

# Language and world's limits

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## 1. Introduction

An important issue within the linguistic-philosophical debate is represented by the role and character of language within human communication, and its relation to the problematic notion of linguistic meaning.

Likewise, in social sciences we happen to deal with an equally problematic notion, namely cultural identity, whose role is particularly difficult to define in relation to the actual experience of social practices.

We would like to show how the two above-mentioned notions, *linguistic meaning* and *cultural identity*, can be appropriately compared and applied to the field of social sciences, for the sake of investigating the role of meaning and identity as ways of conditioning social relations discourse. By means of the above-mentioned comparison, this paper intends to address a set of questions, such as: does meaning determine successful communication or is it successful communication that generates shared meaning? Is cultural identity the common element allowing successful social interaction, or is it rather effective social interaction that results in sharing a common cultural identity? It is by trying to answer those and other related questions that I wish to show how language and idiolects on one side, and cultural and social relations on the other, affect each others and to what extent.

From the perspective of social sciences we often hear that global scale trends undermine nation-states' influence and the stability of national cultural identities; global trends support local trends instead and, at the same time, encourage de-localization from main national customs (so called *glocalisation*). From this preliminary consideration, other interesting questions might be asked, such as: what is the role of languages within a global/local perspective? How do languages contribute to building identities? To what extent do global processes affect those identities? How can language philosophy provide some contribution, if any? All those questions seem to bring us to the old *constructivism vs. descriptivism* dilemma, as both linguistic meaning and cultural identity are notions that might be either discovered or invented, according to the relevant point of view. The reader will draw her own conclusions from our reasoning, supporting either position, but this is not really an issue we intend to deal with here.

As a start, a possible way to approach those questions seems to lie within an empirically constrained notion of linguistic meaning, which supposedly provides solid ground in order to build a similarly empirically constrained notion of cultural identity. According to such a view, a nation's cultural identity would be determined by the set of its empirical social practices, and not by governments' top down choices, labels or policies. Likewise, linguistic meaning would then be determined by daily linguistic practice, rather than being constrained by grammatical and syntactical rules alone. Therefore, the idea is that a change within a cultural perspective reflects onto the way languages fulfil their role in creating discourses capable of building and interpreting a picture of contemporary world(s).

## 2. *Cultural identity in a global era.*

In his paper *Globalisation and cultural identity* John Tomlinson<sup>1</sup> intends to dispel a very common view according to which the complex set of (cultural, economical, social, military, environmental) phenomena known under the label of “globalisation” can be reduced to a generic influence of western/capitalistic market on local cultures and identities. More in detail, he claims that not only globalisation is far from acting as a blind force, meant to “trample the flower of local cultures”<sup>2</sup>, but it actually does favour the birth and evolution of local identities, and therefore each local identity would be, in Tomlinson's words, “much more the product of globalisation than its victim”<sup>3</sup>. More simply, global connections favour general world-scale trends on one side, whereas on the other side they reinforce local powers, bypassing nation-states' authority.

We do not wish to challenge this view in which we definitely sense a good deal of truth; on the contrary, we intend to move from one of Tomlinson's main standpoints, the notion of cultural identity in its relation with globalisation, in order to elaborate on it and to shed some light from a philosophical-linguistic perspective on such a crucial and debated notion. Our main goal here is to provide the reader, if not with conclusive explanations, at least with some new ideas about a language-based analysis of the notion of cultural identity, within the contemporary culturological debate. In order to investigate the role of global processes on (national and local) cultures we intend to borrow some tools from a discipline which is not usually called upon when doing theory of culture and social sciences, namely philosophy of language. As anticipated, our idea is that the notion of cultural identity in social sciences and the notion of linguistic meaning in philosophy of language have several traits in common. If we are correct, equating cultural identity and meaning (more precisely, cultural identity and an *empiricist* conception of meaning) might yield profit to a theory of culture whose view on the notion of cultural identity depends on observation of actual social practices and habits. In this respect, the two notions at issue, meaning and identity, have a strong social dimension that cannot be overlooked.

It is generally accepted that, despite the existence of common elements across cultures, what defines a cultural identity is a set of traits that make that specific identity different from many others. “Identity through difference” is a sort of key slogan, which is generally accepted as true in order to provide a faithful picture of the relation among different habits, trends, symbolic structures, pertaining to different cultures. If we decide to endorse this view it would not make much sense to speak of cultures taken in isolation, as they rather form a sort of interconnected web, where surely some cultures are dominant over others, but where all of them influence each other at different degrees. Perhaps not surprisingly we will see how such a picture quite fits the very notion of meaning as well.

If we usually agree in thinking of cultural identity as determined by differences between ethnic groups, communities, countries, in that a group defines itself as opposed to others in terms of language, habits, traditions, then we should also acknowledge that there have always been contacts and contrasts among cultures, with the consequent hegemony of some cultural trends over others, due to some political, scientific, economic kinds of superiority. The notion of dominant culture has always been understood along these lines in order to define itself in terms of self-preservation and opposition to alien cultures. Still, how different cultures relate to each other is a complex phenomenon, and no univocal explanation or description can be provided: some common stands tend to be more open or more closed towards otherness; for example, a so called *imperialist* stand is set out to impose its own cultural character over

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<sup>1</sup> J. Tomlinson, *Globalisation and cultural identity*, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 270

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 269

others', by recognizing its own as the only acceptable culture. Other positions might rather tend to play defence by referring to other cultures as to alien and fear immigration (defensive stand), or even be more open, and be able to assimilate some of the other culture's elements, which are accepted as compatible (trans-cultural stand). All these positions have one trait in common: they view local cultures and identities as determined by differences.

Other perspectives set the notion of cultural identity against the background of global trends, within a network of connected habits, rather than within a network of oppositions and conflicts. It is one possible way to highlight common trends and elements over differences, thus defining cultural identity with respect to the new 21st century's global stream. Let us now turn to see how these different views on cultural identity relate to our investigation about linguistic meaning.

### 3. *Two notions compared: linguistic meaning and cultural identity.*

As we have just seen, the notion of cultural identity in international relations theory, culturology and social sciences is as much debated and controversial as it is the notion of meaning in language philosophy, semantics, logic and linguistics. In their respective areas of investigation those two notions, cultural identity and linguistic meaning, bear surprising resemblance to each other with respect to their function within theories and to the roles they play in order to account for several empirical facts, such as: consistency within knowledge and symbols transmission, proper communication, and, more generally, the relation among thoughts, language and experience. In a very broad sense, the notion of cultural identity is usually introduced to provide an accurate description about a group's social behaviour, traditions, habits and, ultimately, its acceptance of shared symbols.

Perhaps it won't come as a surprise that the very same functions are performed by the notion of linguistic meaning in order to account for how language works, how it is acquired, and how linguistic content is successfully shared via verbal communication and daily linguistic practice. Moreover, it seems that these two investigated notions are equally reluctant to be univocally defined, even though they both seem to play crucial roles in order to found coherent theories of culture and language; in fact, they both present remarkably similar issues in the way they are dealt with by different disciplines of investigation and the way they somehow resist univocal interpretation.

The idea leading me to equate linguistic meaning to cultural identity stems from the insight that linguistic meaning is (in some way to be explained) what makes communication possible (via syntactic and semantic rules) and, at the same time, is determined by daily social linguistic exchange. Therefore its role is very similar to the role the notion of cultural identity plays in its accounting for shared symbols and traditions and for the way it is, on the other hand, defined by social habits and trends. Both notions are there in order to help individuals to build their shared picture of the world, either via language alone, or by means of more complex sets of symbols which go beyond verbal communication. We might even define cultural identity as a *complex cluster of shared meanings* (regardless of defining identity at local, national or supra-national level, which is a different matter).

After providing a sketchy definition of cultural identity, let us now turn towards a brief description of the notion of meaning.

#### 4. *The notion of meaning in language philosophy*

In philosophy of language there are two main trends concerning the notions of language, meaning and understanding, which can be re conducted towards two well-known traditions, *rationalism* and *empiricism*. When we investigate language, our research constantly oscillates between the contribution from thoughts and the mind, on one side, and the contribution from experience and practice, on the other. Come what may, it is undeniable that human beings share common mental “categories”, schemes, interpretive models, such to make communication possible, despite differences in languages, dialects, codes. We assume that people somehow share some common (innate) linguistic ability, some language faculty, which allows us to successfully communicate our thoughts by means of language. In this view it seems hardly deniable that communication is usually successful and sharing common schemes greatly helps efficient exchange of ideas and opinions. Those schemes, besides coming from innate abilities and sharing the same form of life, come also from grammatical, syntactical and semantic constraints. We speak a certain language because we all master its syntactic and semantic rules.

On the other hand, it is equally undeniable that different cultures have different languages, and each language somehow deals with the world, the extra linguistic, in slightly different ways. There are linguists, philosophers, semanticists, and semioticians who maintain that we do communicate and understand each other, but only to some extent. We understand each other at some degree, which is usually enough in order to perform daily tasks but, they argue, that would not entail that meaning is always preserved and shared within communication. In other words, we only share portions of the same language, and individual codes (idiolects) exert stronger influence compared to socially shared linguistic rules. In fact, according to an empiricist view, meaning is something not captured by grammar or semantics *tout court*, but it is mainly an element truly explicable and justifiable only by means of social practice, language use, and actual communication. According to this view, the social role of language would be prior to linguistic rules themselves and, as a consequence, meaning would be the spawn of social linguistic practices rather than what makes communication possible.

In one particularly extreme view, such as i.e. in the work of W.V.O. Quine<sup>4</sup>, meaning is not regarded as an entity of any sort (mental, empirical, etc.), but it depends on translation manuals, which means that there is nothing as a common meaning truly shared by different speakers, but there are only possible interpretations, more or less compatible with linguistic behaviour. In order to fully understand this position I am going to use a very effective picture, which actually comes from Quine himself: language is presented in the form of a scientific theory (in our cross-disciplinary context, language can be equated to a cultural environment supporting identities), and we should think of it as of a web, made out of interwoven sentences. Those sentences constitute all of the human discourse, ranging from the most abstract reasoning (logic, mathematics) placed at the centre of the web, down to the most empirical sentences, those that Quine calls observational sentences, which belong to the periphery of the web, and that are more experience-constrained. Outside of the web would be the extra linguistic, the world, experience, what (at least in principle) should come before language itself.

Quine's idea (in his famous criticism of Kant's distinction between analytic and synthetic judgements) is that no thread of the web is fully white with theory or just black with experience. In other words, every sentence in our theory, in our theoretical building or in our cultural heritage is always grey. No sentence is totally independent from the others and a theoretical redefinition at the periphery can lead to some change towards the centre of the web. In this respect, Quine's view is that there are no sentences which are true just in virtue of

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<sup>4</sup> W.V.O. Quine, *Two dogmas of empiricism*, Harvard University Press, 1980

experience or true just in virtue of their linguistic meaning: knowledge, like culture, is built on this set of interconnected sentences which must face, in Quine's words, the tribunal of experience as a whole. Hence Quine's holistic view of language, where meaning is not what determines successful communication, but it is rather what comes as a consequence of it.

If we decide to embrace this picture which resorts to an empirically and socially determined notion of meaning, our next step will be to see whether the notion of cultural identity can be built the in the same way, that is, whether what individuals and communities label as "cultural identity" is a notion which can be defined along the same lines of Quine's notion of meaning, that is, in an empirical fashion.

### *5. The notion of cultural identity in social sciences*

Let us assume that things work the same way whether we speak of meaning in a philosophical sense or whether we speak about shared meaning, embedded in local cultural expressions, traditions, customs, habits, rites, and so on: in both cases we are trying to account for something regulating our social and daily communication, and it seems quite intuitive to believe that, if we manage to share symbols within our culture, we owe that possibility to some shared (linguistic) capability to handle meanings conveyed by those symbols. In other words, shared meanings build up identities, on global, national and local levels.

Here we cannot avoid noticing another important element putting meaning and cultural identity into the same basket, as both notions seem to have a normative character: an empirical notion of meaning and a notion of cultural identity are both meant to regulate our actual use of language and our perception of the world and of others in our social interaction. Both the normative dimension connected to words' meanings and the one conveyed by a shared symbolic system, meant to build people's sense of identity, seem to lie on the same level.

On the other side, beyond the normative aspect typical of both meaning and identity, there seem to be quite as strong a reason to support a reversed picture: actual social linguistic and cultural habits determine the two notions at issue, namely meaning and identity. The next step would then be to hold that meaning and identity are nothing but theoretical entities introduced in the theory in order to account for linguistic and social observable phenomena. According to this reversed view, the conclusion would be that meaning and identity do not really have an existence of their own, if not just as theoretical constructions meant to justify empirical facts.

Whatever be our choice, in order to connect the notions of meaning and culture we may want to seek for a theory accounting for how meaning is handled by cultures in order to build identities. In this view, cultural identity would exist within the horizon of shared meaning within a community. Once again, if we reverse the relation, we might as well conclude that linguistic meanings do not only depend upon a shared language, but also upon shared culture. Culture would then be dominant with respect to language and meaning. Whatever picture we decide to support, the two notions seem then to be rather entwined, influencing each other in a sort of loop circle.

We come now to a new step: if (linguistic/cultural) meaning is not in the head, but it is rather embedded in (and determined by) a holistic social experience which evolves slowly but constantly, is the notion of cultural identity to be treated the same way as linguistic meaning? Are we entitled to say that cultural identity is a complex notion like meaning, as it is? Or are identities more like labels, sets of shared symbols, which are clearly defined and can thus be applied to this or that group, community, nation-state, as it is usually believed to be the case?

The literature attempting to define meaning and cultural identity is vast in the relevant fields of investigation, and it would be foolish to try to account for a conclusive definition

here. Our purpose is rather, as anticipated, to look for basic similarities among those two notions in order to show how, somehow, meaning in languages and cultural identities are nothing more than useful theoretical constructions meant to account, in a schematic manner, for observable linguistic and non-linguistic social behaviour. In other words, we resort to semantic notions (meaning, synonymy, analyticity) in order to justify successful understanding and communication when speaking or in general interpreting a language; likewise, we adopt the notion of cultural identity with the purpose of justifying and interpreting sets of different socially (and successfully) shared customs, traditions, idiolects.

An important question comes at this stage: how do we account for any two people sharing the same meaning for the same word? Likewise, how are we to find out when any two people share the same cultural identity? As we noticed, it is actually the very same question being applied to the two notions at issue. If my theory wishes to prove sound it will have to provide some reasonable, non-trivial answer to this question and, eventually, provide an equally reasonable explanation of how the notion of cultural identity is defined within a global scale dimension. Is such an empirically constrained notion of culturally identity possible?

It isn't enough to claim that any two people attribute the same meaning to the same word in a language L appealing to the fact that they speak the same language, as we might ask: what does it mean for two people to speak the same language? And the only possible reply would be: they speak the same language in that they attribute the same meanings to the same expressions in their language. Therefore, linguistic competence would rest on meaning and meaning would rest on shared linguistic competence, in a circle that seems hard to break. A possible solution is to get rid of meanings altogether, and speak only (as Quine and others do) about synonymy and understanding.

In a similar fashion, if we believe that the notion of cultural identity is determined by socially shared habits and traditions, an analogous question comes up: how do any two people share the same cultural identity? If we maintain that they do it in virtue of sharing the same language, traditions, customs, habits, etc., this would lead to another question: how are we entitled to define when it is that any two people share the same language, culture, traditions? Is it because they have the same cultural identity? Or do we run the risk to fall into the same circularity as in the case of linguistic meaning? It seems to me that there is no way to define the notion of cultural identity, except by constraining it to empirical observation of public social behaviour. Following the same reasoning as in the case of linguistic meaning.

#### 6. *A deeper analogy between these two notions.*

In his paper *What is a theory of meaning II* Michael Dummett<sup>5</sup> states clearly that a theory of meaning is a philosophical theory showing how speaking and understanding a language, any language, rests on the notion of *knowledge of meaning*. Such knowledge is, in his view, a form of *implicit* knowledge, which speakers automatically call upon when engaged in any act of verbal communication. Therefore, a theory of meaning would be, according to Dummett, a theoretical description of a practical ability, namely the ability to use language. As a consequence, language is seen by Dummett and his followers as a set of shared linguistic habits regulated by syntactic and semantic rules, hence, speaking a language would entail being able to understand meanings expressed in that language. A theory of meaning should therefore explain what speaking and understanding a language amounts to.

On the other side, Donald Davidson<sup>6</sup> rejects Dummett's argument, according to which sharing a set of syntactic and semantic rules is both necessary and sufficient to ensure

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<sup>5</sup> M. Dummett, *What is a theory of meaning II*, in *The seas of Language*, 1996, vol. 1, n. 9, pp. 34-94

<sup>6</sup> D. Davidson, *Truth and meaning*, 1967

successful linguistic communication. In Davidson's view, successful communication rather rests on linguistic skills which differ considerably from one speaker to another, therefore mutual understanding is achieved by elements other than grammar, semantics and syntax, namely imagination, a shared knowledge of the world, common expectations and beliefs. Shared syntax and grammar are very important but not strictly necessary to successful communication.

On this thesis, both the realist and the antirealist would possibly agree. What they disagree about is the order of the terms within the following relation: *a speaker meaning something by what he says* vs. *two speakers sharing the same language*. What is logically (or empirically) prior? Can we mean anything by our utterances because we participate of a set of shared linguistic practices or can we actually maintain we share some linguistic practices given the fact that we (more or less) attach the same meanings to the same expressions?

In order to clarify this opposition, it is better to quote Davidson directly:

"I do not think we normally understand what others say by consciously reflecting on the question what they mean, by appealing to some theory of interpretation, or by summoning up what we take to be the relevant evidence. We do it, much of the time, effortlessly, even automatically. We can do this because we have learned to talk pretty much as others do, and this explains why we generally understand without effort much that they say"<sup>7</sup>

The main issue here is all internal to the difference between mastering a practice and having awareness of a description of that practice. Both Dummett and Davidson seem to agree that one thing is to implicitly master a practice and another thing is to possess the theoretical knowledge of what that practice is. A big point of divergence between them two seems to be in the degree they hold social environment responsible for successful communication. Dummett, like Hilary Putnam, seems to support the so called linguistic division of labour, according to which some individuals are better culturally and linguistically equipped than others in order to account for some specific words' meanings.<sup>8</sup>

At this final stage, equipped with some elements of philosophy of language, we might try to define cultural identity along the same lines as we tried to define meaning. In other words, the idea would be to conceive cultural identity as a useful notion in order to account for successful social and linguistic interaction. The concept of cultural identity somehow includes the notion of linguistic meaning, as they both account for, and to some extent justify, the functioning of our daily social and communicative practices. Following this logic, M. Castells, in his book *The Information Age*, holds that "identity is people's source of meaning and experience".<sup>9</sup> Let us see how we can move from here into a somehow unified picture.

In the sketch we have just proposed we maintain that from the fact that we successfully communicate to each other and that we effectively share social habits we are entitled to conclude that we share the same linguistic meanings and we share the same cultural identity. However, at least in principle, it would be equally correct to support the opposite view: namely, that we successfully communicate and that we effectively share social habits *because* we share the same linguistic meanings and we participate of the same cultural identity. It is because we have all learnt to speak according to the same semantic and syntactic rules (attributing to the same words the same meanings) that we can actually communicate in an efficient manner. Equally, it is because we have all learnt to share the same language and view of the world (cultural identity) that we can successfully get along together within the same society and keep entertaining socially shared practices. How do we break the circle?

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<sup>7</sup> D. Davidson, *The social aspect of language*, p. 2

<sup>8</sup> H. Putnam refers expressly to natural kind terms, such as *gold*, *water*, etc.

<sup>9</sup> M. Castells, *The information age*, 1997: 6

## 7. (How) Do languages determine cultural identities?

“There is no such thing as a language”, wrote Davidson in his *A nice derangement of Epitaphs*<sup>10</sup>, intending to say that there is no such thing as a language as usually intended by philosophers and linguists; namely, a language intended as a set of socially shared syntactic and semantic rules.

So far we have analysed two notions, cultural identity and linguistic meaning, without really solving the problem of which of the two is prior to the other. Is cultural identity dependent on a specific language, or it is rather language that depends on, and is influenced by, certain cultural settings? Intuitively, one would be led to conclude that the main feature of a community’s cultural identity is its dependency on a common language. But is it really so? Are we sure that sharing a common language is a necessary condition in order to be able to share a culture and to participate of a cultural identity? How much can community members depart from the socially standard way of speaking and yet retain their common cultural identity? Without doubts, there is a sense in which it is correct to say a language is the soul of a culture. But what does this statement really amount to? To what extent does a shared language really condition social interaction? Without considering individual case studies, it seems quite evident that, in the era of global trends, a mixture of local idiolects and global linguistic expressions seem to be the true “codes” bridging the gap between the supranational and the local, bypassing the national level. As pointed out by Dr. Orville Boyed Jenkins

“The culture of a community is integrally related to the language they speak. However, many different peoples may speak the same or very similar language, but still differ somewhat culturally. Spanish, Swahili and French are examples of multi national, multi ethnic languages. Thus the people’s identity (and their worldview) differ from others who may speak the same language, due to different sets of experiences, and the resulting different sets of expectations exist even in the same language “community”. Language alone, as a technical, abstract, academic subject, is not sufficient.”<sup>11</sup>

We agree that the goal of any language is successful communication, and communication is not ensured just by sharing a common set of syntactic and semantic rules. It is also determined by shared common practices that have, as an output, shared linguistic meanings. It is successful communication that determines shared meanings, and this depends, in turn, on effective use of local codes and idiolects. As a consequence, successful linguistic communication seems to be the product of cultural identity rather than its cause. If this picture is correct, we could also account for the fact that, at local level, communication is guaranteed by the dependency of idiolects on local habits and trends, which are by those idiolects reinforced without resorting to a country’s national language but, ultimately, to supra-national global codes. The correct picture seems to be one of a loop-feedback process: local linguistic idiolects, more or less departing from a main language’s syntactic and semantic rules, reinforce local cultural habits and traditions, borrowing from global scale cultural processes and reinterpreting them at local level. At the same time, local reinterpretation of global trends produces a linguistic contamination between idiolects (local dialects, jargons, etc.) and global-scale semantic production (world-scale expressions, codes and linguistic habits), thus ensuring successful communication among people within a nation-state. Without lessening the contribution of the main national languages towards building cultural identities, I believe that the so called phenomenon of *glocalization* can somehow be explained in a cultural-linguistic framework of the type sketched above, by arguing that idiolects and glocal trends, under the

<sup>10</sup> D. Davidson, *A nice derangement of Epitaphs*, from *Truth, Language, and History*, February 2005, pp. 89-109(21)

<sup>11</sup> O.B.Jenkins, *How to learn a language and a culture*, posted on web on 6<sup>th</sup> July 2000

influence of globalised processes, stand or fall together. In fact, it seems quite consistent with empirical linguistic phenomenology to maintain that local cultural habits and local idiolect seem to reinforce one another, and they do so also via a contribution from 21<sup>st</sup> century's global scale cultural changes.

#### 8. *National language vs. local idiolect and the social construction of meaning.*

At this stage it is time to draw some conclusions: if it is true that successful linguistic interaction determines shared meanings, and that daily social practices create a common cultural identity, it also seems consistent to conclude that language and culture inevitably influence each other, in a sort of a loop-feedback. Our last step has led us to investigate the relation between local cultural trends, in connection with non-standard uses of a language, such as dialects, jargons, codes, etc.- under the influence of global-scale cultural and, more strictly linguistic, habits - and the social construction of meaning, intended as the product not just of shared linguistic rules, but rather as the outcome of successful linguistic interaction. The idea is that said global scale cultural trends produce what we might call "portions of meaning" or perhaps "portions of encyclopaedia" (to use a terminology dear to semioticians), and those meanings are interpreted and shared on a local level, according to pre-existing culture, made of local, social and linguistic regional traditions.

If this picture proves correct, one kind of conclusion seems unavoidable: namely, that a nation's culture is not entirely, nor uniquely defined by its common national language, as there are so many uses of language, locally rooted and, at the same time, supra-nationally influenced, which definitely depart from standard linguistic use. Speakers in a community would have little or no interest at all in sticking to a standard syntactic and semantic use of language if, by doing that, communication would actually be limited rather than favoured. Quoting D. Davidson:

"The correct advice is Lord Chesterfield's: "Speak the language of the company you are in; and speak it purely, and unlarded with any other""<sup>12</sup>.

In a similar manner, no one would stick to some standard, national cultural habit if, by doing that, she would risk to break some local, deeply rooted custom (social, religious, etc.). Especially along with the phenomenon of glocalisation, the social construction of meaning on a national level seems to suffer from strong resistance coming from both the inside and the outside of the nation state's borders. Is this then the end of national languages and cultures, as we have known them? Do we have any commitment at all towards sticking to our national cultural and linguistic habits? To the reader we leave the conclusion, only hinting that a possible answer could come in the words of M.Dummett:

"Perhaps, strictly speaking, we have no obligation to *our language* as such: but we have an obligation to others who use it to avoid damaging its effectiveness as an instrument of communication. Each generation of speakers has an obligation to future ones to leave the language with as great an expressive power as when they inherited it. This is not to say that all linguistic change should be resisted. Some changes add to the expressive power of a language, while others diminish it: we should resist the latter and encourage the former. Davidson shies away from such a view for fear that it is "elitist"; but it is not. All today's languages are products of the co-operative efforts of many generations, to which their speakers, of all social classes, have contributed: they are subtle instruments of expression as they are because those speakers have cherished them. By destroying that love an

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<sup>12</sup> D. Davidson, *The social aspect of language*, p.10, from *Truth, Language, and History*, February 2005, pp. 109-127(19)

respect, the doctrine that it does not matter how you express your meaning, as long as you convey it, serves to destroy the language's immune system; that is why it must be combated".<sup>13</sup>

All this reasoning seems to lead us to the following conclusion: even though we generally need to stick to certain linguistic rules in order to understand each other, we often are much better off, in terms of successful communication, by somehow departing from main rules and by sticking to some local linguistic habit, to some idiolect, like a dialect or simply a jargon which has little to do with our main national language. Likewise, even though citizens of the same nation participate of the same national cultural identity, it is not rare to witness phenomena of "glocalization", which clearly show how local cultural and social trends, under the influence of globalisation, tend to override nationally induced habits.

As a final conclusion, it seems reasonable to maintain, in the light of our empirical investigation, that the building of cultural identities, especially at so called "glocal" level, little has to do with conforming to one specific, national language. On the contrary, local idiolects and local trends seem to depend on each other, at the expenses of national social, cultural and linguistic habits.

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<sup>13</sup> M. Dummett, *Reply to Davidson*, pp. 266-267