Czech psychology in international context:  
Three samples from the 1860s-1930s

Josef Brozek and Jiri Hoskovec

Abstract: In a small, „landlocked“ country, bordering in the South, West, and North on German-speaking areas, and exposed for centuries to a strong influence of the German culture, are the writers on psychological topics necessarily „landlocked“ as well? Not necessarily, as three sources of information document: 1) J.E.Purkinje’s outline of the history of psychology (cca 1860); 2) T.G. Masaryk’s contributions of the years 1880-1900; and 3) Three important publications dealing with applied psychology, published in the period 1927-1934. The literature written in English, French, and Germanis was represented.


Preamble

Lieber Lothar,  


Wir haben in dem Dialog auch lange über Methoden, besonders über die Möglichkeiten der quantitativen Bearbeitung von Daten, einschließlich der

Wer weiß, welche „guten Ideen“, die in den Halbträumen auftauchten, inzwischen dem Gedächtnis entschwunden sind? Mit Lachen begonnen, mit Lachen beendet!

Mit warmen Grüßen,

Josef

Introduction

The present paper bears on the history of psychology in what is today the Czech Republic and on the history of international interaction in psychology. Except for the first of its three parts, the approach is quantitative, “bibliometric“.

The Czech lands, consisting of Bohemia and Moravia, have German-speaking neighbors to the North, East and South, and were exposed to a strong German influence for centuries. Politically, for most of the 17th, all of 18th and the 19th, and the early part of the 20th, to 1918, they were a part of the German-dominated Austrian empire.

Did these facts fatally limit, as one might expect, the linguistic horizon of Czech authors writing on psychological subjects to publications written in German? We shall document that this was not the case, taking into account three sources of information, written in Czech:
1) J.E. Purkinje’s sketch of the history of psychology (cca 1860).
2) The psychological writings of Thomas Garrigue Masaryk (1880-1900), dealing with a variety of topics. And
3) Three important publications on applied psychology, published between 1927 and 1934.

J. E. Purkinje’s view of the history of psychology

Purkinje was a physiologist, with a life-long, deep interest in empirical and experimental psychology (Hoskovec & Brozek, 1994). In the closing years of his life he planned to write, in Czech, a volume to be entitled „Fragments of Empirical Psychology“. There exists in manuscript, in transcript (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1987, pp.114-116) and in English translation (ibid., pp.116-118), together with a commentary (ibid., pp. 120-121), a single introductory chapter,
entitled „A glance at empirical psychology“. It was the topic of a separate paper (Brozek, 1988).

In the present context, of direct relevance are not Purkinje’s views on the nature of psychology, its comparison with the natural sciences, and the methodology of a truly scientific, „rigorously empirical“ (in Purkinje’s terminology) psychology, but on the history of psychology.

Purkinje’s perspective is truly international. It includes works in English, French, and German. Among the English-speaking authors he refers to Englishmen (Hobbes, Locke) and Scotsmen (Hume, Reid, Stewart). Special consideration is given to the Irishman Berkeley who, in Purkinje’s view, „deserves to be recognized as the originator of empirical psychology“.

Among the French-speaking authors Purkinje notes Condillac, Helvetius, Cabanis, and Quetelet.

As regards the German-speaking authors, Purkinje is sharply critical of Kant, thinks more of Fichte, but his favorites are Herbart and Herbart’s school (Waitz, Drobsch, Lotze, Fortlage and others), credited with "bringing psychology decisively into the camp of empirical sciences“. While Purkinje recognizes the inescapable need for the use of the „language of metaphors as a net with which psychology’s objects are being sought and caught“, he criticizes Herbart for excessive dependence on „concepts taken over from statics and dynamics“ and premature introduction of higher mathematics into psychology.

Purkinje gives recognition to German-speaking (K.P. Moritz, Johannes Mueller, and Lotze) and French-speaking (Quetelet and Flourens) authors who moved psychology in the direction of „comparing systematically the vital phenomena accessible to introspection with the [underlying] organismic phenomena“.

Thomas Garrigue Masaryk’s psychological writings

Masaryk (1850-1936), earning his Ph.D. in Vienna, first a student and for a short period colleague of Franz Brentano, had a long and brilliant career as philosopher and a university teacher at the Czech university of Prague, politician, and finally president of the republic of Czechoslovakia (1918-1936). In the years 1880-1900 he authored, in Czech, six psychological publications (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1995). We may group them into three categories:
1) Small volumes on hypnotism (1880) and on T.H. Buckle’s theory of history containing a chapter on the relationship of history to psychology (1884a).
2) A chapter on psychology in a volume on the nature and classification of sciences (1885a).
3) Journal articles on the study of poetry (1884b), imitation (1885b), and child psychology (1889/1900).

Our criterion are the frequencies of references to works written in English, French, and German. The data for 5 of Masaryk’s psychological publications are given in Table 1. The article on the study of poetry has no references to psychological works.

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<tr>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Psychology as a science (1885a)</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>Imitation (1885b)</td>
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<td>Child psychology (1889/1900)</td>
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<td>Subtotals</td>
<td>52</td>
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<td>Total</td>
<td>163</td>
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Table 1. Frequency of references to international technical literature in 5 of Masaryk's psychological communications. (E=English, F=French, G=German)

The works referred to were written in all the three major international languages. Dominant are the works written in German (42.3%), followed by works in English (31.9%) and in French (25.8%). It may be of interest to compare these percentages with those observed for the languages of works cited in the American Journal of Psychology for the period 1890-1899: The references written in German represented 30.8% of the total, in English, 56.4%, and in French, 11.2%. The remaining 1.6% referred to „Other“ languages. The total N= 2,537.

In our study we have omitted the few references to works in Greek (Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus) and Latin as well as to an Italian author (Vico).

The process of tabulation of the references in Masaryk’s psychological writings was complicated by the diversity of the ways in which they are registered in different communications. In some instances, e.g., in the essay on hypnotism, a system of notes and footnotes is used. In the chapter on science, included in Masaryk’s volume on „concrete logic,“ the references are given at the beginning of the chapter but additional authors are referred to in the body of the text, mostly without full bibliographic information. In the chapter on child psychology, the literature on the subject is reviewed in the introductory pages but, again some other authors are cited in the subsequent text. In the paper on
imitation the citations are footnoted. In the chapter on the relation of history to psychology the authors are identified by name only. Finally, in the article on the study of poetry no references to technical psychological or esthetic writings are given.

Nevertheless the data, taken as a whole, permit us to assert that Masaryk read widely and wrote as a member of the international community of scholars.

Applied psychology

In the context of a study on Czechoslovak early applied psychology (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1986) we analyzed quantitatively references to materials written in foreign languages and contained in three representative publications:
1) J. Vana's (1926) introduction to psychotechnology,
2) J. Stejskal's (1934) monograph on the intelligence of children and the methods for its study, and

The data (taken from Brozek & Hoskovec, 1986, p.47) are presented in Table 2. In terms of percentages, the publications in German constitute 40.0% of the total, in English, 38.7%, in French, 14.4%, in Russian, 6.2%, and in Italian, 0.7%.

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<td>Stejskal (1934, n=341), Child intelligence,</td>
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<td>Verunac (1934, n=229), Encyclopedia,</td>
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<td>Total</td>
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Table 2. Frequency of references to international technical literature in 3 Czech publications on applied psychology. (E-English, F-French, G-German, I-Italian, R-Russian)

Summary

Purkinje's brief account of the history of psychology, written in Czech around 1860, has been made available in English in a volume on Purkinje's writings,
with focus on unpublished manuscripts (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1987, pp. 116-118) and in a separate publication (Brozek, 1988). A translation or Masaryk’s psychological writings is in press (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1995). The data on applied psychology were reported in an English account of the history of the early Czech applied psychology, published in the Revista de Historia de la Psicología (Brozek & Hoskovec, 1986).

All three sets of data attest to an active interaction of Czech psychology with the world literature on the subject.

References


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