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**LANGUAGE AND IDENTITY IN CYBERSPACE. A  
MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

*Summary of Doctoral Thesis*

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**Key words:** cyberspace, digital world, physical world, Internet linguistics, computer-mediated communication, identity, cyber-identity, socialization, digi-participants, young users, online participation, hyperlinks, online social networks, *Facebook*, *Couchsurfing*, blogs, affordances, digital literacy, digitized features, online practices, Netspeak principles, politeness, pragmatic face, names, nicknames, fictional names, cybernames, glocalization, Franca space, lingua Franca, cyber-community.

### **Summary:**

The Internet and the digital world have created new opportunities for real-time conversations among individuals who are geographically dispersed. People post discourses and participate in "written" conversations in the new linguistic genre, which combines speech, writing, digitized features and online practices. They type their messages in chat exchanges, and these messages appear on the screens of their interlocutors, preceded by the sender's cybername (name or nickname) (see Bechar-Israeli, 2006); they create profiles on social network sites, blogs and game platforms. Hence, in digital spaces, we interpret Netizens' identity taking into account various variables that can be interpreted in random order, but which constitute a whole: Netizens' cybernames; the content Netizens post about themselves or others; the language used; the networks created among participants; the threads of discussions or comments, statuses, posts and so on.

The present thesis focuses on language and identity construction in digital spaces: on online social networks (*Facebook*, *Couchsurfing*, *BeWelcome*, *MySpace*, *LinkedIn*), e-mail and chat services (*G-mail*, *Yahoo*), blogs and game platforms (*Catan*, *Conquistador.ro/com*). We scrutinize the Internet situations encountered (e-mails, forums, synchronous and asynchronous chatgroups, groups of discussion, Wall/Timeline posts, statuses, etc.) in order to account for the variables mentioned above.

Identity is a multifaceted concept: "identity research is complex, multitheoretical and increasingly multidisciplinary" (Omoniyi and White, 2006: 15-16). Hence, we use a multidisciplinary approach in order to explain the concept of identity in cyberspace.

We focus on the following aspects: the conceptualization of cyberspace as a digital world constituted by the digital and by digi-participants' discourse; cyber-language; the online naming practices and cybernames; the construction of cyber-identity/identities in different digital spaces.

We focus our attention on the way in which users express/construct their cyber-identities through the content expressed (narrative identity) and through their linguistic behaviour

(discursive identity). More specifically, we observe young adults, males and females, in various digital communities. We chose Netizens with different cultural backgrounds in order to emphasize the cultural diversity and the *glocality* (global and local aspects) of cyberspace and to scrutinize how different languages are represented online.

In cyberspace, users express their identities or they assume a different identity. Still, they always expose **only what they want** in digital communities and they always make selections: of pictures posted on their profile, of avatars (the images that represent them online), of messages sent, of statuses and comments posted, of links and videos, etc. They can always add, remove, re-edit information. Hence, even when there is authentic information, in accordance with their real life identities, we argue that online identity is a fluid representation. For this reason, we use terms like **constructing/performing** identities. We also use the plural form: **identities**.

We focus on all the digital spaces mentioned in order to highlight that individuals in cyberspace have multiple fluid representations and function like distributed systems because they exist in many digital worlds and play many roles at the same time. Thus, we also argue that, because the conditions for identity construction change in cyberspace, cyber-identity is different from face to face identity.

### **The Newness and Relevance of this Investigation**

We embark upon this investigation because new technologies provide a new field of investigation in what language and identity are concerned (cyber-language variety and cyber-identity – representation) and need a good linguistic description. We reorganize and reinterpret the theories and the resources available regarding the language-identity nexus and we apply them to digital spaces. Moreover, in the case of the ideas put forward by Crystal (2001, 2004, 2006, 2011, 2012), we observe and integrate empirical data from new digital spaces (social network sites, blogs and the game platform of *Catan*).

We emphasize the importance of discourse analysis concepts and pragmatic concepts in the interpretation of identity in cyberspace.

We use the concept *fluid identity* in order to account for the infinite changes of the different online representations of users.

We analyse the names encountered in cyberspace: cybernames.

We investigate how users perform a multimodal identity using the affordances of cyberspace (general and/or particular).

We argue that cyber-identity is characterized by fluidity, uncertainty and constant play. Further, we state that cyber-identity is a blend with two inputs: expression (Input 1) and construction (Input 2). Input 1 usually dominates outside the digital world and Input 2 dominates in most cases in cyberspace. Hence, the concept of *fluid identity* (seen as *representation*) in cyberspace is justified.

## **Objectives**

Our objectives are:

- (1) to conceptualize cyberspace and to explain how it creates a digital world and why it constitutes a new field for language and identity research;
- (2) to highlight that language and socialization in cyberspace are characterised by digitized features and online practices; to highlight the fact that sometimes the language used online is a new variety: cyber-language;
- (3) to analyse the function of cybernames because they constitute the points of access to one's identity and they have a special nature online;
- (4) to scrutinize and explain the concept of *cyber-identity*. Related to cyber-identity, we enumerate different secondary objectives:
  - to demonstrate that cyber-identity is fluid and temporary;
  - to illustrate that identity is a blend between expression (input 1) and construction and play with identities (input 2). In face to face interactions, Input 1 prevails and in cyberspace, Input 2 prevails;
  - to highlight the fact that both in the digital world and in the physical world, identity is mainly a linguistic phenomenon (narrative and discursive phenomenon).

## **The Investigation Methods**

Throughout our research, the methods used are: observational method; experimental method (case studies): Netizens' e-discourses; contrastive analysis: analysing the different online representations of users on social network sites, blogs and game platforms.

All the examples are taken from digital communities on the digital spaces mentioned. The Netizens that we will focus on are active users.

## Outline of the Investigation

Chapter 1 offers a general presentation of cyberspace as a discursive space and a digital world created by users through the general and specific affordances of new media. The chapter emphasizes that cyberspace constitutes a new field of investigation for language and identity research. It also presents how teenagers and young adults use the Internet and how they participate in digital spaces.

Adapting Baudrillard's theories on simulacra and simulation (1983), we create three orders of online participation. The first is **the digital image order** and it refers to the fact that users upload or create representations of themselves which are based on images (photos and avatars). Researchers like Mendelson and Papachirissi state that there are "narcissistic overtones" on Facebook as users upload "strategic representations" of themselves (2011: 267). The second, **the collaborative production order**, explains that cyber-identity is co-produced and emerges as a result of human-technology interactions. **The hyperreality order** applied to cyberspace pinpoints that cyberspace intermingles representation and reality.

We postulate the emergence of the digital approach which would account for the fact that, in the digital world, we have simulations, representations, but also extensions of the physical world and ourselves. It would explain that users are spectators and participants, senders and receivers. We introduce the term *digi-participants* in order to describe the users' position in relation to cyberspace. This concept is different from *netizens* in that the former refers to the users of the internet, external to cyberspace, while the latter describes the representations *digi-participants* construct in cyberspace. Related to this, we mention the *Internet Linguistics* (Crystal, 2011) and explain that it constitutes the main framework within which we place our research because it focuses on language on the Internet.

Internet Linguistics is a panachronic study (the linguistic content of the digital medium is both synchronic and diachronic): searches seem synchronic, but the hits are from different time periods; scrolling down the Facebook page may seem synchronic, but it also involves diachrony; comments on Facebook can be from different time zones and appear in the same threads; pages are always evolving and changing.

When considering new media in the process of constructing one's identity, digital literacy and the general and particular affordances of the digital spaces play a crucial role because cyber-identity is a multimodal collage of text, images, other digital spaces and videos.

Digital literacy is scrutinized by several researchers (Kress, 2003; Kellner and Share, 2007; Claire Bélice, 2006; Allan Martin, 2008; David Buckingham, 2008).

Allan Martin mentions “several literacies of the digital”: *computer and IT literacy, technological literacy, information literacy, media literacy and communication literacy* (2008: 156-164). Digital literacy refers both to the ability of using digital tools and also to critical thinking and reflection. Other terms have been proposed as well: technoliteracy (Walker, Huddleston and Pullen, 2010), eLiteracy (Martin, 2003), Digital Bildung (Søby, 2001).

The affordances are “the unique feature sets and characteristics of particular technologies” (Burden, 2008: 122). Every Internet space presents its own affordances. With regards to social network sites, there are technical affordances, structural affordances (Boyd, 2011) and social affordances (Parks, 2011). Technical affordances refer to the fact the social network sites permit users to create public or semi-public profiles within a bounded space, to have lists of friends, to access other users’ list of friends, to comment and to update their information. Unlike other social networks, *BeWelcome* permits users to negotiate the technical affordances of the medium and, in this way, they negotiate their identities-representations as well. For instance, users negotiated the “recent visitors on my profile feature”. The structural affordances are: persistence (online expressions are automatically recorded and archived), replicability (the content is easily duplicated), scalability (broader distribution) and searchability (the content can be accessed through search). The social affordances are membership, expression and connection.

We present the following digital spaces and their specific (technical) affordances: *Facebook, Couchsurfing*, blogs and the game platform of *Play Catan*.

Chapter 2 underlines that in cyberspace users are very often involved in socializing interactions. Hence, many conversations are characterized by six properties (Weber, 2010): ordinariness, authenticity, privateness, informality, lack of goal orientation/phatic motivation.

The chapter describes language in cyberspace (cyber-language) or Netspeak and highlights that it relies on characteristics belonging to both speaking and writing, but also digital elements and online practices. The characteristics borrowed from speech and/or writing differ from one e-situation to another: the Web is closer to the traditional writing situations, while e-mail, chatgroups, virtual worlds and instant messages contain many core properties of speech (see Crystal, 2006: 31-32). Hence, language in cyberspace constitutes a fourth medium, the first three being speaking, writing and signing (Idem: 272).

We present the online practices of the synchronous chat: synchronous chat turns, online adjacency pairs, chat strategies, online overlaps and interruptions, digi-recipients signals and digi-participation framework.

The cyber-communication and socialization in cyberspace are based on the cooperative principle (Grice, 1991 [1975]) and the politeness principle (Lakoff, 1978; Leech, 1983; Cook, 1989; Locher, 2010) which are adapted to the digital world in order to initiate and maintain an amiable conversation in which users socialize with one another and construct a group identity.

The Co-operative Principle contains four maxims of co-operation: the maxim of Quality: try to make your contribution one that is true; the maxim of Relevance/Relation: make your contribution relevant; the maxim of Quantity: make your contribution as informative as it is required; the maxim of Manner: be perspicuous, and: avoid obscurity of expression, avoid ambiguity, be brief, be orderly. The four co-operative maxims are sometimes flouted or intentionally breached in cyberspace, like in everyday communication, in order to “indirectly convey more than utterances literally denote” (Plăcintar, 2005: 55). Crystal offers an overview of situations in which the co-operative maxims are breached in cyberspace (2001: 52-58). We present his account and we add examples from *Catan*, *Facebook* and *Couchsurfing*: undermining the maxim of quality (trolling activity), undermining the maxim of quantity (lurking, smurfs and smurfettes, spamming – playful, pernicious and ambiguous, flaming), undermining the maxim of manner (long messages posted in synchronous chat conversations/e-mails, Facebook comments), undermining the maxim of relevance (in some Internet situations the purpose is not very clear and, sometimes, there is no purpose but to socialize with other users).

The politeness principle comprises maxims like the following: tact, generosity, approbation, modesty, agreement, sympathy (Leech, 1983). To these, the researcher adds three “second order” principles: the irony, banter and pollyanna principles.

The co-operative principle and politeness are sometimes in conflict. For instance: politeness and truth, politeness and brevity. This shows that users shift back and forth between two ‘interactional ideals’: individual autonomy and ‘social’ identity (Plăcintar, 2005: 77).

Taking into account Brown and Levinson’s theory, we state that, like in the physical world, in cyberspace, “face” is a key concept in understanding politeness. Thus, digi-participants have two types of pragmatic faces: the negative face and the positive face. The negative face is the want of every user that his actions are unimpeded by others and the positive face is the want of every user that his wants be desirable to other users (see Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13; Locher, 2010: 515). Negative face manifests in indirectness, formality, emphasis of social distance, and respect for the interlocutor’s entitlements and resources. Positive face displays directness, informal language use, emphasis of common ground, appreciation of the interlocutor, her actions, possessions, etc. (see Kasper, 2005: 62). We could say that the negative face is the

participants' personal space, while the positive face is the image that participants expose to other participants (their social identity/representation).

Other researchers label these two sides of the pragmatic face as independence and involvement (Scollon and Scollon, 2001); distance and involvement (Tannen, 1986); deference and solidarity (R. and S.B.K. Scollon, 1983), autonomy and connection (Green, 1992), selfdetermination and acceptance, personal versus interpersonal face (Janney and Arndt, 1992).

The face is relevant for online identity construction because it accounts for the linguistic strategies that users revolve to in order to protect their own and others' "face wants" and, thus, social identities.

We state that the "digitized" features and online practices of communication and socialization in cyberspace (speech and writing features, "netspeak" principles and Net idiosyncrasies) give users the sense of (group) identity and they constitute the canvas on which cyber-discourses and identities are fabricated.

The digital productions of young individuals during casual conversations in cyberspace confirmed the fact that they are using computer-mediated language/cyber-language.

Chapter 3 investigates names and nicknames in cyberspace: usernames/cybernames because they constitute the points of access to the users' online identity. The chapter contains two parts: 3.1 Cybernames (Names, Nicknames and Chrematonyms) – A Sociolinguistic Standpoint and 3.2 Cybernames – A Possible World Standpoint.

In the first part, after defining proper names and nicknames, we borrow the typology established by Haya Bechar-Israeli (2006) and we apply it to the online game *Conquiztador* and *Catan*, extracting empirical data from these two game platforms. We also present the characteristics of the *Catan* nicknames and we present a special case of online naming practice on *Catan*: when users address each other using the colours in which their nicknames is written.

The empirical data from the two game platforms, *Conquiztador* and *Catan*, revealed that online naming practices involve idiosyncratic linguistic behaviour and that young users are very creative when constructing a cyber-identity.

Further, we examine *Facebook*, *Couchsurfing* and *Google+*'s policies with regards to the online naming practice. Then, we confront the Facebook policy with the empirical data on the social network site and we show that not all the naming practices on the site correspond to the Facebook policy because the cybernames encountered belong to the three onymic categories: anthroponyms (proper names and nicknames), toponyms and chrematonyms.

In the second part of chapter III, we present the concepts of possible worlds and transworld identity. We present different perspectives on proper names: the Mill-Kripke theory, according to which proper names are only labels, and Russell-Frege theory and Searle's theory, according to which proper names are descriptions.

We focus on fictional names (Currie, 1990) and we highlight that there are three ways in which fictional names are used: "fictive" uses (fictional names are either bound variables or transworld entities); "metafictive" uses (fictional names are abbreviated definite descriptions within the scope of the operator F – fiction) and "transfictive" uses (roles). Further, we distinguish between rigid and non-rigid designators. This distinction determines the difference between fixing the reference (the first category) and giving the meaning to a term (the second category) (Kripke, 1980: 5, 55). Thus, something is a rigid designator if in every possible world it designates the same object and a non-rigid designator or accidental designator if that is not the case (Idem, 1980: 48). We analyse the dichotomy rigid versus non-rigid designators in relation to proper names (rigid designators), fictional names (non-rigid designators) and cybernames. We claim that in the case of cybernames, the dichotomy rigid versus non-rigid is dynamic, changing in every digital macro and micro-community.

Using Currie's account on fictional names, we provide a personal interpretation of cybernames. We use the distinction between Users/digi-participants (individuals who use the Internet) and Netizens (individuals in cyberspace/inhabitants of cyberspace). We argue that users sometimes create online profiles which refer to them even if these online profiles are not a perfect match to their offline profiles. In this case, they create online representations of themselves that we call Netizens-representations. At others, they do not create representations that refer back to them. They assume different identities and in this way they create Netizens-characters. For the Netizens-representations, the naming is external as the referent is placed in the physical world, while for the netizens-characters the naming is internal as the referent is placed in cyberspace (a cyber-referent).

Whether we are dealing with an internal process of naming or an external one, in cyberspace, we could explain the naming process using Kripke's causal chain theory (1982 [1972]): cybernames are attributed when users create their accounts (they have a referent or a cyber-referent). The creation of the account is equivalent to the initial rite of baptism. The relation between words and classes of objects is established and then accepted by the linguistic community on the digital space involved.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to the conceptualization of identity and cyber-identity. We present the theoretical accounts that reflect our opinion about this multimodal concept, we present how they adapt to the construction of cyber-identity phenomena and we provide empirical data taken from cyberspace.

The first account is **the social psychological account**. Within this framework, Deschamps and Devos (1998) mention the dichotomy personal identity-social identity: what individualizes a person in contrast to what makes the person similar to others. For Doise (1998), identity is a social representation which varies from culture to culture. Worchel (1998) focuses on group social identity and argues that the individual's own context (background, history, interpretation of the present situation, and anticipation of the future events, opinions) plays an important role in determining the salience of personal/social identity.

According to the second account, **a postmodern concept**, identity is not solid and stable, but recyclable, changing, always a draft, fluid. Moreover, identity functions like a verb because it implies a project, a postulate (Bauman, 1996).

The third account is **the identification account** (Hall, 1996). He uses the plural form of the notion of identity (**identities**) and the term **identification** and considers that identities are increasingly fragmented and fractured in late modern times. He states that globalization constitutes the background for the debate of identity. To this, we add the Internet and cyberspace which brought about the construction of multiple representations for the same user, depending on the Internet space in which he is actively participating. Hall claims that identity is constructed within discourses and in relation with the Other. Thus, identities are points of temporary attachments to the subject positions constructed by discursive practices.

The fourth account is **the Mediational Perspective** (Norris 2011): identity is a process rather than being, developing rather than static, (co)-production and (co)produced in the social-time-place of particular social actor.

Norris considers that identity is a multimodal concept composed of **identity elements** that are permanent and others that are volatile.

Norris uses the plural form of the notion identity: **identities** and claims that (2011: 33): identities are multidimensional; some identities are macro-socially necessitated (for e.g. national identity), others are micro-socially enforced (for e.g. family identities) and others are chosen by the individual and articulated in their social-time-place (for e.g. friend identities); identities are produced in (inter)actions through higher-level (e.g. a conversation) and lower-level actions (e.g. a joke within a conversation).

In relation to the views presented, we define cyber-identity as the social identity or representation constructed in cyberspace on two levels: individual identity (what is unique to the user) and group identity (what the user shares with other users). It contains other dimensions which are included in one another: personal identity, professional identity, cultural identity, ethnic and national identity, gender identity, etc. These dimensions can be articulated or not and are revealed by the narrative identity (the content exposed) and the discursive identity (how the content is exposed, the language used). We give examples of identity construction through online resources. We also provide a case study which reflects the construction of identity via avatars. The examples and the case study reflect the multimodal aspect of cyber-identity.

We discuss the open-ended interviews that we organized with two target groups in 2012 (a group of twelve Ph.D. candidates from the English Department, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria; and a group of nine students at the Master Program: *Current Trends in Linguistics*, Faculty of Letters, Babeş-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania) in order to find out how young participants perceive cyber-identity and what the difference between cyber-identity and real identity/identity in the physical world is, from a sociolinguistic point of view. We focus on the participants' thoughts and opinions. Thus, some users of online social networks or users of the Internet in general claim that there is little difference between online and offline identity; that we are dealing with different conditions for the construction of identity, rather than with different identities. They say that the essential features are the same, but the conditions are different. Other users state the contrary: the cyber-medium influences the way in which people construct an identity and that cyber-identity is not only different in degree, but also in kind.

Ricoeur's perspective (1991) presents the concept of **narrative identity**. We borrow this concept and state that users construct an identity through the content that they post about themselves and through the content that other users post about them.

In what follows, we state that cultural diversity is a prevalent characteristic in all digital environments and that culture and subculture are mediating inputs of interpretation as digi-participants construct and perceive identities through the mediation of cultural signs and symbols. Hence, young users usually belong to the digital subculture due to their online idiosyncratic linguistic behaviour (e.g. (Internet) slang) and non-linguistic behaviour (videos, images, links, photos, tags, etc.).

When talking about cultural identity, we highlight that digi-participants are involved in a process of glocalization (globalization and localization): users from all over the world are in the same space and create a polyphony of cultures and subcultures. At the same time, cyberspace

constitutes a Franca space, a space where different cultural/subcultural identities are intertwined and where users interact with one another via the help of a lingua franca which is, in many cases, English.

Digi-participants construct a cyber-identity (individual and group identity) within a cyber-community which can take the form of a macro-cyber-community (the *Facebook*, *Couchsurfing/LinkedIn/Myspace/BeWelcome/Catan* community, etc.) or a micro-cyber-community (various online groups on the digital spaces mentioned). We state that the rules digi-participants are expected to follow change from one space to another and are fluid even on the same digital space because of the micro-communities formed. We can establish arbitrary minimum sets of requirements for membership in a cyber-community: a user must log in on a platform within the past three/two/one month(s)/week(s), have a personal picture, have at least x number of friends, have x comments from friends (see Parks, 2011: 193). Moreover, we consider that cyber-communities are extensions of offline communities or communities without propinquity variably, even within the same platform, depending on the digi-participants.

Chapter 5 focuses on Romanian, English and French digital productions in order to display the linguistic and non-linguistic processes through which young digi-participants construct a cyber-identity on a professional network site, on personal blogs and on Facebook.

Upon scrutinizing an article from *Daily News and Analysis, India*, “What’s in a cyber-identity? Ask Salman Rushdie”, we underline that the perception of digital spaces has changed in time. Some years ago, the Internet allowed users to be whoever they wanted to be or to remain anonymous. Nowadays, the Internet is connected to everything from our life; it becomes **Real Name Internet** and users are **Personally Identifiable** (Hogan, 2011). However, not all digital spaces are real name internet spaces and users are not always personally identifiable. Hogan mentions *Facebook*, *Google +*, *Twitter* as Real Name Internet spaces. Still, there are exceptions on these spaces as well.

We analyse the *LinkedIn* platform and we state that users have professional purposes and construct a professional identity within a community of practice (a group of people defined by the members’ activities of practice). Users construct different representations from the representations they display on Facebook. The *LinkedIn* representation assimilates all the narratives of the profession(s) of the individual and content posted by other users (recommendations, identity endorsement with competences and skills, users’ networks).

The way in which users perform an identity on personal blogs is different from the way in which they construct an identity on social network sites because the medium has different

affordances and different purposes. This fact emphasizes again that cyber-identities are fluid because the conditions vary from one Internet space and situation to another.

We illustrate the narrative identity of users on personal blogs: a Romanian blog: *Blogul lui Meșter* (<http://mirceamester.ro>); a French blog: <http://blog.jeromesoyer.fr>; an English blog: *ultrabrilliant* (<http://ultrabrilliant.co.uk>). We provide a diachronic perspective on them: 2011-2013 and we notice that the Romanian blogger constructs the same representation, the French blog is no longer available in 2013 and the English blog bears no resemblance in 2013 with the content in 2011. This pinpoints that cyber-identity is temporary.

Cyber-identity is constructed through various online discursive strategies and identity building resources: the cybernames chosen (chapter III), visual and audio-visual elements, digi-participants' content and discourse posted. All these elements are conditioned by the affordances of each digital space.

In the subchapter **5.4 Acts of Multi-dimensional Identities on Facebook**, we argue that, on Facebook, cyber-identity is constructed on two levels: individual identity – on the Facebook Profile Page, and group identity – created via interaction with other users from the personal list of Facebook friends and via participation in groups of discussion.

Firstly, we examine the performance of (individual) identity through various acts of identity on the users' Facebook profile page. We present examples posted in the time span May 2012 – August 2013: objective information, the **Like** section (2012)/The **More** section (2013), statements/short descriptions, favourite quotations, statuses, comments and small talk. These acts of identity also reveal parts of the offline identity of users. They are revealed in L1 or another language. However, there are selections and embellishments, only the content that users decide to expose. Hence, the result is a representation and not an exact replica of offline identity.

Secondly, users belong to local groups of digi-participants and they form speech communities within which they model their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour according to the groups of users whom they interact with while posting comments, statuses, sharing videos/links/photos and clicking the like option. This situation configures a group identity for the digi-participants.

The youth group identity is constructed through the use of a lingua franca and through online (speech) practices.

Young adults often use English as a second language (L2) when interacting with other Facebook users with whom they share the same mother tongue. They write/insert words, expressions and/or, sometimes, entire threads in English. We have scrutinized the online

productions of Guinean users, French users (“Frenglish” – Apfelbaum, 2002) and Romanian users in order to see how they use English online.

The use of English in cyberspace represents a sign of integration into a global network and of constructing an identity in a second language, resulting in a L2 glocal identity, since they also preserve their specificity.

All young users who interact on online social networks also establish a collective/group youth cyber-identity through the use of a particular cyber-language: English/French/Romanian, etc. cyber-language.

The cyber-language is reflected in the young digi-participants’ discourses on the Facebook platform because their texts contain the digitized features and the online practices (for instance: abbreviations, omissions of vowels, exaggerate use of spelling and punctuations, lack of punctuation marks, lower-case letters, looser constructions, use of emoticons and special symbols). These digitized features and the online practices are known as the international supra-language (see Chardenet, 2004: 61).

Regardless of the international supra-language, each language (English, French, German, Romanian, Spanish etc.) constitutes a different cyber-variety (see Collot and Belmore 1996).

We scrutinize the cyber-French used by the Guinean Facebook users (L1) and the cyber-English used on the Facebook public page *Entertainment.Art/Humanities* (L2, lingua franca).

## **Conclusions**

Cyberspace creates a discursive space and a digital world within which users sometimes use a cyber-language variety while socializing with other users.

Users perform a cyber-identity and the point of access to the cyber-identity is the cybername.

Cyber-identity is a representation. It is multimodal, multidimensional, fluid, temporary and in-action (identities-in-action, Weber and Mitchell, 2007) and all its dimensions are constructed by the content posted and by the language used.

Cyber-identity is different from offline identity because the conditions are different and digi-participants always operate changes. Thus, identity is a blend between two inputs: input 1 – expression of identity and input 2 – construction and play with identities. In face to face interactions, input 1 prevails, while in cyberspace, input 2 prevails. In the same vein, because each digital space contains different affordances, on each digital space, users expose different representations.

The fact that cyber-identity is a representation that changes according to the digital space involved is demonstrated by the cases scrutinized throughout our investigation: on *LinkedIn*, users expose the dimension of professional identity; on *MySpace*, users construct a representation which contains mainly content related to music; on *Facebook*, users construct a social identity through socialization with friends; on *Couchsurfing*, users construct a suitable representation for a traveller, host, guest, etc.; on personal blogs, users construct an identity by telling stories.

The diachronical perspective on the three personal blogs and on *Facebook* maintains our hypothesis that online identity is fluid and temporary.

Using a multidisciplinary approach, our thesis provides a close description of language and identity expression/construction in cyberspace, it presents useful accounts on the language-identity nexus in cyberspace and it explains the process of constructing a cyber-identity via the affordances and online resources available in each digital space.

The present thesis offers future research directions: the construction of identity by the same user in different digital spaces; identity construction on *BeWelcome*; a comparison between identity performance on *Couchsurfing* and identity performance on *BeWelcome*; the use of Romanian online; code mixing; discursive English L2 group identity of *YouTube* fandom, discursive Romanian/English/French L1 group identity of *YouTube* fandom, and many others. Furthermore, many aspects surveyed in this thesis could be further developed. For instance: Netspeak, the relation between affordances and identity construction, online politeness in various digital spaces, the possible world account on cybernames, professional identity construction on *LinkedIn*.

Last but not least, given that new technologies change very fast, this thesis constitutes a useful background.