

The Work of Professor Ján Horecký Completed

Slavomír Ondrejovič

At the very end of this summer's sultry days (11th August, 2006), we were caught by grievous tidings about the loss of our Mr. Professor (as we called him at the *Linguistic Institute of Ludovít Štúr*, Slovak Academy of Sciences) – professor of general linguistics, doctor of philosophy, Dr. h. c. Ján Horecký, DrSc. His death is an irreparable loss for the whole of Slovak and European science and culture.

There is no doubt that Ján Horecký was one of the most significant shapers of contemporary Slovak linguistics and science. For more than 60 years he was involved in almost everything important that shifted the Slovak linguistics forward; for more than a half-century our science of language bears his distinct and indelible impress. At the early age of 29, he published his remarkable *Fonológia latinčiny* [Phonology of Latin] (1949) and from that time on he became the fixed star in the galaxy of the Slovak linguistics and classical philology. Ján Horecký left an extraordinarily extensive and versatile corpus of work, a copious treasury of more than 2000 published works, nearly 30 of them monographs. But his exceptional legacy is also to be found in the number of students and followers who now work in Slovak linguistics, Slavic linguistics, general linguistics, classical philology, modern philology, and in other spheres more or less connected with language and literature.

Although the premier representative of the modern Slovak linguistics recognized as such in Slovakia and perhaps more so abroad, he grew up at home and worked at home. Professor Ján Horecký used to go abroad for lecture tours, such as his one to China, but never for a longer period of time. His postgraduate research students, grantees, colleagues and friends were waiting for him at home. They all got accustomed to his being available and having time for them during the whole half-century of his working at the Institute of Linguistics. It is hardly understandable, but each of them felt that professor Horecký came to work that day mainly because of him/her. And, of course, the Slovak language was waiting for him at home, his native language in its colourful varieties.

Ján Horecký's professional growth was influenced especially by Miroslav Kořínek, the professor of the Faculty of Arts at Comenius University, and perhaps by Copenhagen structuralist Louis Hjelmslev. Professor Horecký, as a member of the Bratislava Linguistic Circle, was interested in the impulses from Prague's functional structuralism. The study of Latin was exceptionally inspiring for his linguistic thinking as well. No matter what the influences were on his work, the most important preconditions for forming a personality as exceptional as his was are the personal qualities, dispositions and abilities of the man himself. All of us who knew professor Horecký understood, or at least guessed, that a humanist in the purest sense of this word was with us. Not only did he exemplify the extraordinary breadth and depth of his education in all that he taught and wrote, he also had the to penetrate to the very substance of problems and phenomena quickly. He was a man concerned with synthesizing and integrating knowledge. In essence, he was the prototype of the real humanist in the sense defined in the not yet published, large dictionary *Slovník súčasného slovenského jazyka* [Dictionary of the Contemporary Slovak Language]. That work defines a humanist as a person with high morality, social feeling and firm characteristic features. The proper name Ján Horecký could be used – if acceptable to the dictionary's creators – as a synonym to this entry.

His exceptional characteristics included also his ability to speak with everyone either in scientific or in friendly debate as with a partner. He did not show his intellectual superiority, but he gave of it and himself to others, because he knew very well that the giving meant seeding and that the more he had given of himself, the more he was left. Thus not only were his treatises, books, compendia and lectures widely inspiring, but, according to an antique model, also his dialogues. If it is sometimes said that the climate in the Institute of Linguistics is humanly favourable and, when compared with the other workplaces, even exceptionally friendly, that standard was “set” by him. Above all, he was the medium out of which the Institute lives and benefits even today. But it is not only the atmosphere in the Institute. His clear style and discussion mode (he never behaved like an owner of the only truth, he never asserted his ‘own’ truth violently; instead he tried to convince others by using cogent arguments) had also influence on the atmosphere in the whole of Slovak linguistics. That is why most of us reacted so sensitively when the attempts to touch his honour appeared.

During his studies, Ján Horecký – at J. M. Kořínek and Ľudovít Novák’s instigation – entered the Institute of Linguistics SAS and he stayed in the official service of the Academy for almost 50 years. But even then he did not retire – crowned with laurel - to deserved repose. To the end he was still leading a creative life. Full of energy, he opened new themes and perspectives of linguistic research, was still bringing new inspirations from abroad usually enriched with a peculiar Horecký’s contribution, and was still filling up the white spaces on the Slovak language map and on the maps of the other languages. Moreover, he was expanding his investigations into the typology of linguistic consciousness, the theory of speech acts and other avant-garde topics. Thus, it can be said that he lived with the Institute until the year 2006, until his last sunny days he was present at almost all actions organised by the Institute, The Slovak Linguistic Society or the other workplaces dedicated to Slovak studies.

As it is perhaps well enough known terminology captivated professor Ján Horecký from the beginning of his professional career. His *Základy slovenskej terminológie* [Essentials of Slovak Terminology] (1956) will remain forever as a standard work of Slovak linguistics. He applied his terminological experience not only when explaining new-appearing terms in various branches and disciplines and when preparing numbers of terminological handbooks, but also when he was editing the multilingual *Slovník slovanskej lingvistickéj terminológie* [Dictionary of Slavic Linguistic Terminology] (1977 – 1979). Gradually he managed to revive scientific and technical Slovak. In addition, he paid attention to the language of literature, starting with the language of his favourite Ján Hollý and finishing with the detailed analysis of language of contemporary Slovak literature, e.g. in Štefan Moravčík and Peter Pišťánek. His works *Slovotvorná sústava slovenčiny* [Word-formation System of Slovak] (1959) and *Morfematická štruktúra slovenčiny* [Morphematic Structure of Slovak] (1964) are also of a fundamental importance. Later the word-formation monographs appeared, domestic and foreign (e. g. *Variation in Language* 1992; *Semantics of Derived Words* 1994), due to them even abroad they spoke and still speak of the Slovak word-formation school.

Professor Ján Horecký was a pioneer and developer of linguistic research in many other fields. He laid the foundations of phonology and grammar, inspired by generative stimuli. His *Úvod do matematickej jazykovedy* [An Introduction to Mathematical Linguistics] (1969) will remain a seminal work, so that contemporary Slovak corpus linguistics rightly considers him as its predecessor. He developed theoretical and methodological language research in Slovakia, partly as a long-time chief editor of the theoretical *Jazykovedný časopis*

[Linguistic Journal], partly in the form of a large number of treatises following-up on domestic and foreign literature, and partly in the form of book monographs *Základy jazykovedy* (Essentials of Linguistics) (1975, 1978) and *Vývin a teória jazyka* [Development and Theory of Language] (1983). His leading role in the project *Dynamika slovnnej zásoby spisovnej slovenčiny* [Dynamics of Standard Slovak Vocabulary] that resulted in the well-known and successful monograph of the same title (1989) will remain an important work for the scientific world. His co-operation on the *Encyklopédia jazykovedy* [Encyclopedia of Linguistics] (1993) revealed the full scope of his knowledge. He wrote hundreds of commentaries, overview articles, reviews and notes in which he commented in detail upon the actual development of his discipline at home and abroad. His works *Kultúra slovenského slova* [The Slovak Word Culture] (1956, 1958), *Spoločnosť a jazyk* [Society and Language] (1982), *Slovenčina v našom živote* [Slovak in our Life] (1988), *O jazyku a štýle kriticky aj prakticky* [On Language and Style Critically and Practically] (2000) and many others were dedicated to the general public.

Professor Ján Horecký became famous for his original theory of standard language with which he, in accordance with the so-called communicative-pragmatic turn in world linguistics, reacted to the new climate and impulses of scientific discourse in the last third of the 20th century. This turn was reflected in the new theory of national language and in innovative sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic and pragmatically and communicatively oriented studies that became the bases for the contemporary sociolinguistic and pragmatic tendencies in Slovak linguistics. Not only did the disciplines on which his was the absolute authority in Slovakia (phonology, grammar, lexicology and semantics, stylistics and textual studies, standard language and language culture, sociolinguistics and psycholinguistics, general and theoretical linguistics) prove how rich and broad his interests were, but so also did the number and type of languages he investigated. Besides Slovak, he dealt innovatively with Czech, Hungarian, Latin, Ancient Greek, Romany and other languages. These activities also resulted in monographs he prepared together with his daughter, indologist Anna Rácová, in particular, *Slovenská karpatská rómčina* [Slovak Carpathian Romany] (2002) and *Syntax slovenskej karpatskej rómčiny* [Syntax of Slovak Carpathian Romany] (2006).

Years took almost nothing from our professor's activeness, creativity and productivity. He remained, fortunately for Slovak linguistics, at the height of his creative powers and abilities for a long time. For that long period he would work in the power structure of the Institute of Linguistics and Slovak Linguistic Association, in the top domestic and international linguistic bodies (apart from the others he was the chief of the Commission for Linguistic Terminology in the International Slavic Committee and the head of the Association of Slovak Linguists), he would co-operate with the Slovak Radio, with journalists and the translation community (he himself was a translator from Latin, German and English), and above all, he would develop his theories and, as he used to say, "ideas" into clear and elegant forms. New and new language views opened in front of him and he immediately informed his colleagues about them. Even at the age when seniors usually only revamp their older things, the penetrating mind of professor Ján Horecký gifted us with new proposals, thoughts and insights into the miraculous structure of language.

It is only natural that honours were given to professor Horecký. He received a number of high decorations for his meritorious work in the development of Slovak linguistics and for the spreading of Slovak linguistics' good name abroad. He became the holder of the 1st class Pribina Cross for the development of Slovak science and culture. Universities (University of Prešov and UCM in Trnava) honoured him with honorary doctorates and in the year 2000 he

was given a title the Scientist of the Year SAS. It should be added that he did not avoid backstair plots, for example, when the Linguistic Institute of Ľudovít Štúr, Slovak Academy of Sciences, nominated him for the corresponding member of SAS. He was never given this honour.

Ján Horecký was never afraid to look with an expert and critical eye at the ‘bearing walls’ of traditional theories, to tap on their facades and to alert the linguistic community to their infirm places. Another excellent feature of the personality, thinking and morality of professor Ján Horecký was his courage to admit his own mistake, for example, when talking about the achievements of new theories revealing new horizons to linguistic thought. These features are not typical of less courageous and creative authors.

Besides his mission in the field of science, Ján Horecký paid continuous attention to pedagogical activities. He prepared a number of university textbooks: *Úvod do jazykovedy*, [Introduction to Linguistics] (1975), *Slovenská lexikológia. Tvorenie slov* [Slovak Lexicology. Word-formation] (1971), *Lexikológia* [Lexicology] (1980) and others. He gave lectures in many places, but Faculty of Arts at the University of Prešov was the first to understand the importance of his being behind the teacher’s desk. Although this university was not the close to Stupava, his native town, he commuted to Prešov for almost 30 years. His tenure at this faculty was not without a distinct influence that is still observable.

And finally, one last feature must be mentioned. Professor Ján Horecký did not like pathos. He used only moderate, gentle metaphor. His ambition was not to dazzle anybody, but “only” to discover or at least to approximate the truth about scientific language, i.e. the truth about the world in and outside of us. He taught us to discover what was miraculous and magic in language, but at the same time he reminded us that it could not be found on the surface and it was not placed near the surface. He taught us spiritual freedom and courage, but also the real submission to language, alerting us to the relativity of the scientific truth. He taught us that it was not enough to observe language, but it was necessary to know intimately its surroundings, because language was to be perceived and explained without false lighting. He showed us that every unpremeditated and violent intervention into it could manifest itself in the disruption of its harmony. And he taught us that if we wanted to teach people to love language, it could not be done through repressions and unimaginative commanding. He taught us to have system and conception, but neither these could bind us so much that we would have to “betray” reality. He taught us the culture of scientific discussions, the respect for facts and the need to adhere to high principles. And, finally, he taught us that we could not be scientists if we were not devoted to it every day: “nulla dies sine linea,” as he used to say. In doing so, he showed us that the status of a scientific worker was not a license with a long-time validity, but rather was a status that was to be permanently retested and reasserted.

There is so much for which our professor will remain an exemplary model and at which we would like to be his good students and followers. The dandelion in the breeze that appeared on the cover of his double-volume monograph *Človek a jeho jazyk* [Man and His Language] published on the occasion of his 80th birthday (2000, 2001) has already produced seeds that have taken root in many other places and other greenswards. All of us who had the privilege of meeting Ján Horecký as a person and of knowing his scientific and cultural work are agreed on one thing: we are happy that we could live in the days of Ján Horecký.

References:

- BUZÁSSYOVÁ, Klára (ed.) 2000. *Človek a jeho jazyk*. Bratislava: Veda.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1949. *Fonológia latinčiny*. Bratislava: Slovenská akadémia vied a umení.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1956. *Základy slovenskej terminológie*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo SAV.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1956. *Kultúra slovenského slova*. Martin, Osveta. (1958: 2nd edition)
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1959. *Slovotvorná sústava slovenčiny*. Bratislava: Vydavateľstvo SAV.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1964. *Morfematická štruktúra slovenčiny*. Bratislava, Vydavateľstvo SAV.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1969. *Úvod do matematickej jazykovedy*. Bratislava: UK.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1971. *Slovenská lexikológia. Tvorenie slov*. Bratislava: SPN.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1975. *Úvod do jazykovedy*. Bratislava: SPN.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1975. *Základy jazykovedy*. Bratislava: SPN. (1958: 2nd edition)
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1980. *Súčasný slovenský jazyk. Lexikológia*. Bratislava: SPN.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1982. *Spoločnosť a jazyk*. Bratislava: Veda.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1983. *Vývin a teória jazyka*. Bratislava: SPN.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1988. *Slovenčina v našom živote*. Bratislava: SPN.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1992. *Variation in Language*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 1994. *Semantics of Derived Words*. Prešov: FF UPJŠ.
- HORECKÝ, Ján. 2000. *O jazyku a štýle kriticky aj prakticky*. Prešov: Náuka.
- MISTRÍK, Ján et al. 1993. *Encyklopédia jazykovedy*. Bratislava: Obzor.
- RÁCOVÁ, Anna and HORECKÝ, Ján. 2002. *Slovenská karpatská rómčina*. Bratislava: Veda.
- RÁCOVÁ, Anna and HORECKÝ, Ján. 2006. *Syntax slovenskej karpatskej rómčiny*. Bratislava: IRIS.

Doc. PhDr. Slavomír Ondrejovič, DrSc.
Slovenská akadémia vied
Panská 26
813 64 Bratislava
Slovak Republic
slavoo @juls.savba.sk