

## BOOK REVIEW

*Reimagining Identity in the 21st Century: Language, Memory, and Representation Across Cultures*, Onorina Botezat, Ramona Mihăilă, George T. Sipos, Ludmila Braniște (Editors), București: Pro Universitaria, 2025. ISBN 978-606-26-2121-6

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### *Abstract*

This book review presents the most recent scientific collection of scholarly views on the various facets of identity via the lenses of language, memory and cultural representations, as they appear in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The contributing editors, Onorina Botezat, Ramona Mihăilă, George T. Sipos and Ludmila Braniște, suggest an interdisciplinary approach, where the four parts of the book are designed to follow a logical progression that moves from the practical and methodological to the symbolic and historical, offering both applied insights and theoretical reflection. The work embraces a genuinely multilingual and multicultural approach, reflecting the varied contexts in which language, literature, and cultural identity are both produced and studied. Contributions appear in English, French, German, and Italian, allowing each author to engage with their subject matter in the language best suited to its conceptual, historical, or disciplinary nuances.

### **Introduction**

The book *Reimagining Identity in the 21st Century: Language, Memory, and Representation Across Cultures* gathers diverse studies that approach language, culture, and identity from interdisciplinary and complementary perspectives, creating a coherent journey from methods of language teaching to broader issues of intercultural integration, self-representation and representation of the Other, and cultural heritage. The scholars have delivered their scientific disseminations in English, French, German, and Italian, thus allowing each approach to be expressed in the language best suited to its conceptual, historical, or disciplinary nuances. Far from being merely a formal choice, this multilingualism mirrors the very themes explored throughout the book: the conciliation and mediation of difference, the interplay between local and global perspectives, and the dynamics of inclusion, communication, and translation across cultures. The linguistic diversity is further enriched by the geographical

range of the contributors, who come from Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Moldova, Poland, Romania, Serbia and Spain. They represent leading universities and research institutions across Romania and Europe, as well as international academic networks. Their expertise spans philology, literature, linguistics, cultural studies, law, anthropology, translation, and communication sciences, covering diverse fields such as classical and modern literatures, intercultural and didactic approaches to language teaching, applied linguistics, lexicography, translation studies, folklore, gender studies, legal discourse, and socio-humanistic inquiry.

### **The Book Structure and Organisation**

The first part, *Teaching Languages in Context: Methods, Resources, and Cultural Adaptation*, opens the volume by focusing on the concrete realities of language education. It projects comparative views of European teaching programs and then narrows its scope to issues of testing, didactic exercises, domain-specific teaching, and the use of authentic resources such as literature. The necessity of intercultural awareness in language learning is the fundamental element of this part, showing how students must adapt to new cultural environments while educators develop methods responsive to diverse needs. The opening chapter, *Commonalities and Discrepancies in English Language Teaching Programs: An Outlook on the European Scenario* (Fernández-Alonso, Sigona, Simarro-Vázquez), establishes the broad European context by analysing teacher training programs across several countries. By pointing out both shared structures and significant differences in how English is taught and assessed in Secondary Education, the chapter sets the stage for more targeted discussions on testing and methodology. Hence, Arina Chirilă's chapter continues the previous idea by shifting the focus to assessment and offering an overview of the widely used *Vocabulary Levels Test* and its subsequent versions and validation studies.

The following cluster of chapters addresses Romanian as a foreign language, moving from general methods to specialized applications and authentic resources. Cristina-Valentina Dafinoiu, Maria-Lucreția Cazac, Ivana Ivanić, Ramona Mihăilă, and Ludmila Braniște all state the importance of intercultural engagement, as well as enhancing learners' motivation and fostering deeper cultural understanding. This sequence is complemented by Cornelia Pătru and Eleonora-Maria Boldojar's paper, which examines how Romanian learners of German navigate a humorous journey through intricate lexical and phonetic associations. The entire chapter highlights how instruction can be adapted to professional domains, how literary works can contribute to a wider intercultural engagement, motivating learners and fostering deeper cultural understanding and how the intercultural dimension of misunderstandings can strike up didactic strategies for taboo topics within the foreign language seminar. The intercultural dimension is explored even more explicitly in Irina-Marinela Deftu, who examines how foreign students negotiate cultural identity in the Romanian context and stresses the importance of balancing tolerance with respect for the host culture. Finally, George T. Sipos's chapter widens the lens to a global scale. By tracing the evolution of Japan's higher education system and the ongoing

challenges of internationalization, his study offers a comparative perspective but, at the same time, highlights the universal tensions between national traditions, institutional autonomy, and global educational demands.

The second part, *From Otherness to Integration: Intercultural Perspectives on Migration*, shifts the discussion toward identity, mobility, and belonging. The emphasis lies on how cultural differences are perceived, mediated, and integrated in various contexts, examining the conceptus of sameness and otherness, then moving on to the practical examination of stereotypes, migration, and intercultural communication. The contributions also address issues such as the role of education and religion in fostering inclusion, as well as historical approaches to teaching Romanian to foreigners, underlining the constant interplay between preserving identity and adapting to new cultural realities. This section also incorporates a historical perspective of Roman legal sources, which explores how the status of foreigners and their burial places reflected broader distinctions between Roman identity and external alterity. Thus, *From Otherness to Integration: Intercultural Perspectives on Migration* opens with a historical perspective through Arnaud Paturet's analysis of Roman legal sources, which explores how the status of foreigners and their burial places reflected broader distinctions between Roman identity and external alterity. Then, Carolina Dodu-Savca's contribution lays out the conceptual assumptions behind identity construction in intercultural contexts. By addressing notions of sameness and difference, the chapter sets the stage for understanding how identities are formed, negotiated, and contested in situations marked by cultural diversity. Building on this theoretical grounding, Silvia Krieb-Stoian and Diana Rîncioig examine the role of intercultural communication in dismantling stereotypes about Romanians, thus pointing out that dialogue and exchange represent powerful tools for moving beyond reductive images toward a more nuanced understanding of identity. This concern is further developed in the chapter *From Theory to Practice: Integrating Research, Practice and Increased Awareness of Cultural Stereotypes in the Implementation of Erasmus+ Blended Intensive Programs*, by Onorina Botezat, Irina David, Anca-Teodora Ţerban-Oprescu and Olivia Cristina Rusu. The authors show how academic collaboration bridges theory and practice, addresses cultural stereotypes, and underscores the importance of transnational cooperation and mobility.

The discussion then turns to more concrete socio-political and economic contexts. Paulina Polko's case study of the Polish Border Defence Movement offers a critical perspective on how national identity and securitisation discourse fuel anti-immigrant activism. Complementing this, Mihaela Hristea examines the phenomenon of Romanian labour migration, analysing its profound consequences for both the individuals who leave and the communities they affect. Institutional and educational dimensions are further explored in Paolo Palumbo's analysis of Catholic religious education in Italy, where we are shown how legal and educational structures negotiate the challenges of pluralism in contemporary Europe. Finally, Luiza Catrinel Marinescu brings the discussion back to cultural and linguistic integration through her exploration of Vasile Alecsandri's first manual of Romanian for foreign students, which closes the chapter on a historical

note, illustrating how language teaching has continuously contributed to cultural mediation.

Representation, Stereotypes, and Media Discourses, the third part of the book, examines how culture is communicated, shaped, and sometimes distorted through discourse. The focus ranges from ideological uses of cultural stereotypes to the persuasive strategies of public relations and the identity-building power of social media, hence illustrating how media and discourse shape not only perception but also collective memory and social identity. The first study takes us back to the interwar period, when the very foundations of modern tourism and cultural representation were being contested. Rob Van De Schoor examines the so-called “anti-guidebooks” such as the Piper Verlag series *Was nicht im Baedeker steht* and Béla Balázs’ *Der Phantasie-Reiseführer*, works that challenged the normative hierarchies of the canonical Baedeker travel guides. The following chapter, Cultural Stereotypes and Aesthetic Forms (Alexandra Moraru and Ramona Elena Chitu), sets the theoretical foundation by exploring the mechanisms through which stereotypes manifest in aesthetic and linguistic forms. Drawing on cultural dimensions and conceptual metaphor theory, the authors show how metaphors act as both a mirror and a reinforcement of stereotypes, urging us to decode and challenge them in order to foster more meaningful intercultural understanding. This conceptual framework is further extended in Angelica-Maria Căpraru’s chapter on Cultural Stereotypes in Different Ideological Contexts, which demonstrates how stereotypes are embedded and reproduced within political and cultural discourses.

Cristina Niculescu-Ciocan’s chapter makes the transition into the realm of mediated communication and investigates how linguistic strategies shape public opinion, drawing on rhetorical theory to reveal the subtle ways PR discourse reframes facts, influences emotions, and constructs collective realities. In continuity, Mihaela Mateescu explores Hispanic identity in social media, showing how digital platforms have become stages for cultural representation and self-construction. A more culturally specific perspective is offered by Lelia Trinca in her study of the Romanian concept of *dor*. The exploration of cultural expression continues in Giusy Negro’s chapter, The Power of Music in Early Childhood Education, which highlights the formative role of music in nurturing emotional, cognitive, and social development. In the same line of thought, Dr. Aynur Gürsoy presents the “Happy Children” Project, a community-based initiative supporting disadvantaged children through arts, language, and intercultural workshops. Grounded in theories of cultural intelligence and social capital, the study offers a concrete model of how education and participation shape identity and intercultural understanding.

The third part culminates with a shift to the global political arena. Oksana Koshulko’s chapter on Russia’s genocidal and ecocidal war on Ukraine situates the conflict within a longer history of imperial ideologies and aggression. Combining primary and secondary research, the study frames Ukraine’s resistance as both a national struggle and a wider battle for freedom, human rights, and the future of Europe. The common core issue is a concern with how culture, in its

many forms, linguistic, aesthetic, digital, artistic, and geopolitical, shapes the ways we understand ourselves and others in today's complex and contested world. The final part, Memory, Literature, and Cultural Legacy, winds up to the cultural and historical foundations that inform present practices. From early Romanian religious texts to the musical theories of Dimitrie Cantemir, from the narrative experiments of European literature to the enduring influence of Greco-Roman civilization, this section highlights the importance of cultural continuity and intellectual heritage. This section is organized in reverse chronological order, beginning with the twenty-first century and moving progressively backward into the cultural and intellectual foundations of Europe. Such a structure is intentional: it mirrors the way memory operates, starting from present concerns and retracing their roots through successive layers of history. By opening with contemporary reflections on Romanian language and literature and gradually moving toward the classical world, the section highlights continuity as well as transformation across time.

The opening chapter of this section, Valeriu Marinescu's study foregrounds the present-day challenges of balancing heritage with innovation in educational contexts. Then, Gina Nimigean explores the aesthetic codes of the 17th–18th-century Romanian novel, tracing the subtle interplay between narrative desire and cultural imagination. A European perspective is offered by Dan Constantin Sterian, whose analysis of Diderot's *Jacques le Fataliste et son Maître* illustrates the experimental, polyphonic qualities of Enlightenment literature and its lasting contribution to dialogic forms of expression. Moreover, further back in time, Laura Maftei revisits Dimitrie Cantemir's musicological legacy, situating his theoretical and compositional work at the crossroads of Ottoman and European traditions, where scientific reasoning and artistic creativity converge. Ioana Ciobanu then brings us to the 16th century with an examination of Coresi's Gospels, a foundational text of Romanian cultural and religious identity that testifies to the enduring role of writing in shaping collective memory. The section concludes with Maria-Luiza Dumitru Oancea's exploration of the Greco-Roman legacy, underscoring how the values, categories, and intellectual traditions of antiquity continue to shape European identity at its most fundamental level. All these studies gather together the concept of cultural memory as a continuum in which the past remains embedded in contemporary education, thought, and identity.

### **Conclusions**

By blending practical concerns with theoretical depth and cultural reflection, the focus of the volume moves from methods of teaching languages and adapting to new cultural environments, through the challenges of integration and representation, and finally to the enduring legacies of literature and cultural memory. This sequence not only discloses the complexity of the topics addressed but it also reveals the interconnectedness of language, identity, and culture in today's world. By weaving together perspectives from linguistics, pedagogy, intercultural studies, media analysis, and literary and historical research, the volume invites readers to engage with the multiple dimensions of identity and

representation across time and space. In this way, it offers both a broad overview and specific insights, providing a resource for scholars, educators, and students interested in the dynamic intersections of language and culture.