

MEMORABLE DATES

ПАМЯТНЫЕ ДАТЫ

130th anniversary of Jean Piaget
К 130-летию Жана Пиаже

Научная статья | Original paper

Correspondence between A.R. Luria and J. Piaget 1930–1966 years

Abstract

The letters exchanged between the renowned 20th-century psychologists Aleksander Luria and Jean Piaget reveal the intricate and sensitive process of fostering collaboration between scholars from two distinct and frequently opposing social “camps”. The unseen participant (and probably the initiator) of these exchanges was Lev Vygotsky. This correspondence is being published for the first time. Notes by A.D. Maidansky and E.Yu. Zavershneva.

Keywords: psychology congresses, developmental psychology, pedology, egocentric speech, Vygotsky, International Bureau of Education

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Переписка А.Р. Лурии с Ж. Пиаже 1930–1966 годов

Резюме

Письма, которыми обменивались два выдающихся психолога XX века, А.Р. Лурия и Ж. Пиаже, раскрывают детали непростой, деликатной работы по организации взаимодействия между учеными двух разных, зачастую враждующих, общественных «лагерей». Невидимым участником (а вероятно, и инициатором) этих контактов был Л.С. Выготский. Переписка публикуется впервые. Примечания — А.Д. Майданского и Е.Ю. Завершневой.

Ключевые слова: психологические конгрессы, психология развития, педология, эгоцентрическая речь, Выготский, Международное бюро просвещения

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International Bureau of Education,
Geneva, 12 February 1930
To Mr. Alexander Luria,
54/5 Arbat Street, Moscow

Dear Luria,

Thank you for your latest letter. I am concerned, however, that you have not received my reply to your previous letters¹; I wrote to you as far back as 1929 to thank you for your kind messages and to say that I have kept unforgettable memories of our conversations at Yale.

Of course, I would be happy to write a preface to the translation of my first two books. Please let me know the exact date by which I should send it. Incidentally, have you published anything on egocentric speech as a precursor to adult inner speech? I would like to quote you in an article I am preparing².

Regarding the Association of Child Psychologists, I agree with your suggestions, but I am waiting for Meyerson to finish his work before taking any action³. He must have written to you – I gave him your name [as a participant] from Russia.

I was very interested to hear about your impressions of America. The most valuable encouragement I have received to date was what you told me there about my own research.

Please accept, dear Luria, the expression of my sincere and deep friendship.

Jean Piaget

The Jean-Jacques Rousseau Institute
University of Geneva
Institute of Educational Sciences
Geneva, 18 September 1930
To Mr. Alexander Luria, Moscow

Dear friend,

Here at last is the foreword to the edition⁴; please accept my apologies for the delay. I would like to thank you once again from the bottom of my heart for everything you have done for this project.

Regarding volumes 3 and 4, I will leave the decision entirely up to you⁵. I believe I have already replied to *Staatsverlag*⁶, but if not, I will write again. Please apologise on my behalf to the person who wrote to me (I cannot recall who it was).

Congratulations on the work you have done in the Caucasus⁷. I look forward to seeing the results.

Rest assured of my devotion, dear friend.

Jean Piaget

Moscow, 2 November 1930

Dear Piaget,

I am writing to you this time in my capacity as Chairman of the International Bureau of Education⁸.

I would like to ask you the following question: we would like to publish a book presenting the principles of pedology, or child psychology, in France and Switzerland, in which the main tenets of French-speaking child psychologists would be clearly expressed.

¹ International mail in the Soviet Union often went missing in transit. Luria's correspondence with Kurt Levin was affected by this issue (see Ratcliff, van der Veer, 2025, p. 5).

² By that time, Lev Vygotsky's first article on the subject had already been published (Vygotsky, 1929), as had a German translation (Wygotski, 1929).

³ No information about Luria's proposals has survived. Ignace Meyerson (1888–1983) was the editor of the *Journal de psychologie normale et pathologique*. After the congress, Piaget wrote to Meyerson to say that he had met "an amazing guy (un type épatant)" who had a "large number of works of first quality" in progress (cited in Ratcliff, van der Veer, 2025, p. 5). Luria was only 27 at the time and Piaget was 33.

⁴ This is the author's preface to the Russian translation of *Language and Thought in the Child* (Piaget, 1932).

⁵ It appears that translations of Piaget's next two books were also planned: *The Child's Conception of the World* (1926) and *Physical Causality in the Child* (1927).

⁶ *Staatsverlag* (the German word for "state publishing house") refers to OGIZ, which published Piaget's book *Language and Thought in the Child* (Piaget, 1932).

⁷ It is not known what was the work is being referred to. In the summer of 1930, Luria visited the resort town of Teberda in the North Caucasus, where he met Lana Lipchina, a biomedical scientist; three years later, they married. It is possible that two Moscow-based scientists took part in the field research; their daughter Elena recounts her mother's memories of conversations "in the evenings by the campfire" (Luria, 1994, p. 78).

⁸ In 1929, Piaget was appointed director of the International Bureau of Education (Bureau International d'Education), which was subsequently integrated into UNESCO.

Would you be so kind as to recommend such a book to us? It could be a work that has already been published, or we could commission a new work from an author you suggest. I look forward to receiving your reply to this matter as soon as possible.

With best wishes to you and your family!

Yours, A. Luria

Geneva, 11 April 1932
To Mr. Alexander Luria
5 Serebryany Lane, Flat 1. Moscow

Dear Luria,

On returning from my trip, I found your letter of 15 March and was very pleased because, with the expedition now postponed until 1933, I think I can accept your kind invitation.

First of all, I must apologise for not replying to your first letter. The reason is that not only am I always late (as you, unfortunately, know!), but also, and more importantly, your invitation has put me in a very difficult position. On the one hand, I was very keen to make this trip to Russian Turkestan, given all the psychological discoveries it promises. But, on the other hand, I have a ten-month-old son, and I am working on a major book about the first two years of a child's life, so there could be no question of abandoning my principal "*Versuchsperson*" [German for test subject] at such a crucial moment.

I was therefore greatly relieved to learn that the expedition has been postponed until 1933⁹. This time I am happy to accept. I am particularly looking forward to spending a few days in Moscow and meeting your fellow psychologists and educators. I would also be grateful for the opportunity to establish technical contacts between the International Bureau of Education and the departments of the People's Commissariat for Education. If you have any advice on this matter, please do share it with me.

For my part, I shall consider the research topics that could be explored during our expedition and shall write to you about them as soon as I have any ideas.

Once again, dear Luria, I thank you most sincerely for honouring me with an invitation to this expedition. Please accept my sincere friendship.

Jean Piaget

Dear Piaget,

A year ago, you kindly agreed to send us a paper for a collection dedicated to the memory of Vygotsky.

We are now ready to publish the collection and look forward to receiving your paper by 1–15 January, if possible. If it could address general issues of child development, that would be preferable. There are, of course, no restrictions on length. The entire collection will be titled *Problems of Development and Dissolution of Mind*¹⁰.

With best wishes to you and your colleagues!

Yours sincerely,

A. Luria

Prof. Alexander R. Luria
13 Frunze Street,
Moscow, USSR
7 November 1935

14 April 1936

Dear Piaget,

A few months ago, I wrote to inform you that we were preparing a commemorative collection in honour of Vygotsky and that we would very much like to include one of your works in it.

⁹ Luria's second expedition to Central Asia took place in the summer of 1932 and was joined by Kurt Koffka. Apparently, a third expedition was planned for the following year, in which Piaget was to participate.

¹⁰ Information about the unfortunate fate of this collection can be found in the Afterword.

Since then, I have received no news from you.

Many psychologists (Gesell, Boitendijk, Gelb, Bühler, Koffka, Lewin) have already sent us their work for the collection, and we are eagerly awaiting yours. Any article you could provide, preferably devoted to the theoretical issues of children's developmental thinking and behaviour, would be particularly highly valued!

Could I receive your contribution sometime in April or May?

I send you my warmest regards.

Yours sincerely, Luria

Prof. Alexander R. Luria
13 Frunze Street
Moscow, USSR

Geneva, 20 April 1936

Prof. Alexander R. Luria,
13 Frunze Street,
Moscow

Dear Luria,

Thank you for your kind letter. I will send you some pages for the Vygotsky memorial book as soon as possible. However, I am very busy at the moment and would ask you to be patient for a little while longer.

Please forgive me for the delay, and accept my best wishes, dear friend.

J. Piaget
Director

9 October 1964
To Mr A.R. Luria

Dear Luria,

Upon returning from my trip, I found your reply, for which I thank you. I apologise for the delay.

I have noted your comments regarding the programme for the symposium on intelligence but it is too early to discuss this as I need to secure sufficient funding first. As you requested, it goes without saying that this symposium will take place after the congress in Moscow.

Regarding your kind enquiries about my participation in the congress, I discussed this with Leontiev over the summer. He will undoubtedly have informed you that I would be delighted to deliver one of the three evening lectures on the subject of "Psychology and Interdisciplinary Relations". In fact, UNESCO has commissioned me to prepare a general report on interdisciplinary relations between the humanities and the natural sciences, among other things. I believe this issue is relevant to psychology, and drawing the congress's attention to it would be a significant achievement.

Furthermore, I am willing to participate in one of the symposia you have planned¹¹, provided it focuses on intelligence or developmental psychology.

Thank you, and please accept the assurance of my sincere friendship and devotion, dear Luria.

J. Piaget

15 March 1965
Mr A.R. Luria,
13 Frunze Street, Moscow

You sent me a very kind letter regarding the symposium on intelligence that the World Psychiatric Association is planning to hold under my chairmanship in 1966, following your congress¹².

You also asked me what I would like to talk about at the Moscow Congress. I replied immediately, but have not yet received a response from you. Perhaps my letter did not reach you, so I am writing again.

¹¹ This refers to one of the breakout sessions at the Moscow Congress.

¹² The World Psychiatric Association Congress is taking place in Madrid from 5 to 11 September 1966. Piaget will be unable to attend.

UNESCO is preparing a major report on contemporary trends in the humanities and social sciences; I have been commissioned to write three chapters for this report, including one on interdisciplinary relations and another on the place of the humanities within the system of sciences (in particular, biology and mathematics). In order to generate a flow of ideas and draw attention to interdisciplinary relations, which I believe are also of great importance for the future of psychology, I would like to engage as many psychologists as possible at your congress in this topic.

The International Congress of Sociology, which is to be held in late summer 1966, has already invited me to deliver the opening speech on interdisciplinary relations, with a particular focus on the general mechanisms of interest to sociology in relation to other sciences. Furthermore, I have been asked to chair a working group on the same topic at this congress, but, as you are aware, I am a psychologist, not a sociologist, so I would be particularly interested in discussing these issues at the congress in Moscow.

Given the large number of symposia you are holding, would it be possible to organise an evening conference on this topic, such as the mechanisms common to psychology and the natural and social sciences, to avoid overloading your programme? Otherwise, a symposium could be considered.

If neither of these topics is suitable, please assign me to a symposium that is connected with intelligence in some way, and I will prepare a short paper along those lines.

I am making these proposals primarily to familiarise myself with the ideas of Soviet psychologists as thoroughly as possible and to prepare three chapters for the UNESCO report. I would very much like to identify all possible trends, not just those with which I am familiar. Therefore, with the aim of gaining far more than I can offer, I am considering an evening conference, as this is often the best way to learn what is difficult to grasp simply by reading countless publications, by getting behind the scenes and having conversations.

I apologise, dear Luria, for making such specific proposals to you; please tell me frankly what you think of this, and rest assured of my long-standing and sincere friendship.

J. Piaget

P.S. I have sent a long article on thought and action to Mr Kashin, the Deputy Minister¹³, who asked me to write it for his journal. When writing it, I kept in mind both readers who are psychologists and those who are educators.

4 November 1966
Prof. A.R. Luria
13 Frunze Street. Moscow

Dear Luria!

I am late in replying and offer my apologies: I have been away and very busy. I shall write these few pages within the next two or three days.

Once again, please accept my apologies and best regards,

J. Piaget

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¹³ Mikhail Petrovich Kashin (1912–1988) was a Soviet scholar and educator, as well as Deputy Minister of Education of the Russian Federative Republic. He was the editor-in-chief of the journal *Narodnoe Obrazovanie*.