ON MIGRATION, IDENTITY, AND LITERATURE IN FRENCH LANGUAGE TEACHING

SUR LA MIGRATION, L'IDENTITÉ ET LA LITTÉRATURE DANS L'ENSEIGNEMENT DU FRANÇAIS

Jana Pecníková[1]

Matej Bel University, Banska Bystrica, Slovakia

Abstract: Developing of current cultural and social issues in education is the main goal of the Erasmus + project called *Development of a Collaborative Space for French as a Foreign Language: Literature, Migration, Exile and Learning project* (DECLAME´FLE). Based on a common international platform consisting of three universities (Université de Rennes 2, Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan), we work to integrate social topics such as migration and exile into teaching French as a foreign language. It is processed through literary texts, into the training of future teachers and translators of French, to increase their linguistic and intercultural competence. The basis of work with students is primarily a literary, linguistic, and intercultural analysis of the corpus of selected literary works by French-speaking authors of non-French-speaking origin, who develop the theme of migration and exile in their works. In this paper, we focus on the socio-cultural level of the connection between literature, migration, and identity, from the perspective of the main character Martin in the selected literary work of Andrea Salajova - *Eastern*.

Key words: migration, identity, community, French language, exile

---

[1] (PhD.) Jana Pecníková is an assistant professor at the Faculty of Arts, Matej Bel University in Banska Bystrica, Slovakia. Her research is focused on the French language and culture; interculturality and intercultural communication; cultural and active citizenship in the EU; cultural and linguistic identity. She holds a position of the head of Department of European Cultural Studies.

Résumé : Le projet Erasmus + *Développement d'un espace collaboratif FLE : Littérature, Apprentissage, Migration, Exil* (DECLAME'FLE) se fixe pour principal objectif de mettre au service de l'enseignement du français langue étrangère les questions culturelles et sociales actuelles relatives à l'enseignement, la littérature, ainsi qu'aux phénomènes de la migration et de l'exil. Le projet, appuyé sur une plateforme commune internationale rassemblant trois universités – l'Université Rennes 2 (France), l'Univesité Matej Bel de Banská Bystrica (Slovaquie) et l'Université Adam Mickiewicz de Poznan (Pologne) – vise à intégrer, à travers l'étude de textes littéraires, les thèmes de société à la formation des futurs enseignants et traducteurs de français de manière à accroître leurs compétences linguistique et interculturelle. Ce projet consiste, pour l'essentiel, en l'analyse, du point de vue littéraire, linguistique et interculturel, par les étudiants sous la tutelle des formateurs, d'un corpus d'œuvres littéraires écrites en français par des auteurs d'origine non francophone et centrées sur le thème de la migration et de l'exil. Le présent article interroge sur les liens entre littérature, migration et identité du point de vue de Martin, le personnage principal du roman *Eastern* d'A. Salajova.

Mots clés : communauté, exil, français, identité, migration

Introduction

Migration has been one of the main topics of socio-political discourse worldwide since the beginning of the 20th century. They are a consequence of globalization, manifested by ethnic and cultural fragmentation. The result is a change in the construction of identities and at the same time a change in the relationship of belonging to the country. We consider international migration to be an important cultural and social phenomenon that transforms the identity of the migrant. We can call it a cultural event that leads to the reconstruction of the perception of the cultural and social community and the transformation of the cultural image of the so-called home. In this way, we analyze the novel *Easter* written by Andrea Salajova (2015). She is a Slovak author who writes in French. She lives in Paris and her literary work is unknown in Slovakia. In her first novel *Eastern*, she brings the stereotype image of Slovakia, which reflects the social and cultural situation (Mališová & Štrangfeldová, 2020, p. 83). The main character is Martin, who is looking for his identity in relation to the environment he lives in. At

the same time, he becomes a migrant himself. A literary work, although based on a fictional story, helps us to understand migration from the perspective of the individual, his search for an answer to where one can feel at home, respected and as a member of the community.

Perception of migration in Slovak context

Immigration and migration have long been postponed in Slovakia to a level where no problem seems to be present. The inclusion policy does not focus on migrants from other countries but is focused on groups living in Slovakia for a long time, namely Roma and Hungarians (Divinský, 2007, p. 23). This explains many attitudes of Slovak society towards migrants. Slovakia has been defined as a transit country for migrants, most of whom are illegal migrants. The perception of migrants in Slovakia becomes a subject of public interest in periods when the situation in other EU countries is exacerbated, resp. when terrorist attacks happen. The fact is that there are few foreigners in Slovakia, they are naturally integrated, and, in fact, they do not yet cause a social or political problem.

Migration studies are a field that interdisciplinary examines sociological, anthropological, cultural, and other manifestations, forms of migration. The basic theory of migration applies the so-called push-pull model, which assumes that the more disadvantages in life in the home country, the more likely the solution of the situation by the departure of the individual or groups. This is a very basic migration principle, and critics blame the model for being simplified and obsolete. Global surveys show that the largest migrant population is relocating within its own country or to neighboring countries. In the case of the literary work *Eastern*, the protagonist first goes to the capital, where he does not find the fulfillment of his ideas about life. For this reason, he leaves his home country. But he keeps in touch with it.

An important factor is the structural links between migrants and the country / community they leave from. This creates an extensive social migration network (Gallová-Kriglerová, 2009, p. 65). This is no longer the case for Slovak migrants, who often stayed in touch with their home environment because they provided information and guidance to future migrants, but often also sent financial resources for their families. In the example of the protagonist, we observe that his priority is not to send remittances, but rather to invest in his development, which is not possible in his home country. The migrant is undergoing a process of assimilation in the new country, which should result in his integration into the majority society. The integration takes place towards the domestic community and the foreigner is

integrated into this system by the integration process. The terms assimilation, integration and adaptation focus on the integration of migrants into the socio-cultural layer of society. For every migrant, this process is very important in terms of maintaining a sense of self-esteem and acceptance.

As in the case of the protagonist Martin, migration is often the result of unfavorable living conditions for people who are thus looking for a way out of a crisis (economic, political, social, etc.). which may encounter negative attitudes on the part of the majority community or racial, ethnic, or religious judgments, etc. jurisdiction. Today, migration is a civilizational challenge from a social, cultural and security point of view. The nature of migration changes over time. If in the past in Slovakia were e.g., waves of emigration associated with the economic situation (poverty), political events (1948, 1968, etc.), we are currently observing migration for work, better living conditions based on individual interests (Divinský, 2007, p. 58). Even applied migration theories are usually tied to specific situations and only some have a more universal use.

At the heart of migration theories is the notion of diversity because of migration. Diversity refers to plurality, or difference. Its development is related to the onset of the postmodern period, in which there is also an increase in the so-called radical plurality. If before, plurality was part of the whole spectrum of traditional social forms, today it has become a basic choice - the need for a plurality of contexts, styles, situations, actions. Postmodern man takes plurality for granted and is in daily contact with it. Migration, which is defined by a plurality of possibilities or the search for better opportunities, thus becomes a tool for the creation of a diversified (multicultural) society. The identity of the migrant is characterized by otherness (Pondelíková, 2020, p. 54). The difference in the possibilities and ways of finding one's place in the world, self-development, but also better living conditions. The main character Martin was first in an internal exile, later he went to the metropolis behind his dream, and even this shift did not meet his expectations and therefore he moved on.

The period in which the story of *Eastern* takes place refers to the migration processes in Central Europe, which were affected by political events and social events. After 1989, migration patterns stopped or suppressed, reappearing, and following the economic transformation of the country under the influence of globalization. In this period, the so-called incomplete migration, is a new type of labor mobility that does not have a permanent character, the status and position of the migrant are not clearly defined in it. Rather, this migration has elements of short-term repeated mobility (most often for work) due to economic backwardness (low wages compared to the West) and lack of work in the Central European region.

Migrant communities

In the case of the main character Martin, however, the cultural and social level of migration, which is based on the search for a community, is much more striking. Martin's goal is to apply himself in the field of art and to integrate into this sphere of society. The cultural dimension of this integration presupposes a sense of belonging to the culture of which migrants become a part. This concept is associated with two key terms: identity and community. On the one hand, he retains cultural specificities as differences, which become disadvantages in achieving economic and social equality. The need to "belong somewhere" is extreme. Bauman (2006, p. 8) also states that "the community makes you feel good: whatever it means, it is good to have a community." It seems to us that a community is always something good. The community presupposes understanding, trust, safety, and the goodwill of those involved. In a real community, there is a constant dispute between individuality and collectivity. Its premise is a natural mutual understanding that cannot be achieved artificially. All members should understand the basic issues of inquiry. This state cannot be achieved by force or by coercion.

Martin did not find a community where he could express his identity freely in Slovakia and emigrated to France. His intention is to become part of the art world. He looks for a community. Every community is characterized by distinguishability, smallness, and self-sufficiency. Distinguishability is reflected in the target focus and definition among other communities, the small amount guarantees the supervision of activities and activities of community members, which also facilitates communication. Self-sufficiency is linked to the fact that community members can provide most of the activities themselves. The fourth criterion in the past was homogeneity, which is now being replaced by diversity.

Migrants create their communities in the interspace of local and global communities (Bauman, 2006, p. 65). Much stronger is the element of identification and acquisition of identity, which is not given, fixed and unchanging, but on the contrary, it is called the so-called multiple identity. No culture is closed and limited. It is manifested by certain features that migrants coming from another cultural background must get used to. After arriving in a new country, the process of acculturation takes place, which does not automatically mean the loss of one's own cultural identity, which manifests itself in e.g., the community life of migrant groups, but at the same time there are interactions with the new cultural environment.

Rather, the process of assimilation is problematic, which requires the adoption of norms and codes of society, as well as identification with the culture of the country to which they come. This statement also raises the most frequently discussed problem of multiculturalism: the dispute over coexistence in increasingly diverse communities. Martin also wants to be recognized in society and wants to maintain human dignity.

In search of identity

In the novel we observe the transformation of Martin's identity, which changes into an intercultural one and he himself becomes an individual "between two worlds". Identity forms the core of every personality. The question of cultural identity as part of the identity of personality is generally a positively accepted concept. Because of the process of cultural homogenization (education and upbringing) people should feel understood with their own cultural system. The exclusivity of the uniqueness of cultural identity is usually positively perceived by society.

Martin's identity changes to intercultural because it transcends a cultural identity bound to one culture. It includes a vital component of emotional identification that is not limited to one social group or culture. The phenomenon of identity is closely connected with interculturality and intercultural activities, especially communication, which brings challenges and confrontations and leads to the enrichment and expansion of personality identity. This shift is called self-update personality. Every individual who is led to develop his/her intercultural identity goes through certain stages of transformation to achieve an optimal level of intercultural competence.

An example of the development of intercultural identity in practice is working in international teams. In addition to professional competencies and the ability to adapt to a new environment, it is precisely cultural interaction that is a key element in the effectiveness of cooperation. Without the development of intercultural identity and intercultural competences, the individual is limited in his or her ability to participate in these intercultural activities. There is direct contact with members of a different culture and an effort to work together, often accompanied by prejudice and inequality of opportunity. The concept of interculturality is in opposition to one permanent and unchanging culture, it expresses the dynamics that lead to the transformation of cultures. For this reason, it cannot be reduced to just comparing cultures (Prucha, 2010, p. 102). Interculturality creates a precondition for an interactive field in which

there is a space for a more comprehensive analysis of the characteristic aspects of individual cultures, despite the effects of globalization.

Martin's intercultural identity is also developing in the dynamics of processes (psychological, relational, group, institutional, etc.). It is a special kind of relationship, a mutual exchange. Intercultural identity does not eliminate cultural differences, but examines the processes of their creation, reactions, and transformation. It does not only relate to the comparison of two objects, but it also arises and disappears in connection with the community.

From this point of view, interculturality is the product of different intercultural identities, which represent different cultural environments. Methodologically, the emphasis is on the "I" (individual identity), which is reflected in communication dynamics. In this case, the communication cannot be reduced to the transmission of information or to the coding-decoding activity. It is the result of ongoing processes, involving many participants in communication and contexts. Knowledge of linguistic and cultural codes is essential for its implementation, but it also requires knowledge of culture as such.

Each communication situation is unique and requires knowledge of the communication rules of individuals in their cultures and the ability to correctly interpret the situation. When communicating different cultural identities, it is necessary to create new codes - cultural hybrids - which may not be specific to their original culture but are willing to seek compromises when trying to work together. This competence depends on the ability and capacity to analyze one's own culture. Intercultural identity presupposes a developed perception of the concept of culture and its practical use in real situations.

The practical problem of the development of intercultural identity is especially ethnocentrism, which is characterized as the tendency to know, evaluate, and interpret the surrounding world only from the perspective of the culture of their own ethnic community. Ethnocentricity assumes that everyone perceives situations and facts in the same way as our own culture. There is a lack of openness to accept different codes and rituals, as when confronting them, one's own culture is defended.

Transformation into an intercultural identity requires contact with other cultures, and passive reception of information is not enough. This transformation consists of 4 stages (Povchanič, 2012, p. 123):

1. reduction of others by own cultural codes
2. access to the cultural codes of others
3. knowledge of the relative nature of cultural codes
4. creation of intercultural space

A key element of intercultural communication is the transformation and relativization of values. In the first phase, we assess different cultures according to our own cultural system, later we begin to realize the differences and similarities, as well as their relative nature. If at this stage we overcome fears of endangering our own culture, we leave open space for the creation of an intercultural environment in which all cultures are equal and capable of mutual communication.

Conclusion

The novel *Eastern* is a story of a migrant from a Central European country who perceives migration as an opportunity to develop his identity. Migration is a means of enabling it to find "his place in the world". In the novel we see the rebirth of his local identity into an intercultural identity, which presupposes the existence of cultural diversity. It relates to different notions of time, space, attitudes in the face of professional or social hierarchy, customs, and conventions. Cultural manifestations can determine cultural identity and cause culture shock, accompanied by feelings of uprooting and nostalgia, frustration, anger, depression, lethargy, rejection of community, language, and culture, as well as a decline in overall health. The main character Martin was preceded by a period of euphoria, followed by a phase of getting used to a different cultural system, acculturation and subsequently stability in a new environment.

References

Bauman, Z. (2006). *Komunita. Hľadanie bezpečia vo svete bez istôt*. Bratislava: VSSS.

Divinský, B. (2007). *Zahraničná migrácia v Slovenskej republike. Vývojové trendy od roku 2000.* Bratislava: Výskumné centrum Slovenskej spoločnosti pre zahraničnú politiku.

Gallová - Kriglerová, E. (2009). *Migranti. Nový pohľad na staré problémy*. Bratislava: CVEK.

Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation.* London: Sage .

Mališová, D. & Štrangfeldová, J. (2020) Quality Evaluation in Education. In L. Černohorská & H. Kopáčková (Eds.) *Three Decades of Challenges, Reforms, and Uncertain Results*. (pp. 78-89). Pardubice: University of Pardubice.

Pondelíková, I. (2020). *Úvod do medzinárodných kultúrnych vzťahov a interkultúrnej komunikácie*. Banská Bystrica.

Povchanič, Š. (2012). *Initiation à la communication interculturelle*. Bratislava: Ekonóm.

Prucha, J. (2010). *Interkulturní komunikace*. Praha: Grada.

Salajova, A. (2015). *Eastern*. Paris: Gallimard.