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THEORY AND METHODOLOGY ТЕОРИЯ И МЕТОЛОЛОГИЯ

100 Years of the Development of Cultural-Historical Psychology: Milestones and Directions¹

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The article gives a brief overview of the emergence and development of the cultural-historical theory of higher psychological functions over the century after it was created. Lev Vygotsky began the development of his theory with the study of the instrumental function of "cultural signs" (primarily words) and therefore he gave it the name "instrumental psychology". The formation of human personality was understood by Vygotsky as the "ingrowing" of social relations into the individual mind and the conscious "mastery of the self", its psychological functions and affects, by means of signs and basing on concepts. The authors of the article point out the main milestones in the development of cultural-historical psychology, briefly characterise its key concepts, methods and the most important tendencies of its development, up to its most recent trends in Russia, which have already emerged in the 20th century.

Keywords: cultural sign, higher psychological functions, instrumental psychology, object-oriented activity, ingrowing, interiorisation, zone of proximal development, double stimulation method.

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Сто лет развития культурно-исторической психологии: вехи и направления²

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В статье дается краткий очерк возникновения и развития культурно-исторической теории высших психологических функций за столетие со времени ее рождения на свет. Создание своей теории Л.С. Выготский начал с исследования орудийной функции «культурных знаков» (слова, прежде всего) и в связи с этим он дал ей название «инструментальная психология». Формирование человеческой личности понималось Выготским как «вращивание» общественных отношений в индивидуальную психику и сознательное «овладение собой», своими психологическими функциями и аффектами с помощью знаковых средств и на основе понятий. Авторы статьи отмечают основные вехи развития культурно-исторической психологии, кратко характеризуют ее ключевые понятия, методы и важнейшие тенденции развития, вплоть до новейших отечественных ее направлений, сложившихся уже в XX столетии.

Ключевые слова: культурный знак, высшие психологические функции, инструментальная психология, предметная деятельность, вращивание, интериоризация, зона ближайшего развития, методика двойной стимуляции.

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The first scheme of L.S. Vygotsky's ideas was perceived by me in a one-on-one conversation at my house and was written by Vygotsky

on a piece of paper, it was late 1924 or early 1925. I must find it!

A.N.Leontiev

The Birth of the Theory

In the personal archive of A.N.Leontiev, a sheet of paper was preserved for a long time on which L.S.Vygotsky sketched the first draft of his theory. He proposed that the key principle should be *the tool-like nature* of human activity in general and the human psyche in particular. Vygotsky later introduced the term "psychological tools". In human cultural behavior, *signs* serve as such

tools. Just as a person uses tools to manipulate the external world, they use "cultural signs" to transform their inner world. The use of psychological tools fundamentally changes the flow and structure of all mental processes, opening up the possibility for a person to control, stimulate, and regulate behavior and psychological development, just as tools allow one to regulate natural processes like the flow of rivers, the growth of plants, or the behavior of animals.

² При написании работы использовались материалы статьи: *Рубцов В.В., Зарецкий В.К., Майданский А.Д.* Культурно-историческая психология: современное состояние и направления развития научной школы // Научные подходы в современной отечественной психологии / Отв. ред. А. Л. Журавлев, Е.А. Сергиенко, Г.А. Виленская. М.: Институт психологии РАН, 2023. С. 144—169.

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Vygotsky initially referred to his theory as "instrumental psychology" because he saw its goal as "revealing the instrumental function of cultural signs in human behavior" [2, p. 158].

He divided psychological functions into "lower, natural" and "higher, cultural". The latter are always mediated by signs and are carried out in symbolic forms, with language being the highest form. Vygotsky called the process of creating and using artificial signals and signs — "signification", in contrast to the conditional reflexive "signaling" described by I.P. Pavlov.

When selecting "a name" for the new theory, Vygotsky considered "historical psychology" or "the *historical* theory of *higher psychological functions*". In the latter, he noted, "lies all our teaching" [1, p. 161]. He further defined this theory as a special part of "cultural psychology of development," which studies the formation of the psyche in the process of social labor.

"The so-called theory of historical (or cultural-historical) development in psychology essentially means the theory of *higher psychological functions* (logical memory, voluntary attention, verbal thinking, volitional processes, etc.) — *no more* and *no less*!" [7, p. 200].

The term "cultural-historical psychology" varies in meaning depending on how one understands the relationship between Vygotsky's teachings and the "psychological theory of activity" developed by A.N.Leontiev and his colleagues. In a broad sense, which we accept, "cultural-historical psychology" includes all modifications and branches based on (i) the distinction between lower and higher (cultural) psychological functions, (ii) understanding the social nature of human personality, and (iii) the laws of mental development discovered by Vygotsky.

Of course, one cannot forget the contradictions between Vygotsky's research program and the projects of his "willful" students. Such contradictions often indicate points of growth in scientific theory and are therefore valuable and necessary for the development of science. In 1931, they led, in Leontiev's words, to a "confrontation of two lines for the future". He disagreed with Vygotsky on the relationship between action and speech, practical activity, and consciousness in general.

Around this time, the first ideological accusations were made against the "Vygotsky and Luria group" for deviating from Marxism, uncritically borrowing Western psychological theories, characterizing the "primitive thinking" of Eastern workers, and more. Thus, an invitation from Kharkiv to organize a psychology department at the Ukrainian Psychoneurological Academy was timely. L.S. Vygotsky and A.R.Luria decided not to move (possibly due to the mass famine that began in Ukraine in 1932). However, A.N.Leontiev established his school in Kharkiv and began research on the development of the psyche from the foundation of object-related activity. "Object-related" refers to the activities of humans and animals in the external world, as opposed to

activities within the organism, such as neural or secretory processes.

A.N. Leontiev, with the participation of A.V. Zaporozhets, created an evolutionary theory of mental development, from the simplest sensation to human consciousness. The four stages of mental development — sensory, perceptual, intellect, and consciousness—correspond to four main types of object-related activity. The highest psychological formation, consciousness, arises and develops within the system of social labor, transforming both the external world and a person's mental life.

Leontiev believed he was continuing the work begun by his teacher in the 1920s, as it was none other than Vygotsky who made the concept of practical activity and labor the cornerstone of scientific psychology. However, Vygotsky, according to Leontiev, then turned away from the path he had opened by focusing on the study of linguistic meanings and the semantic structure of consciousness. The concept of practice took a back seat. Vygotsky considered *affects* to be the driving force of mental development: "Behind thought stands an affective and volitional tendency. Only it can answer the ultimate 'why' in the analysis of thinking" [4, c. 314]. Affects are like the wind that sets the "clouds of thought" in motion.

Leontiev categorically disagreed with this: in his view, thought is born in the processes of *object-related activity* — here and only here lies the driving force of thinking. In turn, Vygotsky reproached Leontiev for underestimating the "power of socialization" and "overestimating the importance of practice".

Undoubtedly, the question of the connection between object-related activity and the psyche was resolved fundamentally differently by the two men, as was the problem of the relationship between "deed" and "word". However, both accepted the "activity" postulate of Faust and Marx: "In the beginning was the deed". Vygotsky wrote about this directly and unequivocally on the last pages of *Thinking and Speech*. He aimed to understand how a deed develops into a word, how language allows a person to achieve $freedom\ of\ action-$ not only in practice, in the external world, but also in the mental, inner world. A person possesses an extraordinary freedom to perform all sorts of actions, even those that are practically meaningless. Such freedom is not yet present in small children, and it is lost in aphasics. The tool for the liberation of the soul is the word. "The word... for us = freedom" $[1, c. 177]^3$.

In the last two years of his life, Vygotsky began researching the semantic structure of consciousness and developing "peak psychology", centered on the problem of mastering affects through scientific concepts. This part of Vygotsky's work did not find continuation in the work of his students. They chose other, their own, paths of developing the theory.

The debate between the creators of cultural-historical psychology turned out to be highly productive. Through

³ On the psychological content and role of the concept of freedom in Vygotsky's teachings, see A.D. Maidansky's work. [10].

intense discussion, a new powerful "cultural activity" trend emerged, within which outstanding scientists such as P.Ya. Galperin, D.B. Elkonin, A.V. Zaporozhets, L.I. Bozhovich, and B.V. Zeigarnik conducted their research; after the war, E.V. Ilyenkov, V.V. Davydov, and V.P. Zinchenko joined this cohort. All of them rightfully considered themselves part of Vygotsky's school.

Theoretical and Methodological Principles and Key Concepts

Vygotsky's notebooks and their analysis allow us to see how the methodology of cultural-historical theory was created. In the winter of 1926, Vygotsky searched for a "key to human psychology", based on the definition of the essence of a person as "a set of social relations" (K. Marx). What does this definition mean specifically for psychology? From the first day of life, a human individual is caught in a web of social relations, and their entire subsequent life proceeds with the visible or invisible, practical or mental participation of other people, of society. The norms and activity schemes adopted in society are internalized, "interwoven" into the individual's psyche, turning into higher psychological functions. This sociogenic layer of the psyche in cultural-historical theory is called "personality" or the human "I".

"I am the social within us", Vygotsky summarized [1, c. 112]. This, in his view, is the key to the gates of human psychology. Personality should be understood as an *individual micro-society*, a particle of society that has taken over the body and soul of the individual.

"What is a person? <...> For us - a social personality = a set of social relations embodied in an individual (psychological functions built on a social structure)" [3, p. 58–59].

From this arises the main genetic law of cultural-historical psychology, according to Vygotsky. It states: "Every function in the cultural development of a child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first — social, then—psychological, first between people, as an interpsychic category, then within the child, as an intrapsychic category. This applies equally to voluntary attention, logical memory, concept formation, and will development" [5, p. 197—198].

All these higher psychological functions arise "spontaneously," as an involuntary skill, and develop in the direction of their "meaning-making" and conscious mastery. As a result, the initial skill (perception, memory, speech, etc.) turns into a "skill for oneself". This is "the general fate of all higher psychological functions" and "the main content of their development" in adolescents during the transitional age.

To describe the process of a child's appropriation of external forms of behavior, Vygotsky used the concept of *interiorization*. Many authors, he clarifies, have long

pointed to the transfer of methods of external action to the internal, mental plane. However, it is necessary to understand this "external" as *social*, as a social relationship between people, mediated by cultural signs.

By introducing the genetic law and the concept of interiorization, Vygotsky bridges the gap between natural and higher mental functions, a division that was characteristic of the psychological approaches of his time: behaviorism and reflexology on the one hand, and "understanding", and "descriptive" psychology on the other.

In his studies of 1933, Vygotsky introduces the concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD), which significantly alters and expands the concept of interiorization. In the system of concepts of cultural-historical psychology, ZPD is key, cementing the entire concept of development, as it opens up the possibility of concretely understanding the path of a child's personality development. ZPD is the domain of actions that a child can consciously perform in collaboration with an adult and more developed peers but cannot yet accomplish independently. Criticizing the prevalent practices of child development research of his time, Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of the ZPD concept for pedagogy. Unfortunately, he only managed to outline this aspect in a series of theses.

The most famous and widely regarded classic definition states: "The zone of proximal development of a child is the distance between the level of their actual development, determined through tasks solved independently, and the level of potential development, determined through tasks solved by the child under the guidance of adults and in collaboration with more capable peers" [6, p. 42].

In fact, this definition should be regarded as a working construct proposed to solve a specific practical task—conveying to teachers and psychologists the idea that it is important to determine not only the actual level of development but also the child's developmental potential. In this perspective, "...all issues of pedology in both regular and special education schools will be approached differently" [ibid., p. 52]⁴.

Vygotsky strongly emphasized that a child's development depends on the assistance provided by adults during their joint activity, in "collaboration". In the book Thinking and Speech, it is stated that learning not only leads development but, under certain conditions, "…one step in learning can mean a hundred steps in development" [4, p. 202]. A child is taught something small, but they develop significantly more. This means that tomorrow the child will be able to do independently what today they can only do with an adult's help. In the zone of actual development, a child copes with emerging problems without outside help. However, if a task is too difficult, they cannot manage without joint action with an adult (or another, more skilled child).

⁴ The idea of such diagnostics was realized in 1976 through the efforts of A.Y. Ivanova (daughter of S.Y. Rubinstein, student of Vygotsky, collaborator and co-author of B.V. Zeigarnik). She developed a standardized procedure for assessing the zone of proximal development.

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Since the late 1990s, Russian researchers have been exploring other, non-intellectual dimensions of the ZPD. N.L. Belopolskaya conducted emotional measurements; L.F. Obukhova and I.A. Korepanova investigated the semantic dimension; E.E. Kravtsova argued that the ZPD concept pertains to overall personality development; G.A. Zuckerman interprets the ZPD as a space of diverse developmental opportunities depending on the types of assistance provided to the child.

Research into the processes and forms of collaboration between a child and an adult in learning activities has helped to clarify the ZPD concept for various cognitive abilities and competencies (D.B. Elkonin, V.V. Davydov, V.V. Rubtsov, Y.V. Gromyko, V.A. Guruzhapov, A.G. Kritsky, A.A. Margolis, I.M. Ulanovskaya, G.A. Zuckerman, B.D. Elkonin, and others). The inclusion of the child as an active subject in collective, jointly distributed activities allows the child to consciously assimilate accumulated cultural experience. In this process, the activity itself becomes a source of development of interaction skills with others, communication, and cooperation, alongside reflective and creative abilities.

Vygotsky himself speculated that the ZPD concept could be extended to various aspects of personality development. As an implementation of this hypothesis, V.K. Zaretsky developed a multivector model of the ZPD. Here, development is viewed as movement in several directions, in each of which three hypothetical zones can be distinguished: the zone of actual development (ZAD), where the child can develop activities without adult help; the ZPD itself, where the child succeeds only in collaboration with an adult; and the zone of actual inaccessibility (ZAI), where the child cannot consciously interact with an adult.

Steps in learning alter the boundaries of the ZAI and ZPD along the vector of educational activity, while steps in development represent qualitative changes in cognitive and personal potential. Thus, the formula "one step in learning equals a hundred steps in development" is clarified: one step in educational activity can cause qualitative changes in several directions of development simultaneously [9].

New research methods and educational practices

Vygotsky considered social relations as the source of the development of higher mental functions: "Behind all higher functions and their relationships lie genetically social relations, real relations, homo duplex⁵. Hence the principle and method of personification in the study of cultural development, i.e., the division of functions between people, the personification of functions. For example, voluntary attention: one person masters it, an-

other possesses it. The division of what is united into one again, the experimental unfolding of the higher process (voluntary attention) into a small drama" [3, p. 54].

This fundamental stance implements a new experimental research method, later called the "genetic-modeling" method. Vygotsky applied it in experiments on mastering attention in children. Attention, as it were, "flowed" from the adult to the child as the child grasped the relationship between object (a nut, cups with lids) and symbolic (color) stimuli.

The principle of mastering a cultural function, initially performed jointly by the adult and the child—divided between them in varying proportions—also formed the basis of the now-classic "double stimulation method". Vygotsky and his colleague L.S. Sakharov modified N. Ach's "search method" (Suchmethode), developed for studying the process of concept formation. In Ach's experiments, the distinction between "full-fledged concepts" and their functional equivalents in a child's thinking, which Vygotsky called "pseudo-concepts", was not taken into account, and the old erroneous scheme of concept formation as the generalization of a series of individual things, moving "from concrete to abstract", was retained.

Subjects were presented with two sets of stimuli—objects and meaningless words—and then given a task that could be solved by associating these words with specific objects. The set of objects was presented at once, while the verbal set gradually increased, making it possible to trace how the words were used in the child's directed psychological operations on objects.

Using the double stimulation method, it became possible to identify the stages of the concept formation process in children: from (i) syncretic imagery through (ii) complex thinking, the peak of which becomes pseudo-concepts, to (iii) the concept in the proper sense of the word. Based on the obtained data, Vygotsky described how a specific symbolic-meaning structure reflecting the content of the objective world arises from the use of words as tools for concept formation. It is important to emphasize that acquiring the meaning of a new word in the process of concept formation is the result of the *joint activity* of the adult and the child, involving all the main intellectual functions. Mastering the concept-meaning of a word is a product of the interiorization of their joint actions.

The transition from the *interpsychic* to the *intrapsychic*, i.e., from the forms of social collective activity of the child to individually performed functions, is, according to Vygotsky, the general law of the development of all higher psychological functions. "It is not the gradual socialization imposed on the child from outside, but the gradual individualization arising from the child's internal sociality, that is the main pathway of child development" [4, p. 282]. In this case, individualization is understood as a kind of "fusion" of the child's personal conscious-

⁵ Double human (in Latin) — the name of the section in "Natural History" by J.-L. Buffon. E. Durkheim wrote about the dual nature of man, in which two origins, individual (biopsychics) and social (morality, first of all) are combined and operate.

ness and practical activity in the external world, during which "...things really shape the child's mind... This new moment, this problem of reality and practice, and their role in the development of the child's thinking fundamentally changes the whole picture" [ibid., p. 51].

The idea of interiorization as a method of forming higher psychological functions was further developed in the works of P.Ya.Galperin. In the 1950s, he began developing the theory of "staged formation" of mental actions and concepts. Under his guidance, studies were conducted on the conditions, stages, and methods of forming mental actions. Galperin's original interpretation of the psyche as an orienting activity served as the guiding principle for these studies.

According to Galperin, an action, initially carried out on an external, material level, then transitions into the "plane of loud speech", directed at others, and at the final stage is transformed into internal speech.

Unlike the "cross-sectional method", widely used in Vygotsky's time, the staged formation method not only shows how a child acts but also reveals *why* they act in a certain way, opening the possibility of purposefully shaping mental processes with specific properties.

Galperin's students conducted numerous experimental studies on the formation of attention, memory, motor skills, and scientific concepts. For example, Obukhova managed to trace the process of forming initial mathematical concepts in preschool children. The operations of quantitative comparison of objects, which Piaget believed to be inaccessible to children of this age, were consistently and accurately formed in Obukhova's experiments.

The conceptual breakthrough in the study of children's concept formation is associated with the names of D.B. Elkonin and V.V. Davydov, who developed a system of developmental education for children aged 6-10 years. Its theoretical core is the concept of "substantial generalization" created by Davydov. This type of generalization, unlike formal-empirical generalization, identifies *the essential*, "genetically primary" relationship within a subject that forms the basis of the subject's development and serves as a principle for interconnecting various aspects and properties of the subject.

According to Davydov, educational activities should focus on mastering scientific-theoretical knowledge and concepts, as well as acquiring *generalized methods* of object-related and cognitive actions. Properly setting a learning task means creating a situation that guides stu-

dents to find a universal way to solve problems of a given type under any variations in the specific conditions of the task.

In the 1970s, Davydov initiated research on collective, "jointly distributed" forms of organizing educational activities. Initially, in the works of G.G. Kravtsov, T.A. Matis, Yu.A. Poluyanov, V.V. Rubtsov, and G.A. Tsukerman, this problem was studied in relation to the task of forming specific scientific concepts. Subsequently, it was proven that the nature of the educational cognitive process depends on the distribution of activities among its participants and directly on the methods of exchanging actions during the process of jointly solving educational tasks. Extensive studies of the patterns of joint educational activities began, requirements for organizing joint actions of adults and children were formulated, and the zones of proximal development of students' thinking were defined.

Based on the obtained data, a new direction in cultural-historical psychology was created— "social-genetic psychology of development" [11]. The social-genetic method demonstrates the dependence of the origin of concepts in children on the methods of interaction and organization of joint actions. The connection between sensory-objective and sign-symbolic forms of action is established in the process of joint search, analysis, and modeling of a certain subject relationship or the relationship of an object's properties.

New directions in pedagogy and educational practice are emerging on the foundation of cultural-historical psychology—from the "pedagogy of cooperation" (S.L. Soloveichik, Sh.A. Amonashvili, and others) to the "reflective-activity approach" (V.K. Zaretsky); in clinical psychology, A.R. Luria's school (T.V. Akhutina and others) is actively working, and "cultural-historical pathopsychology" (A.Sh. Tkhostov and others) is developing.

The fact that the followers of Vygotsky's school do not always succeed in finding a common language in interpreting the foundations and principles of cultural-historical psychology cannot in any way be considered a sign of its internal weakness. On the contrary, "intelligent" contradictions serve as stimuli for the growth of scientific theory, preventing it from becoming stagnant and dogmatically rigid. The diversity of research directions and practices is an inevitable and natural consequence of the rapid expansion of cultural-historical psychology over the past half century on a global scale.

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