

PSYCHOLOGY AROUND THE WORLD

BEHAVIOR ANALYSIS IN ITALY

EL ANÁLISIS DE LA CONDUCTA EN ITALIA

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to outline the development of behaviorism and behavior analysis and therapy in Italy. The behaviorist tradition is relatively young among Italian psychologists for two reasons related to the Italian cultural environment of the first half of the century. First, the idealistic viewpoint in philosophy, which claims the primacy of philosophy over science has dominated Italian scholarship. Second, during the fascist age psychology was almost eliminated, despite its vigor at the beginning of the 20th century. Because of the cultural isolation of those years of fascism, psychology and most everything else emanating from foreign countries, especially from Anglo-Saxon ones, was banned. The year Italian behaviorism born was 1942, when Virgilio Lazzeroni published a paper in which he claimed that behavior was an appropriate subject matter for psychological research. The tree of Italian behaviorism has two main roots: Pavlovian-reflexological-psychiatric and Skinnerian-operant-psychological. These traditions developed independently until the end of the 1970s, when they joined together. Important milestones in the dissemination of behaviorism in Italy are marked by scientific meetings which have seen many important members of the international behavioral community as invited guests. The first scientific association that explicitly traced its roots, or at least part of them, within behaviorism was the Società Italiana di Terapia Comportamentale (SITC - Italian Society for Behavior Therapy). The association that gathered Italian scholars who recognize behaviorism and behavior analysis as their scientific model, however, was the Associazione Italiana di Modificazione del Comportamento (Italian Association for Behavior Analysis and Modification or AIAMC). Founded in 1977, AIAMC has promoted behavior analysis and therapy in Italy through the organization of national and international meetings, four-year post-graduate courses in behavior analysis and therapy, and contacts with other national and international

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behavioral associations. Almost all the major texts in behaviorism and behavior analysis have been translated into Italian. Many of the people in the organizations already mentioned have translated these texts. Furthermore, many other titles also have been originally produced in Italy. These latter texts cover issues related to theoretical, clinical, educational and organizational topics.

Key words: Italy, behavior analysis, history.

RESUMEN

El propósito de este artículo es trazar el desarrollo del conductismo, del análisis de la conducta y de la terapia en Italia. La tradición conductista es relativamente joven entre los psicólogos italianos debido a dos razones relacionadas al ambiente cultural italiano de la primera mitad del siglo. Primero, la perspectiva idealista de la filosofía, la cual clama que la supremacía de la filosofía sobre la ciencia ha dominado en la erudición italiana. Segundo, durante la era fascista, la psicología fue prácticamente eliminada, a pesar de su vigor a principios del siglo XX. Debido a un aislamiento cultural en esos años de fascismo, la psicología fue prohibida, así como también casi todo lo que provenía de culturas extranjeras, especialmente de las anglosajonas. El nacimiento del conductismo italiano fue en 1942, cuando Virgilio Lazzeroni publicó un artículo en donde establecía que la conducta era un objeto de estudio apropiado para la investigación psicológica. El árbol del conductismo italiano tiene dos raíces principales: la raíz Pavloviana-reflexológica-psiquiátrica y la raíz Skinneriana-operante-psicológica. Estas tradiciones se desarrollaron independientemente hasta que se unieron a finales de los años setentas. Los acontecimientos importantes que contribuyeron en la difusión del conductismo en Italia, fueron reuniones científicas en las que se invitó a miembros destacados de la comunidad internacional conductista. La primera asociación que hundió sus raíces en el conductismo italiano fue la Società Italiana di Terapia Comportamentale (SITC- Sociedad Italiana para la Terapia del Comportamiento), la cual estaba integrada por eruditos italianos quienes reconocían el conductismo y el análisis de la conducta como su modelo científico. Sin embargo, la Associazione Italiana di Modificazione del Comportamento (Asociación Italiana para el Análisis y la Modificación de la Conducta), la cual fue fundada en 1977, promovió el análisis y la terapia de la conducta en Italia, a través de la organización de eventos nacionales e internacionales, así como también con el establecimiento de cursos de posgrado de cuatro años de duración y mediante contactos con otras asociaciones nacionales e internacionales. Casi todos los textos sobre conductismo y análisis de la conducta han sido traducidos al italiano por las organizaciones mencionadas anteriormente. Además, muchos otros títulos se han producido en Italia, y versan sobre temas teóricos, clínicos, educativos y organizacionales.

Palabras clave: Italia, análisis de la conducta, historia.

The development of behavioral psychology in Italy is best understood by first outlining the birth and development of Italian psychology, which in turn needs to be located in the history of the late 1800s. I thus will start from the beginning, comparing what was happening in Italy in the second half of 19th century with what was happening in the rest of Europe.

The Historical Context

It is often surprising for people from the Americas to learn that Italy became an unified nation only in 1861, after two wars of independence. In the north the war was against the Austro-Hungarian empire and, in the south the war was against the kingdom of the Bourbons, a royal family of Spanish derivation. Italian unity was more real on paper than in fact. First, many regions of Italy did not yet belong to the Italian State. For example, Rome and its surroundings, where the King-Pope lived, and some parts of the Venice area, toward the north-east, still were under the Asburg dominion (the house of my grandparents, was at that time still in Austria). These latter places were annexed to the Kingdom of Italy only after World War I. Rome became the capital of our country after a war against the Pope in 1870. Why do I spend time talking about the history of Italy in the second half of the 1800s? It seems to me that if we want to understand why Italian psychology developed as it did, it is important to understand the cultural background from which it developed.

In many respects, Italy was a very divided country: different languages, different cultures, different levels of economic development, different cuisine and life styles, different political traditions, with no melting pot where all these differences could be mixed and assimilated. Many of them remain today. The King, coming from Savoy, was not really able to unify Italy. He was concerned with many problems, both foreign affairs important to completing the task of unification, and domestic problems, like illiteracy, poverty, bands of roving outlaws in the South and so on. Furthermore, relationships between the government and the Catholic Church, after the conquest of Rome, were extremely bad. It was in this political climate that Italian psychology was born, basically in the same era as it was born in the rest of Europe. In 1870 Roberto Ardigò published *Psychology as a positive science*, and in 1873 Giuseppe Sergi published *Principles of Psychology*, just one year before the publication of *Gruendzüge der Physiologischen Psychologie* by Wilhelm Wundt, the man who is celebrated as the father of scientific psychology. Actually, though, Sergi was not a psychologist, he was a high school teacher of philosophy.

The important point here is that psychology was born in Italy under a very different cultural milieu than that in Germany, England, or France. The heated debates occurring in those countries concerning such issues as the

associationist view, materialistic philosophy, and the Darwinian theory of evolution, came to Italy only softly reflected and these debates did not affect the traditional spiritualistic attitude of Italian philosophers.

R. Ardigò (1828-1920) the positivist philosopher is considered the father of Italian psychology. Even though he had a theoretical orientation more than an experimental one, he conducted interesting research in the field of perception. Another important feature of his work is the fact that, though his starting point of view was a positivistic one, he refused to reduce psychology to physiology.

By the beginning of the 20th century, psychology was progressively developing in Italy. In 1905 the journal *Rivista di Psicologia* (Psychological Review) was founded and the *V International Congress of Psychology* took place in Rome. In the same year three new professorships in psychology were created in Italian Universities.

After World War I Italy experienced a political period called "fascism" which lasted for 20 years. The fascist party achieved power in a non-democratic way, that is, with no elections, and imposed its new standards in all areas of Italian life, including cultural ones. The cultural climate became hostile to psychology, particularly because the official ideology or philosophy of fascism was neoidealism, which held strong attitudes against science and imposed the primacy of that philosophy on the science. Furthermore, it should be remembered that, because of the cultural isolation that characterized the fascist period, the circulation of ideas was strongly hampered. This suppression of the exchange of knowledge included almost all material that originated from foreign countries, particularly from the Anglo-Saxon ones. Fascism was ambivalent toward psychology, directing considerable criticism against psychology as a science and against its basic research, but at the same time attending carefully to its many possible applications, especially in relation to industry and war.

Actually, at the beginning of the fascist era there were many professors and lecturers of psychology in several universities. By the end of that era, however, there were only two: Professor Ponzo in Rome and Professor Gemelli in Milan. In the 1920s, Professor Gemelli founded the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and in 1927 he established a laboratory of psychology. The Catholic University, as a private university, was powerful and independent from politic power, therefore Gemelli could keep on working both in basic and applied psychology, counterbalancing at least some of the negative effects of the state of isolation in which academic psychology found itself because of the aforementioned lack of scientific exchange with foreign research centers.

Two other factors during the fascist era cannot be neglected. First, as a result of persecution, many Jewish professors were forced to resign, to

abandon their research work and to escape abroad (for example, the famous group of physicians of Via Panisperna went to the United States). Second, some professors refused to take the oath of allegiance to the fascist government and consequently were stripped of their position.

Considering all of these factors, it should not be too surprising that behavioral psychology remained unknown until 1942, when Virginio Lazzeroni introduced the term "psychology of behavior," referring for the first time in Italy to behavior as the main goal of psychology.

The Beginning

In 1992, at the *Behaviorism at Fifty in Italy* Congress in Siena, the homeland of Virginio Lazzeroni, we celebrated the 50th birthday of Italian behaviorism. Actually, Italian behavioral psychology started to develop in significant ways some time after 1942, most notably in the second half of the 1960s. These developments may be traced to two sources. The Institute of General and Clinical Psychology of Siena was for many years a focal point for conceptual work and research related to behavior theory and behavior therapy. In this same period the psychiatrist Gastone Canziani arrived in Sicily from the "mitteleuropean" Trieste, and started teaching psychology at the University of Palermo, where he founded the Institute of Psychology and a laboratory in which experimental investigations of Pavlovian conditioning were conducted. Curiously, he had a psychology appointment under the allied administration that was called AM-chair. In 1943 the allied forces, British and American, landed in Sicily and conquered the country, driving the Germans out. They established a temporary administration to allow people "normal" living. To distinguish what was provided by the new administration the prefix AM was used: for example the money was called AM-Lire (normally the currency was Italian Lire). By analogy, the professorship was called AM-chair.

Italian behaviorism has had two main traditions. One is the Pavlovian-reflexological-psychiatric, divided into two groups, one in Milan and the other in Rome. The other is the Skinnerian-operant-psychological, divided also in two groups, one in Milan, the other in Padua. These traditions followed independent paths until the end of the 1970s, when three of them joined in a common path. The fourth one followed a cognitive path.

In 1965, at the *XV Congress of Italian Society of Neurology*, which took place in Salice Terme, a symposium was devoted to "Conditioned reflexes: Update on the theoretical experimental and clinical problems of the superior nervous activity." Among others, the Soviet Sokolov and the Italians Arian, Bisiach, De Franco and Goldwurm participated in the symposium. In 1967 in Sassari and Rome the International Congress *Advances in Learning and Memory*

was held, with many distinguished Italian and foreign scholars in attendance. Among these notables were E. A. Astratyan, D. Bovet (a Nobel Prize winner), E. Caracciolo, M. Cesa-Bianchi, H. F. Harlow, G. Kimble, G. Oleron, Alberto Oliverio and Jean Piaget.

In 1968, in Milan, Goldwurm e Cazzullo organized the International Congress of *Collegium Internationale Activitatis Nervosae Superioris* (CIANS). Gelder, Rachman and Wolpe, among others, attended the Congress and presented their work on the clinical applications of systematic desensitization.

At the end of the 1960s, the Brazilian behaviorist Isaia Pessotti came to Italy and held a series of seminars in conjunction with the internship activities of the Institute of Psychology of the Medical School of the University of Milan. While there, he contributed to the establishment of a laboratory for the experimental analysis of behavior. In 1970, the volume by Pessotti *Introduction to the Study of the Operant Behavior* was published in Italian. After he retired from teaching in Brazil, Pessotti came to Italy several times. He is now a Professor of Psychology at the University of Urbino. In 1970, again in Milan, within the Congress of *Psychiatry and Neurology of Italian and French Societies*, there was a section devoted to "Therapies of Counterconditioning of Neuroses".

In 1971 two important books were published: Skinner's *Science and Human Behavior* and Eysenck and Rachman's *The Causes and Cures of Neuroses*, that represents the first official introduction of behavior therapy in Italy. Also, in 1971 the Roman group gave rise to the Italian Society of Behavior Therapy (SITC) whose first president was Vittorio Guidano. The Roman group (S. Borgo, V. Guidano, G. Liotti, R. Mosticoni, M. Reda, L. Sibilia) was concerned primarily with clinical issues and gave progressively increasing attention to the rising of cognitive psychology.

In 1972 Victor Meyer conducted a series of lectures on behavior therapy at the School of Specialization in Psychology of the University of Milan. In that same year, Ettore Caracciolo organized an International Conference on *Recent Trends in Psychology of Learning* at the European Center of the Education of Villa Falconieri in Frascati. It was at this latter conference that Fred Keller first visited Italy to speak at a psychology conference. Many other distinguished scholars in the field of learning attended the conference, including H. J. Eysenck, Gregory Kimble, Barbel Inhelder, Victor Meyer, Jean-Francois LeNy, Joseph Nuttin, Pierre and Geneviève OITron, Isaia Pessotti, Leo Postman, Marc Richelle, and Slama-Cazacu.

A consequence of this conference was the establishment of a behaviorist group in Milan at the Institute of Psychology of the School of Medicine around Ettore Caracciolo. This group developed theoretical issues and applications of the analysis of behavior, with particular emphasis on the areas

of both normal and special education.

In the mid-1970s, two northern schools, the Pavlovian-reflexological-psychiatric, and the Skinnerian-operant-psychological, joined together to form the nucleus of the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification. In the same period another group of radical behaviorists was meeting at the University of Padua: Roberto Anchisi, Beatrice Bauer, Aldo Galeazzi, Paolo Meazzini, Ezio Sanavio, and Salvatore Soresi. Through meetings and symposia they disseminated behavior modification theory and practice in northeast Italy. In 1977, during the *XVII Congress of the Italian Society of Psychology* (SIPs) at Viareggio, for the first time in Italy there was a session on behavioral psychology, chaired by Virgilio Lazzeroni.

Taking Off

In Verona, at the end of 1977, the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification (AIAMC) was founded. Roberto Anchisi was the first president: Paolo Meazzini, Gian Franco Goldwurm, Paolo Moderato, Ezio Sanavio, Anna Meneghelli, and Daniela Sacchi followed him as presidents.

In February 1978 an International Meeting on Psychology of Learning and Behavior Modification in the Educational Treatment of Disadvantaged Children was held in Taormina. All of the scholars who, directly or indirectly, had contributed to the birth of the association participated. The meeting, which greatly helped spread behavior analysis in Italy, included presentations by Roberto Anchisi, Beatrice Bauer, Ettore Caracciolo, Cesare Cornoldi, Aldo Galeazzi, R. Larcán, Paolo Meazzini, Paolo Moderato, Luigi Pedrabissi, Silvia Perini, Francesco Rovetto, and Salvatore Soresi.

In June 1978, in Venice, an International Congress on Learning: Theory, Experimentation, Applications in Clinical, Educational, and Social Settings occurred. Among the many international scholars in attendance at the Congress were H. J. Eysenck, Daniel K. and Susan O' Leary, S. Rachman, Arthur Staats, and Travis Thompson.

There were many conferences and other important events for behavior analysis in the early 1980s. In 1980 the *First Congress of the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification* (AIAMC) took place in Rome with special guests H. J. Eysenck and Brenda Milner.

In 1981 the *II Congress of AIAMC* occurred in Turin with Joseph Wolpe as the special guest of the Congress. Ten years after its foundation SITC modified its name to Italian Society of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy (SITCC). In 1982 the *10th Congress of the European Association for Behavior Therapy* was held in Rome. In July, 1983 *The First Meeting of the European Group of Experimental Behavior Analysis* was organized in Liege by Marc

Richelle. Many behavior analysts came from all the world, including B. F. Skinner, along with L. V. Baker, Derek Blackman, Robert Boakes, Arne Brekstad, Charles Catania, Steve Hayes, Fergus Lowe, Linda Parrott Hayes, Ullin Place, Emilio Ribes, Roberto Ruiz, and Terje Sagvolden. This meeting was a milestone for Italian behavior analysis, because for the first time an Italian group of behaviorists, the historical nucleus of the Institute of Psychology of the University of Messina (Caracciolo, Larcán, Moderato, Perini and collaborators), went abroad to present their research and discuss it with behavior analysts from all over the world. It also was the first opportunity for Italian behavior analysts to meet B. F. Skinner.

The Age of Maturity

The mid-1980s witnessed a maturing of behavior analysis in Italy. In Autumn, 1983 the *III Congress of AIAMC* was held in Alta Fiumara. The topic of the Congress was *New Perspectives in Behavior Science: Normality and Pathology of Learning*. Special guests of the Congress were Sidney W. Bijou and Marc Richelle. The proceedings were published in an accompanying volume. In 1984, at the University of Siena, within the Institute of General and Clinic Psychology chaired by Virgilio Lazzeroni the first program in Behavior Therapy was started. Also in 1984, the journal *Terapia del Comportamento* (TC), edited by Paolo Meazzini and Gian Franco Goldwurm, published its first issue. In 1986, the *IV Congress of AIAMC* was held in Milan. The theme was *Behavior Therapy and Modification in the 80s*. Special guests were C. Dostalek, R. P. Liberman, and P. V. Simonov. The proceedings also were published in an accompanying volume.

In July, 1988 Marc Richelle organized in Liege the *Second European Meeting of the European Group of Experimental Behavior Analysis*. This meeting was the most important European meeting for behavior analysts working in continental Europe. At this meeting, participants were able to interact with such distinguished overseas colleagues as Charles Catania, Philip Heline, H. S. Pennypacker, Murray Sidman, Emilio Ribes, Roberto Ruiz, and Joao Claudio Todorov. A contingent of Italian behavior analysts (Caracciolo, Moderato, Perini and collaborators) attended and presented at the conference. In the same year G. F. Goldwurm founded in Milan the Italian Society of Behavior Medicine and Health Psychology.

In 1988 the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification, the Italian Society of Biofeedback and the Italian Society of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapy organized in Treviso a joint meeting on *Health and Life Style*.

In 1989, Latini Dies, the Association of Behavioral Psychotherapy of Latin Language Countries, was founded and held its first Congress in Rome.

Ramón Bayes, Leonidas Castro-Camacho, J. Cottraux, O. Fontaine, J. Miguel-Tobal, Emilio Ribes and many Italian scholars from behavioral and cognitive areas attended this first conference that was to become a biennial series. Subsequent conferences have taken place in Sitges, Spain (1991), Toulouse, France (1993), Guadalajara, Mexico (1995), and Cascais, Portugal (1997).

In 1992, the AIAMC changed its constitution and its name, becoming the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification and Behavior and Cognitive Therapy. In the same year the European Association for Behavior Therapy added the Cognitive term to its name to become the European Association for Behavior and Cognitive Therapies (EABCT).

In 1992, thanks to the contribution of the University of Guadalajara, *Acta Comportamentalia*, a Latin language journal of behavior analysis, was founded and presented during the first Congress on *Behaviorism and Behavior Sciences*, which took place in Guadalajara. *Acta Comportamentalia* is edited by Emilio Ribes, with Paolo Moderato co-editing the Italian section.

In December 1992, in Siena, the *VII Congress of the Italian Association of Behavior Analysis and Modification* honored Virgilio Lazzeroni and celebrated 50 years of behaviorism in Italy.

The *VIII Congress of the AIAMC* took place in Palermo in 1994, within the *Second Congress on Behaviorism and Behavior Sciences*, a series begun by Peter Harzem to stimulate discussion of issues related to behaviorism by scholars from around the world. The third Congress occurred in Yokohama in 1996 and the next one will take place in Seville in 1998. The development of the Italian behavioral psychology was testified to by the presence of so many international scholars, a group one can usually meet only at the Association for Behavior Analysis (ABA). There is not room to mention everyone who attended, but no one present will forget the day that Fred Keller gave his last public lecture at the 1994 congress, a few months before his death in the Spring of 1995.

In 1995 a new journal started: *Psicoterapia cognitiva e Comportamentale*, edited by E. Sanavio. In 1997, 20 years after the AIAMC foundation, the congress of EABCT was held in Venice. Behavior analysts and therapists from 39 different countries came to Venice, making it much more than a strictly European Congress.

Today

Behavioral psychology in Italy is still a minority within the mainstream of Italian psychology, which is most strongly represented by the psychoanalytic and systemic approaches. Nonetheless, behavioral psychology is widespread

and offers many strengths to psychology as a whole in Italy. For example, it contributes strongly to such areas as short-term therapy, special education, organizational behavior and ergonomics, and methodology. Thus, behavior analysis is easily exported to many different areas in which Italian psychologists work. The AIAMC is a rather large association with about 600 members. Within AIAMC there are different subgroups: cognitive, behavioral, behavioral-cognitive, and so on. The AIAMC is the Italian Chapter of ABA. The subgroup concerned with behavior analysis involves a minority of the members of AIAMC but this does not prevent the organization of successful meetings such as the one in Palermo, thereby allowing us to continue research in the emergent fields of BA and to apply effective treatment procedures in different areas. If I were asked to describe a characteristic feature of Italian behaviorism, I would say that it is humanistic. This term aptly defines not only the work of the great Italian Leonardo Da Vinci, master of arts, fine painter, engineer and inventor of amazing machines and apparatus, but it as well defines the attitude and the personality of B. F. Skinner, too often misrepresented as a man other than as a scientist.

Classic Behavioral Literature in Italian

Work by Italians in behavior analysis covers many areas, such as theoretical and methodological, clinical, educational, organizational. It therefore should come as no surprise that many classic works in behavioral psychology and behavior analysis have been translated in Italian, including the following: *Lo sviluppo infantile: una analisi comportamentale* by Bijou and Baer, *Personalità e psicoterapia* by Dollard and Miller, *Principi del comportamento* by Hull, *Imitazione e apprendimento sociale* by Miller and Dollard, *Scienza e comportamento, Il comportamento verbale, 50 anni di comportamentismo, La scienza del comportamento, Studi e ricerche (Cumulative record)* by Skinner, *Il comportamentismo sociale* by Staats, *L'uomo psicologico e Il comportamento intenzionale* by Tolman, *Il comportamentismo* by Watson, and *Tecniche di terapia del comportamento* by Wolpe.

The areas covered by Italian work in behavior analysis and therapy range from basic to applied issues, for instance biofeedback (Anchisi & Gambotto Dessy, 1996), teacher behavior (Ballanti, 1975), mental retardation (Caracciolo & Rovetto, 1988), sexual behavior (Dettore, 1991), applied methodology (Di Nuovo, 1992), behavioral medicine (Goldwurm & Sanavio, 1994), relaxation training (Goldwurm, Sacchi, & Scariato 1986), history of behaviorism (Lazzeroni, 1966, 1985), classroom management (Meazzini, 1978, 1980), anxiety and phobias (Meazzini & Galeazzi, 1978) memory (Moderato, 1989), learning (Moderato, 1995; Moderato & Pino, 1997) theoretical and

epistemological issues (Moderato & Sirigatti, 1995), behavioral ergonomics (Moderato & Russo, 1997), parent training (Pergolizzi, 1997) special education (Perini & Bijou 1992), psychopharmacology (Rovetto, 1990), neurotic and obsessive disorders (Sanavio, 1978a, 1978b, 1991), assessment (Sanavio, Bertolotti, Michielin, Vidotto, & Zotti 1986).

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