

**RESEARCH IN CULTURAL-HISTORICAL PSYCHOLOGY:
REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

**ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ В СИСТЕМЕ КУЛЬТУРНО-ИСТОРИЧЕСКОЙ
ПСИХОЛОГИИ: РЕГИОНАЛЬНЫЙ ОПЫТ**

Научная статья | Original paper

Cultural-historical theory of psychological phenomena by L.S. Vygotsky

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For citation: Ivic, I. (2026). Cultural-historical theory of psychological phenomena by L.S. Vygotsky. *Cultural-Historical Psychology*, 22(1), 109–117. <https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2026220112>

Культурно-историческая теория психологических явлений Л.С. Выготского

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Для цитирования: Ивич, И. (2026). Культурно-историческая теория психологических явлений Л.С. Выготского. *Культурно-историческая психология*, 22(1), 109–117. <https://doi.org/10.17759/chp.2026220112>

The fate of Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky's psychological theory is quite extraordinary. The creator of one of the most original theoretical systems in psychology remained unknown to the wider international psychological community until quite recently. Most of his works are still unpublished in his homeland, and nevertheless, he is regarded as one of the founders of modern Soviet psychology. What is most remarkable about Vygotsky's teachings is that they only gained widespread recognition and began to exert increasing influence posthumously – about forty years after the author's death.

Yet, there is nothing truly unusual about this: with careful reading of Vygotsky today, it becomes evident that his ideas remain highly relevant, alive, and largely

still unparalleled. It is worth noting that modern researchers consider Vygotsky one of the founders of semiotics and psycholinguistics: his ideas and investigations into the problems of meaning and sign systems, as well as their role in organizing and developing human behavior, continue to serve as a model for scientific research.

Vygotsky's personal fate is truly remarkable. Living through a transformative era – during the October Revolution and the height of socialist-oriented thought, both before, during, and immediately after – Vygotsky, it seems, formed his theory of psychological phenomena in an instant. Leaving it incomplete, he died of tuberculosis, not reaching the age of 38. He only just missed – by a few months – the publication of his main work

“Thinking and Speech”, which is now being introduced to Yugoslav readers.

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky was born in 1896. Until 1924, Vygotsky was not involved in psychology. His early talents manifested most notably in literary criticism, literary and art theory, and linguistics. However, this early intellectual activity did not go without influencing his subsequent development of psychological ideas. It seems that especially his analysis of Shakespeare’s Hamlet (twelve notebooks written at a time when Vygotsky was only 20 years old) led him to psychology of art. The book *Psychology of Art*, completed in 1925 (and published in its original version only in 1968¹), became a significant event in Vygotsky’s intellectual evolution, decisively turning him towards the study of psychological phenomena.

In 1924, as a young researcher at the reformed Institute of Psychology in Moscow, Vygotsky began his psychological studies – both theoretical and experimental – from which the cultural-historical concept of psychological phenomena would later emerge.

The scene that Vygotsky faced in those years was far from encouraging: both in world and in Soviet psychology, the notorious crisis of its foundations still continued, a crisis that had accompanied this young scientific discipline from its earliest independent steps after separating from philosophy. It seemed that this crisis of psychology inherited itself from philosophy, from which it had only recently parted. In Western European countries, where psychology emerged as an independent discipline, the tradition of speculative analysis of the spirit was too strong, so attempts to create an empirical psychology modeled on the natural sciences led to complete disjunctions and insurmountable problems. Could psychology become a scientific discipline on par with others – objective and causal – or was it destined to be limited to descriptive, phenomenological analysis of subjective experience, an analysis aimed to understand rather than explain? Is it possible to construct a unified psychology, or do two disciplines exist: one studying the subjective, experiential side of the mental, and the other its objective external manifestations? What is the subject of psychology – consciousness or external behavior? What are the relationships between physiological and psychological phenomena (parallelism, causal links, mutual functional dependence)? Finally, do two entirely separate psychologies exist – one studying the individual and their subjective experiences (individual psychology), and the other examining the relationships between individuals (social psychology)? And due to all these dilemmas, what are

the main methods of psychology – the introspective or the objective?

Soviet psychology of the 1920s – 1930s – the period during which Vygotsky worked – actively engaged in discussions of the common dilemmas characteristic of psychology at that time. These dilemmas were so numerous that they gave rise to a colorful variety of names for the discipline itself: psychology, reflexology (both individual and collective), reactionology, psychoneurology, behavioral science (behaviorism), psychoanalysis, empirical psychology (which analyzes only subjective experience), experimental psychology, and so on – all of these terms aim to denote the field that psychology is supposed to study.

However, the situation in the Soviet Union after the revolution was quite unique in many ways. First of all, the large-scale social upheaval that took place and was still ongoing created a favorable context for innovations in the spiritual sphere as well. The second important factor, stemming from the first, was that the search for new theoretical solutions in psychology was based on Marxist philosophy, which provided incomparably more fruitful frameworks for addressing the mentioned fundamental problems of psychology.

Two main historical circumstances – the state of psychology as a science and the socio-ideological climate in the Soviet Union of that time – form the framework within which Vygotsky’s activity as a psychologist unfolds. It is these factors that determine the grand project undertaken by the young scientist: the creation of a unified scientific psychology aimed at addressing specifically human psychological problems – higher mental functions. In other words, the goal is to avoid, in the pursuit of objective scientific research, a false solution such as studying elementary mental functions that are the same in humans and animals, and to not leave the higher forms of mental life (thinking and speech, intentionality and will, higher emotions, etc.) to speculative analysis, which remains outside the scope of science. Finding a principled solution to the problem of the relationship between physiological and psychological processes, and discovering the links between individual and social psychology – these are some of the main points of Vygotsky’s scientific program during his short ten years of work.

Of course, certain favorable objective circumstances somewhat eased Vygotsky’s task. The social upheaval of such a scale as the October Revolution contributed to the awareness of the historical variability of behavior and the psyche – one of Vygotsky’s fundamental discoveries. Marxist anthropological teachings about man as a being of practice, as a social and historical creature,

¹ Translation into Serbo-Croatian: L.S. Vigotski: *Psihologija umetnosti* (by J. Jani ijevi), Nolit, Beograd, 1975.

offered a general philosophical solution to a number of dilemmas that psychology faces. However, the path from these general principles to specific scientific psychological solutions was long and complex.

Evidence of this can be found in the searches, and sometimes in the wandering, attempts to apply Marxism to psychology in the young Soviet psychological science. Some believed that truly Marxist psychology was the old empirical psychology (Chelpanov), others considered Pavlovian reflexology as such, a third group looked to American behaviorism (Blonsky in his early work), and a fourth saw the solution in a synthesis of introspective psychology and behaviorism (Kornilov)². Nevertheless, Vygotsky's predecessors in Soviet psychology largely laid the groundwork. First and foremost, a fairly clear understanding was reached regarding the significance of social factors in determining psychological phenomena. Even before Vygotsky, Blonsky and Kornilov broke away from the dominant naturalistic orientation and developed the idea that psychology, in its essence, is a social science. (In confrontation with Pavlov's teaching, which was strictly oriented towards the natural science paradigm, such ideas would give rise to one of the specific theoretical difficulties of Soviet psychology: how to reconcile the materialist thesis that mental processes are merely one property of the brain as a highly organized matter, with the position of social determination of the mental.) In the works of Blonsky, Kornilov, and other authors of the 1920s, this emphasis on the importance of social factors sometimes goes so far that universal laws of human behavior are denied, and it is claimed that it only makes sense to study the specific psychology of representatives of different social classes.

The overall atmosphere contributed to the emergence of the first ideas of historical psychology. In particular, Blonsky arrived at a clear understanding that mental functions are not something fixed and unchangeable forever.

Additionally, Pavlov's teachings on higher nervous activity (although to some extent diverging from the social orientation of the young psychologists) in the context of the Soviet Union finally undermined idealistic notions about the separation of the mental from the material substrate.

Alongside Vygotsky's work, other psychologists were also developing the principles of Marxist psychology. Notably, the works of S.L. Rubinstein should be

highlighted, in which the application of Marx's category of practical (object-oriented) activity of humans in psychology was elaborated³.

Thus, although Vygotsky worked in a favorable intellectual environment and relied on certain theoretical achievements of his predecessors and contemporaries, the problems he recognized and posed appeared in all their vastness. How to connect such disparate factors as the "material substrate of the mental", "social nature of human psyche", "historicity", "practical activity", "consciousness", and so on? And especially, how to transform all this into concrete scientific psychological research, and what methods should be used in doing so? Vygotsky also possessed several personal prerequisites for successfully solving such complex tasks. Thanks to his prior engagement with issues of literature and art, he was extremely sensitive to complex psychological phenomena (issues of meaning, problems of psychology of thinking and speech and their interrelation, issues of complex human feelings, etc.). Moreover, Vygotsky was an outstanding expert in all major psychological directions of his time; he knew German psychology very well, which held a leading position at that time. Among other things, he co-authored a book on contemporary trends in psychology with Gellerstein, and wrote reviews and prefaces for Russian editions of works by Freud, Köhler, Thorndike, Stern, B hler, Koffka and others. In addition to his broad general psychological culture, Vygotsky also possessed deep knowledge of linguistics and philosophy, including Marxist philosophy, which many Soviet psychologists sought to apply, but which Vygotsky, according to his colleagues, knew more deeply, directly from original works by Marx. Despite all this, it is evident that Vygotsky had extraordinary personal abilities — primarily, judging by his texts, a special gift for psychological analysis.

Under these conditions, Vygotsky boldly embarked on his ambitious project of reforming psychology as a science. While for some, the crisis in psychology served as a reason to seek simplified solutions (for example, denying the existence of consciousness, as behaviorists did, or fundamentally rejecting the possibility of scientific study of more complex mental phenomena), for Vygotsky, this crisis became an unprecedented challenge for theoretical creativity. Right at the beginning of his scientific career, he formulated what might seem to be a paradoxical problem — "consciousness as a problem of behavioral

²Psychology and Marxism (Collection), Leningrad, 1925 (in particular, see Kornilov's work of the same name); Smirnov A.A.: The Development and Current State of Psychological Science in the USSR, Pedagogy, Moscow, 1975.

³Already in 1933, in S.L. Rubinstein's work "Problems of Psychology in the Works of Karl Marx" (reprinted in the book S.L. Rubinstein: Problems of General Psychology, Pedagogy, Moscow, 1973).

This direction in Soviet psychology culminated in the theory of activity, developed by A.A. Leontiev (see, in particular, his book: Activity – Consciousness – Personality, Publishing House of Political Literature, Moscow, 1975).

psychology”⁴ – emphasizing in the very first page of the relevant article: “By ignoring the problem of consciousness, psychology itself closes the door to studying many complex issues of human behavior”. This becomes one of the recurring themes throughout Vygotsky’s work: it is necessary to tackle those psychological problems that are specific to humans, to seek theoretical explanations specifically for these higher mental functions, and to develop methods for their objective study.

Already in this first work from 1925, Vygotsky moves in the right direction, although there are still many ambiguities and oscillations. Consistently seeking the distinctive psychological characteristics of humans, he clearly realizes that alongside personal experience, humans also have “historical experience” and “social experience” (“collective coordination of behavior”), and that within this coordination, self-awareness – “consciousness is a kind of social contact with oneself” – arises. From this follows the “sociologization of consciousness as a whole” (!), as well as the conclusion that “the social moment of consciousness has both temporal and factual primacy. The individual moment is formed as secondary and derivative, based on the social and strictly modeled after it” (p. 196). Even here, Vygotsky sees the key role of language and speech in the formation of the human personality (“the source of social behavior and consciousness is found in speech”). At the same time, the relationships between the main determinants of mental phenomena had not yet been precisely identified, nor had the thoughts themselves been formulated with sufficient clarity; particularly noticeable was the lack of analysis of the psychological mechanisms of interaction between different components. However, in principle, new horizons were opened, and the internal logic of the initial assumptions, as well as specific psychological research, would lead Vygotsky to increasingly clearer and more developed formulations of his theory.

The decisive factor that protected Vygotsky from being absorbed by sociologizing schemes (similar to those known in French sociological psychology or found among some Soviet psychologists) was the constant dynamic interplay between his theoretical constructs and concrete psychological research, which constituted the true passion of the scientist. Turning to the problems of animal behavior, issues of normal child development, the study of children with disabilities, psychopathological problems of adults, as well as problems of psychology of language and art – all of these served as a powerful an-

tidote to schematism and at the same time as a source of new challenges requiring solutions.

The main ideas regarding the problems of consciousness, formulated in the mentioned article (1925), Vygotsky develops quickly and consistently in subsequent years. The analysis of zoopsychological research by other authors, as well as his own studies of the development of children with disabilities (blind, deaf, mute, mentally retarded), who have diminished influence of social and cultural factors (and therefore, in a kind of natural experiment, the influence of these factors can be traced especially clearly), compel Vygotsky to further develop his cultural-historical position more actively. In the works from 1928–1929, as evidenced by their titles, Vygotsky is entirely focused on the problems of “cultural development of a child”⁵.

Based on the reconstruction of Vygotsky’s intellectual evolution, it can be argued that during 1929 and 1930, he had finally developed his cultural-historical theory of mental phenomena. In these years – the most productive period of Vygotsky’s rich scientific life – he formulated the doctrine on the role of tools and signs in the emergence and functioning of mental processes, the teaching about higher mental functions, which, in terms of origin, nature, and structure, differ from lower functions (the latter Vygotsky called natural or innate, while higher mental functions are cultural). In the same years, Vygotsky clearly realized that the nature and structure of mental functions are not unchanged throughout history, and therefore psychology should also be based on the science of the historical changes of the psyche and behavior.

The existence of culture is a fundamental feature of humans compared to animals, and the historical development – which is also absent in animals – gives rise to profound differences between people of different historical eras. Nevertheless, psychology has long – and to a large extent still does – remain largely insensitive to these so important and decisive facts (possibly due to an excessive focus on micro-facts established through experiments). As a result, the conceptual and terminological toolkit of psychology contains many acultural and ahistorical ideas (for example, when talking about natural child development, the relationship between the organism and the environment, the connections between stimulus and response, or the innate and unchanging mental properties of individuals or groups).

For Vygotsky, who was based on a different methodological foundation (as mentioned earlier), the study of higher mental – cultural – functions and their changes

⁴ Vygotsky, L.S. “Consciousness as a Problem in the Psychology of Behavior” (in the collection *Psychology and Marxism*, Leningrad, 1925).

⁵ The most complete list of Vygotsky’s works is published in: Shakhlevich T.M.: “Bibliography of L.S. Vygotsky’s Works”, *Voprosy psikhologii* (Problems of Psychology), 1974, issue 3, pages 152–160.

becomes the focus of scientific research. However, not in the sense that it is enough to simply prove the existence of changes throughout history (since the emergence of the modern biological type of human). This seems obvious; at the same time, naturalistic psychological theories are unable to explain the very historical variability of mental properties and, moreover, to identify the psychological mechanism underlying this variability in humans. Vygotsky's theory is essentially aimed at developing psychological mechanisms that underpin the historical variability of higher mental functions in humans. Thus, if it is impossible to show that, since the appearance of the modern biological type of human (with a skull volume of about 1400–1600 cm³), there have been progressive changes in the size and structure of the human brain, at the same time (especially over the last 20000–30000 years, with a tendency toward acceleration), there is a clear increase in intellectual effectiveness, as well as changes in the structure of mental functions and personality as a whole, then the task for psychology becomes explaining the nature of these transformations during human cultural development.

Through a comparative analysis of the behavior of higher animals (primarily based on Köhler's experiments with chimpanzees) and a comparative analysis of the behavior of human groups at different stages of cultural development (using data collected from numerous anthropological studies, especially from the works of Levy-Bruhl), Vygotsky gradually arrived at an understanding of the psychological mechanism underlying behavioral change.

For Vygotsky's position, which in a certain sense is instrumentalist in nature, the decisive factor is that the nature of mental activity depends on the tools through which this activity is carried out. Vygotsky writes: "Just as the use of a tool in general determines the form of labor operations, so the nature of the sign used is the primary factor that influences the overall process". From this follows: "...in higher structures, it is precisely the sign and the way it is used that functionally determine the whole and form the focus of the entire process"⁶.

Thus, for the structure of higher mental functions, it is characteristic that they are organized through signs, meaning they are mediated by a sign. The ability to create and use signs and sign systems (the semiotic, or symbolic, function — another name for this ability) is based on a new neurophysiological principle — the "principle

of signification" — which is exclusively inherent to the human brain⁷. In this way, the natural property of the human brain — the ability to create signs (symbols) — unlocks unprecedented possibilities for communication between individuals through sign systems, thus revealing the potential for a decisive influence of social factors on the organization of mental functions.

With the help of sign systems, what Marx called the "inorganic body" of a person is formed. The historical variability of behavior, despite the unchanging morphology of the brain, is therefore explained by the development of sign systems and systems of meanings that humans create and which, as we have seen, constitute an essential part of their mental organization: "... the continuous development of human behavior is primarily based on the improvement of external signs, external methods, and techniques, which are formed in a specific social environment under the influence of technical and economic needs. Under their influence, all natural psychological processes of a person are also transformed. Some die out, others develop. But the decisive, essential, and specific aspect of these processes is that their improvement occurs externally and ultimately depends on the social life of the group or nation to which the individual belongs"⁸. The new principle of psychological development, unlike the one that arises from the improvement of neural structures (such as in the transition from lower animals to higher ones or during anthropogenesis up to the emergence of the modern *Homo sapiens*), is based on amorphous development⁹ — the development outside of the individual, through exteriorization and objectification of achievements thanks to the "principle of signification".

Since sign systems and the ways they are used change throughout historical and ontogenetic development, and since a sign, as we have seen, represents the "focus of the entire (mental) process", all mental processes have a variable structure. In his further theoretical developments and experimental studies, Vygotsky concludes that the essence of developmental changes lies not only in the fact that under the influence of a sign individual mental processes (functions) change but also in the change of the relationships between these functions. In short, development consists in the formation of complex "psychological systems", that is, complexes of individual mental functions interconnected through a sign¹⁰. Unlike lower

⁶ "History of the Development of Higher Mental Functions" (written in 1931–32 as part of a large unfinished work and published in the book: *Development of Higher Mental Functions*, Moscow, 1960).

⁷ *Ibid.* pages 111, 113.

⁸ *Essays on the History of Behavior* (1930), pages 113–114.

⁹ Similar theses about development through "amplifiers" of human capabilities, developed later under the influence of Vygotsky, are elaborated by American psychologist J. Bruner, and they are also reflected in M. McLuhan's ideas about the "extensions" of human abilities.

¹⁰ See about this in: Vygotsky, L.S. "Historical Development of Behavior", *Psychology*, 1972, Issues 1–2, pp. 77–85.

(natural) functions (motor, sensory, elementary forms of memory, primary emotions, etc.), which are simple structures and historically unchanging, higher mental functions (logical memory, voluntary attention, speech, thinking, verbal thinking, complex feelings, etc.) are complex structures because they include signs and meanings, which change. As a result, higher mental functions are organized differently in various human groups, in different historical epochs, and in children at different developmental stages (it suffices to recall how different are the relationships between affect and intellect or memory and thinking). It is worth noting here that this position fundamentally grants human development a greater degree of freedom. Unlike naturalistic approaches, which claim that development is determined by unchanging and universal laws, Vygotsky's position shows that each human group, and within a certain historical epoch — each individual — can create a specific human environment mediated by signs and other auxiliary means, and that divergent developmental lines are possible¹¹.

Sign systems (among which the linguistic system is the most significant) represent a social formation, and their original function is communicative in nature. Unlike traditional psychology, which takes the isolated individual as its starting point, Vygotsky clearly shows that individuals within a human group are connected by extremely complex systems of psychological relationships¹². Practical communication through actions during joint activity, affective communication by non-verbal means, and, above all, communication using sign systems — primarily verbal communication — constitute a necessary condition for the preservation of the community, the development of both the community and the individual, as well as the mental health of people who, when deprived of such communication, fall into pathological autistic states.

Sign systems, which arose from communicative needs, transform — and this is one of Vygotsky's most important discoveries — into means of organizing individual behavior. A sign turned inward serves to structure individual behavior: for self-awareness, for organizing one's own mental processes, and for their voluntary regulation. Thus, there is no insurmountable gap between social and individual psychology; on the contrary, there is intensive interaction between the individual and social levels of behavior. The linking role between these two levels is played by sign systems, with social

factors having primary importance, since the individual encounters already formed social sign systems, primarily the linguistic system. A child begins their “cultural development” precisely by acquiring the linguistic system, which at first serves for communication with the social environment and, during development, begins to fulfill the function of organizing individual behavior (in the development of logical memory mediated by signs, in the process of forming concepts, in the emergence of higher forms of thinking — verbal thinking, and others)¹³.

Thus, we come to Vygotsky's most important theoretical discovery: higher mental functions have a social origin. To properly understand the meaning of this statement, it is necessary to emphasize that it fundamentally differs from many cultural and sociological theses about the role of social and cultural factors in mental development. In this case, something much more radical and essential is asserted: social factors (joint practical activity, social interaction, sign systems, communication through signs) are a constructive element of higher mental functions, meaning that without their influence, higher mental functions cannot arise at all. Therefore, what is most specific in the psychological organization of the individual, as well as what seems most personal (inner speech, complex feelings, the sense of personal identity, the capacity for self-awareness, etc.), arises exclusively in the process of exchange within the human group (society).

Such a theoretical solution would have been less clear, less convincing, and less significant if Vygotsky had not placed it at the foundation of a large-scale scientific program — one that allows for empirical verification. The cultural development of a normally developing child, the cultural development of a child with disabilities, the identification of the complex network of psychological connections within the human community, the study of semiotic, communicative, and psychological functions of the linguistic system, the investigation of the ontogenetic development of speech as a means of communication, as a means of thinking, and as a means of self-awareness and regulation of one's own behavior, the study of historical changes in behavior (through comparative research of human groups at different stages of development, or analysis of products of human activity), and the study of art as a system of signs and meanings — these are only some of the thematic areas that, in light of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of mental phenomena, have been widely opened for scientific research. It is easy to notice that

¹¹ This is rightfully emphasized by J. Bruner as well in the preface to the American edition of Vygotsky's book on speech and thinking (See: L.S. Vygotsky: Thought and Language, The M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, 1962).

¹² See about this in the introductory chapter of the present book.

¹³ At the same time, these are the central themes of Vygotsky's present book.

many of these problems have only recently become the subject of intensive study, and some have given rise to new scientific disciplines that did not exist at the time of the formation of Vygotsky's theory — semiotics, psycholinguistics, and developmental psycholinguistics.

At its core, Vygotsky's theory emphasizes genetic and comparative methods. The comparative-genetic method (comparative study of development in animals of different species, including comparison with child development), the genetic-experimental method (experimental introduction of certain factors into the development process of normally developing children), and, more broadly, the application of the genetic method — that is, the study of development as a way to solve general psychological problems — historical research into mental development (studying historical changes in the psyche based on preserved materials), the historical-experimental method¹⁴ (investigating changes in mental functions in human groups that undergo major historical shifts within an extremely short period — within one generation — as happened with some population groups in the Soviet Union during the October Revolution), constructive analysis (analysis not reduced to breaking a whole into elements, but aimed at revealing the process of gradual formation of a new complex wholeness during development), and the analysis of units rather than elements (that is, the analysis of parts containing all the properties of the whole, for example, the analysis of the meaning of a word as a unit that includes properties of speech, thinking, and verbal thinking — a topic the reader can encounter in this book) — all these are preferred methodological approaches that best align with Vygotsky's theory and were extensively used by Vygotsky himself.

The research program that emerged before Vygotsky in light of his theory is still far from fully realized. Vygotsky himself — independently or together with his colleagues — initiated numerous studies stemming from this program, and some of them he brought to successful completion. The most significant among these are precisely the studies discussed in this book: the development of meanings, the process of concept formation (both experimental and real concepts, especially scientific concepts), the emergence and development of verbal thinking, the formation of inner speech (as well as the description of the functions and structure of inner speech). Outside the scope of this book remain reports on important studies in

the fields of psychopathology (abnormal development, thinking in schizophrenia), psychology of art, insightful analyses of animal behavior and the thinking of so-called primitive peoples (both based, however, on empirical data from other researchers), studies of higher emotions (an extensive unpublished monograph from which only one fragment is known to us¹⁵), games and children's creativity, psychology of grammar, and others.

The period of approximately forty years since Vygotsky's death is relatively long, especially considering the accelerated pace of scientific development. Therefore, it is all the more remarkable that an author from such a relatively distant past is so frequently cited in the latest psychological literature — and notably as one of the carriers of new trends. The explanation for this should be sought in the originality and scale of the scientific achievement accomplished by Vygotsky in psychology. Having begun his work during a “crisis of psychology”, Vygotsky proposed solutions to fundamental problems of psychological science that even today have not been sufficiently utilized either in theory or in psychological research practice, and thus continue to serve as a productive theoretical framework for analyzing contemporary issues in psychology.

It should also be noted that in modern psychology there are no empirical data that seriously call into question the fundamental propositions of Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory. Moreover, none of the significant experimental results from his research have lost their scientific validity to this day, so that most of these findings have become an integral part of educational knowledge about higher mental functions.

In Soviet psychology, Vygotsky's teachings constitute one of the stable components of the psychological science system — both in its theoretical and empirical dimensions. Nevertheless, it can be said that even in Soviet psychology, not all the possibilities of Vygotsky's theory have been fully utilized. This is partly possibly explained by the lingering consequences of the prewar ban on Vygotsky's works (the book *Thinking and Speech* was banned for two years after its publication and was only republished in 1956¹⁶, while many of his works still remain unpublished). Alongside some justified critical remarks — particularly that Vygotsky draws too sharp a distinction between natural and cultural functions and somewhat underestimates the importance of practical activity (i.e., relations with reality mediated by social

¹⁴ Vygotsky himself initiated one such study in Soviet psychology in the early 1930s. See: Luria A.R.: *On the Historical Development of Cognitive Processes*, Nauka, Moscow, 1974.

¹⁵ L.S. Vygotsky: “The Theory of Emotions in the Light of Modern Psychoneurology”, *Questions of Philosophy*, 1970, No. 6, pp. 119–130.

¹⁶ Included in the book: Vygotsky, L. S.: *Selected Psychological Studies*. APN, Moscow, 1956, with an extensive introduction by A.A. Leontiev and A. R. Luria. The same authors wrote an interesting paper for Vygotsky's 80th birthday (“From the History of the Formation of L. Vygotsky's Psychological Views”, *Questions of Psychology*, 1976, No. 6, pp. 83–93).

practical activity) as a factor of mental development — there still seems to be some restraint and caution within Soviet psychology regarding certain basic concepts of Vygotsky's theory. Differences are also found in the understanding of culture and the interpretation of communication¹⁷, especially in the interpretation of the sign and sign systems — differences between Vygotsky and contemporary Soviet psychologists, including some of his pupils. Vygotsky was especially sensitive to phenomena of human communication, viewing them as a fundamental factor in mental development, primarily in ontogenesis. It appears that neither he nor other Soviet psychologists found a fully satisfactory solution to the problem of the relationship between the two main forms of human activity — practical activity and the activity of communication between people. Vygotsky gave a brilliant analysis of the significance of the latter for the emergence and development of higher mental functions, which is of great importance, even if this perhaps led to overshadowing the problems of real practical activity and real practical relations between people (which are not reducible solely to communication relations).

Regarding Vygotsky's theory of the sign, sign systems, and meaning, it seems that Soviet psychology after Vygotsky did not fully utilize the opportunities that this theory opened for the development of psychological problems related to significant activity. (Only recently has the Soviet psycholinguist A.A. Leontiev, in a number of his works, begun to develop what was potentially embedded in Vygotsky's theory of the sign).

In our opinion, outside the framework of Soviet psychology there are two significant fields that are intensively developing today and where the value of Vygotsky's theory is confirmed most clearly, although neither of them can be called directly influenced by him.

The first area is represented by disciplines that deal with semiotic problems: semiotics, linguistics, psycholinguistics (both general and developmental). These relatively new and dynamically developing sciences investigate issues that occupy a central place in Vygotsky's theoretical system: the nature of the sign, the organization of sign systems, the consideration of an artwork as a system of signs, problems of semiotic communication, the psychology of speech and thinking, the acquisition of the language system by children, and the relationship of this process to the development of thinking, etc. At the same time, it creates the impression that even in these fields — especially when it comes to psychological analy-

sis of the mentioned problems — modern research still does not reach the depth that Vygotsky anticipated and partially developed. A particular shortcoming of many contemporary studies is that individual components of significant (semiotic) behavior are considered in isolation. To date, there is a lack of studies analyzing the significance of social semiotic systems in the development and functioning of individual behavior in greater detail than Vygotsky did. That is why the outline of the research program Vygotsky proposes in the last chapter of this book (the psychological nature of meaning, the nature of inner speech, the grammar of inner and outer speech, the relationship between thought and word, the dependence of consciousness and volitional regulation of personality over their own mental processes on the degree of mastery of social sign systems, etc.) still remains the most substantive and attractive program for studying semiotic activity.

The second significant field where Vygotsky's ideas find convincing confirmation is historical psychology — a developing scientific discipline whose subject is precisely the historical variability of human mental functions. As we have seen, Vygotsky's theory asserts the historical variability of the psyche and proposes a reliable psychological mechanism that acts as a mediator between historical factors and the human psyche. However, Vygotsky himself did not engage in actual historical-psychological research. Meanwhile, in the post-war period, especially in France, historical psychology began to take shape as a new scientific discipline at the intersection of psychology and history. Alongside historians such as L. Febvre and M. Bloch, it is important to note the significant pioneering contribution of the psychologist I. Meyerson¹⁸, who developed a doctrine largely close to Vygotsky's theory — on allomorphic development and the historical variability of mental functions, which transform through externalization in works (cultural forms). An important role was also played by a group of psychologists with a strong historical background, led by J.-P. Vernant and F. Malrieu, as well as psychologists from several other countries¹⁹.

Such intellectual currents in modern science, fully consistent with Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory of mental phenomena, serve as confirmation of the high heuristic value of this theory.

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¹⁷ Vygotsky consistently uses the term "communication".

¹⁸ Meyerson, I: *Les fonctions psychologiques et les oeuvres*, Vrin, Paris, 1948.

¹⁹ J.P. Vernant: *Mythe et pens e chez les Grecs (Etudes de psychologie historique)*, vol. I–II, 1974; Ph. Marieu: "Vers une psychologie historique", *Pensée*, 1951; J. P. Vernant: "Sur les recherches de psychologie comparative historique", *Journ. de Psychol.*, 1960, pp. 445–451; Barbu, L.: *Problems of historical psychology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1960.

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Поступила в редакцию 02.03.2026

Received 2026.03.02

Поступила после рецензирования 09.03.2026

Revised 2026.03.09

Принята к публикации 10.03.2026

Accepted 2026.03.10

Опубликована 30.03.2026

Published 2026.03.30