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*Bridging South America and the Far East
through the TRANSIT Project*

edited by
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Introduction

The volume presented here is the scientific output of TRANSIT (Transnational Italian in Higher Education), a strategic project funded by the European Union – NextGenerationEU under the Italian National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR). As Scientific Coordinator and Associate Professor of Spanish Language and Translation at the University for Foreigners of Perugia, I am honored to present this collection, which serves as a crossroads for two distinct yet complementary socio-cultural environments: the historical multiculturalism of South America and the burgeoning linguistic interest of the Far East.

The TRANSIT Project: Objectives and Activities

The core mission of TRANSIT is to redefine Italian Studies through a transnational lens. Our research targets regions where Italian is a living component of a multicultural repertoire – as in our partnerships with Argentina, Brazil, and Colombia – or where it is a rapidly expanding field of academic inquiry, as in China, South Korea, and Vietnam.

In addition to the University for Foreigners of Perugia, the project consortium includes the University for Foreigners of Siena (lead partner), Roma TRE University, the University of Macerata, the University of Cagliari, and associated partners from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and Vietnam. The project rests on four pillars:

1. **Supporting Mobility:** Providing financial support for students, researchers, and teachers from South America and East Asia to undertake mobility experiences at the University for Foreigners of Perugia (and vice versa), thereby strengthening relational networks, linguistic proficiency, and knowledge of contemporary Italian language and culture.
2. **Methodological Innovation:** Bridging the “training gap” for instructors abroad through mobility to Italy; updating teaching practices for Italian language and culture; developing new digital teaching tools; integrating green and sustainable themes linked to Italian culture (e.g., food and local products); advancing reflection in gender studies on debates surrounding the Italian language (e.g., binary and non-binary strategies); and promoting intercultural awareness via peer-to-peer activities such as tandem projects.
3. **Scientific Collaboration:** Fostering dialogue between Italian and international scholars in educational linguistics and sociolinguistics, with emphasis on Italian-indigenous language contact and the evolution of “local” Italian varieties. Key activities included research on Spanish varieties in Argentina and Colombia and their interplay with Italian and regional/minority Italian languages spoken by Italian communities there, alongside expanded efforts on East Asia and Chinese communities in Italy.
4. **Institutional Synergy and Cooperation:** Strengthening ties between Italian and foreign scholars and teachers to establish double-degree agreements and mutual learning initiatives, ensuring long-term academic sustainability.

TRANSIT’s operational success is evidenced by extensive mobility exchanges, particularly those managed by the University for Foreigners of Perugia and its partners:

- Universidad del Norte (Colombia): 1 outgoing student, 4 incoming students (the latter selected for this volume based on research conducted during mobility; others focused on enhancing Italian language and cultural competencies).

- Universidad de Mendoza (Argentina): 3 incoming students.
- Hanoi University (Vietnam): 1 outgoing student, 5 incoming students, and 1 outgoing teacher.
- University of Social Sciences and Humanities in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam): 1 outgoing student; 4 incoming students, 1 outgoing teacher, and 4 incoming teachers (the latter delivered seminars featured in this volume).

Beyond exchange, the University for Foreigners of Perugia organized a strategic event at both Vietnamese partner universities entitled “*The Value of Italian Language and Culture in the Contemporary World.*” This highlighted Italian’s evolution from intellectual tradition to a symbol of taste, well-being, and social cohesion. Central to this effort were the CELI language certification and the DILS-PG teacher-training programme offered by our CVCL – tools not merely as credentials but as enablers of inclusion in Italy’s welcoming, transformative society. These initiatives sustain intercultural dialogue.

A Volume in Two Parts: Colombia and Vietnam

This collection showcases project outcomes through eight contributions from Colombian and Vietnamese perspectives, including research by students during two-month mobilities at the University for Foreigners of Perugia, where they advanced their Italian competencies.

Part One: The Colombian Students’ Research

The first four articles, drawn from final theses by students from Colombian partners, embody TRANSIT’s “new research perspectives.” Full mobility funding enabled these scholars to import South American sociolinguistic insights to Perugia, fostering reciprocal knowledge exchange.

These contributions analyze multidimensional Colombia–EU relations, spanning macro-level international agreements to micro-level social integration and peacebuilding:

- The opening study assesses the revitalization of the EU-LAC strategic partnership, positioning modernized trade agreements and the *Global Gateway* as tools for “open strategic autonomy” and sustainable development amid global competition.
- The second explores international volunteering via Joseph Nye’s soft power framework, showing how the European Solidarity Corps advances “solidarity diplomacy” and shared values beyond state-centric ties.
- The third addresses mixed migration flows, probing tensions between the EU’s human rights norms and security-driven “externalization” of borders.
- The final piece examines the Comunes Party’s post-2016 Peace Agreement challenges, highlighting structural barriers and stigmatization in implementing democratic ideals.

Together, they underscore TRANSIT’s role in linguistically grounded research attuned to Europe-South America transnational dynamics.

Part Two: The Vietnamese Scholars’ Experience

The final four articles in this volume stem from seminars by visiting Vietnamese scholars.

- The first adopts a cognitive-linguistic lens to compare spatial conceptualization in Vietnamese and Italian, identifying two reflection modes, three shaping factors in Vietnamese, and culturally embedded models’ influence on cross-linguistic variation and acquisition.
- The second investigates food’s role in Asian diaspora literature for identity, memory, and power, evolving “foodscape” theories to frame culinary narratives of displacement, belonging, and resistance.

- The third compares local communities' identity-building roles in Italy and Vietnam: not just residential spaces but loci of belonging, memory, and norms, nuanced by Italy's *campanilismo* and Vietnam's village traditions.
- The volume closes with pedagogical research from seminars at Perugia, integrating Thích Nhất Hạnh's mindfulness into hybrid higher education. Findings reveal student interest but challenges in sustained engagement and online assessment; recommendations include shorter guided practices, interactive formats, and structured feedback for the hybrid context.