


Research Article

From Culture to Cultures: Understanding Edward Sapir's Prophecy through Herderian Lenses

Alexandru Casian^{1,*} 

¹ University of Paris 8, France

* Correspondence: alex1992university@gmail.com

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Abstract: In 1934, the American anthropologist, Edward Sapir made a scientific prophecy on the concept of culture which remained largely overlooked but have proved to be surprisingly accurate and relevant in the contemporary era. He was focused on conceptual pluralisation and fragmentation. By predicting the pluralisation of culture, Sapir captured a trend that we can witness nowadays in the continuously growing number of cultures, subcultures, counterculture, and new conceptual interpretations and ramifications. His use of the Herderian concept of culture(s) requires a close inspection facilitated by interdisciplinary methodologies such as historical epistemology. Widely credited as the creator of the term “culture” in its plural sense, Johann Gottfried von Herder played a crucial role for Sapir’s academic formation. In the ruptures and continuities that culture as a concept has experienced, one can find valuable epistemological insights. Sapir did not come up with a daring prediction out of an uninformed position. Putting Sapir’s prophetic statement in the context of his academic and professional journey and in the context of the general research trends of the twentieth century reveals a strong Herderian heritage intensified by the psychologisation of anthropology that has ultimately led to an increasingly powerful and progressively sophisticated pluralisation of culture.

Keywords: Sapir; Herder; culture; psychologisation; historical epistemology

1. Introduction

Culture has become a pluralizing notion that characterises the contemporary lifestyles. Our vocabularies have been invaded by numerous concepts from “Western culture”, “Oriental culture” and “Global culture” to “Sexual-psychopath culture” and “Police canteen culture” (Mridha, 2021). Culture, cultures, cultural are words that became part of our daily lives. Unlike other concepts, culture escapes comprehensive normativity demands and becomes increasingly fragmented and plural. As early as the 1930s, Edward Sapir, in his academic article, predicted this tendency:

I venture to predict that the concept of culture which will then emerge, fragmentary and confused as it will undoubtedly be, will turn out to have a tougher, more vital, importance for social thinking than the tidy tables of contents attached to this or that group which we have been in the habit of calling “cultures”. (Sapir, 1934, p. 415)

Sapir had a great contribution to the rise of the concept of culture to intellectual dominance (Steigerwald, 2004). As a Boasian, Sapir promoted a Herderian concept of culture. He explicitly used the term “cultures” in plural. His focus on the word “culture” and its pluralisation process has deep historical and epistemological implications. Predicting the pluralisation of culture required deep contextual insights into the epistemological structures that are dealt with. According to Guillan (2014), knowing something about the studied phenomena is sometimes insufficient to make a reliable prediction. The more complex the studied phenomenon, the more difficult it is to obtain this prediction. Yet, Sapir achieved an impressive level of accuracy for the characterisation of extremely complex cultural tendencies that continue to unfold nowadays.

This study’s distinct contribution is in presenting the concept of culture from a new perspective. It expands on Herder’s work by examining a short article by Edward Sapir, which was first published in 1934, and putting it into its historical and epistemological context. The

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main aim is to decrypt Sapir's prophecy and to offer a detailed critique. Exploring it could help researchers figure out the complex epistemological links that form the concept of culture. Within this study, culture is defined as a scientific construction arising out of a specific community's historical and epistemological context. The present research shows that Sapir's prophecy has a cyclical connotation and a heavy Herderian heritage.

Although the notion of prediction intersects with our general idea of science, philosophy of science has never given it a great consideration. Prediction has been a topic studied mainly indirectly in the context of theorisations on testing or explaining (Brenner, 2020). Yet, scientific predictions and prophecies have always attracted scholarly attention. Articles such as "The Prophecy of George Grant" (Badertscher, 1980) and "The Prophecy of Ulrich Beck: Signposts for the Social Sciences" (Mythen, Burgess, & Wardman, 2018) illustrate this tendency in fields such as philosophy, political science and sociology. The fascination for scientific prophecies bypassed Sapir's works. His 1934 prediction remained largely overlooked by the academic community. Researchers such as Babcock (2012) make reference to this statement made by Sapir but its importance, scope and accuracy were not properly analysed in academic works. Other predictions on the concept of culture were made, but even three decades after Sapir's bold statement, researchers seemed perplex as they tried to examine the future of the concept of culture:

Conceiving culture as an ideational subsystem within a vastly complex system, biological, social and symbolic, and grounding our abstract models in the concrete particularities of human social life, should make possible a continuing dialectic that yields deepening understanding. Whether in this quest the concept of culture is progressively refined, radically reinterpreted, or progressively extinguished will in the long run scarcely matter if along the way it has led us to ask strategic questions and to see connections that would otherwise have been hidden. (Keesing, 1974, p. 94)

Conceptual pluralisation represents a complex process that requires a careful epistemological attention. In her article "Step toward an Epistemological Pluralization of the Museum", Scholz (2017) analyses the concepts of cosmopolitan memory and shared heritage in order to reflect on the dilemmas that surround the museums and their working processes. Despite the abundance of studies on culture as an academic notion, there has been a very limited body of research that present the Herderian concept of culture within a historical and epistemological context. According to Despres (1995), a large portion of contemporary academic literature constantly befuddles its readers by giving to the concept of culture the status of a nice but mostly intractable idea. Culture will maintain this confusing, idle and unproductive status for as long as accommodates the structure of the general fetish with linear causality, control and bureaucratic paradigms. One cannot achieve theoretical precision on the concept of culture without understanding epistemological bounds and interfaces with recent historical dynamics.

In his statement, Sapir explicitly indicates the predictive nature of his reflection by using the verb "predict". As Force (1982, p. 464) states "a prophecy is a prediction and to prophesy is to predict". For this reason, in this article, the terms "prophecy" and "prediction" are used interchangeably.

Sapir's prediction hasn't an esoteric character. Based on his knowledge and the analysis of contemporary and historical variables, Sapir accurately predicted the trajectory of a concept that has always had a highly instable nature. In this specific case, one can discuss Sapir's statement as a scientific prophecy. According to Adam and Groves (2007), the rise of scientific prophecies has complex historical configurations interlaced with religious influences. Throughout centuries, many scholars have tried to predict and forecast phenomena. From a scientific and epistemological point of view, prophecies have become an object of major academic interest. While Taylor (1998) focuses on William James's prophecy on the demise of positivism in American psychology, Loye (2001) analyses Darwin's striking capacity for scientific prophecy. In the light of science, prophecies come into a close alignment with the historical analysis that requires a broad and informed consideration.

Predictions have a very difficult nature. Uncertainty adds another layer of complexity. When dealing with a limited body of knowledge, various competing theories, and consequently conflicting predictions may arise. Despite existing in natural sciences, conflicting predictions concern social sciences to a greater extent (Guillan, 2014).

Often scholars assume divergent positions regarding the same phenomena. Sapir's prophecy could be viewed as a bold and risky statement. Other philosophers and researchers had different views on the future of the concept of culture. During the 1930, scholars such as E.C. Cline called for the extension of the concept of culture:

Culture is the product of everyone to the extent that he uses his tools in his endeavors to make the best contributions that he can make. The concept of culture must, however, be extended still further. Culture is more than the product of individuals, more than the number of such products extant at any time; culture also includes the capacity to use for human betterment, individual and social, the existing cultural products. The measure of the level of culture in any given society must take cognizance of both these phases: the culture produced and the culture used. (Cline, 1939, p. 498)

Despite some similarities between Sapir's and Cline's views, one should acknowledge that the extension of the concept of culture and its pluralisation are not the same processes. The tension between conceptual narrowing and extending has divided the academic community. For example, Kessing (1974) argued that "the challenge in recent years has been to narrow the concept of "culture" so that it includes less and reveals more" (p. 73). Sapir's unique perspective goes beyond the dilemma between narrowing and extending conceptual links by accentuating the increasingly plural nature of culture

2. Materials and Methods

Unlike other notions, culture seems to have a significant epistemic element. For this reason, from a methodological perspective, this is a theoretical study that seeks to advance through historical epistemology the definition and the understanding of the concept of culture, more particularly, its pluralisation.

From the point of view of historical epistemology, scientific prophecies represent an extremely fruitful topic. According to Guillan (2014), explanation has a causal linkage of knowledge that is epistemologically much clearer. Predicting something, on the other hand, involves a careful consideration of multiple alternatives. Historical epistemology seems to defy this challenge by drawing on the strength of structural concepts in scientific discourses and knowledge. It may help explaining complex dynamics in social and academic environments, and their impact on conceptual frameworks.

Weir (2008) notes that historical epistemologists define scientific truth as a provisional product. Science is not stable or uniform. Historical epistemology brings to light internal ruptures that overturn previously accepted theories. Scientists and researchers need to acknowledge and work with these ruptures. The complex interplay of ruptures and continuities carries a tremendous amount of valuable information. Dissociating itself from the idea of science as the process of constitution of cumulative and permanent truths, historical epistemology uses ruptures and continuities to build a more complete and multi-dimensional picture of scientific discourse.

The dominant conception of prediction has a formal nature (Brenner, 2020). It seems important to emphasise that a prediction can be scientific or non-scientific. According to Guillan (2014), an essential feature of a prediction consists in the theoretical existence of multiple possibilities around a phenomenon that has not yet occurred. In the case of a scientific prediction, uncertainty emerges as a critical issue that may directly affect the production of scientific knowledge. As a consequence, uncertainty becomes a key element in the consideration of the epistemological limits of a prediction. The scientific requirements add a new layer of complexity.

The book chapter "Evolving realities: Scientific prediction and objectivity from the perspective of historical epistemology", by Brenner (2020), represents a particularly important reference for reflecting on the link between scientific prophecies, predictions and their understanding through the lens of historical epistemology. A scientific prediction remains highly dependent from the context in which its author lived and worked. Brenner (2020) gives a special attention to historical epistemology insights as a way to provide coherent accounts of genuine scientific knowledge and practice. For Brenner (2020), predictive power has a highly rational value despite the fact that it may vary during the course of history. Since predicting refers to a complex act of judging, researchers have at their disposal numerous techniques that need to be complemented by a deep historical analysis.

3. Results and Discussion

Sapir's prediction was not spontaneous. It had a very specific objective. Brenner (2020), defines a prediction as a singular statement deduced from a set of premises. Despite its relative lack of specific details, Sapir's statement gave important clues about the evolution of the concept of science. Guillan (2014) argues that any prediction about the future of science must

have a generic character. Cognitive indetermination dictates this rule because the more detailed the prediction is, the less confidence and precision one can attribute to it.

One cannot separate Sapir's prediction from the rest of his work and academic activity. Given the complexity of reality, formulating a singular concrete prediction necessarily must include a multilayered network of knowledge (Brenner, 2020). This network of knowledge requires a careful analysis that takes into consideration the rich historical and epistemological context in which Sapir developed his activity.

Brenner (2020) notes that one may define a prediction as a simple derivation of a consequence from a determined hypothesis. However, this definition does not capture the motivations of researchers and scientists. Brenner (2020) emphasises the temporal and psychological dimensions by describing predictions as surprising, informative and novel statements. As a matter of fact, to have value, predictions should introduce something new and meaningful to the existing body of knowledge.

3.1. *Sapir's Intellectual Baggage*

Sapir was born in Prussia in a family of Lithuanian Jews. During his childhood, the family moved several times, from Prussia to England, and then to the United States. At fourteen, he won a Pulitzer scholarship to attend the prestigious Horace Mann High School, but he used it to for his undergraduate education at Columbia University. Entering Columbia, Sapir completed in only three years a four-years Bachelor's in German. He received his M.A in German but his Ph.D. was in anthropology (Darnell, & Irvine, 1997). Sapir submitted in 1905 his master's thesis on Johann Gottfried Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (Reichel, 2020). His M.A. Degree marked the transition from linguistics to anthropology. This transition was a relatively smooth one. Sapir's thesis reflected the influence of his mentor, Franz Boas (Darnell, & Irvine, 1997).

Akil et al. (2018) establish parallels between the theories of Herder and Sapir. As a matter of fact, Sapir followed many Herderian postulates. For both of them, language became a critical component in the analysis of culture. To answer complex questions such as "How did language come about?", Sapir turned to the works of Herder (Frost, 1992). He conceptualised language as an operating guide to culture. The bound between language and culture served as an opening to psychological dimensions. While Sapir defended the relativity of thought, his work was predominantly concentrated towards cultural relativity. In this equation, languages came to carry the essential symbolic elements that guide cultures (Everett, 2013).

3.1.1. The Herderian Heritage

Herder has had an enormous influence on the concept of culture. The Boasian school of American anthropology actively used the Herderian notions to establish the most influential modern meanings of culture (Kroeber, 1992). The notion of *Volksgeist* has a special importance in the Herderian tradition. Herder argued for the existence of tight links between a nation's language and culturally influenced cognitive styles. Since individuals learn to think and to perceive reality through words, language represents an essential element in the formation of the whole of human knowledge (Omenukwa, 2023).

Sapir's M.A. thesis was on Herder's theory of language. His fascination for the German culture started long before meeting Boas. However, it was Boas who introduced Sapir to anthropological texts that were profoundly influenced by German traditions (Gonçalves, 2012). Sapir's concept of (genuine) culture has had a critical importance in his work (Brown, 2008). Without making any reference to Herder, Sapir promoted ideas that have an explicit Herderian tone: "To deny to the genius of a people an ultimate psychological significance and to refer it to the specific historical development of that people is not, after all is said and done, to analyze it out of existence" (Sapir, 1924, p. 406). By using not only similar notions and but also arguments, Sapir had a great contribution the popularisation of the Herderian concept of culture.

3.1.2. Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language*

During the beginning of the 20th century, Sapir had a major role in elevating language as an essential determinant that shapes our perception of reality and the world around us (Zamruddin, 2017). The controversial link between culture and language has deep roots that can be traced back to Herder's *Treatise on the Origin of Language* (Lafontant, 2002).

At its root, Sapir's concept of culture has a great Herderian load. According to Solanki (2022), in his prize-winning essay written for the Berlin Academy of Arts and Sciences, Herder insisted not only on the link between language and culture but also on his unique

conceptualisation of cultural diversity. Besides analysing the origins of language, the Treatise features Herder's aural theory of cultural diversity built around arguments that critically reflect on the encounters between Europeans and non-Europeans. Unlike most of his contemporaries, Herder did not establish immutable hierarchies and did not conceptualise cultural differences in terms of visible features such as skin colour.

"We can listen, and, as it were, listening, think of words much longer, almost perpetually. - Hearing is, therefore, to the soul, what green, as the central colour, is to the eye. Man is a creature formed for speech" (Herder, 1772/1827, p. 54). One of the main features of Herder's Treatise on the Origin of Language is listening to difference. As Solanski (2022) argues, listening to difference "involves an openness to listening to the voices and sounds of the othered by listeners who recognise their distinct situated, embodied positionalities. It offers alternate possibilities to conceive of human diversity as continually in formation" (p. 1). For Herder, audition is more important than vision. "Hearing is the central sense, with respect to the time to in which it operates, and therefore the sense for language" (Herder, 1772/1827, p. 54). Through his emphasis on fluid dimensions such as time, Herder attributes to the act of hearing/listening a new layer of complexity and importance in the equation of culture.

"The arts and sciences, culture and language, have refined nations upon one grand system of progression, the most refined principle of cultivation, which nature could have selected (Herder, 1772/1827, p. 114). Language served as a starting point to understand cultural differences. Herder established a complex conceptualisation of cultural diversity based on the articulation of voice and situated performances of spoken and sung language. He rejected the ideas of hierarchy and regarded cultural diversity as a process that is continually in formation (Solanki, 2022). The idea of continuity seems to have links to the phenomena of pluralisation of culture which has a continuous multilayered dynamic. "The Roman obtained his culture from Greece, the Greek from Asia and Egypt. Thus, the chain is continually extending from its first link" (Herder, 1772/1827, p. 108).

For Herder, language serves as a portal for understanding and analyzing the human mind and nature. In the Treatise on the Origin of Language, he uses the expression "language of the soul". The triad language - soul - culture acquires much weight as a result of its sensitive interdependence. In his analysis of Herder's *Ursprung der Sprache*, Sapir (1907) emphasises the role of the individual and the individual differences by going beyond the simplistic readings that remains limited to the concept of nation. Sapir (1907) presents Herder's chain of linguistic processes through "the development in the individual, in the family, and in the nation" (p. 27).

Sapir's post-M.A. conversion linguistics-anthropology represents a complex set of continuities and discontinuities. According to Reichel (2020), in the analysis of the Treatise on the Origin of Language, Sapir dismisses many of Herder's claims such as a penchant for fluctuations in primitive languages and discards the allochronisms in Herder's theory of the origin of language. However, Sapir adopted the Herderian concept of culture with a highly individualistic character and used it throughout his career.

3.2. *Tracing the Pluralisation of Culture*

The link between Sapir and Herder goes beyond the importance of language in cultural phenomena. Analysing Sapir's prophecy of the pluralisation and fragmentation of the concept of culture requires a close examination of the Herderian ideas that allowed the beginning of this process. I propose to clarify the mystery behind the global popularisation of the Herderian concept of culture by restoring its historical and epistemological context.

3.2.1. The Herderian Concept of Culture

Sapir, as a Boasian relativist (Handler, 1989), was heavily influenced by his teacher and mentor. For example, both Boas and Sapir emphasised the link between culture and language (Rhode, Voyer, & Gleibs, 2016). This link had an enormous significance in Herder's work. As a matter of fact, to a certain extent, the Herderian ideas can be seen as an anticipation to the theories developed by Sapir and his students according to which language determines psychological processes of thought and behaviour (King, 2016). Despite assuming a critical position on multiple of Herder's views, Sapir actively employed Herder's spiritual notion of a culture's soul. The spiritual dimension obtained a special position in the conception of culture developed by Sapir (Pupavac, 2012). This could be explained by his fascination for psychology discussed in the next chapters.

"No thought of the human soul was ever lost, but also no perfect skill came suddenly into existence" (Herder, 1772/1827, p. 108). By underlying the role of education, "Herder's

characterisation of humans as essentially cultural beings” (Gare, 2016, p. 309) goes hand in hand with Sapir’s conceptions. In his prophecy, Sapir (1934) explicitly uses the word “cultures”. Given his academic background, one can interpret it as reference to the Herderian ideas. It seems important to emphasise that Herder was the first to use the word “cultures” in the plural sense (Gare, 2016).

3.2.2. The Sapirian Concept of Culture

Thanks to Sapir, the term “culture” became a social science instrument (Begaye, 2007). Culture acquired an unseen importance and power in science. “Sapir’s concept of culture as something active, which each person interacts with individually” (Ramage, & Shipp, 2009, p. 278) carries a cryptic Herderian legacy that has remained largely overlooked.

For Sapir “language acts like a polarizing lens on a camera in filtering reality” (Zamruddin, 2017, p. 83). In other words, culture became a multi-functional tool for understanding the surrounding world. Sapir’s amorphous concept suits culture for numerous purposes. Given the subjective and abstract features of the concept of culture, contemporary human beings have started to define culture by what sort of music they listen, what sort of television they watch, what sort of clothes they buy. As a consequence, nowadays we talk about hip-hop culture, Trekkie culture, “tweener” culture and NASCAR culture” (Steigerwald, 2004).

The concept of culture “is necessarily something of a statistical fiction and it is easy to see that the social psychologist and the psychiatrist must eventually induce him to carefully reconsider his terms” (Sapir, 1932, p. 237). By adding a very explicit and powerful psychological element, Sapir made the concept of culture more permeable to subjective interpretations. Generally speaking, “culture is whatever we want it to be” (Steigerwald, 2004, p. 28). In this way, the pluralisation of culture is inevitable. Pluralisation made the concept of culture more multi-functional than ever. Steigerwald (2004) orients our attention to the lack of precision surrounding the concept of culture. The psychological element encourages and intensifies this tendency: “Culture, then, varies infinitely, not only as to manifest content but as to the distribution of psychologic emphases on the elements and implications of this content” (Sapir, 1932, p. 239). With respect to the definition of culture, Sapir (1932) makes a clear delimitation between the “the cultures of groups and the cultures of individuals” (p. 239) which reflects an intersection between anthropology and psychology during the twentieth century.

3.3. Contextualizing the Prophecy

Throughout his career Sapir showed a great interest in psychology. The analysed prophecy is a part of Sapir’s 1934 article “The Emergence of the Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures” which was published in the *Journal of Social Psychology*. One needs to be aware that Sapir’s prophecy was not written in a vacuum. According to Stern (2022), during the 1930s, Sapir built his theoretisations around a unique construction of the individual as an active shaper of history, rethinking the concept of culture itself.

Given the similarity between the Sapirian and Herderian concepts of culture, the historical and epistemological context of psychologisation of anthropology emerged partly out of the Herderian heritage. In his 1934 paper, Sapir gave a special attention to psychological processes in order to go beyond the formal statements of culture and understand the interconnections between behavioural systems. Psychologised anthropology came out as response to the epistemological problems and dilemmas of the twentieth century (Spindler, 1978).

3.3.1. Psychologisation as an Historical and Epistemological Process

The penetration of psychological knowledge into academic circles and cultural milieus induces a new set of questions and problems. Similarly to Fils (2019), one can read the process of psychologisation from an epistemological point of view. Psychologisation reveals many epistemic paradoxes in science (De Vos, 2011). At the same time, this phenomenon seems to solve the problems that the academic community faces. In fact, “psychologizing is an epistemic adjustment” (Margolis, 1997, p. 301).

Society does not remain isolated from the changes that occur in science. Psychologisation of society can be defined as an epistemological expansion (Adolfsson, 2022). It inevitably leads to pluralisation of concepts, models and frameworks. Psychologizing logic and knowledge may include diverse positions and currents (Margolis, 1997). Epistemologically speaking, psychologisation represents a complex process that has occurred over a long period of time through the (re)interpenetration of the existing scientific

approaches.

3.3.2. The Role of Psychology in the 20th Century United States

Due to the unique Protestant and Jewish context, America's psychologised discussions of human nature have a special importance (Heinze, 2001). The capitalistic mentality also encouraged this tendency (Parker, 2010). In the twentieth century, American anthropology started to focus on psychological questions (Spindler, 1978). Leading anthropologists such as Sapir oriented their efforts towards understanding the psychological dilemmas and contradictions of American life (Stern, 2022). In 1932, Sapir wrote for the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*:

There is much tacit mythology in such hugely complex societies as our own which makes it possible for the personal significance of sub-cultures to be overlooked. For each individual, the commonly accepted fund of meanings and values tends to be powerfully specialized or emphasized or contradicted by types of experience and modes of interpretation that are far from being the property of all men. (Sapir, 1932, p. 238)

Psychology became a major concern in many academic circles. The interaction between psychological behaviour and cultural processes raises multiple unsolved problems. If culture consists of complex configurations of activities, as Sapir theorised, then mental development varies according to random cultural and psychological fluctuations (Murray, 1995). Combining psychology and anthropology brings to light several historical and epistemological questions that may lead to an engaged process of inquiry. Psychologisation has become a worldwide phenomenon. Lerner and Rivkin-Fish (2021) link the process of psychologisation with the intensive Americanisation that occurs in the contemporary era.

3.3.3. Psychologisation of American Anthropology

The interest for indigenous populations reinforced Herder's role in American academia. Dueck (2020) classifies Herder as the father of the indigenous psychology. The author emphasises how Herder focused on the plurality of cultures and the sense of belonging to a particular community through the invisible ties of language, history, habit, tradition, memory and feeling. The fascination for indigenous psychology is a stable feature of Sapir's oeuvre. Early works also show this tendency:

We may conceive, somewhat schematically, the development of culture and language to have taken place as follows: A primitive group, among whom even the beginnings of culture and language are as yet hardly in evidence, may nevertheless be supposed to behave in accordance with a fairly definite group psychology, determined, we will suppose, partly by race mind, partly by physis environment. On the basis of this group psychology, whatever tendencies it may possess, a language and a culture will slowly develop. As both of these are directly determined, to begin with, by fundamental factors of race and physical environment, they will parallel each other somewhat closely, so that the forms of culture activity will be reflected in the grammatical system of the language. (Sapir, 1912, p. 240)

Sapir wrote his prediction in a unique historical and epistemological context. He had an essential role in refining the link between culture and psychology. American Anthropology became more permeable to the ideas that originated in psychology. According to Spindler (1978), the psychologising of anthropology had a powerful effect in the American academic environments where it found a generally supportive response, while in other countries, such as the United Kingdom, this trend went largely unheeded. By the mid-thirties, the so-called personality and culture school gained a continuously growing popularity in the United States. Conceptual exchange between psychology and anthropology was very strong. In 1948, the Boasian anthropologist Clyde Kluckhohn wrote for American Psychologist: "We have given you the concept of culture which is now part of psychological thinking. We ask from you in return a formulation of the human nature which is the raw stuff that all cultures act upon" (p. 442).

The potentially problematic psychologisation of scientific disciplines did not start recently (Busse, 2017). Psychologizing logic and knowledge may occur under many forms. From a contextual point of view, one should not underestimate the impact that psychoanalysis had on science during the first half of the twentieth century which started to actively psychologise the individual experience (Parker, 2010). Nowadays psychological theories dominate an increasing number of social and individual spheres (Lerner, & Rivkin-Fish, 2021). Psychologisation is a powerful process with deep and long-term effects on academic,

political and social phenomena (De Vos, 2011).

4. Conclusions

The predictive power motivates and encourages the pursuit of science (Brenner, 2020). This paper presents Sapir's prediction and its remarkable accuracy by taking into consideration the historical background in which it was produced. As Brenner (2020) notes, successful predictions have an impressive power by highly reinforcing our belief in scientific classifications and revoking the idea of theories as purely artificial systems. The scientific prophecy made by Sapir in 1934 may astonish us by its accuracy. Today, nearly a century after this prophecy, the pluralisation of the concept of culture seems as a natural process. The scientific community has given up the search for a singular notion. Authors such as Wijsen and Tanner (2002) firmly state that a unitary concept of culture cannot emerge from any detailed and rigorous research into any society. Even in the smallest and hypothetically most uniform societies, a singular construct cannot be achieved.

Concepts belong to the historical and epistemological contexts in which they emerged and evolved. "Sapir's individualistic concept of culture" (Stern, 2022, p. 171) has an enormous theoretical importance. It is essential to position Sapir's prophecy in its scientific, historical and epistemological contexts, to consider what it can teach us about the value of our conceptual frameworks.

The pluralisation of the concept of culture occurred through its gradual psychologisation. Sapir's analysis of Herder's Treatise on the Origin of Language played an important part in his academic career. It marked significant interdisciplinary transitions. Despite continuous shifts, throughout his life, Sapir remained faithful to the Herderian conception of culture. In the light of these links to Herder and his pioneer ideas on the plural term "cultures", the prophecy of conceptual pluralisation acquires new meanings and explanations. Sapir's interest in psycho-logical variables goes hand in hand with his individualistic conception of culture. Its further evolution and pluralisation need a careful analysis of historical and epistemological contexts and their intersections

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