

# HABILITATION THESIS

Summary

## **An Intercultural Approach to the Mental Lexicon**

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The habilitation thesis, titled *An intercultural approach to the mental lexicon* represents an introspective synopsis of my academic journey following the award of the doctoral degree in Language Education (2004) to date. The calling of teaching has been an indelible mark on my conscience, alongside meticulous and toilsome propensity to theoretical substantiation of my scientific and professional development. I can unequivocally avouch that my whole life has been delineated by the desire to fathom the mechanisms of interpersonal communication, of linguistic and cultural exchanges, of sharing, in general. Transgressing human boundaries enforced by an unfamiliar language, by prejudices or stereotypes, as well as the evanescence of communication breakdowns through simple utterance of contextually and situationally appropriate oral messages have always meant authentic milestones and challenges worth taking.

Simply put, the theory embraced in the following lines is that the words in our mind are nothing like the words in the dictionary. They differ from each other, both from a structural point of view, and in terms of content. Any dictionary would feature in-built obsolescence, as long as, like Samuel Johnson said in 1755, at the very moment they are being printed, new words are budding, while other fade away and die. The mental lexicon is not a fixed entity – daily, we coin new words, either through a process of metaphorical creation, or, much more mundane, though just as authentic, by spoiling pronunciation or maltreating grammar. Dictionaries, in turn, are static and outmoded, poor and despondent (in the personal view of someone who had worked on a dictionary of business collocations for more than ten years!) Libben, Goral and Libben (2017) consider the mental lexicon as the cornerstone of linguistic competence, consisting of a mammoth network of representations, associations and mental processes. Other researchers, such as Aitchison (1994) or Wierzbicka (1992, 1997) reveal the possibility of exploring, through the mental lexicon, of the interweaving between cognition, knowledge organisation and communication.

Chapter One, *Bridging applied linguistics and intercultural communication in the global village* briefly introduces the methodological framework and operational concepts of my current undertaking,

such as language, culture, communication, and through referential narrowing, the mental lexicon and intercultural communication.

The second chapter, *An overarching curricular perspective on ESP training for professional settings* brings to the fore my academic debut, which was intensely and positively imprinted by the doctoral programme attended during 1999-2004, finalised with the PhD thesis “Design and implementation of the language curriculum at the Faculty of Economics”. This endeavour was relevant and pioneering, considering the following:

- the novelty of the topic, circumscribed to applied linguistics, i.e. the Business English genre analysis;
- the didactic vantage point created for the tertiary level business language programmes in which I functioned as a practitioner and agent of change.

The doctoral thesis, as well as the ensuing scientific production have represented significant contributions to the delineation and development of a linguistic branch by then insufficiently explored – the Business English genre. I practically construed my own paradigm from a curricular perspective, upholding that the implementation of Business English programmes encompasses several dimensions: understanding the acquisition of the business language as a process with far-reaching implications; practising on-going formative assessment and self-assessment; creating a proactive, student-centred and real-life, authentic, culturally appropriate learning milieu, all these leading to students’ enhanced genuine and prodigious communicative and linguistic performance together with specific professional and transversal competences, ultimately aiming at students’ empowerment for successful integration in internationally and culturally diverse professional contexts.

The subject was further investigated in subsequent works, especially in *The Business English Language Curriculum*, published in 2017, an overview of Business English as part of ESP, which has as focal point the imperious need for further rigorous research in the field, as also stated by Bargiella-Chiappini & Zhang (2013: 208): “Let us [...] work together towards the recognition of Business English as a mature, research-led scholarly enterprise”.

The third chapter, *Investigating the triad language-culture-communication* brings together four sub-chapters revolving around my theoretical and practical investigations in the field of lexicography and business terminology, figurative language used in business – collocations, idioms and metaphors, of intercultural communication and interconnections between language and culture, and not least translation and cultural mediation. My post-doctoral research includes 2 (monographic) books, 7 textbooks (2 as single-author and 6 as co-author), 3 dictionaries (2 of them with 3 re-prints), 2 co-edited

specialist volumes (published in Great Britain and Poland), 4 volumes of co-edited Proceedings, more than 80 articles and book chapters (out of which 16 indexed in ISI Web of Knowledge, Conference Proceedings, 27 articles indexed in international databases, 4 chapters in books published abroad, 5 book reviews).

The fourth chapter, titled *Assuming mentorship. Training the language trainer / cultural mediator* underscores my activity devoted to educating numerous generations of BA and MA students, as well as English teachers, in my capacity as lecturer (tenured with UAB since 2005) and Associate Professor (since 2014), as ELT methodologist (and Teaching Practicum supervisor), as well as advisor for BA papers, MA dissertations, and last but not least, supervisor for Advanced Teacher Certification Papers. I also tackle in this chapter my activities in academic quality assurance, through successful attempts at curricula harmonisation for philology study programmes. I was instrumental in setting up the Translation and Interpretation undergraduate programme. At “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia I set up the Student Society for Literary and Non-literary Translations, together with dedicated colleagues from the Philology department, and I founded the National Contest for Literary and Non-literary Translations, which celebrates in 2018 its 7<sup>th</sup> edition.

Chapter five, *Research and development in a nutshell* highlights my activity, for over ten years in research and development (of human resources and capacities), as well as educational projects (Erasmus+), both at national and international levels, as project manager (2 research projects and 8 educational projects), and as member (9 development projects and 1 educational project). Mention should be made of my essential contribution to setting up the *Centre for Research and Innovation in Linguistic Education – CIEL*, in 2007 and to founding the *Journal of Linguistic and Intercultural Education – JoLIE* (in 2008), currently indexed in [ERIH PLUS](#), ProQuest, EBSCO, Cabells, Ulrichs, and identifiable, through WorldCat in **605** international libraries. The main tenet of my current investigations is that cognitive metaphors are instantiations of cultural categories manifested in the language spoken by the community that shares a common set of characteristics within a given cultural matrix. Thus, I uphold the idea that metaphors clustered in cognitive categories account for cultural categories, both in terms of conceptual universals and variants, resulting in a complex mapping of interrelated cross-connections. The research nexus I created, in my capacity as project manager (CNCS-UEFISCDI - **PN-II-RU-TE-2014-4-2785**, UNIVERSALS AND VARIANTS OF ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN BUSINESS METAPHORS. A CORPUS-BASED CONCEPTUAL MAPPING OF CONTEMPORARY JOURNALESE), consisting of a senior researcher from Amedeo Avogadro University in Vercelli, Italy, Professor Giacomo Ferrari, 2 postdoc researchers and 3 doctoral students) opened up new exploratory vistas and afforded me unparalleled expertise in coordinating research teams, in motivating and inspiring young researchers in their burgeoning careers.

The sixth chapter, *Building a glocal community of academics and practitioners* makes direct reference to my efforts expended in order to establish an international network of researchers (ENIEDA – The European Network for Intercultural Education Activities) and the series of conferences on Linguistic and Intercultural Education (CLIE), organised, across time, in Romania, Montenegro or Serbia. I also initiated, in my capacity as Director of the International Relations Office, the series of exploratory workshops – Internationalisation of Higher Education: Challenges and Rewards, and I created a genuine brand for promoting interculturality among Alba Iulia youth – the annual event *UAB's Intercultural Youth Days Festival*. The measure of my academic standing earned in time is proven by my presence in over 650 libraries in Romania and abroad, and over 60 citations, most of them international.

The last chapter, *Looking ahead to new career paths and personal development* deals with my prospective research projects in the field of semantics, lexicography and contrastive cognitive linguistics (English and Romanian), as well as my strategic plan for continuous professional development. In the short term, I will continue, alongside my research team, to extend the project objectives, and to lay the foundation of a new research project. Together we will permanently improve the electronic platform for the retrieval of business metaphors, as well as pedagogic instruments and learning materials. In the middle term, I will renew my efforts in enhancing the visibility of *CIEL* Centre and *JoLIE* journal, ultimately aiming at indexing it in Scopus and Arts and Humanities databases. In terms of personal initiatives, I will finalise a volume dedicated to figurative language used in professional contexts, and in the long run I will lay the basis of a major research process in the field of contrastive linguistics with a focus on the mental lexicon vs the cultural lexicon.

My whole intellectual and emotional evolution raised my awareness and responsibility towards heralding the educational ideal of the Romanian contemporary society, through establishing new landmarks and standards of “1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba Iulia, through asserting the local cultural identity and linguistic values, and thus ensuring access to universal knowledge, especially within the context of enlarging the European and international higher education area. I will contribute, to the best of my knowledge, to nurturing, growing and developing the free spirit of the global citizen, able to assume his own linguistic and cultural identity, through accepting and sharing otherness, in order to combat extremism, xenophobia and intolerance.

In the light of all the assets mentioned above, I express my earnest intention to enter a new evolutionary stage, that is, the supervision of doctoral students who will achieve excellence in research, and together with them, I will strive to contribute to the development and advancement of my university on the national and international academic arena.