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CULTUS

the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication

2010, Volume 3

IDENTITY AND INTEGRATION

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FOREWORD

Welcome to issue 3 of *Cultus, the Journal of Intercultural Mediation and Communication*. This volume focuses on *Identity and Integration* and forms the leitmotif for Patrick Boylan's interview with the interculturalist Milton Bennett. More than just an interview it is an exchange of points of view, an animated conversation full of practical examples, personal contributions and experience which support the theoretical frameworks discussed.

Apart from the opening interview, this issue offers a range of contributions, which we have grouped into a Bordieusian view of "Second Language Acquisition", manipulation by and through the media in "Identity and the Media"; and finally, Hofstede's theory is put to the test in determining the extent to which cultural values play a part in "Identity and Integration".

As ever, we wish to express our gratitude to the members of our editorial board who have all acted as referees for the numerous proposals submitted to our journal, and we would also like to thank those colleagues not on the editorial board who also kindly accepted to referee papers submitted for this issue.

The Editors

To be or to be perceived? Identity and Integration: an Introduction.

Cinzia Spinzi

1. Framing the issue

The last few years have witnessed an important growth in research on identity which has by now “attained a remarkable centrality within the human and social sciences” (Du Gay et al., 2000: 1). So, one may wonder why another collection of studies on the same topic. Firstly, it still remains “an extremely complex construct” (De Fina, 2003: 15) which fundamentally alters with time, culture and ideology (Caldas-Coulthard et al. 2009); secondly, any attempt to define it fails not only because of its composite nature but also because it is an ever-changing construct, not forgetting the tensions that emerge from ‘subjective and projected identities’ (see Lemke, 2008: 20). The shift today is from the essentialist approach to identity, as a relatively stable sense of self internal to an individual (see Erikson, 1968), to a more shared social-constructivist perspective. This latter orientation looks at identity in terms of process or better of results from negotiations between individuals, and highlights the importance of social action (Berger et al. 1967; De Fina, 2003). For Riley, the meeting between actors or, as he calls it, “the ability to establish intersubjectivity”, is even “a necessary condition for the formation of identity” (2007: 33). This view acquires crucial importance in a globalized world where migrations and new technologies require interaction across cultures.

In the 1960s, media scholar Marshall McLuhan (1962) coined the phrase ‘global village’, to encompass the idea, revolutionary at that time, of a shrinking world, where an event in one part of the world may be experienced in another part in real time. This implies a continuous coming into contact with the unfamiliar, with an alien (Bourdieuian) *field*, yielding more and more uncertain identities. Indeed, in order to be successful, intercultural communication requires adaptation and accommodation to new external stimuli, raising the question of assimilation (or otherwise) of the values of the other by claiming or not

other identities. Stated differently, does intercultural interaction necessitate a shift in identity and accordingly, does it imply the co-existence of multiple identities?

Against such a complex backdrop, the interview opening this volume sets out to determine if a Bourdieusian transformation or new identity construction is a necessary process when training or communicating interculturally. These and many more questions are posed to the interculturalist Milton Bennett by a provocative Patrick Boylan, starting with the crucial issue, related to Bennett's personal experiences, of mutually constitutive identities. Interacting and integrating with three different audiences in his long career, training company executives, graduates and teaching secondary school students, he has experienced three different social and professional roles whilst, at the same time, remaining centred as himself.

By taking distance from what he calls Bourdieu's relativist approach, Bennett holds the view that reality is not a finite product, but interaction with it implies an on-going activity of attempting to define those realities, and only the subjective *emergent quality* of the negotiation with the real world may be described, not the phenomenon itself. Adopting this view, we cannot exempt ourselves from creating our own *sense of affiliation* according to the different roles and situations we are embedded in, construing what he names *multiple repertoires*. The real problem is how to maintain these *repertoires*. But does this mean –as Boylan counterattacks– that people can construct an identity which is consonant with a culture they do not accept? This question initiates a stimulating discussion around the category of *empathy* followed by that of *integration*.

Unsuccessful intercultural communication is often associated to cultural differences which lead people to either deny others' cultural values or to deny one's own. But, in order to achieve integration, communicators should become sensitive not only to the values of others but also to become more critically aware about how their own culture conditions them cognitively, and to relate successfully with both. As Bennett puts it, 'integration', which is the ultimate goal, requires a multi-stepped process which develops his well-known cline from *denial* to *integration* through *defence*, *minimization*, *acceptance*, and *adaptation* (see *Cultus 2* for a review and critique). This linear continuum sees people moving from a lack of perception of cultural differences to a feeling of hostility, through the acknowledgment of these differences, to their recognition

and thus empathy until complete integration. It means passing from an initial ethnocentric position to an ethnorelative stage.

Any source of inner tensions, in the process of integration in an alien culture, may be solved by embracing the *emergent quality* of the transaction with the unacceptable cultural event which may take place. Against Boylan's remark about the risks one might incur by adopting this view, Bennett defends his position by stressing the non-mutually exclusive character of cultural values. A further practical slant is given in the last part of the interview, which contains a number of examples of current political and social events that are analysed (albeit briefly) giving us a more tangible idea of the previous theoretical premises.

2. Second Language Acquisition

If Bennett distances himself from Bourdieu's deterministic view by stressing individual freedom in determining identity, the French sociologist provides the framework to the two studies which follow. What the two appropriations of Bourdieu's theory have in common, is that both authors see the structuralist-constructionist as primarily a macrostructural theorist.

The theoretical categories underlying the papers are those of the triad *habitus*, *capital* and *field*. *Habitus*, the most controversial concept of the three, is a set of dispositions which generate practices and perceptions, namely a structure by which we try to explain the dispositions that influence us to become who we are. These dispositions, which include beliefs, values, tastes, feelings and body postures are constructed through history, inculcated in childhood, and are socially reinforced through education and culture. As Bourdieu himself argues "the body is in the social world but the social world is also in the body" (1990: 3). This duality, which also invests identity, is the underlying assumption in NIAMH KELLY's Bourdieusian study, the first paper in this volume, where identity influences, but is in turn influenced by, social interactions. For Bourdieu, every linguistic exchange is a relation of symbolic power since through 'legitimate' language we can impose our social competence, power and our authority. This is crucial to second language acquisition (SLA) theories in that interactions between native speakers and non-native speakers may be considered as sites of reproduction of power relations.

Kelly's research highlights the relevance of the role performed by the social, political and cultural context in second language acquisition (SLA). SLA research became more systematic in the mid 1990s when cognitivism in the field of language learning was rejected in favour of a more context-related perspective. Before that date - as Kelly rightly observes - interest in locating learning in social interaction had been shown in Bakhtin's (1981) non-formalist approach to language. Her study contributes to confirming the connection between power and identity through language, and advocates a major role of SLA theory in the pedagogy of L2, since it embodies the complex social identity of the language learner.

Similarly, the interplay between language, identity and socio-cultural context constitutes the backdrop to JANE JACKSON's ethnographic research which involves Chinese participants and their studies of English in England. The research question deals with the discrepancies between the individual's internalised principles and those of the social arena of the school in England, namely conflicts between *habitus* and *field*.

By assembling data from a number of sources she analyses material collected personally over a time span of eight years. Bennett's (DMIS) model outlined in the interview is applied here to track the students' intercultural sensitivity. The author notices that, despite the initial enthusiasm for the project, some students, inhibited by the threat of an unfamiliar setting (*field*), reinforced their national identity by limiting their contact with the host culture; on the contrary another more flexible group of Chinese students was more likely to overcome the culture shock through improved prior knowledge of the British culture. Apart from the prior knowledge, a number of other variables seem to affect the results among which we find agency as well as the degree of mutuality in the host family.

3. Identity and the Media

Two of the papers presented in this issue focus on Italy, with the first in this section. Hardly surprisingly, when discussing the media, Italy provides a fascinating case study. Not only is there Berlusconi, "the great communicator" (cited in Ginsberg 2004: 112), and his power over the media, discussed in this section, but there is also the country's own catholic/liberal struggle for control over media output (covered more in

the 3rd section). But we begin this section with an analysis of how the media itself, this time with examples taken from the US, can create and transform identity through editorial decisions related to front page layout.

ANNA BIANCO's study deals with implicit themes in the language of the news and devotes her analysis to the front pages of two American newspapers *the New York Times* and *the Washington Post*. She begins with a number of related premises. First, no piece of information is stored in isolation in our mind but words form semantically associated clusters with related concepts. Secondly, this association may be accessed both consciously and unconsciously (see Moon 1997; Taylor 1995). Her analysis focusses on the single most important page of the two newspapers, and show how they activate a particular associations of concepts. Bianco demonstrates how seemingly unconnected articles and pictures laid out on the page, actually form part of an editorially pre-determined connecting frame, leaving the reader little room for an independent assessment of the identity of the major players in the news.

Semiotics and stylistics provide invaluable tools in the analysis of how the juxtaposition of words, stories and pictures act to become the manipulative mechanisms allowing newspapers to reinforce particular ideologies.

MARIA CRISTINA CAIMOTTO then, relying on Critical Discourse Analysis, investigates the identity of one particular man, the Italian prime minister at the time, as constructed through his own words, and the one reconstructed through the foreign media.

By combining qualitative and quantitative methodology, Caimotto analyses two corpora and text types spreading over a two year period. A collection of original speeches by Berlusconi are contrasted with articles reporting news from the foreign press and published in the *La Repubblica*. Much, as already noted, has been written about the "great communicator", but the originality of this study is the analysis of the most frequent or 'preferred' stories in the foreign press regarding Berlusconi, which - not surprisingly - build up around sex and corruption.

Caimotto takes as her theme the difference between 'news as information' and 'news as narration' (in Caimotto this volume), and argues that the latter is the focus in the news coming from abroad. The translation of 'the news' into Italian, contrary perhaps to expectations, is used as a further source for gossip and entertainment, where what

counts more is developing the narration of personal identity rather than the institutional role.

4. Identity and Integration

The second theme in this volume, integration, is addressed in FRANCO ZAPPETINI's study which focuses on the role played by cultural values in the construction of Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) identities. The debate in the Italian Parliament of the Bill regarding cohabitation rights for same-sex couples in February 2008 gives the author the chance to analyse LGBT identities and the cultural factors which have affected their integration in the wider Italian social context. Once again, the analysis shows that the exaltation of religious values typical of a Catholic country, such as the importance of 'the family' (see Caimotto this volume), represents a strategy to fight what is now a global wave of countries sanctifying same sex unions. Zappetini demonstrates how the 'uncertainty avoidance' cultural orientation comes to the fore in this context, in that same-sex cohabitation is perceived as a threat to traditional Italian family values. As his media analysis shows, people look to the Church as the institution which provides certainties in an uncertain world. To support this view, the author also analyses other material such as blog pages and scripts of televised debates discussing the Bill and LGBT identity.

What is revealed is that not only 'news as information' and 'news as narration', but opinionated blog pages on both sides of the debate too, demonstrate the same conservative, high uncertainty avoidance, and masculine traits in line with Hofstede's studies. LGBTs are projected, by both sides, as non-conformists - and particularly by the detractors - as undermining the procreational traditional vision of marriage as sanctioned by the Church.

Continuing with Hofstede's cultural orientations, COSTANZA CUCCHI's work demonstrates how 'power distance' and 'individualism/collectivism' can explain differences in a comparable corpus of English and Italian websites of potato-crisp manufacturers. The originality of this investigation resides in the study of the linguistic features of the English version of the Italian website. Although the English texts on this website are forms of mediation from Italian, they

are analysed as being autonomous, addressing the international audience and thus representing a case of English used as *Lingua Franca*.

In order to avoid the problems associated with culture-bound translation (see *Cultus* 1), which tends to leave residues of the original cultural identity, national rather than international food companies were preferred as sites of analysis. The national companies will, clearly, tend to show more of their own national-culture specific characteristics through language.

The study confirms the validity of the cultural parameter of ‘power distance’. Here Cucchi finds patterns of text markers in the English data, which indicate an orientation to equality and the reduction of the visibility of differences in society. Markers in the Italian data, on the other hand, reveal a more pyramidal image of society with respected experts visibly distant, at the top. The quantitative analysis of first person pronouns, for example, shows the presence of a less personalized style in the Italian data. Also, in informing, and promoting the products, the English corpus shows clear signs of subjectivism, use of informal discourse markers and a more informal style, which contrast with the Italian more high-power-distance authoritative and impersonal stance, further confirming Hofstede’s findings.

5. Concluding remarks

The papers presented in this volume have shed light on the complex and multi-layered nature of ‘identity’ both at national and international levels, and its umbilical connection with integration and language. Four major theories have been tested here: Bourdieu’s *habitus* theory, Bennett’s DMIS model, Hofstede’s cultural dimensions theory along with Critical Discourse Analysis. Both Hofstede’s and Bennett’s theories have been discussed and criticised, particularly in Issue 2. What is refreshing here is that theory or model has contributed to furthering our understanding of how communication works to create identity, and how identity works in communication, especially across cultures, from culture shock to integration.

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