THE ROLE OF ATTRIBUTE CONSTRUCTION IN THE FORMATION OF CULTURAL STEREOTYPES. AN ANALYSIS OF COMMUNICATIONAL STYLES

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Abstract:
The present study aims to highlight the limitations of one of the three processes which contribute to the configuration of cultural identity, namely, *the construction of attributes*. Alongside *categorisation* and *identification*, today the theory of attributes is highly appreciated in the setting up of grids for the classification of cultural variations, being considered a logical process in the definition cultural identity. In fact, here too we are dealing with a rather psychological, therefore subjective, process of definition of human groups since the results of the evaluation of "the others" through the so-called logical deduction often leads to cultural stereotypes. The implicit use of diverse forms/styles of communication, including the paraverbal and the nonverbal, as compulsory marks of cultural styles adds to this oversimplifying generalisation, *id est* mistification of "cultural specificity".
Key-words:
Cultural identity, attribute construction, communication (verbal, paraverbal, nonverbal), cultural stereotypes.

1. The analysis of communicational styles - a proposed model

"*After a major row with her spouse, a wife is soaking away her ire into a soothing bath. Emerging from the foam she looks in the long mirror: front, side, back, deep sigh, other side and then front again. Another deep sigh, followed by an explosive:'Well, serve him bloody well right!'*"[1].

This little scene, masterly cast into words, was used to render the quintessence of an entire people – the Poles, in a work equally humourous in point of style and well documented in point of content. From the latter perspective, a virtually generalised grid of criteria can be applied in order to identify the distinctive characteristics of a community living in a given historical-geographic and administrative-political context: nationalism and identity (with subdivisions such as: *how they*

[1] Ewa Lipniacka , 2000, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Poles,* London: Oval Books, p. 25

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see themselves, how the others see them, how they see the others); character; beliefs and values; behaviour and manners; obsessions; systems (education, health, police, transport, armed forces), leisure and destinations; food and drink; customs and traditions; governance and bureaucracy; business; language).

From the scene above we ought to infer that, in the mind of the character, irrespective of the way in which a person appears or acts, the blame for a potential failure is to be put on someone else who shall, logically, bear the consequences, one way or another...

Had the scene been meant to characterise an individual, a certain character (let's say a starlet) or a specific group (feminine thinking, for instance), we may have accepted the characterisation, knowing from the very start that such generalisations contain a grain of subjectivism, almost unanimously accepted, as a necessary source of humour. But the above episode is intended to concentrate – indeed, in a non-conformist manner – the mental paradigm of an entire people..

Of course, in the present case, the reader is warned of the fact that the authors, whose intention is to describe a cultural style of communication and action, have wittingly assumed a vision deformed by prejudice and stereotypes.

2. Attribute construction in defining cultural identity

The point of departure in our study is the acceptance of a theoretical scheme regarding the cultural identity as it emerges from successive analyses and demonstrations of some highly influential authorities in the field.

The first assertion that we recognise as an objective truth refers to the importance which cultural identity holds in defining a human community.

The cultural[2] identity[3] is "a particular case, the most complex, of social identity". It connects personal with group identity and

[2] We are using the generic term *identity* as complex ongoing process, organized around self-image formation along the following dimensions: affective, cognitive, social. The relation between „I" and „the Other" makes the conceptual core of identity, cf. E. Morin, 2001, vol. 5, *passim*.

[3] *Cultural identity* is shared among the members of the same cultures; it acts as an indicator for the way in which beliefs, values, traditions, symbolization systems are conceptualized at the individual and collective level within a certain culture. cf. Gilles Ferréol & Guy Juquois, 2003 (2005, s.v. *Identități culturale*, for the Romanian edition).

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functions as a super-ordinate which is determined by its two components, and which it determines, in its turn[4].

The second assertion that we accept as a premise is the equation "culture = communication", formulated by Edward T. Hall: *"Culture is communication, and communication is culture"[5]. On the basis of the hypotheses of "linguistic determinism*", advanced by B. L. Whorf and E. Sapir[6] and of "social determinism", put forward by M. Hallyday[7], respectively, on the basis of the relationship between language and thought, the (cultural) reality in which we live configurates a certain type of thinking, therefore of communication and, conversely, the type of communication determines certain patterns in our perception of reality[8].

It follows that language is not just one of the three subordinates of cultural identity. In defining human identity - individual and collective - it stands for much more because it ensures the manifestation of the system of interactions between culture and communication.

In this connection, we take into consideration the two essential co-ordinates of language:

a) the system of signs which constitute the language of a community – phonetics, vocabulary, grammatical structures (morpho-syntax), stylistic resources; communicative strategies, defined as individual options "culturally pre-determined" – the level of discourse (with its cultural scripts[9]), discursive practices, that is the construction of meaning, the structure of interaction, inter-personal relationships, paraverbal and nonverbal

[4] A. Şerbănescu, 2007, pp. 161-162.
[5] Ed. T. Hall, 1959, *The Silent Language*, New York: Doubleday.
[6] Edward Sapir, "Status of linguistics as a science", published in 1929, in: *Language*, no. 5; the study was later reproduced in David G. Mandelbaum (ed.), 1983. Although Sapir expressed his reservations towards a „purely linguistic determinism" (cf. Edward Sapir & Morris Swadesh,1929, pp.103 – 112, reedited for Dell Hymes, in: 1964, *Language in Culture and Society*, New York: Harper and Row, pp. 100 – 107), this idea was sustained with new arguments by B. L. Whorf (cf. John B. Caroll (ed.), 1956, *Language, Thought and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf*, Cambridge, Ms.: MIT Press. Later on, the so-called „Sapir-Whorf hypothesis" was ammended, criticized, revalued and nuanced by numerous researchers cf. Jane Hill and Bruce Mannheim, 1992, Suzanne Romanine, 1994, E. F. K. Koerner, 2000, Alessandro Duranti, 2003, among others.
[7] M. A. K. Hallyday, 1973, *Explorations in the functions of language*, New York: Elsevier.
[8] See the discussion in A. Vasilescu, 2007, p. 28 *sqq*.
[9] A set of norms around which verbal interractions/speech behaviours coagulate and are given certain meanings. *Cultural scripts* not only reflect verbal and non-verbal behaviour, but also the social behaviour and the mentality of a group.

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contributions to the construction of meaning, etc., each of them with its mechanisms of action[10].

Also, when interpreting the linguistic facts that account for the cultural identity of a people, the psychological-sociological processes are taken into consideration that are at work in the construction of cultural identity from the social and personal interactions; thus, there are three fundamental[11] processes, *categorization, identification and comparison*- complemented by other two processes – *social knowledge*[12] and *attribute construction*.

Our model of analysis relies mainly on the theories referring to the construction of attributes. This process is psychologically and socially determined and usually expressed at the two levels of communication, but it can also function the other way around, that is it can be induced by a communicative pattern and can fiind forms of expression on a psychological and social level (mentalities, attitudes, behaviours); this process consists of the *elaboration of attributes, namely the elaboration of explanations on the causes of certain events.*

Fritz Heider, one of the theorists who studied this process, explains it by a series of inferences (logical deductions) which, in his opinion, express „the scientific spirit" of mankind, the innate capacity of each human being to *„fiind explanations for the phenomena in the surrounding world"*[13].

Our main idea is that it is exaggerated to apply the term "scientific spirit" to the elaboration of this model of reception of the outside world. As a consequence, the reflection of the world in the human consciousness and speech was altered from the very beginning, as we implied in the lines above on the relation between culture and communication. Moreover, the deformations are so powerful that the intercultural relations as a whole are constructed by a constant activation of the erroneous results of this reception; in other words, these relations are the result of the valorification of the negative patterns of Otherness – the prejudice and the stereotype.

The Use of Stereotypes in Guides to the Labyrinth of Cultures

The material we are using for analysis is excerpted from two series of books that illustrate the same genre: *tourist's guides.* We have chosen books published in series well-known and appreciated among those who opt for an "immersion into Otherness" type of tourism, as

[10] A. Şerbănescu, 2007, pp. 212-255.
[11] H. Tajfel; J. C. Turner, 1968.
[12] S. T. Fiske; S. E. Taylor, 1984.
[13] Fritz Heider, 1982.

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they hope to know the Other by self-knowledge, by the shattering of everyday habits and stereotypes, by the direct "confrontation" with "the Other". These guides are written by professionals, although they do not qualify as academic books. Their scientific qualities consist of the minute documentation, and of the updated information about almost *any* aspect that constructs the culture and civilization of a certain country; they are also useful as a research material as their authors spared no effort in selecting data that are relevant to the profile of the respective community and to the mutual determinations of people and the space they inhabit and of people and time (the diachronic dimension). The use of these books as material for the study of cultural interrelations confirms their authors' subtle knowledge of the countries and communities presented.

On the other hand, these books do not represent samples of spontaneous discourse that can bring a rough, unembellished image of a certain cultural identity. They are not the work of some genius, representative for the "national specificity"- as they often say in linguistics or literary theory. These materials represent the sometimes successful quest of some forms of cultural identity, put to practice in a useful form. This is the main reason why we find that a certain selection from these books is extremely relevant to our study. The authors' idea was simply to guide the users, as efficiently as possible, through "the labyrinth of cultures". This expression was coined by the Romanian linguist Andra Şerbănescu-Vasilescu, a very knowledgeable theorist of (inter)cultural communication. The syntagm is the subtitle of one of her books[14], which we found extremely useful in our analysis of the communicative component of the material.

The first series of materials that we used is edited by Oval Project Ltd., London, under the generic title *Xenophobe's Guide to the…*[15], followed by the name of inhabitants that make the majority of the population in a certain country: Americans, Canadians, Austrians, Swiss, Germans, Italians, Israelis, Italians, Dutch, Spanish etc. As the generic title suggests, the tone of the presentation is funny, sometimes cinical and irreverent, the result of an insider's view of the inclination of the users of these guides toward generalizations that come as a result of attribute construction in the theory of intercultural communication. The authors are specialists in intercultural relations, authors of radio programs, or organizers of conferences on cultural identity. Their ethnic profile appears somehow special, as they are either adopted citizens of the country they are presenting (like Paul Bilton, the author of the

[14] A. Şerbănescu, 2007 and A. Vasilescu, 2007.
[15] Hereafter cited as XG.

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Xenophobe's Guide to the Swiss, an Englishman from Bolton, Lancashire, turned into a "paper Swiss"[16]), or an ethnic of the presented country, who now resides in a different geographic and cultural space (like Ewa Lipniacka, the author of *Xenophobe's Guide to the Poles*, a British subject of Polish origin).

The ideological/scientific program is clearly expressed in the series motto: "A warned reader- a cured Xenophobe" whereas the "technique" of the series is presented in the product description that appears on the back cover: *"Highlights the unique character and behavior of the nation. Frank, irreverent, funny - almost guaranteed to cure Xenophobia"*[17].

We will soon have the opportunity to demonstrate how, besides the data on material culture and civilization of the countries presented in the books, that can be associated with various models of culture classification[18], the authors also largely use the linguistic component in order to describe and define the ethnic groups they focus on. The pragmatic-discursive dimension is obviously favoured in this attempt; sometimes, the "strictly linguistic"component, the lexico-semantic one is used in the presentation. Both these linguistic components are considered reliable databases, objective sources to describe the spiritual profile of a people.

The other series of guides used as sources for our corpus of materials supplies information that are equally essentialized and correct, but on a more serious tone. It is the collection *Petit Futé*[19]. The linguistic

[16] A legal immigrant, who obtained the documentation necessary to be naturalized as a citizen of the Swiss Federation.

[17] Ex: Cf. Louis James, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Austrians,* 2000; Vaughn Roster, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Canadians, 2*003; Martin Solly, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Italians,* 1999; Stefan Zeidentz, Ben Barkow, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Germans,* 1999; Frank McNally, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Irish,* 2005; Aviv Ben Zeev, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Israelis*, 2001 ; Rodney Bolt, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Dutch*, 1999; Ewa Lipniacka, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Poles*, 2009; Drew Launay, *Xenophobe's Guide to the Spanish,* 1999, etc. Another similar series is *Bluffer's Guides*.

[18] In principle, the authors operate, in a more or less visible manner,with the „classic" theoretical models used in the study of cultural identity/cultural diversity: 1. Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck model (*value orientation method* – parameters: activity, human nature, social relations, the relation with nature; 2. Edward T. Hall's model (monochrony/polychrony, contextual dependence; 3. Geert Hofstede's model (that uses parameters of cultural variation – individualism/colectivism, femininity/masculinity, distance from a center of power, avoidance of incertitude; 4. Ronald Inglehart's model (traditional authority/secular-rational authority, values of survival/values of self-expression).

[19] *Petit-Futé: Roumanie 2004-2005,* Paris, Nouvelles Editions de l'Université, 2004. The editor is a holding with over 20 years of activity in tourism industry, PF

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component is used here in any possible way (history, geographic determinations, material culture, spiritual profile); this type of approach uses language as a system of signs, out of which the lexical-semantic component is explored. Each guide displays a list of 25 keywords that are considered representative for the past and present of the respective ethnic group. For instance, in the case of Romania, keywords such as: *gogoşi (doughnuts), pepeni (watermelons), noroc (luck/good luck/chance), mărţişor (March amulet), Mioriţa (a representative ballad), Pluguşorul (a New Year's carol, reminiscing of the pre-Christian fertility rites), manea (popular song, influenced by the Oriental music, mainly Turkish, based on an everyday situation, which presents primitive confrontations; the themes are money, illicit love, punishment of the "enemies", etc)...*

2. The Logic of Approximation

If we return to the attribution theory, our reservations, as formulated above, come from the fact that the authors make too generous and sometimes lax use of the „logical reasoning" (believed to be used by the human being when evaluating their peers). The process responsible for this is thought to be the *deduction*, which is a valid assumption: when interacting, people notice the general, external data, which they later turn into conclusions or definitive remarks. Nevertheless, one should take into account that formal logic equally operates with the reverse process, that is, with induction; besides, the same formal (Aristotelian) logic has been enriched by mathematical logic and by other scores of reasoning schemata, which nuance the intricate process of concept formation that accounts for the reflection of the outside world in the human mind[20], thus shaping the human discourse and behaviour.

What remain valid are the three fundamental human dimensions[21] that concentrate the motivations of an event, behaviour, etc: internal vs. external; controlable vs. uncontrolable; stable vs. unstable[22].

(http://www.petitfute.fr), that successfully produces tourist's guides for the most diverse regions, cities, countries around the world. Hereafter cited as PF.

[20] For clarification, we suggest the brief but eloquent introduction to logic by Marie-Dominique Popelard; Denis Vernant, 1998. Cf. *Iidem*, *Elemente de logică*. Traducere de Ion Vezeanu, Iaşi: Institutul European, 2003 (references to the Romania version, consulted here).

[21] By this attribute we would like to emphasize that there are many other possible perspectives.

[22] Cf. A. Şerbănescu, 2007, pp. 166-167, quoting V. Mihăilescu, 2000.

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In the case of example (1), excerpted from *The Xenophobe's Guide to the Swiss*, the motivation is openly *external, controlable* and, probably, *unstable*, if we are to take into consideration the third dimension.

3. The linguistic component – the "*minor*" and the "*major*" of the attribution schemata

Irrespective of the evaluation grid used for a culture[23], the linguistic component will always be present in two ways: a) as an instrument/means for expressing the other values; b) as a value per se. Even Ronald Inglehart's model, that takes into account the attitude of people towards work and some other related activities (organization of spare time, relational skills), the study, conduced on some 60,000 subjects from 43 countries, relied heavily on the linguistic component of the relations that it explored[24].

As shown before, the linguistic component has two dimensions – system and action (language and speaking).

One of the problems that arise in a research as ours is that, some of the authors quoted here do not constantly follow the same aspect of verbal communication, but shift from one to the other, as they consider it relevant for setting an a priori meaning in the evaluation of a people. In example (1), the author first selected, out of the parameters that define the cultural variables, the style of communication; then, from the style of communication he selected the level of discourse, out of which he then extracted the construction of arguments (to be more precise, the shaping of motivation according to a certain reality).

The authors set the nature of the communicative style and in so doing they set the reason of being of a people, as it results from the system of the language. Below is a definition of Spaniards:

„The vital word to remember in their vocabulary is **mañana** *(usually accompanied by a shrug of the shoulders) and this means '***Tomorrow***', or 'Some time* **tomorrow***" or 'The day after* **tomorrow***', or 'The day after that', or 'Next week', 'The week after*

[23] See Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck; Edward T. Hall; Geert Hofstede; Ronald Inglehart, as presented above in the text.

[24] Ronald Inglehart, 2004, *Human Beliefs and Values: A Cross-Cultural Sourcebook based on the 1999-2002 values Surveys*, Mexico City: Siglo XXI, (co-edited with Miguel Basanez, Jaime Deiz-Medrano, Loek Halman and Ruud Luijkx). The book values previous researches (*The Silent Revolution*, 1977; *Value Change in Global Perspective*, 1995, and it is, at its turn, cited in recent studies *Sacred and Secular: Religion and Politics Worldwide*, 2004; *Modernization, Cultural Change and Democracy: The Human Development Sequence*, Cambridge University Press, 2005. These data available on the website of World Values Survey, coordinated by R. Inglehart, http://w.w.w.worldvaluessurvey.org

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*next week', 'Next month', '**maybe** next month', 'let's think it for 2013', 'later', 'sometime', 'never', 'never ever'"*[25].

It is obvious here that language was used as a system of signs, out of which the vocabulary was brought to a privileged position and then subjected to a semantic analysis from a virtually infinite number of perspectives (diachronic, synchronic descriptive, logical, discursive, etc.).

Our affirmation relies on the fact that in all the models that have culture characterization as their object, time is a factor that appears periodically in the articulation of all possible criteria: orientation towards the past, orientation towards the future or towards the present; punctuality; extension and quantification (including the greeting formulae). Or, the word selected by Drew Launay here envisages precisely this variable, essential to human behaviour.

The Austrians are also characterized by the lexico-semantic component of their language:

*„In an ideal world, there is a perfect harmony between **Ordunng** [order] şi **Gemütlichkeit** [comfort: in such a universe, no one ever spills ashes on the rug and toilet paper never finishes. Mr and Mrs. Österreicher, happily perched on their nest that never gets dirty make love and raise their offspring in the time left between house cleaning and polishing of silverware".*[26]

We are not going to insist too much on the semantic analysis of the two keywords. The first one, *Order,* has a too powerful philosophical meaning to comment on it here. We will just say that the "temporality" variable is invoked in this brief description yet again. Anyway, we notice how two mere words can characterize, by logico-semantic extension, an entire universe. The profound trust in the revealing word is so complete that the other series of materials used in this study *Petit Futé*, selects a limited inventory of words representative for each language; the authors genuinely believe that the selected words tell the essential about a certain people.

We should now return to the discursive level of language, so that we can check the way in which our mental patterns and stereotypes concerning „others/the Others" are confirmed with the help of the most varied possible criteria; these criteria have been generally validated by research[27]. Let us focus on the following pairs of cultural variables: correctness vs. incorrectness; individuality vs. colectivism; the attitude

[25] Drew Launay, *op. cit.*, p. 10.
[26] Louis James, *op. cit*., p. 7.
[27] The corelations among the cultural variables and the communicative styles have been codified, among others, by „W. B. Gudykunst's Classification (1988)"; „M. Clyne's Classification (1994)" and „FitzGerald's Classification" (2003).

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towards authorities and the option for a certain system of organization. All of these are related to verbal behaviours and discursive practices (direct vs. indirect style; brief vs. elaborated; personal vs. contextual; instrumental vs. affective, etc.)

From the perspective of a general cultural style, we can sigh in relief when we find out that it is not the Romanians who are at the top in the hierarchy of kleptomaniac people, but a people that stands much higher on our scale of values[28]. It is about the Dutch, as seen by the authors of the XG:

"Bicycle theft is a national pastime. The Dutch spend more on hefty, supposedly foolproof locks than they do on the cycle itself. A replacement bicycle is easily come by – simply walk to a group of cyclists and say loudly and authoritatively: "That's my bike!" Someone is sure to get off and run away"[29].

From the point of view of discursive behaviour, one can see that the above fragment displays an indirect, brief, contextualized, instrumental style. The question is whether this style is able to render an objective component of the spiritual profile of a people. This remains to be seen.

Corruption is not typical of Romanians, as they have come to believe. In the cultural grids, corruption appears under the criterion "relation with authority, obedience to laws". Thus, it appears that a typical case of insubordination is illustrated by Italians:

"Italian laws would be perfect […] without Italians, who seldom abide by them. As an example, although the safety belt is mandatory, very few Italians use it, and in certain regions of the country T-shirts printed with a safety belt are particularly well sold".

"Italians know that even though others may be more powerful and better organized, they behave exactly like them. They are equally corrupted, only more cunning and apt to avoid getting caught"[30].

With this last example we move away from the description of a cultural style by means of language. To be more precise, language is not used by the subjects of a certain culture for self-characterization, but by the analysts. In other words, language functions here as a meta-system: we say something about what others say. Thus, we characterize them indirectly.

Obviously, these are the most numerous synthetic descriptions, even if they do not offer plenty of materials for the

[28] In a different study we showed that Romanians have a rather negative opinion on themselves, but they do not like others to verbalize their flaws. Cf. P. Gh. Bârlea, 2008, p. 28.
[29] Rodney Bolt, *op. cit*., p. 52
[30] Martin Solly, *op. cit*, p. 7; 23.

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pragmatic and linguistic analysis. It is no less true, though, that they encapsulate the linguistic component in *oratio oblique*, that is in "indirect speech".

An original combination between correctness and incorrectness is present in the definition of Canadians:

*„**It is said*** (underlined by me, P. Gh. Barlea) *that the Canadians are so polite and correct that once a burglar from the southern part of British Columbia entered a store and, after he stood patiently in line, politely **informed** the seller that he had forgotten his gun at home, but he would be back with it in half an hour. The police that arrived **on time** to arrest him **declared** that not only had the guy kept his promise, but he was also **punctual**"*[31].

We emphasized the words *it is said, informed him, declared* in order to prove that a cultural characterization cannot ignore the communicative component; we also emphasized *punctual,* as it is an item of the general characterization for the "time" factor; to this, we can add words, such as: *patiently, on time*, etc. For other parameters, we can select the following terms: *polite, correct, kept his promise.* For the term that makes the plot of the anecdote- the burglary, supplemented with terms from the corresponding semantic field (*gun, police, to arrest),* the first series creates a *contradictio oppositorum*, that generates humour. Does humour stand for something that is lacking? Last, the descriptive language (the metalanguage) appears to serve the indirect characterization, apparently with no connection whatsoever with language (that is, endless trust in creative forces); this would fall into the category "opinion on themselves", that is self-evaluation. The truth is that references are made especially to the art of words:

"*Literary genius is common – there are four Nobel prizes to show for it- and critics suggest it's only talent that's scarce. At any rate, it is said that all Irish people have a book inside them. Only very few of them can be persuaded to keep it inside"*[32].

- Even if we analyzed only the language/the speech, we would not be able to come up with more than simulacra of definitions.
- In the absence of coherent and consistent content information, based on systematic knowledge of the language spoken within various communities, the languages, and implicitly, the respective ethnic communities are labeled by number of external aspects, that is paraverbal and nonverbal elements[33], which are easier to notice by the outsiders. These, too are not valued according to their true role in

[31] Vaughn Roster, *op. cit*, p. 9.
[32] Frank McNally, *op. cit*., p. 38.
[33] Andra Vasilescu, 2007, pp. 32-33 (see also footnotes 12-21).

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attribute construction. All theories of communication agree that verbal elements are intertwined with the paraverbal and non-verbal ones.

But "the others" retain only some of the latter (obviously, the most visible, the most shocking!) and interpret them in their own terms, according to the common mechanisms of deformation, exaggeration and generalization that are characteristic to stereotyping.

In the case of paraverbal particularities, certain modulations of intonation, variations and intensity of tone or inarticulate sound emissions, such as laughter, sighing, interjections, etc. are to be taken into consideration.

By generalization, one assumes that the subjects in the American culture and the Mediterannean cultures speak loudly, whereas the German, the Central European and Nordic cultures this tone makes a bad impression. "The melody" of various types of sentences - interrogative, imperative, statement - creates a number of parameters of cultural communication styles. For example, in Russian, a high rising tone defines an affirmation that should be followed by a concrete reference, for example an enumeration[34]; in India and Pakistan *a beer* is asked for with a falling tone, while in Western cultures one uses a rising tone[35].

Likewise, the rhythm of speech is alert in North America and in the Arab countries, where the pauses between words are brief, while in Japan pauses are used to create intonational and even semantic contour, as they can give a totally opposing meaning to the words uttered before them[36].

Non-verbal elements – mimicry, gestures, the so-called "posture" of the speaker, the speaker's appearance, the way in which he/she uses the space and the time[37] are, on the one hand elements of

[34] Cf. Cicerone Poghirc, "Accentul și intonația" [„Stress and intonation"], in: Al. Graur (coord.), 1972, *Introducere în lingvistică*, București: Editura Științifică, p. 79.
[35] A.Vasilescu, 2007, p. 32, footnote 13.
[36] *Ibidem.*
[37] It is worthwhile mentioning that *time* appears in both extra-verbal components: in the case of the paraverbal components it appears as the duration between words, the duration of vowel uttering, etc; in the case of the non-verbal components, the *time* element appears in the relation speech/silence. According to Hofstede, in the study of cultural varieties, time is as important as the relations between individualism and colectivism, or monochronism and polychronism (cf. G. Hofstede, 1984). Earlier, we showed some of the meanings of the first series of temporal conditioning. Now we may add, as elements of the second series, the following: the negative interpretation of silence (which is usually associated with lack of education, lack of sociability, lack of interest, or a sign of menacing behaviour) in the North American and meridional cultures and the positive interpretation of silnece in the cultures of the north and the Asian cultures. Another relevant behaviour element, punctuality is rather strict in the case of Germans and other subjects of Northern European cultures, somehow

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communication, indelibly connected to articulated speech; on the other hand, they are easier to notice and "process" in the attribute construction.

As long as they are part of the act of speech, of human communication, they are normal and measurable, like any other component of human language and behaviour[38]. *In the process of construction of attributes that describe prejudices or stereotypes, only certain aspects of these particularities are retained (in other words, particularities of…particularities) that are later hyperbolized and, at a later stage, generalized.* Obviously, the result is a simplified image, an image deformed to caricature and with little relevance to the style of communication within a certain community. A videoclip named "*The Offensive Translator*"[39] is a good illustration of such a mechanism. By creating a grotesque image, the short film shows how arts can value stereotyping in a creative manner. An interdisciplinary approach of this topic is an asset and also an argument that stands for the necessity of educating the young generation in the spirit of multiculturalism. Good educational and didactic results in this matter have been obtained by the French and Finnish team, coordinated by authoritative voices in the field, such as Nathalie Anger, Fred Dervin and Eije Soumela-Salmi[40].

approximative in the case of French people (who seem to have generated the sytagm „academic quarter", abusively interpreted, according to some researchers); punctuality is totally relative in the case of Hispanics, mainly those in South America, where being an hour late „represents a lifestyle" (A. Vasilescu, 2007, p. 33, footnote 20).

[38] The non-verbal elements, combined with those that belong to behaviour (related to psychomotricity or to social relations) create, at their turn, other parameters for cultural characterization, as they are memorable and recorded in ethical codes. For example, we may enumerate here: the position and posture on the chair, the orientation/direction of one's look, nodding, arm and hand gestures, the feeling of a „personal space". Mainly this sense of *privacy* has generated an entire literature (cf. A. Pease, Andersen, Gudykunst and many others). The majority of those who approached the topic simply describe and to classify it (large personal space in the case of Northern Europeans, smaller in the case of North American cultures, even smaller in the Western European cultures, and it decreases gradually in the Mediterranean cultures and in the Asian/Oriental cultures. There are significant differences in the perception and organization of space privacy in the Arab and Japanese cultures. Some authors, though, choose to build theoretical schemata that account for the organization of space and privacy. Thus, in Andersen *et alii*, 1987, we find the theory of distances: these are smaller once one gets closer to the Equator and they increase towards the Poles (apud Gudykunst, 2003, p. 75).

[39] http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XY66ZJ0TFUI.

[40] Anger *et alii*, 2010.

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Conclusions

Thus, on a communicative level, all these definitions – either implicit or explicit - appear more than enlightening. Each definition embeds all the three levels: language as system, language as discourse (as a tool for self-knowledge), language as meta-system (as far as external characterization is concerned - the perspective of "the others about us"). The only difficulty lies in the inconsistency of using a certain level in the process of attribute construction, in the case of the XG. There is a certain degree of consistency, though, in the case of PF.

When relating to the content, one reaches inadvertences and sometimes nonsense. For example, the mere fact that the Romanians have been refused a number of qualities/qualifications that they know and acknowledge proves the faulty functioning of these grids.

All of these lead towards the deterioration of the logical scheme that would justify the so-called "scientific reception" mentioned by the attribution theory. Ultimately, the attribute construction, like all the other social-cognitive processes of reception/evaluation of identity/cultural differences (for example, social knowledge, categorization, identification, comparison) may lower cultural labeling so much that the attribute becomes a marker of negative definition. Much like contrastive grammar, the attribution theory is not interested in similarities, either at a genealogic level, or as a manifestation of the universals of thought and speech, although these appear in the examples cited here. The attribution theory emphasizes differences. Implicitly, self-definition is achieved by distance ("we are not like them", "they are not like us"), which leads to assertions such as "*they are not **with** us"*, with an underlying subjective implication: *"we are better, the others as strange people"*.

The value of the books onto which we built our demonstration consists in their limitations, which helped us to verify our hypothesis: *attribute construction inevitably leads to prejudice and stereotype formation.*

One last argument: to those who may believe that our choice of materials is rather unscientific, I will reply that this is…a prejudice. The texts that we used illustrate a certain type of discourse and they can be studied like any other act of speech (for example, the language of wills, the language of newspaper advertisements, the language of blogs, the last messages of those who commit suicide, as in David Lodge's novel, etc.). In conclusion, I would say that meaningful anecdotes should have a place in any scientific treatise on cultural identities.

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