

THE GENESIS OF CULTURAL-HISTORICAL THEORY IN VYGOTSKY'S MANUSCRIPTS OF 1926

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ABSTRACT

The present article aims to analyze a restricted set of notes made by Vygotsky, between 1925 and 1926. The study of these manuscripts was based on his later productions, which gave rise to the Vygotskian project for a scientific psychology. The method used was theoretical study. We found that these notes express the problems faced by the author in defining the object and methods of psychology. The manuscripts indicate the problems encountered by Vygotsky in his search for objective methods for studying consciousness. Therefore, we conclude that his notes are extremely important for understanding the process of building his historical-cultural theory of human development.

Keywords: Vygotsky; Historical-cultural psychology; human development

La génesis de la teoría histórico-cultural en los manuscritos de Vygotsky de 1926

RESUMEN

En el presente artículo el objetivo es analizar un conjunto restringido de apuntes realizados por Vygotsky, entre 1925 y 1926. El estudio de estos manuscritos se basó en sus producciones posteriores, que dieron lugar al proyecto vygotkiano de una psicología científica. Por tratarse de un análisis documental y que presenta como objetivo investigar conceptos creados por el autor, se utilizó el método de estudio teórico. Encontramos que estas notas expresan los problemas que enfrenta el autor al definir el objeto y los métodos de la psicología. Los manuscritos indican los problemas encontrados por Vygotsky en la búsqueda por métodos objetivos de estudio de la consciencia. De ese modo, se concluye que sus apuntes son de extrema importancia para la comprensión del proceso de construcción de su teoría histórico-cultural del desarrollo humano.

Palabras clave: Vygotsky; Psicología histórico-cultural; desarrollo humano

A gênese da teoria histórico-cultural nos manuscritos de Vigotski de 1926

RESUMO

O presente artigo tem como objetivo analisar um conjunto restrito de anotações realizados por Vigotski, entre 1925 e 1926. O estudo desses manuscritos tomou como base suas produções posteriores, as quais deram origem ao projeto vygotkiano para uma psicologia científica. Por se tratar de uma análise documental e que tem como objetivo investigar conceitos criados pelo autor, o método utilizado foi o estudo teórico. Constatamos que essas anotações expressam os problemas enfrentados pelo autor para definir o objeto e os métodos da psicologia. Os manuscritos indicam os problemas encontrados por Vigotski na sua busca por métodos objetivos de estudo da consciência. Desse modo, concluímos que as suas anotações são de extrema importância para a compreensão do processo de construção da sua teoria histórico-cultural do desenvolvimento humano.

Palavras-chave: Vigotski; Psicologia histórico-cultural; desenvolvimento humano

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INTRODUCTION

The Soviet psychologist Lev Seminovitch Vygotsky (1896-1934) is considered one of the great names in world psychology. Those who worked with him were full of praise when describing him. Luria (1979/1992), for example, stated that during his career he never found another person whose intellectual qualities came close to Vygotsky's. Scholars of his work consider him an example of creativity in the scientific field (Dafermos, 2018). Others such as Stetsenko and Arieviditch (2004) attest that his importance comes from his commitment to the ideals of justice, equity and social change. Broadly speaking, its production value arises from its critical position in relation to reductionist conceptions about the constitution of human consciousness, as well as the methods developed to try to overcome such limits.

Given the importance of the author, there is a growing need to understand his theory, especially the methodological foundations he developed for the study of human development. Despite the increased dissemination of his work, Veresov (2010) states that his methodological creations remain unknown in contemporary hegemonic Psychology or have been misunderstood. Elhammoumi (2009), in turn, argues in the same direction, stating that the legacy left by Vygotsky, in the attempt to formulate a Psychology based on Marxist bases, still constitutes an unexplored field by psychological science. There is still a lack of investigations into the prehistory of Historical-Cultural Psychology, as Veresov (1999) attests, especially those that analyze the relations between published and unpublished works.

In this way, his manuscripts and notebooks constitute an important source of bibliographic research about his "creative laboratory", as they express his research process, which involves recording some of his studies, the development of research hypotheses and experimental planning that served as a starting point for empirical research and theoretical elaborations (Vygotsky, 2018).

Our objective will be to analyze a restricted set of notes made by the author and argue that they express conceptions about the object and method that guided his subsequent production, therefore linked to the genesis of the historical-cultural theory of human development. Furthermore, the analyzed material provides clues to understand how the development of consciousness studies began through the mediation of signs and, later, meanings. To this end, we will take as the object of analysis some notes he produced that remained unpublished until recently (Vygotsky, 2018). His notes became public after his family opened his archives in 2006. The selection, organization, transcription and editing of part of the archives was done by Zavershneva (2010).

According to Veresov (1999), Vygotsky's first years in Moscow were "undervalued not only historically, but

also methodologically" (p. 108). In order to fill this gap, we listed as the object of analysis his manuscripts written during the initial period of his foray into psychology. We will especially analyze some notes organized with the title "From Zakhharino's Hospital" (Vygotsky, 2018), as they were produced while Vygotsky was hospitalized for health treatment, between November 1925 and May 1926. These notes were not made with the intention of being published, as they are material for study and reflection by the author himself.

Zavershneva (2012a) was one of the few researchers, to date, to investigate such material, therefore investigations are still needed to reconstruct the research path followed by Vygotsky during the initial period of his production. Their importance stems from the fact that they were notes prior to research involving the instrumental method, the basis for the development of Vygotsky's project for the study of children's cultural development. They also predate the unpublished manuscript "The historical significance of the crisis in psychology" (Zavershneva, 2012b), decisive for the subsequent development of her theory. Furthermore, they form part of a period in which the author was distancing himself from the reflexology of Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) and the reactology of Konstantin Kornilov (1879-1957).

As it is a theoretical study, we carried out an immanent reading of the analyzed material, in addition to comparing it with other materials from the author himself, published and not published later. The dialogue that will be established between the analyzed material and other writings by the author, from later periods, had as its starting point themes linked to the problem of the object of psychology and its methods. As an analysis methodology, we used the *Procedimentos de Interpretação Conceitual de Texto* (PICT) (Laurenti & Lopes, 2016). The objective of this methodology is to enable a synthesis of the main concepts used by the author. To achieve this objective, we carried out several readings in order to separate the subjects into thematic groups, as they are a set of private notes that were not written to be published. Thus, they reflect various concerns that the author had during the writing period and which do not always follow a clear logical order. Despite its provisional nature, several hypotheses and concepts returned in his later writings, as we intend to demonstrate.

The delimitation of the most relevant excerpts was based on their relation with theses and methods that became core to the author's later theoretical system. As this is a research that had Vygotsky's work as its object, we limited ourselves to carrying out analyzes that are based only on the works of the aforementioned author. Therefore, the objective of the research was not to evaluate how the ideas contained in their manuscripts relate to the production of other authors of historical-

cultural theory or other theoretical currents. Before we begin analyzing the material, we will briefly present the nature of your notes, as well as the material selected to support the investigation.

BRIEF CONTEXTUALIZATION OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

The manuscripts that will be analyzed belong to a critical period in Vygotsky's life. He was admitted to Zakharino hospital after arriving from his trip to London, his only trip abroad. The trip aimed to represent the Soviet Union at the International Conference about the Education of Deaf Children (Yasnitsky, 2018). In a note made during the trip, the author predicted that, due to his poor health, he would have at most between 5 and 10 years to live (Vygotsky, 2018). For this reason, the author produced very little during the period he was hospitalized, as in addition to his health conditions, the hospitalization environment was not conducive to intellectual work. He wrote only a few letters and took few notes.

Unlike other sets of notes, which used different supports, such as the back of articles, small paper clippings, receipts, among others, the notes made during his stay at Zakharino's hospital were written in a small notebook. According to Zavershneva (2012a), the notebook has 23 written pages. The pages were not numbered or dated and the format of the writing and the ink used indicate the different moments in which the notes were made.

According to Zavershneva (2012a), the notes began after his hospitalization and ended shortly after his discharge. According to the author, these notes shed light on an obscure period of his production, a period in which historical-cultural theory began to emerge. These notes demarcate a period of transition between the attempt to reconcile psychology and reflexology methods (Vygotski, 2004) and the abandonment of this attempt towards the creation of experimental situations for the study of higher psychological functions based on the mediation of cultural signs. In this way, they belong to the so-called prehistory of Historical-Cultural Theory (Veresov, 1999).

In general, the notes deal with the following themes: 1) Additional notes to his thesis on the *Psychology of Art*; 2) Reflections about the social essence of the person, supported by Marx; 3) Mentions about speech and its role in the development of consciousness; 4) Association of the mediated sign with human development; 5) Notes about the psychophysical problem; and 6) Drafts about the Psychology method that were partially used in the text "Historical significance of the Psychology crisis".

Zavershneva (2012a) approached the manuscripts based on the themes above. We, on the other hand, will focus on topics relating to the problem of the object of psychology and its methods of study. We will analyze the following themes relating to the object of psychology: 1) questions relating to the social origin of consciousness; 2) the relation between speech and human development; 3) reflections about the psychophysical problem. In relation to the methods of studying consciousness, the

themes analyzed will be the following: 1) abstraction method; 2) reverse method; 3) method of reconstructing the phenomenon.

IN SEARCH OF A NEW DEFINITION OF THE PSYCHOLOGY OBJECT

Before we begin the actual approach to the content of the notes, we must mention what does not appear in such manuscripts, as it may indicate a change in the orientation of the author's reflection. The attempt to reconcile reflexological and psychological methods, in writings from the same period, does not appear in his notes. In these published texts, despite pointing out the limits of reflexology, there is still a reading of consciousness that is translated into reflexological terms (Vygotski, 2004). He questioned the need to investigate consciousness through the word as a reversible reflection, created by man himself. It is worth mentioning that he already considered "social experience" as the basis for the formation of consciousness, but there was still no theoretical system with its own concepts to explain this process. Therefore, he resorted to the materialist theory of mental processes that existed at that time, Pavlov's reflexology. On the other hand, in his notes that will be analyzed, the word reflex appears only twice. This may be a strong indication that at that time he had already definitively abandoned the attempt to "reformulate" reflexology. From his warning about the need for reflexology to take the word as an stimulant for behavior and even as a basis for consciousness, all that remained was the concern with the role of the word in such psychological processes. A more complete form of the place of the word in the constitution of psychological functions was a task developed later, but its seed was already planted during this period.

During the period in which he was admitted to the Zakharino hospital, Vygotsky was struggling internally to find ways to study consciousness. Despite the considerations that follow, we must alert the reader to the fact that Vygotsky believed that there could not be an understanding of the research object before the research itself, that is, before the ideal reproduction of the real phenomenon movement. In this sense he was entirely in agreement with Marx's dialectical method. Understanding the object is precisely the result of the process of knowing empirical facts mediated by abstraction. In his words: "[...] the method is, at the same time, premise and product, the tool and result of investigation" (Vygotski, 1960 / 2000a, p. 47). In view of the above, we are contrary to interpretations that include the research method and the explanation of a given phenomenon as a result of the researcher's reflection before contact with his research object. This type of view is an interpretative mistake considering his research method. We propose that it was the research object that imposed itself on the researcher and required the reformulation of both the methods and his interpretation

throughout his research work.

In this sense, hypotheses about the origin of consciousness must be seen as speculations that should be proven by empirical data. One of the notes made about this issue concerns the problem of the relation between the animal and cultural (political) origin of human behavior, a central issue for his future works, and which became the core of his definition of the psychology object (Vygotski, 1960/2000a). The plan to write a monograph that would be titled "*Zoon Politikon*" is one of the expressions of these reflections. Despite the importance of the discussion, such a monograph was never written. We believe that the book "Studies about the history of behavior - simian, primitive man and the child" could be the initial attempt to carry out this plan (Vygotsky & Luria, 1930/1996).

The conception of consciousness as having a cultural and social origin had already been developed since his book "Psychology of Art". In this study, Vygotsky criticized individualist psychologies and drew attention to the need to study "social psyche" (Vygotsky, 1965/1999), as his ontological approach was taking shape during the writing of this book, through Marx and Engels. In that same publication, he states that, according to Marx, "[...] man, in the broadest sense, is a *zoon politikon*, not only an animal to which communication is intrinsic but an animal that can only isolate itself in society." (Marx as cited by Vygotski, 1965/1999, p. 14). It is worth mentioning that the first chapter of the book Psychology of Art was the last material to be written and for this reason it bears similarities with the notes written in Zakharino's hospital and with the text "The historical significance of the crisis in psychology" (Zavershneva, 2012a).

Vygotsky emphasizes, in several passages in his notes, the social origin of consciousness. In this way, he only reinforced a conception that was already taking shape. In the first fragment of the notebook, for example, he wrote down the following topics relating to this issue:

Individual and social psychology. Thought and speech. The analysis of acts of empathy constitutes the development of a theme: 1. Bio and socio methodology; 2. The concrete, central problem, speech is consciousness, the individual is organized according to the type of social structure; 3. Its mechanism is *empathy for objects*, the objectification of internal conditions. (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 73, emphasis added).

We believe that such notes denote, in an embryonic form, the conception of the nature of the person constitution that was synthesized by the author through the "general genetic law of cultural development", elaborated a few years later. In the text entitled "Genesis of higher psychic functions", which is part of the study on the "History of the development of higher psychological functions", Vygotsky (1960/2000a) established that

every higher psychological function has a cultural origin and appears on two levels, firstly on the social plane (interpsychological) and then within the child as an intrapsychic category. Therefore, when Vygotsky asserts, in the passage above, that the individual is organized according to the type of social structure, we have evidence to suppose that there was no substantial change in his conception of the way in which the psychological phenomenon is constituted. What took place was a more complete understanding, based on empirical data, of the interactions between interpsychic and intrapsychic processes. In other words, we clearly have the problem of transfer [*perenós*] between the social environment and psychological processes, seen as central at the end of his production (Vygotsky, 2018). His interpretation of the dynamics between external and internal relations changed throughout his work. At the end of his life he analyzed this problem based on the relation between the field of action and the semantic field (Vygotski, 1997).

His search for a new ontological definition implied criticism of the guidelines of the authors of his time. For example, in the manuscript "The historical significance of the crisis in Psychology", probably written after leaving the hospital, he criticized psychoanalysis, behaviorism, personalism and *Gestalt*. His critical analysis did not spare his compatriots, Pavlov and Kornilov, representatives of the main psychological orientations of that period in the Soviet Union, reflexology and reactology, respectively. In the notes produced during his hospitalization, Vygotsky specifically criticized Kornilov. This psychologist took over command of the Moscow Psychological Institute in 1923. He was also one of the first to propose the creation of a Psychology based on Marx's methods. Vygotsky gradually moved away from Kornilov's reactology and definitively broke with the author in 1928 (Yasnitsky, 2018).

In his critique of reactology, Vygotsky argued that the definition of behavior as a system of reactions, typical of Kornilov's system, involves a fundamental misunderstanding. He criticized the reactological view that proposes that humans are passive in relation to the environment. "My action changes the situation and is not only determined by the previous situation, but by the process of change as a whole - both externally and internally" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 75). This passage from his notes indicates that Vygotsky was aware of the global relation between the individual and the environment, a fact that would be re-elaborated in the production of the 1930s, through the concept of "social situation of development" (Vygotski, 2006). In this sense, we can observe that the conception of the individual as an active being is a fundamental ontological principle that was already taking shape at this moment of his reflection.

The discussion about the active aspect of human behavior is related to the differentiation between human behavior and animal behavior. Next, the

author emphasizes that adaptation is a good term “for morphological changes (a response to environmental conditions)” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 75). For humans, unlike animal adaptation, behavior is “activity”, not a “response”. According to the author, human behavior differs from animal behavior in the following aspects: “1) Artificial stimuli; 2) The apparatus brought from outside (empathy); 3) Artificial reactions (speech, etc.)” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 76). In this differentiation, which was probably based on his studies about the findings of the time regarding animal behavior and his reflections on the origin of the social being, we can identify the prehistory of his instrumental research method. In our hypothesis, this fact can be observed when he points out that “artificial stimuli” make human behavior different from animal behavior. It is also possible to note the problem of transfer [*perenós*] between external and internal aspects, while he notes about the “apparatus brought from outside” as a determinant for human development.

The hypothesis had already outlined that the dynamics between consciousness and the apparatus brought from outside passed through the mediation of the word. The classic comparison of the word as an “artificially created stimulus” with the work “tool”, typical of texts from the instrumental period, already appeared during the period in which he was hospitalized. In his words: “Verbal behavior differs from non-verbal behavior as work differs from animal adaptation (the tool is also outside the organism, that is, it is an organ of society).” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 75). In this sense, at that time, the conception of the role of artificial stimulus as a fundamental element for the differentiation between human beings and animals was already present in his reflection. The artificial character of the stimulus created by man lies, according to this view, in the ability to not only respond to stimuli from the environment, but also create new stimuli, therefore man is not passive in relation to the environment. Linked to this vision is the role of work in the active character of man in the transformation of nature. The word was considered a stimulus for “regulation” and organization of the behavior of the individual and others around them, determining the development of collective work.

The analogy between verbal behavior and practical work activity was fundamental for the development of his method of research into higher psychological functions. In this way, it is possible to note that the understanding of the function of psychological instruments in the constitution of human behavior was already a hypothesis a few years before the creation of the instrumental method and the development of its research that used the genetic-experimental method (Vygotski, 1960/2000a). Therefore, these notes made between 1925 and 1926 are extremely important for us to follow the development process of your research project.

The notes about artificial stimuli and verbal behavior

are related to his hypothesis about the origin of consciousness. Vygotsky noted that “[...] consciousness is speech for oneself, it originates in society with language (Marx)”. He then adds: “[...] speech is always dialogue. Consciousness is dialogue with oneself” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 74). To conclude the demonstration of the connection between these hypotheses and the instrumental method, we will quote an excerpt from an annotation that will echo the general genetic law of cultural development, mentioned previously.

The fact that the child first listens and understands and then acquires verbal awareness indicates that: (1) Awareness develops from experience; (2) Talking to oneself = acting consciously, the child assumes the position of the other, relates to himself as if he were another person, imitates another person speaking to him, replaces the other the person in relation to themselves, learns to be another person in relation to his own body. (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 74).

The quote above demonstrates a problem that was pursued by Vygotsky throughout his life: how do human beings become aware of themselves from the perspective of others? In the text “Conscience as a problem in behavioral psychology”, from 1925, he formulates the following hypothesis, which is close to the quote above: “We are aware of ourselves, because we are aware of others and in the same way we are aware of others, because, in relation to ourselves, we are the same as the other in relation to us” (Vigotski, 2023, p. 55). The role of imitation in human development was central to his explanation of how our consciousness derives from taking another’s perspective, that is, from the relation with the people around us. In the final period of his life, Vygotsky turned to the study of the development of concepts as a way of studying this mechanism. In the context of this investigation, the author even stated that the scientific concept allows the student to act collaboratively, even when the teacher is absent (Vigotski, 1934/2001). Furthermore, imitation is the basis for the development of the Zone of Proximal Development, as it is through the imitation of an adult that the child can accomplish what was previously impossible autonomously (Vigotski, 1934/2001). In this way, the way of explaining self-awareness, in the final period of his work, involved the formation of concepts in collaborative relations.

Regarding this discussion, Vygotsky approaches the notion of “self-development”, inspired by Wilhelm Stern (1871-1938). He agrees with this author, understanding that child development cannot be explained by adaptation. If this were true, ontogenesis should repeat phylogenesis. Despite some criticism directed at Stern, Vygotsky noted that this author’s conception would have value: “[...] The person is formed like a family = a

community within oneself" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 80). Thus, here it is possible to note the ontological conception of the role of the collective in the origin of the person, that is, the social determination of the development of the psyche.

Along with the problem of the origin of the psychological phenomenon, there is also the "psychophysical" problem, which involves the observation that "the subjective absolutely presupposes the objective" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 77). In this discussion, he clearly demonstrates his materialist conception of the origin of the psychic apparatus. For the author, there is no subjective essence that is not related to objectivity. It is not only about the materiality of the biological structure, which supports psychological functioning, but also the role of social relationships in such development. In other words, it deals with the social nature of the mind, objectively structured based on relations among people. The following passage exemplifies this issue: The mental phenomenon is constituted by the relations between "[...] two social individuals (interpsychological) or between the body and the 'ego' (like the social in us)" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 79). Next, Vygotsky says:

We need to discover consciousness, the fetishism of mental phenomena, as well as the fetishism of commodities. The mental phenomenon is, like a commodity, a sensorial-supersensory thing; the suprasensory part is the social, reified, social relation projected into a thing (in the word). Just as a commodity is a commodity not because of its physical properties but because of the social relations behind it, the physiological process in the nerves itself is not a behavioral act but the social relations behind it that give it this meaning. (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 79).

Vygotsky is indicating to us that the mental phenomenon is not a "thing in itself", which has an existence independent of its objective substrate, which are social relations. Just as Marx needed to go beyond the appearance of the commodity to unveil its nature, through social relations mediated by the dynamics among production, distribution, exchange and consumption, Vygotsky indicates that it is necessary to carry out the same operation in order to study psychological phenomena. He calls for the need to search for the "commodities" of Psychology, the "fetishism of mental phenomena". At this time, he still did not have the answer to this question, which was only achieved at the end of his production, as the following passage from a 1933 note indicates: "The [psychological] system is reproduced in every meaning like the capitalist system in the commodity operation" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 354). At the end of his life he found the commodity of psychology: the meaning of the word; however, the path to discovering the "supra-sensory" aspect of the

mental phenomenon required several mediations until it was completely achieved. In our interpretation, he was not the author who deliberately chose meaning as the unit of analysis of the psychological phenomenon, but it was the object that imposed itself. Real psychological phenomena, in their various forms of expression in the research carried out by the author, presented themselves in different ways and at different levels of abstraction, until their movement in reality could be ideally reproduced. The path developed by the author for the reproduction of the object occurred from research that used the instrumental method, through the method of investigating the concepts development in adolescents, analyzes of clinical cases, studies about the ontogenesis of learning, until culminating in the discovery of the role of meaning in the consciousness development.

During the period in which he was hospitalized, Vygotsky expanded his reflection on the psychophysical problem and we can say that he reached three conclusions: 1) the mind is not a nervous process; it is not a thing or a process, but a relation among processes; 2) the mental process is not the expression of psychophysiological processes, but a societal relation of nervous processes; 3) Psychology is the science of the person (not of behavior or mental phenomena). Vygotski also criticized psychophysical parallelism, as "[...] the mind does not consume energy because it is not a physical process, but the societal qualification of nervous processes" (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 79). In this sense, later on, he points out that "[...] Psychology does not study physical realities, but social ones" (p. 80). Vygotsky associated the conscious aspect of the person with social relationships. The biological aspect would represent the "unconscious". The junction of biological and social origin or "[...] the lived cooperation of these two principles is the person." (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 80). A few years after this note, in his text "Psyche, consciousness and the unconscious", Vygotsky (2004) criticized the definition of the unconscious as belonging to the biological apparatus. He stated, on the contrary, that the unconscious is a psychological phenomenon and not just a biological one. This change in perspective demonstrates the provisional nature of his reflections condensed in the notes analyzed. It is worth noting that, despite criticism of psychophysical parallelism, some researchers consider that Vygotsky ended up producing a parallelism interpretation (Dafermos, 2018).

We can see that his conception of the subject of Psychology was undergoing significant changes during the period analyzed. These changes must be seen precisely as different ways of approaching the phenomenon and not as finished definitions regarding the precise object of Psychology. This fact is perceived when Vygotsky declares, in another set of notes, after leaving the hospital, that the object should not appear before Psychology, but after, as a result of the

investigation:

The object of science is a part of reality, represented in concepts, and this comes at the end. *That's why it's worth giving the definition not at the beginning, but at the end of the course*: Then it will be rich in content. The first definition provides a point of view that must be accepted at face value: you must believe me that there is something vital, psychological, etc. We'll soon see what it is. *From this first definition to the entire course* (each new piece of knowledge means a definition of the object) *to the final complete definition*, which must end psychology (Vygotzky, 2018, p. 109, emphasis added).

Thus, what Vygotzky noted in his notebooks about the ontological status is nothing more than reflections about what exists, that is, the nature of mental phenomena, as it was only empirical research that allowed him to describe the real constitution of this object. Following the passage above, written in 1927, Vygotzky emphasizes that the object arises from successive approximations, during the course of the scientific process. In other words, investigation is not the construction of the researched object, but the researcher's approach and its ideal reproduction.

METHODS FOR THE STUDY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

From the beginning of his foray into Psychology, Vygotzky recognized that the human being is constituted by overcoming his biological roots. This finding gave rise to the need to develop new research methods and procedures capable of capturing the social origin of human consciousness. To this end, Vygotzky undertook a critical analysis of the Psychology method of his time. In this sense, the notes analyzed here contain valuable reflections in this regard, and clearly served as a basis for composing the manuscript about the crisis in Psychology and for carrying out research about the development of consciousness.

Vygotzky knew that the Psychology method could not be restricted to the observable aspects of the phenomenon being researched. Still armed with the reflexology framework, he drew attention to the need to develop a new methodology to "[...] investigate inhibited reflexes", which would be inaccessible to direct observation (Vygotzky, 2004, p. 77). Still in this publication, Vygotzky criticized conceptions that were limited to the study of "visible reactions". These conceptions denied the possibility of studying consciousness and their methods would deprive "[...] the most fundamental means to investigate reactions that are neither manifest nor apparent at first glance, such as internal movements, internal speech, somatic reactions, etc." (Vygotzky, 2004, p. 57).

The research methods problem for "internal speech" appears in the texts that are the object of analysis when it reflects on the relation between thought and speech (Vygotzky, 2018). Vygotzky clearly disagreed with certain authors, such as John Watson (1878-1958), for whom the word is just a stimulus that replaces an object or reaction. Vygotzky noted that the word is not just a relation between sound and the word it denotes, but rather "[...] a relation between a speaker and a listener, a direct relation between a person and an object, it is an interpsychological relation, which establishes the unity of two organisms towards an object." (Vygotzky, 2018, p. 74). Next, the author argues: "Linguistics transforms the word into a fetish; the psychologist reveals that behind the visible relations among things are the relations among people (cf. Marx, commodity fetishism)." (p. 74). We clearly see the Marxian reference in the indirect method of studying psychological phenomena. That is, at that time, Vygotzky had already expressed the hypothesis that it would be necessary to understand the phenomenon indirectly, that is, beyond its immediate manifestation. This methodological attitude was fundamental to his experimental research that led the author to evaluate the development of the relation between thought and language. It took Vygotzky a few years to understand the fundamental characteristics that determine this relation (ontogenetic development of concepts, systemic nature of concept formation, relation between meaning and sense, for example). However, by 1925-1926, he was already clear that language was much more complex than a direct relation between sound and word. Thus, given that the problem of the relation between thought and language became central at the end of his life, these notes are of great importance for understanding the evolution of the problem treatment.

In another fragment, now dedicated entirely to Marx's method, some central questions are raised for the reflection that Vygotzky developed after the 1925-1926 notes, specifically in the manuscript "The historical meaning of the crisis in Psychology". Among them, we highlight the indication of abstraction as the method of knowledge necessary to indirectly access the phenomenon and penetrate its essence. In these notes, Vygotzky highlights the problem of the method of analyzing phenomena. "Marx says that in the social sciences the force of abstraction plays the role of the microscope" (Vygotzky, 2018, p. 84). He is referring to the famous passage by Marx (1867/2013), made in the preface to Book I of "The Capital", which deals with the nature of the phenomena he intends to address. According to Marx, "economic forms", unlike natural phenomena, cannot use a microscope or chemical reagents. "The force of abstraction [*Abstraktionskraft*] must replace both" (Marx, 1867/2013, p. 113). Abstraction does not concern free speculation that is not guided by facts, on the contrary. Louis Althusser

(1918-1990), in the preface to the aforementioned work by Marx, clarifies that, despite the fact that we cannot “touch with our hands” the “total social capital” and “surplus value”, concepts elaborated by Marx to explain the capitalist mode of production, “[...] these two abstract concepts designate actually existing realities.” (p. 61).

Despite starting from the analysis method that takes abstraction as the basis for the study of psychological phenomena, Vygotsky does not discard the role of the observation method. This demonstrates that his criticism of guidelines that were limited to taking analysis as the mere description of his phenomenal appearance did not lead him to despise such a method. On the contrary, in a notation produced a year after leaving the hospital, which is probably linked to his presentation at the First All-Russian Pedological Congress, he defended the use of this method as follows:

Nowadays, the methodological approach of experimental psychology increasingly continues on a path in which the role of the observer becomes immense, especially observation, which turns into an experiment. I am referring to the experiments of Köhler and Jaensch, the filming of experiments, etc. Psychologists will agree with me. Not a hierarchy of methods, but the cooperation of all these methods, the foundations of matter and dialectics in principle. (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 111).

Vygotsky criticized the guidelines that reduce the experimental method to a mechanical act, which removes the observer’s role as protagonist in the process of understanding the psychological phenomenon. On the contrary, he attests that the observer’s role is immense. In this way, it is possible to verify the intimate relation between highlighting the importance of the abstraction method and the important observer’s role in the knowledge production process. In other words, abstraction can only be achieved due to the active observer’s role who perceives a phenomenon and analyzes it, within a phenomena system.

The “reverse method” was of great importance for the ontological definition of the psychological phenomenon. This method gave Vygotsky a philosophical basis for treating phenomena in their most developed forms. The abstraction and study of the phenomenon in its “more developed” form would have already been summarized in his book “Psychology of Art”. He used this method when he sought to investigate the structure of different literary works through their more developed forms. To this end, he chose examples that synthesized the pinnacle of artistic forms: fables, romances and tragedies. The analysis of these examples should be able to extract the elements common to other works, even the less complex ones. In the text “The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology”, Vygotsky (2004) says that *The*

Capital was written following this method. Marx analyzed the “cell” of society (the form of commodity value) and showed that there must be mediation between the most developed structure and its cell, therefore the reverse method assumes that it is the most developed form that explains the less developed. This method is linked to abstraction, since, when choosing the representative of a series of phenomena, a generalization is operating.

In this sense, going back to the notes made during his stay at Zakhario’s hospital, Vygotski reflects on Alfred Adler’s (1870-1937) concept of “supercompensation” and places it within the Marxian matrix. He emphasizes that, for Marx and Engels, socialism would be capitalism that has been overcome. The same could be said for art and health. He adds, highlighting that “[...] deep down, this [the idea of supercompensation] is a dialectical principle of a philosophical and epistemological nature” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 81). This author was used by Vygotsky (Vygotski, 1997) in his research about the children’s development with some type of disability. Vygotsky attests that for Adler, disability “consequently becomes the starting point and main driving force of the personality psychic development” (Vygotski, 1997, p. 15).

González Rey (2013) mentions that Adler influenced Vygotski with regard to the role of social relations in the person’s formation and through his concept of “supercompensation”. On the other hand, there was later a distancing in relation to this author’s productions, as Vygotsky (1997) came to understand that it is the social consequences and not the disability itself that give condition the process of “supercompensation”. As a result of this conception, Vygotsky moved away from the objective determinism about the psyche present in Adler’s work. This determinism understands a direct relation between the disease or disability and the psychic configuration. In other words, it assumes that overcoming disability lies in the internal nature of the psyche and not in social determinants.

The dialectical conception of the role of “overcoming” was fundamental to Vygotsky’s future research. This problem appears in his research on the relation between lower and higher psychological functions. He highlights the dialectical movement of this relation, when explaining the meaning of the word “overcome”, in German and Russian (Vygotski, 2000a). This word would have a double meaning in these languages, denoting both destruction and conservation. On another occasion, discussing the “Development of psychic functions in the transitional age”, he emphasizes that “[...] each higher stage denies the lower, but denies it without destroying it, but including it as a surpassed category, as an integral moment.” (Vygotski, 2006, p. 119). This idea goes back to the previous discussion about the “reverse method”, as what was overcome is also present in the more developed stages. It is at the basis of the constitution of his vision of man, because as we have seen, he

understood man as overcoming his biological root. More clearly, this notion appears in research with children with some type of disability and in the analysis of clinical cases, but also in investigations into the “instrumental act”, since the focus has always been to discover how the child “overcomes” a situational-problem, using psychological instruments. Therefore, the dialectical conception that incorporates the notion of overcoming was fundamental for Vygotsky’s future research.

The principle of reconstructing the phenomenon was fundamental in the process of creating his cultural behavior research project (Vygotski, 2000a). It had already appeared in his notes between 1925-1926. In them, Vygotsky considers that “Psychology belongs to the sciences that do not allow direct study (perception of the material), but require its reconstruction” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 90). A few years later, probably at the end of the 1920s, Vygotsky stated that the method of reconstruction has two meanings: “1) it studies not natural structures, but reconstructions; 2) does not analyze, but builds processes.” (Vygotsky 2000b, p. 23). For the author, Psychology should not only observe phenomena, but reconstruct them in controlled situations so that it is possible to observe their development process. Genetic analysis became the foundation of his later method and was linked to the method of reconstruction, because to study the process of development from its beginning, it is necessary to recreate, using artificial forms, the cooperative processes between children and adults that occur “naturally” in everyday life. The constructive method was also linked to the abstraction method which, as mentioned, aimed to overcome the observed facts immediately. In experimental situations after 1927, Vygotsky used the reconstruction method to transform internal psychological processes, impossible to be observed directly, into external processes, observable indirectly.

The creation of experimental situations for the “reconstruction” of the genesis process and phenomenon development was extremely important in Vygotsky’s research trajectory. It was based on it that he arrived at the explanation about the mediated character of human behavior, the origin of higher psychological functions, the genesis of the concepts development that, in the end, made him understand the role of meaning in the thought development. On the other hand, although the reconstruction method allows control of the phenomenon, it also limits its observation. Vygotsky (2004), in his text “About Psychological Systems”, noted this problem at the beginning of the 1930s, when he noticed some flaws in the experimental situations created by him and Sakharov, his research partner, to study the concepts. They used artificial words, created only in the experimental situation, to investigate the formation of concepts. The failure of the investigation resulted from the artificial nature of the experiment, as

he realized that the determining characteristic for the development of concepts, their systemic nature, was not present in an artificial word. In other words, the concept is a generalization that exists at different levels of abstraction, some being closer to materiality than others. And what determines the degree of abstraction made possible by the concept is precisely its relation in a chain with other concepts, a characteristic that did not exist in the artificial concept. In another note, probably dated 1932, he makes the error of the experiments evident by noting: “an error in the evaluation of Sakharov’s experiments: 1) artificiality + 2) as if there were a concept and not its system” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 263). Despite the limits, these experiments helped him reach the following conclusion, following the previous note: “The path of the study of meaning is the central question of the study” (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 263).

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Over the last few decades there has been an increase in access to Vygotski’s works, which has guaranteed the possibility in-depth study of his materialist analysis project of consciousness. In this vein, we try to demonstrate that his recently published manuscripts can be a rich source for rebuilding his creative laboratory. His notes expressed the resumption of theoretical concerns prior to his writing, which were intensifying or being transformed, as well as serving as a guide for future research. Furthermore, some designs were revised and abandoned in his subsequent production, as mentioned. In this sense, they can be considered as part of the genesis of the historical-cultural theory of human development, as they contributed to research about the cultural development of children.

In summary, we observed through reading his notes that, despite his poor health, the author did not stop thinking about his research work and the theoretical problems he faced. One of his central concerns was trying to explain the difference between animals and human beings, without applying a reductionist methodology. In this sense, social experience, brought from outside, through psychological instruments, had already appeared as a working hypothesis for the consciousness origin. In the notes there is clearly a view of man as an active being, who modifies the social environment and mainly, that this transformation of reality is made possible by artificial creations, including language.

Regarding the methodological problems contained in his notes, we can conclude that they concern, above all, the problem of the means of studying what is not directly observed. To achieve this objective, Vygotsky understood the need to adopt abstraction, the “reverse method” and the phenomenon reconstruction. These were judged as necessary “instruments” but insufficient to understand the distinctive characteristics of humans in relation to other animals. The genetic-experimental method was

developed in the years following his hospitalization. His principle was to study the genesis of psychological phenomena through experimental situations. He expresses both the method of reconstructing the phenomenon and the need for abstraction to interpret the mediated activity. The reverse method was put into practice only in his research about the concepts formation in adolescents (Costa, 2020). These were the methods that guided the research of Vygotsky and his collaborators in the following years, despite the difficulties that arose along the way, mainly due to some limits inherent to the methods themselves.

We found that his notes express speculations that should be put to the test of facts, that is, the collection of data, from different means (experiments, observations and comparative psychology), should be able to confirm or refute them. Vygotsky was clear that the method was also the result of the research, as its nature and the conditions of access to it largely determine the methods used by the researcher. In this sense, it does not mean that the problems expressed in these manuscripts were resolved immediately, nor that their research method was fully developed. On the contrary, the analysis of his production in the following years expresses a continuous theoretical-methodological modification. The object, according to materialist dialectics, imposes itself when researching during the process of “excavation” the real. From this, the researcher must verify whether the constructed image of the object corresponds to its objective properties (Chasin, 2009). If they do not correspond, the scientist must identify the fragility of the methods and reformulate them. This determination of the object made him reorganize his research project several times throughout his production.

In short, explanations about human development emerged from his experimental research, which allowed different levels of approach to the researched phenomenon. In this way, these explanations are not a product of the author’s own reflection, as the author does not create his object, but it is an attempt to appropriate the peculiar logic of a peculiar object (Dafermos, 2018).

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This work was carried out with the support of the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel - Brazil (CAPES) - Funding Code 001.

This paper was translated from Portuguese by Ana Maria Pereira Dionísio.

Received on: October 14, 2021

Approved on: October 17, 2023