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**DISCOURSE NATIONAL IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN  
AUSTRIAN MOVIE**

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*Abstract*

Discourse construction of national identity implies a special approach where interdisciplinary theoretical framework combines the form of the critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach based on history, political science, sociology and cultural linguistics. Herewith the mutual influence among the national identity construction, discursive and legal aspects, naturalization, on the one hand, and Austrian socially desirable changes, on the other, is taken into account. Language and culture-specific national elements found in the discourse national identity construction are also significant for Austrian movie. A summary of the Austrian cinema history leads to the conclusion that the film industry can make a significant contribution to the construction of the country's national identity. In addition, the extent of identity realization in Austrian cinema is implemented. The main national identity levels in Austrian cinema are: the content, the discursive strategies and their linguistic forms. The level of content implies Austria community spirit, cultural values, particularities of the national set of mind and national behavior, references to historical facts, geographical and cultural realities. Different phenomena for constructing identity in Austrian cinema are used on the level of discursive strategies. Various language forms (dialects) as well as elements of everyday culture are taken as linguistic means of the Austrian identity constructing. The Austrian films served as data for study. The study concludes that throughout history, the national identity of the Austrians has been consistently constructed in the Austrian movie.

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**Keywords:** Identity, discourse, construction, Austrian cinema, culture.



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## 1. Introduction

As a result of changes in the world scene in the twentieth century, there is the dissipation of some states and the formation of new ones. This fact explains the urgency of the identity research, ways of its construction and preservation. Discourse construction of national identity is one of the central fields of study in the humanities: history, political science, sociology, culturology, linguistics, etc. (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999; Götsch & Dobrosavljevic, 2016; Mai, 2018; Menasse, 1993). Despite a wide range of the Austrian identity international studies from the viewpoint of history, political science, culturology, there are still few Russian researches.

From a historical point of view, the beginning of an independent Austrian identity usually dates either to the 19th century or to the 20th century, the time of the opposition to the Germany National Socialist regime. Austria's history in the twentieth century is a succession of economic crises, political and military upheavals (Holler, 2017). This greatly influenced to the Austrian world perception. Such constant changes have not only formed the Austrian cultural identity (known as "Austrianism" or "Homo Austriacus"), but also have become a sign of the Austrian world view. According to this point, "the end of the one era was not really the end" (Menasse, 1993, p. 39). According to political experts, initially Austrian identity was formed as "supranational" and was common to all nationalities of the Habsburg monarchy (Konrad, 2018). However, the upheavals of the twentieth century also changed the Austrian identity, the construction of which we are going to consider.

## 2. Problem Statement

The key concept of research is identity. Here identity is understood as a set of ideas about who we are and how we correlate with the rest of the world. Another important concept is national identity, which is a set of historical, territorial, political, ethnic and linguistic factors. Hence, there is a direct connection between significant historical, social, cultural events and the forms of national identity (Cillia & Wodak, 2018; Wilk, 2017).

Another important concept identity correlates with is culture (Csúri & Kóth, 2007). It is appropriate to consider it in relation to the language, where its lexical, textual, linguistic and cultural features are manifested in different spheres of communication (Forchtner & Wodak, 2018). These features arise as a result of different communicative conditions of language and culture functioning. In this case, we are talking about a discourse-oriented approach (Kuße & Chernyavskaya, 2019, p. 451). The above provisions are the starting point and basis for a discourse construction study of the national identity in the Austrian movie.

## 3. Research Questions

An important characteristic of any national identity is a language, which influences the knowledge formation about the world. Language is also a mean of constructing and reflecting an individual in society; that is why it is necessary to notice its two functions – discursive and socialization. The function of socialization is responsible for social experience preserving in the content of national identity. The discursive function of language is to ensure production, reproduction, transformation or preservation of

national identity. From this point of view, we will consider the construction of the Austrian national identity with the help of the discursive means.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

*The purpose* of this *article* is to explore the discourse construction of national identity as exemplified by the Austrian cinema. In order to achieve this goal, the following objectives must be considered: to examine the characteristics of the Austrian identity; to establish how flexible the identity was at different periods of the Austrian history and how this influenced the formation of the Austrian national identity; to envisage the linguistic means that allow to construct discursively the national identity in Austrian cinema. The film and film industry are a diverse cross-cultural environment and provide access to other cultures. The history of the Austrian cinema provides insight into formal artistic trends at every stage of its development and shapes social conditions (Beckermann, 1990; Murschetz, 2002). In addition, the history of cinema promotes understanding of discursive ways of constructing identity. The history of the Austrian cinema is an extremely interesting area of various artistic forms, cultures and ideas. The correlation between significant events in the Austrian history and the Austrian film titles will allow to trace the stages of discursive construction of the Austrian national identity.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Cinema plays a significant role in the national identity formation, so it is not surprising that the headlines of Austrian films made in different historical periods in Austria (from 1908 to 2015) served as data for study. Correspondingly, the Austrian films and film titles were taken as a research unit. In total, about 200 films and, consequently, the film titles were analyzed.

The film title is a rather complex formation that includes verbal, visual and sound embodiment. These components are conditioned both by the author's intention and by the national language and culture. The lexical units used in the creation of the film title convey information about the artistic, social, spiritual and moral values of a culture. Hence, social-historical, cultural, literary and linguistic factors are important in cinema. The linguistic-cultural approach to film title analysis is understood as an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that combines the form of critical discourse analysis, discourse-historical approach together with political science, historical and sociological approaches. This approach is also characterized by the usage of the historical and the cultural context. The linguistic construction of identity is grounded in the position of discursive analysis (Wodak, 2018, p. 5).

#### **6. Findings**

According to the foregoing points, we believe that the national identity in Austrian cinema is implemented through the linguistic means on three levels: content, discursive and linguistic (De Cillia, Reisigl, & Wodak, 1999, p. 150). We are going to give an explanation.

- At the content level, identity is constructed by means of the statements that reflect the values, beliefs, and representations of the communicator. In other words, everything that refers directly to Austria and testifies to its national identity (references to historical facts/individuals, geographical and

cultural realities, national behaviours). The construction of national identity is based on information about the past (e.g. genesis myths, flourishing, successes and crises). Not only language, religion, art and science, but also elements of everyday culture such as dress, habits and meal are taken into account in the national identity (for the present and future) constructing.

- Identity is constructed in Austrian cinema through the discursive strategies. Discursive constructing strategies aim to form a certain national identity by unity stimulating, identification and solidarity. At the same time, transformation strategies can be used. They focus on converting an already established national identity into another one. Demolition strategies are designed to destroy parts of the existing discursive construction. Preservation strategies attempt to support, defend and sustain identity. Here identity can also be measured in such categories as self-irony, compromise and neutrality.
- Identity is constructed by linguistic means. Not only dialects are used here (which is typical for constructing an Austrian identity). The most important linguistic tools are: anthroponyms, pronouns, numerals; references to locations (toponyms, adverbs), references to the location of people; time-related tools (time conjunctions, time prepositions and the temporal reference for the noun).

Consider these ideas in relation to the Austrian cinema. Austria is a country with a strong tradition in cinematography. The history of the Austrian movie begins with the opening of the first cinema in 1903, and the first feature film in Austria was released in 1908. The period of the filmmaking blossom in Austria was the era of silent cinema. In all, more than 1000 films were made during this period. This time was particularly diverse. The films were shot from erotic („*Ein Tag im Leben einer schönen Frau*“, 1912; „*Die Göttin der Liebe*“, 1912; „*Seitensprung*“, 1912) to propaganda ones („*Mit Herz und Hand fürs Vaterland*“, 1915).

The collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and then the Great War caused the destruction of Austrian national identity (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2017). As a result, dramatic films appear that represent the next stage in the collapse of national identity (“*Kampftag bei den Tiroler Kaiserjägern*”, 1916; “*Mit Gott für Kaiser und Reich*”, 1917; “*Die Schlange der Leidenschaft*”, 1918).

Since 1933, Willy Forst’s films have established the Viennese film genre which has gained international recognition. The most important films are the masquerade and the country stage (“*Maskerade*”, 1934; “*Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald*”, 1934; “*Singende Jugend*”, 1934; “*Sissi*”). As a continuation of the Viennese film genre of the 1930s, Willy Forst and his colleagues staged comedies and musical films dedicated to the 300-year history of Viennese culture.

The development of a fairly young Austrian cinema is again suspended by the beginning of the Second World War. Many Austrian directors are forced to emigrate. In the 40s, a whole series of films devoted to the homeland, its loss and soul searching (“*Heimat am Steilhang*”, 1944; “*Ein Tag in der Wachau*”, 1944; “*Peter Roseggers Waldheimat*”, 1944), and peasant life (“*Hof ohne Mann*”, 1942; “*Der Landtierarzt*”, 1943; “*Der letzte Einbaum*”, 1944).

In the post-war years, the task of the Austrian cinema was to show how the Austrian society coped with the war. The war is suppressed and kept secret, and Austria is a beautiful, protected and safe place. In addition to the trivial story, the current themes of the Austrian film are mountains, hunting, skiing, beautiful scenery and country life (“*Glaube an mich*”, 1946; “*Der Hofrat Geiger*”, 1947; “*Echo der Berge*”, 1954). In these

films, the Austrians are naive and intimate with nature. After the end of the war, over the next three decades the landscape of Austrian cinema was shaped by what is known as home cinema.

Austria's influence on the international scene became visible in the 1980s. For the Austrian cinema, it was possible to participate more actively in international and national festivals. The motto of the Austrian Film Festival was diversity: cheerful comedies about serious problems, exquisite historical drama, amazing biographies. So there appeared an opportunity to present a differentiated and critical picture of Austria to a wide audience.

Actual themes in films became: reevaluation of Austrian history and critical portraits of famous Austrians (*"Kronprinz Rudolfs letzte Liebe"*, 1956; *"Hasenjagd"*, 1994; *"Die Fälscher"*, 2006); literary screen versions of Austrian authors (*"Radetzky Marsch"*, 1965; *"Schlafes Bruder"*, 1995; *"Komm süßer Tod"*, 2000; *"Die Klavierspielerin"*, 2001); critical analysis of different social classes in Austria (*"Die Siebtebauer"*, 1998; etc.). The modern Austrian film industry has also received a kite-mark. Since 2000, the Austrian school of serious, aesthetically demanding cinema has been recognized worldwide (*"Hundstage"*, 2001).

The analysis of the Austrian film titles allowed to detect the following verbal indications at the content level: historical figures (*Kronprinz Rudolf, Sissi, Kaiser Joseph II., Johann Strauß*); geographical (*Wien, Donau*) historical events (*Die Befreiung der Bukowina*); cultural blossom (*Faschingszug, Budapester Orpheum*) and military defeats (*Kriegs-Journal, Der Zusammenbruch der italienischen Front*).

Discursive strategies are hidden in the Austrian titles. The well-known Austrian irony and self-irony remove misunderstandings, correct sometimes overrated self-esteem, reveal healthy humor towards them (*Zwei in einem Auto, Im schwarzen Rössel*). The most important linguistic tools in the Austrian titles are: anthroponyms (*Frau Gertraud Namenlos*), pronouns; location references (*Die Marilyn aus Ottakring*), time-related tools (*Morgen beginnt das Leben*).

## 7. Conclusion

The study found that identity can be constructed discursively. The consistent construction of the identity of Austrians can be defined as collective cultural self-identification. The trend towards a humanitarian interpretation of identity is reflected in Austrian cinema. This trend is expressed in its content, discursive and linguistic dimensions. The national identity represented in Austrian cinema is to be understood as a purposeful process of socio-cultural and discursive construction. The linguistic and cultural analysis of Austrian film titles revealed that the following identification features of Austrian identity dominate Austrian cinema: picturesque landscape, centuries of thorny history and exemplary culture.

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