

## Summary

# The Vygotsky That We (Do Not) Know: Vygotsky's Main Works and the Chronology of their Composition

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This paper summarizes a notably longer version the paper on Lev Vygotsky's (1896-1934) written legacy that came out in the Russian-language *PsyAnima, Dubna Psychological Journal* (Yasnitsky, 2011b).

**PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS.** Given the immense popularity of Vygotsky nowadays, it is highly surprising to see the great discrepancies in bibliographies of Vygotsky's writings as manifested in different printed and archival sources (Lifanova, 1996; Luria, 1935a, 1935b; Murchison, 1932; Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991; Vygodskaya, 1996; Vygotsky, 1934, 1956, 1960, 1982-84), none of which appearing ultimately and unconditionally correct. Therefore, this study posed two interrelated research questions:

(1) What are the most important written works of Vygotsky that represent his theory in its most developed and advanced form?

(2) What is the chronology of Vygotsky's main works composition?

**DATA AND ANALYSIS.** This study is deliberately focused on larger works such as published books and manuscripts of monographs, but not smaller Vygotsky's journal articles and book chapters, created during the period of 1928-1934. Thus, it leaves out earlier and relatively immature works of "pre-instrumental" period such as the 1925-1926 manuscript *Psychology of Art* (first published in Russian in 1965), the book of 1926 *Pedagogical Psychology*, or the unfinished manuscript draft of 1926-1927 *Historical meaning of crisis in psychology* that, according to recent archival studies, was not apparently intended for publication by its author as a whole, but was later considerably revised and eventually published as several journal articles (Zavershneva, 2009). On the other hand, several later publications are only briefly discussed in this study, which include—with the only exception of *Thinking and Speech* (1934) that is treated here at a considerable length—posthumously published stenographic records of Vygotsky's course notes (such as *Foundations of Paedology*, 1934, 1935) and compilations of his papers (such as *Mental development of children in the process of learning*, 1935 or coedited volume *Mentally retarded child*, 1935, with I.I. Daniushevskii). The former group of sources is excluded from this study for the reason of their questionable reliability as Vygotsky's texts that most unlikely were authorized by their author for publication and might, therefore, contain considerable distortions of Vygotsky's original thought: for the discussion of the issues of reliability of various Vygotsky's publications see (van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011).

This study explored two major categories of data. First, the meta-data of Vygotsky's printed works such as (a) the dates of manuscripts submission to the publisher, of their approval by the censorship authorities, and of their final publication, (b) information about the publishing houses and the institutions that authorized these publications, (c) the contexts of publication and intended readership, etc. Second, in several most problematic instances the author analyzed the discourse of Vygotsky's works.

### FINDINGS.

First. In early 1920s Leon Trotsky announced that in the new socialist society "Man will make it his purpose to master his own feelings, to raise his instincts to the heights of consciousness, to make them transparent, to extend the wires of his will into hidden recesses, and thereby to raise himself to a new plane, to create a higher social biologic type, or, if you please, a *superman*"

(emphasis added, Trotsky, 1925/2005). Inspired by Trotsky's visionary proclamations, as evident in a number of quotes and programmatic statements in his writings (e.g., Vygotskii, 1926, 1926/2008), in 1927 Vygotsky launched a highly ambitious publication project that aimed to “to lay out, in a general sense, psychology with regard to culture and the superhuman” (Vygotsky & Puzyrei, 2007, p. 19) [in German translation: “[es ist eine Chance,] in allgemeinen Zügen die Psychologie unter dem Aspect der Kultur und des Übermenschen darzustellen” (Rückriem, 2008, p. 46)]. This project ultimately materialized as two books that came out in 1930: *Studies on the history of behaviour. Ape, primitive, child* (Vygotskii & Luria, 1930) and *Imagination and creativity in school age* (Vygotskii, 1930b). To their apparent disappointment, as it is evident from Vygotsky's correspondence with his associates and collaborators, the outcome of the work did not meet Vygotsky's high expectations, who self-criticized their “ape-book” for numerous mistakes, inconsistencies, and omissions (Rückriem, 2008, pp. 63-64; Vygotsky & Puzyrei, 2007, p. 26) that resulted from the lack of experimental studies done by the Vygotsky-Luria Circle (Yasnitsky, 2009b, 2011d), and, on the other hand, their inability to provide sufficiently convincing and comprehensive theoretical generalizations. Therefore, the outcome of the undertaking of “psychology with regard to culture and the superhuman”—the two books for general reader that summarized the studies of other, mostly West European scholars—was clearly an overall failure of what started as a highly ambitious and original project.

Second. Perhaps, the most unexpected, striking, and sensational discovery made in this study is the conclusion that such—according to common opinion—foundational Vygotsky's works as *The History of Development of Higher Mental Functions* and *Tool and Sign in the Development of the Child*, in fact, were not considered as his seminal works by their author, who neither included them in his bibliographies of published works and unpublished manuscripts (cf.: Murchison, 1932; Vygodskaya, 1996) nor even intended to publish them, at least in their present form as they are known to us in Soviet publications of 1960s-1980s and their translations into English of 1970s-1990s. Furthermore, this study leads us to the conclusion about numerous both deliberate and incidental falsifications that took place during preparation of the texts for publication by the editors of the Russian six-volume collection of Vygotsky's works of 1982-1984. Thus, *The History of Development of Higher Mental Functions* appears to have been constructed from two different Vygotsky's manuscripts written with the interval of 1-2 years and published in 1983 by the editors of the Soviet edition of Pedagogica Press as one theoretical work under the title that actually never appears in Vygotsky's own publications, papers and archival documents (Vygotskii, 1983). In turn, on the basis of testimonies of the participants of the events of that time and the comparative analysis of Russian and English texts of Vygotsky and Luria's *Tool and Sign in the Development of the Child* we come to the conclusion that this work that we know very well by its Russian (Vygotskii, 1984) and English (Vygotsky, 1994) publications is a fake, or, in the words of Elkonon Goldberg, a “benign forgery”, or, even more precisely, back-translation from an English translation of an earlier Russian text that had not preserved by the time of the preparation of Soviet six-volume publication (i.e. by the end of 1960s) (Goldberg, 2005, p. 99). The main evidence in support of this finding is the fact of numerous repetitions of considerable segments of Russian text, virtually identical in their content, but most frequently varying in their verbal expressions (see Kellogg & Yasnitsky, 2011; also footnote 20 in Van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994, p. 171). Such variations must have resulted from the poorly coordinated work of two (or even more) translators who made redundant translations of the text and, then, from the mistakes of integration of these segments into coherent whole that were presumably made by a highly unprofessional and careless editor of the volume. Finally, it is notable that the English text that served as the original for this back-translation has many features of the earlier discourse of Vygotsky of the end of 1920s (e.g., abundant “stimulus-reaction” terminology), which suggests that first translation of the original Russian text was made in the interwar period, quite likely around 1930. On the other hand, this English text also reveals certain features of Vygotsky's later discourse of 1931-1932, which might be explained by later

interventions and revisions that took place after 1930 when the original text was expanded and augmented with several newer paragraphs here and there, but not fully reconsidered, revised and rewritten as a whole. As a result, what is available to us now is a highly eclectic text that reflects both “reactological” terminology of the “instrumental period” of 1920s and later terminology of the “functional systems” period of the beginning of 1930s. Therefore, in sum, we are safe to claim that such findings do not allow us to treat these two texts— *The History of Development of Higher Mental Functions* and *Tool and Sign in the Development of the Child*—as Vygotsky’s authentic works the way they were published in the six-volume collection by Pedagogika Press in 1980s. The same obviously applies to all subsequent translations of these two texts that were made from this Soviet edition, for instance the English publication of *Tool and sign* of 1999 (Vygotsky, 1984/1999).

Third. This study addressed the problems with the chronology of Vygotsky’s main works and contributed to a better understanding of the place these works occupy within the corpus of Vygotsky’s oeuvre. As a result, this study suggests that we need to question and reconsider the set of his published books and book manuscripts that are traditionally considered as seminal and foundational. Also, the chronology of Vygotsky’s works composition was somewhat revised and in several instances corrected (see Table 1).

Hence, as we can see from the Table, the vast majority of Vygotsky’s most significant texts—those texts that are traditionally presented as the most important and foundational in numerous scholarly interpretations of Vygotsky’s legacy (for most recent critique of some of these see Miller, 2011)—were in fact written before 1931 (the two exceptions are several chapters of *Thinking and speech*, 1934 and several fragments of *Tool and sign*, 1930-1932). Therefore, we realize that these texts do not quite represent the last and the most important and productive period in the development of Vygotsky’s theory in 1932-1934. On the other hand, we also realize that the most popular texts of Vygotsky that were in fact written in 1932-1934 give only a fragmentary and far from complete overview of his integral psychoneurological theory of bio-social and cultural-historical development that was emerging over the last period of his life.

Fourth. From the perspective of our interest in Vygotsky’s integral theory we can see that the paedological cycle of his works such as *Paedology of school age* (Vygotskii, 1928) and *Paedology of the adolescent* (Vygotskii, 1929, 1930a, 1931) were quite undeservedly downplayed and largely forgotten in the numerous contemporary scholarly works of post-Vygotskian scholars. Quite in contrast to the contemporary virtual oblivion of Vygotsky’s paedological publications, the author of these works and his closest associates considered them as important, often referred to these books, and included these publications in the bibliographies of his works. Also, one should keep it in mind that, cumulatively, the paedological books of Vygotsky constitute his largest text—more than 700 pages—that was authorized for publication by its author and was ultimately published during Vygotsky’s lifetime (cf. Table). Analysis of these works will help us better understand the growth of the theory of bio-social development that Vygotsky announced in his earlier programmatic works of mid-1920s. Given that his latest and, thus, the most mature text of this cycle was written not later than the end of 1930s, in our prospective analysis of Vygotsky’s main paedological works it is important to include also his *more advanced works on paedology*: the texts that have frequently preserved as stenograms of his lectures or presentations, or author’s notes for the courses that he typically taught at the Herzen Leningrad Pedagogical Institute in 1930s. Some of these stenograms and course notes were later published posthumously, most likely not proofread by the author, without his consent, and quite probably with editorial changes (Vygotskii, 1933-34/1984, 1934b, 1935a, 1935b, 1996, 2001; Vygotskii & Danyushevskii, 1935). For typical examples of editorial interventions—and, for that matter, distortions of the meaning of the text—in posthumous publications of Vygotsky’s works see recent studies (Kellogg & Yasnitsky, 2011; Mecacci & Yasnitsky, 2011; van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011; Zavershneva & Osipov, 2010). Despite not ungrounded doubts in the authenticity and reliability of these posthumous publications,

they are the best what we currently have of the paedological legacy of the later integrative psychoneurological developmental theory of Vygotsky and, therefore, these sources should be most seriously taken into consideration.

**Table 1.**  
**The updated chronology of Vygotsky's books composition and publication**  
**(italics indicate the works that were not published during Vygotsky's lifetime;**  
**corrections in the chronology of Vygotsky's works that were introduced in this study are**  
**emphasized, in bold characters)**

Title	Date of publication/writing		Length (pp.)	Comments
	traditional	corrected		
<i>Istoriia razvitiia vysshikh psikhicheskikh funktsii</i> [The history of development of higher mental functions]	1930-1931 or 1931-1932	Not later <b>1930</b> (chapters 1-5) <sup>1</sup>	210 or 158 <sup>2</sup>	Total text length of the Russian publication of 1983 — 323 pp.
		Not later <b>1929</b> (chapters 6-15) <sup>3</sup>	165	
Myshlenie i rech' [Thinking and speech]	1934	Not later <b>1930</b> (ch. 2-5), spring <b>1933</b> - spring <b>1934</b> (Introduction, chap. 1, 6 и 7)	320	Chapter 5: an excerpt from <i>Pedologiia podrostka</i> [Paedology of the adolescent] (1931)
<i>Orudie i znak (rukopis' [Tool and sign (manuscript)])</i>	1930	Not earlier <b>1931</b> , probably <b>1932</b>	—	According to <i>Thinking and speech</i> (Vygotskii, 1934a, p. 323), there was also such English copy of the work: L.S. Vygotsky and A. R. Luria, <i>Tool and Symbol in the development of the child</i> (sent to «Handbook of Child-Psychology», 1930)
Pedologiia podrostka [Paedology of the adolescent]	1929 and 1931 or 1930 и 1931	<b>1929</b> (vol. 1, chapters 1-4)	68	Total text length of all three volumes of the book — 504 pp.  The last, third volume completed not later than the fall of <b>1930</b>
		<b>1930</b> (vol. 2, chapters 5-8)	104	
		<b>1931</b> (vol. 3, chapters 9-16)	332	
Pedologiia shkol'nogo vozrasta [Paedology of the school age]	1928	1928	218	
Etiudy po istorii povedeniia. Obez'iana, primitiv, rebenok [Studies on the history of behaviour. Ape, primitive, child]	1930	1930	230	The book most likely completed not later than the fall of <b>1929</b>

Fifth, and the last. Vygotsky's *Thinking and speech* is typically presented as the last and most mature of his works, as some kind of summary of all his theoretical work and a scientific

<sup>1</sup> Presumably, Vygotsky's manuscript of 1930 originally titled by its author *Issledovanie vysshikh psikhologicheskikh funktsii* [Investigation of higher psychological functions].

<sup>2</sup> In Soviet editions of 1960 and 1983 respectively

<sup>3</sup> Presumably, Vygotsky's manuscript of 1928-1929 originally titled by its author *Istoriia kul'turnogo razvitiia normal'nogo i nenormal'nogo rebenka* [The history of cultural development of normal and abnormal child].



testament to his students, followers and future generations of psychologists. Our study demonstrates that roughly half of the text of this book was written not later than 1930, and the whole book was presumably ready for submission to the publishing house by 1932. The second half of the book includes the texts that—although, indeed, actually written in 1932-1934—do not reflect the last phase of Vygotsky's theory of this period. The new research program of the psychology of human consciousness, sense-making, and freedom that Vygotsky announced at the end of 1932, highly reminiscent of his earlier "psychology with regard to culture and the superhuman", was carried out by the members of Vygotsky Circle in *three different yet interrelated directions of empirical studies and theoretical generalizations*. These are:

(1) intensive **clinical and defectological** studies in Kharkov and Moscow that resulted in considerable convergence of psychological theory of Vygotsky-Luria with psychiatry, physiology, and neurology, which defined the contours of the emergent "cultural-historical neuropsychology" (Toomela, in press; Yasnitsky, 2009a, 2009b, 2011d; Yasnitsky & Ferrari, 2008);

(2) **philological** (i.e. linguistic and literary) studies of language, thinking, and culture that, according to the contemporary nomenclature of scientific disciplines, are chiefly associated with semiotics, anthropology, and psycholinguistics (see, e.g., Bertau, 2008, 2011a, 2011b; Friedrich, 2005);

(3) convergence of the "intellectualism" of the earlier Vygotsky of his "instrumental period" of 1920s with the research on **affect, will and action in human "lifespace"** that was conducted by the members of the Berlin group of Kurt Lewin (Lewin, 1935, 1936) and were replicated and continued in the Soviet Union in 1930s by the scholars of the Vygotsky-Luria Circle (Yasnitsky, 2011a, 2012a, 2012b).

These three interrelated domains constitute the main avenues of Vygotsky's integrative theory in its most mature form. It is already apparent that no single text of Vygotsky presents these three lines in most elaborate form that would allow us to see Vygotsky's comprehensive integrative theory at a glance. Instead, what we have is a collection of brief notes, fragments, draft papers and unfinished works (Yasnitsky, 2010; Zavershneva, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c), partially published during the brief period of the Gold Age of Vygotskian psychology after his death in 1934-1936 (Vygotskii, 1933-34/1984, 1934b, 1935a, 1935b, 1936; Vygotskii & Danyushevskii, 1935) (on the "Gold Age" of the period of 1934-1936 see Yasnitsky, 2011c). In this situation there are two different yet interrelated options. First, we need meticulous historical work aimed at restoring and reconstructing the unity of Vygotsky's most precious ideas of the last period from the available fragments. Second, integration of these ideas and their further development in the context of contemporary psychological mainstream research and quest for non-reductionistic, history-oriented and theory-driven integrative research methodology and scientific practice (Clegg, 2009; Toomela & Valsiner, 2010; Valsiner, Molenaar, Lyra, & Chaudhary, 2009). Apparently, the first does not make much sense without the second, and the second is doomed to failure without the first (van der Veer & Yasnitsky, 2011). Which means that quite a lot of work still remains to be done before the original unity is restored of the new integrative "summit" psychology of consciousness, personality and freedom along the lines of the comprehensive and highly ambitious Vygotsky's research project of 1932-34.

And only then we will be able to see the contours of a truly new psychology. And there is no need to worry that this new psychology will correspond as little to the present one as the constellation Little Bear corresponds to a funny bear cub in our local Zoo.

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