FACE – OVVERO: LE FACCE DI UN CONCETTO SOCIO-PRAGMATICO IN CHIAVE SEMANTICA ED EPISTEMOLOGICA

GUDRUN HELD

ABSTRACT

Motivated by the question whether "face" is "the best metaphor" (Arundale 2013), this paper aims to revisit the concept of *face*, which, as a sociological con-struct introduced by Goffman, has dominated sociopragmatic scholarship for more than 50 years. Thanks to Brown and Levinson's normative concept, *face* was tight-ly linked in with *politeness* where the latter was supposed to manifest itself as a range of bipolar strategies mainly deployed in the presence of face-threatening acts. However, when applied to various sociocultural settings and interpersonal relations all over the world, subsequent paradigmatic positions questioned the tight link between the two components until, at last, the relationship was dismissed on the ground of it being too universal and monolithic. Supposing that this epistemologi-cal 'battle' is due to the English term *face* and the semantic link it entails between the emic and the etic understandings of face as a physiological and a sociological metaphor, the paper examines the lexeme *face* in its development from the original Latin lexical field to its borrowing into various European languages; it compares the different ranges of derivational and idiomatic forms and expressions, and identifies possible translations, adaptations and substitutes in lingua cultures distant from the Western view of face-constitution. The findings are discussed against the different waves of research on politeness and facework and are put into a scheme, which rep-resents *face* as a complex and elusive abstraction of a constantly projected self-con-sciousness between ontological and performative criteria.