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Literacy in Motion: International Mobility as a Laboratory of Literacies

Abstract: Reading literacy today means more than decoding a written text: it is the ability to recognise, integrate and process information that arrives through many channels at once – words, images, numbers, sounds, gestures and the space around us. This theoretical study examines international student and staff mobility as a setting in which such integrated recognition and processing of information is tested to the full, in a foreign language and in real time. Starting from the image of a traveller who sees the signs and recognises the words, yet cannot grasp what they mean, it brings together perspectives from aesthetics, linguistics and pedagogy, ethics and economics. It proposes three concepts – situational illiteracy, cultural bilingualism and the ethos of the foreigner – and an integrated model that links four layers of mobility (recognition, processing, interpretation and decision) to the literacies they engage, the risks they carry and the support they require. Culture shock is interpreted as a crisis of reading that, with institutional and mentoring support, can lead to metaliteracy.

Keywords: reading literacy; integrated information processing; international mobility; situational illiteracy; culture shock; metaliteracy; cultural bilingualism; mediation; translation; rhetoric; soft power; Visegrad Group

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1. Introduction

The study is a further output of the project *Developing Reading Literacy Through Integrated Information Recognition and Processing*, supported by the International Visegrad Fund. The first output of the project, the monograph *Literacies for the Twenty-First Century*, set out a conception of literacies as an interconnected system with reading literacy at its core.[1] Here we take up one of its images and follow it into territory the monograph did not enter. To describe a person whose reading literacy is insufficiently developed, we used there the image of a traveller in a foreign country who sees the signs and recognises some of the words, but cannot reliably make out what they mean.[2] The image was meant to show how oppressive it is to live in a world of texts one only half understands, and how easily such half-understanding turns into an invisible prison. The study takes the image literally. Every year, hundreds of thousands of students and teachers travel to countries whose language they speak imperfectly and whose unwritten rules they do not know at all. For several weeks or months, they become precisely that traveller – this time, however, by choice, knowing that their stay is limited, and supported both by the institution that sent them and by the one that received them. The title of the project offers a key to why this matters. Reading in the twenty-first century is rarely a matter of a single printed text. It means recognising information that arrives through many channels at once – written words, images, numbers, sounds, gestures, the layout of a place – and integrating it into a meaning on which one can act. Nowhere is this integrated recognition and processing of information put to a harder test than abroad. A student has to read a tenancy agreement, understand a patient leaflet at the pharmacy, tell a credible source of local news from a dubious one and find their way around an unfamiliar city – and, on top of all this, work out from gestures, silences and tone of voice what is expected of them. Mobility is perhaps the only educational setting in which reading, financial, health, media and spatial literacy are tested all

[1] PAVERA, Libor, Zdenka GADUŠOVÁ and Šimon PAVERA. *Literacies for the Twenty-First Century: Reading Literacy as the Foundation of Education in an Unpredictable World*. London: Heritage & Partners, 2026. ISBN 978-1-917379-04-5. The monograph was the first output of the project; hereafter cited as PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026.

[2] PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, p. 56.

at once, in a foreign language and in real time. We have described school as a laboratory in which one may make mistakes without serious consequences, and life after school as a "live mode" in which mistakes hurt.[3] We can refer to mobility as being located somewhere in between these two worlds, such that it is a live mode with a safety net. The study responds to a threefold change. First, mobility is no longer the privilege of university students. The Erasmus+ programme now supports stays abroad for school pupils and teachers, apprentices and vocational learners, and adults in continuing education, so that time abroad is becoming an ordinary part of educational pathways.[4] Second, research on literacies has so far dealt mainly with school and the mother tongue, and has left international experience largely aside. Third, the environment in which mobility takes place is changing. Artificial intelligence offers instant translation, virtual and augmented reality promise an experience of the foreign without travel, and Europe's neighbourhood is undergoing changes in which trust between people is becoming ever more valuable. We therefore set out to establish what mobility adds to the integrated recognition and processing of information that reading literacy, in the broad sense, requires, and under what conditions this contribution materialises. We pose five research questions, to which we return in the conclusion:

1. In what ways does culture shock resemble the experience of a reader who recognises words but not meaning, and in what ways does it differ from it?

2. Which literacies does mobility develop in ways that classroom teaching cannot?

3. What role do foreign language, translation and mediation play in the passage from misunderstanding to understanding?

4. Can rhetoric be understood as the productive counterpart of reading literacy and as an ethics of speaking to the other?

[3] PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, pp. 20–23.

[4] The Erasmus+ programme covers school education, vocational education and training, higher education, adult education, youth and sport.

5. What economic and geopolitical effects of mobility can be documented, and what are their downsides for the V4 countries and the Eastern Partnership?

The study is theoretical and conceptual in nature, bringing together findings and considerations from four disciplines – aesthetics, linguistics and pedagogy, ethics, and economics – to explore the recognition and processing of information in a foreign environment. On this basis it proposes three concepts – situational illiteracy, cultural bilingualism and the ethos of the foreigner – and an integrated model of mobility as a laboratory of literacies (Table 1), and it formulates hypotheses for empirical research. Where empirical research on study abroad is available, we draw on it to test the plausibility of our claims. We use the term mobility in a broad sense. It covers study stays and traineeships of students as well as teaching and training stays of staff, and it concerns all levels of education, although the study focuses on higher education.[5] The structure of the study follows the path of information itself. Part 1 deals with recognition: how a foreign world is first read through the senses, and why culture shock can be understood as situational illiteracy. Part 2 deals with processing: foreign language, mediation, cultural bilingualism and the role of the mentor. Part 3 deals with interpretation: translation as an ethical act of understanding and of cultural self-formation, and rhetoric as the art of speaking to the other. Part 4 deals with decisions and their consequences: the economics and geopolitics of mobility. Part 5 brings the four layers together in an integrated model and considers the challenges of artificial intelligence and virtual reality for every level of education. In doing so, the study extends the discussion of literacies in four directions: from the mother tongue to foreign language and translation; from reading as a defence against manipulation to rhetoric as its productive counterpart; from school age to university students, teachers and lifelong learners; and from the familiar place of home to a place one is only beginning to read.

[5] We distinguish study mobility, traineeships and staff mobility. We do not regard virtual exchange as mobility in the full sense; on its possibilities and limits see section 5.2. Shorter formats combining a physical stay with online learning (in Erasmus+, blended intensive programmes) are counted as physical mobility.

2. Recognition: Body, Senses and Situational Illiteracy

Before information can be processed in language, it has to be recognised – and in a foreign environment, recognition begins with the senses. This part follows that first stage, from the historical figure of the wandering scholar to culture shock understood as a crisis of reading.

2.1 Learning Through the Senses

Mobility was not invented by the Erasmus programme. The medieval university was an institution on the move from the very beginning: students and masters travelled between Bologna, Paris and Oxford, and later Prague, Kraków and Vienna as well. From its foundation in 1348, the University of Prague was divided into four "nations" – Bohemian, Polish, Bavarian and Saxon – which in itself speaks of its international make-up.[6] The common language was Latin, and the common literacy was the *trivium*: grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. A wandering student did not need to understand the language of the street, but he did understand the language of the lecture, the disputation and the book. The parallel with the present is plain: English as a lingua franca opens the lecture hall, but it does not open the market, the town hall or the host family's kitchen. Erasmus of Rotterdam, after whom the European programme has been named since 1987, lived this model himself: Paris, Cambridge, Leuven, Turin and Basel were stations of a single scholarly life.[7] For a Central European study, the emblematic figure is John Amos Comenius. After 1628 he lived in exile in Leszno, spent time in England and, in the service of the Swedish crown, in Elbląg; between 1650 and 1654 he worked in Sárospatak in Hungary, and he died in Amsterdam in 1670. His life's path crosses the territory of all of today's Visegrad countries; the journeys from Leszno to Sárospatak led through Upper Hungary, today's Slovakia. It was in Sárospatak that the *Orbis sensualium pictus* took shape, published in Nuremberg in 1658.[8] On its title

[6] On the structure of the University of Prague and its nations see e.g. *Dějiny Univerzity Karlovy I (1347/48–1622)* [A History of Charles University I]. Prague: Karolinum, 1995.

[7] The programme's name is also an acronym of *EuRopean Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students*. The programme was launched in 1987.

[8] On Comenius's years in exile see e.g. BLEKASTAD, Milada. *Comenius: Versuch eines Umrisses von Leben, Werk und Schicksal des Jan Amos Komenský*. Oslo – Prague: Universitetsforlaget – Academia, 1969.

page Comenius placed the maxim that nothing is in the intellect that was not first in the senses, and in its preface he made it the foundation of his method.[9] For our subject the principle carries a double meaning. A child first learns the world through its senses and only then through words; an adult entering a foreign culture learns it anew, and in the same way. Comenius's pedagogy, born in exile, is in this sense, too, a pedagogy of mobility. The Greek *aisthesis* means perception through the senses. Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten, who gave aesthetics its name, defined it in his *Aesthetica* (1750) as the science of sensory cognition.[10] Only later tradition narrowed it to the philosophy of beauty and art. It is the original meaning that matters for understanding mobility. A foreign city is first heard, smelt and tasted: the bakeries smell different, the silence on the tram sounds different, the light falls differently, lunch is eaten at a different hour. These perceptions are not the backdrop to knowledge but its first stage – the first layer of information that has to be recognised before it can be processed. Edward T. Hall, who in the 1950s prepared American diplomats for service abroad, called the unspoken rules of a culture its "silent language" and later described proxemics, the culturally shaped handling of space and distance.[11] Gestures, the distance between bodies in conversation, the length of eye contact and one's relationship to time are read with the body before they can be named. Maurice Merleau-Ponty understood the body not as an object we possess but as the way in which we have a world.[12] Michael Polanyi reminded us that we know more than we

[9] KOMENSKÝ, Jan Amos. *Orbis sensualium pictus*. Nuremberg, 1658, title page and preface; in Charles Hoole's English translation: "there is nothing in the understanding, which was not before in the sense". Comenius attributes the maxim to Aristotle; it became a commonplace of scholastic philosophy. Cf. also id. *Didactica magna*, ch. XX. – COMENIUS, John Amos. *The Orbis Pictus of John Amos Comenius*. Translated by Charles Hoole. London: 1887 [9th Edition].

[10] BAUMGARTEN, Alexander Gottlieb. *Aesthetica*. Frankfurt an der Oder, 1750, § 1. Baumgarten defines aesthetics as *scientia cognitionis sensitivae*.

[11] HALL, Edward T. *The Silent Language*. New York: Doubleday, 1959; HALL, Edward T. *The Hidden Dimension*. New York: Doubleday, 1966.

[12] MERLEAU-PONTY, Maurice. *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard, 1945, pp. 203.

can tell.[13] In a foreign culture we experience the reverse: suddenly we do not know what at home we knew without words.

2.2 Situational Illiteracy and Culture Shock as a Crisis

Kalervo Oberg, who introduced the notion of culture shock into the scholarly literature, described it as anxiety caused by the loss of all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse.[14] The definition is remarkably close to our opening image: those signs and symbols are precisely the signs the traveller cannot read. Drawing on the stays of Norwegian Fulbright grantees in the United States, Sverre Lysgaard proposed the U-curve model of initial enthusiasm, crisis and gradual adjustment; John and Jeanne Gullahorn extended it into a W-curve, which also includes the shock of returning home.[15] Empirical research, however, has not unequivocally confirmed such linear stages. Young Yun Kim therefore proposed a stress–adaptation–growth dynamic: not a curve but a spiral, in which every crisis moves a person a little further on.[16] Colleen Ward, Stephen Bochner and Adrian Furnham later organised the field into an "ABC" model that distinguishes the affective (stress and coping), behavioural (culture learning) and cognitive (social identification) dimensions of intercultural contact.[17] What these models describe less precisely is the informational core of the experience. The student recognises the signs but cannot process them into meaning: why the official smiles and yet says no, why a silence after a question is polite rather than awkward. The text – the situation – is there; what is missing is the code. We propose to call this core **situational illiteracy**: a temporary state in which a person whose reading literacy is fully

[13] POLANYI, Michael. *The Tacit Dimension*. Garden City: Doubleday, 1966, p. 4. On tacit knowledge as part of a "literacy of the body" see PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, pp. 47–53.

[14] OBERG, Kalervo. Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 1960, 7, 177–182.

[15] LYSGAARD, Sverre. Adjustment in a Foreign Society: Norwegian Fulbright Grantees Visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin*, 1955, 7, 45–51; GULLAHORN, John T. and Jeanne E. GULLAHORN. An Extension of the U-Curve Hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 1963, 19(3), 33–47.

[16] KIM, Young Yun. *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2001.

[17] WARD, Colleen, Stephen BOCHNER and Adrian FURNHAM. *The Psychology of Culture Shock*. 2nd ed. Hove: Routledge, 2001.

developed in the home environment cannot recognise the signals of a new environment and integrate them into meaning on which they can act, although they partly command its code. Situational illiteracy is not a new name for culture shock. It names its cognitive and informational dimension, which links research on intercultural adaptation with research on literacy. The concept must be distinguished from functional illiteracy, which denotes a lasting inability to use reading and writing for the ordinary demands of life in one's own community.[18] Situational illiteracy differs from it in four respects. It is visible and shared with other newcomers, whereas functional illiteracy tends to be hidden by shame. It is chosen. It is limited in time. And the person does not face it alone, but with the support of the sending and receiving institutions and, ideally, of a mentor (section 2.3). The depth of situational illiteracy varies with linguistic and cultural distance, prior experience and the quality of support. Without support it may lead not to learning but to withdrawal – into a bubble of compatriots or of other international students (section 2.1). With support, however, situational illiteracy can become a source of metaliteracy, which Thomas Mackey and Trudi Jacobson describe as the capacity to reflect on and direct one's own learning across changing information environments.[19] For the first time, the student realises that reading the world is a skill that can be learnt, and watches themselves learning it. Literature offers a rehearsal for this experience, because literary competence is a training in tolerance of ambiguity. Goethe's *Italian Journey* is a record of knowledge gained through the eyes and the senses; the same author later introduced the notion of world literature.[20] Karel Čapek accompanied his travel sketches with his own drawings, as if

[18] UNESCO's classic definition regards as functionally illiterate a person who cannot engage in all those activities in which literacy is required for effective functioning of their group and community. UNESCO. *Revised Recommendation concerning the International Standardization of Educational Statistics*. Paris: UNESCO, 27 November 1978.

[19] MACKEY, Thomas P. and Trudi E. JACOBSON. *Metaliteracy: Reinventing Information Literacy to Empower Learners*. Chicago: Neal-Schuman, 2014.

[20] GOETHE, Johann Wolfgang von. *Italienische Reise*. 1816–1817. Goethe used the term *Weltliteratur* chiefly in the 1820s, among other places in his conversations with J. P. Eckermann (1827).

a second language stepped in wherever words fell short.[21] Ryszard Kapuściński recalls how, on his first journey to India, he found himself without any English – mute, in effect – and learnt the language by reading Hemingway with a dictionary; decades later he described the encounter with the Other as the fundamental experience of our time.[22] The senses recognise the world, but it can only be processed and shared through language. This brings us to Part 2.

3. Processing: Foreign Language, Cultural Bilingualism and Mentoring

3.1 Language in Use: Pragmatics, Mediation and the Lingua Franca

Classroom teaching gives language its system; mobility gives it its use. Only abroad does the student encounter pragmatics in its full breadth: how to decline politely, how to make small talk, when to use the familiar or the formal form of address, or how to disagree in a given language without causing offence. Textbooks describe such knowledge only in part. Mobility also increases willingness to communicate, which linguistics treats as a variable of language acquisition in its own right.[23] John H. Schumann showed that success in acquiring a second language depends on the learner's social and psychological distance from the target community.[24] Empirical research on study abroad supports this view, but with an important qualification. Celeste Kinginger's critical review of the field shows that stays abroad bring gains above all in oral fluency and in pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence, yet these gains vary considerably between individuals. They depend less on the length of the stay than on access to the host community – on housing, social networks and the learner's own investment in local relationships.[25] A stay abroad that closes

[21] E.g. ČAPEK, Karel. *Anglické listy* [Letters from England]. Prague, 1924; ČAPEK, Karel. *Výlet do Španěl* [Letters from Spain]. Prague, 1930.

[22] KAPUŚCIŃSKI, Ryszard. *Podróże z Herodotem* [Travels with Herodotus]. Kraków: Znak, 2004; KAPUŚCIŃSKI, Ryszard. *Ten Inny* [The Other]. Kraków: Znak, 2006.

[23] MACINTYRE, Peter D., Richard CLÉMENT, Zoltán DÖRNYEI and Kimberly A. NOELS. Conceptualizing Willingness to Communicate in a L2. *The Modern Language Journal*, 1998, 82(4), 545–562.

[24] SCHUMANN, John H. *The Pidginization Process: A Model for Second Language Acquisition*. Rowley: Newbury House, 1978.

[25] KINGINGER, Celeste. *Language Learning and Study Abroad: A Critical Reading of Research*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

itself into a bubble of international students talking to one another in English does not reduce the distance Schumann described. The linguistic aim of mobility is therefore the move from a "survival language", enough for shopping and a trip to the registration office, to a language of relationships, in which one can make friends, joke and express sympathy. The 2020 Companion Volume to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages placed mediation alongside reception, production and interaction as a language activity of its own. It distinguishes mediating a text, mediating concepts and mediating communication, and it explicitly includes mediation between cultures and the creation of a shared pluricultural space.[26] A student abroad is an informal mediator almost all the time, explaining their own country to their hosts, the host country to newcomers, and both worlds to their family back home. Each such act of mediation requires them to process information from two cultures at once. English makes such exchange possible on a scale that was once unthinkable. At the same time, it risks concealing the language of the host country. The languages of the Visegrad countries are among Europe's less widely taught languages, and incoming students often see no reason to learn them. Yet even a basic knowledge of the hosts' language is a gesture of respect and a key to everyday life, where English does not reach. Comenius knew this at a time when the lingua franca was Latin: his *Janua linguarum reserata* (1631) taught language through things and was translated into many languages.[27] We may therefore recommend that every longer stay abroad include a basic course in the host-country language and the opportunity for language tandems with local students.

3.2 Cultural Bilingualism

A bilingual speaker does not simply know two languages but gradually acquires metalinguistic awareness: the ability to see language as a system and to step outside it.[28] In the same way, a reader who moves fluently between deep and

[26] COUNCIL OF EUROPE. *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. Companion Volume*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe, 2020, pp. 90–116.

[27] KOMENSKÝ, Jan Amos. *Janua linguarum reserata*. Leszno, 1631.

[28] BIALYSTOK, Ellen. *Bilingualism in Development: Language, Literacy, and Cognition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

rapid reading becomes aware of their own reading; this ability can be called cognitive bilingualism.[29] Mobility allows us to turn the analogy round and take it literally. By **cultural bilingualism** we mean the acquired ability to move between two cultural codes, to process the same situation within the frame of each, and – crucially – to see one's own culture from the outside, as one of several possible ones rather than the natural state of the world. The concept should be distinguished from biculturalism as studied in cultural psychology. Research on cultural frame switching and on bicultural identity integration concerns people who have grown up in two cultures and carry both in their identity.[30] Cultural bilingualism, by contrast, is a competence rather than an identity: it is acquired, it may be partial and it need not change who one is. In Mikhail Bakhtin's terms, it is a capacity for outsideness: the ability to step outside one's own culture and see it with the eyes of another (see section 3.1). As with cognitive bilingualism, its core is not perfect command of one code or the other, but conscious switching between them. Cultural bilingualism corresponds to the advanced, ethnorelative stages of intercultural sensitivity described by Milton J. Bennett, in which one's own culture is no longer the measure of everything but one perspective among many.[31] It is also close to the last of the five dimensions (*savoirs*) of intercultural communicative competence in Michael Byram's model – critical cultural awareness, or *savoir s'engager*.[32] This dimension links intercultural competence with media literacy and with psychological inoculation against manipulation: those who can read their own and other cultures critically are less susceptible to simplified

[29] The concept draws on Maryanne Wolf's notion of a "bi-literate" reading brain: WOLF, Maryanne. *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*. New York: Harper, 2018. For its elaboration see PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, pp. 33–35.

[30] HONG, Ying-yi, Michael W. MORRIS, Chi-yue CHIU and Verónica BENET-MARTÍNEZ. Multicultural Minds: A Dynamic Constructivist Approach to Culture and Cognition. *American Psychologist*, 2000, 55(7), 709–720; BENET-MARTÍNEZ, Verónica and Jana HARITATOS. Bicultural Identity Integration (BII): Components and Psychosocial Antecedents. *Journal of Personality*, 2005, 73(4), 1015–1050.

[31] BENNETT, Milton J. A Developmental Approach to Training for Intercultural Sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 1986, 10(2), 179–196.

[32] BYRAM, Michael. *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1997.

images of others.[33] Darla K. Deardorff, finally, places attitudes – respect, openness and curiosity – at the start of the process, with knowledge and skills building on them.[34] Three observable signs of cultural bilingualism follow from this: the ability to explain one's own culture to an outsider, the ability to recognise what one had taken for granted, and the ability to switch register and behaviour appropriately between the two settings. Underlying all three is tolerance of ambiguity. Stanley Budner defined intolerance of ambiguity as the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as threatening.[35] A foreign environment is the ambiguous situation par excellence. In our earlier research we showed that a targeted intervention in teaching reading in a foreign language develops divergent thinking and tolerance of ambiguity.[36] This suggests a hypothesis worth testing: reading demanding texts in a foreign language is a kind of mobility in miniature, and those who have learnt to tolerate uncertainty when reading a foreign text tolerate it better in a foreign city, too.

3.3 Mentor as a Guide

Contemporary pedagogy describes the teacher's shift from someone who hands down ready-made knowledge to a guide who recognises where a learner is stuck and helps them move on – what David Wood, Jerome Bruner and Gail Ross called scaffolding.[37] In mobility this role is fulfilled by the mentor, whose work has three phases. Before departure, the mentor helps set expectations and name culture shock in advance; in the language of inoculation theory,

[33] On inoculation theory see McGUIRE, William J. The Effectiveness of Supportive and Refutational Defenses in Immunizing and Restoring Beliefs Against Persuasion. *Sociometry*, 1961, 24(2), 184–197; on its current use against misinformation ("prebunking") see ROOZENBEEK, Jon and Sander VAN DER LINDEN. Fake News Game Confers Psychological Resistance Against Online Misinformation. *Palgrave Communications*, 2019, 5, 65.

[34] DEARDORFF, Darla K. Identification and Assessment of Intercultural Competence as a Student Outcome of Internationalization. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 2006, 10(3), 241–266.

[35] BUDNER, Stanley. Intolerance of Ambiguity as a Personality Variable. *Journal of Personality*, 1962, 30(1), 29–50.

[36] GADUŠOVÁ, Zdenka, Martina PAVLÍKOVÁ and Renáta HAVETTOVÁ. Intervention in Teaching Reading in a Foreign Language: Development of Divergent Thinking and Ambiguity Tolerance. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 2021, 12(1), 297–313.

[37] WOOD, David, Jerome S. BRUNER and Gail ROSS. The Role of Tutoring in Problem Solving. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 1976, 17(2), 89–100.

those who know about the shock beforehand recognise it and cope with it better. During the stay, the mentor acts as a cultural interpreter, helping to read situations that make no sense and thus turning situational illiteracy into learning. After return, the mentor leads a reflection without which the experience easily dissolves into anecdotes. In staff mobility, mentoring also becomes a vehicle for transferring good practice. Our research on mentors' perceptions of the teaching practice of future teachers showed how strongly the quality of the mentoring relationship shapes professional growth.[38] Here we also build on the results of the Erasmus+ project Mentor Training (MENTRA), which produced the collective volume *Vzdělávání mentorů* [Mentor Education].[39] A wider team of authors from the project partner countries contributed to it, and its individual passages were discussed at numerous workshops and Transnational Project Meetings. The international cooperation on the project was itself an example of the staff mobility and transfer of good practice we write about here. Peer mentoring matters no less: student buddy programmes give newcomers a partner who knows the local codes and is reminded, in turn, how far from self-evident they are. Language mediates, but every act of mediation is a choice, and therefore an ethical act. This is the subject of Part 3.

4. Interpretation: Translation and Rhetoric

4.1 Translation as Linguistic Hospitality

In his celebrated lecture of 1813, Friedrich Schleiermacher distinguished two paths open to the translator: either the translator leaves the author in peace and moves the reader towards him, or leaves the reader in peace and moves the author towards the reader.[40] Lawrence Venuti built on this pair with the concepts of foreignisation and domestication, and pointed out that the prevailing domesticating translation renders both the translator and the foreignness of the

[38] RADULOVIĆ, Branka, Tijana JOVANOVIĆ, Zdenka GADUŠOVÁ, Alena HAŠKOVÁ and Libor PAVERA. Mentor's Perception of the Future Science Teacher's Teaching Practice. *Journal of Education Culture and Society*, 2022, 13(1), 145–155.

[39] PAVERA, Libor, Slavomíra KLIMSZOVÁ et al. *Vzdělávání mentorů* [Mentor Education]. Prague: Verbum, 2022. ISBN 978-80-87800-99-7. The volume is an output of the Erasmus+ project Mentor Training (MENTRA), whose partners came from the V4 countries and Serbia.

[40] SCHLEIERMACHER, Friedrich. Über die verschiedenen Methoden des Übersetzens [1813]. In: *Sämmtliche Werke*, III/2. Berlin: Reimer, 1838, pp. 207–246.

original invisible.[41] A student abroad faces the same choice every day, not only in translating words but in interpreting behaviour. They can "domesticate" foreign customs, interpreting them by the standards of home and judging them strange or impolite. Or they can leave them in their foreignness and try to understand them from within. In his late writings on translation, Paul Ricœur acknowledged that a perfect translation does not exist and spoke of a work of mourning through which the translator must give up the dream of complete equivalence. In place of that dream he put linguistic hospitality: the pleasure of dwelling in the other's language, balanced by the pleasure of welcoming the foreign word into one's own home.[42] For mobility this carries an ethical lesson. Whoever comes into a foreign culture must give up the claim to complete understanding and settle for equivalence without identity. Only this renunciation opens the way to a genuine encounter. The places where translation resists are the most instructive. In the *Dictionary of Untranslatables*, Barbara Cassin showed that the untranslatable is not what cannot be translated but what one never stops (not) translating.[43] Such words are not blind spots in dialogue but its most sensitive points, and they show that untranslatability itself takes different forms. The Czech *lítost*, to which Milan Kundera devoted the fifth part of *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, gathers grief, sympathy, self-reproach and an indefinable longing; yet Kundera's own definition is sharper: *lítost* is a state of torment caused by the sudden sight of one's own wretchedness, and it longs for revenge.[44] It is a feeling turned inwards.

[41] VENUTI, Lawrence. *The Translator's Invisibility: A History of Translation*. London: Routledge, 1995.

[42] RICŒUR, Paul. *Sur la traduction*. Paris: Bayard, 2004 (English edition: *On Translation*. London: Routledge, 2006).

[43] CASSIN, Barbara (ed.). *Vocabulaire européen des philosophies: Dictionnaire des intraduisibles*. Paris: Seuil – Le Robert, 2004, introduction (English edition: *Dictionary of Untranslatables*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014).

[44] KUNDERA, Milan. *Kniha smíchu a* zapomnění [The Book of Laughter and Forgetting]. Toronto: 68 Publishers, 1981, part five, "Lítost", p. 131. In Michael Henry Heim's English translation (*The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. New York: Knopf, 1980), lítost is defined as "'a state of torment created by the sudden sight of one"s own misery" (p. 167).

The Armenian *karot* (կարոտ) points the other way: it is a longing for someone or something absent – a person, a home, a homeland.[45] We may think of it as the feeling of a cenotaph (from the Greek *kenos*, empty, and *taphos*, grave): a monument that marks a presence precisely through its absence. Such an image may resonate in a culture which, according to tradition, received Christianity from the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew – from those, that is, who had known Christ and the empty tomb themselves – and whose modern history of diaspora and genocide has left many without a grave.[46] Conversations about such words are among the deepest forms of intercultural dialogue, because they oblige both sides to explain what they take for granted. Mikhail Bakhtin gave this experience a philosophical foundation in his concept of outsideness (*vnenakhodimost*). In the realm of culture, he argued, outsideness is the most powerful factor in understanding: a foreign culture reveals itself fully and profoundly only in the eyes of another culture, and a meaning shows its depths only when it encounters and comes into contact with another, foreign meaning.[47] The meeting of *lítost* and *karot* is a small example of such contact: each word becomes more clearly itself when set against the other. Umberto Eco is credited with the remark that the language of Europe is translation.[48] For mobility, it might hold quite literally. Translation is also a school of critical

[45] Armenian կարոտ (*karōt*), "longing, yearning, nostalgia; painful missing of someone or something". Cf. MALKHASYANTS, Stepan. *Hayeren batsatrakan bararan* [Explanatory Dictionary of Armenian]. 4 vols. Yerevan, 1944–1945, s.v.

[46] The reading of *karot* through the image of the cenotaph is our own and is offered as an interpretive suggestion. According to the tradition of the Armenian Church – hence its name, the Armenian Apostolic Church – Armenia was first evangelised by the apostles Thaddeus and Bartholomew; Christianity was adopted as the state religion under King Trdat III and Gregory the Illuminator, traditionally dated to 301 (John Paul II, 2001). Many victims of the genocide of 1915 have no grave; the Armenian Genocide Memorial at Tsitsernakaberd in Yerevan can thus be read as a national cenotaph (Marutyan, 2009, cited in Brill, 2025). John Paul II, *On the 1700th Anniversary of the "'Baptism of Armenia"* (Vatican, 2001); Marutyan, 2009, cited in Brill, *Commemorative Practices and Memorial Sites: the Armenian Genocide Memorial* (2025).

[47] BAKHTIN, Mikhail M. Response to a Question from the *Novy Mir* Editorial Staff [1970]. In: *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*. Ed. Caryl EMERSON and Michael HOLQUIST, transl. Vern W. McGEE. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986, 1–9, here 6–7.

[48] The remark is cited in connection with Eco's 1992 inaugural lecture at the Collège de France, *La quête d'une langue parfaite dans l'histoire de la culture européenne*; the exact source and wording should be verified.

reading. Victor Klemperer, the philologist who recorded the language of the Third Reich day by day, showed how language can think for us: words can act like tiny doses of arsenic, swallowed unnoticed until their effect appears.[49] Euphemisms cover reality, and the reader has to ask who minted a word and what it wants us not to see. Anyone who translates discovers that no word is transparent, that every word stresses something and conceals something else. Someone who has once compared how two linguistic cultures name the same thing recognises a euphemism more readily than someone who knows only one language. Translation thus works as a form of the psychological inoculation discussed in section 2.2.

4.2 Translation as Self-Formation: Mashtots and Jungmann

Culture is often imagined as a fragile artefact that must be guarded behind walls lest foreign influence dilute its purity. Intellectual history suggests otherwise: translation need not threaten identity; it can found, fortify and expand it. Far from being a passive reception of foreign ideas or a concession to cultural dominance, translation can be a sovereign act of self-formation through deliberate engagement with the other. Two cases from opposite ends of Europe illustrate this – the beginnings of Armenian written culture in the fifth century and the Czech National Revival in the nineteenth. At the beginning of the fifth century, Armenia was caught between two expansionist powers: the Zoroastrian Sasanian Empire to the east and the Byzantine Empire to the west.[50] Without a script of its own, Armenian liturgical, political and intellectual life depended on Greek and Syriac, which left the country's cultural identity exposed to absorption.[51] The creation of the Armenian alphabet by Mesrop Mashtots around 405, supported by King Vramshapuh and Catholicos Sahak Partev, was therefore an act of both spiritual and geopolitical

[49] KLEMPERER, Victor. *LTI – Lingua Tertii Imperii: Notizbuch eines Philologen*. Berlin: Aufbau, 1947.

[50] GARSOÏAN, Nina G. The Arshakuni Dynasty (A.D. 12–[180?]–428). In: HOVANNISIAN, Richard G. (ed.). *The Armenian People from Ancient to Modern Times*. Vol. 1: *The Dynastic Periods: From Antiquity to the Fourteenth Century*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997, 63–94.

[51] THOMSON, Robert W. *Studies in Armenian Literature and Christianity*. Aldershot: Variorum, 1994, pp. 457–470.

self-preservation.[52] The programme of the new written culture was announced in its very first sentence, a translation of Proverbs 1:2:[53]

> Ճանաչել զիմաստութիւն եւ զխրատ, իմանալ զբանս հանճարոյ:
>
> *Čanač'el zimastut'iwn ew zxrat, imanal zbans hančaroy.* "To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding."

The choice of this verse made clear that the script was created not for administrative bookkeeping but as a path to knowledge – in the terms of this study, as the foundation of a literacy. The circle of scholars known as the Targmanchats, or Holy Translators, whose memory the Armenian Church honours to this day, worked on a premise that was revolutionary for its time: cultural sovereignty does not require rejecting foreign thought, but making it one's own.[54] The first generation – Sahak and Mashtots with their pupils, among them Koriun and Eznik of Koghb – was sent to study in Edessa, Samosata and Constantinople, and produced translations of Scripture and of patristic literature in a natural, idiomatic Armenian that later generations regarded as the classical standard.[55] From the late fifth century onwards, the so-called Hellenizing School (*Hunaban dprots*) extended the work to secular learning – grammar and rhetoric, Aristotle's logical writings and dialogues of Plato – this time in a deliberately literal style that moulded Armenian vocabulary and syntax on Greek models in order to render philosophical terminology

[52] KORIUN. *The Life of Mashtots*. Transl. Bedros NOREHAD. New York: Armenian General Benevolent Union, 1964, chap. 6–8. Koriun, Mashtots's pupil, wrote the *Life* between 443 and 451. Scholarly dating of the alphabet ranges between 404 and 406.

[53] Proverbs 1:2 in the Classical Armenian (Grabar) translation; English rendering after the King James Version. Koriun records this as the first sentence written in the new script (*Life of Mashtots*, chap. 8).

[54] TER-PETROSSIAN, Levon. *Ancient Armenian Translations*. New York: St. Vartan Press, 1992, 45–52.

[55] Koriun describes how Mashtots sent part of his pupils to Edessa, others to Samosata and later to Constantinople, to collect manuscripts and receive a Greek education (*Life of Mashtots*, see note above). Movses Khorenatsi also claimed to be Mashtots's pupil, but most scholars date his *History* to a later period.

precisely.[56] The two methods correspond strikingly to Schleiermacher's two paths (section 3.1): the first generation brought the author to the Armenian reader, the Hellenizing School brought the Armenian reader to the Greek author. The precision of this work also turned the Armenian language into a repository of world heritage. Several works whose Greek originals were lost survive complete only in Armenian translation – among them the *Chronicle* of Eusebius of Caesarea and a number of treatises by Philo of Alexandria.[57] A similar logic guided Josef Jungmann at the beginning of the nineteenth century. His translations of Chateaubriand's *Atala* (1805) and Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1811), alongside translations from German literature, pursued an explicitly cultural and political purpose: to show that Czech was not a declining rural vernacular but a refined medium capable of bearing the most demanding literary and philosophical content.[58] His five-volume Czech–German dictionary then gave the language the vocabulary it needed.[59] By importing foreign works, Jungmann did not Germanise Czech culture; he gave it the means and the prestige to assert itself. Set side by side, the Armenian Golden Age and the Czech National Revival reveal three principles that bear directly on our subject:

- **Literacy as empowerment in the mother tongue.** Before a translated canon exists, knowledge remains locked in foreign languages accessible to an educated minority. Translation into the vernacular opens ideas to a wider community and lays the foundation of a shared culture – the precondition of literacy in the modern sense.

[56] TERIAN, Abraham. The Hellenizing School: Its Time, Place, and Scope of Activities Reconsidered. In: GARSOÏAN, Nina, Thomas F. MATHEWS and Robert W. THOMSON (eds.). *East of Byzantium: Syria and Armenia in the Formative Period*. Washington, D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 1982, 175–186. On the extent of the translated canon see also THOMSON 1994 (note above), 104–118 (The Formation of the Armenian Literary Tradition).

[57] The Armenian version of the *Chronicle* is accessible in German translation: EUSEBIUS. *Werke*. Bd. 5: *Die Chronik. Aus dem Armenischen übersetzt mit textkritischem Commentar*. Ed. Josef KARST. Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1911. Among Philo's works preserved only in Armenian are the *Quaestiones in Genesim* and *Quaestiones in Exodum*.

[58] Jungmann's translation of Chateaubriand's *Atala* appeared in 1805, his translation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* in 1811.

[59] JUNGMANN, Josef. *Slovník česko-německý* [Czech–German Dictionary]. 5 vols. Prague, 1834–1839.

- **Hybridity without erasure.** Culture is a living organism rather than a static relic. Engaging with foreign texts compels a language community to articulate its own worldview in dialogue with the outside world rather than in defensive isolation.

- **Linguistic growth through texts.** Translating complex philosophical, legal and scientific concepts forces a language to expand: it creates new terminology, enriches syntax and equips the language for literature, statecraft and scholarship.

Mashtots and Jungmann thus show that cultural defence is not achieved through isolation. By opening their languages to the widest horizons of world thought, they made translation a tool of cultural fortification – an act of self-definition that turns foreign wisdom into one's own inheritance. The same holds, on the scale of a single life, for a student abroad: the encounter with another language does not erase their identity but gives it new words.

4.3 Rhetoric and the Ethos of the Foreigner

Reading literacy is usually approached as a defence: being able to read and not be deceived. Rhetoric is its productive counterpart: being able to speak to the other so that they understand. At the opening of the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle called it the counterpart of dialectic and defined it as the ability to see, in each case, the available means of persuasion. Among these he listed ethos, pathos and logos, stressing that the speaker's credibility should arise from the speech itself.[60] Isocrates praised speech as what enabled human beings to found cities, make laws and invent the arts.[61] Quintilian took over from Cato the Elder the definition of the orator as a good man skilled in speaking.[62] The tension between rhetoric and manipulation is as old as rhetoric itself; in the *Gorgias*, Plato condemned oratory without truth as mere flattery.[63] The answer to its misuse, however, is not to abandon rhetoric but to join the ability to speak with

[60] ARISTOTLE. *Rhetoric*, 1354a1, 1355b25–26 and 1356a1–13. PLATO. *Gorgias*, 462b–465e. In: BURNET, John (ed.). *Platonis Opera. Vol. 3.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1903.

[61] ISOCRATES. *Antidosis*, 253–257; cf. id., *Nicocles*, 5–9.

[62] QUINTILIAN (Marcus Fabius Quintilianus). *Institutio oratoria*, XII, 1, 1.

[63] PLATO. *Gorgias*, 462b–465e. PLATO. *Gorgias.* Translated by Benjamin Jowett. In: *The Dialogues of Plato.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1892.

truthfulness, as Quintilian demanded. Here, too, lies part of the answer to the post-truth era: against a skilful lie, it is not enough to be able to read; one must also be able to speak truthfully and persuasively. Aristotle named three sources of a speaker's credibility: practical wisdom (*phronesis*), virtue (*arete*) and goodwill (*eunoia*).[64] A non-native speaker is at a disadvantage in the first, because listeners tend to judge practical wisdom by fluency. Experimental research confirms the disadvantage: Shiri Lev-Ari and Boaz Keysar found that listeners judge the same statements as less true when they are spoken with a foreign accent, because accented speech is harder to process.[65] The credibility of the foreigner therefore cannot rest on eloquence. We call the alternative the **ethos of the foreigner**: credibility built on displayed goodwill and correctability rather than on fluency. It consists of attentiveness, the visible effort to speak the hosts' language however imperfectly, willingness to be corrected and honesty about the limits of one's own understanding. The effort itself signals goodwill. This leads to a testable hypothesis: the disadvantage in processing fluency can be offset, at least in part, by visible goodwill. The ethos of the foreigner has an ethical as well as a rhetorical side. Emmanuel Levinas described the face of the other as an ethical summons that precedes any understanding.[66] Here ethics precedes hermeneutics: I am responsible for the other before I understand them. This applies to the host as much as to the guest. Mobility is thus a school for both, and the rhetoric of the guest is a rhetoric of hospitality. Understanding between people also has its measurable value and its price. These are the subject of Part 4.

5. Decisions: Economics and Geopolitics of Trust

[64] ARISTOTLE. *Rhetoric*, 1378a6–20.

[65] LEV-ARI, Shiri and Boaz KEYSAR. Why Don't We Believe Non-Native Speakers? The Influence of Accent on Credibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 2010, 46(6), 1093–1096.

[66] LEVINAS, Emmanuel. *Totalité et infini: Essai sur l'extériorité*. La Haye: Martinus Nijhoff, 1961.

5.1 Returns, Risks and Financial Literacy

Gary S. Becker described education as an investment that yields returns in much the same way as investment in physical capital.[67] Several components that are hard to acquire through other forms of study get introduced into conventional education through mobility: language skills, intercultural competence, international networks and, not least, a signal to employers that the graduate has managed to adapt to an unfamiliar environment. Empirical studies largely confirm these effects. Matthias Parey and Fabian Waldinger used the introduction of the Erasmus programme as a natural experiment and showed that studying abroad significantly increases the likelihood of later working abroad.[68] The Erasmus impact studies commissioned by the European Commission report better employability among former mobility participants. These findings, however, rest largely on self-assessment and are affected by selection bias.[69] At the individual level, the integrated processing of information ends in decisions with real consequences. Abroad, a student often becomes the manager of their own finances for the first time – in a foreign currency, under a foreign contract, with a foreign bank and foreign health insurance. International surveys show that financial literacy is closely tied to reading literacy.[70] The barrier is harder to cross abroad, since the difficulty of legal and financial texts is compounded by a foreign language and unfamiliar institutions, and international students are frequent victims of rental fraud.

5.2 Selectivity and Brain Circulation

Students from better-educated and wealthier families go abroad more often. Grants do not cover costs equally in every country and city, and direct expenses come with hidden ones: rental deposits, the loss of a part-time job

[67] BECKER, Gary S. *Human Capital: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis, with Special Reference to Education*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1964.

[68] PAREY, Matthias and Fabian WALDINGER. Studying Abroad and the Effect on International Labour Market Mobility: Evidence from the Introduction of ERASMUS. *The Economic Journal*, 2011, 121(551), 194–222.

[69] EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *The Erasmus Impact Study*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2014; EUROPEAN COMMISSION. *Erasmus+ Higher Education Impact Study*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2019.

[70] OECD. *PISA 2018 Results (Volume IV): Are Students Smart about Money?* Paris: OECD Publishing, 2020, pp. 83–85.

at home, uncertainty over credit recognition. Theresa Kuhn pointed out that the Erasmus programme reaches mainly those who would be pro-European anyway, and misses the groups in which it could make the greatest difference.[71] Kristine Mitchell showed that mobility does affect European identity, but that once participant selection is taken into account, the effect is smaller than is often claimed.[72] The "emerging European intelligentsia" thus risks remaining socially narrow. In the 2021–2027 period, the Erasmus+ programme strengthened its inclusion tools, for example top-ups for participants with fewer opportunities.[73] Whether these measures suffice is a question that national agencies in the V4 countries should also follow. Concern about brain drain has accompanied international mobility from the outset. For the states of Central Europe it was pressing after 2004; for the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans it is pressing today. Economic theory, however, offers a more complex picture. Michel Beine, Frédéric Docquier and Hillel Rapoport showed that the prospect of possible emigration increases the incentive to invest in education; if not everyone leaves, the sending country may paradoxically gain.[74] Using the example of engineers who returned from the United States to Taiwan, India and China, AnnaLee Saxenian described brain circulation: returnees connect regions, transfer know-how and set up firms.[75] Short study stays usually end with a return home, but, as Parey and Waldinger have shown, they can also be a first step towards later emigration.[76] What matters, therefore, is whether mobility is designed for circulation or merely for departure. Circulation is supported by joint degree programmes,

[71] KUHN, Theresa. Why Educational Exchange Programmes Miss Their Mark: Cross-Border Mobility, Education and European Identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2012, 50(6), 994–1010.

[72] MITCHELL, Kristine. Rethinking the "Erasmus Effect" on European Identity. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 2015, 53(2), 330–348.

[73] The Erasmus+ budget for 2021–2027 amounts to approximately EUR 26 billion.

[74] BEINE, Michel, Frédéric DOCQUIER and Hillel RAPOPORT. Brain Drain and Economic Growth: Theory and Evidence. *Journal of Development Economics*, 2001, 64(1), 275–289.

[75] SAXENIAN, AnnaLee. From Brain Drain to Brain Circulation: Transnational Communities and Regional Upgrading in India and China. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 2005, 40(2), 35–61.

[76] PAREY and WALDINGER 2011 (see note above).

reliable credit recognition, return grants and active alumni networks that keep in touch with the home institution.

5.3 Soft Power, Trust and Weighing Field by Field

Joseph S. Nye defined soft power as the ability to achieve one's goals through attraction rather than coercion, and regarded academic exchanges as one of its most durable instruments.[77] Carol Atkinson documented a link between study stays in the United States and subsequent political liberalisation in the sending countries.[78] In this respect the European Union holds special significance for Central Europe. The Eastern Partnership was launched in May 2009 at a summit in Prague during the Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU, on a Polish–Swedish initiative.[79] The International Visegrad Fund, established in 2000, supports scholarship and grant schemes that are also open to nationals of Eastern Partnership and Western Balkan countries, including the Visegrad Scholarship Program and Visegrad+ Grants. At this point, however, a caveat is needed. Trust and sympathy for European values are a by-product of mobility, not its goal. An exchange instrumentalised as a tool of propaganda would destroy precisely what gives it value: the authenticity of the encounter. Education is a geopolitical factor of the first order, whose effect is slow but fundamental, and this applies doubly to mobility. It invests in relationships between people, which may one day become relationships between institutions and states. In weighing the benefits and risks of educational change, we have argued for proceeding field by field rather than adopting blanket solutions, recalling the experience of the Central European planned economy, which tried to govern a complex world by a single plan.[80] The principle applies to mobility, too. Its benefits vary with the field of study (medicine, engineering, the humanities), the length of the stay, its direction (within the EU

[77] NYE, Joseph S. *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*. New York: PublicAffairs, 2004.

[78] ATKINSON, Carol. Does Soft Power Matter? A Comparative Analysis of Student Exchange Programs 1980–2006. *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 2010, 6(1), 1–22.

[79] COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION. *Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit. Prague, 7 May 2009.* Brussels, 7 May 2009, document 8435/09 (Presse 78).

[80] PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, pp. 124–125.

or beyond) and the participant's social background. The slogan "more mobility is always better" therefore does not hold. Success should be measured not only by the number of students sent abroad, as is still common, but also by the rate of return, the durability of institutional partnerships, inclusiveness and the circulation of knowledge between sending and receiving countries.

6. Synthesis: Mobility as a Laboratory of Integrated Literacies

6.1 An Integrated Model

The four parts of the study can now be read together. Each corresponds to one stage in the recognition and processing of information, each engages particular literacies, and each carries its own risks and calls for its own kind of support. Table 1 summarises these relationships.

Table 1: Mobility as a laboratory of integrated literacies: a model

Layer	Concepts, literacies, risks	Support
1 Recognition perceiving the signals of a new environment	*aisthesis*; tacit knowledge; proxemics; **situational illiteracy**. Literacies of the body and of place; reading of non-verbal signals. *Risks:* culture shock; withdrawal into a bubble.	naming culture shock in advance; reflective diary
2 Processing turning signals into meaning	pragmatics; mediation; **cultural bilingualism**; tolerance of ambiguity; scaffolding. Foreign-language and intercultural literacy; metaliteracy. *Risks:* stagnation at "survival language"; English-only contact.	mentor and buddy; host-language course; language tandem
3 Interpretation evaluating and responding	linguistic hospitality; outsideness; the untranslatable; translation as self-formation; inoculation; **ethos of the foreigner**. Critical and media literacy; translation competence; rhetorical literacy. *Risks:* judging others by home standards; manipulation; loss of credibility.	conversations about untranslatable words; practice in speaking to the other
4 Decision acting on information	human capital; selectivity; brain circulation; soft power. Financial, legal and health literacy; civic literacy. *Risks:* fraud and debt; exclusion; brain drain; instrumentalisation.	pre-departure module; inclusion top-ups; return pathways

There are multiple implications of this model. First of all, the layers are interdependent: a failure at one level propagates to the next. A student who does not recognise the signals of a new environment cannot process them, and one who misinterprets them decides badly. Second, the literacies engaged are not separate subjects but aspects of one integrated competence, which is precisely what the project title means by integrated information recognition and processing. Third, support must reach every layer. Mentoring acts mainly on the first three, institutional and programme design mainly on the fourth. The model is offered as a heuristic framework; its categories are open to empirical testing and refinement.

6.2 Mobility in the Age of AI and Virtual Reality

Artificial intelligence, virtual reality and augmented or mixed reality reach into all four layers of the model. An earpiece or a phone can now translate in real time. A student can thus get through a stay abroad without learning a single word of the hosts' language, because the machine takes care of the "survival language". What the machine cannot provide is the language of relationships: humour, nuance, or the ethos of a foreigner who makes the effort to speak for themselves. Those without knowledge of their own cannot judge whether a machine's answer is accurate, incomplete or invented. For integrated information processing this is the decisive point: the machine can recognise and translate signs, but it is the human reader who must integrate and evaluate them. The more perfect machine translation becomes, the more valuable human translation competence is, since only someone who knows a language at least in part can check the machine. And Klemperer's question of who minted a word applies equally to words minted by an algorithm. Virtual exchange and virtual and augmented reality can help prepare a stay abroad: a simulated foreign city, practice in situations at the registration office or in hospital, a first meeting with future classmates. They also open international experience to those who cannot travel for health, financial or family reasons. They should not, however, be mistaken for mobility itself. As we have argued elsewhere, a screen is not a forest, and a simulation is a bridge to a skill, not the skill itself.[81] Without smell, taste, fatigue and the body, the first layer of the model remains untested. The benefits of new technologies must therefore be weighed field by field, and this extends to the individual levels of education, because the challenges differ from one to the next.

- **Nursery schools.** The children themselves do not go abroad, but their teachers do. For the children, the first encounter with the foreign is a classmate who speaks another language in their own group. Here Comenius's order applies most urgently: first the senses, play and the body; only then the screen.

[81] PAVERA, GADUŠOVÁ, PAVERA 2026, pp. 51–52 and 122–123.

- **Primary and lower-secondary schools.** School partnerships and virtual exchanges (for example on the eTwinning platform) can prepare pupils for later physical mobility. With the arrival of artificial intelligence, media literacy and psychological inoculation against distorted and artificially generated images of other nations become ever more important.

- **Upper-secondary schools and vocational education and training, including apprenticeships.** The Erasmus+ programme also supports traineeships abroad for apprentices. This revives the old tradition of the journeyman's travels, the craft counterpart of the academic *peregrinatio*, in which tacit knowledge passed from master to journeyman across borders.[82] A virtual workshop can supplement practice, but the last word belongs to the real material and the real master.

- **Universities.** Generative AI is transforming academic writing and teaching. Mobility thereby gains importance as a space of embodied learning that no language model can replace.

- **Lifelong learning.** Mobility is not only for the young. Universities of the third age, adult education within Erasmus+, and corporate training with work placements abroad and intercultural courses bring people into contact with the foreign later in life as well. Every generation needs AI literacy, and dialogue between generations can also take the form of learning new tools together.

The more technology mediates our encounters, the rarer and more precious the unmediated encounter becomes. Artificial intelligence and virtual reality can prepare, extend and widen access to mobility; they cannot replace it.

[82] On the tradition of the journeyman's travels (German *Walz*, *Wanderjahre*) and its survival today in German-speaking countries (RÖMER, Markus. *Wandergesellen auf der Walz – Vergangenheitsrelikt oder Hochschule des Handwerks?* Bayreuth: Universität Bayreuth, 2024. 297 p).

7. Conclusion

We began with the image of a traveller who sees the signs but cannot grasp their meaning. We have shown that this experience, when lived voluntarily, for a limited time and with support, need not be a prison but can be a laboratory – a laboratory of the integrated recognition and processing of information that the project places at the heart of reading literacy. We now return to the five research questions. **1. Culture shock and illiteracy.** The informational core of culture shock can be described as situational illiteracy: the signs are present, but the code for reading them is missing. It differs from functional illiteracy in four respects – it is visible, chosen, limited in time and supported – and this is why, with the help of a mentor, it can lead not to resignation but to metaliteracy. **2. Literacies the classroom cannot offer.** Mobility develops above all the literacy of the body and of place in a foreign setting, cultural bilingualism and the pragmatic dimension of language. It also tests the interconnection of literacies – financial, health, legal and media – in live mode and in a foreign language. Empirical research shows that these gains depend on the quality of contact with the host community rather than on time spent abroad. **3. Language, translation and mediation.** Mediation is the activity through which misunderstanding becomes understanding. Translation, in this sense, is not a technical skill but an act of linguistic hospitality, and untranslatable words are meeting places, not obstacles; in Bakhtin's sense, a meaning reveals its depth only in contact with another. The examples of Mesrop Mashtots and Josef Jungmann show that translation can found and strengthen a cultural identity rather than threaten it. A lingua franca makes exchange possible, but without at least the basics of the hosts' language the student remains on the threshold of their everyday life. **4. Rhetoric as the counterpart of reading.** Yes. Reading literacy protects against manipulation; rhetoric makes it possible to speak to the other truthfully and intelligibly. The ethos of the foreigner, built on goodwill and correctability rather than fluency, shows that credibility can be earned without perfect eloquence. **5. Economic and geopolitical effects.** Mobility brings documented returns in the form of employability, language competence and international networks. It also has its downsides: the social selectivity of participants and the risk of brain drain, felt particularly in the V4

countries, the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans. The contribution of the study lies in three concepts – situational illiteracy, cultural bilingualism and the ethos of the foreigner – and in an integrated model that connects four layers of mobility with the literacies they engage, their risks and the support they require. In this way the study carries further the argument of the project's first monograph, which concentrated on reading in the mother tongue and on school age, towards foreign language and translation, rhetoric, all levels of education and lifelong learning. Its claims are formulated so that they can be tested. We see three hypotheses for empirical research: that the depth and outcome of situational illiteracy depend on the quality of support more than on cultural distance; that reading demanding texts in a foreign language develops the tolerance of ambiguity needed abroad; and that visible goodwill can offset the credibility disadvantage of non-native speakers. Narratives of students and teachers, collected before, during and after their stays, would be a natural first step. Comenius, whose own life was one long, involuntary mobility, wanted to teach all people, all things, in all ways. He was convinced that education is a path to peace, because an educated person knows other perspectives and is therefore more tolerant.[83] International mobility is one of the few instruments that realise this vision literally: in it, one does not read about others but lives with them. Freedom, in this sense, is not freedom from others but freedom among them. Our analysis leads to recommendations for schools at every level:

1. **Before departure:** name culture shock in advance, provide the basics of the host-country language and a preparatory module in financial, health and legal literacy, including examples of typical scams; use virtual and augmented reality as preparation.

2. **During the stay:** provide a mentor and a student buddy, enable language tandems with local students and encourage a reflective diary.

[83] KOMENSKÝ, Jan Amos. *Via lucis*. Amsterdam, 1668 (written 1641–1642). The formula *omnes, omnia, omnino* sums up Comenius's pansophic programme.

3. **After return:** lead a reflection on the experience, including re-entry shock, enable sharing with the home institution, and cultivate alumni networks that support circulation rather than mere departure.

4. **At the level of institutions and programmes:** measure success not only by the number of mobilities but also by inclusiveness, rates of return and the durability of partnerships, and open mobility to all levels of education, including apprenticeships and lifelong learning.

The traveller who has learnt to read foreign signs eventually returns home. And there they find that they have begun to read the signs of home differently, too. Perhaps this is the most precious gift of mobility: the ability to see one's own world with fresh eyes, as if it were a little foreign.

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