-ended data have already been discussed in an identity-focused study (Reșceanu et al., 2026). This study is a more in-depth analysis, asks different questions, uses a corpus-assisted method and focuses on different findings. It does not repeat the earlier argument about identity change. Instead, it examines students' language for difficulty and for the access and opportunity they connect with English in their discipline.

4. Results

4.1 English as a Familiar Medium of Instruction

The first striking result is the frequency with which students describe EMI as presenting little or no difficulty. Of the 81 responses to Question 2, 38 (46.9%) explicitly report no challenge, no major challenge, easy adaptation or difficulties that were

quickly overcome. The formulations are often extremely brief: "None," "No challenges," "I haven't faced any," "Nothing so far," or "I did not face any challenge." One Romanian response, "Nu am întâmpinat încă" [I have not encountered any yet] (P012, author's translation).

These short answers are analytically important. They indicate that, for a substantial part of the sample, EMI is experienced as a gradual rather than sudden change. Several fuller responses explain why. P068 writes that no challenge was encountered because the student could already speak English fluently. P072 refers to long-term exposure through television and the internet. Another response states that difficulties were overcome quickly. In such accounts, the apparent absence of friction is linked not simply to the current programme but to a history of English use previous to university (some participants reported that they had attended English-medium study programmes in high school).

The response pattern to Question 3 reinforces this normalisation. Fifteen of 80 answers (18.8%) describe no, limited or already-normalised influence on academic or professional belonging. One student writes that using English is "like using my natal language in the academic world" (P093). Another explains that English has become "an almost-everyday thing" because learning resources are already used mostly in English (P107). These responses suggest that the transition into EMI may be temporally displaced: the linguistic shift associated with computer science may have begun through digital and disciplinary practices before students entered the English-medium degree.

Normalisation, however, does not mean that friction is absent. The remainder of Question 2 reveals a set of recurring small-scale difficulties that are much more specific than a general "language barrier". Table 2 presents the multi-label coding frequencies.

Table 2. Multi-label coding of reported frictions (Question 2, n = 81)

Friction category	n	%	Operational definition
No/minimal challenge	38	46.9	None, no major challenge, easy adaptation or rapidly overcome difficulty
Lexical/terminological	18	22.2	Technical/specific terms, vocabulary retrieval, grammar/spelling, terminology equivalence
Expressive/productive	14	17.3	Complex ideas, academic tone, oral fluency, public speaking or presentations
Cross-linguistic/voice	13	16.0	Translation, code-mixing, L1/L2 balance, authenticity or cultural voice
Interactional/phonological	10	12.3	Accent/pronunciation/listening, teacher or peer English proficiency/clarity
Institutional/assessment	3	3.7	Materials availability and examination-related language demands

4.2 Lexical and Productive Frictions

The most frequent coded friction after the no/minimal category concerns lexical and terminological issues. Eighteen of the 81 responses (22.2%) mention technical terms, vocabulary retrieval, word choice, grammar or spelling. The lexical profile supports this coding: "terms" occurs ten times in Question 2 (9.6 per 1,000 tokens), "technical" six times (5.8 per 1,000), and "technical terms" occurs five times. One participant describes "the technical terms of my field of study" as the greatest hurdle (P001). Another mentions "using very specific technical terms" (P046), while a Romanian response ("înțelegerea termenilor tehnici") identifies "understanding technical terms" as the challenge (P048).

The important point is that terminological friction is frequently cross-linguistic rather than simply a matter of not knowing the concept. P032 notes possible difficulty with technical terms whose names are more familiar in the native language. P050 describes both "translating technical terms" and difficulties caused by some teachers' English. P060 gives the most explicit example, describing a "complete mix of Romanian and English" in electrotechnical vocabulary and uncertainty about which term belongs to which language. Such comments indicate that students may possess the underlying disciplinary concept while experiencing instability in the linguistic label through which it should be expressed.

A second major friction concerns productive expression. Fourteen responses (17.3%) refer to expressing complex ideas, academic tone, speaking fluently, public speaking or presentations. The recurrent phrases are revealing: "complex ideas" appears seven times and "expressing complex" four times. P002 writes that the challenge is "expressing complex ideas as clearly as I could in my native language". P034 says that even when the content was understood, he/she sometimes struggled to find "the right words or academic tone in English", creating a gap between what they knew and what they were able to express. The difficulty, therefore, was not necessarily understanding the subject, but communicating that knowledge clearly in English.

This distinction is reinforced by oral-performance comments. P042 mentions social anxiety in public speaking in English. P069 reports needing to become accustomed to speaking fluently for longer periods. P108 states that it was initially difficult to express technical ideas fluently, especially "during presentations or group projects". The response later concludes that "communication matters more than perfection", showing a gradual shift from focusing on linguistic accuracy to focusing more on effective communication.

As the responses show, students with similar overall levels of English may still experience very different difficulties with specialised vocabulary and expressing their ideas. Those who are sufficiently proficient to study Computer Science through English may still encounter task-specific friction when disciplinary knowledge has to

be formulated spontaneously, publicly or with terminological precision. This pattern is consistent with the broader EMI literature showing that productive skills can remain more variable than receptive skills even in programmes where students are able to follow English-medium content (Rose et al., 2026).

4.3 Interactional, Phonological and Cross-Linguistic Frictions

Ten responses (12.3%) identify interactional or phonological difficulties. These include peers who are "not so fluent" (P007), teachers who are not sufficiently clear (P059), teacher pronunciation (P078), different accents (P089), rapid teacher speech (P095) and uncertainty about one's own accent (P036, P073, P108). These comments show that communication difficulties in EMI do not depend only on the individual student. Even students who are well prepared to study in English may experience difficulties when teachers or classmates have different accents, levels of fluency or pronunciation.

Accent appears in several responses not simply as a comprehension issue but as a relation between linguistic form and perceived confidence. P073 writes that a Romanian accent "made me sound different", affecting confidence. P108 describes initial uncertainty about "accent or vocabulary" in presentations and group work. This suggests that the communicative demands of EMI include social evaluation, in the sense that students need not only to communicate the content, but also to feel that their English sounds appropriate and competent.

Cross-linguistic and voice-related frictions occur in 13 responses (16.0%). These responses include translation, Romanian-English mixing, concerns about native-language terminology, authenticity and the relationship between academic English and one's own voice. P026 writes about expressing ideas in a second language without feeling as if a small part of identity is being lost and notes that it can be difficult to sound equally "confident or authentic". P089 similarly reports that thoughts could sound "less authentic when translated from my native language". P105 describes the challenge as "balancing academic English with my own voice".

Although these comments touch on identity, their relevance in the present analysis is communicative rather than identity-related. They demonstrate that friction can arise because meaning is not perceived as linguistically neutral. Students sometimes experience a gap between having an idea and recognising the English version of that idea as fully their own. In other cases, moving between the two languages is simply a practical strategy. P065 translates from English into Romanian to check understanding, while P107 notices unintentional mixing of Romanian and English. These practices show that EMI participation often relies on the whole linguistic repertoire even when the formal medium is English.

Institutional and assessment-related issues were less frequent but still present. Three responses explicitly mention bilingual availability of materials or examinations. P088 notes that not all material is available in both English and Romanian, while P096 and P097 mention learning English terminology for use in classes and exams. The low frequency of this category should not be interpreted as evidence that assessment or materials are unimportant in general; it simply means that these were not the main concerns students chose to mention in their answers to this open-ended question.

4.4 Affordances: Knowledge, Participation, Confidence and Opportunity

The lexical and thematic profile changes in Question 3. Whereas the challenge corpus is organised around "terms," "complex ideas," "native" and "expressing," the belonging corpus is dominated by "academic" (19 occurrences), "professional" (13), "international" (12), "opportunities" (10), "helped" (9) and "connected" (7). These words do more than produce a positive sentiment. They specify what English is perceived to make possible. Table 3 summarises the multi-label affordance coding, while Table 4 presents selected lexical items from the two principal subcorpora.

Table 3. Multi-label coding of perceived affordances (Question 3, n = 80)

Affordance category	n	%	Operational definition
global/belonging	22	27.5	wider/international academic or professional membership
knowledge/resources	22	27.5	articles, documentation, materials, research and disciplinary knowledge
confidence/inclusion	21	26.2	confidence, integration, inclusion and feeling capable or connected
communication/collaboration	19	23.8	interaction, collaboration and communication across backgrounds
career/opportunity	16	20.0	jobs, career readiness, future mobility and professional opportunities
no/limited/normalised influence	15	18.8	no effect, limited effect, or English described as already ordinary
critical/constraint	1	1.2	English described primarily as a structural constraint

Note: Percentages do not sum to 100% because a response could receive more than one code.

Table 4. Selected recurrent lexical items in the friction and affordance subcorpora

Question 2 item	Raw f.	per 1,000	Question 3 item	Raw f.	per 1,000
terms	10	9.6	academic	19	14.8
ideas	9	8.7	professional	13	10.1
native	9	8.7	international	12	9.4
complex	7	6.7	opportunities	10	7.8

Question 2 item	Raw f.	per 1,000	Question 3 item	Raw f.	per 1,000
technical	6	5.8	helped	9	7.0
expressing	6	5.8	connected	7	5.5
			resources	5	3.9
			global	5	3.9

Knowledge and resource access is one of the two most frequent affordance categories, appearing in 22 of 80 responses (27.5%). Students mention documentation, current learning materials, research articles, technical content and broader sources of information. P050 contrasts potentially outdated materials in Romanian with more current material in English, explaining that English allows independent research without being "out of the loop". P064 states that English makes it possible to read articles written by people who do not speak Romanian. P076 refers to access to more resources and opinions, and P102 connects researching sources of information with joining "the international circle of academia". These comments show that students connect belonging to access to knowledge: being part of the field also means being able to reach and use the knowledge on which it develops.

Global or international belonging is also coded in 22 responses (27.5%). Students refer to broader communities, international academic circles, global discussions and participation beyond Romania. P001 writes about feeling part of "a broader community, pursuing science regardless of our different backgrounds". P086 reports feeling connected to "a larger community". P089 describes inclusion in a "global academic and professional world" and a stronger sense of belonging to an "international community of learners and professionals". The language of belonging therefore operates at several scales: local classroom, academic community, international profession and global disciplinary communication.

Confidence and inclusion appear in 21 responses (26.2%). Some students describe English as making them more confident in their own skills, more included, better integrated or more capable of expressing themselves. P072 says that comprehending new material in another language gives an additional "confidence boost". P104 links English with feeling "more confident and connected in the academic world". Importantly, this positive confidence pattern coexists with the reduced confidence reported in Question 2 when students struggle with accent or complex expression. English can therefore increase students' confidence, but in some situations it can also make them feel pressure to perform well.

Communication and collaboration are present in 19 responses (23.8%). Students mention speaking with people from different countries, interacting with students and teachers of other nationalities, sharing work and participating in wider discussions. P063 describes being able to communicate with people "all around the globe", while P073 links English with communication across countries and access to learning resources. These responses show that English is not only a skill students need, but also a means of connecting with other people and participating in their academic field.

Career and professional opportunity is coded in 16 responses (20.0%). Students refer to job opportunities, international companies, professional advancement, foreign academic or professional environments and preparation for an international career. P004 connects English with better job opportunities and career advancement. P046 writes that English makes more career opportunities available. P108 states that daily use of English has increased preparedness for an international career because "resources, research papers, and job opportunities in IT are in English". As Sahan and Şahan (2024) caution, perceived professional advantage should not be equated automatically with guaranteed labour-market outcomes. Nevertheless, the pattern is important because it reveals how students imagine the future advantage of studying in an EMI context.

Only one response points to English as a constraint in Question 3. P051 argues that English has become a constraint through the "monopolization of written papers", since many publications are unavailable in other languages. This comment presents a different view of English. The large amount of research available in English makes the language useful, but it can also make English feel necessary rather than optional. In this way, the response draws attention to a pressure that most students do not explicitly mention.

4.5 Transition as Access and Expansion

Corpus-assisted analysis also identifies a recurring spatial pattern in the affordance discourse. Twelve of the 80 Question 3 responses use overt spatial or access expressions including "doors," "gate," "circle," "place," "broader," "larger," "bigger" and "beyond". For instance, P026 states that English has "opened doors" to international communication and collaboration and has expanded belonging "beyond my local environment". P052 writes that English "opened doors to international opportunities". P063 describes English as opening "the gate to more than just 'Romania'". P073 says it has "opened many doors" academically and professionally. P103 combines "opened doors", previously inaccessible opportunities and participation in a "global conversation". Other responses refer to a "larger community" (P086), an "international circle of academia" (P102), a "bigger world" (P105) and having "a place in the foreign academic or professional world" (P015).

These expressions are important because they present the transition in spatial terms. English is described as opening access, widening students' horizons and bringing new academic and professional opportunities within reach. In this way, access to resources, communities, careers and communication becomes part of a broader movement into the international academic and professional world.

The contrast between Questions 2 and 3 can therefore be described as immediate difficulty versus wider possibility. In the challenge answers, frequent

words concern the practical work of participation: "terms," "ideas," "native," "complex," "technical," "expressing". In the belonging answers, the vocabulary looks outward: "academic," "professional," "international," "opportunities," "connected," "resources". The first set concerns how students communicate and show knowledge. The second concerns where successful participation may lead and what wider academic or professional spaces students imagine through English.

This explains why students can say that EMI is easy and still mention particular problems, or say that English feels ordinary while connecting it with major opportunities. The students' answers describe different aspects of the same experience. In the classroom, they mention difficulties with vocabulary, accents, fluency and translation. At the same time, they see English as giving them access to international knowledge, wider academic communities and future professional opportunities. These two perspectives do not contradict each other. They show both the difficulties and the opportunities that come with gradually using English more fully in academic and professional life.

5. Discussion of Results

The findings suggest that EMI in this Computer Science programme is best understood as a change in what English is used for, rather than simply as a change from one language to another. Most participants have studied English for many years, and many encountered it extensively through social and/or digital media and computing before university. Formal EMI therefore begins where English is already familiar and closely connected with the discipline.

This helps explain the many "no challenge" responses. These answers do not mean that language no longer matters. Rather, English has become familiar enough that many students no longer see it as unusual. Difficulties appear mainly in specific areas such as technical vocabulary, complex expression, speaking, accent, translation and assessment.

The difference between understanding and producing language is especially clear. Several students describe knowing the content but not always finding the words or academic tone needed to show that knowledge as precisely as they would like. This agrees with wider evidence that productive language outcomes in EMI are less consistently positive than receptive outcomes (Rose et al., 2026), and with studies showing that language-related difficulties depend on task and discipline rather than on one general proficiency threshold (Altay et al., 2021). For teaching, the important question is therefore not only whether students "know English", but whether they have practised the kinds of explaining, presenting and writing through which computer science knowledge is assessed and shared.

The affordance results show the other side of the transition. Students do not mainly describe English as a source of belonging because it connects them symbolically with an English-speaking culture. Their answers are practical: they speak about reading, researching, communicating, collaborating, applying for jobs, entering discussions and meeting people from different countries. This emphasis on action fits ecological approaches to affordance, where opportunities matter when learners perceive and can act on them (Jiang & Zhang, 2019; Kim et al., 2022). It also recalls Patiño-Santos et al.'s (2024) account of students as active participants who position themselves within internationalised higher education. In this corpus, the strongest opportunities concern knowledge, communication and professional participation.

The repeated images of doors, gates, circles and larger worlds make this idea clearer. Students describe English as a way of entering wider academic and professional spaces. This does not mean that English guarantees success or international opportunities, but that students see it as helping to make these opportunities possible. The critical comment about the "monopolization" of academic writing is therefore important, because it shows that English can provide access while also becoming something students feel they must use.

The corpus-assisted method makes this pattern more visible than a thematic analysis alone would. Close reading can identify themes such as terminology, confidence or career opportunity. Frequency counts, recurrent phrases and concordances show that these themes are also expressed through repeated linguistic forms. "Complex ideas" repeatedly names difficulty; "opened doors" and similar spatial expressions repeatedly describe opportunity; "academic," "professional" and "international" dominate the language of belonging. The counts therefore support the interpretation, while the full responses remain necessary for understanding what the recurring words and phrases mean in context.

The main transition can therefore be described as a movement from English learner to disciplinary user. Most students have learned the language for years before university, but EMI gives it a more specialised function. English becomes the language of technical terms, explanations, research, assessment, collaboration and imagined professional futures. Difficulty appears when general proficiency does not fully cover these tasks, consistent with earlier work on proficiency in the programme (Reșceanu et al., 2023). Opportunity appears when English gives students access to knowledge, people and careers, complementing earlier findings on professional and international motivation (Reșceanu et al., 2025).

This also shows that transition does not have to be sudden to be important. For many students, English becomes part of computer science gradually through school, online activities, programming and university study. By the time they enter an EMI programme, using English may already feel normal. What changes is mainly its role:

English is no longer only a language they learn, but a language they use to understand their field and think about future academic and professional opportunities.

6. Pedagogical Implications

The findings also have practical implications for EMI in computer science. Students may have strong general English skills but still need help with technical vocabulary, complex explanations, presentations and different accents. Language support is therefore most useful when linked directly to disciplinary tasks. For example, lecturers can also help students connect English and Romanian terminology through short bilingual glossaries or occasional comparison of technical terms. This can support understanding without changing the language of instruction. As Stiegelbauer (2026) argues, effective English-medium instruction requires not only language proficiency but also pedagogical strategies that make specialised knowledge accessible to students.

Moreover, classroom participation should develop gradually, from small-group discussion to more formal presentations. When English is not being assessed directly, evaluation should focus mainly on disciplinary knowledge rather than minor language errors. As Chang (2021) suggests, EMI should support communication of content without turning subject lecturers into language teachers.

Finally, teaching can build on what students already value in English: access to current resources, international communication and professional opportunities. For instance, tasks based on authentic documentation, current research or collaborative problem solving can strengthen this connection.

7. Limitations and Directions for Further Research

We point out here to several limitations of our study. Firstly, the study concerns one English-taught Computer Science programme at one Romanian university, so the response patterns cannot simply be extended to other EMI settings. Computer Science is also unusually rich in English terminology and digital resources, which may partly explain why many participants describe English as already familiar in their studies.

Secondly, the corpus is small and consists of short questionnaire answers rather than interviews or classroom talk. Corpus methods are therefore used descriptively. A larger study could compare programmes, years of study or proficiency groups. It could also use a second independent coder and calculate inter-coder agreement, providing a clearer measure of how consistently the categories are applied.

Finally, the data capture students' views at one moment. The movement from English learner to disciplinary user is supported by how students describe previous

familiarity, present difficulty and future opportunity, but the study does not follow that movement across several years. Repeated data collection throughout the programme could show whether technical vocabulary, productive fluency and perceived professional access change with greater experience of studying computer science through English.

8. Conclusions

This study has examined student voices in English-medium Computer Science through a corpus-assisted analysis of the difficulties and opportunities students describe. The results do not support a simple view of EMI as either difficult or beneficial. Almost half of the respondents to the challenge question report no difficulty or only a minor one, suggesting that English is already familiar to many students. At the same time, the answers contain recurring problems involving technical terminology, complex expression, speaking, accent, movement between Romanian and English and communication with teachers and peers.

When students discuss academic and professional belonging, the language changes. English is connected with access to knowledge and documentation, membership in wider academic communities, communication across borders, greater confidence and professional opportunity. Many of these possibilities are expressed spatially: English opens "doors" and "gates", gives access to "larger" circles and makes a "bigger" world available. Such expressions present transition as a movement towards wider academic and professional spaces.

The value of the corpus-assisted approach lies in placing the counts beside the students' actual words. The coding shows how often different experiences appear, while recurring words and phrases show how students give them linguistic form. The contrast between "complex ideas" in answers about difficulty and "academic," "professional," "international" and "opportunities" in answers about belonging points to two scales of EMI: the everyday task of expressing knowledge and the wider academic and professional contexts in which that knowledge can be shared.

Taken together, the answers show a gradual educational transition. For many Computer Science students, English was already familiar from school, media, programming and online activities before university. EMI therefore does not always feel new. What changes is the role of English: it becomes the language students use for technical terms, explaining ideas, reading research, working with others and preparing for their careers. The shift is therefore not simply from Romanian to English, but from learning English to using it as a language of study and professional life.

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Practical Transition towards Applying COIL

Paula-Andreea ONOFREI

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University, Iași

Abstract. *Taking into account the extraordinary mobility we have nowadays and the fact that international students are part of our teaching experience, it is absolutely crucial to adapt to national specificity in order to build cultural bridges. In this respect, based on Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory and the Lewis model, by the present article, we intend to reflect on integrating the COIL experience in academic teaching, offering a practical model of COIL which can be seen as the basic structure of any COIL activity, to be applied in all fields of study.*

Keywords: COIL, international students, intercultural communication, adaptation to internationalization, linear-active culture, multi-active culture, reactive culture.

1. Introduction

To begin with, we have recently had the pleasure of attending the Training "COIL and Intercultural Learning", our guiding Professor was Ferdi Hofstede, Windesheim University of Applied Sciences, Zwolle, The Netherlands. The term "COIL" was a new concept for us, being the abbreviation of "Collaborative Online International Learning", connected to the following remark made by Professor Hofstede: "Students develop demonstrable international and intercultural competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude) within the offered (co)curricula. They do this in alliance with teachers, fellow students and the work field, and with as many nationalities and cultures as possible, by means of a (mandatory) stay abroad and/or with Internationalisation@home."

2. Practical Transition towards Applying COIL

Moreover, if we step back into the past, Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) has emerged as a disruptive and highly scalable pedagogical framework within global higher education, having a specific fundamental quality: it

involves ALL students, irrespective of their nationality. The official start of COIL was in 2006, when the State University of New York (SUNY) launched the COIL Centre managed by Jon Rubin. In 2017, he published an article in the Journal "Internationalization of Higher Education", the title being "Embedding Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) at Higher Education Institutions"[1]. COIL activities were originally designed to connect classrooms globally without physical travel. This learning model spread worldwide and was massively used especially during the COVID-19 pandemic period.

Furthermore, if we analyze the nowadays academic trends, students travel all over the world to study at the desired faculty. Never before have we experienced this beneficial travel mobility, which brings specific advantages that need to be capitalized by the university professors aware of the importance of COIL:

1. Irrespective of the country students come from, COIL offers the possibility of learning from each other ONLINE. This means no costs regarding travelling, which makes COIL activities attractive and user friendly.
2. We are facing difficult times (wars, recession, natural disasters etc.) which are marked by instability and financial challenges. The answer to all these is COIL, because it involves learning in a safe environment (in the comfort of your home, online, taking advantage of the power of internet and technological devices).
3. One COIL activity can take place between 5-8 weeks, from what we have read, this implies that during the entire academic year, we may design and put in practice several COIL sessions, having intercultural learning objectives that will surely enrich the involved students and professors.

To be more specific, we have sketched the phases of a specific COIL activity which can be applied to any field of study. It is extremely important to know what time zones you, as a professor, will bridge. Moreover, it is essential to find international academic partners who teach complementary disciplines. These are the 5 phases of every COIL project:

A. Select and Align with an Academic Partner

It is crucial to find a professor abroad that can become your academic partner, teaching a complementary discipline. To continue, you need to align and make sure that your course schedule, your academic calendars and time zones can overlap for 5-8 weeks, depending on the designed activities. Regarding teaching styles, it is of great importance to be on the same page, therefore it is advisable to set up some

[1] https://www.globalcasestudychallenge.com/blog/collaborative-online-international-learning/what-is-coil-and-why-have-not-i-heard-of-it-before/ Last viewed on September 15, 2026.

preliminary video calls with the chosen professor to make sure that you can work together, share expectations, build trust in order to work together.

B. Co-work: Design the Project

It is advisable to plan a timeline spanning 5-8 weeks during the semester, taking into account 3 specific intercultural or discipline goals for students from both universities to achieve. It is desirable to have between 4-6 members in each team, mixed from both institutions.

C. Work Together on the 4-Phase Curriculum, which should have the following flow:

c.1. Phase 1 (specific to Week 1) Icebreaking and team building, which supposes the usage of computers for informal video and texting in order for students to introduce themselves, share cultural insight and break down barriers in order to have collaborative international teams.

c.2. Phase 2 (for Week 2) Analyze a chosen topic. It is advisable to find a specific topic and to explore it from both regional perspectives, insisting on similarities and differences.

c.3. Phase 3 (Weeks 3-5): Actual collaborative project. In this phase, teams co-work in order to obtain a final deliverable, such as a report, a presentation, a survey etc.

c.4. Phase 4 (Weeks 6-7): Reflection and evaluation. Students and professors reflect on the results of their co-work and underline what they managed to acquire in terms of international collaboration, national specificity, intercultural differences.

D. Choose the tech stack

In order to efficiently collaborate online, because time zones are different, it is advisable to use Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Discord, Moodle, Canvas, WhatsApp, Padlet or neutral platforms like Google Classroom.

E. Assess and Reflect

The focus is on the collaborative work itself, on the intercultural reflection that is the most important part of this online learning process. Moreover, it would be both useful and measurable to introduce a survey in order to identify the degree of engagement of students, to see where they encountered cultural and technical problems and how they managed to overcome them.

As part of the reflection process, the two professors draw conclusions on the online teaching intercultural activities and adjust their COIL objectives for future international endeavors, debriefing with COIL specialists, if possible.

Based on the outstanding input received from Professor Ferdi Hofstede at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University during the two days of COIL training (17-18 September 2026), we have decided to practically reflect on the intercultural dimension of this type of project, taking into account Hofstede's Cultural Dimension theory and the Lewis model.

To begin with, we would like to pinpoint the following statement: "It is a misconception that students automatically acquire intercultural and international competencies simply by studying or doing an internship abroad, or by participating in an international classroom. … The reality, however, is more complex. These activities do not necessarily guarantee such outcomes."[2]

Only by shading light on intercultural similarities and differences, on stereotypes, on ethnicity, traditions, diversity, nature, belief, will our students be able to understand each other in a global learning environment, accepting diversity and dealing with ambiguity, uncertainty when they encounter a totally different culture. In this respect, we consider that Hofstede's Cultural Dimension needs special attention, being the basis of intercultural communication:

What are the guiding principles of Hofstede's Cultural Dimension? What is the Lewis Model? Our intention is to decipher the theory of Hofstede and its impact on the outcomes of intercultural learning.

First of all, the factors which need to be taken into account, from the Dutch social psychologist Geert Hofstede's point of view, are these: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, masculinity vs. feminity, long-term vs. long-term orientation, indulgence vs. restraint. They have remained unchanged from the 1980's, being complemented by the Nobel laureate Sir Arthur Lewis, whose model was launched in 1954, referring to either the Dual-sector Model of Economic Development in economics or the Dimensions of Behaviour Model in cross-cultural communication.

Secondly, why are these two names, Hofstede and Lewis, crucial for the process of understanding cultural differences among nations? The answer is this: depending on the type of personality and cultural stereotypes, people may be: multi-active, linear-active and reactive. In this respect, we will detail the three above-mentioned categories:

[2] De Wit, Hans, *Internationalization Misconceptions. International Higher Education*, 2011, nr. 64, pp. 6-7, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/313417442_Internationalization_Misconceptions



Fig. 1. Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory

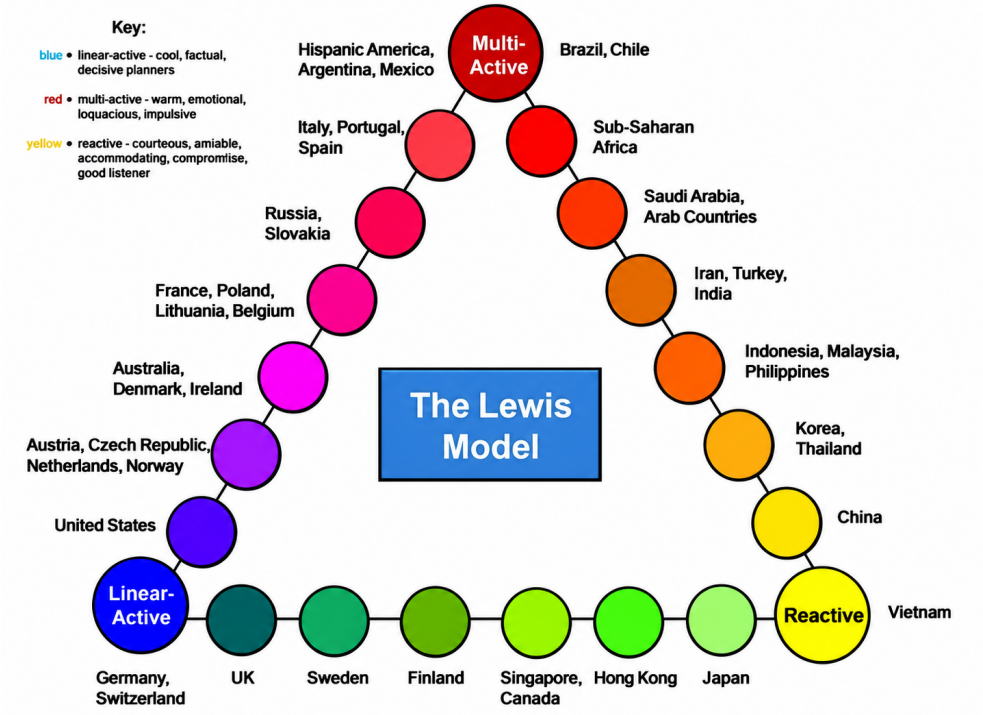

Fig. 2. The Lewis Model

- **Linear-active culture:** task-oriented, highly-organized planners, preferring to do one thing at a time in the sequence shown in their diary.
- **Multi-active culture:** extroverted, people-oriented, tending to do many things at once, often in an unplanned order.
- **Reactive culture:** introverted, reluctant to initiate firm actions or opinionated discussions, preferring to listen.

To continue, these three cultural models are very much connected to one's nation and personality, as we can see from the image below:

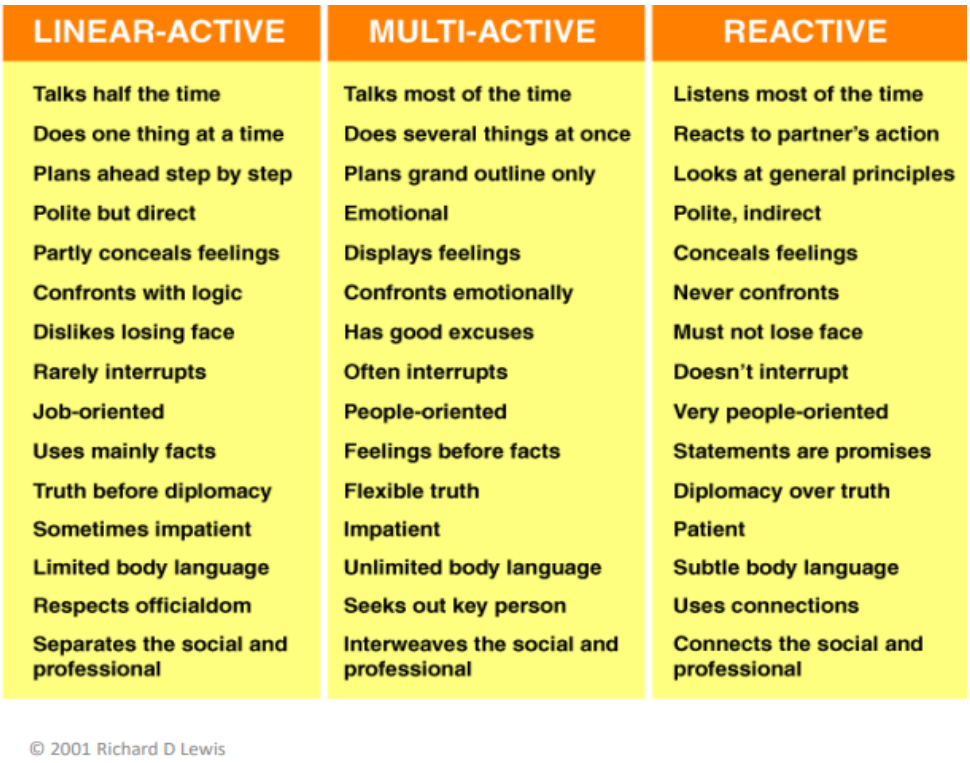

Fig. 3. Detailed Lewis model

3. Conclusion

In a nutshell, we believe that COIL activities can be extremely useful, especially while having classes with international students. Moreover, Collaborative Online International Learning represents a natural pedagogical shift towards digitally fluent higher education, transforming global diversity into an accessible learning environment for students belonging to various nations. By integrating COIL activities in the formal curricula, professors prepare culturally agile professionals.

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Teaching in Transition: Language, Authorship and Professional Identity in the Age of Generative Artificial Intelligence

Marta GANA

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania

Abstract. *Generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) is transforming educational practice not only by introducing new tools, but also by reshaping the linguistic, epistemic and professional conditions in which teaching occurs. Because GenAI operates through language and automated text production, it complicates established assumptions about authorship, expertise and educational voice. This conceptual article examines GenAI as a transition in professional identity, with particular attention to teacher agency, epistemic authority, authorship, ethical responsibility and relational presence. Drawing on seminal scholarship on teacher identity and agency, recent peer-reviewed studies on artificial intelligence in education, and international policy frameworks, the article uses a critical integrative review to analyse how teachers' professional roles are being renegotiated in AI-mediated contexts. The synthesis identifies six interconnected transitions: from knowledge transmission to epistemic curation; from instructional design to human-AI co-design; from product assessment to process verification; from generic digital competence to situated AI literacy; from individual expertise to distributed professional agency; and from implicit ethical responsibility to explicit governance of AI use. The article proposes a human-centred framework in which professional identity is sustained through pedagogical judgement, transparent authorship, relational care and accountable human oversight.*

Keywords: teacher professional identity; generative artificial intelligence; educational transition; authorship; educational discourse; teacher agency; AI literacy

1. Introduction

Periods of technological change are also periods of professional redefinition. In education, the arrival of generative artificial intelligence (GenAI) has accelerated this

process because the technology does not merely automate routine administrative tasks. Contemporary generative systems can produce explanations, lesson materials, assessment items, examples, feedback, summaries, simulations and extended written texts in response to natural-language prompts. As a result, functions traditionally associated with teachers' expertise are now partially reproducible by machines. This does not make the teacher redundant, but it does force a reconsideration of what constitutes distinctively professional work in teaching. The central issue is therefore not simply whether teachers should use GenAI, but how the profession can preserve educational purpose, professional agency and human responsibility while pedagogical activity becomes increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence.

Research on artificial intelligence in education has documented both considerable opportunities and persistent risks. Systematic reviews describe potential benefits in personalisation, feedback, teaching support, assessment and administrative efficiency, while also identifying concerns related to accuracy, bias, transparency, privacy, unequal access and the need for meaningful human oversight (Celik et al., 2022; Chiu et al., 2023). The emergence of large language models has intensified these questions because they interact through fluent language and can appear knowledgeable even when their outputs are incomplete, misleading or fabricated. Kasneci et al. (2023) therefore argue that educational use requires new competencies, critical verification and pedagogical strategies rather than unreflective adoption. Tlili et al. (2023) similarly show that enthusiasm surrounding conversational AI coexists with ethical and practical concerns such as misinformation, manipulation, privacy and academic dishonesty.

Because teaching is enacted largely through language-explanation, questioning, feedback, narrative, assessment instructions and the interpretation of texts-GenAI also transforms the discursive conditions of professional practice. The technology can generate, reformulate and imitate educational discourse, thereby complicating the boundaries between human and machine contribution. In this context, authorship becomes a pedagogical and cultural question rather than merely a technical one. Teachers and students must decide how generated language should be attributed, revised, verified and incorporated into legitimate academic work. The transition therefore concerns not only tools and competencies but also voice, authority and ownership of educational texts (Kasneci et al., 2023; Miao & Holmes, 2023; Tlili et al., 2023).

These developments matter for professional identity. Teacher identity is not a fixed collection of personal traits; it is constructed and reconstructed through experience, social relations, institutional expectations and changing understandings of what counts as legitimate professional practice (Beijaard et al., 2004). Akkerman and Meijer (2011) further conceptualise teacher identity as dialogical: simultaneously continuous and changing, individual and social, unitary and multiple. From this

perspective, GenAI is significant because it introduces a new participant into the educational ecology. The familiar teacher-student relationship increasingly becomes a teacher-AI-student configuration, a shift explicitly recognised in UNESCO's AI competency framework for teachers (Miao & Cukurova, 2024). This altered configuration creates new identity positions, new responsibilities and new tensions concerning authority, authorship and professional judgement.

The present article treats GenAI as an educational transition with linguistic, cultural and professional consequences. Its focus is not on predicting a technologically determined future, but on examining how teachers can negotiate continuity and change in their professional identities while language production, authorship and pedagogical activity become increasingly mediated by artificial intelligence. The guiding question is: How does generative artificial intelligence, as a language-producing technology, reconfigure teacher professional identity, authorship and educational authority, and what forms of agency and human judgement are required to sustain a human-centred educational transition? To address this question, the article brings together teacher identity theory, ecological perspectives on agency, emerging scholarship on AI literacy and recent empirical work on teachers' experiences of GenAI. The analysis culminates in a human-centred conceptual framework and practical implications for teacher education, professional development and institutional governance.

2. Professional Identity as a Site of Transition

Professional identity provides a useful lens for interpreting technological change because it links what teachers do with how they understand who they are as professionals. Beijaard et al. (2004) emphasise that teacher identity develops through ongoing interpretation and reinterpretation of professional experiences. It is shaped by context, involves both person and profession, contains multiple sub-identities and requires active agency. These features make identity especially relevant in periods of rapid transition. When institutional expectations, pedagogical tools or knowledge practices change, teachers must reconcile established professional commitments with new forms of practice. Resistance, uncertainty or enthusiasm are therefore not merely attitudes towards technology; they can be expressions of deeper identity negotiation.

Akkerman and Meijer's (2011) dialogical perspective helps explain why such negotiation may be simultaneously productive and unsettling. Teachers can inhabit multiple positions: subject expert, mentor, evaluator, curriculum designer, caregiver, researcher, institutional employee and learner. GenAI introduces additional positions, including AI user, prompt designer, verifier, data steward, ethical moderator and co-designer of learning. These positions do not simply replace older ones. Instead, they

enter into dialogue with them. A teacher may value the efficiency of AI-generated materials while feeling that excessive automation threatens professional craftsmanship. Another may welcome AI-supported feedback while questioning whether the resulting interaction weakens the relational dimension of teaching. Identity transition therefore involves managing tensions between efficiency and meaning, assistance and dependence, innovation and professional continuity.

Sachs (2001) demonstrates that teacher identity is also shaped by competing discourses of professionalism. Her distinction between managerial and democratic forms of professionalism remains relevant in AI-mediated education. A managerial discourse may frame GenAI primarily as a means to increase productivity, standardise processes, reduce workload or generate measurable efficiencies. A democratic or professionally agentic discourse, by contrast, emphasises teachers' participation in shaping how technologies are selected, governed and used for educational purposes. The difference is consequential. If AI integration is imposed as a technical solution, teachers risk being positioned as implementers of externally designed systems. If teachers participate critically in design and governance, AI can become a context for renewed professional agency.

Teacher agency is therefore inseparable from identity. Priestley et al. (2015) conceptualise agency ecologically, as an achievement emerging from the interaction between individual capacities and the cultural, structural and material conditions of practice. Teachers do not possess agency in isolation; they achieve it within particular environments. This insight is crucial for GenAI. A teacher may have strong pedagogical knowledge but limited agency if institutional policy is unclear, access to approved tools is unequal, data protection procedures are absent or professional learning is unavailable. Conversely, supportive leadership, collaborative norms, transparent policies and access to meaningful professional development can enable teachers to exercise informed judgement. The transition to AI-mediated education is therefore not a matter of individual adaptation alone. It is an institutional and cultural process that shapes what teachers can legitimately become.

3. Generative AI, Language and Authorship as an Educational and Cultural Transition

Artificial intelligence has been present in education for decades, but generative systems represent a distinctive phase because they operate directly within language, representation and knowledge production. Earlier educational technologies often functioned as databases, learning management systems, adaptive platforms or analytics tools. GenAI can participate in activities that appear discursive and creative: drafting explanations, generating examples, reformulating ideas, proposing questions,

simulating dialogue and producing apparently original text. For this reason, the transition is simultaneously technological and cultural. It affects how educational communities understand authorship, expertise, originality, effort and legitimate assistance.

Seen from a philological and discourse-oriented perspective, GenAI intervenes directly in the production, circulation and interpretation of texts. It can reproduce genres, simulate disciplinary registers, paraphrase, translate and compose extended discourse at scale. Yet linguistic fluency does not establish epistemic reliability, nor does it automatically clarify authorship. Educational texts produced with GenAI may therefore become hybrid artefacts in which human intention, machine generation, subsequent editing and institutional conventions intersect. This hybridity makes attribution and interpretive responsibility central educational concerns: what matters is not only who produced particular words, but who formulated the purpose, selected the evidence, evaluated the claims and accepts responsibility for the final text (Kasneci et al., 2023; Miao & Holmes, 2023).

UNESCO's guidance on generative AI advocates a human-centred approach that prioritises human agency, data protection, ethical validation and pedagogical appropriateness (Miao & Holmes, 2023). The subsequent AI competency framework for teachers develops this orientation through five dimensions: a human-centred mindset, ethics of AI, AI foundations and applications, AI pedagogy, and AI for professional learning (Miao & Cukurova, 2024). Significantly, the framework treats AI competence not as technical skill alone but as a combination of knowledge, values, judgement and professional development. This supports a broader interpretation of educational transition: teachers are not simply learning a new software category; they are learning to inhabit a changed relationship among human expertise, automated generation and educational responsibility.

AI literacy scholarship reinforces this point. Ng et al. (2021) describe AI literacy through dimensions that include understanding, use, evaluation, creation and ethical awareness. In teacher education, however, the concept remains underdeveloped. Sperling et al. (2024), in a scoping review, argue that the literature has often privileged technical and exploratory perspectives while insufficiently capturing teachers' situated professional knowledge and ethical judgement. Their use of the Aristotelian distinction among episteme, techne and phronesis is particularly valuable: teachers require theoretical understanding of AI, practical skill in using it and professional wisdom to decide when, why and under what conditions it should be used. The last dimension is indispensable because pedagogically appropriate AI use cannot be reduced to procedural competence.

Recent empirical studies suggest that teachers are already experiencing identity change. Almazán-López et al. (2025) found that teachers' postdigital identities are being renegotiated in relation to GenAI and smart technologies, while Guan et al.

(2025) show that pre-service teachers' preparedness for AI-integrated education involves not only attitudes and capabilities but also anticipated changes in the identity of being a teacher. Gamlem et al. (2026) similarly report that pre-service teachers vary in familiarity, knowledge and perceptions of GenAI's usefulness, highlighting the importance of teacher education in developing informed and balanced professional orientations. These findings indicate that identity formation now occurs in an environment where future teachers encounter AI both as students and as prospective professionals.

The process also affects in-service teachers. Zhai (2025) proposes a progression from observer to adopter, collaborator and innovator, linking increasing GenAI engagement to changing teacher roles and agency. More recent evidence from higher education describes an affective and professional movement from an initial crisis of authority towards a reconstructed identity as AI collaborator, mediated by peer communities and policy conditions (Li & Zhang, 2026). Such findings are important because they challenge simplistic narratives of either replacement or effortless enhancement. Teachers may experience uncertainty when AI can generate products once associated with their expertise, yet authority can be reconstructed around interpretation, contextualisation, ethical judgement and the orchestration of learning.

4. Methodological Approach: a Critical Integrative Review

This article adopts a critical integrative review rather than a systematic review or meta-analysis. The purpose is conceptual synthesis: to connect established scholarship on teacher professional identity and agency with rapidly developing research on GenAI, AI literacy and teacher education. A purposive body of literature was assembled around four conceptual clusters: (a) teacher professional identity and identity negotiation; (b) ecological teacher agency and professionalism; (c) artificial intelligence and generative AI in education; and (d) AI literacy, teacher preparation and professional development. Seminal theoretical works were included to provide conceptual continuity, while recent peer-reviewed studies and major international policy documents were selected for their direct relevance to the changing roles, competencies and responsibilities of teachers.

The analytical procedure was abductive and iterative. First, recurring professional functions associated with teacher identity were identified in the identity and agency literature, including knowledge authority, pedagogical design, assessment, ethical responsibility, relational work and professional learning. Second, recent AI-in-education literature was examined for ways in which GenAI redistributes, amplifies or complicates these functions. Third, the two bodies of literature were brought into dialogue to identify patterns of transition rather than isolated affordances

or risks. The resulting synthesis is organised around six interrelated shifts. Because the review is conceptual and purposive, it does not claim exhaustive coverage of all publications on AI and teacher identity. Its contribution lies instead in constructing a theoretically grounded interpretation of professional transition and in proposing a coherent framework for teacher education and institutional practice.

5. Six Transitions in Teacher Professional Identity

The literature suggests that GenAI does not generate a single new teacher identity. Rather, it intensifies existing tensions and redistributes professional functions across human and technological actors. Six transitions are especially visible. They should not be understood as linear stages through which every teacher must progress. Instead, they are analytical dimensions that may coexist differently across subjects, age groups, institutions and national contexts.

5.1 From Knowledge Transmission to Epistemic Curation

One of the most visible identity challenges concerns epistemic authority. Teachers have never been merely transmitters of information, yet access to reliable disciplinary knowledge has historically supported their authority. GenAI changes the informational environment by producing rapid, fluent responses to questions that students might previously have directed primarily to teachers or textbooks. This can create the impression that knowledge is instantly available and that expert mediation is less necessary. However, the very characteristics that make GenAI useful also make epistemic judgement more important. Generative outputs may be plausible without being accurate, may omit context, reproduce bias or fabricate references. The professional task therefore shifts from controlling access to information towards curating, contextualising, challenging and validating it.

In this transition, teacher authority becomes less dependent on being the fastest source of an answer and more dependent on being able to evaluate the quality and educational significance of answers. Kasneci et al. (2023) emphasise the need for fact-checking, critical thinking and continuous human oversight in educational uses of large language models. UNESCO's human-centred frameworks similarly preserve human accountability as a foundational principle (Miao & Cukurova, 2024). Epistemic curation therefore includes selecting trustworthy sources, distinguishing evidence from confident language, identifying disciplinary nuance and modelling how claims should be verified. Far from reducing the need for expertise, GenAI can make expert judgement more visible because students must learn not only to obtain information but to interrogate how knowledge claims are produced and warranted.

5.2 From Instructional Design to Human-AI Co-Design

A second transition concerns pedagogical design. GenAI can rapidly produce lesson outlines, differentiated tasks, examples, questions, rubrics and alternative explanations. These affordances may reduce preparation time and support creative exploration, but they also risk encouraging generic or decontextualised teaching if generated materials are adopted without professional adaptation. Chiu et al. (2023) and Celik et al. (2022) show that AI can support teaching in multiple ways, yet the educational value of such support depends on how teachers integrate technological outputs into broader pedagogical goals.

The teacher's role therefore evolves from sole producer of instructional materials to designer and curator of human-AI workflows. Co-design does not mean sharing professional responsibility equally with a machine. It means using AI as a provisional generative resource within a process that remains governed by educational purpose. Teachers decide what problem is worth solving, what learner needs are relevant, what constraints should be respected, how outputs should be adapted and whether the final activity supports meaningful learning. Zhai's (2025) distinction between adoption, collaboration and innovation is useful here because it highlights qualitative differences in use. Copying an AI-generated worksheet is not equivalent to deliberately using GenAI to explore multiple representations, then selecting and revising those representations in response to a particular group of learners.

This transition also repositions creativity and authorship. If AI can generate many possible lesson ideas or textual formulations within seconds, professional creativity is less about producing novelty from nothing and more about purposeful selection, recombination, contextual judgement and accountable revision. Authorship consequently becomes layered: generated language may contribute to a pedagogical artefact, but the teacher remains responsible for its purpose, accuracy, appropriateness and final form. Teacher educators should therefore resist treating prompt-writing as the central skill of AI pedagogy. Effective co-design requires curriculum knowledge, knowledge of learners, assessment literacy and the capacity to recognise when an apparently attractive AI suggestion conflicts with developmental appropriateness, inclusion, disciplinary accuracy or the intended learning outcome.

5.3 From Product Assessment to Process Verification

Assessment is among the areas most directly disrupted by GenAI because traditional take-home products can no longer be assumed to represent unaided student performance. When a system can generate an essay, solve routine tasks or provide extensive feedback, the meaning of authorship becomes less transparent. This creates a professional identity challenge for teachers as evaluators. A policing model

focused exclusively on detecting AI use is unlikely to be sustainable, particularly because detection tools are imperfect and because legitimate AI use may increasingly be incorporated into learning activities. The more productive transition is from evaluating only final products towards designing assessment systems that make learning processes visible.

Process verification can include staged drafts, oral explanation, reflective commentary, source trails, in-class components, documented revision and explicit declarations of how AI was used. Such practices do more than protect academic integrity. They also return assessment to its educational purpose by making reasoning, decision-making and development observable. The teacher's authority is reconstituted around setting standards, interpreting evidence of learning and determining whether technological assistance has supported or substituted for the intended cognitive work. In this sense, GenAI can prompt a deeper reassessment of what should count as evidence of competence.

This transition also requires a cultural shift from hidden use to transparent use. Students need clear boundaries that distinguish prohibited substitution, permitted assistance and pedagogically required AI engagement. Teachers, in turn, require institutional support so that such boundaries are consistent and defensible. UNESCO's guidance stresses the importance of transparent, ethical and age-appropriate use (Miao & Holmes, 2023). Without shared expectations, individual teachers may be left to improvise rules, producing uncertainty for both staff and students. Assessment integrity in the GenAI era is therefore not only a technical problem but a matter of professional governance.

5.4 From Digital Competence to Situated AI Literacy and Phronesis

A fourth transition concerns the meaning of competence. Digital competence has often been framed around the effective use of digital tools for communication, content creation, collaboration and teaching. GenAI requires an additional layer because the technology participates in knowledge generation and can influence judgement. AI literacy therefore includes understanding what systems can and cannot do, how outputs are produced probabilistically, how bias and data issues arise, and how to evaluate the consequences of use. Ng et al. (2021) provide a useful foundation through dimensions of understanding, application, evaluation, creation and ethics.

For teachers, however, AI literacy must be situated within professional practice. Sperling et al. (2024) warn that AI literacy in teacher education cannot be defined primarily from a computer-science perspective. Teachers need forms of knowledge that are pedagogical, contextual and ethical. This is where phronesis, or practical wisdom, becomes central. A teacher may know how to generate differentiated reading tasks with AI and still decide not to use the tool because student data would be

exposed, because the task requires direct observation, because the generated language is developmentally inappropriate or because the learning objective requires students to struggle productively without automated support. Competence includes the capacity not to use AI when non-use is educationally preferable.

Empirical research supports the importance of such balanced literacy. Du et al. (2024) found that teachers' AI literacy is related to self-efficacy, ethical awareness and intentions to learn about AI. Guan et al. (2025) likewise report that pre-service teachers need stronger understanding of AI foundations and ethics and may initially view AI mechanically as a tool rather than as a participant in changed educational relationships. Teacher education should therefore move beyond isolated workshops on applications. It should integrate technical understanding with case-based ethical reasoning, pedagogical experimentation, critical reflection and opportunities to examine how AI changes professional roles.

5.5 From Individual Expertise to Distributed Professional Agency

GenAI also challenges the idea that professional competence resides entirely within the individual teacher. Contemporary teaching already depends on distributed expertise across colleagues, curricula, digital infrastructures, specialists and institutional systems. AI adds another layer to this network. The crucial question is not whether agency becomes distributed, but how responsibility is maintained when activity is distributed. Ecological theories of teacher agency are particularly helpful because they locate professional action within cultural, structural and material conditions rather than within individual skill alone (Priestley et al., 2015).

In practice, teachers' ability to use GenAI responsibly depends on conditions such as access to approved tools, clarity of policy, time for professional learning, collegial support, leadership expectations and data protection arrangements. Li and Zhang (2026) show that identity negotiation in AI-enhanced higher education is mediated across micro, meso and macro levels, with peer communities and policy pressures influencing how teachers reconstruct professional roles. This indicates that professional development should not be treated as remediation for individual deficits. Institutions themselves must become capable of supporting responsible AI practice.

Distributed agency also changes collaboration among teachers. Shared prompt libraries, collaboratively evaluated outputs, discipline-specific guidelines and peer discussion of difficult cases can turn GenAI from a private tool into an object of professional inquiry. Such collaboration is important because many AI-related decisions are context-sensitive and cannot be resolved through universal rules. A language teacher, a primary teacher and a university lecturer may face very different questions about authorship, developmental appropriateness and acceptable

assistance. Professional communities provide spaces in which general ethical principles can be translated into situated norms.

5.6 From Implicit Ethical Responsibility to Explicit AI Governance

Ethical responsibility has always been part of teaching, but GenAI makes some dimensions of that responsibility more explicit. Teachers must consider privacy, data protection, bias, accessibility, copyright, authorship, transparency, reliability and the potential effects of automation on learner autonomy. These issues are not peripheral to pedagogy because they affect who benefits, who is exposed to risk and what forms of learning are encouraged. UNESCO's frameworks place human agency and ethics at the centre of AI competence rather than treating them as optional additions (Miao & Cukurova, 2024; Miao & Holmes, 2023).

The identity implication is significant: teachers increasingly function as local governors of AI use. They interpret policy, establish classroom norms, explain acceptable assistance, model transparent practices and decide when human judgement must override automated recommendations. This role can be understood as ethical guardianship, but it should not imply paternalistic control. The aim is to create conditions in which learners can use AI critically and progressively assume responsibility for their own decisions. Ethical governance therefore combines boundaries with education.

Institutional responsibility remains essential. Teachers should not be expected to resolve legal, technical and ethical questions alone. Clear organisational policies are required on approved systems, data handling, assessment, disclosure and accountability. At the same time, excessively rigid policies can undermine teacher agency by converting complex pedagogical decisions into compliance. A human-centred approach requires a productive balance: institutions establish safeguards and shared principles, while teachers retain professional discretion to interpret those principles within specific educational contexts.

6. A Human-Centred Framework for Teacher Identity in AI-Mediated Education

The six transitions can be synthesised into a human-centred framework organised around four core dimensions of professional identity: epistemic authority, pedagogical agency, ethical guardianship and relational presence. These dimensions are supported by situated AI literacy and by institutional conditions that enable responsible agency. The framework does not define an ideal technologically enthusiastic teacher. Rather, it defines the professional capacities required to make justified decisions across a continuum ranging from purposeful non-use to sophisticated AI-supported pedagogy.

Epistemic authority refers to the teacher's responsibility for evaluating and contextualising knowledge claims. In an environment saturated with generated content, authority is exercised through verification, disciplinary interpretation and the modelling of intellectual standards. Pedagogical agency refers to the capacity to design learning in ways that use or refuse AI according to educational purpose. Ethical guardianship refers to the explicit responsibility to govern privacy, transparency, authorship, fairness and accountability. Relational presence refers to the human dimension of teaching that cannot be reduced to information exchange: recognition of learners, responsiveness to emotion, trust, encouragement, conflict mediation and the creation of belonging.

Relational presence deserves particular emphasis because debates about AI can become overly cognitive and instrumental. Teaching is not simply the transfer of correct information or the optimisation of task completion. It is a relational practice in which learners are recognised as persons developing identities, values and capacities. AI can support some communicative functions, but it does not assume moral responsibility for a learner, participate in institutional accountability as a person or share the lived social history of a classroom. The teacher's human presence therefore becomes more, not less, significant when technological mediation increases. A human-centred transition should use AI to protect time and attention for meaningful human interaction rather than to minimise it.

Table 1. Professional identity transitions in AI-mediated education

Dimension	Established emphasis	GenAI-related transition	Human-centred professional response
Epistemic authority	Teacher as primary source and interpreter of disciplinary knowledge	AI generates fluent explanations, examples and claims at scale	Teacher curates, verifies, contextualises and models standards of evidence
Pedagogical agency	Teacher designs materials and learning sequences largely through human production	AI can generate, adapt and recombine instructional resources	Teacher governs human-AI co-design according to curriculum, learners and purpose
Assessment	Final products often treated as evidence of individual performance	AI can produce or extensively transform assessed products	Teacher designs process-visible assessment, verification and transparent AI-use rules
Ethical responsibility	Ethical decisions often embedded implicitly in professional practice	AI introduces explicit risks around privacy, bias, authorship and accountability	Teacher becomes an ethical moderator within institutionally supported governance

Dimension	Established emphasis	GenAI-related transition	Human-centred professional response
Relational presence	Teacher-student interaction is the primary interpersonal architecture	AI adds a non-human conversational and feedback actor	Teacher protects trust, belonging, care and human accountability in mediated learning
Professional learning and agency	Competence centred on subject, pedagogy and general digital skills	AI changes rapidly and redistributes expertise across tools and institutions	Teacher develops situated AI literacy through collaborative, continuous professional inquiry

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on the literature reviewed in this article.

7. Implications for Teacher Education

If GenAI is reshaping professional identity, teacher education cannot respond by adding a single technical module while leaving the rest of the programme unchanged. Future teachers need repeated opportunities to examine AI across curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, ethics and professional identity. This is especially important because pre-service teachers experience GenAI simultaneously as university students and as future educators. Their habits of use, beliefs about authorship and assumptions about AI's authority can become part of their emerging professional identities. Research with pre-service teachers already shows uneven knowledge and varying confidence, together with a need for explicit preparation for AI-integrated education (Gamlem et al., 2026; Guan et al., 2025).

First, teacher education should integrate foundational AI literacy. Students do not need to become machine-learning engineers, but they do need conceptual understanding sufficient to avoid anthropomorphising systems or treating fluent output as equivalent to verified knowledge. They should understand probabilistic generation, limitations of training data, hallucination, bias, privacy risks and the importance of verification. Technical understanding should be connected directly to educational scenarios rather than taught as abstract information.

Second, programmes should develop pedagogical judgement through design tasks. Pre-service teachers can compare human-designed and AI-assisted lesson plans, critique generated materials for developmental appropriateness, revise biased examples, test alternative prompts and justify when AI use improves or weakens a learning activity. The purpose is not to reward greater use of AI but to make professional reasoning visible. Assessment of such activities should focus on justification, adaptation and pedagogical coherence rather than on the sophistication of generated outputs.

Third, assessment literacy must be redesigned for AI-rich environments. Future teachers should learn to create tasks that remain educationally meaningful when students have access to GenAI. This includes deciding when AI use should be prohibited, permitted, disclosed or required; designing process evidence; using oral or interactive verification; and distinguishing assistance from substitution. Such preparation can reduce reliance on surveillance-oriented responses and support a culture of transparent academic practice.

Fourth, ethical case analysis should become a recurring component of professional preparation. Cases might involve a teacher uploading student work to an external AI service, a generated text that reproduces stereotypes, unequal access to paid AI tools, a student using AI as an accessibility support, or an AI-generated citation that cannot be verified. Students should be asked to identify stakeholders, competing values, relevant policy and possible courses of action. This develops phronesis by linking ethical principles to situated judgement.

Fifth, identity reflection should be made explicit. Teacher educators can ask students to articulate what they believe should remain distinctly human in teaching and how their answers change as they gain experience with AI. Reflective portfolios, professional narratives and structured discussion can help pre-service teachers recognise tensions rather than suppress them. Because identity is dialogical and evolving (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011), uncertainty can be treated as a legitimate part of professional learning. The aim is not to produce a uniform identity but to support coherent, ethically defensible professional positions.

Finally, teacher educators themselves require support. The credibility of AI-related teacher education depends on staff having time, access and institutional permission to experiment critically. Professional development should be collaborative and discipline-sensitive. Teacher educators need spaces to compare practices, develop shared language and evaluate emerging tools without pressure to adopt every innovation. In this respect, the transition of teacher education institutions mirrors the transition expected of schools: professional agency depends on supportive structures, not on individual enthusiasm alone.

8. Implications for Schools, Universities and Educational Policy

Institutional policy determines whether AI integration becomes a source of professional empowerment or professional insecurity. Policies based exclusively on prohibition are difficult to sustain as generative capabilities become embedded in common software, while policies based on unrestricted experimentation neglect

legitimate concerns about privacy, integrity and accountability. A more durable approach establishes clear principles and protected boundaries while allowing pedagogical discretion. UNESCO's human-centred guidance provides a useful orientation because it connects innovation to human rights, accountability, age appropriateness and data protection (Miao & Holmes, 2023).

Institutions should begin by defining approved and non-approved uses rather than assuming that all AI systems are interchangeable. Data governance is particularly important when tools process student work, personal information or institutional materials. Teachers need to know what can be uploaded, what requires consent, and which platforms meet organisational requirements. Where institutions fail to provide guidance, responsible teachers may avoid potentially useful tools while less cautious users proceed without safeguards, producing an inequitable and inconsistent environment.

Assessment policy should also move from reactive detection to transparent design. Shared principles for disclosure, citation of AI assistance, process evidence and the protection of authentic student learning can reduce uncertainty. Departments and subject teams should be encouraged to interpret these principles locally because legitimate AI use varies by discipline and level. A creative writing assignment, a mathematics proof, a lesson plan and a clinical reflection do not raise identical questions. Institutional consistency should therefore concern values and minimum safeguards, not identical rules for every task.

Professional development should be sustained rather than episodic. The rapid pace of GenAI development means that a one-off workshop can become obsolete quickly. More importantly, teachers require opportunities to analyse practice, not just demonstrations of new functions. Professional learning communities can examine anonymised cases, compare generated outputs, develop assessment strategies and review emerging research. Such collaborative inquiry supports both agency and identity because teachers participate in defining professional norms rather than receiving them only from external authorities.

Equity must remain central. Access to advanced tools, reliable infrastructure and professional learning is uneven. If AI-supported productivity becomes an implicit expectation without equal access, existing inequalities among institutions and teachers may widen. The same applies to students. Paid models, language coverage and accessibility features can produce differentiated opportunities. Human-centred policy should therefore evaluate not only whether an AI tool is effective but also who can access it, whose language and knowledge are well represented, and who bears the risks associated with its use.

9. Discussion: Continuity within Transformation

The analysis suggests that GenAI should not be understood as a simple substitution technology. Its deeper significance lies in how it redistributes tasks and challenges the symbolic foundations of professional expertise. When systems can generate explanations, materials and feedback, teachers may initially experience a threat to authority. Yet the literature on professional identity reminds us that authority has never rested solely on information possession. Teaching involves judgement, interpretation, ethical responsibility, relational commitment and the orchestration of learning in context. These elements become more visible when routine production can be partially automated.

Professional identity is also partly constituted through discourse: through the language teachers use to explain expertise, justify decisions, address learners and assume responsibility. GenAI unsettles these discursive markers because a system can imitate the linguistic surface of expertise without occupying the social, institutional or ethical position of a professional. The resulting problem is not simply whether AI-generated language sounds teacher-like, but whether authority, authorship and accountability remain traceable. This distinction strengthens the case for transparency: generated language may assist professional communication, yet the teacher remains responsible for the educational meaning and consequences of the final text (Akkerman & Meijer, 2011; Beijaard et al., 2004).

This interpretation aligns with recent empirical work showing that teachers can move from uncertainty towards reconstructed forms of collaboration and agency rather than merely surrendering authority (Li & Zhang, 2026; Zhai, 2025). It also helps explain why AI competence cannot be separated from professional identity. A teacher who knows how to use GenAI but lacks criteria for judging educational value is technically enabled but professionally underprepared. Conversely, a teacher with strong pedagogical judgement but no understanding of AI's affordances and risks may struggle to guide students in environments where the technology is already present. Professional competence requires integration of technical literacy and pedagogical wisdom.

The concept of transition is useful because it avoids both technological determinism and nostalgic resistance. A transition contains discontinuity, but it also involves continuity. Teachers do not need to abandon established professional values in order to engage with AI. Indeed, values such as intellectual honesty, inclusion, care, professional autonomy and responsibility can provide the criteria by which AI use is evaluated. The key question shifts from "Is AI modern or traditional?" to "Does this use of AI serve defensible educational purposes under conditions of transparency and human accountability?" This reframing places professional judgement at the centre.

There are nevertheless risks of deprofessionalisation. If institutions use AI primarily to standardise teaching, increase output expectations or replace deliberative professional work with automated templates, teacher agency may be weakened. Sachs's (2001) analysis of competing professional discourses remains relevant here. The same technology can support either managerial intensification or democratic professional learning depending on how it is governed. Efficiency is not educationally neutral. Time saved through automation can be reinvested in relational work, feedback and curriculum development, or it can simply lead to increased workload expectations. Institutional choices determine which trajectory becomes more likely.

There is also a risk of epistemic dependency. Frequent use of GenAI for planning, wording or problem solving may gradually reduce opportunities for teachers and students to practise independent reasoning. The solution is not abstinence but intentional design. Human-AI collaboration should preserve moments in which learners and teachers generate, struggle, interpret and decide without automated assistance. Productive use therefore requires boundaries. In professional terms, knowing when to disengage from AI is as important as knowing how to use it.

The proposed human-centred framework emphasises four dimensions — epistemic authority, pedagogical agency, ethical guardianship and relational presence — because together they clarify what remains professionally distinctive in an AI-mediated environment. None of these dimensions implies human infallibility. Teachers can make mistakes, reproduce bias or exercise poor judgement. The point is that they are accountable participants in educational relationships and institutions. Human-centred education therefore does not mean idealising human action; it means ensuring that responsibility remains assignable, contestable and open to ethical deliberation rather than being displaced onto opaque technological systems.

10. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

As a conceptual integrative review, this article has several limitations. It does not provide a systematic mapping of all empirical studies on teacher identity and GenAI, and the field is developing so rapidly that new evidence may alter particular conclusions. Much of the existing empirical literature is concentrated in higher education, language education or technologically advanced contexts, which limits generalisation to early childhood, primary education, vocational education and under-resourced settings. The present synthesis should therefore be treated as a framework for further inquiry rather than as a definitive model.

Future research should investigate professional identity longitudinally. Short-term attitude surveys can identify acceptance or concern, but identity change unfolds through experience, institutional interaction and repeated negotiation. Longitudinal

studies could examine how teachers move from initial experimentation to stable practices, how professional confidence changes, and whether AI use strengthens or weakens perceived agency over time. Research should also compare contexts in which institutional policy is supportive, restrictive or ambiguous.

More attention is needed to relational and emotional dimensions. Emerging evidence indicates that AI can trigger uncertainty about authority and professional value, yet these experiences are often treated as secondary to competence. Studies should examine how emotions, trust, recognition from students and collegial communities shape identity reconstruction. Research on early-career teachers and teacher educators would be especially valuable because both groups occupy transitional professional positions.

Finally, research should examine non-use as a legitimate professional practice. Current innovation discourse can create an assumption that greater AI adoption represents greater competence. A human-centred perspective requires more nuanced criteria. In some contexts, deciding not to use GenAI may reflect high professional judgement rather than resistance. Future studies should therefore investigate the conditions under which purposeful non-use, limited use and intensive use each support educational quality.

11. Conclusion

Generative artificial intelligence is changing education not only because it can perform tasks, but because it changes the meaning of professional tasks. Teachers are increasingly required to work in environments where information, language and instructional materials can be generated instantly by non-human systems. This transition unsettles established assumptions about expertise, authorship, assessment and authority. At the same time, it creates an opportunity to articulate more clearly what professional teaching requires.

The synthesis presented in this article identifies six interconnected transitions: from knowledge transmission to epistemic curation; from instructional design to human-AI co-design; from product assessment to process verification; from general digital competence to situated AI literacy and practical wisdom; from individual expertise to distributed professional agency; and from implicit ethical responsibility to explicit AI governance. Across these transitions, teacher identity is not erased but reconstructed.

A sustainable educational response should therefore be human-centred rather than technology-centred. The teacher's professional contribution lies increasingly in the quality of judgement exercised around technology: what to trust, what to question, what to design, what to disclose, what to protect and when to refuse automation.

Epistemic authority, pedagogical agency, ethical guardianship and relational presence provide a basis for this reconstructed identity. Teacher education and institutional policy should support these dimensions through critical AI literacy, process-oriented assessment, ethical reasoning, collaborative professional learning and clear governance.

The central challenge of the AI transition is not to prove that teachers can compete with machines in producing text or information. It is to ensure that educational systems preserve the human capacity to assign purpose, interpret context, assume responsibility and sustain meaningful relationships. The broader cultural significance of this transition is visible in changing relations among language, authorship, identity and institutional authority: generated discourse can expand the resources available to education, but it cannot itself determine the legitimacy, meaning or ethical consequences of its use. In that sense, the future of teacher professionalism will depend less on resisting artificial intelligence than on defining, with greater precision, the forms of human judgement and accountable authorship that education cannot responsibly outsource.

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Emergent Digital Literacy: The Competence Young People Need to Navigate Emoji-Based Communication

Valentina MUREȘAN

West University of Timișoara

Abstract. *The present paper brings into discussion the difficulties of teachers in addressing the issue of competence formation in an age of a multitude of co-existing communication modes and operational frameworks, which, due to the present day educational needs, are not only constantly changing, but also become more field specific. However, the major educational trends attach increasing importance to interdisciplinarity, which points to the need of designing a new communicative competence framework, one that may include new dimensions, such as digital literacy and multi-modal literacy. In order to better understand the difficulties digital natives may have in decoding a new form of communication, the language of "emoji", a qualitative pilot study was conducted using a small convenience sample of participants. The present research underlies aspects linked to several competence frames - communicative, multi-modal and emoji competence in an effort to redefine the set of sub-competences needed to be an effective communicator in the 21st century.*

Keywords*:* communicative competence, digital literacy, emoji competence, multi-modal competence, new media literacy

1. The Context

At present the field of ELT (English Language Teaching) has to respond to calls to adapt teaching strategies to the requirements of learners today and, furthermore, of employers today. Thus, adopting a particular language teaching method is seen by Kumaravadivelu (2006, 169) as "inadequate to meet the challenges of the practice of everyday teaching", the concept of method having "lost much of its significance" (184) and proposes instead that in language teaching teachers rely on a tri-dimensional framework and a set of teaching principles, which he calls "the post-method condition" (184).

Moving from language teaching on to a larger scale, educationalists such as Sir. Ken Robinson (2016), Sugatra Mitra et al. (2016) have brought into discussion for some time now the issue of systems which are shaped for different times and different educational, economic or cultural needs, advocating for a change to better suit the learning needs of a new generation.

Furthermore, education strategies nowadays respond more and more to the demands of a job market which calls for new competence development — see the Nesta and Pearson 2017 study, Morgan et al. study of 2020, OECD 2019, or the EU 2018 Key Competence for Lifelong Learning, where effective communication and digital competence are common denominators. Therefore, ELT teachers must take all of these factors into consideration and propose language teaching strategies where the learner develops not only their linguistic competence with regards to a particular language but must be sufficiently equipped to communicate effectively in a foreign language, in the age of technology.

2. Communicative Competence

For language teachers it is essential to define the elements that build up the communicative competence so as to be able to address all sub-competences in teaching a particular language, often referred to as communicative methodology, where language use involves all the sub-competences necessary to sending and receiving messages. There were many attempts to define the concept of communicative competence and its components – D. Hymes, M. Canale and M. Swain, M. Celce-Murcia (in Celce-Murcia, 2007), the latter proposing the most complex model so far (see Mureșan 2017 for a comparative diagram).

Claiming that new pedagogy should equip learners to be linguistically and culturally competent in L2, Celce-Murcia (2007) re-defined the communicative competence as a six-sub-competence model, which includes: linguistic competence (knowledge about the linguistic systems — phonological, lexical, morphological, syntactic), formulaic competence (knowledge of the "pre-fabricated phrase" (47)), strategic competence (strategies which allow for meaning negotiation, resolution of ambiguities, other compensatory strategies for meaning making), socio-cultural competence (conveying messages "appropriately within the overall social and cultural context of communication" (46)), interactional competence ("hands-on competence" (48)) and discourse competence (knowledge concerning the organisation and sequencing of messages "to achieve a unified spoken message" (46)).

Although Murcia's interactional competence includes the sub-categories of actional competence, conversational competence and non-verbal, or para-linguistic competence (2007, 48-49), these do not address all the skills, attitudes and amount of knowledge involved in dealing with the new, multi-modal forms of communication, in a digital age, where people need to decode messages that often rely on the correct understanding of visuals rather than text or the combination of these two communication modes.

Royce (2007) revisits the 1996 discussion proposed by the New London Group on multiliteracies and the need for teachers to be concerned with the development of a multi-modal communicative competence, "so as to equip students with the necessary tools to fully participate in communal life" (New London Group in Royce 2007, 362) especially in the context of "the increase in attention to and provision of computer-assisted language learning and media-based teaching-learning materials and methodologies" (362). Royce claims that in the second language classroom the focus on communicative competence "has often led to the exclusion of other modes of meaning" and that little "attention [is] being paid to the interrelationship between language and other semiotic systems" (362). Thus, he argues in favour of a focus on multi-modal literacy, on developing skills such as "visual literacy" and "a pedagogical metalanguage to facilitate these abilities, when images co-occur with spoken and written modes" (366).

Royce discusses about the complexity of the language system starting from Halliday's (1978) claims about language as functional, semantic, semiotic and motivated by social and cultural contexts (Halliday in Royce, 2007, 367) only to construct a model of language realisation that covers four dimensions lexical/grammatical, phonetic, semantic (linguistic level) and cultural awareness (extra-linguistic level). This view of language realisation and expression is then expanded and replicated to define the visual semiotic and includes three visual levels (visual grammar, semantics and representational symbology or systems of display elements) and one extra-visual level — the context of culture (2007, 369). In an attempt to explain the complexity of the multi-modal competence, Royce describes the components of visual literacy or multi-modal literacy, inferring that the use of visuals may be considered a "language" system.

In accordance with this implication, Marcel Danesi (2017) not only compares the use of emoji (digital images/ pictograms, variant of emoticons — emotion icons) to other writing systems, but claims that the use of emoji can be considered a language in its own right, with a grammatical system, semantic and cultural variation and involving a certain level of pragmatic competence, with emoji being

used "as mood enhancers" (97). Danesi thus observes that the "emoji code is evolving into something different than its original intent to provide a simple picture-word system of universally comprehensible symbols for facilitating global communications […] leading more to its diversification in response to social pressures and trends that are reshaping it along the lines of natural languages" (34).

Danesi speaks about emoji usage as "a staple of digital communications" (33) backing this claim up with findings of previous researchers that recorded the heavy presence of emoji in messages — nearly half of all messages exchanged — with a particular function of adding "a largely emotional tone to text messages" or "connotative nuances to specific parts of their content" (33).

In his research Danesi (2017) reveals the details of this new communication mode, which relies in part on what has so far been referred to as communicative competence, with a particular focus on the linguistic competence necessary for written communication, but one where two modes of communication — text and image — convey the message together. In other words, this new communication form lies at the crossroads of digital competence (as it gained popularity with text messages written in electronic form, for which the users need to have a certain degree of digital literacy), communicative competence (it is a form/system of communication with a particular lexical/grammatical system and allows for cultural variation) and multi-modal competence (as the sending and decoding of messages relies on visual literacy).

Danesi (2017) defines this competence "emoji competence" as "knowledge of how to intersperse emoji images into a written text in order to imprint a positive emotional tone into it or to maintain phatic communion with interlocutors" (35). Thus, "emoji competence is more than concrete knowledge of how to select and combine emoji forms in specific ways, it also involves a form of what linguists call 'communicative competence' or knowledge of how to use the code effectively" (36) and adds the claim that linguistic and communicative competence are seen today by most linguists as "interactive rather than mutually exclusive" (36). Thus, emoji competence requires knowledge of the symbols or familiarity with "the emoji code" (36), which is further divided into a set of core emoji and a peripheral lexicon, linguistic competence (familiarity with grammatical structures, a good degree of knowledge of semantics and lexicology — to recognise meaning relations, connotations etc.), pragmatic competence (understanding discourse functions) and cultural awareness (appropriate use/understanding of culturally sensitive symbols, allowance for cultural variation).

In an attempt to define a more complex communicative competence model that addresses the particularities of multi-modal communication, including emoji use, the present paper discusses the findings of a pilot study conducted among a small group of Bachelor students in linguistics, who study both English and Romanian as part of their training.

3. The Pilot Study

3.1 Research Method

The purpose of the pilot study was to determine whether the chosen research model was appropriate for conducting a small scale qualitative research in a particular educational context and whether adjustments needed to be made to its content or form, in order to follow the correspondence between the sub-competences of emoji use and the questions asked, in the context of a research which focuses on the understanding of the particularities of communication as social practice, since the data under investigation here is the production of messages in real-life social contexts, or not "entirely abstracted from 'real-life' contexts" (Mason, 2002, 3).

The selected research instrument was the questionnaire consisting of 16 questions, of which 11 were open-ended questions that progressively moved from understanding the context (age, level of digital literacy) to determining competence in decoding the emoji lexicon (familiarity with the emoji code), decoding complex emoji structures (proverbs written in emoji code) both in English and in Romanian and, finally, to asking participants to reflect upon their proficiency in emoji. The questionnaire was administered online to a group of 70 students out of which 14 filled it in, a 20% response rate. However, 14 answers for a pilot study may be considered acceptable in qualitative research (Braun, V. and Clarke, V. 2013).

The 14 participants were second year students in a bachelor programme specialised in the study of applied modern languages. The group of students may be named a convenience sample as they are students whom I teach, but they also fall into the category of "digital natives" (Tapscott, 2009) from the point of view of their age and are also students in foreign languages, thus they already master linguistic competence to some extent in English as a foreign language and in Romanian language.

All participants assessed themselves as "digitally literate" in response to question three (Q3). Moreover, asked to assess their level of digital skills on a scale of 1 to 10 (Q4), with ten being the highest value, the majority, 11 out of 14, situated themselves in the higher score bands of 8, 9 and 10 and none below 6. Also concerning the use of technology in their personal life (Q6) all of them appear to use technology either for communicating

with others, or for getting information, shopping, playing videos/ music and for studying (Q5), most of them claim to use technology for research, online classes, project writing. Only two participants said they did not make any use of technology for studying. The purpose of these questions was to determine the user's profile and verify the assumption concerning the skill in the use of technology, since according to their age the participants belong to the "digital native" generation (Tapscott 2009), one that is prone to use such communication modes as texting.

3.2 Findings

In the assessment of the decoding of emoji symbols competence, the questions followed three steps. The first step was to determine the familiarity with emoji symbols (individual signs, taken out of context); the next questions aimed to determine whether there was any change in emoji decoding when more complex structures were used — English proverbs written as series of emoji symbols - some just replaced groups of letters in a phonological representation of the words, while others had a denotative function. In this second exercise I tried to establish competence in decoding complex emoji structures; however, the difficulty was intentionally a double-edged one, as some of the structures were not easily identifiable due to the students' competence in English language skills. Since the chosen emoji were given as separate lists, the pragmatic encoding of the emoji in use in actual written communication was not considered, so research participants were not asked to assess the speech function, or the added tone, or even whether they are used additively to a text or substitutively of a text (Danesi, 2017, 36).

Firstly, let us discuss the interpretation of ten emoji symbols below used in Q9. All participants claimed to use emoji in texting (Q7) and most of them, 13 out of 14 (Q8), estimate they have a good degree of familiarity with decoding emoji messages, placing themselves at 3, 4 or 5 out of 5 on the Likert scale. Although the selected emoji in the open ended question 9 were rather familiar ones, the difficulty here lay in the fact that some emoji are used synonymously, others may differ in connotative meaning and others may involve a certain amount of cultural knowledge in order to allow for appropriate decoding, such as emoji 9. As reference source for the decoding of emoji, the answers received were compared against Unicode (version 13.1) or Emojipedia online. Of the 14 answers, one student did not provide any explanation for the given emoji, while one provided a very general answer ("can understand when the person is laughing, crying, he appreciates smth. or he just expresses love" without any specific link to the emoji used).



Emoji 1, “face with tears of joy” (Unicode) and 8, “beaming face with smiling eyes” (Unicode) are synonymous and express different nuances of happiness and in a

certain relationship of antonymy with emoji 7, "loudly crying face" (Unicode). Most of the students reduced the decoding to the basic laugh, smile and cry without discussing intensity (loud cry), but quite a bit of variation was decoded here as well. One student decoded emoji 1 as "happy" and 8 as "peaceful", while 7 is seen as "unsatisfied".

Moreover, one student also gave for emoji 8 an additional explanation "I usually use this emoji when I'm nervous or when I speak with strangers and I want to seem nice" or "8. Smile emoji — we usually use it in a passive-agressive way and not for actually smiling, there is another emoji for that". There were other students who referred to emoji 8 as grinning, although both Unicode and Emojipedia refer to this as smiling, while the grinning emoji are the ones typically used for smiling (Grinning Face).

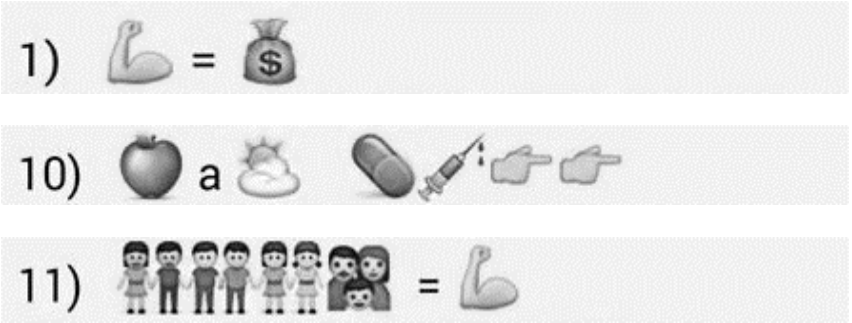
The great variation in students' responses further extended to kissing, that is emoji 2 and arguably 5 (kiss mark). Also, since emoji 2, 3 and 4 all involved hearts this has led to an extension of meaning in the interpretation of some emoji — "4 heart eyes, in love"; "2. Kiss 3. love 4. also love/I love it 5. Kiss"; 2. To Kiss 3. To Love 4. To be in love 5. Give a *passionate* kiss"; "2 — sending kisses, 3 — love, 4 — in love/loves something, 5 — kiss"; "2. kiss 3. heart 4. smiling heart with heart eyes/in love 5. lips kiss"; "2. Kiss emoji 3. Heart emoji (when you love something you might add it on) 4. Heart eyes emoji (When you are really *excited about something*) 5. Kiss emoji (*When you want to "simulate" a kiss for example after saying happy birthday*)" or "2. Kisses 3. Love 4. *Exciting* 5. Kiss". The observation to be made here is that in the decoding of the connotative meaning of emoji 5, linked to sensuality, only two of the participants made claims to illustrate this, namely the observation that it represents "*Lipstick stain*", or "give a passionate kiss", while the others associated it with love and kissing. Perhaps the most intriguing interpretation here is the applicability of the kiss mark for the birthday wish situation dismissing any connotative meaning of sensuality in favour of the literal meaning of a kiss.

The see-no-evil monkey, emoji 9 is a special case of decoding as a potential superimposition of a culture specific non-verbal meaning transfer. The Macmillan online dictionary explains the "hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil" phrase as "to pretend something is not happening or is not the case" and also makes reference to the emoji in question as intended to be used "in the same context that the phrase is used in". The participants interpreted emoji 9 as "I can't see," "see-monkey," "ashamed," "embarrassed," "to be embarrassed," "a monkey who covered its eyes," "hiding your face because of embarrassment/other feeling," "shy," "express shyness," "monkey emoji (When you pretend not to see something written)," "shy". As can be noticed only three of the participants associated the emoji with its intended meaning, although "see-monkey" and "monkey who covered its eyes" are ambiguous and may not in fact be used by the participants with the pretend not to have seen/pretend not to happen meaning in actual communication. However, the majority (6 of the 12 clear answers)

have operated a transfer of meaning between the culturally embedded non-verbal message of "sheepishly admit" and the gesture of hiding one's face with one's hands as a result of wrongful doing.

Finally, emoji 10, described by Unicode as "winking face with tongue" was decoded accordingly by many participants, some extending the meaning to "naughty," "jok[ing]," "playful" or "loolish".

Question 10 involved interpreting the picture with English proverbs and sayings written as sequences of emoji taken from an online quiz (Puzzle World quiz online). Since only 11 out of 14 answered this question, I chose to bring into discussion here only the sayings for which most answers were received. Additionally, since some of the students got all of the proverbs and sayings accurately and in the same wording as they occurred online, the possibility that they did some online research must be taken into consideration.



The ones that were understood by most were the first one "Health is wealth" according to the Puzzle World quiz, although according to Lefter V. (2007) the English saying is "Health is above Wealth". Yet some participants decoded it in a literal way, health is wealth (2 participants), while others interpreted the flexed biceps emoji as power and also operated a subject object inversion to adjust the visual code to the saying "money is power" (5 responses). In other words, not only that the reading of the emoji coded phrase reflected that there was a certain level of ambiguity of the symbol for health, but also that the readers make mental adjustments to match the visual representation to what is already familiar to them.

Concerning proverb number 10, there was overall agreement and almost no variable in its textual representation, 7 students associating it with "An apple a day keeps the doctor away", with only a minimal change of "a day" with "per day". Finally, saying number 11, in the quiz explained as "Unity is strength" was recognised as such by two participants, while the rest also mentioned other valid English sayings "Many hands make light work", "there is strength in numbers" and "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link". As these are all valid English sayings that can be associated with the emoji coded phrase, we can only comment here on the fact that as

before, the visual symbols were not interpreted literally but adapted to the decoder's experience and linguistic proficiency. One of the interpretations however "Family is power" does not fall into the category of familiar English phrases and can only be explained through analogy with "power is money" or the familiar "knowledge is power", the participant substituting one of the components with a more familiar interpretation of the emoji code.

In the discussion on Romanian language emoji phrases I suggested a quick quiz to decode 15 proverbs as launched by radio Zu (a contest proposed by Domnul Flick). The purpose of this exercise was to determine whether emoji code as it occurs in phrases is affected by the linguistic competence in a foreign language or not. This proved to be the case, as there were more participants who attempted to decode the proverbs and also many of the participants (8) wrote an answer covering all proverbs proposed.



The proverb which was accurately decoded by all participants was the first one "Banul este ochiul dracului" (above), the English equivalent being "Money is the root of all evil". Perhaps in this case the overlap of very clear and unambiguous emoji symbols and language knowledge made it more easily identifiable.





The other easily recognisable Romanian proverbs were "Țara arde și baba se piaptănă" [Eng. The country is burning and the old woman is combing her hair] with no apparent English language equivalent, but implying not to place importance to irrelevant and unnecessary things and "Găina bătrână face ciorba bună", with a possible equivalent in English "better old wine than new", both proverbs accurately decoded by 8 participants. The observation to be made here is that in spite of the use of the woman getting a haircut emoji, to which meaning was still accurately ascribed, as the main focus was hair. Also, an interesting comment here is that there were few cases of misinterpretation of proverbs, participants preferring instead not to answer. However, the most humorous misreading was of the proverb "peștele de la cap se impute", that is "A fish rots from the head down", which was decoded as "the mouth stinks of fish".

In the final three questions students were asked to discuss what the emoji coding and decoding competence involved and they enumerated several sub-categories — from language and emoji knowledge, digital skills, visual skills, attention to detail, concentration, practice/ experience and cultural knowledge. Several participants underlined the possibility of misrepresentation of the intended meaning — "I think that in order to decode emojis you need digital skills. A lot of them are used in a different way and not how they were intended." Asked about potential problems they may have had with decoding emoji, participants mentioned that the novelty of the emoji, or their uncertainty of the intended meaning in a particular context caused difficulty — "Yes, it's hard to understand an emoji sometimes in texts because of the meaning they can have. A smiling emoji doesn't necessarily mean that the sender is happy, maybe the opposite, and a kiss emoji can be sent with sarcasm".

The last comment draws attention to the importance of understanding emoji in context and making use of one's pragmatic competence to decode speaker attitudes as this is relevant for accurate message reception, more participants giving examples of inability of others to decode irony or sarcasm in text messages when emoji were used. The most humorous example is "Yes. In a sunny day I used this emoji 😳 and the person who I was talking to, thought that I was horny and I wasn't. I was only heated". Finally, a student addressed the age gap as a reason for wrongful decoding of emoji messages, claiming that their mother never understands emoji.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this pilot study reflected some of the problem areas to be further addressed concerning the instrument to be used for larger scale data collection - namely that the amount of the emoji codes to be discussed needs to be reduced in further questionnaires in order to make it more user friendly and increase the number

of responses, while at the same time certain changes need to be made to the content so as to discourage quick checks on the internet. Furthermore, a possibility of different questionnaires for different sub-competences (lexical, grammatical, pragmatic, cultural) should be entertained and also expanding the research to address students in technical fields or parents may be worth investigating. Additionally, this research did not address the issue of memes or other non-verbal symbols so as to check age-specific preferences and fashions or delve deeper into miscommunication situations on account of verbal and non-verbal messages or only non-verbal.

Secondly, for the field of ELT, the introduction of such exercises in language class activity may prove beneficial as there are numerous outcomes: creating a positive learning environment (participants used words such as "fun", "pleasure" or "entertaining" to describe the questionnaire completion experience); the deliberate process of multi-modal communication improves skills not just from the point of view of language use, but it also allows for a very good opportunity to build analytical skills and critical thinking, while focusing on linguistic issues and cultural difference in foreign language use/ study. In other words, the design of such multi-modal comprehension activities has multiple positive learning outcomes.

Finally, as multi-modal communication gains popularity the need for changes to be made to the communicative competence framework are essential as this raises awareness of the need for intersemiotic training and visual sign decoding as part of the new media literacy for effective communicators in a global context.

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Pedagogical Application to Early Childhood Education in Germany and Romania

Patricia Jana Maria BOTA

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *This thesis conceptualizes early childhood education not merely as a preparatory stage for formal schooling, but as a foundational process in shaping an individual's personality, autonomy, and value system. Grounded in the premise that contemporary society faces a profound crisis of values and individual responsibility, the paper argues that societal renewal depends directly on how we structure a child's earliest learning experiences. The purpose of this article is to present a comparative analysis between the early childhood education systems in Germany (Bavaria) and Romania. In Germany, the educational model is strongly anchored in attachment theory (Becker-Stoll), considered the indispensable prerequisite for any exploratory endeavor. The concept of co-construction (Ko-Konstruktion) redefines the educator's role: they relinquish their traditional posture as an "expert" to become a partner in dialogue and exploration within learning communities, applied particularly in the open kindergarten model (Offener Kindergarten). This structure is built upon the four fundamental freedoms formulated by Gerhard Regel: free choice of space, materials, partners, and play duration. In contrast, the educational system in Romania, although undergoing a continuous process of curricular modernization, often retains a more rigid structure. Romanian educational institutions are marked by strict age-group stability, reliance on fixed didactic planning, and a heightened tendency on the part of educators to control and accelerate the learning process. In conclusion, the thesis advocates for a shift in perspective: prioritizing the quality of learning experiences over content quantity and administrative routine. Adapting child-centered practices from the German model, such as semi-open room concepts and greater trust in child autonomy, offers a promising path toward enriching early childhood education in Romania.*

Keywords: Early childhood education; Comparative analysis; Ko-Konstruction; Learner autonomy; Open kindergarten model

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, research in the field of pedagogy has demonstrated that investment in the education of young children has long-term effects on cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional competencies. In this context, a comparative analysis of pedagogical approaches and perspectives on early childhood education in Germany and Romania is of particular importance.

A comparative study of the two educational systems shows that Germany places particular emphasis on child-centred education, learning through play, the development of autonomy, and the continuous observation of children's progress, whereas Romania is undergoing a process of modernising and harmonising its early childhood education curriculum with European standards, while children's autonomy and freedom to choose their learning activities are different or even absent. Examining these differences and similarities makes it possible to identify good practices that may contribute to optimising the educational process.

The relevance of the topic is supported by contemporary social and educational changes: increased population mobility, cultural diversity, the development of bilingual education, and the need to adapt pedagogical strategies to children's individual needs. In the paper *Identity Dilemmas and Social Dynamics. Haiti or On Cultural Syncretism,* S. S. Milancovici (2017) addresses the dynamics between the mother tongue and a secondary/institutional language and the way in which linguistic syncretism shapes an individual's identity. At present, many children in Romania benefit from early childhood education in bilingual contexts or in contexts inspired by Western educational models, which calls for a scientifically grounded comparative analysis.

Furthermore, the subject of this paper is important from the perspective of European educational policies, which promote the quality of early childhood education, the continuous professional development of teachers, and the use of modern methods of assessment and educational intervention. Comparing the pedagogical perspectives of Germany and Romania provides a relevant framework for understanding how educational theories are translated into practice and adapted to the national context.

The choice of this topic is also justified by the constant need to adapt early childhood education to the requirements of contemporary society, by the growing interest in the quality of education, and by the opportunity to conduct a comparative analysis of two European educational systems. At the same time, as S. S. Milancovici states in *L'impact de la technologie sur l'acquisition des langues étrangères dans les universités: Tendances et pratiques optimales,* "Professional Communication and Translation Studies", today's educational environment and methodological adaptation are essential elements in meeting learners' needs.

I considered it necessary to introduce a motto at the beginning of the two chapters, both to provide a conceptual framework and to create coherence within the content of the paper. It also has a motivational and reflective role, giving greater depth to the text. From a pedagogical perspective, this paper contributes to enriching the specialised literature by highlighting effective educational models and formulating proposals for improving educational practices in early childhood education. It may be useful both to teachers and to future education specialists, who can draw on the experience of other educational systems in their professional activity.

According to Sorin Cristea (2010), pedagogy has the task of reflecting two opposing tendencies of postmodernity in relation to modernity, with the aim of reconstructing a new form of modernity. He identifies new approaches to education in Romania: eliminating elements that generate a dominant ideology and reducing the overcrowding of school programmes; promoting creativity, communication, and the multiplication of formative styles within the curricular educational project (Cristea, 2010).

2. Preschool Education and Development

"Children must be educated, but they must also be left to educate themselves."
Ernest Dimnet

Quality education develops the capacity for self-reflection and self-knowledge. It teaches us to ask essential questions about our own identity, values, and goals in life (Mușat, A., 2025). Thus, education becomes a process of self-improvement, continuous transformation, and personal development. Moreover, education cultivates resilience - the ability to adapt to change and overcome difficulties.

In Germany, the educational system, from early childhood education onwards, focuses on the learner's basic abilities and on healthy cooperation between educators, caregivers, and the child, with particular emphasis being placed on attachment behaviour. As defined in Bavarian specialised literature, attachment is a long-term emotional bond with a particular person who cannot be replaced. It should be noted that this behaviour becomes even stronger when activated by needs such as hunger or thirst, fatigue, being in an unfamiliar environment, or overstimulation. For example, an infant initially attempts to establish proximity to an adult through crying.

Children, both during the preschool and school periods, are prepared to explore, interact with their surroundings, or learn only when attachment reaches an appropriate and satisfactory level for them.

Dr. and Professor Fabienne Becker-Stoll explained this in 2009 through the following scheme:

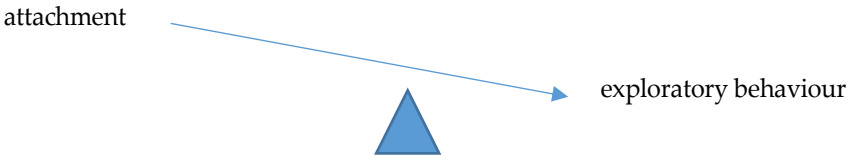

Fig.I.1. Decrease in exploratory behaviour

In most Bavarian kindergartens, emphasis is placed on the following abilities, capacities, and values:

- Motivational skills: children should act independently and perceive themselves as competent.
- Cognitive skills: problem-solving, exercising memory, imagination, and creativity.
- Physical skills: gross and fine motor skills, relaxation after demanding exercise, and taking responsibility for health and physical well-being.
- Social skills: empathy and appreciation for others, communication skills, and conflict resolution.
- Development of values: respect for differences.
- Ability to take responsibility: for one's own actions, for others, and for nature and the environment.
- Ability to participate democratically: respecting conversational rules, engaging in dialogue and voting, and expressing one's own point of view.

At the same time, the child should enjoy pleasant interaction with the teacher, receive availability and support throughout educational activities, and be encouraged to engage in new explorations, as also stated by F. Becker-Stoll.

According to a scientific study conducted by Landerl and Karin Kaufmann, in which a sequence of events was presented using a box representing a stage and two teddy bears, it was demonstrated that young children are born with remarkable abilities, the so-called "basic abilities" (perception, language, and mathematical abilities). Therefore, the more varied and challenging the stimuli, tasks, and learning experiences are from the very beginning, the more children's abilities and desire to learn will grow and develop, gradually expanding their understanding of the surrounding world. At the same time, it must be taken into account that children learn by discovering something, sharing it with others, and negotiating meanings.

Regarding the involvement of the teacher, they are responsible for observing children in order to identify their interests and difficulties, with the purpose of developing appropriate suggestions or supporting them during activities. Psychological and physical needs may also arise in this context, with the caregiver playing an important role. In addition to their need for belonging, young children want to act according to their own ideas and interests and are satisfied when they undertake

activities on their own initiative. When children are given autonomy, their desire to acquire knowledge and solve tasks that bring them satisfaction increases. However, they often need to learn how to find a balance between their own needs.

Furthermore, the German educational system places strong emphasis on a process known as "Ko-Konstruktion" (Sophia Altenthan, Gesa Düerkop, Christine Hagermann, Beate Hofmann-Kneitz, Christoph Rösch, Anneliese Sammer, Robert Troidl, Pädagogik/Psychologie, 2013). This concept represents a form of co-construction, in which the adult no longer plays the role of an "expert". Teaching and instruction become secondary, while learning together in "learning communities" and supporting learning become paramount. Even young children learn through interaction with other children.

The composition of the group is an important aspect that should be taken into consideration. With regard to young children, groups of two are the easiest to manage, while for older children the maximum recommended group size is five, after which they can form a team. Thus, diversity in terms of temperament, learning pace, developmental level, or cultural background enriches "learning communities" by opening up new impulses and opportunities.

Actual knowledge is not considered as important as exploring the meaning of newly introduced elements, according to pedagogical specialists. In this way, the teacher can observe and identify certain mistakes or gaps, which become sources of questions that can be clarified and corrected through the process of "co-construction".

The child should also be allowed to develop their own path of knowledge acquisition. They will certainly learn from solving a problem independently, because the brain stores the feeling experienced while performing that activity. In this way, self-image and the desire to learn can reach high levels. Experiencing self-efficacy is important for building self-confidence and self-esteem.

In the Romanian educational literature, depending on the degree of teacher involvement in directing educational processes, three types of teacher-student relationships can be identified: democratic, laisser-faire, and autocratic. The laisser-faire approach is quite prominent in Germany and less present in Romania, where the initiative for learning lies with the learner. This approach, which has often been criticised by pedagogues, is characterised by a reduced role of the teacher, who becomes merely an accompanier of the learner's initiatives. It can lead to an "exaggerated asymmetry in favour of children", as Constantin Cucoș (2014) points out.

Education specialists carefully, systematically, and purposefully analyse the educational opportunities inherent in specific learning situations, the programmes they can offer children, and the ways in which they can best support learners' educational and learning processes.

With regard to Romanian education, the development of values and attitudes derives from the teacher's continuous educational activity. They are important for the

educational process, just as competencies are, covering the cognitive dimension of personality and being subject to different methodological organisation and assessment criteria. If knowledge is not accompanied by sensitivity and ethics that have a positive effect on an individual's life, it may contribute to the degradation of social life and to personal failure.

In both Germany and Romania, elements of the social environment are directly reflected in the components of the educational process. Focusing now on Romania, I have observed that technological changes in teaching, the occasional emergence of distrust towards educational institutions, whether kindergartens or schools, and unfavourable economic circumstances generate both behavioural models and negative values, which should receive deeper consideration from state decision-makers.

Framework objectives are pursued over several years of study and refer to the development of abilities and attitudes generated by the specific nature of a discipline, whereas reference objectives focus on the progression of ability development and knowledge acquisition from one year to another, specifying the expected learning outcomes. Depending on the area to which they refer, objectives can therefore be cognitive objectives (transmission of knowledge), affective objectives (development of beliefs and attitudes), and psychomotor objectives (behaviours and manual operations).

According to Krathwohl and Bloom, the taxonomy of affective objectives includes the following stages in the acquisition of attitudes and values: "receiving (participation), responding (reaction), valuing (evaluation), organisation, and characterisation by appreciation" (Constantin Cucoș, 2014).

German specialised literature maintains that awareness of responsibility, that is, competencies (der Kompetenzbegriff), is always linked to attitudes and values. Similar to the Romanian system, Bavarian early childhood education is also organised around educational areas such as language, motor skills, health, music, and art.

One aspect particularly emphasised at Winkl Kindergarten was health, probably also due to the fact that we were in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. The child learns to take responsibility for their own physical well-being, body, and health in a self-determined manner. They acquire the knowledge necessary for a healthy lifestyle, with the educational process involving several different areas. Thus, learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own behaviour (Christine Hagermann, 2013).

If we were to define values according to German concepts, they can be understood as ideas about what is considered good, right, and desirable in a society, such as honesty, tolerance, assertiveness, conscientiousness, adaptability, sincerity, and others. Fundamental values underlying Bavarian society include the right to the free development of personality, equality, and freedom of expression. "The supreme goal of education is the happy individual!" said A. S. Neill, a supporter of anti-authoritarian education, at the end of the 1960s, during the so-called Flower Power

movement. Continuing his argument, he maintained that contemporary democratic society is built upon responsible, emancipated citizens who are willing to compromise and are tolerant, while society needs ambitious young people who possess these key qualities.



Fig. I.2. Play in an anti-authoritarian kindergarten (Spiel im antiautoritären Kindergarten)

Although the Montessori model is known both in Romania and Germany, the Bavarian system refers to the principle "Help me to do it myself", which means that the educator does not impose their will on the child, but rather prepares an optimal environment for them. According to the principle that a child's development unfolds automatically in accordance with their individual inner plan, Montessori pedagogy aims to enable the learner's independence and self-directed activity and to provide positive impressions of the environment. Completing tasks independently and working on one's own include deciding what to do, for how long, and with whom to interact. Independent correction of mistakes, independent manipulation of materials, cleanliness, and maintaining order support the child's healthy development of abilities that they will later apply in the environment in which they live.

As in Montessori pedagogy, the concept of the "Open Kindergarten" assumes from the outset that the educator's role consists largely of creating a stimulating environment, namely spaces and play areas in which the child can develop and learn according to their individual needs. The learner is viewed as an independent, curious, and open-minded person, with unique experiences, needs, and interests that must be supported and guided.

In order for a child to meet their individual play and learning needs autonomously, they must have sufficient freedom of movement. Therefore, Gerhard Regel (2007) identifies the "four freedoms": freedom to choose the play area; freedom to choose toys and play objects, the theme and content of play; freedom to choose the play partner and the level of difficulty of the game; and freedom to choose the duration of play.

In German terms, this can be understood as the opening of doors. The concept emphasises that learners are free to decide where they go and what they do. The entire kindergarten, including the outdoor area, provides various play zones, for example for movement activities, creative and experimental activities, role play, cooking and eating, as well as a quiet area where children can rest in the shade of a tree. The children at Winkl also benefited from this type of Öffnung der Türen.



Fig I.3. Kindergarden playground yard

In the first picture, there are horses made from tree trunks, while in the background, towards the forest, the children have a wooden house where they play shopkeeper. The second picture was also taken in the kindergarten yard. In the foreground is the Hedgehogs group's mini-garden, where children plant flowers and vegetables, while in the tent in the background they enthusiastically play Native Americans. The third picture shows the place where attendance is taken through the morning song, Hallo, Hallo, schön, dass du da bist! Each child holds hands with the

child next to them and says their name. The children also discuss the topic of the day, eat breakfast, and sing for those celebrating their birthdays. As the kindergarten is located in the forest, the children have access to a large and beautiful space. Activities generally take place outdoors. Only when it rains or snows do the teachers and children stay indoors. The children spend a great deal of time outdoors and are appropriately dressed.



Fig.I.4. The place where the morning meeting took place

By independently choosing a game or play area, the child also chooses the play group or where they wish to carry out the activity. Therefore, group and team work and play predominate in this context.

The entire kindergarten — group rooms, auxiliary rooms and corridors, as well as the outdoor area — is designed and organised to provide equal freedom of use for both younger children and those preparing to attend school. In addition to the aspects mentioned above, participation in "kindergarten life" and collaborative learning are important principles of Regel's concept.

Through the regulations established in an open-door kindergarten, children learn how to behave within a community. They have the opportunity to participate in establishing common rules and structuring and organising daily routines, learning to contribute and take responsibility not only for themselves but also for what happens in the kindergarten.

The objectives and competencies pursued in German educational institutions based on the open concept include the following: the ability to resolve conflicts together; understanding that actions have consequences; a well-developed willingness to participate and contribute; the ability to manage one's own problems; organisational

skills; willingness to assume responsibility; decision-making abilities; and independence. All these aspects do not create chaos but imply guided freedom, with the child belonging to the community rather than only to their class or group.

In Romania, by contrast, many kindergartens operate according to the principle of group stability as an indicator of quality and control. Early childhood education in private kindergartens generally works with a maximum of 20 children, which encourages a more rigid structure compared with the German model. In Germany, the concept requires more staff to supervise children, whereas in Romania some kindergartens place greater emphasis on cost optimisation. The German system, on the other hand, tends to emphasise autonomy, choice, and individual pace.

I believe that this concept could be applied in Romania, but in an adapted form, namely through a semi-open model. For example: "open doors" for 60 minutes per day, during specific time intervals, with movement restricted to two or three areas of the kindergarten, and children wearing bracelets indicating the name of the kindergarten and their group.

3. Psychomotor Development through Movement Activities

"Only a person who is responsible for themselves can assume responsibility for the community. A person who has discovered that they can change themselves will also contribute to the changes necessary around them." (Völker, 1980)

At the beginning of life, every person is dependent on their environment, and as control over their own body increases, they strive for independence from external control. They develop an active sense of self that increasingly intervenes in their own development and assumes responsibility for their own life.

Autonomy also means acting in a socially responsible manner. People are active, vibrant, and enterprising beings. Therefore, young children need to explore their surroundings, strive for knowledge, and develop their creative abilities. A healthy environment and appropriate movement activities facilitate the development of an individual's talents and abilities. We must also adopt a holistic perspective. Psychological, cognitive, emotional, social, and somatic processes should be interconnected.

Therefore, a child develops primarily through action. Through their own activity, the child receives stimuli that lead to developmental progress. The self-concept incorporates both personal interpretations and feedback from those around us. Consequently, this concept is based on two pillars: self-image, which is more cognitively oriented, and self-esteem, which is emotionally oriented.

According to German specialised literature, the term "psychomotor" denotes the functional unity of psychological and motor processes, through which confidence in one's own abilities is built and difficulties that a child experiences in relating to

others and to the environment are regulated. The purpose of kindergarten activities is to promote children's initiative, encourage independent action through group experiences, and provide opportunities for experimenting with their own resources (Renate Zimmer, Handbuch Psychomotorik, 2019).

Tasks should always be designed to promote children's independent activity. Movement activities should therefore include options that allow every child to find their own solutions, explore equipment according to their own ideas, and participate in team games and pair activities, with the emphasis placed on individual development.

The German principles for designing kindergarten lessons aimed at psychomotor development include: Taking as many senses as possible into account when transmitting learning content. Using working and play materials that allow for a wide range of sensory experiences: letters made of wood, velvet, plastic, or sandpaper, which can be written or painted in sand, clay, or snow. I solating sensory areas: feeling numbers or letters with one's eyes closed, separating them from others, recreating a visual symbol using a rope, etc. Connecting the senses: listening to a sound and finding the corresponding letter from a tactile bag, receiving a number "written" on one's back by a classmate and saying the number aloud.

Below, I will provide several practical examples from Germany that can be used as play ideas for developing children's psychomotor skills. They follow the structure of an introductory game, a main play activity and theme-specific exercises, followed by relaxation and rest rituals. They can be adapted according to the specific needs of the group. Their purpose is to provide inspiration and encourage a playful spirit, while children's ideas and suggestions are welcomed in this context.

An example of an introductory game is "Falling Stars". Balloons and very light, transparent scarves are needed. Each balloon is tied to a scarf, creating the appearance of a falling star. Initially, each child can explore their own ideas for playing with their balloon. The teacher's suggestions can then extend these ideas, such as trying to throw the balloon as high as possible or hitting a wall or ceiling with it. The material is suitable for encouraging even shy children to participate.

This game is intended for children aged 3-5 and helps develop visual perception, hand-eye coordination, and experience in handling materials. It can be played in the kindergarten gym or in the classroom, provided that sufficient space is available.

"Der Rote Peter" is a catching game. Two children each have a red cloth. They run after the other children and try to touch them with the cloth rather than throw it. The cloth can be replaced with a glove or scarf, depending on the season. Whoever is touched takes the cloth and tries to catch someone else. According to the rules, this game is intended for children aged 4-6. There is no fixed number of participants. It develops reaction time, endurance, role reversal, and cooperation.

Another game, this time one that can be played outdoors and which I implemented myself during free time in the kindergarten yard, is "Wir sind die

Freunde des Herbstes" ("We Are the Friends of Autumn"). This is a stop-and-go game. It can be adapted according to the season and in accordance with the theme and subject of the lesson. Because most children have a great deal of energy, this type of activity can be introduced when they begin to become slightly restless. The teacher uses two stones to produce sounds between commands. During this time, the children move according to the rhythm produced by the stones, which can range from slow to fast. At the end of the exercises, everyone holds hands and forms a circle. They then shake their arms from top to bottom while inhaling and exhaling like a strong wind.

Table II.1. We Are the Friends of Autumn (Wir sind die Freunde des Herbstes)

Command	Movement task	Targeted competence
 Kürbis	Bend down while trying to maintain balance on your toes as well as possible. Keep your back straight and your arms joined above your head.	balance
 Blätter	Assume a push-up position, keeping your palms open like a leaf. Hold the position for 10 seconds.	strength
 Steine	Spread your legs and bend your knees. Extend your torso and arms vertically, keep your chin towards your chest, your back straight, and remain as still as a stone. Hold this position until we count to 10.	concentration and endurance
 Baum	Stand still on one leg. Cross your arms above your head and move your fingers like leaves on a branch.	balance
 Regen	Spread your legs, let your torso and arms fall forward, and try to touch your toes with your fingers, moving from left to right.	flexibility

4. Conclusions

According to the French pedagogue René Hubert (1965, p. 9), education can be conceived as a structure organised on several levels, integrating scientific, philosophical, technical, and artistic dimensions. This perspective emphasises the complex and multidimensional nature of education, which cannot be reduced to simple teaching procedures or the mechanical transmission of knowledge.

In Romania, the increasing complexity of educational phenomena has led over time to the expansion and diversification of the field of educational sciences, deepening specialisations and multiplying analytical perspectives.

In a social context characterised by multiple interdependencies and accelerating social processes, educational systems have become increasingly difficult to manage, while educational outcomes have become more difficult to predict (Văideanu, 1988, p. 21). These transformations require a reconsideration of how the educational process is conceived and implemented, particularly in early childhood education, where the foundations of children's cognitive, emotional, and social development are established.

The present research highlights the need to move beyond a strictly didactic perspective on education and towards an integrated educational approach centred on the child and their real needs. At the same time, I believe that the German "open doors" method supported by pedagogue Regel could gradually be implemented in Romania as well.

In relation to the scientific works of various authors, the study by S. S. Milancovici entitled *Identity and alterity in the central and peripheral european culture. The case of Romanian writers of French expression*, may also be taken into consideration. Reducing excessive bureaucratisation and making programmes and planning more flexible could constitute important premises for improving the quality of education. In this respect, emphasis should shift from the quantity of information transmitted to the quality of the learning experiences offered to children. To conclude, based on the research conducted, I developed a table in which I noted the similarities and differences between the two educational systems in Germany and Romania. In our country, children's needs are often addressed promptly by adults, at the expense of providing opportunities to practise autonomy. This practice may lead to inhibition of initiative and discouragement of independent exploration, aspects reflected in the initially lower level of autonomy and persistence observed during the pre-experimental stage.

I attach a comparative table summarising the main characteristics identified in the instructional-educational process and the pedagogical observations concerning educational practices in the German and Romanian contexts.

Table III.2. Characteristics of the educational style in different educational contexts (Germany – Romania)

Germany	Romania
Relationship between teacher and child: the teacher maintains a greater degree of distance.	Excessive sensitivity, both on the part of parents and caregivers/teachers.
Answers to children's questions are adapted to their age level.	Answers to children's questions are adapted to their needs.
Positive relationship.	Positive relationship.
A relationship of trust that subsequently develops into a collaborative relationship, strengthening the child's self-esteem. The child is given time to put on their shoes (e.g., five minutes) and is allowed to eat independently even if they get dirty.	Lack of trust in the child's abilities; needs are addressed promptly. The caregiver puts children's shoes on for them, and young children are fed so that too much time is not lost.
Learning processes are guided by emotions. Depending on the emotional states expressed by children, the teacher may change the proposed topic. The motto "Viel hilft viel" ("More is better") is not applied, because it is not the quantity of stimulation but the quality of the educational process that is valued.	Learning is associated with a positive feeling. The teacher follows the planned programme. The principle "The more we learn, the better" is applied.
Stimuli are based on the child's previous experiences. Mistakes are viewed as opportunities for learning. Interaction with the environment helps children develop a realistic understanding of the world and acquire knowledge more easily. Self-directed learning (children have more frequent contact with nature). An alternative "reality" is constructed in the classroom through environmental modelling.	Children become discouraged much more easily if they are not allowed to discover things on their own. In this way, they will make fewer mistakes. A different "reality" is created for children in the classroom through the structuring of the learning environment. The environment is modelled within the classroom.
Older children are encouraged to teach younger children; the level of assimilation of new knowledge is higher in this case.	Younger children work at different tables or in different teams with children of the same age, without having much contact with older children in the class.
Meeting basic psychological needs (social connections, autonomy, competence, and belonging) is considered necessary.	Meeting physical needs is important but insufficient for healthy development. Unfortunately, in many cases, in order not to interrupt the activity, the teacher merely shows the child that their needs have been heard without fully meeting them.
Children are given greater freedom Solving problems independently leads to the acquisition of new behaviours.	Excessive indulgence can hinder development.

Germany	Romania
Excessive praise and rewards may have negative effects, or may have a positive effect when used appropriately.	The child's search for solutions to autonomy-related problems may be inhibited.
Language development: role plays and short performances based on stories; role play; picture reading; storytelling.	Children participate in performances mainly on special occasions; role play; picture reading; storytelling.
Play and movement: mainly outdoors. Most kindergartens have an indoor gym where children can expend their energy.	If the weather is unfavourable, activities and play are preferably carried out inside the classroom.
Natural elements are used during play, free time, and educational activities.	Natural elements are represented by various materials, with attempts being made to recreate images from nature in the classroom.

The educational perspectives that resonate with the principles of pedagogical practices in the German context, but which can also be valued within the Romanian educational system, include avoiding excessive curricular content, teaching in an intuitive manner, and adapting the teaching-learning process to the child's developmental level, cognitive capacity, and linguistic characteristics.

Understanding and consolidating information requires sufficient time for exploration and practice, in accordance with the principle of "learning by doing", supported since the period of classical pedagogy.

Harmonising teaching resources so that they support thinking processes, stimulate curiosity and creativity, and sensitise children to various issues contributes to cultivating a sense of balance and beauty. At the same time, designing educational spaces that encourage free movement and active participation, together with teaching staff who accompany children in play and activities while providing freedom within clearly defined limits, favours the development of self-esteem and a positive self-image.

I believe that future research could analyse the influence of cooperation between kindergarten and family on the development of children's autonomy, according to the German model, as well as the way in which educational policies and the institutional framework support or limit the implementation of flexible pedagogical practices adapted to children's actual needs.

In conclusion, this article opens up relevant perspectives for further study of educational styles in early childhood education and highlights the need for an integrated, reflective, and child-centred approach as the foundation of an effective educational system adapted to contemporary realities.

"Every child whom we teach is a person whom we win.", Victor Hugo

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PART IV.
VOICES OF PUBLIC DISCOURSE, DEMOCRACY AND SECURITY

A Cultural and Non-Verbal Highlight of Deceit in Everyday Life and Healthcare Communication

Stăncuța Ramona DIMA-LAZA

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania

Abstract. *This article explores the complexities of non-verbal communication in detecting deceit, with specific reference to culture, stereotypes and healthcare environments. Physiological reactions generally stem from anxiety or emotional distress. Even though traditional body language literature connects certain gestures to dishonesty, recent research emphasizes that isolated cues represent unreliable signals of deception. The most common elements related to this topic are hand-to-face or self-soothing gestures meant either to suppress speech or to distance oneself from deceit. However, such reactions may often mimic other conditions, such as the "white-coat syndrome" or simple embarrassment. Cultural variations also have a major role in the analysis of an individual's behaviour. Ultimately, body language should not be treated as a definitive lie-detection tool, but rather as a guide to identify discomfort, fear or reluctance. Recognizing such behaviours allows people to adapt their communication strategies and encourage transparent disclosure.*

Keywords: non-verbal communication, deception, baseline, congruence, healthcare, gestures, anxiety.

1. Introduction

Non-verbal communication goes back millions of years and it originates in primitive animal behaviour. Many anthropologists believe that human communication first relied on facial expressions, hand gestures and body posture. The first formal research emerged in 1872 and it belongs to Charles Darwin. His study, *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, links human characteristics and emotions to their origins in animal behaviours and suggests a universal nature of expression for the entire human species. (Waller, 2013). Willingly or not, in everyday life, people often interpret facial expressions, eye contact or body posture to analyse intentions and attitudes. Non-verbal cues have been regarded as a reliable sign of identifying deceit when the individual detects an inconsistency with verbal responses.

The subconscious plays a major role in human body language. The internal psychological conflict a person experiences when attempting to mislead others leaks out through micro-expressions or involuntary gestures. Even though a sudden mismatch between the verbal message and the tone of the voice or physical posture serves as a strong indicator that something of off, such behaviours must always be interpreted in context and by taking into consideration the individual's baseline.

Awareness of such aspects is not only relevant in everyday life, but also in doctor-patient interactions where transparent behaviour is fundamental to diagnosis and treatment options. There are patients who experience fear of judgment and therefore minimalize symptoms or conceal information. A patient may claim that everything is fine while displaying nervousness; he could also agree to a treatment plan while displaying reluctance through his body language. Another patient may be protecting a certain part of the body while denying experiencing pain. Such discrepancies indicate lack of honesty, generally caused by fear, embarrassment or even misunderstanding. If healthcare professionals are able to identify such cues they can rephrase sensitive questions and formulate more open ones, using thus non-verbal communication as a guide for further clinical dialogue.

People often lie but not for the same reasons. There are certain forms of deception meant to protect an individual's feelings. In order to preserve friendly social relationships, sometimes we need to resort to *white lies*. They are intended to make others feel comfortable and to avoid offending them by saying out loud the cold, hard truth. These people are known as social liars and they seem to be more popular than the ones who always reveal their thoughts. However, when a person deliberately sets out to deceive someone for personal advantage, we are dealing with *malicious lies*. This article begins with this distinction, emphasizing the difference between concealing an unpleasant truth for altruistic reasons and using a form of deception to manipulate others. The distinction between these two types of liars is highly relevant to healthcare because patients may minimize symptoms for fear of being hospitalized; they deny certain behaviours because of shame or deliberately in order to get access to certain medication. This material allows clinicians to identify nonverbal changes and communication signals that may draw their attention to issues that need empathy or clarification.

Even though the interpretation of nonverbal communication cannot rely solely on the identification of certain gestures, psychological tension frequently accompanies lying. A person may touch their nose because they are lying or because they are anxious or because it represents a habit. Avoiding eye contact may indicate discomfort or it could be just a cultural convention. In a study published in 2003, DePaulo et al., examined 1338 subjects involving 158 possible cues to deception and observed that many behaviours showed weak connections with lying. (DePaulo et al., 2003) Therefore, interpretation of non-verbal behaviour should focus on a broader

observation of behavioural change, cluster, timing and context. This article systematizes the main gestures and treats nonverbal behaviour as a potential source of information rather than reliable proof of deception.

2. Common Gestures Associated with Deception. Significance in Healthcare Settings

A socially motivated lie may have the purpose of preserving a relationship.

By preventing unnecessary emotional distress. A deliberate lie on the other hand, is generally undertaken for material or strategic benefits. Considering this aspect, the emotional experience and manifestation of someone telling a white lie is substantially different from that of a person deliberately attempting to use someone else for personal advantages. And precisely this motivation and the importance of the information concealed can influence the individual's behaviour. According to Allan Pease, a worldwide known researcher in the field of body language, when we hear, speak or see something that is not true, we have the tendency to cover our ears, mouth or eyes. There is a study attributed to Desmond Morris, which Allan Pease mentioned in his book. It relates to a group of nurses who were instructed to lie to their patients about their health. When they did this, they showed a greater frequency of hand-to-face gestures than those who told the truth to the patients. When someone uses a hand-to-face gesture it doesn't always mean that he or she is lying. It all depends on the context and on the other gestures observed. But it indicates that the person is holding back information and more attention should be paid to him/her, alongside other behaviours. (Pease, 1988, p. 71-72). Liars therefore, may appear more tense than truth tellers. A gesture does not establish whether a statement is true or false, but it can increase or decrease the plausibility of an interpretation.

As mentioned above, in clinical settings, patients may provide incomplete or inaccurate information for fear of being judged or having to face consequences. Such aspects occur when dealing with sensitive issues like substance abuse, financial difficulties, mental health. Alcohol consumption is often minimalized because of shame, they deny difficulties in taking medication because they do not want to disappoint the family members or even the physician; they claim to have understood the diagnosis because they do not wish to appear uninformed. Under such circumstances, the healthcare provider should observe whether there were changes in the patient's behaviour, when they occurred, and what topic triggered them. He should also pay attention to the cultural and linguistic factors that might be responsible for certain attitudes. "Cultural misunderstandings, biases, and stereotypes continue to shape how individuals and institutions interact across national and ethnic lines". (Milancovici, 2025, p. 172)

3. Hand-to-Face Gestures

To begin with, a hand-to-face gesture is an indicator that the conversation has reached a psychologically sensitive point. *Mouth-covering* gestures are often associated with the suppression of speech. It may have different forms: by using the finger, fist, palm or by an apparently incidental cough. In body language literature, this gesture is often presented as an important indicator of deceit, as if the individual was trying to prevent the production of speech. In a medical context, this may occur not only when lying, but also when discussing sexual-health related issues or bad news that trigger discomfort and anxiety. When noticing such behaviour, the doctor should respond by providing reassurance and slowing down the medical interview. When asked if he had been taking the medication every day, the patient might cover the mouth, pause and avoid answering. Thie behaviour is, first of all, an indicator that something is off, and that the matter needs further investigation. It could be a signal of deceit or embarrassment or difficulty remembering the medication schedule. Rephrasing the questions can be helpful by creating a less threatening environment for disclosure.

When this gesture is directed towards another speaker it may communicate suspicion that the other person is withholding information. If, for example, an individual covers their mouth while *you* are speaking, they might feel that *you* are hiding something. The familiar childhood "shhh" gesture also illustrates how bodily movements can acquire symbolic meaning through social learning. Mouth-covering therefore, becomes more relevant when it represents a change from the person's baseline or everyday behaviour and occurs at a psychologically significant moment.

The "lump of rice test" goes back 3000 years, to ancient China and ancient India. It was considered to be one of the first methods of lie detection or "polygraph machine" in human history relying on a certain physiological reaction to fear. Suspects in a trial were asked to hold dry rice in their mouths during the interrogatory and then spit it out. Dry rice would suggest lying whereas moist rice would mean truthfulness. According to science, the sympathetic nervous system, triggers a fight-or-flight response that slows down the digestion and suppresses the salivary glands under such circumstances. Hence a reaction of fear or nervousness which produces a dry mouth. However, recent research claims that this is not a valid lie-detection method as the stress or anxiety of a person subjected to accusation can affect salivation but it is not synonymous to deception. And still, physiological reactions do not always have a single psychological meaning. In medical research, a dry mouth may indicate dehydration, an individual taking medication, certain diseases or simple anxiety generated by the hospital or by the so-called "white-coat syndrome". Some patients may experience a racing heart, sweating or trembling when dealing with doctors. Therefore, interpreting physiological arousal as evidence of deception may be particularly misleading during medical consultations. (Vicianova, 2015).

Nose-touching represents a source of possible deception-related behaviour. Biologically speaking, when an individual lies, chemicals known as catecholamines are released, causing tissue inside the nose to swell. Lying also triggers increased blood pressure which makes the human nose expand, fact that is known as "The Pinocchio Effect". (Gomez, 2019). Consequently, the nerve endings in the nose begin to tingle resulting in a rubbing action to satisfy the "itch". From a linguistic point of view, the above-mentioned pattern suggests the tendency of liars to use more words than those who tell the truth. (Swol, Lyn & Braun, 2012, p. 79-106). Even though nose touching is traditionally associated with lying, a crucial interpreting point is represented by the fact that it should be read in clusters and not as isolated behaviour.

In a medical environment this principle can be applied constructively. Imagine a doctor asks about illicit drug use and the patient starts touching the nose and licking the lips. Such changes indicate obvious discomfort. But the reasons may be different. He could become physically tense either because of fear of being judged, fear of the legal consequences or because of lying. Under such circumstances the physician should rephrase questions that lead to better communication rather than formulate a conclusion about dishonesty. He should reassure the patient in order to reduce the perceived threat and to potentially improve disclosure.

Eye rubbing is interpreted as an unconscious attempt to "block out" something unpleasant. When we don't want to see something distasteful, we cover our eyes; the brain tries to remove the deceit. There are also differences of intensity of the gesture with men and women. When lying, men vigorously rub their eyes, women make gentle touching motions. Popular belief frequently assumes that liars avoid eye contact. Yet, Allan Pease conducted several experiments where participants were asked to tell a series of lies. What he discovered was that approximately 30% of the liars constantly looked away and the viewers spotted these lies around 80%. The other 70% of the liars maintained strong eye contact assuming they were less likely to get caught if they did the opposite of what people expected. They were right. Lie-catching dropped to 25%. Women were again more perceptive at detecting lies. (Pease, 2004, p. 164-167). This study emphasizes a fundamental problem in deception. People are aware of the stereotypes associated with lying and tend to modify their behaviour accordingly. Therefore, gaze aversion should not be treated as a universal sign of deception.

Ear touching can take several forms: tugging at the earlobe, rubbing the back of the ear, finger inside the ear, pulling at the earlobe. This gesture may indicate reluctance to accept what has been said especially when it is associated with eye-contact avoidance or verbal agreement. As an example, imagine you talk to a friend about buying a new purse and you say: *It only costs $300*. At this point the person grabs their ear, looks away and says: *It sounds like a good deal to me*. Verbal agreement goes in contradiction with the gesture so the friend is actually believing the opposite and his

gesture means *I don't want to hear about it. It's too expensive*. As in the case of nose-touching, the ear grab can also be linked to anxiety as this is a broader psychological state than deception. People often become nervous when dealing with an unexpected or socially-threatening question.

From a cultural perspective, in Italy, ear grabbing while pointing toward a man suggests that he is effeminate or homosexual. It is actually a street gesture with origins in the historical imagery of earrings, traditionally worn by women. Body language literature highlights that tugging the earlobe while eating in Spain or Portugal means that the food is delicious. In Greece and Turkey, when associated with a clicking sound with the tongue, this gesture is used to drive away bad luck.

Neck scratching similarly suggests uncertainty. A characteristic movement is using the index finger of the writing hand to scratch below the earlobe five times. When accompanied by verbal agreement it signals doubt. Suppose someone says "I understand how you feel" but at the same time he scratches his neck. This may be an indicator that he does not. The academic value of this example lies less in the gesture itself than in the concept of incongruence: the spoken message and the behavioural message appear not to correspond.

Postural retreat represents an even clearer signal of "suspicion". People tend to lean back when don't believe in what they are saying or know it to be untrue and want to distance themselves from what they have just said. If, after giving an answer to a tricky question, the person moves away from the spot they were originally in, this may be a sign that they want to distance themselves from their answer and that it may not be genuine. Timing is important. If the retreat takes place when hearing the question, the person feels nervous or threatened but if it takes place after giving the answer, it is a possible indicator of deceit. The same movement can have different meanings depending on whether it occurs before, during or after a particular verbal exchange.

Collar pulling is interpreted as a response to uncomfortable sensations in the neck or facial areas. Lies cause a tingling sensation in the delicate facial and neck tissues and people pull the collar to scratch. It also occurs when the person is feeling angry or frustrated. If, at this point, you ask him: "Could you repeat that, please?" he might give the game away.

The *fingers-in-the-mouth gesture* is a self-soothing behaviour associated with the need for reassurance. It is an unconscious attempt to revert to the safety of the child sucking on his mother's breast and occurs when a person feels under pressure. As an adult, the person replaces mother's breast with fingers, cigarettes, pens, glasses, chewing gum. This person needs reassurance and guarantees. These actions are regarded as adaptors or movements that help individuals regulate discomfort. They are indicators of emotional activation rather than direct proof of lying. So, nonverbal cues are more useful when they generate questions rather than conclusions. In healthcare environments such gestures help regulate anxiety when waiting for a

diagnosis for example. However, intensification of self-soothing behaviour can indicate that the medical check-up has reached a difficult topic. In such cases, the clinician's communication strategy is essential. He should use a simple acknowledgment phrase that improves communication considerably: *This seems to be a difficult topic for you. Just take your time before moving on*.

4. Smiling and the Baseline

In what concerns smiles there are two important aspects to consider. First, there is the so-called *duping delight*. It represents a subtle form of pleasure that one gets over having someone else in one's control and being able to manipulate them. If the individual telling a lie thinks that he or she is being believed, he will feel relief manifested through a half-smile. But, knowing that they are telling a lie, they will try to suppress the expression by making it barely visible, through slightly upturned corners of the mouth that almost immediately disappear. This is a powerful indicator of the interaction between emotion and social control. A person may experience satisfaction at successful deception and, at the same time, awareness that displaying that satisfaction would expose the deception.

The Duchenne smile, or smiling with your eyes, as explained by Paul Ekman in his book *Emotions Revealed*, provides a useful framework for understanding facial expression. Drawing on the work of Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne, he observes that this smile involves coordinated movement of facial muscles around the mouth and eyes. If the smile does not reach the eyes only the muscles of the mouth it is probably a fake or a polite smile that does not involve positive emotions. The first scientific studies in this respect belong to Guillaume Duchenne de Boulogne. In the 19th century he used electrical stimulation to distinguish between the smile of real enjoyment and other kinds of smiling. His research highlighted that genuine smiles involve two sets of muscles: the zygomatic major muscles (which run down the side of the face and connect to the corners of the mouth, pulling the mouth back to expose the teeth and enlarge the cheeks) and the contraction around the eyes that involves the orbicularis oculi (which pull the eyes back and cause "Crow's feet"). Contemporary studies distinguish between Duchenne and non-Duchenne smiles according to these two muscles. The zygomatic majors are consciously controlled and they generally produce false smiles; the orbicularis oculi act unconsciously and reveal a genuine smile. A fake smile often appears stronger on one side of the face. (Ekman, 2007, 204-207). The half of the brain's cortex that specializes in facial expressions is in the right hemisphere and sends signals mainly to the left side of the body. As a result, fake facial emotions are more pronounced on the left side of the face. In a real smile, facial expressions are symmetrical. (Pease & Pease, 2004). Such studies provided a

physiological foundation for distinguishing between different forms of smiling but these investigations should be interpreted carefully as smiles often represent a simple social convention.

One of the most important concepts in body language reading is *the baseline*. Every individual has a specific pattern of emotional and behavioural expression, known as the baseline. A gesture becomes significant when it represents a deviation from that person's normal behaviour. For example, if a person generally has the habit of touching his nose during a conversation, the gesture has no meaning at all as it is part of his baseline. However, if the individual never touches the nose under ordinary circumstances but begins doing so during a particular conversation the change may draw attention for further analysis. If there's anything above or below that emotional baseline, the person analysed will do more or less of it. Hence, the interlocutor should ponder over what changed, over what caused the behavioural deviation. A related concept is the lack of congruence. According to body language literature, there should be congruence between verbal and non-verbal responses, between facial expression, posture and gestures. A verbal statement of confidence accompanied by sudden non-verbal visible withdrawal may indicate uncertainty or discomfort.

In medical consultations, the physician may find it useful to observe the patient's baseline. At the beginning of the interview when discussing general medical history, the doctor will observe how the patient normally speaks, sits and responds. Later, a sudden behavioural change may occur when a sensitive topic is introduced. Therefore, he may start touching the face, speak slower, avoid direct answers, basically deviate from the baseline. This pattern is worth exploring as it can help the clinicians formulate the right questions.

The physiological descriptions above-mentioned are useful insofar as to show that visible behaviour usually has a biological explanation. Yet, physiological patterns should be distinguished from deception as fear, anxiety, embarrassment or anger can all produce bodily changes. The purpose of the observer is to notice such behaviours and then to determine the likely source of that stress.

5. Conclusions

The material presented above can be synthesized into an integrated model consisting of four stages. First, the individual's baseline is being analysed in order to establish habitual gestures. Second, the observer identifies change when a particular subject is introduced. Third, the clusters and congruence are examined. The observer will pay attention to whether several behaviours change simultaneously: facial expressions, gestures and posture. Fourth, context and culture must be evaluated in order to determine whether the behaviour could be explained by social conventions,

cultural norms or environmental conditions. This model serves as evidence to the fact that body-language analysis is not a simplistic system of symbolic decoding and a very complex process that involves several factors: linguistic aspects, biology, communication skills and culture.

The study of nonverbal communication offers valuable insight into interpersonal communication. The gestures above analysed represent potentially relevant observations, especially when they occur in meaningful clusters. One of the most important conclusions is that no isolated gesture should be treated as evidence of deception. This article repeatedly emphasizes this principle by pointing to context, timing, clusters and baseline behaviour. Congruence, or the lack of it encourages observers to compare verbal and nonverbal aspects and to determine the underlying cause of inconsistencies. The material examined in this article identifies numerous gestures traditionally associated with deception, including mouth covering, nose touching, eye rubbing, ear touching, neck scratching, postural retreat, collar pulling, self-soothing movements and changes in smiling. The cultural examples referred to, such as "the lump of rice theory" further demonstrate the long-standing human desire to discover visible evidence of dishonesty. Nonverbal cues can indicate discomfort, uncertainty and show where further questioning may be appropriate. In order to avoid the trap of behavioural stereotypes and the danger of treating body-language as a lie-detection strategy, the points the observer must pay special attention to are: what changed, in what context, in what cluster and why.

Nonverbal communication also plays an important role in doctor-patient interactions because gestures and facial expressions complement the patient's verbal responses. The physician should use body language as a potential indicator of discomfort, uncertainty or fear. Healthcare providers may identify which subject generated discomfort, while cultural awareness can prevent inappropriate interpretations.

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The Actual Romanian System of Scientific Research in the Field of Psychology and the Transition's Effects upon It

Adrian PĂCURAR, Lia Lucia EPURE

"Vasile Goldiş" Western University of Arad, Romania

Abstract. *This study uncovers the effects of the general transition process, from a communist country to a fully EU integrated one, upon the distinct system of scientific research from the field of humanistic sciences from contemporary Romania. The study is focused in particular upon the way in which scientific research from psychology was shaped during the long period of Romania`s political transition and a special attention is given to the current status of this system. This study is a detailed analysis of the actual Romanian system of scientific research in psychology and the entire endeavour starts by presenting the concept of scientific truth in modern science. Further on the study is focused about the possible measures which in our view should be implemented in order to improve the quality of scientific research from the academic field of psychology in contemporary Romania. Also some general final remarks about the roles of politics and administrative tools in the effort to improve the scientific research system from contemporary Romania are being made.*

Keywords: transition, scientific research, epistemology, human resource, psychology

1. Introduction

After the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe in 1989 and after the integration process of former communist countries within the general political and economical frame of the European Union a distinct line of evolution was represented by the changes that have been made within the educational and academic system. A distinct path was the way in which some academic structures from within the scientific research system had to adapt to the new reality. Thus, in the case of our study we talk about the way in which these academic structures are now organized in Romania in order to provide a robust, authentic and effective scientific process. But

did these academic structures form the research system really achieved their declared goals? The transition process had indeed manage to build a solid scientific research system in Romania? All the changes that have been during the long period of transition have indeed a positive end for the Romanian academic research system? A part of our study is dedicated exclusively to this topic and by doing so we tried to uncover some fundamental elements in order to understand how these structures are really functioning within the general academic system. In order to achieve the purpose of our study the entire analysis is centered around one distinct field of scientific research from contemporary Romania. We talk about the actual Romanian research system, the way in which it is organized and the results produced by it, from within the academic field of psychology. The entire effort is made step by step and it starts with some general considerations about what should be and what should be no considered science.

2. The Steps of the Analysis, Its Goals and the Proposed Perspectives

Starting from the above considerations, a significant part of this study is about the general status of the actual epistemological condition of psychology among some other humanistic and social disciplines. Our paper will try to uncover and to clarify some key concepts regarding the whole set of epistemological issues involved in the scientific research process from within the domain of psychology. In order to do this our survey will follow a clear and coherent path. Thus, firstly we will make a brief set of general considerations regarding the general epistemological condition of the human sciences. This preliminary effort will be brief and we will not enter in details regarding some historical perspectives about this specific topic. Secondly, we will also try to see in which measure the human resource involved within the scientific research process from the field of psychology in contemporary Romania is really prepared to develop a relevant and robust scientific effort within their own general field of theoretical interest. Here the analysis will try also to uncover not only the actual status of the human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology but also will try to uncover the general set of causes which led to the actual situation. Thirdly, the study will go further and the next distinct topic will be centred around the idea of improving the actual professional quality of the human resource which claim that is doing scientific research in psychology today in Romania. Here the main focus will indicate some concrete modes in which the quality of this human resource could be indeed improved and could be in the end made it capable to deliver real science. In the end a special attention will be given to the sensitive topic regarding *the limits* of an authentic scientific effort in the field of psychology but also in the general field of social and humanistic sciences. Together with this topic will be also briefly approached the ethical issue involved in any scientific research project in general. And the whole

picture will be completed with a general comparison between the way in which was functioning the scientific research in the field of psychology in Romania before the transition to the status of an EU member country and the way in which this system is functioning today.

The problem of training the human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology is in our view a crucial one not only because this issue directly affects the quality and also directly could determine the relevance of the scientific research results but also because it could also have an impact upon the credibility of psychology as a science. And for a claimed authentic scientific domain the issue of credibility is fundamental not only for the researchers which are involved in that domain but also for the way in which is build and maintained a positive public perception regarding that field of knowledge in its academic frame.

3. Science, Scientific Standards, Scientific Research and the Concept of Science in Modern Thought

From its very beginning the scientific effort was build upon some key features which had become in time the major set of relevant characteristics in European epistemological thinking regarding the concept of *scientific truth.* For psychology and other humanistic disciplines this set of relevant epistemological characteristics was build around the concept of *positivist science* with all that this fact could imply (Jovanović, G., 2022). Without entering here in too many epistemological details we could summarize the concept of scientific truth by indicating some of its core features. Thus, in order to construct and finally to have a scientific valid truth the entire process through which the scientific research is developed must to fulfil some fundamental ad mandatory conditions. Firstly, the terms that are used within the scientific research effort must be all clear, unambiguous and they must have the same sense for all individuals. This first step, the problem regarding the clarity of terms which are being used within a scientific research process is fundamental because only if all terms are clearly defined for everyone it could be assured the fact that all the researchers are talking about one and the same thing when they are using one term or another and all of them are referring in only one sense about every single term that they are using during the scientific research process. If this condition is not met then the first risk, among others, will be the apparition of confusion and in the end the whole process could not be scientifically validated.

Secondly, another major and fundamental element which is absolutely needed in order to construct an authentic, robust and credible scientific endeavour is the using of *quantifiable elements* within the whole theoretical frame. This is also a crucial condition but here it is important to mention the fact that quantifiable elements must

be used only if the data which could be obtained from the empirical level are indeed reliable. Otherwise the using of any mathematical apparatus is completely absurd and irrelevant. This observation has a tremendous importance for psychology, especially for the so called *quantitative research*, and the using of any mathematical apparatus, regardless of the way in which the empirical data were obtained, could lead to a solid explanation about the failure of quantitative research itself.

Thirdly, any authentic scientific research effort must be also developed in such manner that it must be able to guarantee the conditions for developing experiments *in highly controlled environment.* If this condition is not met than also the entire scientific research effort could become completely irrelevant from any epistemological point of view.

Another key factor which is absolutely necessary in order to generate and to finally have a solid and authentic scientific effort is represented by the condition of achieving the replication of the results which are obtained by the entire scientific research process. If there is no such a thing as is the feature of replication then there could be no scientific truth. Unfortunately this issue represents a serious problem within the actual process of scientific research in the field of psychology and it is known as the *issue of replication*. And, as already been demonstrated today there are unfortunately more and more studies from the general academic field of humanistic and social sciences which can not be replicated (Resnick, B., 2018). But, we also have to acknowledge the fact that the problem of replication is not limited only to the area of humanistic and social sciences even if in the natural sciences the replication crisis has, at its core level, some different elements to talk about (Vasishth, S., 2017).

There are some others key elements regarding the essential features of any robust and authentic scientific effort. One of these is the feature of *predictability.* This particular element is among the most important of them and it represents something crucial for the concept of *scientific truth* adopted by the general frame of modern science. Without the key element of predictability the entire effort of scientific research would be almost completely absurd because within this hypothetical dark scenario the results of any alleged scientific research project will be completely useless in terms of its practical relevance but also in terms of academic credibility and public trust in science.

Finally, another essential element which is absolutely necessary in order to have a proper, authentic and credible scientific research project is the key factor of *testability*. If this crucial element is absent then it could not be any possibility to verify, from various points of views, the essential features of the scientific research results.

All the above-described conditions are fundamental for modern sciences but beyond this picture we must also have in mind the fact that contemporary science is going through a complex and continuous process of globalization and this process has a profound and deep impact especially upon humanistic and social sciences (Renn, J.

and Hyman, M. D., 2012). Thus, this is another major element which must be taken into consideration when the goal is to obtain real scientific results, particularly in the field of humanistic sciences, because their scientific truth must be also *universal*, like is the scientific truth from the natural sciences. Thus, for example, any empirical and quantitative research from the field of psychology must produce the same scientific truth regardless of the location in which the research was developed.

To summarize this essential frame, which is fundamental for the concept of truth in modern science, we can add here some final remarks. Firstly, we must be aware of the fact that these features are representing the nucleus of the epistemological frame of modern science. Secondly, these features could be, of course, adapted to any particular epistemological context, depending on the domain and on the method which is used in order to fully develop a scientific effort. And, thirdly, even if these elements are accepted as crucial for any modern scientific endeavour this does not mean that these elements are above any further epistemological discussion. By the contrary, these elements are yet open to epistemological debates and, at least in some cases, these debates are very complicated and with no end in sight. And this situation is crucial for psychology too not only for the general set of humanistic and social sciences as a whole. Regarding psychology it is also important within this context to remember the fact that today its epistemological status had become more fragile than ever before and the entire professional community seem to be fully aware about this fact as long as this could have a direct impact upon the credibility and the scientific relevance of psychology after all (Ferguson, C.J., 2015).

4. The Actual Status of the Romanian System of Scientific Research in the Field of Psychology and the Impact of General Transition to the EU Country Member Status upon It

From this point our study goes further and tries to uncover the actual situation in Romania regarding the status of human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology. The entire effort will be developed by permanently having in mind the *real needs* that must to be fulfilled by the human resource from this field. In other terms, the whole situation will be evaluated not only by describing the actual status of the human resource from scientific research in psychology from contemporary Romania, and here we will focus especially upon the quality level of epistemological training for this human resource, but also by having in mind the real demands that must by fulfilled by any type of human resource which could ever claim to be capable of doing real, profound, relevant and authentic scientific research.

Regarding now about the actual status of human resource from the field of scientific research in Romania, and especially about the human resource from the

general domain of psychology, the whole situation could be briefly described as it follows bellow.

Thus, the general training in *epistemology* but also in the vast and complex theoretical domain of *methodological training* about how a credible scientific research activity should be made, for the vast majority of the psychologists, which are not only professionals in their field but also are making scientific research, is assured through their academic route. Thus, they are indeed formally prepared in the field of epistemology and they are indeed formally customized with the whole process of using various and different methods during the entire process of scientific research but, however, some things must said about this general situation. And this issue is a major one because the problem of methodological approach in scientific research from the field of psychology is crucial and it could directly affect the results of the research effort after all (Ray, W.J., 2025).

Firstly, this formal training is done during their academic general training *but their knowledge in the field of epistemology is just a general one* and in many cases this may not be enough in order to make a serious and credible scientific research activity. Even worse, this general training in epistemology is not delivered to them, in the vast majority of situations, by authentic professionals in the field but by their colleagues from different departments of psychology which are embedded to the general structures of faculties. We consider that this is a topic upon which is absolutely necessary to insist because the level of training in epistemology could have a direct impact upon the quality of the scientific research effort. Thus, we think that the fact of not having a proper training in epistemology has, as a first consequence, the inability to understand some crucial and fundamental details regarding some key elements of the *methodological perspectives* which are present within the research process but also the inability to see and to deeply understand details about the way in which the interpretation of the results are made regarding the entire research effort. Due to our knowledge this very specific and sensitive topic was not approached until now in Romania. And the situation described above could be verified very easy by everybody because it will be easy to see that the number of trained professionals in the academic field of epistemology is indeed very small in every department of psychology from contemporary Romanian academic system.

Secondly, by having only a general training in epistemology is also making difficult for the psychologists to fully understand the whole set of implications regarding their research effort when it comes to issues which are directly linked to *logic* or *mathematics* as distinct and relevant disciplines from an epistemological point of view. And is absolutely imperative for any researcher, regardless of his or her academic field of interest, to have a solid background in logic and mathematics because any form of quantitative research implies, sooner or later and in one way or in another both of these two fundamental disciplines. To put a temporary end to these

considerations we add here the observation that if you do not have real professionals in the field of academic research then the chances to promote, deliberately or not, questionable research practices will increase. And from this point on there could be only another small step until the risk of having the unethical phenomenon such is the data falsification. Some relevant authors have developed extensive and credible research about this academic phenomenon in which the ethical rules of scientific research are being so massively violated (Fanelli, D., 2009).

We consider that the general picture described above regarding the current situation of the human resource from the field of Romanian scientific research in the academic domain of psychology had and still has some significant consequences upon the general quality of research. And in this particular context, when it comes to Romanian psychology, there were already some authors which have pointed out the precarious scientific results obtained in the last few years by Romanian psychologists (David, D. 2016). Even if these authors have not explicitly established a direct link between the relatively poor level of epistemological training and the poor quality of the results that these researchers have for us this link exists and, at least to some point, it could be demonstrated. And the poor results that Romanian researchers have in the field of psychology are more intriguing if it is to compare the actual general status of Romanian psychology with its highly honourable past. Unfortunately, today there are no Romanian great authors in psychology and those few of them which have indeed some international visibility could not be compared with the great Romanian authors in this academic domain from the past. It remains to be seen which will be the historical course of Romanian psychology at short but also at long term. However, what is sure for now is the fact that if the actual general status will not be changed for the better then the improvement will not be possible.

As an intermediary conclusion regarding the general topic of our study we can summarize the whole effort as it follows. Firstly, today, in Romania, a significant proportion from the human resource which is directly involved in the process of scientific research in psychology should be further trained in epistemology, in logic and mathematics. As long as their training is limited to what they learned during the period of academic general training and as long as this training is not offered to them, generally speaking, by real specialists in epistemology, logic and mathematics, we can not talk about an authentic training at all. This is true due to the simple fact that a psychologist is just a psychologist and it could never claim that is more than this. He is not trained today in Romania in a proper manner in scientific research methodology and we think that this could even a global problem.

Secondly, another major issue is the ethical one but this should not be considered and should not be limited only to the way in which a research project is developed. By the contrary, in our view, the first significant ethical step that a researcher in psychology should adopt, especially in relation to itself, is to be fully

aware about his limitations in training and the lack of expertise in logic or mathematics and to accept the fact that in order to achieve some significant scientific results he must learn, at a consistent level, some major theoretical elements from other fields, from epistemology, from logic and from mathematics. And also to accept the fact that he can properly be trained and learned about these things only if he is doing this with professionals in those theoretical fields.

Thirdly, a significant word must have the political and administrative approach because the academic system could not solve the issue of human resource quality from the field of scientific research only by itself. The whole transition process from the the status of a communist country to that of a free EU member country should be reconsidered and the basic idea which should be adopted is *the concept of professionalizing the scientific research in terms of professionalizing the epistemological training of researchers.*

5. The Academic and Administrative Perspectives about the Transition to An Open Scientific System and what Should Be Done Next

The actual status regarding the training of Romanian human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology requires, of course, a distinct and elaborate effort not only to improve its level of training regarding some epistemological issues but also in order to further develop its possibilities to be integrated within the international academic world in terms of scientific research but also regarding the ways in which should be published the results of the scientific effort. Due to our knowledge there are no significant studies in Romania about the distinct topic of training the human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology. An authentic training in this domain is absolutely necessary in order to obtain a highly trained scientific staff capable of doing real science. In our perspective, in order to improve the quality of this resource and in order to increase the chances of having a more number of Romanian authors published in high quality international journals it should be implemented a list of specific steps and actions. These steps should be made at an academic level but also some of them should be implemented through some administrative tools.

Thus, a first step that should be made in order to have a better prepared human resource in the field of scientific research from psychology is to have a better quality of training in scientific research. This goal means, among some other things, that the specific training in epistemological issues should be made by *professionals* which are trained themselves to do just this. In other terms, the methodological and epistemological training for the Romanian researchers in general should not be implemented only within the faculties of psychology and not only by individuals

which have a background and basic training only and only as psychologists. When you want to be truly prepared to be capable of making an authentic scientific research effort then your training should be made by authentic specialists like logicians, mathematicians, or those professionals from the field of epistemology.

A possible second step which also should be made in order to create a better human resource in Romania in the field of scientific research in psychology *is to build an institutional frame* able to extend the period of training and to offer, if needed, a continuous effort in this direction. It is simply not enough to limit the training in epistemology only to the period in which psychologists are obtaining their basic training in their own academic domain.

Another step that could be also made is to try to obtain a better training in terms of *ethical training* that is needed in order to implement a credible scientific research effort and process. This very distinct topic should not be limited to the process of training the researchers how to avoid any form of moral or epistemological mistake during their scientific research effort but must include a *moral dimension regarding the obligation of accepting the limits of the scientific effort in the field of humanistic sciences in general*.

In our view the issue of having a better prepared human resource in the field of scientific research is a general one and it is not limited only to the field of psychology. For all the measures which could be implemented it is needed at least a dual approach.

Firstly, we need to have a credible *openness* from the academic institutions in order to recognize the fact that there is indeed a problem with the way in which the actual Romanian human resource from the field of scientific research in general is build and operates. Starting from this point on the academic institutions should develop at their level strategies and forms through which the level of training the researchers in epistemological issues could be later increased. As direct steps we can mention here some of them. Thus, the academic institutions should be fully aware of the fact that any scientific domain must be developed only with authentic professionals and just because of this fact the academic institutions should provide a credible frame in which the epistemological training for researchers should be made only by professionals with extended training in logic or mathematics for example. This is crucial because through epistemological training could also be assured the logical training but also the mathematical one. Due to our knowledge within the actual Romanian academic system in general the basic training in using methodological tools in order to make scientific research are not delivered by specialists in epistemology but by some other members of the academic staff which, in the vast majority of the cases, do not have o proper training and background in epistemology or in history of sciences in general.

Secondly, the entire process of peer-review filter must be in our view almost completely changed. We do not say that all things here are now wrong but our

suggestion is that is here is needed a special attention upon the *final filters* before a claimed scientific material is accepted to be published. This is especially true about the psychological research because in many situations there is the risk of confusion between the using of some mathematical tools regarding the level of observational research and a real and authentic scientific effort. The trend of the so called quantitative research in contemporary psychology has generated until now too much failure, here, of course, we can include the *replication crisis*, and in order to further demonstrate this it is relevant to have us remember the whole spectrum of mistakes which could occur from using mathematical tools in psychology`s quantitative research and not only the replication crisis itself. At this point we only want to add one thing. Thus, it would be desirable that the peer-review process regarding the materials from any form of psychological theoretical research to be implemented by real specialists in scientific methods together, of course, with their colleagues, the psychologists.

Thirdly, we also consider that the entire frame through which today is made scientific research in Romania, and especially the one from within psychology`s academic field, should be modified in a very consistent manner. Of course, this will be possible only through a consistent political will because in this case will be needed significant changes in regulations and laws in such manner that in the end the quality of scientific research, and that from psychology in particular, could be indeed increased. In order to be more specific here we can give an example. Thus, in our view, a private organization such is today in Romania the College of Psychologists should not have the right to decide in some cases regarding the quality of some scientific gatherings, i.e. conferences, workshops, as long as these manifestations are being organized by academic institutions, like universities.

Beside these three major lines of possible future approach designed, in our view, to improve and to increase the general quality of the human resource from the field of scientific research in psychology there could be, of course, some others but these three are fundamental for the future evolution of scientific research in psychology in Romania.

6. Future Perspectives in Scientific Research from the Field of Psychology in Romania

In the end of our endeavour, we will be brief and our last remarks will be limited only to draw a short picture about the future possibilities of evolution regarding the actual scientific research in the field of psychology in Romania.

What it is very clear at this particular point is the fact that now we have the need of adapting and changing the actual frames through is researchers are trained in Romania in the academic field of psychology. If there will be no changes at all then it is only a matter of time before the public trust and even the trust of the researcher`s

community itself will be shattered. And if this will ever happen then the psychology as a distinct academic domain will be at risk to disappear.

A second possible line of evolution is the one through the psychology`s academic field of scientific research from the actual Romania will made indeed changes in order to obtain to improve itself. In this case the international visibility of the Romanian researchers from the domain of psychology will have a chance to be increased but, however, even in this positive virtual trend the basic epistemological issues regarding the general scientific research in psychology will remain. This mean that even in this second possible line of evolution the Romanian researchers from the field of psychology will have to accept the crisis through which is undergoing now psychology in general even if some authors have doubts about this reality (Palmer, K.M., 2016).

In the end we add just a final observation made some time ago by one of the most respected actual Romanian psychologists. The remark underlines the fact that among contemporary Romanian psychologists there are no authors focused on creating new concepts or new theoretical perspectives in psychology (David, 2015). It seems, we can add, that indeed the whole scientific effort the actual Romanian psychology is unfortunately reduced to the form of so-called quantitative research with all its limitations and biases. But psychologists must never forget the close relation between psychology and philosophy and must recognize the full potential in terms of theoretical creation, that could appear from this act of recognition (Wendt, A.N., 2025).

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The Principles of Alterity and Creativity in Political Discourse in the Republic of Moldova in the Context of the Transition to Democratic Communication

Aliona ZGARDAN-CRUDU

"Ion Creangă" State Pedagogical University of Chișinău

Abstract. *The article analyses the principles of alterity and creativity as fundamental dimensions of political discourse in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the transition from communication characteristic of the Soviet system to democratic communication based on pluralism, diversity of opinions, and public dialogue. The study examines the ways in which relating to the* Other *and making use of creativity contribute to the recognition and acceptance of differences, respect for the plurality of opinions and perspectives, and the enhancement of the effectiveness of political communication. From a theoretical perspective, the study examines the meanings of alterity and creativity, including from the perspective of Eugeniu Coșeriu's conception of these two dimensions of language and communication. The analysis demonstrates that respect for alterity entails recognising social, cultural, and political diversity and avoiding stereotypes, exclusion, and polarising rhetoric, while discursive creativity promotes originality, expressiveness, accessibility, and the persuasive power of political messages. At the same time, the study examines forms of distortion of the two principles, such as discrimination, the manipulation of identities, stereotyping, the excessive use of clichés, and the use of linguistic forms that do not conform to the established norm. The study emphasises the need for responsible, inclusive, and creative political discourse grounded simultaneously in respect for alterity, freedom of expression, and linguistic responsibility.*

Keywords: alterity, creativity, political discourse, democratic communication, political pluralism, public discourse, linguistic norm.

1. Introduction

The political and social transformations that took place in the Republic of Moldova following the dissolution of the Soviet Union significantly altered the organization of public life and the practices of political communication. The transition

from the Soviet system, based on an ideological monopoly, univocal discourse and restrictions on pluralism, to a system founded on political pluralism and discursive competition fostered the emergence of new forms of expression and representation of social reality. In this context, political discourse becomes a space for the negotiation of identities, the definition of the relationship between *us* and *the others*, and the confrontation of divergent interpretations of reality. Its analysis reveals tensions between the values of democratic communication and discursive practices based on the exclusion, homogenization or delegitimization of alterity. At the same time, discursive creativity may function both as a resource for expressiveness and persuasion and as an instrument of manipulation. The study aims to examine the ways in which the principles of alterity and creativity are reflected or violated in the political discourse of the Republic of Moldova during the transition to political pluralism.

2. Defining the concepts

In order to understand how the relationship between *us* and *the others* is constructed and negotiated in political discourse, it is first necessary to define the concept of alterity and identify its principal meanings.

Alterity refers to the concept of the "Other" or of "difference" and is important for understanding identity and interpersonal relationships. In philosophy, alterity denotes existence viewed from a perspective different from itself, highlighting the transition of an entity from one state to another. Alterity therefore concerns the perception and understanding of the *Other*, that is, of persons or groups who differ from ourselves in terms of culture, religion, ethnicity or other distinctive characteristics. It is a central concept in intercultural studies and communication because it facilitates an understanding of human diversity and promotes tolerance and mutual respect. "Alterity, as a form of knowledge and relationship, resembles a lens that captures details, real or imagined, and subsequently focuses them in the form of a beam of observations projected onto a particular screen, thereby bringing about attitudinal and affective-behavioural changes in observers, as well as desired positive changes in the way they observe, understand and act" (Alexandrache, 2011).

Eugeniu Coșeriu addressed the concept of "alterity" within the framework of his integral theory of language, highlighting the importance of the relationship with the *Other* in the process of communication and in the formation of language. In this regard, it should be noted that alterity is a highly significant phenomenon for achieving effective, constructive, empathetic and persuasive communication in any field and situation. Indeed, through their relationship with the *Other*, individuals and communities define and consolidate their own identities. E. Coșeriu states, with reference to alterity, that "Language belongs to the individual and, at the same time,

to the community of which he or she is a member, presenting itself within the individual as alterity, as something that also belongs to others [...]" (Coșeriu, 1999, pp. 12-13). Thus, alterity presupposes that language belongs to all its speakers; consequently, when we communicate verbally, we use linguistic elements that are familiar to all speakers of that particular language. The fact that we construct our messages by using words known to all speakers of Romanian, arranged syntactically in a particular order and in accordance with the lexical and grammatical specificities of our language, illustrates the alterity of language; the variety of utterances constructed and used in the communicative process, in terms of the lexical elements employed and the ways in which they are combined, substantiates the claim that language has two dimensions that are simultaneously manifested in the process of communication: alterity and creativity.

According to Constantin Dehelean, "to reveal yourself to the world means preparing your own identity for the acceptance of alterity" (Dehelean, 2018). This entails recognizing, becoming aware of and accepting one's own identity, as well as the identity of every person within society, within the group in which one works, and within the communities to which one belongs, while bearing in mind that every individual is unique in his or her own way, shares certain similarities with others, but also possesses numerous differences that must be recognized and accepted, since self-awareness is formed through the perception that each of us is different from and unlike the *Other*.

The recognition and acceptance of differences contribute to reducing prejudice and stereotypes, thereby facilitating the development and maintenance of harmonious relationships among diverse individuals and social groups.

Alterity teaches us that the world is not merely mine or ours; it also belongs to others. Therefore, we must demonstrate openness and flexibility towards variety and linguistic, religious and cultural diversity, among other forms of diversity.

We emphasize that relating to the *Other* takes multiple forms of interaction, which, in turn, determine several types of alterity, manifested both within the structure of "interiority" and in the sphere of "exteriority." For this reason, alterity is generally examined along several dimensions (Ciobanu, 2008), resulting in a "typology" of the forms in which it manifests itself, determined by the economic and socio-political context (fundamental alterity) and by psychological structure (the global alterity of the human being, whereby an individual, upon losing his or her inner emotional balance, "becomes another being") (Enăchescu, 2003, pp. 28, 43). By recognizing alterity as a fundamental dimension of social life, underlying harmonious coexistence among people, it becomes necessary to highlight its following values and meanings: *alterity contributes to the enrichment of knowledge and experience*, as interaction with diverse perspectives and practices provides opportunities for learning and personal development, stimulating creativity and innovation; *alterity contributes to the prevention*

of conflicts and discrimination, since, in multicultural societies, understanding and accepting differences reduces the risk of social tensions and fosters community cohesion.

In this context, it is important to become aware of the filters that obscure the image of the *Other* and to demystify ethnocultural, political and social stereotypes. Alterity thus serves as a foundation for developing intercultural competences and for building communication based on respect for difference. In an increasingly globalized world, the ability to interact effectively with people from diverse cultural, political, religious and social backgrounds is becoming ever more important, while recognition of alterity constitutes one of the essential prerequisites for such competence. In communication, relating to the *Other* entails moving beyond a perspective exclusively centered on one's own values and experiences and demonstrating a willingness to understand and incorporate different points of view. This perspective becomes all the more relevant in democratic communication, where the plurality of voices, respect for diversity and recognition of the right to express an opinion constitute essential conditions for authentic dialogue. In political discourse, therefore, the principle of alterity entails not only recognizing the existence of the *Other*, but also respecting the *Other* as a legitimate participant in public life, even when his or her opinions, values or choices differ from those of the speaker.

Throughout the entire course of life, from childhood to old age, the individual remains continuously engaged in relationships with the *Other*, within the family, the community and society, while awareness of one's own identity is constructed and affirmed through engagement with alterity and through recognition of the differences between oneself and others (Doinaș, 2002b). In this regard, it should be noted that alterity plays a vital role in building an inclusive and harmonious society in which diversity and variety are valued and respected. In a cultural context, alterity involves recognizing and accepting cultural, social and individual differences, being fundamental to intercultural dialogue and to the construction of collective identity. It represents that distinctive, seemingly dichotomous "back-and-forth" movement that enables one to move from one's own identity towards understanding and accepting the identity of the *Other*.

Ştefan Augustin Doinaş reflects in an original manner on identity and alterity, establishing three levels of alterity: *fundamental alterity* (between the *ego* and any other thing or being), *second-degree alterity* (which places the *self* in opposition to the *Other*), and a *third form of alterity*, which lies between the first two and consists in the difference between the sexes, not merely in biological terms, but also in terms of the body and the spirit (Doinaş, 2002a). In political discourse, it is important to take into account all the dimensions and types of alterity, including these three levels of alterity.

The principle of alterity emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting differences among individuals, whether cultural, social or individual. This

principle is crucial for promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual understanding. Its violation may lead to discrimination, marginalization and a decline in people's self-confidence. Therefore, every individual should be aware of the diversity present in society and in the various environments and communities to which they belong, and should adapt their behavior to the specific characteristics and requirements of the environment in which they live and work, so that everyone around them feels comfortable and does not experience a sense of being misunderstood, ignored, rejected or excluded.

In politics, the principle of alterity emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting diversity and differences among individuals and groups within political processes and governance. It constitutes a fundamental principle for promoting authentic democracy, in which a plurality of opinions and perspectives is valued and incorporated into political decision-making. "Identity and alterity, philosophical categories par excellence, constitute two vital axes around which the polymorphic substance of political discourse is constructed. Political argumentation, emerging as a response to differences of opinion (*ex superficie*) and interests (*ex profundis*) in the political sphere, is dialogical in nature. In order to ensure the effectiveness of political argumentation, it is important to identify the moment that marks the emergence of difference and, consequently, the contours and essence of alterity in the political sphere" (Mihaila, 2018).

The principle of alterity is implemented in politics through a range of actions and activities, which we present below: the promotion of political pluralism, which consists in ensuring a political system that allows multiple political parties and movements to exist and operate freely, thereby reflecting the diversity of citizens' opinions and interests. Political pluralism presupposes certain principles governing the functioning of the political system and political processes within society: dialogue, identification of common ground, tolerance, acceptance of alternatives, etc. (Băbălău, 2014, p. 226); respect for diversity, understood as the development and implementation of public policies that recognize and respect cultural, ethnic, religious and social differences, thereby promoting inclusion and social cohesion; inclusive participation, which involves creating mechanisms that enable all citizens to participate effectively in decision-making processes, regardless of their differences, thus ensuring the representativeness and legitimacy of political decisions.

It follows that respect for the principle of alterity contributes to reducing undesirable phenomena and supports processes that are important for society; for example, it discourages fanaticism and polarization (Neamțu, 2011).

By integrating diversity and promoting dialogue, the principle of alterity strengthens democratic institutions and enhances their legitimacy in the eyes of citizens. Recognizing the differences and specific needs of various social groups makes it possible to develop policies that respond appropriately to these realities, thereby

promoting equity and social justice. Thus, in politics, the principle of alterity is fundamental to building a democratic, inclusive and tolerant society in which diversity is perceived as a valuable resource and differences are respected and constructively integrated into the political process.

In political discourse, therefore, the principle of alterity emphasizes the importance of recognizing and respecting diversity and differences among individuals and groups within political communication. The application of this principle contributes to the creation of inclusive political dialogue and to the promotion of an authentic democracy in which a plurality of opinions and perspectives is valued.

Political discourse that respects the principle of alterity is characterized by the following features: persuasion and argumentation — political discourse is inherently persuasive, as its purpose is to convince the audience of the validity of certain ideas or policies. In this context, respect for alterity entails the use of arguments that take into account the diversity of the audience and the avoidance of fallacies, which may introduce ambiguity or manipulate perceptions (Neamțu, 2011); necessary/controlled ambiguity — at times, political discourse may strategically employ ambiguity in order to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate; avoidance of stereotypes — political discourse that respects the principle of alterity avoids stereotypes and negative generalizations about different social, cultural or ethnic groups, promoting instead an approach based on understanding and mutual respect.

It is important that necessary/controlled ambiguity should not compromise respect for the differences and distinct identities of the groups concerned (Stoica, 2002, p. 16).

At the same time, the principle of alterity ensures the promotion of social cohesion — political discourse that recognizes and respects alterity contributes to strengthening social cohesion by reducing tensions and conflicts within society. This principle also contributes to improving the quality of democracy — by respecting the diversity of opinions and perspectives, political discourse becomes more representative and more responsive to the needs of society as a whole.

In this way, the principle of alterity in political discourse is crucial for ensuring ethical and responsible political communication that reflects the diversity of society and promotes genuine democratic values.

Creativity represents the capacity to generate new ideas and concepts or to establish original associations between existing ones, while also constituting a mental and social process through which the speaker exercises the freedom to construct, in an individual and subjective manner, utterances and texts adapted to their communicative intentions. It is important for education, personal development, and societal progress, contributing to the development of critical thinking and to the ability to approach problems from different perspectives, thereby facilitating their effective resolution (Burcea, 2023). With regard to societal progress, it should be noted that

innovations in science, art, and technology are the result of creativity and have a major impact on cultural and civilizational development. Although creativity is usually associated with the arts, it is important in all areas of life, including science, business, education, and politics. The development and encouragement of creativity can lead to innovative solutions to existing problems in society and contribute to an improved quality of life.

Alongside alterity, creativity constitutes an important dimension of political discourse, as it enables the speaker to draw upon, in an original manner, the diversity of perspectives, opinions, and experiences and to construct forms of expression adapted to the communicative context. In this respect, creativity stands in a dichotomous relationship with alterity, both constituting, in E. Coșeriu's view, two key principles of communication. According to the linguist, the principle of creativity is "common to all cultural activities, that is, to the free activities of human beings" (Coșeriu, 1999, p. 9).

Like alterity, creativity may be regarded as a value and a transdisciplinary competence, since throughout their lives, individuals must not only acknowledge and accept the existence and value of their fellow human beings and express themselves in ways that are similar to those of others, but must also distinguish themselves from others through originality, creativity, and novelty.

It is problematic that speakers in general, and politicians in particular, sometimes misunderstand creativity, regarding it as the freedom to construct or use in communication words, lexical forms, meanings, syntagms, or phraseological expressions that are inappropriate to the Romanian language. Such a phenomenon may have various causes, among which the influence of Russian and English on Romanian is particularly noteworthy in the current context. This influence is manifested, among other things, through the emergence of linguistic calques, many of which do not conform to the norms of the language. In this regard, a diminished interest in the cultural prestige of the language and in cultivating correct forms of expression may adversely affect the quality of public discourse. Therefore, discursive creativity should not be confused with deviation from the linguistic norm, since the freedom to construct an utterance simultaneously entails responsibility toward the language being used and toward the recipient of the communication. Every message must ensure clarity and precision of expression so that the interlocutor can identify the communicative intention unambiguously (*Lexicologia practică a limbii române*, 2013, p. 16).

Understanding creativity as freedom of expression coupled with linguistic responsibility entails identifying appropriate ways of stimulating it, which foster originality, diversity of perspectives, and the clear and relevant expression of ideas.

The most widely recognized methods for stimulating creativity are the following: encouraging exploration, by providing opportunities to experiment with and explore new ideas without fear of failure; creating a conducive environment – that

is, an environment that supports free expression, where originality can stimulate creative thinking; developing divergent thinking — this involves encouraging the generation of multiple solutions to a problem rather than a single one; stimulating curiosity — this means that encouraging questions and the desire to learn new things can lead to creative ideas.

The application of these methods for stimulating creativity also entails taking into consideration a series of fundamental principles that define the manifestation and development of creative thinking. Thus, in order to understand and stimulate creativity, several fundamental principles have been identified, which are defined below.

Originality is the ability to produce unique and innovative ideas that differ from existing ones. Flexibility of thinking represents the ability to approach a problem from multiple perspectives and to adapt problem-solving strategies according to the context. Fluency of ideas is the ability to generate a large number of ideas within a short period of time, thereby increasing the likelihood of finding effective solutions to identified problems. Curiosity consists in the constant desire to explore, ask questions, and seek deeper meanings. Openness to new experiences lies in the willingness to accept and incorporate diverse experiences and information that may lead to innovative perspectives. Tolerance of ambiguity represents the ability to manage unclear or uncertain situations while remaining open to multiple interpretations and solutions, without prematurely resorting to conventional answers. Perseverance helps sustain creative effort in the face of obstacles and failures, viewing them as opportunities for learning and development. Autonomy means independence in thought and action, enabling individuals to move beyond conventions and explore unconventional ideas. Last but not least, social interaction is achieved through collaboration and the exchange of ideas with others, which may lead to the development of creative synergies.

3. Application of the Principles

The application of these principles in the professional environment, in everyday life, and in political discourse can facilitate the development of creativity and may lead to the identification of innovative solutions to existing problems in these areas.

In political discourse, the principle of creativity refers to the innovative and original use of language and communication strategies to capture the audience's attention, convey complex messages, and influence public opinion. In this context, creativity involves developing new forms of expression, adapting messages to diverse audiences, and making effective use of rhetoric in order to construct persuasive, honest, and objective arguments.

In political discourse, creativity is frequently manifested through innovative metaphors and symbols — politicians often use original metaphors and symbols to simplify complex concepts and establish emotional connections with their audiences. For example, in the field of political terminology, linguistic creativity is reflected in the names given to military operations. This claim is supported by such metaphorical designations as *the theatre of military operations*; *Operation Desert Storm* (the designation suggests a rapid and devastating action in a desert environment, reflecting the military campaign conducted by the international coalition during the Gulf War in 1991); *Operation Barbarossa* (the name refers to Emperor Frederick Barbarossa, evoking a campaign of considerable scale and ambition and designating Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941).

On many occasions, politicians creatively construct narratives that resonate with the experiences and values of their audiences, which can make a political message more memorable and convincing. Examples include *Nelson Mandela — The Struggle Against Apartheid* and *Barack Obama — "Yes. We Can."*

Other strategies of creativity involve visual design and political branding — that is, the creation of visually appealing materials, such as posters, logos, and videos, which communicate the identity and messages of a political campaign in a distinctive and memorable manner; as well as innovative rhetoric — the use of unexpected rhetorical structures or wordplay can attract attention and highlight a political message within a crowded media landscape. An example of innovative rhetoric is Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on August 28, 1963, during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In this speech, King employed a range of rhetorical techniques to convey a powerful message of equality and racial justice: anaphora (repetition) - the repeated use of the phrase "I Have a Dream" at the beginning of several sentences created a distinctive rhetorical rhythm, emphasizing the message of the speech and reinforcing Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision of a more equitable society; metaphors and evocative imagery — King portrayed racial segregation as a "chain of slavery" and referred to a "valley of despair," providing powerful visual images that resonated with the audience; biblical and historical allusions — references to the Bible and the Declaration of Independence endowed the speech with moral authority and connected the struggle for civil rights with the fundamental values of the nation; appeal to emotion (pathos) — King evoked profound feelings of hope and determination, mobilizing listeners to join the movement for social justice.

Martin Luther King Jr.'s rhetorical innovation lay in his ability to combine these elements in a manner that not only captivated the audience present at the time but also inspired entire generations in the struggle for equality and justice.

All these ways in which political discourse can manifest itself through the creative use of the resources of language highlight the role of originality and

expressiveness in political communication, as reflected in the following aspects: capturing attention — in an environment saturated with information, creativity helps differentiate a political message and attract the audience's interest; facilitating understanding — creative metaphors and narratives can simplify complex ideas, making them more accessible to citizens; stimulating participation — creative political discourse can inspire and motivate people to become actively involved in democratic processes and public debates; building a positive image — politicians who demonstrate creativity in communication may be perceived as innovative, flexible, and attuned to the needs and aspirations of society.

In applying the principle of creativity, political discourse must remain authentic and ethical, avoiding manipulation and disinformation. Creativity should serve as a tool for promoting constructive dialogue and strengthening trust between political leaders and citizens.

Although alterity and creativity represent important principles of democratic political communication, their application in discursive practice is not always appropriate, as there are situations in which these principles are ignored, distorted, or violated.

The violation of the principle of alterity, that is, the failure to recognize and accept diversity and differences among individuals or groups, can have devastating consequences for social cohesion and interpersonal relationships.

At the social level, the violation of this principle manifests itself through a series of phenomena that affect the right to difference, equality of opportunity, and the full participation of individuals and groups in community life. These include discrimination and social exclusion – failure to respect alterity may lead to unequal treatment of certain individuals or groups based on prejudices related to race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or other characteristics; social conflicts and tensions — ignoring or rejecting cultural and identity-based differences may generate misunderstandings and conflicts between groups, negatively affecting social cohesion. A lack of information about and familiarity with other cultures may give rise to suspicion and reluctance, thereby exacerbating tensions (Popa et al., 2014); violations of fundamental rights — failure to respect alterity may result in violations of human rights by restricting equal access to opportunities and resources; hindering personal and collective development — an environment that does not value diversity limits opportunities for learning and growth, both for individuals and for communities. In order to ensure an inclusive and conducive environment for development, it is important to promote a value-centred ethics in the public sphere (Sandu, 2017).

To prevent violations of the principle of alterity, several measures should be undertaken: education and awareness-raising, consisting in the implementation of educational programmes that promote understanding of and respect for diversity; the implementation of clear institutional policies, consisting in the adoption and firm

enforcement of non-discrimination policies in organizations and institutions; the promotion of intercultural dialogue, through the creation of platforms and opportunities for cultural exchange and open discussions about diversity. Therefore, respecting the principle of alterity is important for building an equitable, inclusive, and harmonious society in which every individual is valued and has the opportunity to contribute to the common good.

To ensure the observance and promotion of the principle of alterity in political discourse, the following measures are recommended: civic education, through the promotion of democratic values and respect for diversity among citizens; the development of legal regulations, through the implementation and enforcement of legislation that sanctions hate speech and discrimination; political accountability — political leaders should adopt inclusive and democratic discourse that promotes social cohesion and mutual respect. All these actions are particularly important for maintaining political discourse that is correct, objective, and decent. Indeed, as previously mentioned, respecting the principle of alterity in political discourse is necessary for a democratic, inclusive, and harmonious society.

The violation of this principle in political discourse is also frequently manifested through the following: discriminatory discourse, which involves the use of language that promotes negative stereotypes or prejudices against certain groups; exclusionary rhetoric — this refers to proposing policies or measures aimed at restricting the rights of minority groups; the manipulation of identities, through the exploitation of cultural or ethnic differences in order to gain political advantages, often by inciting hatred or division.

Evidently, the violation of the principle of alterity in political discourse entails certain consequences. These include, for example, social polarization — as previously mentioned, discourse that fails to respect alterity may lead to increased tensions and social fragmentation. When politicians employ exclusionary rhetoric, the democratic principles of equality and justice are compromised, ultimately resulting in the erosion of democracy. Political discourse that violates the principle of alterity may legitimize intolerant attitudes and behaviours among the population, thereby contributing to an increase in intolerance.

We emphasize the idea that creativity is just as important as alterity. Both are acquired and developed throughout life, and their concrete manifestation in the communication process in general, and in political communication in particular, indicates the possession of communicative competence (Barna, 1995). The following activities are important for the development of creativity: creating a flexible environment that allows for the exploration of new ideas and experimentation with different solutions without fear of failure; encouraging collaboration, by promoting teamwork and the exchange of ideas in order to stimulate collective creativity.

Undoubtedly, respecting and promoting the principle of creativity is relevant to both individual and societal progress, facilitating adaptation to change and the generation of innovative solutions in response to current challenges (Munteanu, 2007).

In political discourse, the violation of the principle of creativity may manifest itself through excessive reliance on stereotypes, clichés, and conventional discursive formulas, which limit originality and diversity of expression and may facilitate manipulation. At the same time, the repetitive use of established rhetorical constructions and strategies may lead to the homogenization of discourse and diminish its capacity to respond adequately to complex social contexts and problems. Discouraging innovative ideas and alternative perspectives limits the flexibility of thought and reduces the potential of political discourse to generate new solutions and interpretations. At the same time, discursive rigidity, manifested through excessive conformity to predetermined formulas and the rejection of unconventional perspectives, may diminish the effectiveness of communication and its capacity to stimulate reflection and public dialogue. Therefore, the violation of the principle of creativity affects not only the expressiveness of political discourse, but also its function of contributing to the diversification of perspectives, the stimulation of public debate, and the adaptation of communication to the dynamics of society.

In political discourse, violations of creativity take the following forms**:** the use of fallacies and errors in reasoning — in order to support their positions, politicians resort to false arguments or flawed reasoning, thereby avoiding authentic and constructive debate and the provision of plausible explanations; lack of originality and repetition of clichés — political speeches may become predictable and devoid of substance when they rely on worn-out expressions and standardized rhetorical formulas without offering new perspectives or innovative solutions; avoidance of responsibility — through ambiguity and generalizations, politicians avoid providing clear answers or proposing concrete solutions, thereby hindering progress and the development of effective policies.

A further issue related to creativity is that speakers often exceed the boundaries of common sense by making excessive use of subjective creativity, ultimately resulting in the misuse of language and violations of linguistic norms, correctness, and established rules. This is how words and lexical forms coined by speakers, occasional meanings, newly created phraseological expressions, and other such formations emerge in language.

With regard to abusive creativity, it should be noted that this phenomenon has currently spread to an absurd extent in communication among many speakers, largely as a result of a lack of interest in language and, implicitly, in general culture. Thus, as previously mentioned, speakers produce words, lexical forms, and phraseological expressions through non-recommended calques, analogies, various forms of awkwardness, transformations, unsuccessful substitutions, and so on, forgetting that

"Speech is a mirror, sometimes a window, of us, of the self, of the person. The person appears not only in the clothes that envelop our body, but also in the words that clothe what we wish to communicate" (Tran & Stănciugelu, 2003, p. 67).

We have no right to generalize with regard to the hollow expression and communication of the majority of Romanian-speaking politicians in the Republic of Moldova; nevertheless, we must acknowledge that, unfortunately, what is abnormal has become the norm in communication. For many speakers in general, and politicians in particular, it has become commonplace to use barbarisms in communication, predominantly borrowed from Russian and English, to coin words and lexical forms, to assign new meanings to existing words, and to alter the form of phraseological expressions according to personal preference and whim, as previously noted.

We are part of the *civilization of the spectacle* (see M. V. Llosa's *The Civilization of the Spectacle*) and are witnessing gratuitous, grotesque *comedies at the gates of the Orient* (see A. Pleșu's *Comedies at the Gates of the Orient*), not only with regard to morality, values, conscience, good manners, behaviour, culture, and art, but also-and we state this with deep regret-with regard to language. This statement needs to be taken into consideration in communication practice, which requires not only adherence to the principles outlined above, but also continuous reflection on one's own preparation for communication as an indispensable activity of human life, carried out throughout one's entire existence, as well as on the level of general education required for the exercise of professional competences in a particular field.

These observations and statements are also applicable, unfortunately, to political discourse. Moreover, excessive creativity that does not conform to the norms of the standard literary language gives rise to misunderstandings and confusion in communication.

In the context of political communication, the inappropriate use of the Romanian language, through the use of lexical forms and expressions that do not conform to linguistic norms, improper syntactic constructions, barbarisms, or calques, may affect the clarity and persuasive force of the message, as well as the credibility of the speaker. In the case of individuals holding public office, responsibility for the quality of their language is all the more important, as their discourse may serve as a reference point for communication practices within society. Compliance with the norms of standard Romanian should therefore be regarded not merely as a linguistic requirement, but also as a form of responsibility toward the interlocutor and toward the public sphere. At the same time, recognition of linguistic and cultural diversity does not imply the unconditional acceptance of deviations from linguistic norms, but rather the productive valorisation of such diversity within the limits imposed by the functionality and identity of the Romanian language.

To promote and stimulate creativity in political discourse, the following measures are recommended: encouraging authentic debate by fostering a political

environment in which new ideas and innovative solutions are valued and openly discussed; promoting transparency and accountability through the use of clear language that reflects a commitment to addressing the real problems facing society; and providing education for critical thinking by developing politicians' and the public's capacity for critical thought and their appreciation of creativity in the decision-making process.

4. Conclusion

Thus, adherence to the principles of alterity and creativity in political discourse represents an important desideratum in contemporary society, both for the development of effective public policies and for the consolidation of democracy through the active and informed participation of citizens. Politicians' lack of knowledge, neglect, or disregard for these principles of communication in political discourse may result in the distortion of the message, its being misunderstood by listeners, or even an erosion of trust and sympathy toward speakers and toward the discourse they disseminate in various social and political activities.

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Political Language in Times of Transition: Discourse, Agency and Responsibility in the European Union

Gheorghe FALCĂ

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania
Member of the European Parliament

Abstract. *The European Union is undergoing simultaneous geopolitical, technological, economic and social transformations that are changing both political priorities and the language through which they are communicated. In periods of uncertainty, political discourse does more than describe change: it interprets events, constructs collective meanings, mediates between institutions and citizens, and seeks to mobilise political action. This article examines political language as a form of agency in the European Union, paying particular attention to the position of political representatives operating between national and supranational public spheres. Drawing on Critical Discourse Analysis and the Discourse-Historical Approach, it analyses selected European political discourse from 2025-2026 concerning security, enlargement, competitiveness, technological change and democratic resilience. The analysis identifies four interconnected functions of political discourse: interpretation, mediation, agency and responsibility. It argues that the capacity of political representatives to frame social transformation constitutes a form of political power, but that democratic legitimacy transforms communicative capacity into responsibility. In an increasingly fragmented and technologically mediated information environment, responsible discursive agency therefore becomes an important dimension of democratic political leadership.*

Keywords: political discourse; social transformation; European Union; political agency; responsibility; Critical Discourse Analysis; political communication

1. Introduction: Political Language in a Europe of Transitions

The European Union is experiencing several forms of transition simultaneously. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has altered assumptions about European security and defence. Global economic competition and technological change have intensified debates about productivity, industrial capacity and Europe's ability to maintain its economic model. Artificial intelligence is transforming economic activity

and communication, while digital platforms have changed the conditions under which political information is produced, distributed and consumed. Enlargement has returned to the centre of European politics, particularly in relation to Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans. At the same time, European democracies face disinformation, political polarisation and declining trust in institutions.

These developments are frequently examined as separate policy challenges. Yet they share an important communicative dimension. Before political institutions can respond to transformation, change must be named, interpreted and made politically intelligible. Whether a development is described as a threat, an opportunity, a crisis or a strategic priority is not linguistically neutral. Political actors select particular descriptions of reality, connect events to broader narratives and formulate interpretations of what should happen next.

Political discourse therefore does not merely follow political transformation. It participates in the social process through which transformation acquires meaning. Critical Discourse Analysis has long emphasised the relationship between discourse, social structures and power (Fairclough, 1992; 1995; van Dijk, 1997). The Discourse-Historical Approach similarly examines political discourse within the historical and institutional contexts through which particular representations become meaningful and legitimate (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009; Wodak, 2015).

This perspective is particularly relevant to the European Union. EU political communication takes place within a multilevel, multinational and multilingual political system. European political representatives communicate not only within institutional structures in Brussels and Strasbourg but also within national political systems and local constituencies. Political language consequently travels between political arenas.

The position of a Member of the European Parliament illustrates this process particularly clearly. An MEP participates in European legislative and political processes while remaining directly elected and politically connected to a national electorate. The representative must therefore communicate European decisions to national audiences while also articulating national and local concerns within a European institutional vocabulary. This article conceptualises this function as discursive mediation.

The communicative role of political representatives has acquired additional significance because the information environment itself is changing. Social media platforms have accelerated political communication and expanded opportunities for direct interaction between politicians and citizens. At the same time, algorithmic amplification, coordinated disinformation and artificial intelligence have complicated distinctions between authentic and manipulated content. The European Democracy Shield, adopted as a Joint Communication in November 2025, reflects the growing institutional recognition that the integrity of the information environment has itself

become a question of democratic resilience (European Commission and High Representative, 2025).

Political influence must therefore be examined together with political responsibility. Democratic politics necessarily involves persuasion. Political representatives are elected to defend positions, represent interests, establish priorities and persuade others. The relevant distinction is consequently not between influence and neutrality. Rather, it is between forms of persuasion compatible with informed democratic judgement and communicative practices that deliberately impair citizens' ability to evaluate political claims.

Against this background, the article asks:

> ***How does political discourse operate as a form of agency during periods of social transformation in the European Union, and how does the capacity to influence political interpretation create corresponding responsibilities for democratic political actors?***

The article proposes four interconnected dimensions through which this relationship can be analysed: **interpretation, mediation, agency and responsibility**.

Interpretation concerns the process through which political actors give meaning to transformation. Mediation describes the movement and reformulation of political meaning between institutional, national and public spheres. Agency concerns the capacity of discourse to contribute to agenda-setting, coalition-building, legitimisation and collective action. Responsibility concerns the democratic obligations generated by the capacity to influence how political reality is understood.

The article develops the concept of responsible discursive agency to capture the relationship among these dimensions. Responsible discursive agency refers to the capacity of political representatives to interpret transformation, mediate between political spheres and advocate collective action while remaining accountable for the informational and democratic consequences of their communicative choices.

The argument does not assume that political language independently produces social transformation. Wars, economic structures, technologies, institutions and material interests cannot be reduced to discourse. The claim is narrower: political language contributes to determining how transformation becomes intelligible, which dimensions acquire urgency, who is attributed responsibility and which responses become politically conceivable.

Periods of transition make this function especially visible. When established assumptions become unstable, political actors acquire greater interpretative influence. The language through which uncertainty is explained can facilitate collective agency and democratic deliberation, but it can also intensify fear, polarisation and distrust.

Political language in times of transition should therefore be understood simultaneously as a resource of political action and a field of democratic responsibility.

2. Language, Discourse and Political Power

2.1 Discourse as Social Practice

The theoretical starting point of this article is that political language cannot be treated simply as a neutral vehicle through which pre-existing ideas are communicated. Fairclough (1992) conceptualises discourse as a form of social practice. Language is shaped by social structures and relations of power, but it can also contribute to their reproduction and transformation.

This approach is particularly relevant to political transition because change generates competing interpretations of what is happening, why it is happening and what should follow. The same economic development may be described as modernisation, disruption, decline or opportunity. Enlargement can be framed as solidarity, geopolitical necessity, economic opportunity or institutional risk. Investment in defence can be represented as militarisation or as a condition for preserving peace.

These descriptions do not mechanically determine political outcomes. They nevertheless structure political argument by making certain relationships more visible than others.

Fairclough's (1995) approach connects textual characteristics with processes of production and interpretation and with the broader social practices within which discourse operates. This makes it possible to analyse political communication at several levels: the vocabulary and grammatical structures of a text; the institutional position from which it is produced; and the broader political environment within which particular formulations acquire meaning.

Van Dijk (1997) similarly argues that political discourse must be understood in relation to political actors, institutions, processes and structures. Political language is political partly because of its context: who speaks, in what institutional capacity, to which audience and with what potential consequences.

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power further demonstrates why the effectiveness of political speech cannot be separated from the authority of the speaker. Identical words acquire different significance when uttered by a private individual, a journalist, a government minister or the president of a European institution. Political discourse derives part of its capacity to act from the institutional conditions that authorise and amplify it.

This qualification is important. Political power does not reside in words alone. Language becomes politically consequential through the relationship among speaker, institution, context and audience.

2.2 Language as Action

Speech-act theory offers another way of understanding this relationship. Austin (1962) demonstrated that utterances can perform actions rather than merely describe states of affairs. Parliamentary and political discourse cannot be reduced to classical performative utterances, but the distinction between describing and doing remains useful.

Political language can establish commitments, announce priorities, challenge decisions, articulate demands, legitimise policies and mobilise coalitions. A parliamentary intervention does not automatically become legislation, but it can contribute to a sequence of institutional actions through which an issue acquires political significance.

This helps distinguish discursive agency from a stronger and less defensible claim that political language itself determines social reality. Agency is relational and institutionally situated. Language can create possibilities for political action without guaranteeing their outcome.

2.3 Crisis, Framing and Transformation

Periods of crisis make these dynamics especially visible. Lawrence (2014) argues that crisis should not be understood merely as an objective description of exceptional circumstances. Crisis discourse itself performs political functions by establishing particular interpretations of the status quo and shaping expectations concerning appropriate intervention.

The significance of this observation extends beyond the financial crisis from which Lawrence develops the argument. In contemporary European politics, geopolitical insecurity, economic competition, migration, technological disruption and threats to democratic information environments are frequently articulated through vocabularies of urgency and exceptional pressure.

Recent research continues to demonstrate that the construction of crisis is politically contested. Zubani (2026), for example, shows how political and media actors constructed competing images of the EU as a crisis manager during the COVID-19 pandemic. Similarly, Sojka et al. (2025) demonstrate how Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine contributed to the Europeanisation of national political debates. These studies reinforce the importance of examining not only political responses to external events but also the discursive mechanisms through which events become interpreted as European problems.

Strategic narrative scholarship provides an additional perspective. Gellwitzki and Houde (2023) demonstrate how political actors strategically reconstruct narratives of Europe at national level by connecting them with national narratives and collective memory. Political narratives are consequently not only descriptive accounts of European integration. They can become resources through which political choices are justified and made meaningful to particular audiences.

This literature supports the first dimension of the framework developed here: interpretation. Political actors do not create geopolitical or economic realities through discourse, but they participate in constructing the categories through which societies understand them.

3. European Political Representation as Discursive Mediation

3.1 The Multilevel Communicative Environment

The European Union complicates conventional models of political communication because authority and representation operate across several levels simultaneously.

Political representation is not exhausted by the formal transmission of electoral preferences. Michailidou and Trenz (2013) conceptualise European representation as a mediatized communicative relationship involving representatives, constituents and broader audiences. Representatives interpret developments, justify positions and construct communicative relationships between institutions and citizens.

This function is particularly significant because there is no single homogeneous European public sphere. European issues circulate through multiple national media systems, languages and political cultures. Research on Europeanised public spheres has shown that European political actors and issues achieve uneven visibility and are frequently mediated through national political contexts (Grill and Boomgaarden, 2017).

The European Parliament occupies an unusual position within this environment. Its members participate directly in supranational law-making but remain elected through national political systems. Research on MEP communication has demonstrated that representatives employ different strategies of representation and self-representation when communicating with citizens online (Lilleker and Koc-Michalska, 2013).

The MEP can consequently be understood as a discursive mediator.

3.2 Two Directions of Mediation

Discursive mediation operates in two directions.

The first moves from European institutions towards national and local publics. European legislation and institutional negotiations are often technically complex.

Communicating them requires more than reproducing legislative terminology. Political representatives must explain why decisions matter, identify their consequences and connect them with recognisable public concerns.

The second direction moves from local and national experience towards the European institutional sphere. A problem originating in a constituency must frequently be reformulated through European policy concepts before it can become actionable within EU institutions.

A local transport problem, for example, can acquire European political relevance through concepts such as cross-border connectivity, the Trans-European Transport Network, territorial cohesion or military mobility. A national concern about labour shortages can be reformulated through the European language of skills, labour mobility, demographic change or competitiveness.

The representative therefore does not merely carry a fixed message between two levels. Political mediation involves **recontextualization**.

This process can be represented schematically:

> ***European institutions → interpretation and mediation → national and local public spheres and national and local concerns → political articulation and recontextualization → European institutions.***

This two-directional process helps explain why political language matters for representation. A political demand that cannot be expressed in terms recognised within a particular institutional arena may struggle to acquire influence, even when the underlying problem is real.

3.3 Multilingualism and Political Meaning

The multilingual character of European politics adds another layer to this process. Political meaning travels not only between institutional and national contexts but also across languages.

Calzada Pérez (2018), analysing original and translated English in the European Parliament, demonstrates the analytical significance of translation within parliamentary discourse. Translation is therefore not merely an administrative service surrounding European politics. It forms part of the communicative infrastructure through which political meaning circulates across a multilingual political system.

For an MEP, discursive mediation consequently occurs within an environment in which political concepts are repeatedly reformulated across linguistic, institutional and cultural boundaries. Despite formal EU commitments to inclusivity and multilingualism, a significant part of le latter still stand, as S. S. Milancovici notes in her recent study dedicated to these aspects of communication, including structural asymmetries between Western and Eastern member states, cultural stereotyping and

rising nationalism amplified by algorithmic digital platforms that reinforce linguistic and ideological echo chambers. Moreover, marginalized communities often lack institutional representation, reinforcing communicative inequalities. (Milancovici, 168)

Terms such as *security*, *solidarity*, *sovereignty*, *competitiveness* or *cohesion* may have common institutional meanings while simultaneously carrying different historical and political associations within Member States.

The representative's communicative function is therefore not simply to make European terminology linguistically understandable. It is to make European political choices contextually intelligible.

4. Methodology and Corpus

This study employs qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis, supplemented by elements of the Discourse-Historical Approach, to examine how contemporary European political language constructs transformation.

The methodology is appropriate because the research question concerns both textual characteristics and the institutional context in which political discourse acquires authority. Following Fairclough (1992; 1995), the analysis considers discourse as both text and social practice. The Discourse-Historical Approach complements this framework by examining how political representations are connected to historical narratives, institutional contexts and constructions of social actors and responsibility (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).

The empirical material consists of a purposive corpus of public political texts produced primarily by the presidents of the European Commission, European Parliament and European Council during 2025-2026. These institutional actors were selected because their speeches occupy central positions in European political communication while reflecting different institutional functions.

The corpus includes Ursula von der Leyen's 2025 State of the Union discourse; statements by European Parliament President Roberta Metsola concerning security, competitiveness and European political capacity; speeches and parliamentary reports by European Council President António Costa addressing Ukraine, defence, enlargement and competitiveness; and the 2025 European Democracy Shield Joint Communication.

The corpus is purposive rather than statistically representative. Its purpose is not to quantify all political discourse produced by the European institutions. Instead, texts were selected because they explicitly interpret major contemporary transformations and provide material suitable for close linguistic and contextual analysis.

Three substantive fields structure the empirical analysis:

1. **geopolitical and security transformation**, including Ukraine, defence and enlargement;
2. **economic and technological transformation**, particularly competitiveness and European capacity;
3. **transformation of the democratic information environment**, including disinformation, digital platforms and artificial intelligence.

Within these fields, the analysis examines four discursive functions: **interpretation, mediation, agency and responsibility**.

Attention is paid to lexical choices, modality, collective pronouns, metaphors, repetition, temporal constructions and semantic relationships between policy concepts. Particular attention is given to combinations such as peace-defence, security-prosperity, enlargement-security, competitiveness-sovereignty and democracy-resilience.

The analysis does not seek to evaluate whether the political positions contained in the corpus are substantively correct. Its purpose is to examine how political language constructs relationships among events, actors and possible responses.

The position of the MEP is treated as an institutional case of discursive mediation rather than through analysis of the author's own political texts. This distinction is methodologically important. Practitioner experience informs the research problem, but the empirical evidence is drawn from an external corpus of European political discourse.

5. Discourses of European Transformation

5.1 From Peace as Inheritance to Peace as Agency

One of the most visible changes in contemporary EU political discourse concerns the relationship between peace and defence.

European integration has historically been narrated as a peace project. Contemporary political discourse does not necessarily abandon this narrative. Instead, it increasingly reformulates the means through which peace is to be preserved.

António Costa's statement that "peace without defence is an illusion" provides a particularly clear example (European Council, 2025a). The construction establishes a relationship between two concepts that can otherwise appear politically opposed. Defence is not presented as an alternative to the European peace project; it becomes a condition for sustaining it.

The surrounding discourse strengthens this relationship. Costa states that "Europe's security starts in Ukraine" and subsequently connects security with prosperity. Investing in defence is connected to European industries, technologies and employment (European Council, 2025a).

The linguistic operation is significant. Security, Ukraine, defence, industry and prosperity are not treated as separate policy fields. They become components of a single narrative of European capacity.

This discursive transformation reflects wider changes in European security narratives following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. Sojka et al. (2025) demonstrate that the invasion generated significant vertical Europeanisation of national political debates, reinforcing the extent to which security questions became articulated as European rather than exclusively national concerns.

Metsola's February 2025 discourse uses a comparable structure while relying more heavily on modality and repetition. Her call for "more action, more financing and more cooperation" is accompanied by repeated formulations of what Europe *must* and *needs to* do (European Parliament, 2025a). The modal construction presents security not simply as a policy preference but as an obligation generated by changing circumstances.

This dimension of cooperation can also be interpreted through the lens of security management, understood as the process of coordinating the resources, institutions, and partners involved in responding to shared risks (Daniel, 2024).

Collective pronouns strengthen this construction. Expressions such as *we need*, *our security* and *our responsibility* create a collective European political subject.

This represents the interpretative function of discourse. The speeches do not merely communicate decisions about defence expenditure. They provide an explanation of what defence now means: responsibility, capacity, protection of peace and support for Ukraine.

They simultaneously perform the function of agency. Europe is constructed not simply as an object affected by geopolitical change but as an actor capable of responding to it.

There is nevertheless an important critical dimension. Collective pronouns can rhetorically compress political diversity. "We" may refer simultaneously to institutions, Member States and citizens whose preferences are not identical. Critical discourse analysis therefore requires attention not only to the collective agency created by such formulations but also to the disagreements they can temporarily obscure.

5.2 Enlargement: from Accession Process to Geopolitical Investment

Enlargement provides another example of changing European political language.

In institutional terms, enlargement remains a complex process governed by accession criteria, negotiations, reforms and unanimous political decisions. Yet contemporary discourse increasingly represents enlargement through a geopolitical vocabulary.

Costa repeatedly describes enlargement as a major or the most important "geopolitical investment" in European peace and security (European Council, 2025b).

The metaphor of investment deserves attention. Investment normally belongs to economic discourse. It implies a present commitment made in expectation of future value. Applied to enlargement, the metaphor changes the relationship between the Union and candidate countries. Enlargement is no longer constructed solely as something offered to candidate states. It becomes something the existing Union does in its own strategic interest.

The discourse therefore changes the implicit distribution of benefits. Candidate countries remain beneficiaries of accession, but enlargement itself becomes a resource for European security, stability and geopolitical influence.

This development is consistent with scholarship showing that enlargement discourse constructs political boundaries and conceptions of European membership. Bélanger and Schimmelfennig (2021) demonstrate that enlargement has become increasingly politicised and that parliamentary discourse participates in defining boundaries of European membership.

Contemporary geopolitical language adds another dimension to this process. The question is no longer only *who belongs to Europe?* but increasingly *what does Europe's security require its political boundaries to become?*

Historical narratives reinforce this construction. Previous enlargements can be represented as moments through which democratic transition, prosperity and European integration became mutually reinforcing. Through the Discourse-Historical Approach, such historical references can be understood as argumentative resources through which present policy choices acquire legitimacy (Reisigl and Wodak, 2009).

Enlargement also illustrates discursive mediation particularly clearly. For Member States neighbouring candidate countries, enlargement can simultaneously concern European strategy and immediate national interests. Moldova, Ukraine and the Western Balkans can be discussed through the languages of European security, economic integration, historical experience and national interest.

The role of the representative is not necessarily to choose between these vocabularies but to establish relationships among them.

5.3 Competitiveness, Sovereignty and the Language of Urgency

Economic transformation generates another distinctive vocabulary.

The 2025 State of the Union address described the contemporary period as Europe's "independence moment" and linked defence, technology, energy, economic capacity and democracy to Europe's ability to determine its own future (European Commission, 2025). The formulation constructs independence not as isolation from the world but as the capacity to make choices within it.

This is an important semantic shift. Concepts traditionally associated with political sovereignty increasingly appear within discussions of technology, energy, industrial policy and competitiveness.

Costa similarly links security and prosperity, while Metsola connects investment in security with competitiveness, growth, skilled employment and innovation (European Council, 2025a; European Parliament, 2025a).

These formulations illustrate the growing permeability between economic and security discourse. Economic capacity becomes a precondition for geopolitical agency, while defence expenditure becomes potentially productive economic investment.

Strategic narrative scholarship helps explain this process. Gellwitzki and Houde (2023) show how political actors can reconstruct European narratives in ways that connect policy choices with broader collective stories and moral imperatives. The effectiveness of such narratives depends not only on their factual content but on their ability to situate decisions within an intelligible account of past, present and future.

The language of competitiveness also relies heavily on temporality. Expressions such as *falling behind*, *act faster*, *cannot wait* and *now is the time* construct political action in relation to a narrowing temporal horizon.

Metsola's 2026 statement that Europe has a "narrow window of opportunity" for competitiveness provides a clear example of this temporal construction (European Parliament, 2026). Urgency changes the perceived consequences of inaction: delay itself becomes a political choice with potential costs.

Crisis discourse scholarship suggests why such constructions deserve scrutiny. Lawrence (2014) demonstrates that crisis narratives can shape expectations concerning the legitimacy and necessity of intervention. Urgency can accurately communicate real constraints, but it can also narrow the apparent space of political alternatives.

The democratic distinction is therefore between communicating urgency and manufacturing inevitability.

Political representatives must be capable of explaining genuine constraints. Yet responsible discourse should avoid presenting contestable political choices as if no alternatives exist simply because urgency provides rhetorical advantage.

5.4 Transformation of the Information Environment

The digital transformation differs from the previous cases because it changes both the subject matter and the infrastructure of political communication.

Digital platforms have weakened traditional boundaries among institutional communication, journalism, campaigning and interpersonal exchange. Political representatives can communicate directly with citizens at unprecedented speed and scale. At the same time, the visibility of political communication is increasingly affected by algorithmic systems that neither political representatives nor citizens fully control.

Artificial intelligence further changes this environment by reducing the cost of producing convincing synthetic text, images, audio and video.

The European Democracy Shield identifies the integrity of the information space, foreign information manipulation and interference, media resilience and democratic participation as interconnected concerns (European Commission and High Representative, 2025). The document itself illustrates an important discursive transformation: information is increasingly constructed as part of democratic infrastructure.

This has implications for political agency.

Historically, communicative influence was closely connected to access to established institutions: parliamentary speaking time, newspapers, broadcasting and political parties. Digital platforms have expanded the range of actors capable of reaching large audiences, but they have not eliminated inequalities of influence. Algorithms, coordinated networks, financial resources and platform design create different forms of communicative power.

Political representatives occupy a distinctive position because digital reach can combine with institutional authority. A statement by an elected representative can circulate simultaneously as personal communication, partisan argument, institutional information and journalistic content.

This convergence increases the importance of the fourth dimension of the framework: responsibility.

6. Political Discourse, Representation and Democratic Responsibility

6.1 Influence is Intrinsic to Democratic Representation

Political persuasion is not a democratic defect. Representatives are elected precisely to formulate political positions, defend interests, construct arguments and seek support.

The appropriate normative standard for political communication cannot therefore be neutrality.

The question is instead how political influence is exercised and whether it preserves citizens' capacity to evaluate competing claims.

Bourdieu's (1991) analysis helps explain why this question is particularly important for political representatives. Institutional position gives some speakers greater symbolic authority than others. Access to parliamentary institutions, information, political negotiations and media visibility changes the potential consequences of their speech.

At European level, this authority interacts with the mediating function discussed above. A Member of the European Parliament can move between

institutional arenas and national political debate. A constituency concern can become a parliamentary question, committee intervention, amendment or political-group position. Conversely, an institutional negotiation can be interpreted for national audiences.

Language is one mechanism through which this movement occurs.

Political discourse can therefore exercise agency by defining a problem, connecting it with an institutional arena capable of addressing it and mobilising support for a response.

This is not unlimited power. Individual representatives operate within legal rules, parliamentary majorities, political groups and interinstitutional negotiations. Discursive power is consequently relational rather than absolute.

Nevertheless, constraints do not make discourse politically irrelevant. Political language helps establish which problems receive attention, which coalitions appear possible and how political choices are publicly justified.

6.2 From Influence to Responsibility

The capacity to influence political interpretation creates a corresponding responsibility.

This article proposes the concept of responsible discursive agency to describe that relationship. It refers to the capacity of political actors to interpret transformation, mediate between political spheres and advocate action while remaining accountable for the democratic and informational consequences of their communicative choices.

The concept should not be interpreted as an argument for politically neutral, technocratic or emotionless language. Political communities require narratives, values and disagreement. Strategic narratives are an unavoidable component of political communication, particularly when complex institutional decisions must be connected with public experience (Gellwitzki and Houde, 2023).

The relevant distinction lies between persuasion and manipulation.

Persuasion presents an interpretation and attempts to convince an audience of its validity. Democratic audiences retain the possibility of contesting that interpretation.

Manipulative communication seeks instead to impair the conditions under which judgement occurs, for example through deliberate fabrication, systematic decontextualisation, deceptive amplification or the strategic presentation of uncertain information as established fact.

This distinction becomes especially significant in the contemporary information environment. Digital technologies increase both the speed with which misleading

information can circulate and the difficulty of correcting it once established within fragmented political communities.

Responsible discursive agency can therefore be understood through four requirements.

First, it entails epistemic responsibility. Political actors should distinguish, as far as reasonably possible, between established facts, interpretation, prediction and normative preference. Political leadership often operates under uncertainty, but uncertainty should not automatically be converted into certainty for rhetorical advantage.

Second, it entails contextual responsibility. Factually correct information can nevertheless mislead when deliberately separated from the institutional or historical context necessary for its interpretation. This is particularly relevant in the EU, where political responsibility is distributed among institutions and Member States.

Third, it entails representational responsibility. Political disagreement should not automatically be transformed into claims that political opponents, institutions or groups lack democratic legitimacy. Democratic politics requires contestation; disagreement and delegitimisation are not synonymous.

Fourth, it requires consequential awareness. Political representatives cannot control every subsequent interpretation of their words, particularly within digital platforms. Institutional authority nevertheless creates an obligation to consider the foreseeable consequences of deliberately inflammatory, misleading or unverified claims.

These requirements do not eliminate forceful political argument. They establish conditions under which political influence remains compatible with democratic judgement.

6.3 Complexity without Deceptive Simplicity

Responsibility is particularly important during periods of transition because uncertainty increases public demand for explanation.

Citizens are simultaneously being asked to understand changes in defence, energy, technology, enlargement, competitiveness and democratic communication. These transformations involve genuine uncertainty, competing interests and political costs.

Political discourse performs an essential democratic function when it makes such complexity understandable. Yet explanation always involves selection. No political speech can reproduce the full complexity of a legislative negotiation, geopolitical conflict or economic transformation.

Simplification is therefore unavoidable.

The democratic problem begins when simplification becomes deceptive simplicity: when relevant uncertainty, responsibility or alternatives are intentionally removed in order to construct a politically convenient reality.

EU politics provides particularly fertile conditions for this problem because institutional complexity makes responsibility difficult to communicate. National politicians may attribute unpopular outcomes vaguely to "Brussels" even when national governments participated in their adoption. European institutions may emphasise collective achievements without adequately communicating costs or implementation difficulties.

Responsible mediation therefore requires explaining not only outcomes but also where political responsibility lies.

This is one of the most important implications of the MEP's position as discursive mediator. The representative operates close enough to European decision-making to understand institutional complexity while remaining directly accountable to citizens. That position creates both an opportunity and an obligation to translate complexity without fundamentally distorting it.

6.4 A Four-Dimensional Model of Political Discourse in Transition

The four dimensions proposed in this study should ultimately be understood as interconnected rather than separate.

Interpretation gives transformation political meaning.

Mediation carries and reformulates that meaning across political and institutional contexts.

Agency seeks to transform interpretation into political attention, support and action.

Responsibility concerns the democratic conditions under which that influence is exercised.

Together they provide a framework for understanding political language during periods of European transition.

The contribution of this model is not to suggest that discourse replaces institutional power. Rather, it identifies language as one of the mechanisms through which institutional power becomes politically meaningful.

Policies must be justified. Crises must be interpreted. Interests must be articulated. Compromises must be explained. Political priorities must be established. Collective action must be made intelligible.

The European Union provides a particularly revealing setting because these processes require continuous movement among different institutions, levels of governance, languages and political communities.

The power of political language consequently resides neither in words alone nor exclusively in the institutional authority of the speaker. It emerges from the interaction between language, authority, context and audience.

Recognising that power also requires recognising the responsibility attached to it.

7. Conclusion: Language as an Instrument of Democratic Transformation

Periods of transition intensify the political importance of language. When established assumptions about security, economic development, technology or international order become unstable, political actors are required not only to make decisions but also to explain what is changing, why it matters and what forms of collective action are possible.

The analysis developed in this article has identified four interconnected functions of political discourse: interpretation, mediation, agency and responsibility.

Interpretation gives social transformation political meaning. Contemporary European discourse establishes relationships among developments that might otherwise appear separate: security and Ukraine, defence and peace, competitiveness and sovereignty, enlargement and geopolitical stability, democracy and the integrity of the information environment.

Mediation transfers these interpretations across political contexts. This function is particularly important within the European Union because its political system is simultaneously supranational, national and multilingual. The position of the MEP illustrates this complexity. European policies must be translated into nationally intelligible political narratives, while local and national concerns must be reformulated in terms capable of entering European institutional processes.

Agency concerns the capacity to turn interpretation into political action. Political language can define problems, establish priorities, construct collective identities and mobilise support. The increasing use of vocabularies of responsibility, urgency, security and sovereignty in European political discourse constructs Europe not merely as an object of global transformation but as a political actor capable of responding to it.

The capacity to influence interpretation leads, however, to the fourth and most consequential dimension: responsibility.

Democratic political communication necessarily involves persuasion. The relevant distinction is therefore not between political influence and neutrality but between persuasion compatible with informed democratic judgement and communication that deliberately weakens the conditions under which such judgement can occur.

This article has proposed responsible discursive agency as a way of conceptualising this relationship. Political actors exercise responsible discursive agency when they use their institutional and communicative capacity to interpret transformation, mediate between political spheres and advocate collective action while remaining accountable for the informational and democratic consequences of that influence.

This responsibility becomes increasingly important as the information environment itself changes. Social media, algorithmic amplification, disinformation and artificial intelligence have expanded the capacity to communicate while complicating questions of authenticity, authority and trust. Responsibility therefore cannot be understood only as protection against external manipulation. It must also apply to democratic political actors themselves.

The relationship between language and social transformation is ultimately reciprocal. Transformation changes political language by introducing new concepts, priorities and narratives. Political language, in turn, influences how societies understand transformation and which responses become politically imaginable.

This relationship becomes particularly significant in periods of uncertainty. Societies require political interpretation precisely when they are most vulnerable to oversimplification, polarisation and manipulation.

Political leadership is therefore exercised not only through the decisions political representatives make, but through the language by which societies are invited to understand those decisions and the transformations surrounding them. The democratic power of political discourse lies not simply in its capacity to influence, but in the responsibility with which that influence is exercised.

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Naming Information Threats in Transition: Truth, Intent and Harm in European Institutional Security Discourse, 2017-2026

Cristian BENȚE

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania

Abstract. *The vocabulary used by European institutions to describe harmful and manipulative information has expanded considerably over the past decade. This article examines how information-related threats are defined and differentiated in a purposively selected corpus of nine institutional documents published between 2017 and 2026. Drawing on terminology studies, research on information disorder and security framing, the study applies a qualitative diachronic terminological and discourse analysis centred on five dimensions: truth status, intentionality, harm, agency and coordination, and security framing. The analysis shows that misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, influence operations, foreign interference and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) do not form a simple sequence of replacement. Rather, they coexist while assigning different conceptual weight to the characteristics of the threat. Whereas earlier frameworks foreground falsity, intention and harm, later FIMI-oriented documents increasingly emphasise coordinated behaviour, threat actors, infrastructures and strategic interference. The principal transition therefore lies not in the abandonment of earlier terminology, but in the widening of the institutional object of concern from problematic information content towards organised manipulation of the information environment and its security implications.*

Keywords: disinformation; misinformation; malinformation; FIMI; information threats; European security; institutional discourse

1. Introduction

The vocabulary used to describe harmful or manipulative information has changed considerably over the past decade. Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation have become familiar categories in academic and institutional debate, yet the concepts are not interchangeable. More recent European policy language has

added information influence operations, foreign interference and Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference, usually abbreviated as FIMI. These labels direct attention to different aspects of the information problem, ranging from the accuracy of particular claims and the intention behind their dissemination to the actors, methods and strategic purposes involved in manipulating an information environment.

An important point of departure was the information-disorder framework developed by Wardle and Derakhshan (2017) for the Council of Europe. Instead of treating "fake news" as an adequate general category, they distinguished misinformation, disinformation and malinformation through the interaction of falsity and harmful intent. Their model was also broader than a simple classification of content, since it considered agents, messages, interpreters and processes of creation, production and distribution. The distinction nevertheless provided an influential conceptual vocabulary in which truth status, intention and harm remained central to differentiating the principal categories.

European Union institutions subsequently developed a more elaborate policy vocabulary. The European Commission's 2018 Communication, Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach, defined disinformation in terms of false or misleading information, intentional deception or economic motivation, and potential public harm. It already connected the problem with democratic processes, manipulation, external actors and security (European Commission, 2018). By 2020, however, the European Democracy Action Plan distinguished four categories explicitly: misinformation, disinformation, information influence operations and foreign interference. The latter two shifted attention more clearly towards actors, coordination and deceptive practices rather than the accuracy of a particular item of content alone (European Commission, 2020).

This widening of the vocabulary raises a problem relevant both to discourse analysis and to security studies. When the defining question is whether a statement is false or misleading, the analytical object remains closely connected to informational content. When the emphasis moves towards intentional and coordinated manipulation by identifiable actors, however, the phenomenon becomes broader. Strategic information activity may involve falsehoods, selective truths, genuine material released for damaging purposes, deceptive identities, artificial amplification, proxy networks and coordinated interference. In that context, truth or falsity remains important but no longer exhausts the definition of the threat.

Recent scholarship has already recognised the growing importance of this change. Galán-Cordero and Cremades-Guisado (2026), for example, examine the movement from disinformation towards FIMI in European security and focus

particularly on its policy and legal consequences. Their study shows why contemporary manipulation cannot be reduced to inaccurate content and emphasises the relevance of coordinated and strategically oriented behaviour. The present article addresses a related development from a different perspective. Its primary concern is terminological and conceptual: how selected institutional documents distribute emphasis among truth status, intentionality, harm, agency, coordination and security framing over time.

The period from 2017 to 2026 is particularly useful because it reveals both change and continuity. Misinformation and disinformation remain in institutional use after FIMI becomes established, and the emergence of newer categories does not erase the earlier ones. At the same time, information manipulation becomes increasingly connected with foreign interference, hybrid threats, threat actors, operational techniques and institutional response. The relevant transition should therefore not be understood as a linear progression in which each new term renders the preceding one obsolete.

The article addresses three research questions:

RQ1. How are information-related threats defined and differentiated in selected European institutional documents between 2017 and 2026?

RQ2. What roles do truth status, intentionality, harm, agency and coordination play in these conceptualisations?

RQ3. How does security framing reshape the institutional conceptualisation of information-related threats as the terminology moves towards manipulation, interference and coordinated agency?

To answer these questions, the study conducts a qualitative diachronic terminological and discourse analysis of nine selected institutional documents. The 2017 Council of Europe report provides the conceptual baseline, while subsequent European Commission, Council of the European Union and European External Action Service documents allow the analysis to follow the development of institutional terminology through 2026. The purpose is not to measure the prevalence or impact of disinformation campaigns or to assess the effectiveness of European countermeasures. The object of analysis is narrower: the changing institutional construction of the problem.

In this context, transition refers not simply to the introduction of new terminology but to a redistribution of conceptual emphasis. The central question is whether an institutional vocabulary initially organised strongly around falsity, intention and harm broadens towards one in which coordinated behaviour, actors, infrastructures and strategic interference become increasingly important.

2. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

2.1 Information Disorder and the Problem of Conceptual Boundaries

The terminology surrounding problematic information has never been completely stable. Terms such as fake news, misinformation, disinformation, propaganda and manipulation frequently overlap in public discussion despite referring to phenomena with different characteristics. Research has repeatedly pointed to this lack of conceptual agreement.

Tandoc et al. (2018), for example, examined 34 academic articles that had used the expression "fake news" and identified six different categories: satire, parody, fabrication, manipulation, advertising and propaganda. Their typology relies particularly on different degrees of facticity and deception. The study demonstrates why "fake news" is of limited value as an umbrella term: a single expression has been used for communicative forms that differ markedly in purpose, production and relationship to factuality.

Wardle and Derakhshan's (2017) information-disorder framework offers a more precise distinction. Misinformation describes false information shared without an intention to cause harm, whereas disinformation combines falsity with deliberate harmful intent. Malinformation differs because the information may be genuine but is strategically used to cause harm. Truth status and intention therefore operate independently. False material can be misinformation or disinformation depending on intent, while authentic material can become harmful through its strategic use.

The distinction also shows why problematic information cannot be defined through falsity alone. Harm may result from material that is inaccurate, misleading or entirely genuine. The context of dissemination, the intentions of actors and the way information is deployed are consequently relevant to classification.

Later scholarship has reinforced the difficulty of establishing fixed boundaries. Egelhofer and Lecheler (2019) distinguish fake news as a genre of pseudojournalistic disinformation from "fake news" as a political label used to delegitimise journalism. Their distinction illustrates a broader point: terminology itself can become politically consequential rather than functioning as a neutral description.

Kapantai et al. (2021), in their systematic review of disinformation scholarship, similarly identify the absence of a commonly agreed taxonomy and consistent categorisation criteria. The problem is therefore not simply that different authors use different words. Different terms foreground different dimensions of a complex phenomenon, including falsity, intent, deception, harm, source and mode of dissemination.

Vraga and Bode (2020) add an important qualification to this definitional problem. They argue that misinformation cannot be treated as a completely

unbounded category of contested claims, because classification depends on the best available evidence and on relevant expertise. This is useful for the present study because it separates epistemic assessment from intention. A claim may be judged false or misleading on evidential grounds even when the communicator's motives remain uncertain. Institutional definitions that add deliberate deception, strategic purpose or coordination therefore move beyond the question of accuracy and introduce further criteria for classifying the activity. The distinction helps explain why misinformation and disinformation can remain useful categories even after the emergence of FIMI: they answer different analytical questions.

For the purposes of this study, terminology is treated as analytically significant rather than as a set of interchangeable lexical choices. Cabré Castellví's (2003) work on terminology is relevant here because specialised terms operate simultaneously as linguistic, conceptual and communicative units embedded in particular domains and contexts. Institutional terminology can consequently contribute to delimiting what an organisation regards as a particular type of problem.

A move from misinformation and disinformation towards influence, interference and manipulation may therefore indicate more than lexical variation. It may reveal that different characteristics of the phenomenon are being brought to the foreground. This does not imply a predetermined linear evolution. Earlier and later categories can coexist precisely because they delimit different objects or different dimensions of the same information environment.

2.2 Information Manipulation and Security Framing

The conceptual question acquires further significance once problematic information becomes embedded in security discourse. Bennett and Livingston (2018) connect contemporary disinformation with a wider transformation in democratic communication and declining confidence in political and media institutions. Freelon and Wells (2020) similarly position disinformation within a broader field of political communication that includes misinformation, propaganda and media manipulation. Both approaches suggest that disinformation cannot be fully understood by examining inaccurate statements in isolation from the political and institutional environments within which they circulate.

Security studies offers another relevant perspective. Buzan et al. (1998) distinguish securitisation from ordinary politicisation by focusing on the processes through which issues are constructed as security matters. The relevance of this approach to the present study lies in the changing institutional language surrounding information manipulation. Terms such as threat, hybrid campaign, attribution, deterrence and perpetrator position information activity within a vocabulary traditionally associated with security governance.

Balzacq's (2011) refinement of securitisation theory is particularly relevant here because it places greater weight on audience, agency and context. This makes it possible to avoid equating the presence of security vocabulary with a completed securitisation process. In the documents examined below, terms such as threat, interference, attribution and deterrence are evidence of an increasingly security-oriented institutional framing, but they do not by themselves demonstrate how those claims are received or accepted outside the institutions producing them. The analysis therefore treats security framing as one dimension of conceptual change and uses securitisation theory to interpret the direction of that change, rather than to claim that the full process has been empirically established.

The present article does not, however, claim to demonstrate a complete securitisation process. A full securitisation analysis would require more than institutional texts, including consideration of audiences and acceptance of securitising claims. Security theory is therefore used here as an interpretive framework for understanding changes in institutional framing rather than as a complete analytical model.

This distinction is particularly important with FIMI. Recent European terminology increasingly treats the relevant object as a pattern of coordinated manipulative behaviour rather than merely as a collection of false messages. Galán-Cordero and Cremades-Guisado (2026) have recently examined this shift in relation to European policy and legal frameworks. The present study instead asks how the conceptual boundaries of the threat change when truth status, intentionality, harm, agency, coordination and security framing are compared systematically across selected institutional texts.

3. Corpus and Method

3.1 Corpus Selection

The study is based on a purposively selected corpus of nine institutional documents published between 2017 and 2026. The corpus begins with the information-disorder framework developed by Wardle and Derakhshan for the Council of Europe and subsequently concentrates on documents issued by European Union institutions and the EEAS.

Documents were selected according to four criteria: institutional authority, explicit definition or differentiation of information-related threats, relevance to democratic resilience or European security, and significance in the development of the terminology examined here. The corpus is not intended to represent the entirety of European institutional discourse. Its purpose is to bring together key documents in which conceptual distinctions are sufficiently explicit to permit comparison.

Table 1. Institutional corpus, 2017-2026

Year	Institution / author	Document	Principal analytical role
2017	Wardle & Derakhshan / Council of Europe	Information Disorder	Baseline for misinformation, disinformation and malinformation
2018	European Commission	Tackling Online Disinformation: A European Approach	EU definition of disinformation, intention and public harm
2020	European Commission	European Democracy Action Plan	Differentiation of misinformation, disinformation, influence operations and foreign interference
2022	EEAS	SG.STRAT.2 Annual Report 2021	Explicit FIMI definition and behaviour-centred approach
2022	Council of the European Union	Council Conclusions on Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference	Integration of FIMI into the response to hybrid threats
2023	EEAS	1st EEAS Report on FIMI Threats	Shared analytical taxonomy and methodology
2024	EEAS	2nd EEAS Report on FIMI Threats	Development of the Response Framework
2025	EEAS	3rd EEAS Report on FIMI Threats	Actors, networks and digital infrastructure
2026	EEAS	4th EEAS Annual Report on FIMI Threats	Further operationalisation through deterrence

Source: Compiled by the author from the institutional documents included in the corpus.

The 2017 Council of Europe report occupies a distinct position. It is used as a conceptual reference point rather than as evidence of an EU policy position. The Commission documents of 2018 and 2020 were selected because they formalise important distinctions in EU institutional terminology. The 2022 documents capture the consolidation of FIMI as a behaviour-centred security concept. The four annual EEAS reports then allow the analysis to follow the operational development of the framework from 2023 to 2026. The first report establishes shared taxonomies and standards; the second introduces a Response Framework based on 750 investigated incidents; the third focuses on the digital infrastructure supporting FIMI operations; and the fourth builds on the Response Framework, FIMI Toolbox and FIMI Deterrence Playbook (European External Action Service [EEAS], 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026).

3.2 Analytical Procedure

The study employs qualitative diachronic terminological and discourse analysis. It does not seek to measure the statistical frequency of particular terms. Instead, it examines passages in which information-related phenomena are explicitly defined, differentiated, framed as threats or associated with institutional responses.

Five analytical dimensions provide a common basis for comparison: truth status, intentionality, harm, agency and coordination, and security framing.

Truth status concerns whether falsity, misleading information or factual authenticity contributes to the definition of the phenomenon. Intentionality refers to deliberate deception, manipulation or strategic purpose. Harm concerns actual or potential consequences for individuals, democratic institutions or society. Agency and coordination refer to the actors involved and the extent to which networks, foreign involvement or organised activity form part of the conceptualisation. Security framing concerns vocabulary associated with threats, hybrid activity, resilience, detection, attribution, response, disruption or deterrence.

The unit of analysis is the institutional conceptualisation expressed in definitional, classificatory and operational passages, rather than the individual lexical occurrence of a term. This choice is important because the same word may appear in descriptive, legal, political or analytical contexts without carrying identical conceptual weight. Each document was read for passages that specify what the phenomenon is, which actors or intentions are relevant, what kinds of harm are anticipated, and what responses are attached to the category. The chronological comparison then examined continuity and change across those passages. This procedure is consistent with the exploratory purpose of the study and avoids converting a small purposive corpus into an artificially quantitative dataset.

These dimensions are comparative categories, not mutually exclusive coding variables. No numerical score is assigned to them. The analysis asks instead which characteristics are required by a definition, which remain secondary and which become increasingly important within the broader institutional framework.

4. Naming Information Threats, 2017-2026

4.1 Information Disorder as the Conceptual Baseline: 2017

Wardle and Derakhshan's 2017 report provides a useful conceptual starting point because its three main categories depend on the interaction between factuality and harmful intent. Misinformation involves false information circulated without an intention to cause harm. Disinformation combines false information with deliberate

harmful intent. Malinformation differs from both because the underlying information may be genuine but is strategically used to cause harm.

The distinction makes truth status important without making it sufficient. False content belongs to different categories depending on intention, while genuine content can become problematic through its strategic use. The framework therefore already moves beyond a simple true-false binary.

Agency is not absent from the model. Wardle and Derakhshan also distinguish agents, messages and interpreters and discuss the creation, production and distribution of information disorder. Actors may differ in motivation, organisation, intended audiences and technological means. Nevertheless, the three headline categories themselves remain organised primarily through the relationship among factuality, intention and harm.

This makes the report an appropriate baseline rather than a purely content-based model. Behaviour and agency are recognised, but they have not yet become the defining centre of the terminology.

4.2 From False Content to Coordinated Influence: 2018-2020

The Commission's 2018 Communication narrows institutional attention towards disinformation. Disinformation is defined through three central characteristics: false or misleading information, intentional deception or economic motivation, and possible public harm. The category of public harm includes effects on democratic processes as well as public goods such as security (European Commission, 2018).

The document should not be characterised as exclusively content-centred. It already discusses manipulation, external actors, automated dissemination and broader societal consequences. The core definition, however, still relies substantially on the relationship among misleading content, purpose and harm.

The 2020 European Democracy Action Plan makes the conceptual structure considerably more explicit. It distinguishes misinformation, disinformation, information influence operations and foreign interference, and states that these different phenomena require different policy responses (European Commission, 2020).

Misinformation remains defined through false or misleading content without harmful intent. Disinformation adds an intention to deceive or obtain economic or political gain and potential public harm. In both cases, the status of the information remains central.

Information influence operations and foreign interference are different. The former concerns coordinated efforts by domestic or foreign actors to influence target audiences using deceptive means. Foreign interference focuses still more explicitly on coercive and deceptive efforts by foreign state actors or their agents, often within wider hybrid operations.

The significance of the 2020 document therefore lies less in abandoning earlier definitions than in placing them within a wider conceptual architecture. The Commission continues to distinguish content-related categories while adding categories in which actors, coordination and strategic influence are defining characteristics.

This distinction is also linked to institutional response. The Action Plan treats misinformation differently from activities involving harmful intent and argues that influence operations and foreign interference require stronger and more coordinated responses. Naming consequently has policy implications: different conceptualisations of the phenomenon make different forms of intervention appear appropriate.

4.3 Institutionalising FIMI as a Security Threat: 2021-2023

The EEAS activity report covering 2021 marks an important stage in the consolidation of FIMI terminology. The concept centres on a pattern of manipulative behaviour characterised by intentionality and coordination and capable of negatively affecting values, procedures and political processes. State and non-state actors, including proxies, may be involved (EEAS, 2022).

The distinction from earlier terminology is important. Truth status is not a necessary defining condition of FIMI. False or misleading content can form part of an operation, but the defining object is broader: intentional and coordinated manipulative behaviour. This does not render disinformation irrelevant. Rather, it alters the conceptual level at which the threat is described.

The institutional security dimension became more explicit during 2022. The Council's conclusions on FIMI described such activity as frequently forming part of wider hybrid campaigns intended to mislead, deceive and destabilise democratic societies. The conclusions emphasised strategic and coordinated behaviour and called for measures that could be taken against FIMI actors where necessary to protect EU public order and security (Council of the European Union, 2022).

The vocabulary is revealing. The relevant object is increasingly an actor, campaign or coordinated pattern of activity rather than an isolated claim. Manipulation is connected with broader security concerns, particularly in the context of foreign interference and hybrid operations.

The first EEAS FIMI Threat Report, published in 2023, took this development further by establishing an analytical methodology based on shared taxonomies and standards. The report was based on a first sample of FIMI cases and sought to improve common understanding of the threat and inform countermeasures (EEAS, 2023).

Here the behavioural orientation becomes methodological. Analysis increasingly concerns threat actors, tactics, techniques, procedures and patterns of

manipulation. Narratives and content remain part of the investigation, but they are examined within a wider operational structure.

The development from 2021 to 2023 can consequently be described as a consolidation of FIMI as both an analytical and a security-policy category. Intentionality and harm remain important, but coordinated agency and manipulative behaviour acquire a more central role.

4.4 From Response to Exposure and Deterrence: 2024-2026

By 2024, the underlying definition of FIMI had become comparatively stable. The more visible development concerned the institutional architecture surrounding the concept.

The second EEAS report introduced a Response Framework designed to connect analysis more closely with timely action. Its findings were based on 750 investigated FIMI incidents recorded between December 2022 and November 2023 (EEAS, 2024). The purpose was not simply to produce a larger collection of examples, but to establish a more systematic relationship between detection, assessment and response.

The 2024 framework also marks a change in the relationship between diagnosis and institutional action. Earlier documents sought to clarify categories and identify types of manipulative activity. The second threat report retains that analytical work but connects it more directly to decisions about prevention and response. In this sense, the development is not merely terminological. Once FIMI is treated as a recurring pattern of hostile behaviour, the institutional problem becomes how information about actors, methods and vulnerabilities can be translated into coordinated action. The Response Framework is therefore relevant to the present argument because it demonstrates how a behaviour-centred definition begins to structure an operational repertoire.

This represents a significant development in security framing. The institutional question increasingly becomes what follows once manipulative activity has been identified. The language of response, countermeasures and networked defence places FIMI within an operational security environment.

The third EEAS report, published in 2025, develops the approach by focusing on the infrastructure used to conduct and amplify FIMI operations. The EEAS maps digital infrastructure deployed by foreign actors, mainly Russia and also China, to interfere in the information space of the EU and partner countries. The associated analysis identifies more than 500 incidents in 2024 and at least 38,000 accounts or channels involved across multiple platforms (EEAS, 2025).

The introduction of the FIMI Exposure Matrix is especially relevant to the conceptual argument of this article. Attention moves increasingly towards

relationships among channels, networks, infrastructures and threat actors. The informational message itself remains relevant, but it becomes one component of a broader operational environment.

The fourth annual report, published in March 2026, takes another step through the development of deterrence. It explicitly builds on the Response Framework, FIMI Toolbox and FIMI Deterrence Playbook, whose stated purpose is to make FIMI activity more costly and less sustainable for perpetrators (EEAS, 2026).

The report also places FIMI within the wider hybrid toolkit of foreign threat actors. In its discussion of Russia, for example, it treats information manipulation as one instrument used alongside other forms of hybrid activity. This context reinforces the security conception of FIMI as organised hostile behaviour rather than merely the circulation of inaccurate claims.

The Deterrence Playbook seeks to identify critical points across infrastructures, intermediaries and supply chains at which institutional instruments can raise operational costs or constrain actors' capabilities. The development therefore moves beyond correction or reactive communication towards a more explicitly strategic response to organised information manipulation.

Table 2. Comparative analytical matrix of information-threat conceptualisation, 2017-2026

Stage	Truth status	Intentionality	Harm	Agency and coordination	Security framing
2017, information disorder	Defining distinction	Defining distinction	Defining distinction	Explicit but secondary to headline taxonomy	Contextual
2018, disinformation	Defining	Defining	Defining	Clearly recognised	Explicit but one dimension among several
2020, differentiated EU vocabulary	Defining for mis/ disinforma tion	Central	Central	Defining for influence operations and foreign interference	Increasingly prominent
2021-2022, FIMI consolidation	Not required by FIMI definition	Defining	Central	Defining	Explicitly linked to political and security threat
2023, first FIMI threat framework	Secondary	Central	Central	Central through actors and TTPs	Operational

Stage	Truth status	Intentionality	Harm	Agency and coordination	Security framing
2024, Response Framework	Secondary	Central	Central	Central	Analysis linked to response
2025, infrastructure and exposure	Secondary	Central	Retained	Dominant focus on networks and infrastructure	Exposure and attribution
2026, deterrence	Secondary	Central	Retained	Central	Disruption, costs and deterrence

Source: Author's synthesis based on the institutional corpus.

5. Discussion

The analysis does not support a simple account in which misinformation was replaced by disinformation and disinformation was subsequently replaced by FIMI. Earlier and later concepts continue to coexist because they delimit different aspects of problematic communication. The more significant development lies in the relative importance assigned to different defining characteristics.

The information-disorder framework makes this particularly clear. Misinformation, disinformation and malinformation cannot be differentiated without considering truth status and intention. Those distinctions remain useful. What changes later is not their validity but the level at which institutional concern increasingly operates.

By 2020, the Commission already distinguishes misleading content from coordinated influence and foreign interference. The emergence of FIMI develops this distinction further. The question is no longer limited to whether particular information is false and whether somebody intended to deceive an audience. Increasing attention is directed towards who is acting, whether behaviour is coordinated, which techniques and infrastructures are used, and what strategic objectives those activities serve.

The transition is therefore better understood as conceptual expansion than terminological replacement. FIMI is not simply a more sophisticated synonym for disinformation. Its scope permits analysis of operations in which falsehood may be present but is not necessary. Genuine information, manipulative context, deceptive identities, covert channels, coordinated amplification and proxy actors can all form part of an information operation.

This conclusion is compatible with the argument made recently by Galán-Cordero and Cremades-Guisado (2026), who similarly observe that FIMI moves the policy focus beyond false content towards strategically coordinated manipulation. The contribution of the present study is narrower. It traces how the relative importance

of truth status, intention, harm, agency, coordination and security framing changes across selected institutional terminology rather than concentrating primarily on legal or regulatory adequacy.

One of the clearest findings concerns truth status. Falsity is constitutive of the institutional definitions of misinformation and disinformation. It is not constitutive of FIMI. Intentionality, by contrast, remains important across both earlier and later conceptualisations. Agency and coordination then acquire greater prominence once the institutional vocabulary moves towards influence operations, foreign interference and FIMI.

The second important development is the growing security framing of the phenomenon. It would be inaccurate to argue that information problems suddenly became security issues after 2022. External actors, security implications and manipulation were already present in earlier documents. What changes is the degree to which information manipulation is integrated into an operational security architecture.

The progression of the EEAS reports illustrates this development particularly well. The first report concentrated on analytical taxonomy, the second on linking analysis to response, the third on exposing infrastructure and relationships among threat actors and channels, and the fourth on deterrence. The core concept does not have to be redefined every year because the later transition takes place increasingly at the level of institutional practice.

This matters from a security-studies perspective because how a threat is defined influences which responses appear appropriate. A problem understood predominantly as inaccurate information tends to invite measures involving reliable information, correction, media literacy or platform transparency. A problem understood as coordinated strategic interference opens an additional range of responses involving attribution, exposure, disruption, sanctions and deterrence.

These response repertoires are not mutually exclusive. European institutions continue to employ media literacy, proactive communication and resilience alongside more security-oriented tools. The significance lies in the widening range of measures made relevant by the changing conceptualisation of the problem.

The coexistence of these response repertoires is important. The expansion towards attribution, disruption and deterrence does not imply that correction, media literacy or access to reliable information have become obsolete. Instead, European policy increasingly operates on more than one analytical level. Measures concerned with content remain appropriate when the immediate problem is false or misleading information, while actor-centred measures become more salient when the problem is organised interference. The changing terminology thus helps differentiate both the object of concern and the scale at which institutions intervene. This is one reason why

conceptual expansion is a more accurate description of the period than terminological replacement.

The evidence nevertheless calls for caution in describing this development as complete securitisation. The documents clearly demonstrate stronger security framing and institutional incorporation into hybrid-threat policy. They do not establish, by themselves, the audience acceptance required for a full securitisation analysis in the Copenhagen School tradition. The study can therefore identify an increasingly security-oriented institutional construction of information manipulation without claiming that the complete securitisation process has been demonstrated.

A related caution concerns truth. A behaviour-centred approach does not mean that accuracy has become irrelevant. False and misleading narratives remain central to many information operations. The change is that falsity no longer defines the outer boundary of the security concern. By 2025 and 2026, networks, infrastructures, actor relationships, operational techniques and strategic persistence are increasingly treated as part of the object to be analysed and countered.

The transition identified in the corpus is therefore not from one inaccurate label to a more precise one. It is a movement from a comparatively narrower concern with the properties and harmful use of information towards a broader concern with the organised behaviour through which information environments are manipulated.

6. Conclusions

The analysis has shown that the changing European vocabulary of information threats between 2017 and 2026 cannot be represented adequately as a sequence of terminological replacement. Misinformation, disinformation, malinformation, information influence operations, foreign interference and FIMI coexist because they identify different characteristics and levels of problematic communication.

The first research question concerned how these threats are defined and differentiated. The documents show that earlier terminology gives considerable weight to the relationship among truth status, intention and harm. Later terminology retains those concerns but broadens the field through categories in which actors, coordination, interference and strategic behaviour become defining characteristics.

The second question concerned the relative role of the five analytical dimensions. Truth status remains crucial to misinformation and disinformation, while intentionality remains important across the period. Harm is consistently relevant, although its institutional interpretation broadens from damage produced through particular information towards effects on democratic procedures, political processes and security. Agency and coordination become increasingly prominent once influence operations, foreign interference and FIMI enter the institutional vocabulary.

The third question addressed security framing. The corpus does not reveal a single moment at which information manipulation suddenly becomes a security issue. Instead, security concerns become progressively more operational. From 2021 onwards, FIMI is increasingly integrated into a vocabulary of threat actors, hybrid activity, detection, response, attribution, infrastructure, disruption and deterrence. The development of the EEAS framework from shared analytical taxonomy to response, exposure and deterrence is particularly indicative of this transformation.

The findings consequently suggest that institutional naming matters beyond lexical preference. A term does not merely describe an existing problem. It helps delimit which characteristics of that problem are institutionally salient and, by extension, what kinds of responses become relevant.

The study has several limitations. Its corpus is purposively selected and cannot represent the entirety of European institutional or public discourse. It examines conceptualisation rather than the empirical effectiveness of FIMI campaigns or the measures used against them. It also does not investigate reception and therefore cannot establish a complete securitisation process. Future comparative work could examine whether similar changes occur in national security strategies, NATO discourse or other institutional environments.

Within these limits, the period from 2017 to 2026 reveals a meaningful transition in the language of information threats. The change is neither a movement from falsehood to truth nor the straightforward replacement of an obsolete term by a more accurate one. It is a widening of the institutional understanding of the threat, from the properties and harmful use of information towards the actors, behaviours, networks and strategic practices through which information environments are manipulated. That widening is closely connected with the increasingly prominent place assigned to information manipulation within European approaches to democratic resilience and security.

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Identity Vulnerabilities of Romania's Security Mix

Adrian TOMA

"Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad

Abstract. *Since joining NATO in 2004, Romania is one of the most consistent allies on the Eastern Flank, in terms of official positions. The internal support for this policy and the capacity cu translate it in common defensive capabilities are volatile and, recently, decreasing. Diverse identity profile: Latin language and orthodox confession, simultaneously placed in three cultural zones, westernizes through the push of an elite educated abroad, scarred by the trauma of a secular administration imposed from outside, triggers a complex security response. At the community level, the widely felt need for national security measures coexists with divergent cultural pressures that can affect the coherence of the overall strategy and limit the alignment of allocated resources with the pace of the alliance. The theoretical framework of liminality, already applied to the Romanian case by Stoicescu (2012), is used to assess its consequences for the security mix, as revealed by developments during the 2024-2026 period. Using the ontological security and liminal state concepts, the article identifies four operational vulnerabilities, documented with history sources and public opinion facts between 2024 and 2026. Ultimately, the hypothesis regarding the security-related relational assets Romania possesses, both for itself and for NATO, stemming from its specific identity, is validated only if the nation's institutions act as a transmission mechanism between its cultural profile and realistic, enduring objectives.*

Keywords: liminality, ontological security, strategic anomie, security mix, delegitimized elites, reciprocity gap,

1. Strategic Anomie

Since 2004, Romania was the exemplary member of NATO: the highest scores for the sense of belonging, broad acceptance for limited participations on foreign military missions, warm welcome for the Alliance's contingents and bases, strict diplomatic alignment with Brussels' discourse on European and global tactical landscape. However, there are increasing discrepancies between the government's message and the views of significant segments of the public. In February 2026, 66,6%

of survey respondents were confident that NATO would defend the country, although only 40,9% considered that Romania should offer complete military assistance for an ally under attack (the percentage was 51,1 in 2022). Significantly, the option for neutrality had increased from 12,2% to 19,6%, in the same period. This is a significant difference between what Romanian people expect to receive and what they are willing to offer, in terms of decisive military effort.

This is the starting point of the study. How Romania's distinctive and seemingly contradictory identity profile influences the coherence and applicability of the country's security mix, and to what extent it facilitates relational assets of value to both the country and the alliance.

Security mix is a combination of military, informational, economic, energy-related, diplomatic, judicial instruments and alliances commitments through which a state pursues its security objectives. The relative weighting of these elements and the level of domestic support for them is important, because the mix is more a matter of implementation rather than declaration one (spending, hosting, contributions, votes during crises s.o.). Also, legitimacy is essential, as that combination of instruments can get different levels of support and sustainability within the alliance. It depends whether the electorate consider as its own or imposed. Identity comes into play here.

In the decades following NATO accession, the Romanian public was primarily presented with the benefits for the alliance derived from Romania's membership: access to the Black Sea, continuity of the Eastern Flank extending to Greece, a platform for bases supporting the war on terror, and the hosting of the US missile defence shield at Deveselu (aimed at countering Iranian missiles). The underlying message was that NATO would assume a major role in securing the country in exchange for these assets. As such, the discourse regarding costs was limited and understated: a low number of casualties among contingents deployed outside Europe in secondary theatres of operation, targeted procurement of Western weaponry and restricted economic and political ties with the West's adversaries-a situation relatively easy to accept given domestic energy production levels above the EU average and the predominance of trade relations with democratic Europe.

The article's thesis is that the widening gap between the rational commitment of the majority of elites and population — within the NATO/EU framework — and the fragile support of a significant portion of the public (susceptible to destructive appeals based on identity) constitutes a vulnerability for Romania's national security mix.

2. Identity and Security

The analytical approach begins with the constructivist hypothesis that a country's security interests do not stem solely from an assessment of external conditions but are instead constituted through identity (Wendt, 1992, 1999). Building

on this premise, Katzenstein (1996) and, subsequently, Hopf (1998, 2002) developed an empirical model of the relationship between identity and foreign policy. In the literature on ontological security, states seek not only physical security but also the consolidation of their own identities; without a coherent developmental trajectory, akin to the consistency found in the biographies of successful individuals, their path is overshadowed by unsettling randomness (Giddens, 1991; Mitzen, 2006; Steele, 2008). Kinnvall (2004) demonstrated the role of religion and nationalism as identity anchors during hard times, while Zarakol (2011) proved that historical defeat or imperial subordination often coexists with ambivalent relationships with the Western established order: adherence and resentment. This body of literature explains why a state can be simultaneously firmly aligned at an institutional level and socially less willing to pay the price.

This is where the concept of liminality comes into play, originally referring to rites of passage for individuals (van Gennep, 1909/1960; Turner, 1967, 1969): an individual with a liminal profile possesses neither the characteristics of the previous state nor the constitutive elements of the subsequent one. The author points out that ambiguity is defined as risky by the entity performing the classification (likely belonging to one of the two states-initial or final), rather than by the subject undergoing the transformation. In the field of international relations, the concept was adopted within the *Review of International Studies* (Neumann, 2012). Rumelili (2012) shows that entities defined by the Europe/Non-Europe dichotomy react through two mechanisms aimed at eliminating ambiguity: the absorption of the transitional anomaly via conditionality and monitoring, and the precise calibration of subversion-that is, the conduct through which states leverage identity to perpetuate ambiguity. This second scenario gives rise to the situation theorized by Mälksoo (2012), wherein the rule of transitional liminality, which culminates in identity recomposition — is replaced by permanent liminality, resulting in the transformation of ambiguity into societal disorientation. Stoicescu (2012), who described the Romanian case as a series of interconnected liminalities, demonstrates that there are no arguments for an exceptionalist Romanian profile. We consider it to fit within the theoretical model through which Todorova (1997) and Bakić-Hayden (1995) described Eastern European societies that constructed their belonging to the West by distancing themselves from an immediate Eastern neighbour, a process that was not limited to differentiation from Russia but also extended to differentiation among themselves.

Through the lens of liminality theory, the critique levelled over a century ago by Titu Maiorescu regarding the "forms without substance" of late 19th-century Romanian society can be interpreted by reference to Turner's concept of "communitas": Romanian society has remained in a perpetual state of identity ambiguity-a condition that, in times of crisis, hampered its capacity for action, including in the realm of security. The convergence of geopolitical, linguistic, and

religious liminality created the conditions for a succession of phases marked by identity ambiguity throughout the various stages of integration into the European family (the break from the Phanariot legacy and Russian influence between 1848 and 1939, resilience during the communist era, and the post-1990 return to the European fold).

In this context, it is worth noting the broad "movement" unfolding around and involving Romania during the aforementioned 180-year period. The prevailing flow of Western European political, economic, and institutional influence toward the east of the continent-interrupted only by the 45-year Soviet military presence in former socialist countries-has had visible consequences. This can be understood through Neumann's (1999) concept of a political construct involving an "Other" that has shifted increasingly eastward from the perspective of the expanding bloc of states defining themselves as "the West." Reflecting Wolff's (1994) culturally grounded positioning, Romania and the Balkans have, over this period, increasingly repositioned themselves relative to the core of Western civilization, shifting from being part of the "Orient" to becoming an internal "Other" within Europe. Currently, this process is being replicated regarding the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine; EU member states in the East are applying the same mechanism of Western identity construction by differentiating these nations from their eastern neighbours (ranging from the harsh approach adopted by Hungary to the "paternalistic" models employed by Romania toward Moldova and, occasionally, by Poland toward Ukraine).

In this context, we believe Romania is traversing the final stage of its identity ambiguity, driven both by the objective eastward shift of the West's physical political border and by the systematic, widespread debate surrounding various overlapping forms of liminality, some of which, having remained insufficiently addressed, have continued to hinder a re-aggregation of the national self that would be more aligned with the subjective elements of the European project.

The operationalization of these concepts within the framework of Romania's security mix is highlighted by the way the alliance dilemma, as articulated by Snyder (1984), manifests itself: the tension between the elites' fear of abandonment and the fear of entrapment felt by broad segments of the population. The accentuation of this asymmetry renders the national security strategy vulnerable.

3. The Layers of Romanian Liminality

Romanian identity is not a completed synthesis but a superposition of layers that coexist yet have not fully fused. Although the internal coherence of each layer has evolved over the last two centuries, each continues to exhibit variables and remains politically mobilizable, both within the realm of its specific domain and in relation to the other domains. Four such layers can be identified.

The cultural-spiritual component*: linguistic Latinity and the Orthodox faith.* The combination is unique in Europe. It results in the inability of either of the region's major identity blocs, Central European Catholic Latinity or Slavic Orthodoxy, to provide a sense of total identity belonging. As Boia (2001) noted, the assertion of a "Latin island in a Slavic sea" was endorsed by the political elite during the 19th century.

Administrative history, legal tradition, and geopolitical patterns. Transylvania and the Banat possess a two-century-old Habsburg administrative-legal legacy; Moldavia and Bukovina took shape after 1700 within the Russian-Ottoman contact zone; Wallachia, Oltenia, and Dobruja are historically conditioned by the Balkan-Ottoman context. Although there is no internal heterogeneity, variations in political culture and institutional trust persist (Livezeanu, 1995; Janos, 2000; Mungiu-Pippidi, 2015).

The national political and institutional project*: Westernization as an elite choice.* The mid-19th-century transition from the Cyrillic to the Latin alphabet, officially concluded between 1860 and 1862-the rise of the Transylvanian School (stemming from the Union with Rome, 1697-1701), and the education of the intellectual elite from both sides of the Carpathians in Vienna and Paris all reflect a top-down normative choice for Westernization. In the absence of direct contact between the general population and the social realities of the West, this process did not constitute an organic development (Hitchins, 1969; Drace-Francis, 2006).

The demographic layer: *phased arrival and ethnic coexistence, accompanied by a progressive decline in the proportion of minorities*. Romania's current territory received successive waves of population: Saxons and Székelys in medieval Transylvania, Habsburg-era colonizations, a Greek and Levantine presence (serving administrative and ecclesiastical roles in the Principalities) that predated the Phanariot reigns and persisted after their end, as well as Armenian, Jewish, and Roma communities. It is a national identity built through absorption, rather than exclusion. This layer shaped the others, fostering a gradual increase in internal cohesion. The ongoing trend of a rising Romanian share of the population across all provinces led to a reduction in institutional, legal, and spiritual diversity-though this also involved the majority population adopting certain cultural habits of the minorities (e.g., hungarian and german influence in Transylvanian cuisine, the observance of All Souls' Day by Orthodox Christians in Transylvania, and musical patterns of Serbian origin in the Banat, Russian in historical Moldavia, Oriental in Dobruja and Roma everywhere).

4. The Legacy of Imperial Marginality

For 1,500 years, the territory of present-day Romania served as a transit zone for migrating peoples or as a space for the temporary influence and expansion of neighbouring state entities. Over the last 500 years, empires became the primary

external stakeholders regarding the security choices implemented by the Romanian principalities. Unlike earlier periods, the history of this region-unfolding alongside the Western expansion sparked by the Renaissance and the Reformation-was shaped by the influence of military, economic, political, and cultural conglomerates possessing a mass far greater than that of Moldavia, Wallachia, or Transylvania. Consequently, enduring behavioural patterns became embedded in every aspect of the local communities' existence, though these should not be interpreted as absolute determinants.

One initial security strategy was alignment pursued strictly for the sake of survival. Given the tendency for the dominant imperial power to shift every generation or two, flexibility can hold greater adaptive value than consistency. The Romanian people have internalized the major realignments of modern and contemporary history: the transition from Ottoman suzerainty to a wartime alliance with Russia in 1877-during which Russia seized southern Bessarabia from the Romanian ally that had intervened on its behalf at critical moments in the fighting south of the Danube; the 1883 military alliance with the Central Powers, which was never activated; entry into the war alongside the Entente in 1916; the 1940 alignment with an Axis power that had instigated and abetted the country's territorial losses; the "turning of arms" on August 23, 1944; the pursuit of military autonomy within the Warsaw Pact after 1964; the refusal of Soviet military "support" during the bloody 1989 revolution; and, finally, accession to NATO in 2004. While clear sociological data exists regarding the alignment of this last choice with the identity preferences of the majority of the population, many earlier episodes reflect alignments born of circumstance-alignments to which the public remained resistant. The tension between the state's stance-formalized by the ruling elites-and the hostile or skeptical attitude of a significant percentage (or even the majority) of citizens stems from the following two historically grounded interpretative and behavioral predispositions.

The externalization of fundamental decisions. There is a widespread belief that decisive choices originate outside the country: the appointment of Phanariot rulers based on sums paid to the Sublime Porte (rather than on merit or lineage); the existence and interests of the Romanian state determined by treaties among the Great Powers (Paris in 1856 regarding the Union of Moldavia and Wallachia; Berlin in 1878 concerning independence; Trianon regarding the union of Transylvania with the Kingdom of Romania; the loss of three provinces following the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact and the 1940 Vienna Award; and the division of spheres of influence in 1944-1945). In terms of security, the result is that the quest for a powerful protector takes precedence over the implementation of a homegrown strategy (Chirot, 1976; Janos, 2000; Djuvara, 1995).

The delegitimization of elites. The Phanariot precedent and the Soviet imposition cemented a dual interpretive framework. The ruling elite is presumed not

only to serve foreign interests but also to be incompetent-a presumption rooted in the logic of extractive regimes, which are interested in stifling rather than cultivating indigenous performance (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012). Tismăneanu (2003) documented the communist iteration of this pattern: a party with a minimal domestic base that compensated for its lack of legitimacy through nationalist co-optation while retaining Stalinist tactics. Mungiu-Pippidi (2015) outlines the governance system common to these regimes in Romania-namely, particularism, wherein the allocation of public resources is driven by affiliation and personal ties rather than impersonal rules (a system perpetuated by the generalized expectation that others will act in a particular way, making non-cooperation the rational choice). The consequences of these patterns for the security mix are that any national strategy is open to challenge on grounds of either betrayal or incompetence.

The ambivalence regarding the efficacy of the foreigner's actions. The history of the Romanians is a succession of imperial presences on national territory, a context in which indigenous resources and organization rarely withstood superior external pressure. The Romanian lands belong to those "shatter zones" contested by the Habsburg, Ottoman, and Russian empires (Rieber, 2014); lacking locally concentrated capital and coercive power, such entities failed to build their own military-administrative apparatuses, instead becoming segments of imperial systems (Tilly, 1990). The resulting backwardness-and the enduring perception thereof-stems primarily from external causes and persists across successive domestic regimes (Janos, 2000). This gives rise to an identity pattern characteristic of a former imperial periphery, comprising two complementary components. The first is an appreciation for the procedural efficacy of the foreigner as a model for action; this corresponds to the borrowing of institutional templates typical of late development (Gerschenkron, 1962), the mimetic adoption of models perceived as legitimate amidst uncertainty (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983), the "menu-style" selection of Western templates during the accession process (Jacoby, 2004), and a receptiveness to socialization through training and persuasion-as seen in the NATO case study regarding Romania (Gheciu, 2005). This component is coupled with the voluntary importation of foreign models, a phenomenon theorized as cultural self-colonization (Kiossev, 1999). The second factor-specifically, reluctance regarding major decisions implemented within the Romanian context-generates a pattern of public conformity coupled with a parallel mode of behavioural reticence, driven by an awareness of the asymmetric power relationship (Scott, 1990). The decoupling of formal structure from actual activity (Meyer & Rowan, 1977) occurs against the backdrop of status sensitivity characteristic of stigmatized spaces (Zarakol, 2011). Furthermore, Krastev and Holmes (2019) theorize the resentment stemming from the imperative to imitate; this is strongly reflected in the Romanian public sphere by the resurgence-during times of crisis-of identity values opposed to EU-driven modernization, such as militant Orthodoxy, a return to

ruralism, and a cult of regional rather than pan-European genetic roots (e.g., "the Dacians" versus "the descendants of Rome"). The result is a potential identity profile of an ally characterized by high procedural conformity but low strategic assimilation. In this context, external crises entailing a cost to sovereignty can activate-to varying degrees-this asymmetry, which should be viewed as a variable of strategic culture (Biehl, Giegerich & Jonas, 2013) rather than an inherent behavioural deficiency.

It can be argued that the strategic realignments of 1877, 1916, and 1944 were choices dictated by political realism in the face of power constraints, rather than cultural reflexes. Even so, empirical data from the period and the subsequent, enduring stance of society demonstrate the variation in domestic support for any given alignment.

5. Identity Based Vulnerabilities

5.1. Ontological Oscillation and the Reassurance Loop

When belonging to a specific cultural and security sphere is not perceived as permanently secured, it must be periodically reaffirmed through gestures of loyalty; conversely, any signal to the contrary triggers a demand for reassurance. The reduction in the US military presence announced on October 29, 2025-specifically, the failure to replace a brigade from the 101st Airborne Division, leaving a force of approximately one thousand troops-was framed by the US side as a posture adjustment, yet it was interpreted domestically-politically and in the media-as a potential signal of disengagement regarding Article 5 of the NATO treaty. The prevailing response within Romanian society was a demand for reassurance from the US, rather than a reconfiguration of the country's own military capabilities.

The impact on the security mix is an over-reliance on external guarantees relative to domestic effort. Low public expectations of the political elite-including in the realm of security-have led to a paradoxical situation: the tolerance of rhetoric regarding Romania's ambition to become the "second-largest military power on the Eastern Flank" (dating back to November 2025) alongside evident government paralysis during a crisis. Between 2004 and 2024, Romania's national security strategy was never put to a functional test: the relatively stable level of US commitment to Europe fueled the narrative of successive Bucharest governments regarding "American security guarantees"; Russia had not launched large-scale aggression prior to 2022; military spending as a share of the national budget remained low; economic growth and the well-being of the average citizen took precedence; and a restrictive stance on Chinese investments incurred no opportunity costs (aligning with the approach of the entire European Union, with the exception of Hungary). By 2026, all these premises had vanished.

While the anxiety of abandonment is understandable for any state situated on the exposed edge of the alliance, the identity-based argument sheds light on the intensity and nature of the reaction.

5.2. The Reciprocity Gap

Survey data from February 2026 show high confidence that the alliance would defend Romania (66.6%), much lower support for the reciprocal obligation (40.9%, down from 51.1% in 2022), and a growing preference for neutrality (19.6%, up from 12.2%). Regarding Ukraine, only 10.5% supported providing military aid, while 42.6% believed Romania should provide no aid whatsoever.

In Snyder's (1984) terms, Romania exhibits simultaneously high abandonment anxiety and entrapment anxiety-a combination that, at the elite level, produces declarative alignment lacking societal backing. Although reluctance regarding the direct costs of the conflict is widespread across the EU after four years of war, the magnitude of this decline among Romanians is striking, particularly given the massive increase in direct geographic exposure resulting from repeated violations of national airspace. This reluctance differs significantly from the Polish context and correlates with the low level of trust in Romania's political institutions. Indeed, the January 2026 INSCOP Barometer highlighted trust levels of under 12% for Parliament, under 19% for the Government, and less than 28% for the President, with a trend of declining scores. Notably, a significant level of trust in the Church-63.9%-persists, far exceeding the European average of 35-40% (a figure significantly boosted by states such as Poland and Greece, alongside Romania).

In this context, the public's limited commitment to initiatives involving increased defense spending, financial and material aid to Ukraine, or active participation in the defense of a NATO state does not so much reflect a disengagement of citizens from the alliance or Europe-indeed, the 2026 Eurobarometer shows 74% of Romanians trust the EU-but rather a lack of confidence in the competence and integrity of the political class tasked with implementing national security policies. The Army and the Police command trust ratings of nearly 62% and 50% respectively, reflecting an awareness of their fundamental roles, whereas the government-which allocates their resources and sets priorities-fails to reach even 20%. Consequently, this disparity stems from two legacies of "imperial marginality": elites lacking legitimacy and an expectation that fundamental decisions will be adopted from the outside. The divergence between the perception of the EU's functioning and the continent's major decisions affecting Romania aligns with the final post-imperial pattern described: an appreciation for the procedural effectiveness of the "foreigner" as a model for action, coupled with reluctance regarding the major decisions they implement within the Romanian context. The rise in trust in the Romanian Orthodox Church by over 6%

between 2025 and 2026 fits precisely into the model of "resentful identity activation" posited by Krastev and Holmes (2019).

5.3. Delegitimizing Security Measures

The existence of an enduring interpretive framework-whereby strategic decisions are viewed as foreign dictates-renders the acceptance of partnership obligations open to attack, regardless of their actual content. The annulment of the first round of the 2024 presidential elections, following institutionally documented external interference, led a segment of the public to interpret the Constitutional Court's subsequent actions through this same lens during the May 2025 elections. This direct link is evidenced by the campaign rhetoric, which explicitly alluded to an alleged "abandonment" of national interests and identity-based values by pro-NATO and pro-EU candidates.

Without questioning the legality of decisions adopted by Romanian institutions, it is worth noting the narrative held by many self-described "traditionalists," who view measures taken to uphold external commitments as proof that decisions vital to Romania are made outside the country.

Widely disseminated public analyses regarding the exploitation of social media platforms by hostile Eastern state actors-following the mapping of identity-related elements that could be co-opted into anti-EU and anti-NATO discourse-reveal the vulnerability of the information component of Romania's security mix to hybrid aggression. The Romanian elections, serving as a case study for the Alliance and the Union, indicate that while identity profiles created a landscape receptive to such aggression, they did not necessarily generate an anti-Western sentiment.

5.4. The Implementation Deficit

The layering of conflicting administrative traditions and modernization through imitation (Janos, 2000; Alexandrescu, 1998) translate into low and inconsistent execution capacity. In 2026-amidst an interim government, failed attempts to appoint a prime minister, near-zero economic growth, the highest inflation in the EU, and only partially successful efforts to access European funds from the National Recovery and Resilience Plan-an army procurement plan relying heavily on European funding was nonetheless adopted; however, this plan requires substantial domestic production capabilities. Despite the opportunities that the funds allocated for rearmament offer to address the aforementioned issues-while simultaneously bolstering military security compromised by the reduced US presence-the implementation of the industrial component of this mix is lagging. The slow pace in capitalizing on the opportunity to resolve the project's financial and technological aspects through external means-along with the associated collateral benefits-reflects the fact that the vulnerability is not budgetary in nature, but rather one of absorption and operationalization.

6. Relational Assets: a Validity Test

The hypothesis that Romania's identity profile generates not only vulnerabilities but also bridges that can be utilized by the European Union and NATO cannot be substantiated merely by invoking historical affinities. To be verifiable, the hypothesis requires a test defined prior to its application. A relational vector becomes a relational asset if it meets four conditions: there is a documentable historical, linguistic, religious, or demographic affinity; this affinity is supported by a current treaties, cooperation framework, diaspora or trade flow; NATO or EU currently lacks that channel or it is inconsistent; the channel is not opposable with Romania's alliance obligations. The coming together of all four marks the transition from rhetoric to diplomatic effectiveness.

Table: Validity yest applied to relational vectors

Vector	Affinity	Anchor	Needs	Compatibility	Verdict
Republic of Moldavia	yes	yes	yes	yes	Confirmed active
Turkey	yes	yes	yes	yes	Confirmed active
Israel	yes	yes	partial	yes	Niche asset
MENA	yes	in decline	yes	partial	Residual
Africa	partial	no	yes	yes	Inactive potential
Iran	weak	no	yes	no	Invalid
China	historical	no	no	no	Invalid (unusable)
Russia	no	no	no	no	Invalid (negative case)

Source: author's assessment, based on the criteria set out in the text; situation as of 2026.

For three vectors, the test is positive. In the Republic of Moldova case, all four conditions are met: a shared language, widespread granting of Romanian citizenship, and Bucharest role as energy supplier and advocate for the European integration path. Also, its identity profile generates a capacity for action unique among member states. Turkey is an instructive case from a theoretical standpoint: the affinity comes from Istanbul profiling as the least intrusive empire during modern era: a late suzerainty centuries ago rather than direct administrative conquest of the Principalities. This is explaining the absence of resentment felt by other Balkan states (furthermore, unlike Russia, Turkey is not responsible for the loss of historical Romanian territories). The enduring and uncontroversial presence of Turkish and Tatar communities in Dobrogea also helps. The anchor here is concrete: the shared role as bases for the US/NATO strategy in the region and the joint operationalization of security measures

for infrastructure in the Black Sea (beyond the restrictions of the Montreux Convention imposed on the NATO format, yet useful to the alliance and EU).

Israel represents a niche asset, rooted in the fact that Romania was the only communist state not to sever diplomatic relations after 1967, in the role it later played during the process leading to the Egyptian-Israeli agreement, as well as within the significant community of Israelis who are of Romanian descent or choose to regain their citizenship. Common military program and intelligence cooperation represents a foundation for security relations superior to the level attained by other EU and NATO members.

Relations with the Middle East and Africa are subject to specific constraints. In the Arab world, the affinity that existed during the latter half of the last century was genuine and well-documented-cemented by the large number of students trained in Romanian universities prior to 1989 and the presence of Romanian enterprises in the region-yet the educational and economic levers were abruptly severed after 1990 and never replaced. Currently, this constitutes a residual asset, the potential for even marginal capitalization of which will expire within a decade. The situation is similar regarding Africa, where-as with the Middle East-Romania possesses the cultural advantage of having no colonial past. However, the limited scope of Romanian diplomacy in recent decades suggests an unexploited positional advantage rather than an active asset.

The Chinese, Iranian, and Russian vectors fail the test. Regarding the relationship with Beijing, there is genuine historical capital-stemming in part from the long-term vision of Chinese regimes-which still lends an identity-based weight to a relationship where Bucharest has invested minimal effort over the last four decades, compared to the era when it served as a bridge to Washington for the PRC. Romania's alignment with the 2019 5G technology memorandum, the strict vetting of non-EU investments, the failure of energy projects, and so forth, have compromised the prospects for a privileged diplomatic relationship. Reopening that former channel would do more to undermine Western confidence in Bucharest than to generate influence in Beijing. In the case of Iran, there is merely diplomatic continuity, devoid of affinity or identity-based connections, and existing against a backdrop of economic decoupling. Regarding the relationship with Russia, shared Orthodoxy has not fostered political affinity. The Romanian people's collective memory is dominated by occupation and territorial loss: 1812, 1878, 1940, and 1944. Romania directly contradicts the hypothesis of civilizational-confessional solidarity postulated by Huntington, for the following reasons:

a) The Pan-Slavic doctrine of the "Russkiy mir" offers nothing to Romanians, whose identity tends to be defined more by language than by confession (the expansion of Neo-Protestant denominations in Romania-which are opposed within Russian territory-reflects significantly different long-term stances);

b) Ethnophiletism-specifically the alignment of Orthodox churches with ethnicity-is the general rule, even if formally rejected. In Romania's case, this drives the "national" church to align with a founding myth that stands in contrast to Russian narratives; although tsars following Peter the Great sought to link Romanian emancipation to a liberation brought by Russia itself, the reality-shaped by the brutality of the Eastern colossus over recent centuries-has been a story of continuous effort to break free from Russian occupation or orbit (a situation opposite to that of the churches in Bulgaria and Serbia, which remain explicitly unaligned with the push for integration into Atlantic structures).

c) The Romanian Orthodox Church is not only resistant to the "Third Rome" claims revived in various forms by Moscow but also maintains a revisionist stance regarding jurisdiction vis-à-vis the Russian Patriarchate. This is evidenced by the hundreds of priests in the Republic of Moldova who have switched allegiance from the Metropolis of Moldova (subordinate to Moscow) to the Metropolis of Bessarabia (under Bucharest).

These observations are significant because, within the broader Eastern European context, they indicate that while Orthodoxy is not a Euro-Atlantic driver-being deeply intertwined with national resilience and the concept of autocephaly-it does not serve as an asset for the Russian narrative either (except when leveraged through religiously resonant founding myths linked to historical moments initiated by St. Petersburg or Moscow).

In this context, the apprehension regarding anti-NATO and anti-EU propaganda-observed among significant segments of the Romanian electorate-does not reflect cultural affinity nor does it create a channel that Bucharest or Brussels can strategically exploit; rather, it is a reactive public response to the vulnerabilities described in sections 5.2 and 5.3.

7. Conclusions

Romania's composite identity profile affects its security mix not through the content of its alignment with the national strategy, but through the coherence of that alignment. The four operational vulnerabilities identified are not insurmountable; they create predispositions for value-based judgment rather than imposing constraints on action. Furthermore, given that Bucharest's external security interests are more stable than at any other time in the state's modern history, this composite identity profile can actually accelerate specific stances favourable to national security-rather than merely acting as a long-term brake on systemic frameworks (as evidenced by the high level of acceptance regarding EU membership and the strong preference for the presence of allied contingents).

The hypothesis regarding relational advantages was only partially confirmed, specifically concerning small and medium-sized external actors-a category that aligns with the Romanian state's own global weight. Drivers of future relationship-building are active in three scenarios where cultural affinity overlaps with institutional anchors.

This study does not argue for the existence of a national character with immutable traits, nor does it claim that identity dictates strategic choices. The legacy of military, cultural, and administrative ties is accessible to broad segments of the population and can be activated under identifiable conditions. The extent to which the resources required for this process are utilized determines the variation in domestic support for security policies-an aspect that structural explanations fail to account for.

Romania is certainly not an isolated case. Its status as a liminal state-comparable to others in a similar position-was one of the factors prompting this analytical study.

Several avenues for further research remain open:

a) the extent to which the documented reciprocity gap is mirrored in other "flank" states characterized by different forms of composite identity profiles;

b) whether the vulnerability to delegitimization is mitigated by the generational shift-replacing those who experienced communist totalitarianism with cohorts formed entirely within the Euro-Atlantic framework-or if it is perpetuated through other mechanisms;

c) potential changes in the process of European identity formation as the application of mechanisms linked to the "internal otherness" paradigm-used to assimilate Central and Eastern European nations-approaches the limits of available geographic and demographic resources (coinciding with the establishment of what appears to be a final frontier in Kyiv and Chisinau, facing the new Iron Curtain erected by Moscow). This entails analysing shifts in identity and Europe's centre of gravity resulting from the maturing economic, political, military, and demographic integration of states such as Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Croatia, Slovenia, Romania, and Bulgaria.

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Contributors' Biographical Notes

Raul PAȘCALĂU is Associate Professor of Modern Languages at the University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" in Timișoara, Romania. His teaching and research activities focus on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) pedagogy, Translation Studies, and the teaching and learning of English in the context of life sciences. He has also participated in several research projects related to internationalisation and the Erasmus+ programme, contributing to academic cooperation and international educational initiatives.

E-mail: raul.pascalau@usvt.ro

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9335-0939

Dumitra-Mădălina PANTEA is affiliated with the University of Oradea, where she is Senior Lecturer. She specializes in language teaching methodologies, translation studies, and English for specific purposes, and currently teaches Methodology of English Teaching, Traductology, and English in Medicine. Her main teaching and research interests include the intersection of linguistics and pedagogy and specialized translation. Through research, publications, and conference participation, she explores innovative approaches to language instruction and translation, emphasizing effective communication across professional disciplines.

E-mail: mapantea@uoradea.ro

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4571-706X

Corina Georgeta BARNA, PhD, is Assistant Professor at the University of Life Sciences "King Mihai I" from Timișoara, where she teaches Romanian as a foreign language, French for specific purposes, professional communication and intercultural communication. She is Head of the International Students Office and has extensive experience supporting the academic and cultural integration of international students. Her research focuses on specialised terminology, veterinary and life-sciences discourse, multilingual higher education, project-based language learning and AI-assisted pedagogy. She is the author of the *Histoire et méthode en terminologie, Dictionnaire français-roumain de terminologie vétérinaire, Le français pour les vétérinaires* and *Le roumain pour les sciences de la vie*. She also serves as a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions National Contact Point and as an assessor for the European Commission's Human Resources Strategy for Researchers.

Email: corina.barna@usvt.ro

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8599-5411

Elena Laura VULPOIU holds a Ph.D. in Applied Languages, Literature, and Translation from the "Jaume I" University of Castellón. Her research career began at the same institution, during her Research Master's program in Translation and Interpretation, when she focused on the analysis of audiovisual translation (TAV), an emerging field in both the academic and professional spheres in Romania. Her doctoral dissertation approaches this discipline through a comprehensive methodology structured around three fundamental dimensions: historical, sociological, and translation studies. The results of her scholarly work have been showcased through active participation in relevant international conferences. Among her landmark academic contributions are the studies "Subtitling in Romania and Spain: A Contrastive Analysis" (2017), "Audiovisual Translators and the Skills Required for This Profession in Romania" (2021), and "Subtitling Between Translation and Interpretation" (2024). These works delve into the procedural mechanisms and professional competencies essential for the evolution of audiovisual translation, combining fundamental research with sociocultural perspectives applied to the Eastern European translation market and exploring the evolution of censorship and professional training in the field of translation and interpretation.

E-mail: vulpoiu.elena-laura@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6299-3245

Victoria VINTU is University Lecturer in the Centre for Pre-university Studies and Language Education at "Nicolae Testemițanu" State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Republic of Moldova. She holds a PhD in Philology. Her research focuses on two main areas: post-war Bessarabian poetry, including its rehabilitation trends, and the teaching of Romanian as a foreign language. Her recent studies address the didactics of Romanian as a foreign language and develop methodology based on students' needs.

E-mail: victoria.vintu@usmf.md
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4515-122X

Viorica CAZAC, PhD, is University Lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages at "Nicolae Testemițanu" State University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Republic of Moldova. Her academic work focuses on English for Medical Purposes, specialised medical discourse, academic writing, and Romanian-English medical translation. She develops teaching and research materials for medical education and is interested in how terminology, phraseology, genre conventions, and professional context shape the international communication of medical knowledge. Her recent work also addresses authentic materials, task-based learning, and the use of artificial-intelligence tools in specialised language education and academic writing. Her research lies at the intersection of applied linguistics, translation studies, and medical

education, with particular attention to linguistic accuracy and professional real-life communication.

E-mail: viorica.cazac@usmf.md
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2449-2084

Anemarie ARSENIE, PhD, is Assistant Professor at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania, and a teacher of German as a foreign language. She holds a PhD from the West University of Timișoara, where her doctoral research focused on didactic games in German as a foreign language instruction, with particular attention to their use with children and adults. Her academic and teaching experience spans German language education, foreign language didactics, and pedagogical practice. She has participated in national and international academic conferences and has published work in the fields of education and German language teaching. Her research interests include German-language literature, Romanian-German cultural relations, intercultural studies, language teaching methodology, identity and memory, with particular interest in the relationship between language, literature, and cultural experience.

E-mail: arsenie.anemarie@uvvg.ro

Mădălina CRIȘAN is a first-year PhD student at the Doctoral School of Philology, "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, Romania. Her doctoral research focuses on Ioana Nicolaie's prose, with particular attention to discourse strategies, grammatical structures, and pragmatic and cognitive approaches to literary texts. Her academic interests include contemporary Romanian literature, memory, identity, and the formative dimensions of literary discourse. She is also the author of the children's book *Negrilă și Codruța. O prietenie aristoteliană*. Alongside her academic and literary activity, she works in institutional communication as spokesperson for the Alba County Police Inspectorate in Romania.

Email: toma.madalina.sdf2026@uab.ro

Bogdan Mihai DASCĂLU is Senior Researcher II at the "Titu Maiorescu" Institute of Banat Studies of the Romanian Academy, Timișoara Branch, where he coordinates critical editions published under the aegis of the Academy, among them the critical edition of Titu Maiorescu's writings and diary. He holds a doctorate in philology and has carried out research at the University of Vienna and at Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg. His work lies at the intersection of imagology, comparative literature, Romanian and German literary history, textual scholarship and translation studies, with a sustained interest in the image of the Banat in Romanian writing of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A former editor-in-chief of the *Revista de studii banatice*, he has published studies on the image of Greece in Romanian

poetry, on the image of the German in Romanian memorial texts, and a series of articles on the history and method of imagology.

E-mail: bmdascalu@yahoo.com

Simona OLARU-POŞIAR is Associate Professor at Victor Babeș University of Medicine and Pharmacy in Timișoara, where she teaches English and German, as well as courses on cultural mediation and inclusion. Her doctoral thesis, entitled *Das Motiv des Wahnsinns in der deutschen Literatur — von Georg Büchner bis Patrick Süskind*, is the first study in south-eastern Europe written from a dual perspective — that of a philologist and that of a clinical psychologist — a work that combines concepts from clinical psychology and literature. She is the author of several studies both in Romania and abroad, including *Art in Context — Shakespeare on Caravaggio's Canvas*, published by UVT Press, Research Library, and has contributed to the monograph *Language in the Digital Era. Challenges and Perspectives*, writing the chapter entitled 'Training and Development in the Digital Era', a study published by De Gruyter, Berlin.

E-mail: olaru-posiar.simona@umft.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0005-4039-1995

Andrea PETERLICEAN, Ph.D., is University Lecturer at *Sapientia* Hungarian University of Transylvania, Faculty of Technical and Human Sciences, Târgu Mureș. Her teaching and research interests include applied linguistics, discourse analysis, translation studies, English phonetics and phonology, specialised languages, multilingualism, and intercultural communication. She has taught English and German in higher education and has developed teaching materials for translation, language learning, and English for specific purposes. Her recent research examines multilingual and multimodal discourse, cultural mediation, public identity, digital media, and the ways linguistic choices participate in the construction and circulation of meaning across cultural contexts. She is also interested in the pedagogical applications of emerging technologies in language education and translation.

Email: andrea.peterlicean@ms.sapientia.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0006-0321-898X

Marinela COJOCARIU is Associate Professor at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania. Her teaching and research interests focus on literature, creativity, communication, and media studies, with particular emphasis on the interpretation of classical and modern texts in contemporary cultural and social contexts. Her academic work explores the intersections of literature, identity, representation, and communication, examining how established narratives acquire new meanings through changing cultural perspectives. Her recent research has addressed the construction of public identity, self-presentation, and the relationship

between traditional forms of storytelling and digital media. She is involved in academic teaching and research, adopting an interdisciplinary approach that connects the humanities with contemporary cultural and media discourse.

E-mail: cojocariu.marinela@uvvg.ro

Roxana Silvia MORARU is Assistant Professor at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania. Her academic interests encompass narrative fiction, postmodern expressions of thought, multicultural studies, and interdisciplinary approaches to literary and cultural analysis. She is interested in the dialogue between literary traditions and contemporary cultural developments, as well as in the connections between literature and other fields of knowledge within the humanities.

E-mail: moraru.roxana@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8917-6092

Alina REȘCEANU is a Senior Lecturer at the Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Letters, University of Craiova. She has an MA degree in Formal (Computational) Linguistics at the University of Bucharest and a PhD in Theoretical Linguistics at the same university, with a paper on comparative syntax in the Minimalist approach. She has published two books, many articles and studies and participated in numerous national and international conferences on theoretical and applied linguistics. Her main interests focus on topics related to language acquisition and language learning, contrastive grammar, English as a medium of instruction, and Global English(es).

E-mail: alina.resceanu@edu.ucv.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6789-7313

Paula-Andreea ONOFREI is Lecturer of English at "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University from Iași, Romania. Her research focus is on ESP, didactics of teaching English, COIL, universal literature, Christian Orthodoxy, arts, interdisciplinarity, interculturalism.

E-mail: paula.onofrei@info.uaic.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6107-528X

Marta GANA, PhD, is Lecturer in the field of Education Sciences at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania. Her academic interests include teacher education, curriculum and instruction, educational innovation, digital pedagogy, artificial intelligence in education, and inclusive educational practices. Her teaching and research focus on the relationship between pedagogical theory and professional practice, the development of future teachers, and the responsible integration of emerging technologies into learning environments. She is particularly interested in

how educational transitions reshape teacher competencies, professional identity, assessment practices and classroom relationships. Her current scholarly work examines the pedagogical, ethical and professional implications of generative artificial intelligence for teacher education, with an emphasis on human-centred practice, teacher agency and educational quality.

E-mail: gana_marta@yahoo.com

Patricia Jana Maria BOTA, born with a passion for languages and education, her academic path began at the "Dimitrie Țichindeal" Pedagogical High School in Arad. She pursued a Bachelor's degree in Romanian and Italian at the West University of Timișoara (2010-2013), followed by a Master's in Romance Studies (2013-2015), which included an Erasmus+ exchange in Rome at LUMSA University. Driven by deep philological interest, she completed doctoral research in Classical Philology (2015-2018), focusing on dramatic structures in Plautus and Goldoni. Her teaching career spans secondary, private, and higher education. She worked as a foreign language trainer at Fokus Educational Center (2022-2023), taught Romanian Literature at the "Vasile Goldiș" Private College (2023-2026), and served as a University Assistant at the Faculty of Medicine, "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, teaching Romanian to international students. Committed to lifelong learning, she earned a degree in Primary and Preschool Education Pedagogy (2023-2026) and she is pursuing advanced Master's degrees in Linguistics and Educational Policies at "Aurel Vlaicu" University. Her mission remains bridging rigorous academic research with innovative, student-centred teaching.

E-mail: ianapatricia91@yahoo.com

Stăncuța Ramona DIMA-LAZA is Associate Professor at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania, where she has been actively involved in higher education and philological research since 2003. She holds a PhD in Philology from "Lucian Blaga" University of Sibiu, as well as a degree in Nutrition and Dietetics. Her academic work reflects an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together English for Specific Purposes, with particular emphasis on medical and dental terminology, cultural studies, and non-verbal communication. Her research interests also extend to intercultural dialogue, while her scholarly and teaching experience is reflected in numerous books, indexed publications, and international teaching mobilities undertaken through the Erasmus+ programme.

E-mail: dimalaza.stancuta@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6370-2380

Adrian PĂCURAR is currently Lecturer at "Vasile Goldiș'' Western University of Arad, Romania. He holds a BA in Philosophy, an MA in Philosophy of Science, and a PhD in Philosophy from the West University of Timișoara, Romania. His main research interests are philosophy of science, epistemology of humanistic and social sciences, existential analysis, psychology and the epistemology of psychological knowledge.

E-mail: pacurar.adrian@uvvg.ro

Lia Lucia EPURE is currently Associate Professor at "Vasile Goldiș'' Western University of Arad, Romania. She holds a PhD in Organizational Communication Management from West University of Timișoara, Romania. She also attended during time numerous prestigious international courses in the general domain of public communication and advocacy. She had a scholarship at the US State Department in the field of Journalism & Communication, 2004 and she also is specialized in Lobby and Advocacy at the Academy of Lobby and Advocacy, USAID, 2003. Her main research interests are public communication, new media and contemporary public communication tools, and organizational management.

E-mail: epure.lia@uvvg.ro

Aliona Zgardan-CRUDU is Associate Professor and holds a PhD in Philology at the Faculty of Philology and History, "Ion Creanga" State Pedagogical University of Chisinau. Her teaching and research activities are situated within the field of philological sciences, with particular interests in contemporary Romanian, stylistics, lexicology, discourse, and communication. Her research focuses on the development of Romanian terminology, political discourse, alterity and discursive creativity, as well as the cultivation and standardisation of the Romanian language. She is the author and co-author of approximately 200 scholarly and educational articles and works. She collaborates with general secondary education institutions in the Republic of Moldova, contributing to the professional training and development of teachers. She participates in radio and television programmes devoted to issues of language, education, and communication and is actively involved in national and international scholarly events, as well as in curriculum development and enhancement.

E-mail: zgardan.aliona@upsc.md

ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2969-4953

Gheorghe FALCĂ, Lecturer at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Physical Education and Sports, where his teaching focuses on communication and international relations. He is also a Member of the European Parliament, representing Romania within the Group of the European People's Party (EPP). His parliamentary work focuses primarily on

transport and mobility, employment and social affairs, the internal market, European competitiveness and EU policy-making. His combined academic and institutional experience informs his interest in political communication, European integration, democratic representation and the relationship between political discourse and social transformation.

E-mail: falca.gheorghe@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7668-0992

Cristian BENȚE is Associate Professor at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania, where he also serves as Vice-Rector for Academic Strategy and Student Affairs. His teaching and research focus on international relations, security studies, European security, Central and Eastern Europe, hybrid threats, migration and border governance, as well as the historical and political dimensions of contemporary security. His recent work has examined European security discourse, securitisation, information manipulation, and the changing role of borders in European policy. He is involved in academic teaching, research and editorial activities in the fields of international relations and security studies.

Email: bente.cristian@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0007-8340-4017

Adrian TOMA completed his PhD in sociology in 2024 at West University of Timișoara (UVT), with a thesis on *Social reinsertion and extraction from deviant environments in the community of beggars in Arad*. He is currently Lecturer at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Physical Education and Sports. His research interests include sociology, social vulnerability and marginalization, discrimination against homeless persons and beggars, juvenile delinquency, social reinsertion, as well as security studies and international relations. His published work addresses topics such as discrimination and social exclusion, disability-related vulnerability, corruption, power and alterity in international relations, and contemporary global security dynamics. Adrian Toma has published articles in peer-reviewed and indexed journals, and has contributed chapters to academic volumes. He also collaborates on interdisciplinary research in the fields of social work, sociology, and security studies.

E-mail: toma.adrian@uvvg.ro

Editors' Biographical Notes and Contact Data

Speranța Sofia MILANCOVICI holds a PhD in philology, obtained in 2008 from the Romanian Academy's Institute of Literary History and Theory "G. Călinescu" in Bucharest. Her doctoral research focused on Romanian and French literature, through a monograph dedicated to the bilingual author Benjamin Fundoianu / Fondane. She is Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Physical Education and Sports at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania (UVVG). Her academic work spans Romanian and French literature, intercultural studies, discourse analysis, and higher-education management. She is Editor-in-Chief of an internationally indexed scholarly journal and serves on several editorial boards. She also supervises doctoral research at "1 Decembrie 1918" University of Alba Iulia, participates in the Executive Committee of FEDE - Federation for Education in Europe, and acts as an expert evaluator for ARACIS. In addition, she is involved in international academic networks and contributes to institutional partnership and accreditation initiatives.

Email: milancovici.speranta@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0009-0783-8432

Laura-Rebeca STIEGELBAUER holds a PhD in Philology from "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași and is Associate Professor of English at "Vasile Goldiș" Western University of Arad, Romania (UVVG). She coordinates the BA programme in Applied Modern Languages within the Faculty of Social Sciences, Humanities, and Physical Education and Sports. Her teaching and research interests include translation and interpreting studies, specialised discourse, terminology, intercultural communication, and the integration of artificial intelligence into language education and assessment. Her academic work focuses particularly on the relationship between language, culture and professional communication. She is the author and co-author of scholarly publications in these fields and contributes to academic publishing through editorial and peer-review activities. She serves on the editorial boards of several scholarly journals and publications and is Head of the Editorial Board for the Philosophy, Communication, and Media Sciences series at Trivent Publishing, Hungary. She also collaborates with the British Council Romania in delivering professional development presentations for English language teachers and is a Cambridge English Speaking Examiner.

E-mail: stiegelbauer.laura@uvvg.ro
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0003-0688-2278

Voices of Transition: Philology, Identity, and Cultural Encounters explores the complex relationship between language, culture, and identity in a world marked by continuous change. Bringing together interdisciplinary perspectives on translation, cultural mediation, literary memory, education, public discourse, and security, the volume examines how individuals and communities interpret, negotiate, and respond to transformation. The contributions invite readers to look beyond conventional understandings of transition as a historical or institutional process and to consider its linguistic, cultural, and human dimensions. Through its diversity of voices and approaches, the collection offers a space for critical reflection on the ways identities evolve, meanings shift, and cultural encounters shape our understanding of the world.

The Editors

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