

## BOOK REVIEW: LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF CONTESTED IDENTITIES IN THE MEDIA: THE SPECIAL CASE OF SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPEANS AS ‘OTHERS’ IN THE BRITISH PRESS

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The problem of identity formation and understanding of “Who are I?” (related to the multiple social, cultural, and personal identities one always possesses) has been discussed and analyzed for years. As the theory generally postulates, we understand ourselves on the basis of the differences or similarities we share with other people or groups (Taylor, 2002; Hall, 1996; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2013). They help us define who we are and where we belong (see Hall, 1996). At the same time, we should not neglect the fact that identity is never static and fixed, but is fluid and always changing. This cannot be more true nowadays when the free movement of people and the intermarriages between them is a reality. Supranational structures as the EU also provoke interests in transnational identities as the next step after the in-between culture discussed by Homi Bhabha (1994). This in itself is a challenging task as not many people, especially those who feel in dominant position, are willing to accept the idea of equality within variety. This is particularly evident when a culture is not familiar with the characteristics of those considered different, but still avoids any contacts with them and thus the abyss between the two expands. To make matters worse, the media which have the power to create reality (Fairclough 1995), fan ideas about the outlandishness of the different ones and even hyperbolize their difference in order to present them as scary, problematic and abnormal (see Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Cottle, 2003).

In her book *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as ‘Others’ in the British press* (2016) Mihaela Culea tries to look into all these problematic areas of changing identities and perceptions of those who are different from us with the focus on (a) minority culture(s).

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Mihaela Culea has used a very broad theoretical, as well as sociological and political base for an in-depth exploration of the problem of Otherness as reflected by the British press in its representations of Southern Europeans. The book *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as 'Others' in the British press* (2016) successively explores the issues of European identity, Otherness, the existing dichotomy Centre – Periphery, and the way these are presented in the media through the employment of various metaphors, stereotypes and by ways of specific reporting and subjectivity, among others.

The book consists of two main parts and has six chapters each focusing on a different aspect of the issues mentioned above. The general structure and thematic presentation of the book closely follow and are in line with the author's intention to present the idea of "otherness" from different points of view. In this respect the method of analysis chosen, namely triangulation, employing the perspective of metaphor, stereotypical representation, and moral panic discourse, is particularly suitable.

Nested in the general field of critical discourse studies (Richardson & Flowerdew, 2018; van Dijk, 2016, 2018; Fairclough, 2018), the book provides a comprehensive account of the political, social and historical factors in addition to the discursive practices that govern the presentation of Southern Europeans as the Other in the British media, and the British printed discourse in particular. To this end, Mihaela Culea provides a full account of the period around the creation of the European Union, the formation of common European identity, or at least the idea behind such a formation, and the time of accession of Romania and Bulgaria who joined the union together. This background is a necessary prerequisite for the analysis that follows on how "peripheral" Europeans, namely Romanians, Bulgarians, and Greeks, are perceived and constructed by the "central" Europeans, i.e. the British, as the Other. It only does justice to the author that she has also presented the idea of what it means to be British, so that contrasts would provide a plausible starting point for the analysis to come. As the real world, and "our" real world in particular, is the criterion by which we measure any difference, the contrast between Britishness and un-Britishness is only necessary for the differences between us and them to become even more explicit.

The comprehensive theoretical review in the first part of the book prepares the reader for the analysis of the conceptual metaphors from the point of view of cognitive linguistics and the stereotypes put forward by the British press and the moral panic discourse created as a result of the linguistic choices made by journalists around the possible immigration waves of southern Europeans. The analysis at hand is really significant as it shows the thinking patterns and the underlying cultural, ideological or cognitive framework, or mindset, of a certain

community in its historical evolution, and the way these affect or govern the perception of who the Other really is. The study shows that when talking about Romanian, Bulgarian or Greek identities, the British media discourse invariably employs the centre-periphery<sup>1</sup> dichotomy attributing qualities such as poverty, financial difficulty, disorder, crime, savagery, economic abuse or misuse, peril, and calamity, which are invariably linked with the idea of the scary, unfamiliar and strange Other coming from the periphery, an agent perceived as the ultimate threat and the Alter Ego (see Turk, 1993 quoted in Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2020) of the West. As the members of the periphery are usually perceived as a threat (see Cohen, 2002; Said, 1979, 1997) they are also to be kept at a distance and not fully accepted. Therefore, the narrative about them is to be hyperbolized in order for the distance between members of the majority and the new-comers to be maintained, lest they come into contact and the fact that truth has been distorted is brought to the open.

The second part of the book is more analytical in its nature and focuses primarily on the ways the process of othering is achieved mostly through the employment of various metaphors, stereotypes, reporting and subjectivity. The choice of a viewpoint is very appropriate once again as the British media discourse is characterized with high metaphoricity on the one hand (see Fairclough, 1995; Fowler, 1991; Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2013, 2018, 2020), while on the other, the “pictures” in our heads (cf. Lippmann, 1922; Svartvik, 2013) are more memorable and are easier to digest. Still further, the preference for one linguistic structure over another, the use of passive vs. active voice or different types of modality, are meaningful as all these convey the ideas of the journalists covering a particular event and their stance (Fowler, 1991). Thus, readers are introduced to a host of metaphors, such as EU IS AN EDIFICE/ A BODY/ A FAMILY; POLITICS IS WAR; EU IS A CONTAINER; BRITISH POLITICS IS CONFLICT ... discussing the perception of British people of EU, their role in it and their sense of belonging to it. The ideas presented through the employment of these metaphors show the somewhat priggish and haughty attitude of the British towards the union and the sense of superiority they have as a result of their perceived uniqueness and the fact that they live on an island detached from mainland Europe.

Analyzing the conceptual portrayal of Greece, Mihaela Culea has singled out metaphors, such as GREECE IS A PROBLEM CHILD, GREEK ECONOMY IS A DISEASED BODY and the GREEK ECONOMY IS A DEAD PATIENT which present the country and its behavior in an unfavorable light and instill negativism towards its subjects in the minds of the British. All these linguistic

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1. Said (1979) distinguishes between “positive” geography, i.e. the UK, and “imaginary” geography – everything that falls outside the British borders. It is like an undefined mass of countries producing identities that are backward, scary and illiterate.

representations form the background against which the author explores the metaphoric presentation of immigrants from Romania and Bulgaria. The notions are negative again and by no means new, as immigration has frequently been conceptualized through water metaphors (see Cheshmedzhieva-Stoycheva, 2017, 2020; Taylor, 2021), as in ROMANIAN (and BULGARIAN) IMMIGRATION IS A DISASTER (FLOOD/ INVASION). Another negative presentation of Romanian immigrants is obtained through the metaphor ROMANIAN IMMIGRATION TO BRITAIN IS AN INVASION. Culea skillfully analyzes the used metaphors not only in terms of their lexical representations but also as a part of some general scenarios put forward and appropriated by the British media. Another typical presentation of minority groups which is also highly governed by the idea of backwardness generally associated with the periphery is the association with a herd of animals or flock of birds. Taylor (2021) defines this type of metaphors as dehumanizing and shows them as conventionalized, used by the media for over 200 years in their discourse on migrants. In Culea's research, the negative image of Romanians traveling to the UK is further stressed through the suggestion that Romanians go to the UK not to work but for pleasure or in search of some kind of benefits, i.e. health tourism and benefit tourism, revealed through the use of ROMANIAN IMMIGRANT IS A (BENEFIT) TOURIST metaphor. All these images create the idea of the unknown or potentially dangerous Other who has to be feared as they pose a threat to everything considered British – their culture, the order created, civilization, rights, etc. (see Smith 1991; Said, 1979). Furthermore, the metaphors, along with their frequency of use, show the thinking patterns applied and further developed by journalists as a result of the existing ideology in regards to immigrants in general and those from South/East Europe in particular.

The messages conveyed in the analysed metaphors are further developed and directly lead to the stereotypical representations of Romanian immigrants. Analyzing the existing stereotypes, Culea follows the same approach undertaken at the beginning of the book, namely showing first the point of view of the “dominant” culture, the one that reports on the Other, as this is the conceptual framework that all British journalists, officials, and common people use to understand the Other, i.e. Romanians.

I find the addition of the cartographic representation of European stereotypes an especially interesting and noteworthy idea which also shows the in-depth understanding and exploration of the topic by the author. She presents the auto stereotypes used by both British and Romanian officials in the respective media discourses which is of importance for the self-identification of the two nations.

When her focus is on the stereotypes employed, Culea successfully applies the methodology developed by Tonkiss (2012) and traces successively the key themes, such as criminality, unemployment and dire poverty, abuse of the British social

or health systems, and invasion or conquest, and arguments, which are rarely based on official statistics or real cases of criminal acts. Then she reviews the association between East-European immigration and criminality, or between the Roma people and the Romanians; us vs. them; Labour vs. UKIP. The next aspect analysed is variation exemplified through observed inconsistencies between analyzed problem and offered solution; the use of voice and intertextuality. Culea studies also characterization which is predominantly negative as Romanian immigrants are related to pickpocketing, mugging, begging, rioting, abusing or stealing, and even to selling their own babies. In the same vein the author also shows examples of using people of authority who resorting to data disprove five of the stereotypes mostly associated with Romanian immigrants, i.e. their mobility rate, the abuse of benefits, the rise in crime, the assumption that it is Roma rather than Romanians traveling, along with the fact that Romanians are presented as undereducated. Agency, i.e. the roles of the participants, are also analyzed and Mihaela Culea identifies emphasis, i.e. the frequency of used references to big masses, numbers, data, etc., as well as silences represented through the neglect of certain aspects, groups, of their presence or voice.

In addition to the stereotypes and presentations of Romanians, Culea provides an account of the image Greece enjoys in the British media discourse, which once again is highly negative, equating the country metaphorically with the “bad boy of Europe”.

In the last chapter of the book, Mihaela Culea looks into the conceptualization of the dichotomy centre-periphery and the attributes this distinction has on people coming from both locations. The author presents an analysis on how migration and crossing of boundaries and borders interferes with or alters the established dichotomy and shows the push and pull factors for said migration. The aspects of multiculturalism, transnationalism and globalization are also discussed and are then explored in relation to the ongoing movement of people and the perception of the Other as a threat. This section in a way binds together the preceding chapters focusing on the various devices used in the development of the image of the Other and on the resulting marginalization experienced by immigrants. The existing divisions and problems around the integration of the ethnic Others all lead to the moral panic phenomenon as defined by Cohen (2002) and the creation of public devils in the face of immigrants in order for the dominant group to protect what is theirs. The issue of moral panic and the discourse ensuing from it are the focus of attention in this final chapter of the book. The book ends with the voice of Romanians who actually disprove the stereotypes adopted and spread by the British media about them.

I really find *Linguistic representations of contested identities in the media: The special case of South-Eastern Europeans as ‘Others’ in the British press* an interesting and commendable read as it sets a frame for future analyses which

could be further conducted on a comparative basis. The book can be used both by scholars working in the field of media studies, identity politics, culture studies and students making their first steps in discourse analysis, as it provides a comprehensive methodology which is widely applicable to further research in the area of media studies.

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