

On the concept of will in L.S. Vygotsky's work

Bento Selau

Professor, Universidade Federal do Pampa, Brazil

bentoselau@gmail.com

Cristina Boéssio

Doctor, Professor, Universidade Federal do Pampa – UNIPAMPA, Brazil

cristinapdb@hotmail.com

This article presents the results of an investigation which aimed to identify the theoretical notions developed by L.S. Vygotsky on the theme of will, trying to observe them on the context of the scientific work of researchers involved in cultural-historical investigations. The research was guided by a bibliographical method. The results indicate that L.S. Vygotsky drew the attention to the human capacity of volitional control of higher psychic functions. The author also showed that the human being lives in society and, as a result, he is under the influence of other people through the relationships that are established by language. For L.S. Vygotsky, language is one of the most powerful ways of influence on the conduct of other people, and, dialectally, to orient their behavior; because of this, language is, mainly, a fundamental psychological instrument of mediation to the constitution of will. It is highlighted that the conception of will in focus manifests the freedom of the human being, which occurs under conditions of awareness of the need to elect among different options that are presented to the person. Auxiliary motives, culturally created, help the person in the act of choosing. Will has as its basis the creativity and imagination of each person, and the social environment within the person participates reveals itself as a constitutive element of human will.

Keywords: cultural-historical theory; L.S. Vygotsky; will; election; auxiliary motives; freedom; bibliographical research; awareness; language; higher psychological functions.

Introduction

If the psychological studies developed by L.S. Vygotsky at the beginning of the last century are carefully observed, we see that one of his main contributions, both to the area of Psychology and to Education, are the investigations regarding the thematic of will as a constitutive psychological factor of the human psyche. Vygotsky devoted himself especially to the study in respect of the problem of will; therefore, nowadays, the results of his researches must be taken as important theoretical references in cultural-historical studies related to freedom in the human activity and the constitution of conscience in different steps of the human development in several contexts.

The problem of will in the work of L.S. Vygotsky was approached under different angles and will have changed in different periods of his creative path. According to Jantzen [6], the early works of L.S. Vygotsky [26] the will appears as dependent of instinctive and emotional attractions, as referring to the representation and realization of a goal; later, Vygotsky [23] emphasized that the will appears in his works as

volitional action, higher and lower psychic function, social process, combination of processes of intellectual type, under the aspect of the development of will in children and adolescents, as a philosophic-psychological criticism to the concept of freedom, and also, related to the theoretical currents of psychology which were concerned with its study.

As everything that was done in many of his brilliant works, the problem of will was treated, initially, in a schematic way, in a historical review that culminated at the current state of this theme in the science of his epoch. According to L.R. Lordelo, R.M. Tenorio [11], Vygotsky indicated through the text "The Historical Meaning of the Crisis in Psychology", that the psychological science of his time was in crisis. The authors argue that Vygotsky distinguished, in his time, two large blocks of psychological theories: "the ways of psychology would be these: or the science, which, in this case, should be able to explain phenomena (rejecting what was in them of psychic or subjective), or the knowledge of particular views about what would be the psychic phenomenon (thus precluding its existence as science)". To L.R. Lordelo, R.M. Tenorio [11], which

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seems to draw attention, however, is the argument that Vygotsky uses to assign meaning to the crisis: this meaning would reside for him in a wrong and confused formulation of the epistemological problem, or rather, in the confusion between the ontological and epistemological problem: it seems that the main problem would be in mistaking the relationship between spirit and matter with the relationship between subject and object.

In performing this task, L.S. Vygotsky [22] separates the investigation studying the problem of will in two groups. The first group, which was denominated by Vygotsky as the group of the heteronomous theories, groups the experimental researches that explained the volitional actions of man, reducing them to complex psychic processes of non-volitional character to associative processes, that is, the explanations on the origin and development of volitional actions in man sought in elements considered out of will. This group of theories involved the associationists, reflexological and behaviourist theories. According to Jantzen [6], heteronomous theories did not explain the will within the being, as something that comes from the man. The second one, called the group of the autonomous theories, tried to explain the will based on the unit and irreducibility of the volitional processes and sensations: the representatives of these schools tried to explain will from the laws proper of the volitional act itself. Jantzen [6] mentions that the autonomous theories used to move between the two extreme poles of a mechanism spiritualist (James) and spiritualism (Bergson). L.S. Vygotsky does not take sides for either of the two points of view previously mentioned, but highlights some of their incoherent and productive aspects, putting them together again without excluding them, trying to speak about the new that comes from science which is occupied with the study of will. He criticizes the heteronomous and autonomous groups of theories because they used to emphasize just one cause and an only explanation of the psychological phenomenon of will, disregarding some theories to each other and, thus sustaining divisions about the will in the man. The newness introduced by L.S. Vygotsky refers to the fact that a mediated connection is the characteristic of the volitional processes of the human actions; among all the mediated processes, the external language is involved as a factor of extraordinary importance, both as a mediator of the volitional behaviour which manifests itself as a way of social behaviour as with respect to the proper subject (J. Derry [4], R.A.P. Dranka [5], B.B. Sawaia [16; 17]).

Although the theory of L.S. Vygotsky seems fruitful for an exhaustive debate in all of its points, the intention now is stopping in some issues considered central to the understanding of will, once the objective of our work is to identify the main theoretical notions developed by L.S. Vygotsky concerning the thematic of will, trying to observe them on the context of researches of authors involved with cultural-historical investigations. An accurate comprehension on the theoretical conceptions produced by L.S. Vygotsky becomes fundamental to the development of new studies based on his work. These

aspects are going to be developed afterwards and they refer to the conceptions of Vygotsky on the freedom of man and analyzed during the phase of scientific historical-cultural production. In order to assist in the identification of some meanings exposed on the theme of will, the scientific production in the area was taken into consideration. Before presenting the results of the conducted investigation, the pieces of information on the research methodological context are going to be described.

The method of research

The method of the research was guided by the bibliographical research modality. The methodological technique of bibliographical research answered to a sequence of investigative procedures suggested by A.D. Salvador [15] and improved by T.C.S. Lima, R.C.T. Mioto [10].

After the preparation of the research project, the collection of the bibliography to the development of the study was done. At this stage, the following works were used: Collected Works of L.S. Vygotsky [21–26]; B. Spinoza [19], specially cited by Vygotsky in his investigations on will; texts of A.N. Leontiev [8; 9]; the consultation to works of authors of international recognition who analyzed the thought of L.S. Vygotsky (J. Derry [4], J. Shotter [18], A. Kozulin [7], R. Van Der Veer, J. Valsiner [20], A. Riviere [14], J.V. Wertsch [27], Luria [12], Jantzen [6]); Brazilian researchers that studied the proposed theme (R.A.P. Dranka [5], M.F. Damiani [3], B.B. Sawaia [16; 17]); other researchers who studied the thematic of will (A. Damásio [2]).

Later, the collection of information contained in the bibliographical chosen material was initiated. This work involved different moments of reading: a reading of recognition of the bibliographical material, which consisted in the material location and selection which presented data relative to the theme; an exploratory reading, which resulted in a reading to verify if the selected data would really interest to the study; a selective reading, to look for the material directly related to the objective of the research. Finally, the ideas expressed in the works used were analyzed in order to achieve the objective of finding answers.

The collected data were worked by the alternative of textual discursive analysis proposed by R. Moraes [13], composed based on the analysis of the content of L. Bardin [1], but also using elements of discursive analysis. R. Moraes [13] proposes an analysis cycle configured in three stages (unitarization, categorization and communication) which present themselves as a movement that enable the emergence of new comprehensions about the researched reality. This author understands that the textual discursive analysis comes from a set of assumptions related to the material that is examined. The analyzed materials constitute a set of signifiers and the researcher gives them signified that comes from his knowledge and theories. The results of the analysis are going to be presented on the sequence of this article.

Studying will in L.S. Vygotsky

The main cultural-historical studies with respect to the freedom of man together with the debates involving the theory of Spinoza and Descartes were composed by Vygotsky between 1931 e 1933. Through psychological researches, the author started to investigate the theme of will, based on philosophy, particularly the philosophy of Spinoza (J. Derry [4], R.A.P. Dranka [5], M.F. Damiani [3], R. Van Der Veer, J. Valsiner [20]). L.S. Vygotsky [23, p. 301] makes this proposal clear when he indicates that "when reaching this point of our investigation, a broad philosophical perspective is opened in front of us. For the first time in the course of the psychological investigations, it arises the possibility to solve through experimental psychological ways purely philosophical problems and to manifest empirically the origin of free will. (...) We cannot fail to mention that our idea about freedom and self-control coincide with the ideas that Spinoza developed in his Ethics".

The importance that L.S. Vygotsky assigns to philosophy leads him to use it in psychology. His theory on will is directly bound up with the philosophy of B. Spinoza [19]. B.B. Sawaia [17] proposes that Spinoza was the favourite philosopher of Vygotsky. According to the author, Vygotsky did not let himself being imprisoned by the Cartesian paradigm, as well as he rebelled against the dualism body/mind, intellect/emotion, common among the psychologists of that time. Therefore, the influence of the reading he did on the work of Spinoza was outstanding.

J. Derry [4] indicates that, by agreement with B. Spinoza [19], Vygotsky used to understand that self-determination is not possible through a pure act of will, but arises indirectly through mediation. This means that the human mind can be oriented to an intention due to different reasons weighed by the person in a particular activity. J. Derry [4] also argues that, for Vygotsky, the basis of freedom is the capacity of man to separate his passions from the contingencies of nature, to make for him a space in which he can determine his actions. It is fundamental to emphasize that such actions are not determined by external and independent causes, but by the subjects who can be encountered in them.

Besides the influence of Spinoza, the texts of Vygotsky developed in the phase of his scientific cultural-historical work highlight the general psychological trait that distinguish the lower psychic functions from the higher: the self-regulation of the psychic higher functions through the use of the auxiliary motives. J.V. Wertsch [27] calls the attention to the fact that the psychic lower functions are under the control of the surround, while the higher functions obey the domain of the reactions of the subjects. That capacity which the psychological tools in the cultural adult have for not responding directly to the stimuli of the environment allows to the human being to *domain his own conduct*, as Vygotsky [23] stressed, or, a *voluntary regulation* of behaviour, as J.V. Wertsch [27] cited, or it allows *taking decisions*, such as A. Kozulin [7] indicated. To L.S. Vygotsky [23],

what characterizes the domain of the conduct of the person is the possibility of *election* under the options of choice; behind this election, there is a conflict of *auxiliary motives*.

L.S. Vygotsky [23] proposes that man has freedom to perform, intentionally, any action. He points out that this is a characteristic of civilized man (which appears in lesser degree in child and, probably, it appeared in lesser degree also in primitive man). For the author, this capacity distinguishes men from related animals in much greater extent that his higher intellect could be used for. Vygotsky demonstrates that, in several moments of life, man has different possibilities of election under objects, situations, paths to walk along, that present themselves simultaneously; for this reason, he needs to take decisions about which choice will be made. For L.S. Vygotsky [23], the human being is able to choose between one and another possibility, because he has auxiliary motives that help him to take decisions which he considers more convenient. How does this process occur?

In situations that involve different possibilities of election, people are able to elect between one and another situation, just because they take conscience of the circumstance and they can support themselves in one (or in more than one) auxiliary motive established by them, that are going to choose which course to take, which choice is going to be made. This auxiliary reason is mentally organized by the person and it is the result of his different cultural and social experiences (which are memories of experienced related situations, ideas, learning, opinions received by others, the establishment of comparisons, inter alia). For this reason, L.S. Vygotsky [23] emphasizes that will is not free, comprehending free as detached from reality: on the contrary, will is influenced by social environment and by culture.

At the time of taking a decision, human beings use techniques designated to provide an artificial mediation (such as a raffle, conversations with other people, etc.), without necessarily a natural connection with the content of the decision, regulating the conduct (A. Kozulin [7]). It is important to highlight that the auxiliary motives are not psychic processes that take decisions by people, they don't force them to act; they help, however on the process of taking decisions emphasizing some present options. People themselves are those who make their decisions.

L.S. Vygotsky [23] stresses that even the subjects who put the capacity of election based on luck domain and orient their conduct by auxiliary motives. To exemplify his theoretical proposition, the author brings to debate the anecdote denominated as the *donkey of Buridán*. According to the story, a hungry donkey, equidistant from two bales of hay, one at its right and the other at its left, will die because the reasons that act on the animal are totally equalized and turned to opposite directions. Man, however, would resort to the help of auxiliary motives, artificially introduced, by the influence of culture on his development, to perform the choice that he intended. Thus, the person creates a cor-

respondent stimulus which can provoke a conduct process and orient him to a given direction.

Will has some peculiarities. The first one is that there is a differentiation among the components involved with a particular choice and the consequent action of the subject. A. Kozulin [7] helps to understand this proposition, indicating that, in the human being, the conflict among reasons is produced on the stage of taking decisions, much more than the moment of executing the action. L.S. Vygotsky [23, p. 291] understands that "the paradox of will, therefore, is found on the fact that will originates non-volitional acts". The intention constitutes a process that involves election by the aid of auxiliary motives (according to the example offered by Vygotsky, the person needs to send a post, hence he sees the mailbox: at this stage, the moment of the decision happens), but the execution refers to an automatic achievement (once the mailbox is seen, the natural answer of depositing the letter occurs). The voluntary act happens by an automatic action, therefore, out of the reach of will.

This finding leads Vygotsky to understand that the conduct of a person who needs a specific intent in such situation is at the mercy of the circumstance. The man who does not have any purpose with the object in front of him is under the power of the things that surround him. Intentionality is precisely based on creating an action that can be deduced from the direct requirement of the things presented. Vygotsky [23] explains this situation, physiologically, as follows: first, the moment of decision happens, when a functional apparatus is formed, a reflex connection is established and a new nerve pathway is opened; second, the final part of the volitional process, the moment in which conditioned reflex is configured.

The second peculiarity of the will is precisely used to try to solve the previous problem, the relation between the neural executor mechanism and the moment of decision. Therefore, Vygotsky understands that there is a dependency between the moment of the choice and the moment of the action through need, that is, that thing that leads the person to think about, to take the appropriate decision. When the need is gone, the correspondent apparatus is automatically disconnected. This means that necessity is the cause of the action, instead of the conditioned connection.

This second peculiarity of the will puts in evidence a difference between stimulus and reason in the human being: stimulus act directly on the reflex arc, while reason is a complex system of stimuli related to the election of some reflex arcs. Motive is, therefore, rationally weighed by the person at the moment of taking a decision and does not happen with the objective of obtaining a motor reflex reaction (as when it occurs with stimulus), but to elect a way to follow. Necessity can be biological (eat, sleep) but it can also be culturally created (wearing appropriate clothes, acquiring a property, going to college). All these elements make L.S. Vygotsky

[23, p. 298–299] conclude that volitional action can be learned with the goal to dominate our own actions: "Will (...) means the domain on the action that happens itself; we just create artificial conditions to the fulfilment of the action; for this reason will is never a direct, immediate process". Will, thus, to Vygotsky, is a product from the cultural development of the person.

According to the theory of Vygotsky, it is emphasized that the decisions based on will are mediated by language. J. Derry [4] calls the attention to an aspect of the theory of Vygotsky that is crucial to the comprehension of the constitution of will in the person: the use of the language creates conscience and even will. Differently from what happens with animals, for which the influence of a present visual situation is what determines its behaviour (Vygotsky [22]), the human being is capable to overcome the visual field and taking decisions based on abstract elements, when he learns language as a mediator of the actions that he performs. At this point, a mental modification occurs as well as a change of the psychological structure, what influences in his act towards nature and in his decision-making.

Vygotsky [22, p. 169] explains this process as follows: using the word, the child directs his attention to certain attributes, "serving himself with the word, he synthesizes, symbolizes the abstract concept and operates with it as the higher signifier among all who have created the human thought". The main factors that direct the conduct of the child are not the laws of the visual field — whose "slaves", according to the expression of Köhler¹, cited by Vygotsky [24], are animals — but the laws of volitional self-determination of the proper behaviour, the laws of the visual field: the ape sees the situation and live it. The child, whose perception is guided by language, knows the situation. According to L.S. Vygotsky [23, p. 290], "man who lives in society is always subject to the influence of other people. Language, for example, is one of these powerful means of influence over the conduct of others and, naturally, the man himself in process of development dominates the same means he used to use to orient his behaviour".

The arguments used by L.S. Vygotsky [23] to propose that human will is influenced by auxiliary motives make him believe that the biblical theory of the free will is an illusion: this theory, according to the author, is lost because will is not free, but it depends on auxiliary motives. Vygotsky indicates that the free will does not consist of being free from reasons: the person involved with an election, firstly, takes conscience of the situation, takes conscience of the need of electing, that the reason is imposed; secondly, takes conscience that his freedom is a gnosiological need. For Vygotsky [23, p. 287], the freedom of choice, without the interference of external influences, does not mean anything but a mere illusion: "(...) free will is lost as we intend to analyse the determinism of will, its dependence on motives". Having freedom, and understand it as a gnosiological need, means being aware of auxiliary reasons, being aware of

¹ Köhler W. (1887–1967), German psychologist.

the need of choosing and not the absence of the needs and the motives.

The general context of the argumentation of Vygotsky exposes the general trait of the development of higher psychic functions, what constitutes its differential characteristic: the human capacity of the volitional control of the psychic processes. For Vygotsky [23], will is developed and is a product of the cultural development of the human, not being derived of a transcendental, metaphysical essence. The domain of the proper conduct is, therefore, socially built and constituted with culture.

Some considerations on the importance and application of the revised data

Vygotsky's analysis about the concept of will is useful nowadays because it offers an important theoretical contribution to the development of research in the areas of Education and Psychology. A practical appliance of the theoretical aspects developed by Vygotsky about will within the ambit of education can be observed on the work of M.F. Damiani [3]. The author uses the theoretical perspective of Vygotsky to support the achievement of her analysis. Her work reports the findings of an investigation that aimed to understand, from the point of view of the subjects, the causes of school success (absence of dropout and repetition), during basic schooling, in a group of nine young people of the working class, aged between 22 and 23 years old. These young people presented risk factors for failure, because they belonged to the group of lower family income group, whose head of the household had semi-skilled or non-qualified occupation. The results found by the researcher point to the fact that the will of the participants was determining for them to have a life different from that of their families, as a propelling factor of the arising changes.

Analysing the findings of the research from the theoretical framework of the cultural-historical psychology, M.F. Damiani [3] argues that will is due to the context in which people develop, and not something innate or

due to a vocation or a gift. Considering the reports from the participants interviewed of her research, the author indicated that the auxiliary motive seemed to be the glimpse of a situation more promising than that of their families, in economic, professional and social terms. The establishment of such auxiliary reason can, then, have been the factor that led them to devote themselves to the studies with special importance.

This is an example of voluntary process, which involves the establishment of an auxiliary motive, when the person exercises his freedom to the full, paradoxically restrict to the recognition of the necessity of making choices.

Making use of the philosophical conceptions of B. Spinoza [19], L.S. Vygotsky [22; 23] understands that the free action is not a question merely detached from reality, spiritual, but it is the result of the mental activity in communion with the learning deriving from the experiences of the subject in social interaction. B.B. Sawaia [17] indicates that the theory of Vygotsky on will points to a freedom of the human being that requires collective action and does not confuse it with free will, based on the creativity and imagination of each person.

When considering that the will of each person is also influenced by social and cultural aspects, it can be understood that the motives of each one also result from the interpersonal experiences that life gave or did not give them. It is opened a space for discussions and investigations that are beyond the limits of this research, such as the influences that teachers have (or not) over the life of the students: among these influences, for example, the educators can help the students taking decisions they will have to take during the course of school or college education, fostering the desire of the students to increase their time spent at school or university.

The theoretical review developed by Vygotsky on the theme of the will suggests that the old saying, "want is power", may be reasoned, although it needs to be understood in a particular way, since this the will can not be only seen as the individual responsibility, but as closely related to the experiences and social relationships that each person has in its life.

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К проблеме воли в трудах Л.С. Выготского

Бенто Селау

профессор факультета психологии образования
Федерального университета пампы, Бразилия
bentoselau@gmail.com

Кристина Боэссио

доктор, профессор факультета литературы и испанского языка
Федерального университета пампы, Бразилия
cristinapdb@hotmail.com

В статье представлены результаты исследования, ставившего своей целью проследить теоретические понятия, разработанные Л.С. Выготским применительно к проблеме воли, и рассмотреть их в контексте других работ, выполненных в рамках культурно-исторического подхода. Исследование было выполнено с опорой на библиографический метод. Полученные результаты свидетельствуют о том, что Выготский уделял особое внимание человеческой способности к произвольной регуляции высших психических функций. Будучи существом социальным, человек испытывает на себе влияние других людей через отношения, опосредованные языком. Речь же, согласно Выготскому, является одним из наиболее мощных средств воздействия на поведение других людей, равно как и средством организации собственного поведения человека. Таким образом, речь человека выступает фундаментальным психологическим орудием, опосредующим его волю. Особо подчеркивается, что понятие воли предполагает наличие у человека свободы как осознанной необходимости выбора между различными возможностями, открывающимися перед ним. Вспомогательные мотивы, формирующиеся под воздействием культуры, помогают человеку совершать выбор. В основе воли лежат воображение и способность к творчеству, однако социальная среда, внутри которой живет и действует человек, оказывается не менее значимым компонентом человеческой воли.

Ключевые слова: культурно-историческая концепция, Л.С. Выготский, воля, выбор, вспомогательные мотивы, свобода, библиографическое исследование сознательности, язык, высшие психические функции.

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