

A Mosaic of Professor Ján Horecký's life and work

Ján Sabol

The life circle of one of the most prominent Slovak (but *pars pro toto* also Slavic, European and even world) linguists, professor PhDr., Dr. h. c. Ján Horecký has ended (8. 1. 1920 Stupava – 11. 8. 2006 Bratislava). The number eight in these dates seems to suggest the idea of timelessness, the echo of eternity. Because his work in general linguistics (he was the professor of general linguistics, and he was continuously confirming this competence by his substantial research in the field of linguistic theory and methodology) and in Slovak linguistics (his work not only linked Slovak research to the theoretical-methodological subsoil of linguistics, but also connected it to the interdisciplinary linguistic space) is of permanent value thanks to its extraordinary innovativeness, creativity, and inspiration.

In examining this mosaic of professor Ján Horecký's life and work, tuned to a large extent by the reflection of our personal contacts, meetings, discussions and meditations and by our commonly experienced linguistic situations, I am going to stop myself – only selectively and often allusively – at some aspects of the life and work of this excellent scientist and outstanding man.

* * *

Professor Ján Horecký's research work was substantially connected with his educational and science-organizing activity. He was a member of many inaugural, habilitation and defense commissions, he wrote tens of various reviews ranging from doctoral works up to those which reveal his expert opinions in promoting someone to professorship. His intensive help in increasing qualification competence of university teachers and scientists brought its salutary fruit, especially in East Slovak philological university workplaces, although this statement can also be fully applied to the other domestic and even some foreign scientific-research and academic workplaces.

Without Professor Horecký's work at our common workplace, the Faculty of Arts, University of P. J. Šafárik/Prešov University, we would have failed to experience his unrepeatable scientific spirit as an initiator, coordinator, adviser, and comforter. Hundreds of graduates of the philological disciplines remember his educational activity with esteem and thanks.

Let me please mention here the connection between poetry and science. The connection of a poet and a scientist that at first sight seems to be inappropriate and artificial, was productive in the symbiosis of **metaphor**, stemming from the association between Ján Hollý and Ján Horecký. The association is not only based on similar names, their origin from the region of Záhorie, devotion to Latin and Greek, but predominantly on 'enlivening' the imagery and formation of our mother tongue, Slovak.

At a conference in Smolenice, the first head of the Department of Slovak Language and Literature, Faculty of Arts, P. J. Šafárik University, professor Štefan Tóvik compared Ján Horecký's merits in the inception and development of Slovak scientific terminology to Ludovít Štúr's linguistic work. Ján Horecký revived scientific Slovak, he breathed the soul into it, just as Ján Hollý did to poetic Slovak. Despite the passage of time, his meritorious activity is being proved even more significant; yet, there is much more to be mentioned, for example, Horecký's pioneering work in the field of synchronic research into the units (and

the relations among them) of all language levels based on theoretical linguistics, his inspiring ideas about Slovak studies and Slavic studies, and also classical and some other languages (in recent years, for example, Romany). Furthermore, we should mention tens of monographic works, hundreds of scientific treatises and additional hundreds of skilled contributions, the creation and edition of dictionaries, important codification work, textbooks preparation, and more.

At this point, we also need to remember his chronologically organized research work represented by scientific and specialized book production: *Fonológia latinčiny* (*Phonology of Latin*; 1949); *Základy slovenskej terminológie* (*Basis of Slovak Terminology*; 1956); *Kultúra slovenského slova* (*The Culture of Slovak Word*; 1956; 1958); *Slovotvorná sústava slovenčiny. Podstatné meno. Prídavné meno. Sloveso* (*Word-formation Structure of Slovak. Noun. Adjective. Verb*. 1959); *Morfematická štruktúra slovenčiny* (*Morphematic Structure of Slovak*; 1964); *Slovenská lexikológia. 1. Tvorenie slov* (*Slovak Lexicology. 1. Word-formation*. 1971); *Základy jazykovedy* (*Essentials of Linguistics*; 1978); *Súčasný slovenský spisovný jazyk. Lexikológia* (*The Contemporary Slovak Language. Lexicology*, 1980; co-author); *Spoločnosť a jazyk* (*Society and Language*; 1982); *Vývin a teória jazyka* (*Development and Theory of Language*; 1983); *Slovenčina v našom živote* (*Slovak in our Life*; 1988); *Dynamika slovnej zásoby slovenčiny* (*Dynamics of Slovak Vocabulary*; 1989; co-author); *Variation in Language. Code Switching in Czech As a Challenge for Sociolinguistics* (1992; co-author); *Encyklopédia jazykovedy* (*Encyclopedia of Linguistics*; 1993; co-author); *Semantics of Derived Words* (1994); *Reč o reči 1; 2 Speech about Speech* (1996; 1998); *Getting beyond the Rules of Language* (1997; co-author); *Slovenská karpatská rómčina* (*Slovak Carpathian Romany*; 2000; co-author); *O jazyku a štýle kriticky aj prakticky* (*About Language and Style, Critically and Practically*; 2000); *Slovenčina - náš prestížny jazyk* (*Slovak – our Prestigious Language*; 2000); *Kultivovanie slovenčiny. Princípy a kritériá* (*Cultivation of Slovak. Principles and Criteria*; 2001); *Modelovanie a lingvistiká* (*Modelling and Linguistics*; 2003; co-author); *Onomaziologická štruktúra slovenčiny* (*Onomasiological Structure of Slovak*; 2003); *Syntax slovenskej karpatskej rómčiny* (*Syntax of Slovak Carpathian Romany*; 2006; co-author). Incredibly, he was creating almost to his last breath.

Let us also mention, more specifically, some pioneering areas and theorems of Professor Horecký: classical philology (phonological system of Latin, sound structure of Old Greek); philosophical problems of linguistics and science in general; language consciousness and its value field; mathematical linguistics; semiotic nature of language (components and dimensions of linguistic sign, relation between semiotics and semantics); linguistic models; lexical semantics, word-formation, terminology (dynamic nature of the vocabulary, onomasiological approach to word-formation, intension and extension of a term, comprehensive description of the Slovak word-formation system, foundations of Slovak terminology); morphematic structure of word and word-form; verbal valency; system of verbal behaviour, theory of language culture, and so on. In his linguistic research, Professor Horecký moves masterfully on the axis of dialectical opposition between the individual and the universal, the variant and the invariant (the above-mentioned review of his basic theoretical interests also demonstrates his ability to analyze linguistic phenomena in terms of both universal and specific features, and to evaluate various linguistic factors at different levels of abstraction). All in all, he was a master of the miniature as well as large frescos – reflecting the invariant organization and function of language units; and he managed to evaluate individual, seemingly marginal or isolated phenomena in terms of broader systematic interrelations with respect to the particular theory, and to reveal their synergic potential.

* * *

Let us also point out some language-external ‘tonalities’ of Professor Horecký’s life and work. **Stupava** was his spatial ‘song of songs’. A hamlet near Bratislava, muffled up in the scent of nuts and maize, with its West Slovak dialect that, because of being a hamlet, features a unique stylistics. Professor Horecký, naturally, did not resist it either – in the register of languages he managed masterfully and used with versatility in his linguistic research, the hamlet’s language belonged to his most intimate contacts with family, with home, and with the security of its silence and understanding. As if bound to one place, a solid starting point that he protected like Ariadne’s thread, as the *cantus firmus* of ‘world’s things and businesses’, of the values’ verifier, of the silent, creative kingdom of books and contemplation. Home was a place that returned him from the world of theories to natural things: that is why he understood language not only as a system, but also as a social phenomenon that is as natural as a man’s step, breath or smile. He felt and knew, indeed with Benvenista, that language does not serve just for communication, but for life.

Anybody who met Professor Horecký knows that no topic in our conversation got stuck. This is how I have remembered him from the commemorative autumn of 1963, when he started lecturing at our Faculty and when, in the gloomy old corridor, Jurko Furdík, Jožko Mlacek and I bothered him with a number of linguistic questions that he willingly and patiently, as usual, answered. He found time for everyone although he was actually very busy. He could speak with enthusiasm about the morphemic structure of a Slovak or Bengali word, about a new theory of standard language, about the unilateral or bilateral theory of linguistic sign, about whether the terminological connection *powder metal* is more appropriate than *metal powder*, but also about his garden in his native Stupava, where he, when digging potatoes or gathering grapes, solved many linguistic problems, or even about his holiday in Zemplínska Šírava, about his grandchildren and great-grandchildren, about a broken clutch or about the dog that got lost nobody knows where. Every theme mentioned by him changed into an exciting experience and became a part of one of his big love – the **life**. Perhaps the sources of his scientific touch with language were somewhere there, for, no matter how abstract his research theory may be, it has its reflections in concrete speech practice and can be proved by it and through it.

Professor Horecký **made a pilgrimage to knowledge**; he studied in Bratislava. There are numerous examples in our and world literature of the big ideas and excellent themes engendered from the dust of journeys. It may be that Professor, on his returns to his native town, thought of the ideas of his great teachers – such as academic Ľudovít Novák – in direct contact with the time and space measured by his own steps and reflections. How many seeds for later linguistic topics were germinated on these journeys in the intellectual world of this future adept in linguistics?

He studied **Latin** – a monumental language with precise grammatical structure whose sentences are as castle walls resisting the strain of centuries. It seems to me that he, once armed with the knowledge of this language, was only a step away from the conviction about the strength, grandiosity and the exciting beauty of language, even the native one that he was revealing for more than six decades to the following generations of linguists and Slovak language speakers.

These decades were filled with intensive research and organizing activities at a single place, *The Linguistic Institute of Ľudovít Štúr, Slovak Academic of Science in Bratislava*. Another secure point in Horecký’s life: the place of his research activities, of the implementation of his visions, and also a place enticing him to the spheres of research and organizing routine, a temptation to which many of his contemporaries succumbed. However –

and fortunately to his former workplace – a characteristic feature of Professor Horecký was creative restlessness, research innovation, everlasting research growth, development and improvement of new theories.

Thus, his life had, physically and spiritually, two solid places: his native Stupava and The Linguistic Institute of Ľ. Štúr at the Slovak Academy of Sciences, but he stepped from them to explore all directions and found new ways to approach not only linguistics, but also other spheres of human world.

It was a blessing and a good, ungrudging destiny for us that one of his footpaths led to Prešov and partly to Košice for four decades. And it was the footpath that never became overgrown with the grass of the ordinary, stereotyped repetition; rather one on which our precious life-long colleague left indelible traces of his intellect inscribed into the permanent movement of knowledge.

* * *

The linguistic work of Professor Horecký is as monumental as one of the languages he studied. Everything in linguistics he touched came to be decorated with gold or at least with silver. His linguistic work rested on firm research roots and spread its crown out, bearing rich fruit of knowledge and offering songs of birds, all this in pursue of the symbiosis between the wisdom of rationality and suggestiveness of emotion. Professor Ján Horecký – by observing the panorama, by reading the language micro-world, and by interconnecting his theoretical and philosophical linguistic thinking full of humanity – bore his unique testimony to the fact that the solo of mother tongue can sound functionally and impressively in an orchestra of languages, in the exciting homeostasis of semiotic succession and simultaneity.

Professor Ján Horecký was a precious embodiment of an insightful scientist and of a good, willing, and modest man.

*Prof. Dr. Ján Sabol, DrSc.
Department of Slovak and Slavic Philologies and Communication
Faculty of Arts
Šafárik University
Košice
Slovakia
jan.sabol@upjs.sk*