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Original Contributions - Originalbeiträge

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# A long-lasting Brentanian and Prague connection, around Ehrenfels, about language

## 1. Prague: An effective crossroads

It is well known that Gestalt psychology and theory have focused much more on visual abilities and arts than on linguistic ones.

To unveil factual, promising intersections between incipient Gestalt research and linguistic structures, on the one hand, and literary or communicative arts and competences, on the other hand, Prague is both an effective meeting place and a fruitful laboratory due to its objective relevance and role as a site of interpersonal attendance.

However, it would be rather arbitrary or tenuous to identify 'family resemblances' à la Wittgenstein among the various consonances surrounding a pre-Gestalt-oriented research trend without simultaneously being able to point to well-documented convergences grounded in a shared cultural *humus* – which are even more apparent in a multidisciplinary field.

Indeed, we can isolate a spatiotemporally unified context – Prague at the turn of the 20th century – that can explain, or rather help us understand, how, 'from an empirical standpoint' (echoing Brentano's subtitle of his *Psychology*), philosophical and psychological queries happened to converge on a lively intertwinement between linguistic and psychic dynamisms in the Central European context.

Christian von Ehrenfels published his seminal paper *Über Gestaltqualitäten* in 1890, six years before becoming Professor of Philosophy at the German University in Prague, a position he held until 1929 (the same year the first conference of the Prague Linguistic Circle took place and the first volume of the *Travaux du Cercle Linguistique de Prague*, which advanced the well-known Theses of the Circle, was published). Ehrenfels had attended Franz Brentano's lectures in Vienna (1879–80) and written his dissertation, *Relations of Magnitude and Numbers. A Psychological Study*, in Graz under the supervision of Meinong**,** one of Brentano's most prominent students. Ehrenfels would later become a colleague of another of Brentano's pupils (in Brentano's previous Würzburg years, 1867–69), namely Anton Marty, who had already been appointed to the same German University in

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Prague in 1880. Marty taught there until 1913, devoting himself primarily to the philosophy of language.

Thus, there is an evident local *fil rouge* to be identified. Yet, it is not a simple matter of spatiotemporal contiguity. Rather, there was an underlying convergence on a new, empirically grounded theoretical perspective able to integrate observations and interpretations, detail and comprehensiveness, scientific methodical inquiries and philosophical foundations.

Beyond pointing out a mere contingent consonance, our claim is to make explicit the overcoming of the gnoseological dualism, the epistemic divide, that had long characterised modern philosophy, thereby determining the enduring conflict between rationalism and empiricism. Instead of abruptly shifting to the idealistic turning point via Kant's *Kopernikanische Wende*, these authors reestablished a more complex, articulated connection between experience and its transcendence – between observable, perceptible data and intellectual configurations – without oversimplifying their mutual relationship. Indeed, a long-running philosophical enquiry required empirical investigation; an abstract framework had to be processed with, tested on and applied to many languages – and on multiple linguistic and metalinguistic levels.

One emblematic keyword to begin with could be *perception*, or in German, *Wahrnehmung* (a noun of action, *nomen actionis*, with the suffix *-ung*). The core root *nehm* is semantically equivalent to the Latin *cap/cip/cep*, as in *capio* – hence *perceptio* (with the suffix *-tio*). This gives us the English *perception*, whose *incipit* is a different preposition in Latin, *per*, signifying a 'motion through'. Meanwhile, the German *-wahr* invokes a target in German, that is, the target of an action of taking – *verum*, or what is true.

The two expressions underline the role of a process, focusing either (in Latin) on the path to be followed, *per*, or (in German) on the destination, namely *truth*. This convergent divergence represents a kind of icon of both tenets of our enquiry: process and goal.

A strict alliance between philosophy and psychology is typical of the Gestalt School and, even before them, of a trend focused on experience. What is new and stands out in the Gestalt movement is the experimental approach; the need to question experience through a purposeful procedure; the attention paid to nonlinear, segmented trajectories; and the firm will of a critical, sophisticated evaluation of habitually cursory processes and overly hasty conclusions. Conversely, the multimillennial horizon of philosophical queries could warn psychologists to beware of naïve discoveries.

As can be carefully documented, on the other hand, the interesting exchange of letters between Marty and Ehrenfels (1898–1907) – not to mention some earlier

contributions by Herbart – show that 'our knowledge is limited' (Poggi 1994: 4; Poggi 1977). The challenge we wish to take up is as follows: Beyond the novel awareness of the importance of maintaining a sound balance between sensory acquisition and intellectual elaboration, how can such a balance reach a meeting point, an effective integration, to develop a progressive knowledge?

To better understand topics and arguments emerging from the Praguian milieu as our focal authors understood them, and to capture fresh insights from that context, the six letters by Marty present in *Christian von Ehrenfels: Korrespondenz* [1] should be considered. However, they are all handwritten, and only an expert reading could grant adequate comprehension. I limit myself here to mentioning the copies I was able to view and reporting their shipping places and dates. All these letters were sent by Marty to Ehrenfels (and not vice versa), and all came from Prague, except one (sent on 19 August 1907), which was sent from Schelesen bei Lieboch (now Želízy), in the Czech Republic, 50 km north of Prague. This is a location surrounded by pine forests that was remembered as a *Lieblingsort* by Kafka, who, from 1918 (four years after Marty's death), spent some months there writing his novel *Castle* (1925). The Praguian letters were sent by Marty in two different temporal clusters: 1898 (30 June, 23 October and 19 November) and 1907 (5 September and 7 September). This correspondence lasted 10 years, then, even though intermittently.

To further populate the ranks of Ehrenfels' correspondents, we may mention his letter to Meinong (from Wien, 5 November 1883), the letter he received from Bühler (14 April 1914) and a pair of letters from Oskar Kraus, apparently in the same year, 1916 (28 April and 30 December), although the last one lacked any mention of the year. This correspondence provides a 'philological' confirmation of a context that had been in the making for decades.

## 2. Is our knowledge limited yet in progress?

Leaving for a while this detailed setting, we now step back to the broader context of enquiries into language – specifically, to the theories developed in philosophy and linguistics – from the end of the 19th to the beginning of the 20th century.

Description is a crucial activity. It requires an observative attitude and, at the same time, a plausible and replicable step-by-step approach towards the full apprehension of the target entity's proper identity. The importance of descriptions (from indefinite to definite, in the terms of the philosophy of language) cannot reduce the importance of contextual factors; mentioning 'the present king

[1] These letters belonged to the Verzeichnis der in der Forschungsstelle verwahrten Kopien aus dem Ehrenfels-Nachlaß der Universität Graz.

of France', as noted in Strawson's (1950) acute reply to Russell (1905), is neither a blameworthy clue of a culpable ignorance about history nor a ridiculous nostalgic dream. It is simply an incomplete expression that deserves to be situated in a precise context, where it can be evaluated as either meaningful or deprived of any referential function.

Further enquiries by Putnam (1975) indicated that even mistaken descriptions can be 'saved' if we are able to pragmatically regain their referent. The person who is (described as) drinking a martini can be capably identified in a certain setting, even if they are actually drinking gin. Moreover, proper nouns, as argued by Kripke (Frigerio 2003), perform their referential function remarkably well and do excellent work, even though they cannot be exhaustively replaced by mutually complementary expressions within coreferential equivalences. Can we not think of intersubstitutable noun phrases, such as 'the present king of England' or 'Charles III', while remaining confident enough of having assured a referential continuity?

This intersubstitutable cluster of naming processes reveals a great variety of epistemic accesses: a shared repertoire of ready-made tools, or rather the lazy and acritical reception of ways of saying ('the sun rises' vs 'the earth turns, or rotates'), the blooming of new 'labels' worked out by expert scientists in the place of naïve approaches (e.g. *morbillo*, which, in Italian, literally means 'a tiny illness'; *-illo* is a diminutive suffix to the morpheme *morb-*, meaning 'illness', which is rendered in English as 'measles', denoting the reddish spots characteristic of the disease. This morpheme comes from a Proto-Germanic root meaning 'spot' and was subsequently superseded by the technically precise medical designation and acronym SSPE (for *subacute sclerosing panencephalitis*), not to mention dogmatic linguistic coinages, such as 'geocentrism'.

At least two rules, or rather criteria, govern human communication needs: the principle of economy and the cooperation principle, articulated respectively by Martinet and Grice. However, to frame the question on a pragmatic level, to what extent do our paradigmatic selections and syntagmatic combinations rest on register choices? To what extent do they suggest adequate solutions in both dialogical exchanges and translation practices? Solutions must be neither exhaustive nor simply allusive to establish a dynamic balance between exhaustivity and overly poor, semantically void clues.

Such a balance attests to the importance of a good relationship between *praxis* and *theoresis*, agility and precision, accuracy and attention paid to different cultural and intercultural contexts.

Already in 1922, Robert Musil, in his *Hilflose Europa*, had written,

> Our epoch does not own a philosophy, not so much because it is not able to create it, but rather because it declines offers not agreeing with facts. (Who wishes to deal with an example, read the book by the young Berliner Wolfgang Köhler, *Die physischen Gestalten in Ruhe und in stationären Zustand*, modestly defined as an essay of natural philosophy; and, if he possesses the knowledge to understand it, he will see how from the ground of factual sciences one already begins to glimpse the solution of very ancient metaphysical difficulties.) (cf. Coppola 2024: 46–47)

Therefore, after so many mutually overwhelming claims, from methodical doubt to the drastic opposition between empiricists and rationalists, or between enlighteners and idealists, was it the right time, at the turn of the 20th century, to admit how complex knowledge is? How challenging is the task of both collecting and observing empirical data, on the one hand, and interpreting, organising and understanding them, on the other hand, to effectively transcend and embrace them in a broad and multidimensional view? The previous claim – of factual observation and intellectual understanding – regarding our limited knowledge could sound like a wise recognition.

But was this prudential attitude a truly radical novelty? Or had there been, even in the distant past, any similar awareness of the complex process underlying the formation of human knowledge?

What about the ancient enquiries into *nous poietikos* and *nous pathetikos*? We are not compelled to go back as far as Aristotle's Greek works and terminology. It is sufficient to recall that in 1867, Franz Brentano published an essay on this very topic: *Die Psychologie des Aristoteles, insbesondere seine Lehre vom ΝΟΥΣ ΠΟΙΕΤΙΚΟΣ*.

A quotation from Dante's *La Divina Commedia* (Par 17, 130–132) opens that book as its exergue: 'Chè, se la tua voce sarà molesta / nel primo gusto, vital nutrimento / lascerà poi quando sarà digesta':

For if thine utterance shall offensive be

At the first taste, a vital nutriment

'Twill leave thereafter, when it is digested'.[2]

What does Brentano mean by using this quotation? He answers as follows:

> The word by Dante, that we wrote on this treatise, does not have truth for the Poet only, it is likewise meaningful for the great Thinker as well, whom he honours as the master of those who know. Meaningless and obscure on first listen, often his demands become comprehensible *to the long and serious reflection* [italics ours], but the light of thought, when eventually it

[2] Translated by H.W. Longfellow, Boston and New York, Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1867 p. 549.

> shines through out of the dark words, is then rich reward for all effort. If this generally and almost in every work by Aristoteles is valid, it is indeed in a very special way instead, from that passage in the third book of the soul, which contains the doctrine of the νοῦς ποιητικός, and the explanation of which is the foremost endeavour of our treatise. (Brentano 1867).

An interesting background to this Brentanian reading and commentary is provided in the Introduction written by Martha Nussbaum and Amélie Rorty (1995: 313) to the Aristotelian *De Anima*:

> This essay explores Aristotle's conception of the active intellect or *nous poietikós*. The earliest, medieval, and most recent interpretations of this concept are discussed by Brentano. It is argued that even Aristotle's immediate disciples disagreed in their conception of the active intellect, nor was there any more unanimity in the Middle Ages. According to Trendelenburg, the difficulty of the Aristotelian doctrine lies in the fact that the nous is sometimes said to be so intimately connected with the other faculties of the soul that it appears to be incapable of existing without them. When it is viewed as the highest nous, as *nous poiētikos*, it is separated from the rest of human nature and contrasted with it as something higher and its ruler.

This gives us an additional interpretive avenue that links our Gestaltists with prominent figures who influenced both Brentano's and Marty' philosophical paths: Adolf Trendelenburg and Rudolf Hermann Lotze.

In his book *German Idealism. The Struggle against Subjectivism*, Frederick C. Beiser first linked Lotze's relationship with Hegel to Weiße's mediation. While engaging with Weiße in 1841, Lotze wrote the article *Bemerkungen über den Begriff des Raums*. As Denis Fisette (2021: 46) claims,

> We see, then, that the power of the mind, which acts consciously on the physical body, always first brings about a transformation of sensory perceptions. It is easy to see how extraordinarily important this is. No artistic activity, no rational action, no communication between minds would be possible without it, and this alone would naturally inhibit the intellectual development of each individual. But also directly, because of the dependence of our thinking on phantasms, it becomes one of the most important factors for our cognitive activity, without which the most ordinary phenomena of our thinking cannot be explained.

Let us now turn to the grafting of Brentano's shift towards descriptive psychology onto Marty's own philosophical enquiry.

### 3. A kind of 'metànoia' in Marty's philosophy of language

Sometimes, in the very early works representing an author's original thought, we can find traces of later counterbalanced developments. If we consider the title given

by Marty to his first paper, an unpublished entry written in Mainz in 1867 for a student competition, we can observe a focus not only on a psychic process – abstraction – but also on its sources, sense images, within the framework of a critical examination of further theories of knowledge.

Here, we encounter a clear opposition between *übersinnliche Ideen* and *sinnliche Bilder.* The cited author – mentioned right in the title of his essay – is St Thomas. In the background, we can consider Aristotle and his relationship with Plato according to the new investigations published by the Tübingen School and other scholars (Cattanei 1990). The term *Vorstellung*, chosen by Brentano to designate the most basic level of psychic acts, attests to the tendency towards a gradual descent from the logical level to a psychological one, from the intellectual active power of *concipere/begreifen* (hence *conceptus/Begriff*) to that of *represent/vorstellen.* In my opinion, this constitutes a clear index of subordination to previous sensory access to experience.

Such gradual access from an 'empirical standpoint', which is typical of Brentano, will, on the one hand, open Marty's eyes (and ears) to the diversity of languages. This approach partly recalls the title of the well-known work by Wilhelm von Humboldt *Über die Verschiedenheit des menschlichen Sprachbaues und ihren Einfluss auf die geistige Entwickelung des Menschengeschlechts* (1835), an author of great importance to Marty. On the other hand, it encourages the teleological perspective that will characterise his own philosophy of language as well as the functionalist structuralism of the Prague Linguistic Circle. The Praguian milieu undoubtedly encompassed a vivid, though not so easily *erlebt*, plurality of cultures and languages.

Let us begin to consider the way Marty observed the forms of gaps between expression and meaning – that is, the same structures facilitating different kinds of judgements (whether predicative or existential), or lexical interlinguistic differences that bely near-semantic equivalence. For instance, we can consider the different ways to mean – in written or oral form – the same numerical quantity: either XVIII (X + V + I + I + I) or 18 (10 + 8), either eighteen (8 + 10) or *diciotto* (10 + 8), either eighty (8 x 10) or *quatre-vingt* (4 x 20). If we choose here to speak of 'gaps', this will help us to consider the inexhaustive power of 'suggesting' – a key term in Marty's lexicon – that nonetheless usually suffices to direct listeners' attention (at least, those belonging to the same linguistic community) to the intended meaning.

We began with the Brentanian axis. In 1875, after receiving a doctorate in Göttingen under Rudolf Hermann Lotze, Marty published his first book, which was devoted to a difficult yet intriguing topic – and one especially resistant to a descriptive viewpoint: the origin of language. An interesting shift towards a more descriptive and contrastive (i.e. comparative) point of view is attested by

his second book, *Die Frage nach der geschichtlichen Entwicklung des Farbensinnes* (1879). While still an enquiry into diachronic development, this was also a crucial turn towards a term (*Sinn*, sense) belonging both to the realm of sensation and to the semantic/onomasiological field. His most mature and systematic work was *Untersuchungen zur Grundlegung der allgemeinen Grammatik und Sprachphilosophie*, which appeared in 1908. His last published book (1910), entitled Zur *Sprachphilosphie: Die "logische", "lokalistische" und andere Kasustheorien*, places the theoretical focus on inflectional morphology. After Marty's death (1914), some 10 years later, another work, posthumously edited by Otto Funke, was published. Its title (and not the title only) sounded rather Gestaltic: *Satz und Wort* (1925), or *Sentence and Word*. Here, he examines categorematic and syncategorematic uses of the meanings and functions of linguistic forms within upper units, that is, sentences. Once again, we find our *leitmotiv*: parts and wholes.

Before the end of Marty's work, in 1900–1901, Husserl published his *Logical Investigations,* including the third ('On the theory of wholes and parts') and fourth ('The distinction between independent and non-independent meanings') parts, which are closely aligned with our topic.

Back to Prague, in 1911, the later founder (1926) and first president of the Prague Linguistic Circle (from 1926 to 1945), Vilém Mathesius, published an article on ellipsis and verbless sentences in English. This topic concerns not just the principle of economy in languages (another remarkable subject relevant to the area of Gestalt inquiries) but also the agile expressive choices in literary texts. Such expressive dynamics were much later explained in the domain of conversation by Paul Grice's cooperative principle and conversational maxims (1975).

After assembling a large collection of textual data documenting the evident and long-lasting practice of ellipsis use, both in written works and in reported oral exchanges (a sort of *ante litteram* linguistic resource creation), Mathesius's most striking aim was to distinguish descriptive approaches from prescriptive ones and descriptive attitudes from explicative ones. As a first observation, the high frequency of ellipses in literary works was evaluated as a self-conscious and intentional shortening of speech – an abbreviating motivated by functional or economic reasons operative in actual discourse (see Sundén 1904). Mathesius criticises the usual criteria according to which verbless sentences are classified, which depend on what, according to the linguist, is omitted. Only quite recently – Mathesius notes – had a few linguists spoken out against such a classificatory, aprioristic and inaccurate method. On the contrary, it should be crucial to characterise verbless sentences, not by converting them to how they would appear with a verb, but rather by examining to their concrete form – that is, the functional and semantic value of the existing members.

> We cannot simply judge the mode of thinking from the linguistic form, because the mode of thinking and the linguistic form of language do not coincide. *The richness of the phenomena of our inner life that can generally be expressed clashes with the expressive potential of a given language, so that we can often describe the same phenomenon with various linguistic structures and at other times – and no less often! – due to the insufficiency of expressive linguistic tools or as a result of their automation, we have to describe different phenomena with the same structure.* This clash, which explains the struggle of poets and scientists to express emotions and thoughts with maximum precision, also makes it impossible to judge a priori from the form of verbless sentences how the overall idea is analysed. (Mathesius 1911: 159 it.)

On the topic of ellipses, it is worth mentioning what Karl Bühler added in 1934 in his *Sprachtheorie*:

> Of course there are ellipses. There are uncompleted buildings (think of mediaeval cathedrals) and all sorts of other human works that have come to a standstill in the course of realisation, among the uncompleted utterances. I am far from disputing the fact that there are ellipses in language in the widest sense of the word, or the special fact that there are elliptical sentences in particular. There are causes, occasions or reasons enough: internally, that a speaker loses his train of thought or runs out of breath or that every further word seems to him to be superfluous and untimely; or externally, that he is cut off in the midst of a sentence. This remains uninteresting from the point of view of the theory of language until, to put it briefly, products are pointed out that look incomplete when regarded from one angle that does no violence to them, but then from another look closed and complete. […] But the flood of ellipses will be checked before it swells up if it can be shown that the presupposition is wrong: all words used meaningfully must be situated in a synsemantic field, they must be borne by a context. That alone is the effective and *radical cure* for the ellipsis plague that has been with us now for two millennia. (Bühler 1934/2011: 187–189)

The fact that ellipses are a satisfying kind of speech from the point of view of practicality leads Bühler to describe the 'elliptical utterances' as follows:

> Islands of language emerge from within the sea of silent but unequivocal communication at the places where a differentiation, a *diacrisis*, a decision between several possibilities has to be made, and easily can be made by interspersing a word. They emerge and are welcome just as names and arrows are welcome on signs at the crossing of paths that one takes. (1934/2011: 176)

I remember a lecture by Federico Albano Leoni (Bergamo University, 2012) in which, after pointing out that 'structure' and 'structural' are terms that entered linguistic terminology with the Cercle Linguistique de Prague Theses (1929), he revisited the notion of structure from a historic-critical point of view. His

aim was to distinguish different structuralisms, bringing his audience into the fold of Prague theory. He portrayed it not as a monolith but rather as shaped by different contributions and multiple disciplinary skills, which are not always mutually complementary but sometimes assume a reciprocal tension. The lecturer deliberately reintroduced this tension to retroactively recover a more dynamic meaning of structure closer to that of *Gestalt* – a meaning capable of accounting for syntagmatic and not only paradigmatic relationships in language, of explaining the processes of word recognition, of illuminating and interpreting the parts in the whole of a text and of a text not separated from its context. This is why he pointed out that in certain structuralist vulgates, the relationship between message and context remained unexplored, and therefore, the structural laws of ellipsis remained unanalysed.

Regarding these trends, he noted that Bühler's vigorous stance on ellipsis in his *Theory of Language* (1934) was an exception. Why did Bühler, who had been publishing on sentence theory and the essence of syntax since 1918, argue that the 'two-thousand-year-old calamity of ellipsis' requires 'radical treatment' (Bühler 1934/2011: 189)? Why, on the other hand, did he consider it necessary to acknowledge the existence of elliptical constructions? There are countless causes, motives and reasons for why speakers might interrupt themselves, run out of breath, feel that any further words are superfluous and outdated or be interrupted from outside while uttering a sentence. So, it is precisely this reference to the textual perspective amid the structuralist debate that caused a precocious pragmatic turn in the 1930s.

It was at this point, during the debate following Albano Leoni's lecture, that I spoke up to remind everyone that Mathesius, the future founder of the CLP (1926), had published an article on ellipses in 1911. I did not say much more than that, nor do I think I can prove in any way that Bühler was aware of Mathesius' article (nor is there any evidence that he read Czech). However, it cannot be ruled out, and indeed it is highly probable, that during his time in the Circle, the Viennese physician–philosopher–psychologist had frequently discussed and heard discussions about the subject of ellipsis in particular and syntactic issues in general (see Raynaud 2008). What matters here is the intention to document, if I may simplify, a structuralism of *parole* as well as of *langue*, that is, a systematic focus on semantic-communicative processes as well as on grammatical systems, and an emphasis on textual dynamics as well as code resources.

Such a 'work in progress' has indeed a pragmatic framework on both the collective and personal levels. We need to be in context, to inherit what our antecedents have codified, made accessible and left us and, at the same time, to develop new paths, change habits, charge old resources with new destinations. At the same time, we need to exchange communications, to engage in dialogue, to listen to one another.

We need to develop our own idiolects, to learn those of others, to mix-and-match our sociolects. It is a real texture – a webbing continually being spun.

However, prior to these lexical, morphological and syntactic units, a more basic compositional perspective had already been investigated by Marty in Humboldt's steps: the *figurative inner linguistic form* of lexical entries.

I cannot go into greater detail in this Praguian Gestalt-oriented overview. Instead, I will briefly mention some paradigmatic glimpses of linguistic phenomena and processes that sound quite 'Gestaltic', without being so labelled, and reveal a strong similarity with what has been widely investigated in the visual domain. These are accurate, well-balanced linguistic and textual observations that required extensive data collection and, at the same time, careful, systematic explanations. All of them share the Praguian context.

First, we identify two complementary 'inner linguistic forms': the already mentioned figurative form as well as the constructive one, both so named by Marty. These are strategies to make total meanings accessible either partially or gradually.

We quote Marty's multilingual examples (1908: 141):

> I remember for instance the images taken from different psychic processes, where here and there the same psychic process […] is circumscribed. Or when the German says: 'lead is heavier than ice' [das Blei ist schwerer als das Eis], while Modern Greek 'Βαρύτερον ἀπὸ τὸν σίδερον' [is heavier than iron], in German 'Storchschnabel' is named in French 'bec de cigogne' [cranesbill] or 'pantographe' [pantograph]; what in Germany we name the socalled *Leichdorn* [corn] as 'Hühnerauge' the Dutch as 'Elsternauge', the Manchu 'fisheye'; what we express by 'vielleicht' (= sehr leicht) [perhaps], in Greek by τάχα derived from ταχύς [quick] or ἴσως [equally or quite probably], derived from bilateral equal chances, in English with 'perhaps', connected with 'hap', the chance, in Spanish with 'a caso', connected with 'casually', in Latin rendered with 'forsitan' (forsit an). The English speaking person, instead of 'eine Unverschämtheit' has to say 'a piece of impudence', the Javanese instead of 'I' has to say ''servant', instead of 'you' 'your feet' o 'your palace'.

Another dynamic contribution to the shaping not just of the syntactic relationships within a sentence but also of the intersubjective comprehension of whole utterances in communicative exchanges is the so-called functional sentence perspective. This notion has been named in a number of ways: 'aktuální členění větné', 'aktualnoje členenije predloženija', 'aktuelle Satzgliederung', 'funktionale Satzperspektive', 'Mitteilungsperspektive', 'kontextové členění věty', 'contextual segmentation of the sentence', 'významová výstavba výpovědi', 'the thematic organisation of the utterance', 'smyslovoje členenije predloženija', 'Thema-Rhema-Gliederung', 'topic-comment structure'. This so-called functional

syntax, which mainly concerns topic-focus articulation, represents the collective result of joint research developed within the Prague Linguistic Circle and at Brno Masarykova University and explains how the order of sentence elements conveys information.

A further step along this path is not limited to sentence structure but extends to entire texts. Here, we simply underline the anaphoric and cataphoric deferrals that occur within any sequence along a textual development to assure so-called textual cohesion. To clarify why our focus on Prague does not exclude further dissemination of this kind of research, let us simply recall that Jakobson read Marty in Moscow around 1920, and Bühler reviewed Marty's *Untersuchungen* in 1910 in the *Göttingische Gehlehrte Anzeige*. In order to explain this dissemination:

> There is a sense – Fisette (2016) writes – to say that, upon his arrival in Vienna, Bühler assumed Brentano's legacy. Indeed, by obtaining a laboratory in psychology in this university, Bühler has succeeded where many of his Viennese predecessors have failed, starting with Brentano himself who left Vienna in 1895 by evoking among other things the refusal of the Ministry to grant him a laboratory of psychology. Although it was not Bühler but Schlick who inherited officially of Brentano's chair, the hiring of Bühler in Vienna was intended nevertheless to fill this gap vigorously denounced by Brentano in his article "My last wishes for Austria" as confirmed by a report from the Ministry dated 1922: 'Since Brentano's departure, the Faculty of Philosophy in Vienna and its institute, which specialises itself in experimental psychological research, have been deprived of their representative in this field. We therefore very much welcome the news that Professor Bühler will obtain from the municipality of Vienna a prestigious research chair within the Faculty and a fully equipped experimental psychological research institute with assistants and an extensive library, which will be made available to him. Through the person of Bühler, this institute will maintain a close relationship with the Faculty of philosophy, which will be to the advantage of the research chair's scientific activities' (quoted in G. Benetka, 1990, p. 179). But by granting a laboratory to Bühler, the Ministry wanted to ensure to fill the position and at last to correcting a situation of which it was itself responsible and that lasted since the arrival of Brentano in Vienna. […] But the relationship linking his to Brentano and the Austrian tradition in philosophy is not merely institutional. Indeed, in most of his works published before his arrival in Vienna, especially in his books *Die Gestaltwahrnehmung* (1913) and *Die Erscheinungsweisen der Farben* (1922), his main interlocutors are associated with the Austrian tradition and Brentano, whom Bühler called the "Spiritus Rector of a group of psychologists of the old Austria" (Bühler, 1960, p. 15). The theoretical part of his 1913 treatise on the perception of gestalts focuses on the discussions triggered by the publication by Christian von Ehrenfels of his classic article "On Gestalt

Qualities" and to which participated most of Brentano's students. Bühler (1913, p. 6) focuses on "the mental character of gestalt perceptions and the conditions of their emergence." These discussions belong to what is called the first phase in the debate over the perception of gestalts whose main protagonists are Ernst Mach, Stumpf, his student Husserl, Alexius Meinong and his students in Graz as well as A. Marty, F. Hillebrand and A. Höfler.[6] Moreover, it is explained in the first sentence of his treatise on the modes of presentation of colours published in 1922, Bühler's debt to Stumpf is very important […]. Bühler's works published after his arrival in Vienna show how his thinking is deeply rooted in the Austrian tradition not only in the field of psychology but also in his writings on language and phonology. This is confirmed, among other things, by his polemic with another student of Stumpf, Kurt Koffka, in his article *Die 'neue Psychologie' Koffkas*, which is a reaction to the publication in 1925 by the latter of an article entitled "Psychology." […] In summary, Bühler's defence consists in minimizing the bearing of this hypothesis on his main interlocutors in his 1913 book and of presenting his own conception of Gestalt against the students of Stumpf, who […] will himself take Bühler's defence against the criticism of his own students. In his later writings on gestalt psychology, Bühler (1961) adopts essentially the same position on the perception of gestalts and the Austrian tradition as a whole. In his theory of language, for example, Bühler (1927, p. 61) sometimes evokes the names of Bolzano, Husserl, Meinong and Marty as his precursors, and we will see that the notion of structural laws, which is the basis of Bühler's structural model of language, has its origin in Stumpf and his student Husserl. Finally, let us emphasize the importance granted to Brentano and Husserl in Bühler's teaching in Vienna as confirmed by several of his students including the philosopher Aurel Kolnai (1999, p. 129). Some commentators of Bühler discussed several aspects of the close relationship linking Bühler to the Austrian tradition. […] In his latest book published in 1960 under the title *Das Gestaltprinzip im Leben des Menschen und der Tiere*, Bühler also explains why, in the field of visual perception, the influence of Stumpf surpasses that received from Brentano and his other students: His [Stumpf's] analysis appeared to me different than the contributions made by Brentano and Husserl, particularly because they were written and tailored for empirical psychology (or experimental psychology to be more precise). But this does not mean that Stumpf spoke as a psychophysicist in the strictest sense of the term, for in his research on acoustics for example, he is concerned not with the ear's anatomy, nor with the corresponding cerebral processes at the physiological level, but precisely with the "psychical phenomena or functions", as he himself calls them (K. Bühler, 1960, p. 19). Founder of the prestigious Institute of Psychology in Berlin, which gave birth to what is now associated with Gestalt psychology, Stumpf was also known then as one of the pioneers in the field of ethnomusicology and the founder of the Berlin Phonogram Archive, now under the protection of UNESCO. We also owe to Stumpf a number of

empirical studies in the field of acoustics and psychology of sound, for example, and his book *Tonpsychologie* remains today an important reference in this field. This being said, as Bühler rightly emphasizes in this passage, even in his empirical and experimental works, Stumpf never loses sight of his programme and philosophical concerns.[3]

## 4. A dynamic, agile and cooperative Gestalt-oriented perspective on verbal communication in both philosophy of language and general linguistics

If experience deserves to be recognised as the basis of our knowledge, then our authors had to acknowledge that the limits of our cognitive faculties and the constraints imposed on human communication, especially the temporal ones, require a difficult-to-achieve balance between clarity and agility, perspicuity and practicality. This is the best explanation of the tension between the completeness of signification and accessibility for comprehension. Such a tension generates two possible results: either an abbreviated access to the whole *significandum*, or a mere opaque mention of its totality devoid of any specifying feature. Furthermore, these alternatives can change from one language to another.

The technical expression chosen by Marty to indicate the disproportion between what must be entirely signified and the features that merely hint at that whole is *suggestive*, as in *Vorstellungssuggestive* and *Urteilssuggestive*, or *motiv*, as in *emotive*. This provides a clear confirmation of the focal relationship between the whole that is intended and the part that is expressed. It offers an implicit invitation to cooperate, especially on the affective level, concerning the so-called phenomenon of interest. The latter is not merely something to be evoked but rather becomes a complementary correspondence.

Another possibility is to name the whole without being able (or perhaps not needing) to articulate its components. This is the case with simple, basic terms, which contemporary linguists call 'simple lemmata' or 'radicals'. A further possibility is to condense, as in a flash, the individual identity of a single (or collective) being, as in the case of proper nouns: 'Peter', 'Rome', 'UN' (as an acronym for 'United Nations') and so on. In philosophical semantics, they are conceived of as carrying no sense but merely referring to entities.

Either a hint to capture the whole, or a totality that eschews details.

Either one side – one profile instead of a 360° description – or a summary global identification. Either a short confirmation of assent or dissent, or a syntagmatic chain of noun and verbal phrases, or of main and subordinate sentences, saturated

[3] I report such a long passage by Fisette 2016 because it testifies to the well-documented historical-institutional investigations conducted in the Canadian and later European research contexts by authors such as Denis Fisette, Guillaume Fréchette, Laurent Cesalli, Hélène Leblanc, Claudio Majolino and others.

elements or adjuncts. We must not forget the canonical suspended expressions, such as exclamative or interrogative sentences, where it is only intonation in orality or punctuation marks in writings that suggest some incompleteness to be integrated.

To identify with due precision the sources and occurrences of these specific expressions, an important chronological extension of our enquiry can be provided. Following Marty's proposal, the role of Wilhelm von Humboldt needs to be elucidated and discussed. A broad multilinguistic scenario must be explored without adopting the naïve assumption of a parallelism between language and thought, which would, in fact, diminish the creative and selective powers of the various speakers' communities.

Two motions; two principles of a fusion, a conjoining echoed across generations and centuries, if not millennia – and still at work.

**Summary**

Christian von Ehrenfels published his seminal paper *Über Gestaltqualitäten* in 1890, six years before becoming a professor of philosophy at the German University in Prague, where he would remain until 1929. He had attended Brentano's lectures in Vienna (1879–80) and written his dissertation in Graz under the guidance of Meinong (one of Brentano's most prominent students). Ehrenfels would later become a colleague of another pupil of Brentano (in Brentano's Würzburg years, i.e. 1867–69), Marty, recruited by the same German University in Prague already in 1880, where he taught until 1913, devoting himself mainly to the philosophy of language.

Thus, we can isolate here a spatiotemporally unified context – Prague at the turn of the twentieth century – which can help us understand how philosophical and psychological queries 'from an empirical standpoint' happened to converge on a lively interaction between linguistic and psychic dynamisms.

Further terminological enquiry would help detect promising relationships on a theoretical basis.

The technical expression introduced by Marty to indicate the disproportion between what must be entirely signified and the features that merely hint at that whole is *suggestiv*: *Vorstellungssuggestive*, *Urteilssuggestive, Emotive*.

Again, in Prague, in 1911, the later founder (1926) and president of the Prague Linguistic Circle, Vilém Mathesius, published an article on ellipsis and verbless sentences in English.

A deeper understanding of the potentials and limits of these terminological choices would be fostered by examining Bühler's discussion concerning the couple 'Form' vs 'Gestalt' in his 1934 *Sprachtheorie* and in his 1910 review of Marty's *Untersuchungen.*

Finally, to better understand topics and arguments concerning the Praguian milieu, letters in *Christian von Ehrenfels: Korrespondenz*, contained in the *Verzeichnis der in der Forschungsstelle verwahrten Kopien aus dem Ehrenfels-Nachlaß*, (R. Fabian), were also taken into account.

**Keywords:** Prague context, knowledge processes, Marty's turning point, Gestalt-oriented view of verbal communication.

## Zusammenfassung

Christian von Ehrenfels veröffentlichte seinen grundlegenden Aufsatz *Über Gestaltqualitäten* im Jahr 1890, sechs Jahre bevor er Professor für Philosophie an der Deutschen Universität in Prag wurde, wo er bis 1929 tätig blieb. Er hatte Brentanos Vorlesungen in Wien (1879–80) besucht und in Graz unter Meinong promoviert, einem der bedeutendsten Brentano-Schüler. Ehrenfels wurde später Kollege eines weiteren Schülers Brentanos aus dessen Würzburger Jahren (1867–69), Anton Marty, der bereits 1880 an dieselbe Deutsche Universität in Prag berufen worden war und dort bis 1913 lehrte, wobei er sich hauptsächlich der Sprachphilosophie widmete.

Damit lässt sich ein raum-zeitlich einheitlicher Kontext – Prag an der Wende vom 19. zum 20. Jahrhundert – isolieren, der uns helfen kann zu verstehen, wie philosophische und psychologische Fragestellungen „vom empirischen Standpunkt aus" in eine fruchtbare Interaktion zwischen sprachlichen und psychischen Dynamiken mündeten.

Weitere terminologische Untersuchungen könnten vielversprechende theoretische Zusammenhänge sichtbar machen.

Der von Marty eingeführte technische Ausdruck für das Missverhältnis zwischen dem voll auszudrückenden Gesamtgehalt und den Merkmalen, die dieses Ganze nur andeuten, lautet *suggestiv*: *Vorstellungssuggestive*, *Urteilssuggestive*, *Emotive*.

Ebenfalls in Prag veröffentlichte Vilém Mathesius 1911 – der spätere Gründer (1926) und Präsident des Prager Linguistenkreises – einen Aufsatz über Ellipsen und verblose Sätze im Englischen.

Ein vertieftes Verständnis der Reichweite und Grenzen solcher terminologischen Entscheidungen lässt sich durch eine Analyse von Karl Bühlers Erörterung des Gegensatzes „Form" vs. „Gestalt" in seiner *Sprachtheorie* (1934) sowie in seiner Rezension von 1910 zu Martys *Untersuchungen* gewinnen.

Schließlich wurden zum besseren Verständnis des Prager Milieus auch Briefe aus *Christian von Ehrenfels: Korrespondenz* herangezogen, die im *Verzeichnis der in der Forschungsstelle verwahrten Kopien aus dem Ehrenfels-Nachlass* (R. Fabian) enthalten sind.


**Schlüsselwörter:** Prager Kontext, Erkenntnisprozesse, Martys Wendepunkt, gestaltorientierte Sicht auf verbale Kommunikation.

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