

DIVERSITY AS A CHANCE: GADAMER AND BREXIT

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Abstract: *Hans-Georg Gadamer believed that the use of a unique language to disseminate knowledge related to human sciences would be inadequate and impact research on at least four levels as follows: the formulation of knowledge related judgments, the choice of the object of knowledge and of the latter's eligible target audience. Brexit could be the chance of increasing the likelihood for enhancing the prestige of all European languages as instruments serving knowledge, as well as for using diversity as a value adding tool that underlies the unity of Europe.*

Key words: *Brexit, diversity, language, human sciences.*

1. Introduction

The results of the 2016 Brexit referendum proved once again the difficulty of framing human behavior via traditional theories, as well as the limits of the predictive dimension of human sciences. In other words, they emphasized the differences that the hermeneutical tradition outlines between these theories and natural sciences. This paper aims at indicating another effect of Brexit on human sciences, aside from that of clarifying the latter's epistemological status, namely the chance of retrieving natural languages as knowledge instruments. That chance was glimpsed about 30 years ago by Hans-Georg Gadamer.

2. The Unifying Dimension of Diversity in Europe

In his 1989 work – *The European Heritage* - Gadamer makes a connection between the spiritual destiny of the old continent and the creative potential of diversity. Such potential is supported by evidence provided by the existing tensions among science, art, religion, philosophy as distinct dimensions of human creativity. According to the aforementioned author, these dimensions are so clearly delineated only in Europe. Their differentiation that triggers the tensions among them is aligned to the cultural core that described the European way of life. What is more, differentiation is an integral part of a Europe whose origins go back to the Greek and Christian traditions that have been ever since valued. The difference between the East and the West of the continent is a “fundamental internal distinction” (1999, p.139). The division of the Roman Empire, that was also reflected in the division of the Church between the Eastern Orthodox and the Western Catholics and Protestants, followed afterwards by the ideological separation of Communism from

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Capitalism as a result of the Iron Curtain are also historic landmarks (of a generic nature that can actually also be captured at local level) for the distinction that Gadamer considers to underpin and define European cultural unity. Inside the latter “The separation elements are likely to be more powerful than the unifying ones” (1999, p.139). In this context, according to Gadamer, “Before any likely political configuration of a unitary Europe, the spiritual unity of Europe is more of a reality and obligation that is deeply motivated by this continent’s consciousness of multiplicity. The fact that the specifics of live traditions outlive in consciousness via competition and cultural exchange is the most visible vital sign and the deepest spiritual approach through which Europe becomes aware of itself. To contribute to that is, in my opinion, for the human sciences to bring a durable input not only to the future of Europe, but also to the future of mankind” (1999, p. 152)

The capacity of Europeans to render a creative dimension to diversity is the result of their rich experience in living together. As Gadamer indicates, the respect for the other, for the different, acknowledging the possibility for the other to be right and to win in a confrontation are part of this experience. “Maybe it is the Europeans’ advantage that they could and had to learn more than the dwellers of other lands to live with the others even though the latter are different.” (Gadamer, 1999, p. 134).

Europe’s multilingual features, the linguistic valorization of the other as an equal are signs of this advantage. The common meanings should be established bottom up, through the agreement of the speakers of various natural linguistic communities, and should not be adopted. Moreover, a unitary, adopted language reduces the inventory of instruments of expression to which speakers have access and deprives the latter of the subtle understanding of a reality that is linguistically shaped. The author does not hesitate to use the handiest example: there is a significant difference between a simple okay and a troubled and unsettling similar answer to maybe a poetry or love declaration.

Gadamer does not challenge the advantages that epistemology in its positivist alternative shaped by the Vienna Group attributes to a unitary language, namely the efficiency of research and result dissemination in natural sciences. But that is as far the advantages go. In human sciences it is exactly the alterity that is linguistically supported that allows for the framing and outlining of common meanings. Hence, human sciences — “which are supported by this pluralism of linguistic traditions and are linguistically mediated”(Gadamer, 1999, p.135) are closer to the historic nature of cultures than natural sciences. If their capacity to generate and disseminate prejudice is controlled, natural languages unveil the cultural content that they store, thus facilitating knowledge and their acknowledgment. And Gadamer gives Caesar what is Caesar’s by admitting that in Europe the English language is employed to research nature. However, he adds and thus underlines the cultural importance of European plurilingualism: “We can hardly imagine that this world of culture could agree on – no matter how practical that could be – one language for international communication, human sciences included.” (1999, p.137).

He also adds that to view the other just as the other – an experience that is facilitated by the European experience and by human sciences as they are disseminated via natural languages (namely, naturally spoken languages, by Gadamer’s definition) – is mankind’s chance for survival given the unplanned effects of the spectacular technological development after WWII. Thus, summarizing his statements of 1989, Europe is a continent that thrives on cultural differences. In this respect, human sciences are better able to grasp – namely, at a deeper level- than natural sciences these differences and to fruitfully employ them. What is more, peoples’ languages, as a result of their diversity, are instruments that are adequate for the sciences focusing on the spirit.

3. Advantages of the English Language and Advantages of Employing Natural Languages

Advantages of the English language. Ever since its fall, the Iron Curtain has been disclosing and developing its consequences, the European Union has been expanding its border to the East in sequential steps with the enthusiasm and generosity of the survivor and then, it slightly switched the speech to the topic of a Europe of concentric circles – an attempt that is actually characteristic of Europe’s need of differentiation (as already described by Gadamer). The EU acknowledged and proclaimed the diversity of its dwellers transforming the statement *United in Diversity* its motto since the 2000s. Nonetheless, the Brexit crisis emerged apparently under the pressure of a much higher diversity than reckoned and that the members of the union could not master any longer. Meanwhile, the transformations at the level of human sciences, that Gadamer considered meaningless, actually occurred. Some European languages became more important than others, and among these, English the most important. This salience is justified by contemporary life led by the communication based paradigm (Codoban, 2001), which means that to exist is to be known, communicated. Academically speaking, the aforementioned importance is related to the visibility of academic results in international databases and, especially, in listed publications acknowledged by the latter- most of which published in English.

Within this context, Brexit appears. Consequently, if interpreted through the lenses proposed by Gadamer almost 30 years ago that are related to the alignment of natural languages to human sciences, such an event acquires a new relevance. Gadamer stated without substantiating a reduction of the distance between natural sciences and human sciences with the support of technological support for research methodologies. Even natural sciences by transforming their ideas into technology have this closer relation, considered the author and he was right. The expansion of the investigation field, the fast and sophisticated interpretation of data, the control of error margins in the socio-humanities and humanities are the result of an improvement in the technology aiding methodological approaches, as well as arguments for reducing the epistemological difference between two kinds of investigation of the real. A reduction in the distance is such an effect of an extended pressure applied, implicitly or explicitly, of logical positivism on Western sciences. The positive connotation is still defining for the methodological approaches (Onuț, 2014), and the prestige of methodological monism makes the use of alternate approaches difficult.

This reduction in the distance between natural sciences and human sciences could be one of the causes leading to the reign of the English language - an already important instrument employed in the dissemination of the knowledge related to natural and human sciences. The common ground supporting both strands of sciences could be the analytical efficiency of the English language, its quality to be (asymptotically) closer to the logically perfect language from the logical program of atomism. The predominant status of the English language in socio humanities might be rooted in anthropology, a discipline that is mostly anchored into the aforementioned language, with all its categories and distinctions required to describe the subjects from the colonies of the British Empire. The same role of this language could be also the result of long and successful Anglo-Saxon policies aimed at correctly valuing research both within and outside the academic field. Any of the alternate explanations or all of them could have made English the common

intermediary for disseminating knowledge in the contemporary sciences of the spirit. Johan Galtung (1988) indicated as features of the Saxon research style its openness to debates and productive dialogues, politeness in its critical approaches, its focus on comprehensive documentation and details, the trust in the capacity of data to impose consensus on topics under debate, as well as a relaxed approach to one's own system of beliefs and convictions along with the low appetite for the elaboration of new theories in support of paradigms. All of the above are traits of globalization, of an easy access to data, and of postmodernism. Most likely the status of the English derived from imposing the Saxon approach to research (with its inherent British and American alternatives) and continued it as such.

Anyway, how much harm can English cause to the non-English speakers working in human sciences? How much harm could a foreign language employed in human sciences generate? What could underlie such a categorical rejection of Gadamer?

Advantages of employing natural languages. Firstly, it is a matter of using via language the connotations inherent in the intention of the transmitter and recognizable by the receiver. It is actually the issue of the antinomy between language and speech that was outlined by Jacques Lacan (1992) as a continuation of Saussure's traditional approach between *langue* and *parole*: the more functional the language, the less appropriate for speech, and the more language becomes more specialized and becomes speech, the less reduced its function as a language. The speech value of language can be measured via the inter-subjectivity characteristic of the *we* pronoun, highlights Lacan. That is a matter of the difference between the possibility of communicating the dimensions and variables of a concept, and, by forcing the dividing line, an issue that makes the difference between correct and inspired translations. In other words, is a matter that is related to the spirit of language that can hardly and just partially be captured by dictionary based definitions but which are naturally employed by native speakers. It is actually the difference between the unctuous and rich *fromage* on the one hand, and the fresh and light *cheese* characteristic of the French and English languages, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss (1978), a difference that extends to the organic cheese of the French and the pasteurized one of the Americans (Rapaille, 2006 *apud* Berger, 2010). Getting back to human sciences and Gadamer's perspective, even the translation of the term he uses *Geisteswissenschaften* as *human sciences* is a good example of partial communication rendered by the very translation of the meaning over that of the spirit and cultural and historical connotations of the phrase that human sciences carry in German philosophy.

Secondly, narrowing and changing the meanings employed by a language other than a natural one (as this is defined by Gadamer) imposes a recalibration of the perspective of reconfiguration of the research areas. It is the problem identified by Wittgenstein, with its famous statement "5.6. *The limits of my language mean the limits of my world.*" (1991, p.102). And that is not only related to available linguistic resources, or to the set of concepts that allows researchers to describe reality by naming it. The latter is unavoidably smaller for other languages than natural ones. It is also related to the efficiency with which the available resources can be used, namely the complexity of the relationship network among the objects that these linguistic resources can describe. Thus, for example, it is only for a Romanian native speaker to understand the relationship between *poplar*, *pears* and the verb *bear* always conjugated in the future tense and thus generate the saying *It is only when the polar will bear pears and the willow a ten-week stock that ...*" that can never be perfectly translated by the English *when pigs fly*. (For the elder

Romanians, the statement reminds the events of December 1989 when Bucharest dwellers hung pears in the trees of the city as a delayed reply to the speech delivered by Ceaușescu in the summer of that year in which he claimed that capitalism would be back to Romania when pigs would fly. In the aforementioned example it is about taking over via new language structures a new framework for structuring reality, namely a change via language of the way reality is perceived. A new set of categories generate new questions that are not necessarily important, but which impose themselves and order reality.

Thirdly, the language employed by human sciences requires awareness of the target audience and, hence, of the aim for which knowledge directed at these is generated. By writing in a natural language, authors address those who best understand them and thus offer themselves to these by unveiling both their own and their target audience's reality. They write to communicate research results they think are of interest for these. When they write in a foreign language (most likely in an international journal or for an international publisher), authors do that in order to share their interests with people preoccupied by the same field, even though of different nationalities. Hence, they try to simplify the text to make it eligible and eloquent and add explanations they view as simplistic but which are necessary for those who are unfamiliar with the topic. And what is more, they make sure they write in a manner similar to other published authors (by employing the same concepts, references, or academic structure for the text). They rather write to be published (and in the Romanian academic field that is a job-related task) than to share their ideas, research results, conclusions. By doing so, they reinforce the main trend in academic writing standards and thus render prestige to the research methods disseminated via the latter. At the same time, by taking over and perpetuating editorial constraints they minimize their chances to truly bring novelty into knowledge, to supply unexpected information, to be a self-sustaining voice. Thus, they get involved into sort of research levelling efforts that implicitly sabotage special interests and topics of knowledge.

Summing up, the use of a language other than a natural one constrains the freedom of movement of those who generate knowledge in human sciences on at least three levels: the things they can communicate; the research topics they can approach and the eligible target audience for their message. In this context, Brexit - an occasion to recalibrate the status of the English language within European scientific research - could also be an opportunity for revaluing different European languages via human sciences. However, this recalibration effort should not target the replacement (somewhat of a payback nature) of the English language with the rigorous German language or the rich French, which is not very generous though when it comes to creative writing as Emil Cioran, while striving to use it, stated the status of national heroes for the French authors who chose to write in their native language. Such an approach would not only signal the decay of an age anchored into a specific cultural tradition - a process that actually took pace during the history of the continent (e.g. in the case of Romania, the previous cultural anchors for yester generations were of French and Austrian origins, especially for Transylvania and Bucovina, then of Russian influence). On the contrary, it should unleash the input into the area of knowledge and the use of the specific. Thus, it would give back all European languages their former prestige.

English is a comfortable language. However, from the perspective of those who are not trained from a linguistic perspective and hence use it given its ease of use, it is not a language to allow for nuances. The use of English over other languages, which could allow for specific subtleties, transforms the problem of pertinent communication into a

translation one. In the case of using English, authors aim at simplifying translations in order to increase the quality which is to avoid complicated formulations and topics difficult to translate. Such a reductionist approach is not valid for the use of natural languages, except for the time when a good translation is required. The quality of the translation depends on the professionalism of the translator who, more often than not, is different from the researcher in human sciences. A professional does not need to simplify the text. Approaching efficient communication via competent translations creates, beside an increase in the request for good translators, the premise for accelerated development of specialized translation software. The interest in improving translation extends to current attempts to develop IT based models aimed at cross-linguistic analysis of plagiarism.

Brexit could thus catalyze an approach under the logic of Hermes that allows for the whole to unveil through its components (Noica, 1986). And that is naturally the hermeneutical logic of Gadamer who equates Europe's unity to the sum of its diversity.

4. Conclusions

Brexit could be the chance to correct the trajectory of the sciences focusing on the spirit, namely to retrieve what, hermeneutically speaking, Gadamer viewed as a meaningless practice in this field: the use of a unique language in disseminating knowledge. The hermeneutical perspective is historic and, in its turn, will become outdated. Nonetheless, the re-valorization of natural languages could support nowadays a European approach towards the crystallization of identities, and edifying self-knowledge. By finding again their own roots and using them as resources, Europeans could enhance their unifying diversity and thus add more meaning to the EU motto.

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