Globalisation is not a new experience. The anthropologist N.P. Pieterse (2004) maintains that anthropologists, economists, historians, political scientists and sociologists see it as a long-term historical process, which has witnessed, amongst others, the ancient population movements across and between continents and the diffusion of technologies (military technologies, numeracy, literacy, sciences…). All these have led to intense intercultural encounters. Yet, under the pressures of contemporary globalization, meanings are multiplied and being put into question more than ever before. Consequently individuals and groups experience bigger uncertainty as to who they are and where they belong (Hermans 2001).

For the fields related to intercultural communication, and the social and human sciences as a whole, this means that objects, theories and methods have to be reviewed in order to scrutinize this new episteme. Many concepts, that have been central to the study of the Human, and the interdisciplinary domain that concerns us here, have been questioned over the past thirty years: culture, identity, community and society. The French anthropologist Maurice Godelier (2009: 7) goes as far as asking if these concepts, whose meanings and usages are more and more complex, are still useful for the production of scientific knowledge. Let us try to see how this burning issue applies to intercultural communication.

RECONCEPTUALISING CULTURE AND IDENTITY

This chapter looks at the concept of cultural identity and its relations to representation and Othering. The combination of the adjectives cultural and identity makes the concept a contended one, as the two words are polysemic, slippery and “illusory” as analytical categories (Bayart 2005).

A review of the concept of cultural identity as a whole shows first of all that it is a “floating signifier”, which seems to encompass many different things. For Jonathan Friedman (1994: 29) for instance, cultural identity refers to “the attribution of a set of qualities to a given population”, who act as cultural beings. He adds that in practice, i.e. as it is experienced by individuals, cultural identity is equivalent to ethnicity – another concept which is highly contested today (Brubaker 2006). Chen’s definition (2006: 12) complexifies the concept: “personal, sexual, national, social, and ethnic identities all combined into one”. In intercultural communication (be it research or teaching), cultural identity often refers to a localized national culture. Herzfeld (1997: 192) has demonstrated how, since their creation in the late 18th century in Europe and later on elsewhere, Nation-States have made every effort to promote a sense of national cultural identity in order to limit communitarian divisions within their own space and to help people to identify with each other (cf. also Bauman 2004). This is often referred to as “imagined communities” after B. Anderson’s study on the creation of national imaginaries (1991).
In dealing with cultural identity, we are faced with the immensely challenging concept of culture. Many scholars have tried, unsatisfactorily, to define it. Some others have even asked for it to be “banned” in e.g. research (Bazart 2005). Many issues are at stake with the concept and I shall spend a bit of time here trying to specify some of them.

Let us first take a detour via anthropology. This field, which was created in the 18th century, used to aim at grasping the Human by proposing objective accounts of cultures through ethnographying exotic, strange and foreign places. This approach is now called “culturalism” or “essentialism”, i.e. “pretending that knowing the other takes place through knowing her culture as a static object” (Abdallah-Pretceille 2003: 13). According to Denzin and Lincoln (1984), anthropology has gone through at least five different historical movements that have shaped what it has become today. I won’t summarize all these movements but concentrate briefly on the last two movements as it will help us to see in what ways anthropology has changed. From about the 1980s, anthropology went through an important period, which is often called the “crisis of representation” (Clifford and Marcus 1986). Through this, meanings were put into question by anthropologists themselves, especially in relation to their methodology, i.e. ethnography and the derived data: who makes meanings? How do people represent these meanings? Who can interpret them and how? The basic question of what is culture? was then put aside as it became more and more problematic as the core of human experience. This was also the time when postmodern thoughts (and all its declensions: Queer theory, Post-feminism, post-colonialism…) became increasingly influential and started questioning and deconstructing how the human and social sciences had worked over the last two centuries. In fact what these sciences are criticized for is their trying to imitate “hard sciences” through scientific rigour, even though working on the Human implies not being able to attain Truth and Reason (Maffesoli 1996).

It is quite interesting that many domains that work with interculturality seem to have remained “stuck” in the first movements of anthropology (Dahlén 1997). Though, to be fair and avoid essentialising the field, as we shall see later on, many changes are occurring.

From culture to culturality

Why is culture problematic then in both scholarly work and in quotidian conversation? For Bhatia (2007: 49), the meaning of culture is related to power relationships; it is also composed of conflicting representations. For the Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan (2002: 75), culture is “both over and underrated” and its definition depends on the researcher’ vantage point (ibid: 84). Also, she asserts that culture is too often used as an agent in explaining intercultural encounters, while it doesn’t have any autonomous nor material existence (ibid.: 87). In fact it is the acting subject only who does, thinks, behaves… (ibid.: 84). For T.H. Eriksen, culture is a “cosy blanket” (2001: 141), which can be misused and abused (Wikan 2002: 75). Culture is also often depicted as if it were unchangeable and representative of all its “members”, while it is an object of power, which provides some people with the “right to define what is to count and for what” and “truth” (Wikan 2002: 86).

But culture cannot be but plural, changing, adaptable, constructed… (Clifford & Marcus 1986). A culture that doesn’t change and exchange with other cultures is a dead
culture. That applies to anthropological daily-life culture but also to “high culture” (cinema, arts, etc.). Another aspect of culture which should be reviewed is the fact that cultures should be less defined as a certain amount of characteristics and cultural traits than relations and interactions between people and groups (Abdallah-Pretceille 2003: 15).

As a direct result of these criticisms and the dubious analytic utility of the concept of culture, many other concepts have been proposed to replace it. French intercultural educationalist Martine Abdallah-Pretceille (2003; 2006) has put forward the concept of culturality to express these vital aspects of culture. Wikan suggests using knowledge/experience (2002: 86). While Eriksen (2001: 141), simply explains that “Instead of invoking culture, if one talks about local arts, one could simply say “local arts”; if one means language, ideology, patriarchy, children’s rights, food habits, ritual practices or local political structures (…))”.

A lot of postmodern phenomena are confusing for the individual: the retreat of Nation-States; the speed at which things occur; the transformation of human relations (“new families”, new sociality); confusing changes, which often appear to be uncontrollable; identity crises... These all trigger in our liquid individuals (to borrow Z. Bauman’s definition of contemporary individuals) a tendency “to group around primary identities: religious, ethnic, territorial, national” (Castells 1996: 3) and thus a reduction of the complexity around them.

Now if we come back to the concept of cultural identity, it is easy to see how such a concept can be problematic and difficult to define. At a recent conference on multicultural education in Europe, I was very surprised to notice that one session was about “multicultural education to help develop cultural identity”. Based on what has been said until now, this goal does not make much sense, to develop a cultural identity (if based on a solid/culturalist comprehension of the concept) will lead to the strengthening of identities – and thus possibly a closing up of the individual. Then how can one accept, respect and deal with different others, if one is strengthened in one’s identity? This leads me to a proposal concerning cultural identity. This concept could refer to the acceptance that we all process along culturality and that we are thus plural. So cultural identity is what we construct whenever we are in contact with other human beings – regardless of the fact that they are from the same “environment” or not. Some scholars have started to assert that this plurality means that we have different cultures. But this doesn’t solve the problem. What are their boundaries? Can they be named?

I mentioned that anthropology, the study of the Human par excellence, had moved away from culture as a central phenomenon to study. According to Th. H. Eriksen (2001: 45), the field has recently shifted to the study of identities. Identity, which also constitutes the concept we are trying to understand here, cultural identity, is a complex and much disputed one.

“The daunting task of ‘squaring a circle’” (Bauman 2004: 10): identity work

Questions of identities – be they cultural, national, ethnic, religious… identities – have never mattered more than with current complex practices of intercultural communication. As such, the concept of identity is now omnipresent in research on interculturality. According to C. Levi-Strauss (1977: 331), any usage of the notion of
Identity must start with a criticism of the concept. Identity has been widely theorized and studied in many different fields, from the human and social sciences to the “hard” sciences. For Z. Bauman (2004: 17) “identity is the ‘loudest talk in town’, the burning issue on everybody’s mind and tongue”. Cooper & Brubaker (2000: 1), in an article entitled Beyond Identity, tell us that the social sciences and humanities have “surrendered to the word ‘identity’”. They argue that it is an ambiguous concept which is either meaningless or too weak or strong (ibid.). Besides, the fact that it is both an analytical and practical category makes it complex to work with (ibid.). The concepts of identification and categorisation, Self understanding and social location, commonality, connectedness, groupness, amongst others, are often used interchangeably (Cooper & Brubaker 2000).

In practice, identity allows individuals to stratify their social experiences by linking with various others and groups or communities. Though the last two concepts have to be put into question: what are their “boundaries”? Aren’t they mere constructs? cf. Amit 2002), they allow people to “compose and decompose their identities” (Bauman 2004: 38). In the age of “crisis of belonging”, where national identity is competing with other global, alternative identities, globalization leads towards some sort of pluralization of identities (Bauman 2004: 20).

It is important to note that some identities become strengthened in reaction to the feeling of emptiness or loneliness but also threat and uncertainty that globalization can trigger (ibid.). This has led to the revival of traditional cultural and religious practices or even the creation of new identities to maintain continuity (Jovchelovitch 2007: 76). In the field of intercultural education, this often translates through helping students to develop their cultural identity. However, by organizing activities within closed communities, emphasizing sameness and difference, geographical, physical, linguistic, religious boundaries are then produced (cf. Jovchelovitch 2007: 76). These boundaries are both physical and psychological (Ibid.) and they often lead to representations on the actors involved (cf. below). All in all, this allows “communities and individuals to develop knowledge about themselves and others, to recognize a history that is handed down by previous generations and give to self an identity, i.e. a coherent narrative that connects events, actions, people, feelings and ideas in a plot” (Jovchelovitch 2007: 79). Yet when identity is reduced in such ways, or the consequences can be quite strong: “conflicts and barbarities” (Sen 2006: XV) but also “Stereotyping, humiliating, dehumanizing, stigmatizing identities…” (Bauman 2004: 38). When expressing an identity, there is always an issue of power at hand (Duncan 2003: 150).

What has become clear in terms of research and practice recently, is that identity cannot be reduced to a single element, in other words, there is no such thing as a singular identity. This is shared by all postmodern thinkers such as Z. Bauman, M. Maffesoli, Ch. Taylor... This discourse of the plural self and other also resonates in intercultural research as we shall see later.

This understanding of identity is related to the recognition that people cross various collective and individual positioning and voices on a daily basis, which can be opposed, see contradictory (Hermans 2001). As such, the individual is torn apart between various networks, multiple interdependences... For the anthropologist K.P. Ewing (1990), this is not just something that is happening in the Western world or in affluent countries. She writes (ibid.: 251): “I argue that in all cultures people can be
observed to project multiple, inconsistent self-representations that are context-dependent and may shift rapidly. At any particular moment a person usually experiences his or her articulated self as a symbolic, timeless whole, but this self may quickly be displaced by another, quite different “self,” which is based on a different definition of the situation. The person will often be unaware of these shifts and inconsistencies and may experience wholeness and continuity despite their presence”. Ewing explains that anthropologists have started looking at these inconsistencies (rather than consistencies) and contradictions in their work and more specifically at situational contexts involving “experiencing actors” (ibid.: 262). This is a potential agenda for research on intercultural communication.

Inconsistencies are related to our next concept: representation. Complexity needs to be reduced on a permanent basis as the human mind needs to box and categorise experiences, ideas, others… to “survive”. Howarth (2002: 20) reminds us that “identities are always constructed through and against representations”. She also argues that when dealing with identity, if one doesn’t incorporate representations, one doesn’t work on a complex understanding of it. Social psychology has been working on these notions for a very long time now and can provide us with the tools to study them in intercultural communication (Jodelet 1991).

REPRESENTING THE SELF AND THE OTHER

The concept of representation has been extensively studied by social psychology and has had a lot of impact on other fields (cf. Scollon and Wong Scollon 2001 for intercultural communication). A worldwide phenomenon, the study of social representations started with Moscovici’s seminal study of the perceptions of psychoanalysis (1961) and has reached nearly all fields of social experience (Howarth 2002: 3). Trying to define social representations is a difficult task as it is a very rich domain (ibid.: 4) and it is very close to quite similar notions such as stereotypes and attitudes (Moore 2003: 9). The classic definition given by Moscovici himself (1961: xiii) is: “Social representations are systems of values, ideas and practices which enable communication to take place among the members of a community by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the various aspects of their world and their individual and group history”. For Jodelet (1991), another main theorist of social representations, meanings are condensed in social representations and help people to construe their experiences.

Social representations have many usages. They are a socio-cognitive practice which allows us to create sociality, position ourselves, assert identities and defend ourselves when “attacked” by others (Howarth 2002). As such, representations are particular presentations of experiences, people, voices… which are reinterpreted and represented and “constitute our realities” (Howarth 2002: 8). Jovchelovitch (2007: 11) goes as far as telling us that “the reality of the human world is in its entirely made of representation: in fact there is no sense of reality for our human world without the work of representation”. For Brubaker (2006: 79), representations and other phenomena such as perceptions, interpretations, etc. are “perspectives on the world - not ontological but epistemological realities”.
So representations allow us to grasp sociality and the world, but they also help us to interaction with other people (Gillespie 2006). Whatever representation is shared, is also co-constructed with others, it re-presents “what reality is intersubjectively agreed to be” (Howarth 2006: 8). The consequence of this is the instability, hybridity and multiplicity of representations, which compete with each other (Moscovici 1961).

Amongst the social representations that are co-constructed, some have a macro aspect while others are more micro. In other words, there are “hegemonic representations” that are widely circulated and that dominate sociality, while “oppositional representations” can be less circulated, more micro (Howarth 2006: 22). Yet these two types of social representations can combat and influence each other. This means basically that representations do have an ideological component and that an exercise of power is always present in representations (especially representation of the Other, cf. Duncan 2003).

All in all, representations emerge from the interrelations between “self, other and the object-world” (Jovchelovitch, 2007: 11). They are not copies from originals but a symbolic, arbitrary means of putting meaning on people, ideas... (ibid: 3). Also, representations do not always correspond to acts/actions or behaviours. This makes studying representation a complex and forcibly unfinished business; but also, it reorients research in intercultural communication and education from questioning “what is people’s cultural identity?” to “how do they construct/re-present their cultural identity?”.

The formation of Stereotypes

Several types of social representations have been studied by both social psychologists and other fields (psychology, cognitive psychologists, but also linguistics, language educationalists...): prejudice, deligitimization, collectivizing and more relevant to our field stereotypes and Othering. Let us review these two concepts.

The study of stereotypes emerged in the 1950s. Stereotypes are “a set of beliefs about the characteristics of a social category of people” (personality traits, attributions, intentions, behavioral descriptions..., cf. Allport (1954) (Bar-Tal 1996: 342). The images that emerge from stereotypes are often stable and decontextualised (Moore 2003: 16). Though often described as having “negative connotations”, human and social sciences have preferred to emphasise their constructive functions, as “collective meta-attitudinal” discourses that lay boundaries between groups (Moore 2003: 14). In acts of interaction, people are guided in their behaviours and discourses through the cognitive order of the stereotypes that they have formed and learnt within their groups (Bar-Tal 1996; 1997: 493). Usually two types of stereotypes are put forward: auto-stereotypes, which regard people’s in-group and hetero-stereotypes which are related to an out-group (“the Other”). Stereotypes are often described as being static, limited and inert but they often change as their content is not shared by everybody but is contextually and individually determined (Bar-Tal 1997). They can serve the purpose of showing how superior one’s group is (but also oneself) and differentiate. They also have an ideological aspect (Scollon & Wong Scollon 2001: 169).

As such, the study of stereotypes can constitute a sound basis for understanding intergroup behaviors (Tar-bal 1997). Many theories have tried to explain stereotypic contents held by various groups: realistic conflict theory, scapegoat theory, belief
congruence theory, social learning theory, or authoritarian personality (Bar-Tal ibid.). Bar-Tal (1989: 170), who has done some extensive work on stereotypes based on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, criticizes studies of stereotypes for failing to pinpoint how they guide behaviours towards groups – while concentrating on cognitive and affective components of relations. What he then finds important is to examine how stereotypes are formed and how they change by investigating the factors allowing this process (1997: 492). The researcher has proposed an integrative model which is very useful in this sense as it allows us to look at the factors that contribute to the creation of stereotypes: background variables (socio-political and economic conditions and historical relations), transmitting mechanisms (societal channels such as the political, the social, the cultural, the educational…) and mediating variables (1997: 494-495). All these aspects allow researchers using the model to identify individual and contextual differences in stereotypes. Bar-Tal adds that the model cannot predict particular contents (1997: 517).

For intercultural communication, both researchers and teachers should endeavour not to try to “break” stereotypes or merely present a list of stereotypes, hoping that these will help to get rid of them – or paradoxically substitute them with the “Truth”. This approach is flawed as stereotypes as such cannot be suppressed (cf. Einstein’s quote at the very beginning of this chapter). What is interesting instead is to see how stereotypes are created and co-constructed and what they tell us about the people who resort to them (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006). In other words, working on stereotypes allows researchers and teachers to reflect on the notion of identity.

**Othering: making differences**

Othering is another form of social representation, which is very much related to stereotypes. According to Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2006), theories on Othering have been developed in relation to Women (de Beauvoir 1949/1953) and representations of race and ethnicity (Said 1978; Clifford & Marcus 1986). Othering consists in “objectification of another person or group” or “creating the other”, which puts aside and ignores the complexity and subjectivity of the individual (Abdallah-Pretceille 2003). In intercultural research, culturalism and essentialism, amongst other things, have tended towards Othering by imposing cultural elements as explanations for people’s behaviours, encounters, opinions… (Holliday 2006; Dervin 2008, 2010; Virkama 2010). A good example of this is studies directed by Hofstede on the business world (Cf. Mc Sweeney’s excellent criticism 2002). Resorting to cultures or mere Culturespeak (Hannerz 1999) will lead to Othering. This is shared by Abu-Lughod (1991: 143) when she writes in a famous critique of the notion of culture that it is “the essential tool for making other”. Just like stereotyping, Othering allows individuals to construct sameness and difference and to affirm their own identity (ibid.: 87). Thus Othering is not just about the other but also about the self. For A. Gillespie (2006), Othering leads people towards a widespread tendency to differentiate in-group from out-group and Self from Other in such a way as to reinforce and protect Self.

As a summary to the points made up to now, it is clear that when working with the concepts of cultural identity and representations, we are walking on many slippery slopes. On the one hand, intercultural communication should strive to work against
stereotypes, biases, racism, etc. but on the other, we know that e.g. non-Othering is impossible (Abdallah-Pretceille 2006).

CRITICAL ISSUES AND TOPICS

In the social and human sciences, and increasingly in the field of intercultural communication, researchers are now moving away from transcendentalist/structuralist concepts of identity and dispensing the idea that identity is a given or an artifact. If we have a look at the fields that work with the concept of culture (or concepts that are related to it), there is a tendency to move beyond it: in anthropology, Gupta and Ferguson (1997: 2) call for ethnography without the *ethnos*; Philipps (2007) multiculturalism without *culture*, Brubaker (2006) ethnicity without groups. So what intercultural studies should increasingly concentrate on is interculturality without culture (Dervin 2010). This may sound paradoxical but what it means is discard of solid visions of culture, or culture as a “catch-all explanation for everything” (Philipps 2010: 65) to explain encounters, but on the other hand examine how culture is used in discourse and actions to explain and justify one’s own actions and thoughts (Dervin 2010). In other words, it is all about moving from façade diversity based on cultural unicity to the diversities that each and every one of us have in us to see the potential constructive and manipulatory power of culture. Anne Philipps, in a book entitled *Gender and Culture*, gives some examples of how culture is used for example in courts (or what is called “cultural defense”, 2010: 86-87) to provide prosecutors with easy explanations and often successfully to reduce sentence (ex: he killed his wife because in China that’s what people would do).

So what is interesting for researchers working on interculturality is to look at how representations that are presented to interlocutors (be they teachers, researchers, friends, enemies…) are expressed and constructed. This is already a clear agenda for fields such as anthropology, linguistics, social psychology… Since the 1970s intercultural education in language learning and teaching has been about identifying representations, stereotypes and signs of prejudice in order to crush them. What some researchers have noticed is that the “crushing” usually leads to replacement with other representations or stereotypes, which are as unreliable, as constructed as the others. As such, if we take the Finnish context, some teachers would assert that Finns are not shy (as the auto- and hetero-representation goes) but that they are more reserved than others (cf. Berry 2006). The problem remains: it is through such discourse that one way of conceptualizing, “inventing” the self and the other takes place (Virkama 2010). In her study on “black pupils” in a London school, C. Howarth (2002: 6) shows how multiple representations of the same social object (“black pupil”) are constructed and manipulated. She summarises by writing that “representations have to be seen as alive and dynamic - existing only in the relational encounter, in the in-between space we create in dialogue and negotiation with others”. And this is what researchers and teachers should endeavour to examine: this creation – but also why they are constructed and how they lead to possibilities for communication, negotiation, resistance, transformation… (ibid.: 6). We should also bear in mind that not everything can be explained and that often we are dealing with hypotheses only (Maffesoli 1996).

The importance of intersubjectivity in the construction of identities and thus representations, stereotypes and Othering should be further explored. As asserted before,
representations are unstable and co-constructed; this co-construction means that it is only through relations that meanings occur (Howarth 2006). This is an important point for researchers and teachers alike: as identities and representations require “some other in and through a relationship with whom self-identity is actualized” (Laing, 1961: 81-82) (which may be accepted, rejected, imposed, etc.), the influence of this other should be included in analyses, exercises, etc. as much as possible to open up the focus (Howarth 2002: 17).

The field of humanistic-experiential psychotherapy (Cooper 2009), amongst others, argues that experiencing doesn’t reside in individuals but that it is always -inter, i.e. an intersubjective phenomenon. Cooper (ibid: 86) explains that: “the fact that we experience others who experience us experiencing them, ad infinitum, means that our experiences are fundamentally embedded within a complex, multidirectional “interexperiential” web (Cooper, 2005), in which our “own” experiences can never be entirely disentangled from the experiences of others”.

Various fields in linguistics share this vital point: pragmatics or the study of how people do things with words (Levinson 1983); conversation analysis (Psathas 1995) which looks at how discourses and representations are jointly created and negotiated through topic development, turn-taking, etc.; Critical Discourse Analysis (Barker & Galasinski 2001) which examines how power intervenes in the construction/questioning of meaning through intertextuality, control…; theories of enunciation (Marnette 2005) which looks at how intersubjectivity leads to the construction of objective-subjective discourses. These various approaches, which can complement each other, can help us to look at how people opt in and out of identities; the kinds of strategies that lead people to resisting representations and protect themselves (Howarth 2002); the ways people manipulate (tone down/emphasise) identities, etc.

This leads us to one final aspect: the researcher’s and educator’s positions in the identity/representation game. As an “other” (and any other “other”), researchers and educators impact on other people, be they their research participants, the people who read them, their learners, etc. and as people themselves, they circulate ideas, representations… A good example of this is given by Kumaravadivelu (2008: 60) when he details how Asian students are reduced to (often negative) representations in L2 education and especially in ESL/TESOL research and teaching. He cites the following examples: they show blind obedience to authority; they lack critical thinking skill; and they do not actively participate in classroom interaction. Though this is often heard from teachers and learners alike, this needs to be questioned, as the author rightfully does: “the language teaching profession has shown a remarkable readiness to forge a causal connection between the classroom behavior of Asian students and their cultural beliefs even though research findings are ambiguous and even contradictory” (Kumaravadivelu 2008: 54). This means that representations such as stereotyping and Othering are often put forward in the field by people who should work towards interculturality (i.e. culture and identity as changing objects) but who in fact seem to be working against it by “boxing” their students or informants. I have proposed a critical analysis of research on intercultural communication to reveal Othering or the potential for it. This is what I have done in one of my studies by looking at how researchers working on student mobility have dealt with
Chinese students theoretically, methodologically and analytically (Dervin forth.). This is also an important research agenda for the field.

CURRENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESEARCH

Intercultural communication and education are not fixed fields, which makes it difficult to review the current literature. Some choices need to be made. In this section, I propose to review six studies, derived from various fields that have dealt with the issue of representations and questions of cultural identity. The fields represented here are linguistics (Da Fina, Pepin), social psychology (Gillespie, Bhatia), and anthropology (Baumann, Dahlén). The studies are: Nicolas Pepin’s publication in French about French nationals’ experiences in Switzerland; Anna De Fina and her examination of illegal Mexican immigrants in the USA; Alex Gillespie with his study on tourists in Northern India; Sunil Bhatia and professional Indians in the USA; Gerd Baumann and his famous study of Southhall in London; Tommy Dahlén and his book entitled Among the interculturalists where he looks at the professional field of intercultural consultants in Sweden and the USA. Though all these studies are varied and diverse in terms of themes, contexts, theoretical backgrounds and approaches, they all have in common the fact that they are interested in examining how cultural identity is constructed and represented in intercultural contexts.

The first two studies presented here are derived from linguistics. Nicolas Pepin’s book (2007) is about the identities of French people who live in Switzerland. Pepin brings together research on membership categorization analysis (influenced by the work of Harvey Sacks) and conversation analysis. The following specific research question is addressed: how do French migrants in Switzerland express, construct and support their memberships in interaction with a researcher and other participants? The subtitle of the book, Eléments pour une grammaire de l’identité (“towards a grammar of identity”), is explained by the author as follows: “the presence of recurring linguistic forms and devices used by speakers to activate, manage and show identities” (ibid.: 13, my translation). The corpus is based on twelve interviews led in dyads, in triads or in groups with French nationals who settled in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. The following elements compose his ‘grammar of identity’: various linguistic, paraverbal, non-verbal, or spatial elements through which categorizations can take place; linguistic forms (nomination/identification) and categorization procedures (stabilization/dynamization; stereotyping…) but also intersubjective devices, which can allow formulation and reformulation, categorization and re-/de-categorization of memberships (the enunciative multiplicity of ‘I’, reported speech, category affiliation, typicality, etc.). Pepin offers an analysis of what the participants consider as ‘Swiss-French’ and how they insert the words septante, huitante and nonante in their speech (70-80-90 in Swiss-French as opposed to soixante-dix, quatre-vingt and quatre-vingt dix in “French” French). Pepin shows that their use of these words is not neutral as they serve emotional purposes and impact on the situated identities in the interviews. Another analysis is based on the role of accents in the construction of identities. It is clear, from Pepin’s analysis, that accents in one language do allow categorizing people, be they participants in the act of interaction or ‘absent third parties’. In addition, Pepin shows that accents have an imitative function as they are used in interaction to document and
authenticate various accents; but also to caricaturize and dramatize them. All in all this study is very useful to understand how language interacts with “culture” in the creation of identity.

The second study is derived from Anna De fina’s (2003) work on 14 Mexican undocumented immigrants’ experiences of border crossing in the USA. The author examines through a discursive analysis (narratives) how group identity (e.g. ethnic identity, “ethnic labeling” ch. 5) is represented, constructed and negotiated and how the relationships between identities and actions build up group self-representations. For the author there are strong relationships between narrative and identity. The scholar explores various linguistic and rhetorical resources that can allow identifying the narrators’ identification in their story-telling (pronoun switches, tempo, pitch, reported speech…). She argues (2003: 352): “by telling stories, narrators are able not only to represent social worlds and to evaluate them but also to establish themselves a member of particular groups through interactional, linguistic, rhetorical and stylistic choices”. Through pronominal choice, De Fina evaluates how the immigrants present themselves in relation to others through an examination of the pronouns I and We in Spanish to express distance from or solidarity. She noticed that more than half of the narratives are constructed with we, showing thus that the migration process could lead to strong relationships between migrants themselves. Also, she looks at the kinds of categories that the narrators use to talk about the self and the other. In the narratives, ethnic identity, through the use of different ethnic terms, is the only clear identity that is identified by the researcher. It is often used to generalize about the self and the other and to oppose them (e.g. “there is no sense of community among Hispanics”; “Americans think that Hispanics are ignorant” ibid: 152).

With the next two studies, we move on to the field of social psychology. The first study, written by Alex Gillespie (2006), evolves around the context of tourism, more precisely in Ladakh, which is located in the northernmost part of India, in the Himalayas. This site welcomes well above 12,000 tourists per year. Using informal group discussions led in Ladakh, the author maps the discourses of two groups: the tourists but also the Ladakhis’ “experience of being toured”. The scholar looks at how encounters between the two groups have an impact on their self-reflection and the emergence of new identities. Based on George Herbert Mead’s ideas, what the scholar does in terms of research method is that he resorts to a dialogical overtones approach (or “population of discourse” such as quotes, semiotic elements such as books, films, narratives, the mentioning of a social act… ibid.: 159). The idea is to search for traces of social interactions in the discourses that are presented to the researcher. Based on these traces, he asks the following questions: “What is the meaning of the trace? what is it doing in the speaker’s discourse? Whose voice is it? What do tourists say among themselves about themselves and Ladakhis?” (ibid.: 160). All in all, Gillespie looks at uncertainty, points of debate and clash of differing perspectives in people’s discourse (between people, groups or within themselves). The author shows that the image of the tourist as a naïve and unreflective individual is quite wrong as, even though one can easily get the impression that they search for authenticity, their discourse is evolving between various (often contradictory) positions and dimensions. For example, the tourists are well aware that the local Lakhis are actually “inventing” their cultural identity for them.
In a different context, the USA, the cultural psychologist Sunil Bhatia (2007) resorts to a similar approach but grounded in reflexive, critical and “postmodern” ethnography to examine first-generation, professional middle class Indians living in a northeastern suburb. The author is interested in how his informants understand the racial, ethnic and cultural labels created by the “other”. Using a Dialogical self approach, which challenges static identities, he argues that studying the polyphonic construction of self can help researchers review canonical “culturalist” and static approaches to acculturation and assimilation, often used in immigration studies (2007: 39). Based on interviews, the study is a good example of how “the “culture concept”, as made of contested codes, concerns the ways in which different modes of interpreting culture are tight to the historical, institutional, and social contexts in which these interpretations are produced” (2007: 41). The study shows how solid identities are imposed on these professional Indians – even though they have well-paying jobs and a good status in American society. Yet many of Bhatia’s informants try to tone down any form of racism that some say they have experienced. Also, interestingly, Bhatia shows in chapter 6 how his informants reject identification with “blackness” and put forward their resemblance with “whiteness” instead.

These contradictions and instabilities in identification are also very much present in the anthropologist Gerd Baumann’s study on Southhall (1996), a multi-ethnic suburb of London near Heathrow airport, England. Baumann rented a house in the very centre of Southhall during six years and involved himself in the life of the suburb. Talking to youngsters and adults of any “origins” (“Asians”, “Whites”, “Afro-Caribbeans”…), the anthropologist looks at the interplay of various discourses on culture and identity and shows how both “groups” presented him with shifting identities during his fieldwork. He writes: “the same person could speak and act as a member of the Muslim community in one context, in another take sides against other Muslims as a member of the Pakistani community, and in a third count himself part of the Punjabi community that excluded other Muslims but included Hindus, Sikhs, and even Christians” (1996: 5). Starting with a criticism of the concepts of culture and community, which are related to dominant discourses which “equates ethnic categories with social groups under the name “community”, and it identifies each community with a reified culture” (ibid.: 188), Baumann demonstrates how the two concepts are renegotiated in the informants’ discourse. On the one hand, discourse of community was presented as the basis of ethnicity or “self-evident communities of culture”, where people emphasized their belonging to a specific ethnic group. But on the other hand, he identified what he calls demotic discourse which contradicts the dominant one by putting forward an image of community as creation, “culture as process”, where “communities” or identities cut across the canonical ones.

The final study that I would like to mention is a bit different from the others but it will allow me to wrap up this chapter on cultural identity and representations. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, there is often some confusion as to how culture and identity could be understood and I mentioned earlier that e.g. anthropology has moved away from a reified and essentialised vision of these two concepts. The following study by Tommy Dahlén (1997) will help readers who still feel confused about this issue to understand what has happened to these notions. The study is entitled “amongst the interculturalists” and it was written by Swedish anthropologist Tommy Dahlén. Having done an
ethnography of intercultural consultants represented in the book by the Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR), Dahlén shows how specialists in intercultural communication function and how they themselves create representations on the self and the Other. The author explains for example how the SIETAR meetings are an important place for spreading models and ideas on intercultural communication (ibid.: 27), which are often derived from interculturalists such as Hofstede or Trompenaars. The latter have been highly criticized for leading to a generic, essentialist and representational view of cultures. What the anthropologist notices is that the ideas and concepts that are borrowed by interculturalists from anthropology are derived from the 1930s-1950s and that they can be labeled structural-functionalist, where culture is seen as a “stable value system” (1997: 159), which anthropology has abandoned many decades ago, to concentrate on “internal diversity within various kinds of social units” (1997: 174). The author concludes that as the interculturalist field (unlike anthropology) is practically oriented and situated in the marketplace, they need to be able to offer to their customers ways of predicting the behaviour of “people from different cultures” (ibid.) and this might explain why they stick to these concepts.

For us, researchers and educators, these pressures are not on us. The world is changing all the time; our conception of intercultural encounters is in the midst of a revolution. As we have demonstrated in this chapter, the concepts we have been used to work with (culture, identity, cultural identity) are very slippery and the research tools offered by the fields that have worked on representations, stereotypes and Othering are very useful to take a critical stance towards them. The future of research on intercultural communication, if it follows the changes other fields which deal with Otherness (Anthropology, psychology, sociology, philosophy…) have witnessed, lays within further reflexivity, criticality and the idea of diverse diversities (Dervin 2010).

REFERENCES

Sen 2006
FURTHER READING


De Fina, A., D., Schiffrin & M. Bamberg (2006) *Discourse and Identity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (This volume explores how social practices shape our identity through applying various research methods. Many chapters are related to intercultural communication).


RELATED TOPICS

Culture, communication, context, and power
Language, identity, and intercultural communication
Multidisciplinary approaches to intercultural communication research
Learning the language of ‘the Other’: Identity, conflict, and intercultural communication.
Beyond cultural categories: Cross-cultural adaptation and identity transformation

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Fred Dervin is Adjunct Professor of Sociology at the University of Joensuu and Adjunct Professor of Language and Intercultural Education at the University of Turku (Finland). He is *Docteur ès Lettres* from the Sorbonne (Paris, France) and Doctor of Philosophy (University of Turku, Finland). Dervin has published extensively on issues related to intercultural communication and education within the contexts of academic mobility, migration, binational couplehood and language learning and teaching. Further information on the author can be retrieved from his personal website: http://users.utu.fi/freder/