

**INTERRELATION OF IDEAS AND SCHOOLS**  
*ВЗАИМОСВЯЗЬ ИДЕЙ И ШКОЛ*

## On Account of the 120<sup>th</sup> Birthday Anniversary of L.S. Vygotsky and J. Piaget

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J. Piaget and L.S. Vygotsky were born within the same year, they breathed the same air, they read the same books, the authors of which were Freud, Stern, Buhler, Ah, Eliasberg and many others; they both experienced the impact of psychoanalysis. Many people would recall that on May 6, the 160<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary of Sigmund Freud was celebrated. It took J. Piaget eighteen months to undergo supervised psychoanalysis with psychoanalyst S. Spielrein. L.S. Vygotsky called psychoanalysis «a narrow path over an abyss for those who are free of vertigo». J. Piaget and L.S. Vygotsky worked in the same scientific field of developmental psychology, studied the same problem of the development of speech and thinking, but treated them with different methodological perspectives, particularly, from natural and scientific, and cultural-historical, standpoints, respectively. Both experienced each other's influence, but never had the opportunity to discuss their accumulated experience in person. J. Piaget dreamed about meeting L.S. Vygotsky, and he regretted that his wish was never fulfilled.

L.S. Vygotsky set a high value on the works by J. Piaget. In 1932, in the preface to the Russian edition of the book «Speaking and thinking,» he wrote that the works of J. Piaget were of historic significance. Those words were spoken by one peer about another peer, by one young man about another young man, by one contemporary about another contemporary. Such assessment is seldom to be found among scientists living in the same historical period.

Justifying such high appraisal, L.S. Vygotsky emphasized that J. Piaget was the first who set the problem of a child's development as a qualitative problem and revealed that a child's way of thinking was qualitatively different from an adult's thinking. He was the first one to prove on an experimental basis that a child thinks differently from an adult.

L.S. Vygotsky also noted a sea of facts, both of major and minor significance, which flooded psychology from

the pages written by J. Piaget. Only the first five of his books had been published by that time, but by the end of his life their number was ten times greater. Today, following D. Elkind, we may say with confidence that the facts provided by J. Piaget were the most established facts in the field of a child's psychology. They can be obtained by any researcher, no matter where he or she lives. It was not for nothing that, P.Y. Galperin suggested to call his facts «Piaget Phenomena» at the 18th International Psychological Congress held in 1966.

L.S. Vygotsky emphasized that many facts could only be obtained through the introduction of a new method of scientific research. J. Piaget created such a method. This is the method of clinical conversation, or a talk with a child, on the topics, which are beyond his experience. According to L.S. Vygotsky the method created by J. Piaget is adequate to the object of research and is based on the analysis of a child's logical development. This method of J. Piaget was in contrast to the method of tests, which only establishes the level of development that has been already achieved, but does not allow one to understand how this level has been reached. J. Piaget was quite suspicious of the use of statistical methods in psychology. Almost hundred years ago, in the early 1920s, he wrote that the use of statistics can prove anything, and therefore he preferred to use qualitative and clinical analysis of facts in his research.

Today, the criticism of L.S. Vygotsky of the early studies by J. Piaget is perceived in a new light. Today, no one thinks that L.S. Vygotsky «smashed to pieces» the concept of J. Piaget, and showed «the limited nature and fruitlessness of his metaphysical method of thought»; no one thinks that the facts obtained by J. Piaget «are not of universal, but of limited value».

As is known, all features pertaining to a child's perception of the world and physical causality, his speech and logics, were explained by Piaget as the egocentric nature of a child's thinking, his lack of understanding of

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the limitations of his own point of view, his inability to correlate it with the point of view of other people, his lack of reasoning and understanding as to the grounds, on which a child's thinking is based.

In contrast to J. Piaget, L.S. Vygotsky explained these features of a child's thinking by a child's lack of systematic spontaneous concepts, and insufficient development of intercommunity between them. A child is not sensitive to contradictions, he is syncretic, he co-understands judgment instead of integrating them "into a single structure of higher concept", precisely because his thinking is dominated by the logic of perception without contradictions, but not the logic of thoughts. L.S. Vygotsky writes that a child's statements are inconsistent not from this child's point of view, but from the point of view of an adult. L.S. Vygotsky emphasized: "The source of these features is not self-centered children's thoughts, a compromise between the logic of dream and the logic of action, but those peculiar relationships of community between the concepts that exist in the thinking which is made up of spontaneous conceptions. Not because a child's concepts are far from the real objects in comparison with those of adults and saturated with autonomous logic of autistic thinking, but because they form different, more intimate and immediate relations with the object compared with the concepts of an adult, and unique movements of thought arise with a child, as described by Piaget".

Don't we see that it was actually affirmed by Piaget, as he noted that a child, due to direct, egocentric attitude to things, is at the same time closer to direct observation and is further away from the world of objects compared with adults? In this regard, a phrase of F.D. Gorbov comes to mind, which was heard by a large audience at the Psychological Institute: "Well, what a Piaget this Vygotsky is". (By the way, on 6<sup>th</sup> July of this year that is rich in jubilees, the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday anniversary F.D. Gorbov, prominent Russian psychologist, is celebrated).

The difference between the views of J. Piaget and L.S. Vygotsky lies only in the fact that that L.S. Vygotsky explained the facts themselves by fragmentary nature of children's concepts, whereas J. Piaget considered this cause to be just an external manifestation of a deeper mental tendency, which he called egocentrism of children's thinking.

This is where the interests of two great psychologists crossed, the interests of two scientists of different world views, different cultures, different social systems, the scientists who created the most influential scientific schools, the Soviet school and the Geneva school. While going their own ways in psychology, they obtained similar results in experimental studies, however, they established different theories in respect of the same facts.

L.S. Vygotsky subjected the concept of egocentrism of children's thinking to profound theoretical and experimental criticism. In this concept, egocentrism is regarded as a transitional stage from autism (dreams, a baby's fantasies) to socialization. L.S. Vygotsky clearly demonstrated in his theory that autism cannot be a primary step in the development of mind either in phylogeny, since an animal knows only one real way to satisfy needs, or in the historical development of mankind, since a savage

does his "autistic stupid things" only where experience and knowledge are not sufficient, or in ontogeny, since practical experience is a cardinal factor in the mental development of a child. A child's communication with an adult is practical material activity. Both in the process of "humanization" in the course of anthropogeny and in ontogeny in the child's mind, a spiritual moment arises in the system of this material relationship (A.V. Zaporozhets, P.Ya. Galperin).

L.S. Vygotsky opposed the idea of the late socialization of a child. He showed that as early as in the first months of his life, a child is a social being to the greatest possible extent. The development starts with the situation of the indissoluble unity of a child and an adult, which L.S. Vygotsky called the "great-we" situation; gradually a child's personal position starts to be distinguished in it. A child's development is directed from the social to the individual, and not conversely.

From the viewpoint of L.S. Vygotsky, J. Piaget failed to understand the true meaning of the child's egocentric speech and its relationship, as well as its connection with inner speech, and, therefore, misinterpreted its nature, functional, structural and genetic.

Experimental studies carried out by L.S. Vygotsky led him to the conclusion that egocentric speech is the transition to the development of inner speech. He showed that the function of egocentric speech performed the function of action planning; in terms of its structure, it is close to inner speech (it is reduced and difficult to understand) and, finally, it has its future, it does not die away, as J. Piaget thought, and, when on the threshold of school age, it develops into inner speech.

According to Vygotsky, "a child's egocentric speech is one of the phenomena of transition from intersychic functions to intrapsychic functions, i.e. from the forms of a child's collective social activity to its individual functions. This transition is a common law... for the development of higher mental functions that appear initially as a form of activity in collaboration and only later they are transferred by a child into the sphere of his psychological forms of activity. *Speech for oneself* (italics added. — L.O.) occurs through differentiation of the initially social function of speech for others. No gradual socialization introduced into a child from the outside, but the gradual individualization that occurs based on the internal sociality of a child is the main path in a child's development", this is the way L.S. Vygotsky thought and wrote.

J. Piaget understood the basic route of a child's development in another way. From his point of view, it is a movement of total self-centeredness through decentration to the objective position in the cognition of things, other people, and himself. In later works, of which L.S. Vygotsky could not have known, J. Piaget wrote that in the process of intellectual development from birth to adolescence, the process of overcoming egocentric mindsets is performed at three different levels. At the sensory-motor intelligence stage (from 1.6 to 2 years of age), a child moves from complete lack of distinction between the subjective and the objective to the understanding that the world consists of objects, and he himself is an object among other objects existing independently of him in space and time.

Egocentrism appears for the second time at the preoperational intelligence development stage, and it is expressed in the lack of distinction between a child's own point of view and that of other's. As a result of decentration, by the age between 7 to 8 years, a child understands the objective relations between things and builds interpersonal relationship in the form of co-operation. Egocentrism appears for the third time by the age between 11 to 14 years, when a teenager attributes limitless opportunities to his own thinking that, in his opinion, is able to transform life around him. The process of overcoming egocentrism, or decentration, in this period consists in the fact that a teenager turns into a doer from an abstract reformer of society. It is associated with the beginning of adulthood and the transition to serious professional training.

Based on such understanding of the basic line of mental development, egocentric speech is viewed by J. Piaget as one of many other symptoms of egocentric thinking. The features of children's logic (putting statements in a single line, lack of sensitivity to contradiction, transduction, etc.), a specific character of a child's view of the world (intellectual realism, when a child takes visible for real; animism, or animation of inanimate objects; artificialism, a belief that natural phenomena are man-made) — all these are the symptoms of egocentrism of a preschool child.

When criticizing J. Piaget, L.S. Vygotsky chose only the phenomenon of egocentric speech from all the wealth of facts that he had obtained in the latter's early works. He focused on the middle position of egocentric thinking between autism and the logic of rational action in the original development scheme suggested by J. Piaget, and concluded that egocentric speech could not be the expression of egocentric thinking — it performed the function of realistic thinking. "Together with this connection," L.S. Vygotsky wrote, "falls the basic factual ground, on which the concept of a child's egocentrism is built". Thus, having destroyed the foundations, having reinterpreted the roots, the function and the fate of egocentric speech, in his opinion, he destroyed the entire building constructed by J. Piaget. This conclusion does not correspond to the actual course of a child's mental development. The egocentrism thrown out by L.S. Vygotsky through the door comes back to us through the window.

However, it should be strongly emphasized that the concept of "egocentric speech" has been *defined* by J. Piaget and L.S. Vygotsky *in different ways*. For J. Piaget, the main feature of egocentric speech is that it is *the speech from one's own point of view*, and for L.S. Vygotsky, it is *the speech for oneself*. The whole interpretation of egocentric speech and egocentric position of a preschool child described in the second chapter of L.S. Vygotsky's book "Thought and Speech" depends on this definition of the notion. Early studies of J. Piaget present the formula for measuring the egocentric speech, where echolalia (repeating words and syllables for the pleasure of uttering them) and a collective monologue (speech from one's point of view) are placed in the numerator, whereas the whole amount of a child's utterances, which includes the socialized speech that is built with due regard for the point of view of another person (questions, to which the child is awaiting a response, requests, etc...) are placed in the denominator. Sometimes J. Piaget

included one more characteristic in the definition of egocentric speech — that is speech predominantly about oneself. L.S. Vygotsky had a right to make his choice.

One may quote L.S. Vygotsky, who in the chapter of the book "Thought and word" made this witty remark: "... sometimes people fail to come to terms with each other not only in case where the two of them are deaf, but in the case where the two persons give a different meaning to one and the same word, or have contrary points of view". There can be no winner in the debate of L.S. Vygotsky and J. Piaget on the issue of egocentric speech. ***Both are in the right!***

In 1962, the book "Thought and Speech" was published in the USA. It was J. Bruner who initiated its translation into English. He also asked J. Piaget to write comments about L.S. Vygotsky's critical feedback related to him. In those comments, J. Piaget expressed sincere regret that the clock couldn't be turned back and the impossibility of a personal meeting with L.S. Vygotsky to discuss the critical feedback of the latter in relation to Piaget's early works. J. Piaget acknowledged that the choice of the term "egocentrism" was unfortunate and tried to replace it with the word "centration". However, this did not change the essence. "Cognitive egocentrism, — J. Piaget wrote, — is based on insufficient differentiation of one's own point of view as compared to other possible ones". As far as egocentric speech was concerned, J. Piaget maintained his position, but, at the same time, accepted L.S. Vygotsky's hypothesis, having expressed his profound respect for the author.

As far as the concept of "socialization" criticized in the book by L.S. Vygotsky, J. Piaget again explained his point of view, according to which a child, from the very beginning of his life, is a social being, however, not yet socialized, since he is not able to decenterate and to speak with due regard for the listener's point of view.

The discrepancy in the interpretation of the same facts in the theory of J. Piaget and theory of L.S. Vygotsky is scientific evidence of the time, when psychology became established as independent science, when new facts were opened, the laws of development were formulated, the internal mechanisms of this process were revealed, when the general methodological principles underlying different approaches to the study of mental evolution were perceived. Of course, this process was not simple and straightforward. The path to the truth, according to J. Piaget, lies through discussions and debate, which take place both in the development of thinking of each person and in the history of any science.

We daresay that the theories of these two prominent psychologists of the twentieth century show different understanding of the essence of a human being and his development. J. Piaget's theory today appears to us as a rational, fully objective scientific system corresponding to the natural science approach to the study of human psyche, whereas L.S. Vygotsky's theory is the basis for a fresh approach to human nature and its development, which is highly-moral and humanistic in the true sense of the word, which can be squared with — strange as it may seem — the religious ideas of Creation and Love. It is this new approach that addresses the issue of education and development. However, that is a topic of another message dedicated to the development of the ideas of L.S. Vygotsky in the theory of P.Ya. Galperin.