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ORGANIZERS

# CULTURAL-HISTORICAL APPROACH

## EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH IN DIFFERENT CONTEXTS

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## CHAPTER 1

# CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE RECEPTION OF VYGOTSKY'S THEORY IN THE INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES

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### INTRODUCTION

Lev Vygotsky founded an original theory commonly known as cultural historical psychology at the end of the 1920s and 30s in the USSR. At that time Vygotsky's works did not have a high impact on the international scene of psychology and other disciplines.

Vygotsky's 'second life' in the 'western world' began from the early 1960s, when Vygotsky's book *Miclenie I rech* (*Thinking and speech*) was published under the title *Thought and language* (1962) with Jerome Bruner's introduction. It is worth noting that the Russian edition of Vygotsky's book *Miclenie I rech* in 1956 modified the Russian edition of 1934 without further explanation. The 1962 MIT Press translation of Vygotsky's work *Miclenie I rech* became the source of translations in other countries such as Argentina (1964), Italy (1966), Brazil (1987), etc. The Russian version of 1956 was translated into various languages such as Japanese (1962), German (1964), Polish (1971), etc. For many years a limited and problematic version of Vygotsky's book *Miclenie I rech* has circulated in different countries (Lima, 1995b).

After publication of the book *Mind in society* (1978) under Vygotsky's name the 'Vygotsky boom' started. American philosopher Stephen Toulmin referred to Vygotsky as the 'Mozart of Psychology' (Toulmin, 1978). The book *Mind in society* is not written by Vygotsky. *Mind in society* is "a compilation and juxtaposition of fragments taken from different Vygotsky works written during different periods of his scientific career" (Yasnitsky, 2010, p. 4).

A bibliography of Vygotsky's works, which was prepared by Lifanova (1996), includes 275 titles. But the majority of researchers used only two of Vygotsky's books: *Thought and language*, and *Mind in society*.

Large literature on Vygotsky's legacy and many different applications of his ideas in different disciplines have emerged. Multiple interpretations about the theoretical

background and possible applications of Vygotsky's theory have developed. Many educators and psychologists extol the benefits of Vygotsky's theory, but actually they know little about his works. Many researchers accept only a few fragmented ideas, taken out of the specific context within which these ideas have developed.

According to Daniels, Cole and Wertsch (2007), studying Vygotsky in context means that we should define two different historical eras and multiple social milieus – the context of the Soviet Union in the first half of the twentieth century and different parts of the world of the twenty-first century. In recent years in the English-speaking regions of the Western world a transformation of Vygotsky into “a ‘chewing gum’ for everybody, every day, and every occasion” takes place (Dafermos, & Marvakis, 2011, p. 95). The term ‘westernization’ of Vygotsky does not depict the complex processes of the reception and implementation of Vygotsky's theory in different parts of the globe (North America, Latin America, China, Japan, different countries of Europe such as Germany, England, Holland, Denmark, Finland, etc.). Vygotsky's masterpieces have been translated into various languages. There are several attempts at analysis of Vygotsky's theory in different sociocultural settings such as the USA (Miller, 2011), China (Hong, Yang, & Cheng, 2007), Brazil (Lima, 1995a), Latin America (González Rey, & Mitjans Martínez, 2013), etc. However, the analysis and multiple applications of Vygotsky's theory across countries and the geopolitical regions remains open-ended question.

Debates across different ‘camps’ or schools over Vygotsky's legacy have been carried out in various international Vygotskian academic communities. In the context of a dialogue of different Vygotskian ‘camps’ many questions about dialectics, relativism, developmentalism, Marxism, etc. have been raised (Toomela, 2008; Allakhverdov & Ivanov, 2008; Matusov, 2008; Elhammoumi, 2009; Veresov, 2005). What should be the criteria of choice between different readings and versions of Vygotskian theory? Are the positions of these versions or ‘camps’ compatible or incompatible?

Firstly, it is important to note a paradox of the interpretation of Vygotsky's theory.

Radically opposite readings of Vygotsky's texts and different interpretations of Vygotsky's legacy have emerged. Papadopoulos (1996) attempted to analyze the reception of Vygotsky's theory in academic psychology. He discussed two typical cases of Vygotsky's reception, one cognitive and other cultural. He concluded that Vygotsky's ideas have been incorporated in paradigmatically different theories.

However, it would be incorrect to limit Vygotsky's ideas only to psychology, because his ideas provide a broad framework which has been expanded in various disciplines such as pedagogy, linguistics, anthropology, etc. (Lima, 1995a). Daniels (1993, xvi) argues that “Vygotsky's theory can provide grounds for different, if not opposing, epistemologies and pedagogies”. The idea of the existence of many ‘Vygotskian’ pedagogies, psychologies, and epistemologies reinforces the paradox of the reception of Vygotsky's theory in international academic communities.

The systematic investigation of the reception and implementation of Vygotsky's legacy in different parts of the globe is beyond the scope of this chapter. In the present work I will focus mainly on critical reflections on several widespread tendencies in the reception and interpretation of Vygotsky's theory in international academic communities. Three main issues will be discussed. First, I will discuss the existence of different definitions of Vygotsky's theory.

Second, I will analyze three widespread theoretical frameworks of interpretation of Vygotsky's theory: cognitivism, culturalism, cultural historical activity theory. Third, I will discuss challenges connected with the 'archival revolution' in Vygotskian studies and highlight the need for a reconsideration and deeper investigation of Vygotsky's theory.

### HOW TO DEFINE VYGOTSKY'S THEORY?

How to define Vygotsky's ideas? Various designations of his own theory could be found in different Vygotsky works: 'instrumental psychology', 'conception of the historical development of the higher psychological functions' [kontsepsiia istoricheskogo razvitiia vysshikh psikhologicheskikh funktsii], 'theory of the higher psychological functions' [teoriia vysshikh psikhologicheskikh funktsii], 'the cultural –historical theory of the development of higher psychic functions', etc. (Keiler, 2012, p.21; Veresov, 1999, p.27).

Various designations have been used by the next generation of Soviet psychologists: 'cultural-historical theory of the psyche' [kulturno-istoricheskoi teoriei psikhiki] (Leontiev & Luria 1956, p. 7), 'theory of the development of the higher psychical functions' [teoriia razvitiia vysshikh psikhicheskikh funktsii] (Leontiev, Luria, & Teplov, 1960, p.3), 'cultural-historical theory of the higher psychical functions' [kulturno-istoricheskaja teoria vysshikh psikhicheskikh funktsii] (Brushlinskii, 1968).

According to Keiler (2012), the label 'cultural-historical theory' [kulturnogo-istoricheskaja teoriia] is no authentic designation for the conceptions elaborated by L.S. Vygotsky, but has "been introduced in the mid-1930s by adversaries of Vygotsky... with the defamatory purpose, to impute to the 'Vygotsky-Luria-group'" (Keiler, 2012, p.22).

D. Elkonin defines Vygotsky's theory as 'non classical psychology' which is presented as "the science of the way the subjective world of a single person emerges from the objective world of art, the world of production tools, the world of the entire industry" (Elkonin, 1989, p. 478).

Vygotsky's theory has been defined also as 'height psychology' (or 'peak psychology') (Yaroshevsky, & Gurgenzidze, 1997, p.351; Robbins, 1999, p.v) which emphasized the potential for development through social collaboration.

Contemporary researchers use the notions 'sociocultural theory'. Wertsch states that "I use the term sociocultural because I want to understand how mental action

is situated in cultural, historical, and institutional settings. I have chosen this term rather than others (such as cultural or sociohistorical) in order to recognize the important contributions of several disciplines and schools of thought to the study of mediated action. On the one hand, I wish to recognize the contributions made by Vygotsky and his colleagues (although they typically used the term 'sociohistorical' rather than sociocultural). On the other, I wish to recognize the contributions made by many contemporary scholars of culture (although most of the scholars I have in mind do not use the term historical in descriptions of what they do). In a sense, a term such as sociohistorical-cultural would be more accurate, but it is obviously much too cumbersome" (Wertsch, 1991, p. 15-16).

Vygotsky has never used the term 'sociocultural' for codification (or labeling) of his own theory. The term 'sociocultural' does not refer to the theory founded by Vygotsky and his colleagues, but the theoretical framework of its reception and incorporation in North American settings. Vygotsky's theory was only one of many thinkers who have inspired the founders of sociocultural theory.

There are a lot of difficult questions about a link between 'sociocultural theory' and 'cultural-historical psychology' such as the question of the relationships between the historical perspective of cultural historical psychology and the concept of cultural differences of 'sociocultural theory'. Wertsch (1991, p.16) criticizes Vygotsky for "reducing cultural differences to historical differences". It is only one example of the serious differences between Vygotsky's theory and its reception and transformation by North Atlantic scholars. Robbins (2007) argues that sociocultural theory cannot deal with history as change and sometimes "turns into a model of postmodern bricolage". For Vygotsky 'history' and 'historical' were very important as it refers to the onto-genesis and phylo-genesis of the human mind. Neglect of 'historical' in Vygotsky's theory is an indicator of a misunderstanding of its essence.

'Cultural' and 'historical' are the two interconnecting aspects of his theory which constitute its content. The definition (or labeling) of Vygotsky's ideas is not a neutral point of view, but it depicts the understanding of the essence of his theory. Yasnitsky (2011) argues that the terminological diversity and fluidity reflect the constant search for adequate descriptors for the research programme introduced by Vygotsky and his colleagues (Yasnitsky, 2011). In my opinion, this terminological diversity and fluidity express also the existence of different ways of receiving and implementing Vygotsky's theory in various social and scientific contexts.

Edward Said (1983) argued that when a theory is moving in a new environment, it will be transformed as a result of changes in place and time. Traveling around the globe Vygotsky's theory has been essentially transformed under the influence of multiple contexts in its reception and implementation. The main problem is that frequently

researchers and practitioners are not aware of the difference between Vygotsky's theory and its own frames and filters in its reception.

### THE MIRRORS OF COGNITIVISM

The first translations of Vygotsky's works in an English language context appeared at the end of the 1920's years (Vygotsky, 1929). The reappearance of Vygotsky's ideas in western academia occurred in the early 1960's in the new social and scientific context.

As I have already mentioned, J. Bruner played a crucial role in introducing Vygotsky's theory to Western Academia. Bruner was involved in educational reform taking place in the USA under the influence and pressure of the 'Sputnik shock' of 1957. As the result of the 'Sputnik shock' "...America was made to realize that it was lagging behind the Soviet Union in preparing scientists, and also citizens who were well educated in such areas as science and math, from whom future intellectual leaders would emerge" (Takaya, 2008, p.4-5). Bruner was one of the first American thinkers who was aware of the inadequacy of the principles of the so-called experience-based education as well as behaviorist theory learning. Jean Piaget and Vygotsky were the two psychologists who helped him realize the importance of studying the development of the human mind (Takaya, 2008).

In the context of North Atlantic psychology the reception of Vygotsky's theory took place under the influence of the 'cognitive revolution' which "was intended to bring 'mind' back into the human sciences after a long cold winter of objectivism" (Bruner, 1990, p.1). The behaviorist model S-R could not moreover satisfy many researchers. The reintroduction of thinking in psychology after a long period of behaviorist domination opened up new perspectives for the development of psychology and learning theory. J. Bruner, one of the protagonists of the cognitive revolution considered the introduction of a middle link (Sign-mediated thought) between S-R as a way to overcome the behaviorist pattern (Papadopoulos, 1996).

Vygotsky provides "the foundations for the cognitive developmental theory on which Bruner builds his account of the role of education in human development" (Olson, 2001, p.106). Bruner argues that "the cognitive revolution simply absorbed the concept of learning into the broader concept of "the acquisition of knowledge" (Bruner, 1990, p.105).

Cognitivism emerged in the 1950s in North America as a reaction to the domination of behaviorism. Cognitivism is based on the assumption that cognition constitutes a "manipulation of symbols after the fashion of digital computers. In other words, cognition is mental representation: the mind is thought to operate by manipulating symbols that represent features of the world or represent the world as being a certain way" (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p.8). Cognition is considered by representatives of cognitivism as totally separated from the consciousness of particular subjects involved

in social interaction. “Cognitivist, on the other hand, postulates processes that are mental but that cannot be brought to consciousness at all.

Thus we are not simply unaware of the rules that govern the generation of mental images or of the rules that govern visual processing; we could not be aware of these rules” (Varela, Thompson, & Rosch, 1993, p.49). In contrast to cognitivism, for Vygotsky (1997b) consciousness is one of the most important and difficult problems of psychology. Vygotsky developed various strategies for its investigation in different periods of the development of his research program (Veresov, 1999), but for all the last years of his short life he attempted to analyze the problem of consciousness which has been ignored by cognitivist thinkers.

The growing interest in Vygotsky’s theory took place under the influence of the linguistic revolution in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Already in 1950 the debate between Chomsky and behaviorists was at its peak (Newman & Holzman, 1993). Chomsky criticized mechanistic, reductionist interpretations of language which have been proposed by behaviorists who consider psychic phenomena as simple reactions to external stimuli. Vygotsky’s theory of a mutual relationship between thought and speech radically differs both from Chomsky’s innatist explanation of language competence and the behavioral theory of verbal behavior.

Van der Veer and Valsiner note that the creation of the figure of Vygotsky in the USA was connected with the decline of interest in Piaget’s ideas in the 1970s. “Vygotsky’s message - of the role of the ‘social other’ in child development (even if not original to him, nor very unusual among other sociogenetic thinkers) - fitted into American education contexts where Piaget ascribed individual learning freedom of pupils was threatening the authority and control functions of the teachers” (Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p.4).

One of the serious barriers for understanding Vygotsky’s theory in the USA is connected with the tendency to create a distance from its ideological backgrounds and the sociocultural context in which it was formed. “What is more important, however, is a more general tendency not only to avoid the connection of Vygotsky’s theory to Marxism, but to avoid any contextual considerations of Vygotsky’s work at all. One can see a great irony here: Cultural–historical theory tends to be interpreted and taught in a cultural and historical vacuum” (Ageyev, 2003, p.437). Decontextualization of Vygotsky’s theory constitutes a kind of incorporation into a radically different theoretical and methodological ‘paradigm’.

“Present-day psychologists’ interest in Vygotsky’s thinking is indeed paradoxical. On the one hand, his writings seem increasingly popular among developmental psychologists in Europe and North America. On the other hand, however, careful analyses and thorough understanding of the background of Vygotsky’s ideas are rare...Vygotsky seems to be increasingly well-known in international psychology, while remaining little

understood. The roots of his thinking in international philosophical and psychological discourse remain largely hidden. His ideas have rarely been developed further, along either theoretical or empirical lines" (Valsiner, 1988, p. 117).

Vygotsky's theory has become popular in contemporary pedagogical literature. Vygotsky's ideas have had a great impact on educational theory and practice in different countries and geopolitical regions. It is reported that the interest in Vygotsky's theory in the USA emerged in the particular social context: "The reception of Vygotsky was also facilitated by social factors— such as American educators' growing interest in a pedagogical reform that would de-emphasize the traditional, individualist view of learning. Pedagogy and child psychology were moving away from a reliance on behaviorist models. They needed a new paradigm, and in the context of increasing liberalism (partly provoked by the Vietnam war) the Vygotskian approach seemed particularly appealing" (Hyman, 2012, p.644).

It is worth mentioning an example of the reception of cultural-historical psychology in the field of pedagogy and child psychology in the North American context. Famous in western literature is the concept of 'zone of proximal development', but this is not the central and original Vygotsky idea and in isolation from other concepts of cultural-historical psychology it could easily be misunderstood (Dafermos, 2014). Bruner used the Vygotskian concept of ZPD for the foundation of his theory of 'scaffolding'. Although Vygotsky has never used the term 'scaffolding', the terms ZPD and 'scaffolding' become synonyms in literature (McLeod, 2012). The contemporary reception of Vygotsky is "highly selective, distorted and perhaps oversimplified in its apparent coherence" (Gillen, 2000, p. 184).

In accordance with a limited, formal interpretation of cultural historical psychology ZPD is presented only as a psychological unity and not as a socio-historical unity of study (Newman, & Holzman, 1993). Many critical pedagogies in Brazil argue that the concept of zone of proximal development as presented in the Portuguese translation of the North Atlantic translation offers "a linear and partial understanding of human development" (Lima, 1995b, p.493). In the Brazilian context Vygotsky's theory is considered through the perspective of complementing and expanding the theoretical background of critical pedagogy which is presented as pedagogy of and for social transformation (Lima, 1995a).

It can be seen that Vygotsky's theory has been radically transformed in different cultural historical contexts. Totally different interpretations of the concepts of cultural historical psychology such as the concept 'zone proximal development' (mainstream and critical) can be found. The problem is that usually researchers and practitioners are not aware of their implicit assumptions of adopting Vygotsky's theory and how these assumptions are connected with their scientific, educational, political, social practices.



### THE MIRRORS OF CULTURALISM

Cultural psychology is one of the typical patterns (modes) for the reception of Vygotsky's theory. Michael Cole, one of the major figures of cultural psychology, carried out post-doctoral research working under the guidance of Alexander Luria. Undoubtedly, Cole essentially promoted the dialogue between Soviet and American psychologists.

Using the concept of cultural artifact (including material tools and language), Cole attempted to elaborate a mediational theory of mind. "Artifacts are the fundamental constituents of culture. The growth of the human mind, in ontogeny and in human history, must properly be understood as a coevolution of human activities and artifacts" (Cole, 1996, p. xiv). Contrary to Vygotsky, who made a clear distinction between material tools, and signs as psychological tools, introducing the concept 'cultural artifact', Cole (1996) eliminated the qualitative difference between them.

Cole's cultural psychology is based more on Wartofsky's conception of artifacts (Daniels, 2008) than on Vygotskian analysis of material and psychological tools. There was no conception of artefact in Vygotsky's theory. Vygotsky rejected the "subsumption of tools and signs under the concept of 'artifact'" (Rückriem, 2009, p.100). "Phenomena that have their own psychological aspect, but in essence do not belong wholly to, psychology, such as technology, are completely illegitimately psychologized. The basis for this identification is ignoring the essence of both forms, of activity and the differences in their historical role and nature. Tools as devices of work, devices for mastering the processes of nature, and language as a device for social contact and communication, dissolve in the general concept of artefacts or artificial devices" (Vygotsky, 1997c, p.61).

In Cole's Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition at the University of California cross cultural research was carried out. Michael Cole incorporated cultural historical theory into his cross-cultural research. His cross-cultural research is based on the one hand on the tradition of American Anthropology and, on the other, on cultural historical psychology and activity theory.

Cultural relativism is one of the key concepts of cultural Anthropology. From the standpoint of cultural relativism cultures are considered as discrete units both in time and space. According to Rogoff (2003), understanding of human development from a sociocultural perspective includes the following patterns:

- Moving beyond ethnocentrism to consider different perspectives
- Considering diverse goals of development
- Recognizing the value of the knowledge of both insiders and outsiders of specific cultural communities
- Systematically and open-mindedly revising our inevitably local understandings so that they become more encompassing" (Rogoff, 2003, p.12).

Cultural relativism is constructed as a rejection of ethnocentrism and a celebration of cultural differences. Cultural relativism is based on the fragmentation of culture and the exoticization of cultural differences. Cultural relativism emerged in cultural anthropology and expanded in other disciplines (linguistics, cultural studies, psychology, etc.).

Matusov (2008, p.85) argues that there are not only similarities, but also some important differences between Vygotsky's cultural-historical and sociocultural projects. In contrast to the sociocultural approach which emphasizes cultural diversity, the cultural-historical school ignores important differences between cultures. In my opinion, the problem is not that Vygotsky ignored the differences between different cultures. The difficulty consists rather in that the concept of culture in cultural historical psychology is totally different than in a sociocultural approach. "Therefore, any time Vygotsky uses the word *culture* or *cultural*, we have to keep in mind that he, generally, means its generic, universal connotation, not its specifics and particulars" (Ageyev, 2003, p. 441). Even in Luria's research in Uzbekistan, Luria and Vygotsky did not focus on specific characteristics of Uzbek culture, but they investigated general routes of cognitive development. Vygotsky's concept of culture differs radically from cultural diffusionism and cultural relativism.

Contemporary cultural relativism is connected with multiculturalism based on the particularism of different cultures and the celebration of cultural differences. The developmental perspective of cultural historical psychology differs totally from post-modern relativization and fragmentation of culture. The modernization of Vygotsky's theory as well as post-modern reading by relativistic oriented cultural psychology leads to a theoretical confusion and misunderstanding. Moreover, the relativistic cultural psychology rejects totally the developmental, historical orientation of cultural historical psychology as a theory of the development of higher mental functions (Veresov, 2009). *The separation of the cultural dimensions of psychological processes from the historical, developmental perspective of their consideration leads to distortion and confusion.*

## **THE MIRRORS OF CULTURAL-HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY**

Cultural-historical activity theory (CH/AT) has become one of the most popular theoretical frameworks of the incorporation of Vygotsky's legacy in Anglo-Saxon literature over the past three decades. According to Yamagata-Lynch (2010), the introduction of Cultural Historical Activity Theory in North America is connected to the attempt by researchers and practitioners to study complex learning environments. The increasing interest in Vygotsky's ideas is closely linked to the disappointment with traditional learning theories such as behaviorism and cognitivism. Cultural-historical activity theory is based on the compilation of various ideas of Russian schools of psychology and their adaptation within the North American context. "When activity theory was adopted in North America

most scholars, including myself, used it exclusively as a descriptive tool in qualitative studies and not as a method for changing practice” (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010, p.31).

Different versions of Cultural-historical activity theory can be found. Engeström’s theory of activity systems tends to be among the most powerful versions of CHAT (Engeström, 2001; Engeström, Mietinen & Punamaki, 1999; Engeström, Lompscher & Rückriem, 2005). Sawchuk, Duarte & Elhammoui attempt to develop a critically-oriented version of Cultural historical activity theory on the basis of Marxist dialectics (Sawchuk, Duarte & Elhammoui, 2006). Stetsenko & Arieivitch consider Cultural-historical activity theory as a project able to explain human subjectivity and promote social transformation (Stetsenko & Arieivitch, 2004a, 2004b).

However, there are some common orientations between different versions of Cultural historical activity theory. Contrary to approaches emphasizing differences between cultural historical psychology and activity theory, “the basic impulse underlying a CH/AT approach is to reject this either/or dichotomy” (Cole, Engeström, 2007, p.485). Focusing on similarities and underestimating the differences between cultural-historical psychology and activity theory, the representatives of CH/AT attempt to develop a framework for their combination.

Engeström’s approach of three generations of Cultural-historical activity theory is based on the rejection of the dichotomy between cultural-historical psychology and activity theory and historical legitimization of Cultural-historical activity theory. The first generation refers to Vygotsky’s theory of mediated action. The second generation is connected with A.N. Leontiev’s theory of emphasizing the collective nature of human activity. Engeström’s activity systems model is considered by him as the main achievement of the third generation of Cultural historical activity theory (Engeström, 2001).

The scheme of three generations of Cultural-historical activity theory offers a linear, continuous, presents, decontextualized account and obscures the gaps, tensions, and inconsistencies in the history of cultural-historical psychology and activity theory. From the perspective of the idea of three generations of Cultural-historical activity theory, it is hard to explain the tension between Vygotsky and Leontiev in the early 1930s.

At this point the idea of three generations of Cultural-historical activity theory coincides with the ‘canonical approach’ in Soviet psychology, considering activity theory as a continuation of cultural historical psychology (Radzikhovskii, 1979; Davydov & Radzikhovskii, 1985). Proponents of the ‘canonical approach’ argue that there is the ‘school of Vygotsky-Leontiev-Luria’. The ‘canonical approach’ of the development of the ‘school of Vygotsky-Leontiev-Luria’ has been criticized for ignoring the serious differences between Vygotsky’s research programme and the Kharkov group’s research programme (Yasnitsky, 2011). The proponents of the second approach focus on discontinuities and gaps that exist between Vygotsky’s and Leontiev’s research

programs. Toomela (2000) argues that activity theory is a dead end for cultural historical psychology. Martins (2013) focuses not only on the theoretical breakout that occurred between Vygotsky and Leontiev, but also on differences between them connected with conjectural and ideological positioning, arising from political changes in the Soviet Union.

In the context of Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CH/AT) both Rubinstein's version of activity theory and also Leontiev's and Rubinstein's debates on the concept 'activity' disappeared. The image of the development of the concept of activity would be simplified, if we did not take into account the differences in each of these scientific schools and debate between them (for example, the differences of Galperin's and Leontiev's positions).

Serious differences between the 'third' and previous generation of CHAT can be found. Hakkarainen (2004, p.4) argues that western CHAT accepts "a multidisciplinary approach while the Russian activity approach is more or less psychological". A multidisciplinary approach to activity theory has developed at the Center for Activity Theory and Developmental Work Research (University of Finland, Helsinki) led by Yrjö Engeström. The 'first' and 'second' generation of activity theory worked in the context of psychology as a discipline, while the 'third' generation developed a multidisciplinary research program.

The question of relationships between Vygotsky's cultural historical psychology and Leontiev's activity theory provokes discussions and controversy in international academic communities. Analyzing debates on cultural historical activity theory in China, Hong, Yang & Chen (2007) state that "still today there seems to be a gap how Leont'ev's activity theory is actually connected to Vygotsky's cultural-historical development theory. People may keep asking: 'Is Vygotsky's theory the same thing as what we have talked about to be the activity theory?' Or a similar question: 'Is the activity theory only an expansion of Vygotsky's theory?'

For many reasons, there was very little published concerning Leont'ev's work during the 1930s. This seemed to lead to a 'vacuum zone'" (p.121). In the same paper a theoretical comparison is presented of commonalities and differences of Leontiev and Rubinstein as discussed by Chinese researchers (Hong, Yang, & Chen, 2007). Some differences between Leontiev's and Rubinstein's versions of activity theory have been analyzed by other scholars (Jones, 2000; Dafermos, in press) (the different understanding of the subject matter of psychology and the relationship between internalization-externalization may be considered as most important among them).

The presentation of Vygotsky's, Leontiev's and Luria's legacy are part of the same theoretical framework: similarly, what was defined as CH/AT is common to the three avenues of the introduction of Soviet psychology in Latin America: first, through Marxist circles that were close to the Communist Parties in the region; second, through a group of Cuban psychologists who did doctoral studies in Moscow after the Cuban Revolution, with a few exceptions such as González Rey (González Rey, & Mitjans

Martínez 2013) and third, through North American psychology, because many scholars and practitioners in Latin America have been oriented to its theoretical framework.

Focusing on the third avenue of the introduction of CHAT, it is useful to remember Martin-Baro's warning (1994, p. 20) about the uncritical swallowing of theories and methods from North America psychology: "Latin American psychology looked to its already scientifically and socially respectable 'Big Brother', and, borrowing his methodological and practical conceptual tools, hoped to gain from the power structure in each country, a social status equivalent to that attained by the North Americans".

CH/AT as well as other types of reception of cultural historical psychology in a North American context spread rapidly to other countries and continents. However, as Vygotsky wrote: "He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled" (Vygotsky, 1997a, p.261). Anyone who borrows ideas and theoretical systems from North Atlantic psychology and pedagogy, "gets his share of the 'pitch' of these systems, i.e., the philosophical spirit of the authors" (Vygotsky, 1997a, p.261).

#### **FROM THE ARCHIVAL REVOLUTION TO THE RECONSIDERATION OF UNDERSTANDING VYGOTSKY'S LEGACY IN ACADEMIC COMMUNITIES**

One of the most serious obstacles to understanding Vygotsky's theory is connected with limited access to Vygotsky's works. Vygotsky's *Collected Works* appeared in the Soviet Union in the 1980s and in the 1990's their translation was published in English. However, the six-volume collection of Vygotsky's works is incomplete and does not include many of Vygotsky's works such as *Psychology of Art* (1925), *Educational Psychology* (1926), *Imagination and creativity in childhood* (1930), *Essays in the History of Behavior. Ape. Primitive. Child* (1930; written by Vygotsky and Luria), *Children's Mental Development in the Process of Education* (1935) and etc. More than 90 Vygotsky reviews of theatre performances, and novels in the early 1920s have not been translated in other languages.

Different kinds of mistakes and distortions have been detected in English translations of Vygotsky's works: inaccuracies, suppression of terms or passages, suppression of names, unidentified or suppressed citations, omissions, and outright falsifications (Van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011; Kellogg & Yasnitsky, 2011). These mistakes and distortions have emerged at different moments in the path from the manuscripts and published papers to Soviet editions of Vygotsky's writing and after their translations into English (or other languages).

An 'archival revolution' in Vygotskian studies has taken place. Both publications of Vygotsky's private archives and new undistorted editions of Vygotsky's writings have opened up new opportunities for investigation and understanding of Vygotsky's legacy (Zavershneva, 2008a; Zavershneva, 2008b; Zavershneva, 2009; Zavershneva, (2010a). Zavershneva, 2010b; Zavershneva & Asimov, 2010). Vygotskaia's and Lifanova's book

paints a vivid picture of Vygotsky's life (Vygodskaya & Lifanova, 1996). S.F. Dobkin's memoirs highlight Vygotsky's early life and early development as a thinker (Feingenberg, 2000). Vygotsky's reviews of theater performances, and novels offer a useful insight for an understanding of the later foundation of cultural historical psychology (Feingenberg, 1996). A special mention should be made of the contribution of the *Journal of Russian and East European Psychology* in recent archival publications. Moreover, in the context of the 'PsyAnima Complete Vygotsky' project many 'forgiven' Vygotsky's writings have been republished. This project aims "at republishing all Vygotsky's works and most of works of the representatives of Vygotsky's Circle" (PsychAnima, 2012).

However, by itself the new disclosure of Vygotsky's life and the new editions of Vygotsky's writings is necessary, but not sufficient condition for a deeper understanding of his theory. In my opinion, the creative reconstruction of Vygotsky's theory is possible on the basis of the investigation of three interconnected aspects: (a) the cultural, historical context of its appearance and development, (b) the specific juncture in the history of science, the particular scientific context and links of cultural-historical theory with other theories and (c) the path of Vygotsky's life and the development of his scientific program during his life.

Contextualizing cultural-historical psychology in the history of science as a 'drama of ideas' allows assessment of Vygotsky's contribution in promoting psychological knowledge. Vygotsky's creativity in science is a complex phenomenon and for its comprehension a concrete historical investigation of the mutual interaction of the social, the scientific and the personal dimensions on the process of knowledge production is essential.

Vygotsky was in a creative dialogue with many different thinkers and trends in the history of philosophy and science such as Spinoza, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, and Darwin. Vygotsky was "a child of the Silver Age of Russian culture and philosophy and the influence of this should not be underestimated" (Veresov, 2005, p.45).

In accordance with the traditional portrayal of Vygotsky's theory, Vygotsky is presented as a solitary genius. The new inquiries are focused on Vygotsky's personal network of scholars. The personal network of Vygotsky includes not only the members of the 'troika' (Lev Vygotsky, Alexander Luria and Aleksei Leontiev) or 'petiorka' Alexander Zaporozhets, Lidia Bozhovich, Roza Levina, Nataliya Morozova and Liya Slavina), but also many others individuals: Leonid Vladimirovich Zankov (1901-1977), Boris Efimovich Varshava (1900-1927), Zhozefina Il'inchna Shif (1904-1978), Ivan Mikhailovich Solov'ev (1902-1986), Nikolai Aleksandrovich Bernstein (1897-1982), Soviet film director Sergei Mikhailovich Eisenstein (1898-1948), poet Osip Mandelstam, etc. (Yasnitsky, 2011). Cultural historical psychology emerged in a dialogue with these and many others personalities of Vygotsky's personal network.

Many researchers have contributed essentially to the study of Vygotsky's life and sketch the biography of his ideas (Kozulin, 1990; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991;

Vygotskaya, & Lifanova, 1996; Veresov, 1999; Keiler, 2002). However, the conceptual and methodological investigation of the development of Vygotsky's research programme remains an open-ended question. The first steps in this direction have been made by Veresov (1999). But even so, the path remains open and researchers still have much work to do in order to reveal the contradictions in the development of Vygotsky's research programme in its different stages. From this standpoint, *the conceptual and methodological investigation of cultural-historical theory as a developmental process constitutes the most difficult and challenging issue.*

## CONCLUSION

Vygotsky's legacy has become a source of inspiration for many psychologists and educators around the world. Researchers and educators from different parts of the globe have accepted many ideas of Vygotsky and other Soviet psychologists, because "it seemed to fill certain gaps and answer important questions that had hitherto remained unanswered" (Hyman, 2012, p.644).

The recent study has found that there are multiple readings and interpretations of Vygotsky's theory. Moreover, Vygotsky's theory has been incorporated in a radically different theoretical and methodological 'paradigm'. Cognitivism, cultural relativism and CHAT constitute different frameworks which have emerged in response to demands arising mainly in the North Atlantic context. There is a strong tendency for the integration and incorporation of Vygotsky's theory into mainstream North Atlantic research. The North Atlantic schemes for the reception and implementation of Vygotsky's theory have been expanded across countries in various parts of the globe.

There are at least three main problems in the reception of cultural historical psychology in North-Atlantic research. The first problem is connected with a fragmented reading of particular ideas of Vygotsky, which dominates in North-Atlantic research without enough understanding of the theoretical programme in which these ideas have been included. For example, some fragmented ideas such as ZPD, sign mediation, etc. in separation from the methodology of cultural historical psychology tend to become a synonym of Vygotsky's theory. The dialectical understanding of human development disappeared in the mainstream interpretations of Vygotsky's theory as cognitivism, cultural psychology and CHAT. Moreover, in the mainstream interpretations of Vygotsky's theory it is hard to find the understanding that cultural historical theory is not a closed system of ideas which can be applied in an already prepared form in practice, but a *dynamic, developmental process.*

The second problem is frequently that the expansion and application of cultural-historical psychology in the different social settings does not connect with a consideration of the social and scientific context of its formation. The reconstruction of the theoretical

programme of cultural historical psychology in the social and scientific context of its formation may provide a framework for delineation of its achievements and limitations.

Moreover, as Veresov notes “in order to introduce Vygotsky’s theory to world psychology the Western Vygotskians simplified and adapted the whole picture to the existing tradition”(Veresov, 2009, p.290). Many contemporary researchers and practitioners have not developed a critical reflection on their own cognitive schemes and their connections to personal, collective and social practices.

Understanding Vygotsky’s theory requires posing at least the following questions: why do we need Vygotsky’s theory? Why do we focus on the particular aspects of Vygotsky’ legacy (and not on some others)? What do we attempt to do with Vygotsky’s ideas?

The ‘archival revolution’ in Vygotskian studies challenges the mainstream interpretations of Vygotsky’s theory and stimulates its reconsideration and reconceptualization. In the light of new findings as the result of the ‘archival revolution’ it has become clear that Vygotsky’s legacy remains “partly forgotten and partly misunderstood” (Veresov, 2009, p.269) or as Elhammoumi (2009) argues “terra incognita”.

Future research should focus on developing Vygotsky’s theory and methodology in the 21st century and rethinking cultural historical theory from the perspective of problems arising in psychological, educational, and social practice around the globe. Moving with and beyond Vygotsky remains unexplored territory (Barahona, Benitez, Dafermos, & Hakkarainen, 2014).

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