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## WHAT DO WE THINK ABOUT AND WHAT DO WE NOT THINK ABOUT?

Jerzy Brzeziński presented many important problems that should provoke community debate on psychological research practices in Poland. In the present article, a few other problems are discussed: (1) first, elitism and a caste system in the publication process, accompanied by disdain for good research monographs; (2) second, the lack of self-criticism and modesty on the one hand and the “publish or perish” philosophy on the other, resulting in the submission of manuscripts that do not meet scientific standards; (3) third, the stylistic level of manuscripts, and even published papers, does not meet academic standards; (4) fourth, researchers’ focus on science bibliometrics, instead of focus on scientific discovery; (5) fifth, in some research scientists observe participants’ imagination instead of measuring psychological mechanisms in behavior.

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Jerzy Brzeziński’s inspiring article induced me to join the debate. This was not because the author is wrong. He is more than right. The article induced me to join the discussion because its author passed over many important aspects worth reflecting on. I believe Brzeziński’s stance is largely conservative. I will begin by following his line of thinking and then go on to point out the phenomena that he does not mention but I consider important.

### **The Global Character of Psychology**

It is hard not to agree with Jerzy Brzeziński that psychology is one of the supracultural, supralinguistic, and suprarreligious scientific disciplines. Neither problems nor methods are local in psychology. What may be local is only results, specific to certain conditions or times. Interpersonal trust is understood similarly

all over the world and studied using similar methods, but local differences are found – such as the high trust rates in Denmark and the very low ones in Poland. A substantial part of over 2,500 meta-analyses available in the EBSCO database on the subject of interpersonal trust show this clearly. We solve the same problems that our colleagues all over the world solve. Results are sometimes replicated and sometimes they are not. Melvin Lerner (1980) found that Americans believed the world to be just, whereas Dariusz Doliński (1993) found that Poles believed it to be unjust – and this is particularly interesting.

However, I do not fully agree with the author that names such as *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation*, *Poznań Studies in the Philosophy...*, and the like have a sentimental meaning only. I think they represent – and rightly so – brand emphasis rather than an expression of local sentiments.

### **The Language (Languages) of Publication: More Than Just English**

For some time, debates on language in Polish psychology have focused on the dilemma of whether to publish in Polish, in English, or both in Polish and in English. At any rate, the guideline is to publish. At the same time, many important questions are neglected (which is also a weak point of Brzeziński's text):

For whom do scientists write?

Does an author have anything to communicate to the world in any language?

From the cognitive perspective, is it better for “the world” to learn what I think or is it better for me to know what “the world” thinks?

Should language be international or should it be correct and communicative in the first place?

Does anyone read what we write, and who are they?

Let us consider this, for there are many illusions, myths, or – at best – misunderstandings.

### **The Glass Bead Game: Why Polish Scientists Despise the Popularization of Science**

There is a widespread belief in academic circles that scientific publications are meant to be for scientists. Why should it be otherwise, one may ask. After all, they represent a special form of scholarly discourse, used by specialists who possess knowledge as well as know the terminology and methodology to exchange discoveries the way collectors exchange stamps or valuable specimens of Meissen porcelain. It is deceptively similar to Hermann Hesse's *Glass Bead*

*Game*. The initiated know, the uninitiated do not need to know, and even if they happen to find out – they will not understand. I am told, for example, that publications making knowledge accessible to the uninitiated are trifles and that making knowledge accessible in your mother tongue is like painting eggs at Easter. I would very much like to know what Jay Gould, Jane Goodall, Daniel Kahneman, Michael S. Gazzaniga, or Judith R. Harris – authors of fascinating works popularizing knowledge (Gazzaniga, 2011; Goodall, 1995; Gould, 1991; Harris, 2010; Kahneman, 2013) – would say about it if they had the opportunity.

The assumption that knowledge is an elite thing and that one ought to publish exclusively for the learned colleagues is not only caste-minded but also dysfunctional. Regrettably, it is common in Polish academic policy as well as in Polish psychology. In the face of antiscientific attitudes growing stronger and in the face of shamanism of all descriptions spreading, it seems strikingly shortsighted to dismiss the popularization of science (I mean science, not personal beliefs). This is one thing. The other thing is this: it seems preposterous to discuss whether or not researchers working in Poland should publish in Polish – just as preposterous as it would seem to ask whether or not Russian researchers should publish in Russian and American ones in English. Researchers are part of the society they work among. A refusal to publish in your mother tongue appears to be acting to the detriment of your own society. It certainly amounts to leaving your potential readers exposed to news about so-called “discoveries” of scientists published by tabloids – the kind of news that no one is usually even able to straighten out.

### **Publish or Perish: Publish Whatever You Manage to Write**

Everyone whose duty it has been to review texts submitted for publication in journals (or research projects applying for grants) knows what a multitude of embarrassingly weak texts there are: how many works are, literally, about nothing at all. This is not a local or exclusively Polish phenomenon. It is enough to take a look into the EBSCO database to find out that a considerable proportion of publications documented there are intellectual rubbish. You will find thousands of papers there that testify to their authors’ substantive and methodological incompetence as well as texts that contribute nothing of significance (or nothing at all) to the body of knowledge. Sometimes they supply curiosities, which tabloids thrive on. This may be seen as indicating a lack of self-criticism or, more generally, a lack of humility, but it may also be treated as a symptom of desperation:

publish or perish! Since nobody wants to perish, they must publish at all costs. If a text begins with a statement that the basic concept “is not definable” and if the author goes on to suggest what he or she calls the operationalization of that concept and a measurement instrument (and this really does happen!), then no comments are necessary. The language of the text makes no difference.

Encouragements to publish carry the hidden assumption that everyone who writes anything has something to say – and if he or she does have something to say, they must say it in English. This leads straight to pathology, which I elaborate on below.

### **“The World” About Me or I About “the World”?**

I am not sure how widespread this is. I presume it is frequent. Self-critical scholars sometimes think about which part of their work belongs (or would belong, in certain conditions) with global science and which part belongs or would, in certain conditions, belong with local science at best. It usually turns out that much falls into local science and little falls into global science. I myself, having written much over the years, can think of only two or three studies of mine that could have been of interest to the world (if they had been published in an international language). The belief that everything one writes (well, most of it anyway) is, a priori, part of the achievements of world science is nothing more than a manifestation of thoughtless megalomania.

This, of course, is a matter of choice. I have no ambition to bring the world to its knees: what others do and write seems more important to me.

But there is another side of the phenomenon, too. If someone writes a text and has it published in an international language, is there anyone who reads it? I would not like to give examples, but the picture is far from optimistic.

### **The International Language or Any Language Correctly Used?**

The urgent pressure to publish in foreign-language journals pushes the problem of native language usage out of view. Even though it seems unbelievable, there is plenty of evidence of extreme linguistic incompetence on the part of authors writing in Polish. If (to use another actual case) you have to read a text without a single grammatical subject for over a page, no comment is needed. It would seem that every educated person knows the simple language rule: subject, verb, object. Well, not every educated person knows it. Still, not knowing it, they want to publish. Perhaps they not so much want to as have to publish.

In a number of reviews I wrote (and I am sure I was not the only one who did) that I did not understand what I was reading. I admit that this might be my problem, but I refuse to admit that this is so in every case. Some texts fail to provide definitions of basic terms, as if it was enough to believe that we understand one another somehow anyway. The language is bombastic, riddled with Americanisms, and often very convoluted in expressing simple matters. The language situation is similar in the case of many conference presentations, poster sessions, and (probably) university lectures. Polish language usage is the weakness of many Polish-language psychological publications. I often feel sorry for editors, who – like it or not – have to do something about it.

### The Need for Monographs

The bibliometric dictatorship imposed by representatives of exact sciences dooms scientific monographs to extinction. At any rate, it does in Poland. In social sciences, a monograph is an attempt (sometimes more and sometimes less successful) at a synthesis of the achievements of a particular discipline. In psychology there is an abundance of empirical data and few successful syntheses. In Polish psychology monographs are on the decline because **writing monographs does not pay off**. Everybody knows this. An excellent though negative example is the psychology of motivation. Monographs on motivation are written by Germans and by Americans (Gollwitzer & Bargh, 1996). Maria Lewicka's fascinating monograph, devoted to the psychological functions of the place where people live (Lewicka, 2012), is one of few exceptions. Janusz Reykowski's *Experimental Psychology of Emotions (Eksperymentalna psychologia emocji)*, written nearly fifty years ago, remains a valuable source of knowledge (Reykowski, 1968).

The evaluation of monographs is not easy – monographs themselves being highly diverse – but it is feasible. More than that: it is necessary. It is startlingly short-sighted, or even wasteful, to dismiss synthetic studies, which amount to more than mere collections of empirical data or collections of theoretical positions. After all, they constitute a basic source of knowledge not only for numerous graduate and doctoral students but also for specialists in other fields of psychology.

### Points Instead of Discoveries

Professor Kajetan Wróblewski, an eminent physicist, once said (though I am not sure it was him who said it) that scientists' achievements should be spoken of

the way you speak at funerals – you should speak about the achievements, not about the sum total of parametric points.

It is now time for nostalgic tones. There was a time when discoveries counted, and now it is a time when points are counted. Discoveries needed no points. Real discoveries quickly became part of knowledge and their authors won widespread recognition. Parametric points need no discoveries. The sum total of scientists' happiness is, after all, a sum total of points. The more points there are, the more valuable a scientist is. Yet, a question arises: valuable to whom? Valuable to what? To science, or perhaps to scientific institutions. Discoveries are no longer discussed.

Of course, I know the arguments in favor of granting points for scientific publications. Everyone knows them, but most of us are functionally blind to the pathological phenomena that ensue. J. Brzeziński has written about some of them (plagiarism, data falsification). There are others. Let me mention two. The first example is large cooperatives. Notice that if a person publishes a few dozen articles a year (as a coauthor) in prestigious journals, that means he or she “co-authors” one of them each week. Apart from that, he or she lectures, takes part in conferences, and travels the world. Careful analysis of texts devoted to one or another psychological field reveals the existence of numerous cooperatives producing points. It is characteristic that members of such cooperatives come from different academic centers and, thanks to this, each of them harvests his or her own points. Anyone who has ever written a collectively authored text knows that it takes more time to write than an individually authored text does. The conclusions are obvious.

The second example is a local one. Some universities separately reward English-language publications of their staff. It is their inalienable right to do so. However, at the same time, there are quite many English-language journals that publish at the authors' cost. The cost of publication is roughly the same as the reward. This is a temptation that “well organized” authors yield to. I know quite a few such cases.

What I consider desirable is a discussion about discoveries, not about points: an annual review of discoveries rather than bidding with points. Discoveries do not happen often, but it is them, not the points granted, that the condition of science depends on. Yet, hardly anyone deals with discoveries at present.

### Imaginative Psychology

Partly under pressure to collect points and partly under pressure from increasingly bureaucratized ethical boards, which I have written about elsewhere (Łukaszewski, in press), an alarming phenomenon has appeared. Ironically, it is particularly visible in social psychology. It consists in conducting research on imaginary representations of behaviors offered by all kinds of stories rather than on people's actual behaviors. "Imagine that he behaved in this way," "imagine how you react or would react in this situation." The whole idea is based on the assumption that people imagine only what they would do or have done in a particular situation and nothing else. In fact, there are no serious premises for such an assumption. Numerous studies on mental simulations and on so-called imagination inflation show that the converse is true: there is an increase in the probability of those behaviors that one has previously imagined (Loftus, 2001; Maruszewski, 2005; Pham & Taylor, 1999; Taylor, Pham, Rivkin, & Armor, 1998). In other words, people do what they have imagined rather than imagine what they will do. This is one thing.

The other problem is even more important: the ecological validity of many stories offered is unknown or, in many cases, highly dubious. Psychology is becoming, in part (still in part, luckily) a science about imaginary behaviors of imaginary actors.

### Instead of a Conclusion

A certain uneducated illiterate Caucasian shepherd watching the sky at nights discovered, five hundred years after Copernicus, that planets revolve around the Sun. He did that his own way, not the Copernican way. He was very much late, he did not publish it in English, and he received no points for it whatsoever. But does that mean his discovery merits no respect?

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