

Chapter 4

Subjectivity and Perezhivanie: Empirical and Methodological Challenges and Opportunities



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Abstract This chapter explores possible ways of connecting subjectivity and perezhivanie on both an empirical and a theoretical/methodological level of analysis. It begins with elaborating two meanings of perezhivanie which exist in the original texts of Vygotsky—perezhivanie as a psychological phenomenon (P1) and perezhivanie as a concept in cultural-historical theory (P2). Perezhivanie as an empirical and observable psychological phenomenon might bring new ways of understanding of how subjectivity works since perezhivanie is a complex nexus of various psychological processes and should not be reduced to pure emotional experiencing. In certain sense, perezhivanie is an empirically observable manifestation of subjectivity. This makes an analysis of children’s concrete perezhivanie a powerful tool for studying how subjectivity works. It shows that a child’s subjectivity, the individual subjective configuration of the child, is no less powerful in defining the course of her individual unique developmental trajectory than the objective characteristics of her social environment. On the other hand, the concept of subjectivity might bring a new dimension into the empirical studies of perezhivanie. Perezhivanie as a concept within the cultural-historical theory (P2) is not an empirically observable phenomenon; it is a theoretical tool for analysis of the influence of social environment on the course of child development. New concepts of the micro-social situation of development and of dramatic perezhivanie are introduced, and an opportunity to investigate theoretical and methodological links between the concept of perezhivanie and subjectivity is discussed.

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss possible new avenues of inter- and intra-theoretical dialogue on perezhivanie and subjectivity. By saying this, I do not mean purely theoretical constructions and considerations; theoretical discussions which

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do not create a new framework for experimental and empirical research are mostly senseless. Theoretical improvements become powerful when they allow us to put new research questions and open new ways of data collection and analysis, using theoretical concepts as analytical tools. Theoretical concepts are instruments for analysis, and they should be carefully selected and properly used according to what they were designed for. In this respect, they can be compared with surgical instruments in medicine, having a specific application. The chapter discusses perezhivanie and subjectivity and their relations with this “medical” metaphor in mind. It begins with introducing perezhivanie in a way informed by Vygotsky’s original and seminal writings and discusses how this might enrich and improve the understanding of the concept of subjectivity and subjective configuration, with an aim of opening up new ways of empirical research and new types of research questions. However, what is discussed in this chapter are not solutions, but rather challenges which need further elaborations, clarifications and collective discussions in a dialogue pursued through empirical and theoretical studies. This chapter looks at these challenges as potential opportunities in the development of a cultural-historical research methodology. In a certain sense, this chapter continues, and, I hope, contributes, to a dialogue started in the previous book on perezhivanie, emotions and subjectivity (Fleer et al. 2017).

4.2 Perezhivanie: P1 and P2

In Vygotsky’s (1994, 2001) original writings, perezhivanie is presented in two inter-related, but different meanings and contexts—(1) perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1) and (2) perezhivanie as a theoretical concept within cultural-historical theory (P2). Elsewhere, I undertook an extended discussion of P1 and P2 (Veresov 2016a; Veresov 2017; Veresov and Fleer 2016); I therefore will limit myself by discussing issues related to the topic of this chapter.

I begin with discussion of perezhivanie as P1 and how this might contribute to empirical research and what kind of new research questions it might generate. Then, I briefly identify possible areas of continuing a dialogue with the theory of subjectivity and subjective configuration.

4.2.1 *Perezhivanie as a Phenomenon (P1): Challenges and Implications*

Perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1) is “how a child becomes aware of, interprets, and emotionally relates to a certain event” (Vygotsky 1994, p. 341). In other place, more general and integral characteristic is given: “Perezhivanie¹ must be understood

¹Translated as “experience” in English translation (Vygotsky 1998, p. 294).

as the internal relation² of the child as a person to one factor or another of reality” (Vygotsky 1984, p. 382). Perekhivanie is a complex nexus of different processes and individual (even personal) characteristics of a human being. It includes components of representation, understanding, subjective interpretation and the awareness of an individual in relation to certain events in her social environment.

This interpretation challenges the existing tradition of presenting perekhivanie as an emotional phenomenon (emotional experience), which originates from English translation of Vygotsky’s Collected Works (more discussion of this in Mok 2017; Veresov 2016a). Another aspect of this challenge is the meaning of the word “experience”. It might complicate understanding and even be misleading because in translation of Vygotsky’s works the Russian term “opyt” (опыт) is also translated as “experience”.³

The second challenge goes far beyond the translation issues. In different periods of Vygotsky’s theoretical evolution, in different original texts, the word perekhivanie was used with different meanings. For example, in early writings such as *Psychology of art* and *Pedagogical psychology*, written before 1924, perekhivanie is used only as P1 because the cultural-historical theory did not exist (Zavershneva 2010a, b). Vygotsky’s theoretical programme at that time was to build a theory of consciousness on the reflexological objective method, and consciousness was defined as “merely a reflex to reflexes” (Vygotsky 1997, pp. 46-47). Perekhivanie as a theoretical concept within the cultural-historical theory appears at the last stage (1932–1934) of Vygotsky’s work. Thus, dealing with Vygotsky’s legacy, especially with English translations, we should always undertake a sort of small textual investigation. Since volumes in Collected Works do not always follow the chronological order, we should pay attention to the year of original publication (or the year it was written) which might help to identify whether “experience” means perekhivanie or opyt, and if it means perekhivanie, does it mean P1 or P2?

4.2.2 *Perekhivanie as P1: Implications for Empirical Research*

Despite its complexity, perekhivanie as P1 is visible, empirically observable and experimentally researchable (see, e.g., Chen 2015; Ferholt 2015; Fler and Hammer 2013). However, beyond the surface, complexity exists that cannot always be seen on the surface. Thus, this phenomenon has hidden dimensions and dynamics, but this does not prevent from its empirical investigations. For example, Mackenzie and Veresov (2013) present the situation where children were invited to draw a picture of the excursion on a bus to a church on Eastern. One child’s drawing was of a picture of the bus, whereas another child’s drawing was of the church (. 4.1). The drawing on the left is the bus, and the drawing on the right is the church.

²Translated as “external” in English translation (Vygotsky 1998, p. 294).

³For example, “work experience” in Russian is opyt raboty (опыт работы).



Fig. 4.1 Children's drawings (Mackenzie and Veresov 2013)

These pictures provide an opportunity to clarify how one and the same event was perceived, interpreted and understood differently by different children (see also Veresov and Fleer 2016). This fits with Vygotsky's (1994) approach to *perezhivanie* as a refracting prism: "Perezhivanie, arising from any situation or from any aspect of his environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child" (p. 339). However, this is influence of a very special kind. As Vygotsky concludes: "it is not any of the factors⁴ in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence ...but the same factors⁵ refracted through the prism of the child's...*perezhivanie*" (Vygotsky 1994, p. 340). Thus, the above-mentioned example of two drawings allows us to identify which particular aspects or components of the event of excursion to the church influenced these two children.

Yet, this is not the whole story. *Perezhivanie* is a unique phenomenon as it allows us to investigate the subjective psychological characteristics of the child in the process of refraction. As Vygotsky puts it: "the personal characteristics of children are, as it were, mobilized by a given ...*perezhivanie*, become crystallized within a given *perezhivanie*" (Vygotsky 1994, p. 343). Therefore, studying child's *perezhivanie* "also helps us select those characteristics which played a role in determining the attitude to the given situation" (Vygotsky 1994, p. 342). What makes *perezhivanie* a unique phenomenon and interesting to investigate in empirical research is that it allows us to identify which specific aspects (moments) of environment influence the child and, at the same time, which personal characteristics of the child are mobilized and crystallized through *perezhivanie*. We might know that the excursion to a church influences different children differently; but the analysis of children's drawings might give us an answer *how this happens* and *what sort of influence* it is.

⁴Moment (МОМЕНТ) in the Russian original (Vygotsky 2001, p. 72) is not factor, but rather a certain component, a part or particular aspect of a situation or an event.

⁵The same moments in Russian original.

4.2.3 *P1 and Theory of Subjectivity: New Avenues for Dialogue*

The theory of subjectivity, developed by Gonzalez Rey (Gonzales Rey 2005, 2007, 2015, 2017; Gonzales Rey et al. 2017), introduces subjectivity as not something individual and internal, but as a “new ontological domain of human phenomena, whether social or individual, which is inseparable from the cultural-social world within which human beings live their experiences” (Fleer et al. 2017, p. 3). On the other hand, subjectivity is not considered as an opposition to “objectivity” or a kind of subjective perception of an objective world which is the concept still dominant in a mainstream literature.

This approach might look like a challenge to the cultural-historical understanding of P1 as the *internal* relation of the child to reality discussed above. However, what does this mean—“the internal relation to environment”—within the logic of the cultural-historical approach? What is its psychological content, its dimensions and characteristics? Does “internal” mean “subjective” here?

We can probably get some insights into the following words of Vygotsky: “...in perezhivanie we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the perezhivanie” (Vygotsky 1994, p. 342). “Indivisible unity” is obviously the key word here. From this very important conclusion follows: “...it is always necessary to approach environment not with an absolute but a relative yardstick...” (Vygotsky 1994, p. 338). This “principle of relativity” pertains equally to the personal characteristics in perezhivanie. Aspects of environment and aspects of personality melted into perezhivanie, and represented in perezhivanie, cannot be considered as absolutely internal or absolutely external; they are unmeasurable with absolute yardstick.

It seems to me that Vygotsky’s reading of P1 and Gonzales Rey’s approach to subjectivity have more in common than it might appear. Taking this challenge as an opportunity, a new avenue for a dialogue emerges. The concept of subjectivity, developed by Gonzalez Rey, might provide a powerful analytical tool to apply as a *relative* yardstick in studying perezhivanie as P1 (that is as a complex phenomenon). On the other hand, studying different examples of perezhivanie (P1) allows us not only to identify specific aspects of the environment, but also to study both empirically and experimentally which components of the environment become an integral part of child’s subjectivity. What is important is that this type of research allows us to take these aspects of environment neither as absolutely external, objective, nor, at the same time, as absolutely subjective. And, finally, such kind of research might contribute to a better understanding of how it happens, how subjectivity is being constructed in and through perezhivanie in various environmental settings.

The theory of subjectivity radically reconsiders the concept of psychological functions and processes. As Gonzales Rey puts this,

Psychological functions, from this point of view, are not merely cognitive operations, or specific fragmenting entities; they become subjectively configured processes and functions,

being connected to the subjective system through their ongoing subjective configurations (Fleer et al. 2017, p. 4).

At first glance, it also looks as if the statement contradicts and challenges the cultural-historical understanding of higher mental functions as separate psychological processes (logical memory, voluntary attention, abstract thinking, etc.). However, if we take a look at the children's drawings presented in Fig. 4.1, we can analyse them in two different ways. For example, we can interpret these drawings strictly in terms of what remained in a child's memory after the excursion to the church on a bus and therefore how a child's memory works. However, in this case, an analysis will be fundamentally incomplete and superficial because the fundamental question of *why* the church remained in the memory of one child, but the bus remained in the memory of another is outside the scope of analysis. But if we take this as an example of children's *perezhivanie*, we gain an opportunity to study how these two children became aware of, interpreted and emotionally related to the whole situation of an excursion.

All three processes (awareness, interpretation and emotional response) do not come one after another as separate steps; they coexist as an integral unity of *perezhivanie*. The process of becoming aware cannot be divided into separate psychological functions; interpretation is not a result of thinking alone; it also includes subjective perception, understanding, memorizing and even imagination. Even more, child's past experience, interests and motivational sphere play a role. At the same time, these processes cannot be separated for the convenience of analysis as they work together being configured by the unique way in a subjective system. This presents another interesting opportunity for continuing a dialogue: *perezhivanie* (P1) and the subjective system. I am aware we still have a lot to do, but I think that the phenomenon of *perezhivanie* originated in Vygotsky's writings and developed by recent theoretical studies might significantly contribute to the research into subjectivity.

4.2.4 How P1 Might Enrich the Research of Subjective Configuration?

The concept of subjective configuration is integral to the theory of subjectivity. Yet, my task is not to discuss this concept in details; I will only focus on possible areas of a dialogue on how studies on *perezhivanie* as a complex phenomenon (P1) might enrich and probably advance the concept of subjective configuration and, on the other hand, how the concept of subjective configuration might contribute to better understanding of *perezhivanie*.

The place and role of the concept of subjective configuration might be shown with these two quotes:

...processes and functions become subjective when they are organised within a subjective configuration, as self-organised subjective system that generates subjective senses, and

whose emergence cannot be explained or be evident to observers as objective elements of the experience (Fleer et al. 2017, p. 4).

This quotation resonates with the “relativistic” approach to “objective–subjective” discussed in the previous section; however, there is something more if looked at from a theoretical perspective. This quotation shows the connections of this concept with other concepts in the theory—(1) subjectivity, (2) psychological functions, (3) a subjective system and (4) subjective sense. The second quote is a definition of the subjective configuration as a “complex organization of subjective senses” (Gonzales Rey 2007, p. 12) and, from a wider perspective, as “an attempt to define a unit of subjective functioning that allows us to overcome the dispersive taxonomy of concepts that has characterized the history of psychology, which also has been the basis on which developmental psychology developed” (Gonzales Rey et al. 2017, p. 227).

Taken from this perspective, the children’s drawings presented in Fig. 4.1 could be interpreted not as children’s subjective reflections on an excursion to the church, but as material representations of the productions of their subjective senses, generated by the different and unique subjective configurations of two children, as two unique symbolic-emotional units “of emotional and symbolical processes that form a new qualitative phenomenon” (Fleer et al. 2017, p. 3). Drawings here are more than examples of what children remember after the excursion; they are examples of what subjective senses were generated due to different subjective configurations.

This approach opens an opportunity for a new question: Is there a difference between what is defined as subjective senses in Gonzales Rey theory of subjectivity and as perekhivanie in the cultural-historical theory? Or are they coinciding phenomena? These questions cannot be resolved on theoretical level only; they require empirical and experimental research. However, the challenge is that there is a little empirical research of both phenomena—subjective configurations and perekhivanie,⁶ and there is no research studying the relations or connections between them.

If we take this challenge as an opportunity for a dialogue, it might open a new perspective of empirical research. For example, the drawings in Fig. 4.1 might be approached from a new angle: looking from the perspective of the theory of subjectivity this kind of data might give an answer to the question “What subjective senses were generated within the subjective configurations of these children”? Looking from a perekhivanie perspective, questions like “How were these subjective senses generated?” or “Why were these particular subjective senses generated by these children?” might inform an empirical or experimental study.

Another challenge which might be taken as an opportunity for a dialogue is related to the understanding of social environment and its influence on children’s experience. In cultural-historical theory, the social environment is considered not as a factor, but the basic source of development (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198). The theory of subjectivity seems to challenge this basic concept. As González Rey (2005), suggests social processes are no longer seen as external to individuals or as mere factors of influence.

⁶Some examples of contemporary empirical research on perekhivanie are discussed in Veresov (2017) and Veresov and Fleer (2016).

They have become part of a complex system of social subjectivity (p. 202). However, in Vygotsky's original writings, the social environment as a source of development is understood in a specific way. "Source" here is not a metaphor, such as the source of a river from which the water flows naturally, but rather as an infinite source from which "child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing⁷ them from the social reality" (Vygotsky 1998 p. 198). This highlights the active role of the child. The source does not determine the process; it becomes a resource when the child begins to draw from it. Here again, we see more similarities than differences.

I will return to this point in the following section of the chapter where I discuss theoretical perspectives of a dialogue, but here in discussion of perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1), I would like to highlight an important direction for discussion. Social environment is not static, it is not given in a permanent form, it changes all the time both at the micro- and macro-levels, and the child is always part of a process of permanent change. This statement might look general and undisputable, but in this particular case, that is in relation to the phenomenon of perezhivanie, it acquires concrete psychological content. The dynamics of the social environment mean changes in its various components. This, in turn, means that in different moments of time, different components of an environment change and therefore different psychological characteristics of a child are mobilized and crystallized through perezhivanie. What is new in such an approach is that it is not the environment which mobilizes and crystallizes the child's personal characteristics, but perezhivanie. It is impossible to predict which moments of environment are being refracted in a child's perezhivanie and which personal characteristics are being mobilized and crystallized through perezhivanie. However, what we can say is that the process of subjective configuration is changing; configuration is not something which is stable, but constantly evolving. It can be compared with the word "construction", which might mean both the result ('the solid construction of a bridge prevented it from being destroyed'), and the process ("Sorry, this website is under construction").

For empirical studies, this means that the subjective configuration cannot be captured as something stable as in every moment it is in motion; the "picture" of subjective configuration never reflects its motion. However, perezhivanie can in principle be discovered in more or less stable form. This does not mean, of course, that perezhivanie is more stable than the subjective configuration. Rather, this only means that it is much easier to collect empirical indications of perezhivanie in particular research. The drawings on Fig. 4.1 do not provide much empirical data about the subjective configurations of these two children; however, they are rich, as it was discussed above, in relation to children's perezhivanie. I do not know yet how this kind of research and analysis of perezhivanie as a phenomenon might improve our understanding of subjective configuration (reconfiguration), but I hope this opens an opportunity for an inter-theoretical dialogue.

In this section of the chapter, I tried to show that the cultural-historical understanding of perezhivanie as a complex human psychological phenomenon (P1) creates

⁷Vygotsky uses the word черпать (to scoop) in Russian original text, like scooping water from the well.

opportunities for empirical research and, at the same time, might in different ways contribute to a dialogue with the theory of subjectivity. Researching different types of children's perezhivanie might enrich our understanding of subjectivity, subjective senses and subjective configuration.

Perezhivanie might be a powerful tool for empirical studies of how social environment becomes an integral part of a subjectivity and influences children. This allows to look at social environment not as something existing outside the child and surrounding her, but as a reality which becomes an environment *because* its components are refracted or being refracted by a child through her unique perezhivanie. Studying different examples of perezhivanie in a particular child in a concrete environment, we can deepen our understanding of how the social environment influences the child. The children's drawings in Fig. 4.1 are clear examples of such influences. But to influence the child and to influence the course of a child's development are not the same. We cannot make any conclusions about how the excursion to the church influenced the whole process of development of these two children. Yet, this perspective is not completely closed. To study the influence of an environment on children's development, we need to consider perezhivanie not as a phenomenon (P1) but as a theoretical concept (P2), that is an analytical tool for researching the process of development.

4.3 Perezhivanie (P2) as a Theoretical Concept and a Tool to Study the Process of Development

This section of the chapter is focused on perezhivanie as a theoretical concept (P2). I begin with the brief outline of the difference between P1 as a phenomenon and P2 as an analytical theoretical tool. Then, I give an example, taken from original Vygotsky's texts, of how perezhivanie was used as an analytical tool. This is followed by some theoretical perspectives in relation to perezhivanie and the social situation of development. At the end of the section, I show how the cultural-historical understanding of perezhivanie (P2) might contribute to the improvement of the concept of social subjectivity.

Studying children's perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1) might bring rich data for the analysis of how concrete social environments influence a child's mind, and how a particular child interprets and emotionally relates to certain event. But perezhivanie as a cultural-historical concept (P2) has no phenomenological content; it is not something empirically observable; it is a part of the theory, and its content is completely theoretical. Cultural-historical theory in general is a system of interrelated and interconnected theoretical concepts and principles to study the process of sociocultural development of human mind, aimed not at "objects under study", but rather at "the process under study" in all its key aspects (Vygotsky 1997).

Concepts of the cultural-historical theory are instruments, theoretical analytical tools, and they can be compared with glasses or lenses which uncover and clarify

what is hidden under the surface of empirically observable phenomena. However, if the theoretical content of the concept is vague and blurred, it will make the image of the process under study vague and blurred also. This is why it is important, as a first step, to clarify the theoretical content of the concept. The way to clarify the content of perezhivanie as a concept within this theory is to answer questions: (1) How is this concept related to the process of cultural development, and which aspects of cultural development does it theoretically reflect? (2) How this concept is related to other concepts within the theory?

Elsewhere, we undertook an extended analysis of the theoretical content of perezhivanie (P2) (Veresov 2016a; Veresov & Fleer 2016); I therefore will focus on its main aspects which relate to the topic of the chapter.

Perezhivanie as a concept plays a specific role:

... perezhivanie is a concept which allows us to study the role and influence of environment on the psychological development of children in the analysis of the laws of development (Vygotsky 1994 p. 343).

Perezhivanie is a tool (theoretical concept) for analysing the influence of the sociocultural environment, *not on the individual* per se, but on the process of development of the individual, which is seen as the “path along which the social becomes the individual” (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198). Using this concept as an analytic tool, a researcher might explore how social environment influences the whole course of child development, the sociocultural genesis of the human mind. Probably the best way to show how perezhivanie works as a theoretical tool for data analysis is take an example from original Vygotsky’s writings (Vygotsky 1994, p. 339–340), which I present in the following section.

4.3.1 Vygotsky’s Example: How P2 Works as an Analytical Tool

Vygotsky’s famous example is about three children from the same family. The situation in the family was awful because the mother drank and suffered from several nervous and psychological disorders. When drunk, the mother regularly beat the children or threw them to the floor and had once attempted to throw one of the children out of the window (Vygotsky 1994 p. 339–340).

The three children present completely different pictures of disrupted development, caused by the same situation. The same circumstances result in an entirely different picture for the three children. The youngest child reacted by developing a number of neurotic symptoms, that is symptoms of a defensive nature, in the form of attacks of terror, depression and helplessness.

The second child was

... developing an extremely agonizing condition, a state of inner conflict ... On the one hand, from the child's point of view, the mother is an object of painful⁸ attachment, and on the other, she represents a source of all kinds of terrors and terrible emotional experiences [perekhivaniya]⁹ for the child. He experienced internal conflict expressed in a simultaneously positive and negative attitude towards the mother, a terrible attachment to her and an equally terrible hate for her¹⁰ (Vygotsky 1994 p. 340).

Finally, the third and eldest child showed signs of some precocious maturity, seriousness and solicitude. Because he understood the situation, he could see that the younger children were in danger and therefore he took on a special role as the senior member of the family, the only one whose duty it was to look after everyone else.

As a result of this, the entire course of his development underwent a striking change. This was not a lively child with normal, lively, simple interests, appropriate to his age and exhibiting a lively level of activity. It was a child whose course of normal development was severely disrupted, a different type of child (Vygotsky 1994, p. 341).

How can one explain why exactly the same environmental conditions exert three unique influence on these three different children's development?

...Each of the children experienced¹¹ the situation in a different way. So ... depending on the fact that the same situation had been experienced by the three children in three different ways,¹² the influence which this situation exerted on their development also turns out to be different (Vygotsky 1994, p. 341).

Therefore, it is not any of the factors¹³ in themselves (if taken without reference to the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's ... perekhivanie (Vygotsky 1994, p. 339–340).

This is an example of a *theoretical* analysis in relation to the influence of an environment on the course of child development.

⁸In the Russian original, the expression «предмет большой привязанности» (object of great/intensive attachment) is used (Vygotsky 2001, p. 73–74).

⁹In the Russian text «источник самых тяжёлых впечатлений» (a source of all kinds of ... terrible impressions for the child) is used (Ibid). Nothing is said about emotional experience or perekhivanie in this sentence.

¹⁰In the Russian original “страшной привязанности к ней и страшной ненависти к ней” (a terrific attachment to her and an equally terrific hate for her). The word страшной here means the degree of attachment (“deep”, “intensive”, “strong”, “terrific”), not the character of it (“dangerous” or “terrible”).

¹¹In the original Russian text, the verb perekhival (переживал) is used. This is the past singular grammatical form of the verb perekhivat' (переживать), from which the noun perekhivanie has been derived.

¹²In the Russian original text «у троих детей возникло три разных переживания одной и той же ситуации» (three different perekhivanie of the same situation appeared in three children) (Vygotsky Vygotsky 2001, p. 74–75).

¹³In the Russian text, the word моменты (moments) is used: существенными моментами для определения влияния среды ... (Vygotsky Vygotsky 2001, p. 72). Factor in Russian is фактор.

4.3.2 P2: Analysing Vygotsky's Analysis

Elsewhere, I undertook an extensive discussion about how *perezhivanie* as a concept (P2) was used by Vygotsky as theoretical tool for analysis of this example (Veresov 2016a). Here, I take the next step in theorizing by reviewing Vygotsky's analysis to illustrate what this type of analysis allows to discover. In doing this, I would like to highlight three important characteristics of Vygotsky's analysis. In other words, I will undertake an analysis of the analysis.

The analysis Vygotsky did was not focused on the content of child's *perezhivanie* (as, e.g., in the analysis of children's drawings in Fig. 4.1). It begins with a general characteristic of a situation ("awful", "difficult", "dangerous") with emphasis on the detailed description of different developmental outcomes in the three children ("different pictures of disrupted development" in Vygotsky's words). In other words, there is almost nothing about P1 in this analysis, and *perezhivanie* is taken as an analytical tool, as a concept (P2). This enables him to *distinguish* two processes: (1) the influence of the environment on the children and (2) the influence of the environment on the course of each child's development. Yet, how does this work? The two paragraphs which follow might provide some insight.

First, the concept of *perezhivanie* (P2) here is a theoretical tool which avoids the "factors" model of analysis. Social environment is not conceived as a system of factors which influence development, but as the source of development from which the child acquires and develops new personal characteristics through *perezhivanie* (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198).

Second, the concept of *perezhivanie* as a tool for analysis of this example enables the differentiation of three concepts: (1) social environment, (2) social situation and (3) social situation of development (SSD). The social environment is the wide context in which the child lives; however, the task of analysis is not to "investigate the environment as such without regard to the child, but instead ...the role and influence of the environment on the course of development" (Vygotsky, 1994, p. 342). The social situation is a component of the wider social environment and, as a *concrete situation*, is a complex, contradictory, dramatic and challenging situation in Vygotsky's example.

However, being in the same social situation, the children demonstrated different developmental outcomes because the same situation was refracted by different *perezhivanie*. Therefore, in the same social situation, three *different* social situations of development existed. This introduces an important concept of the social situation of development (SSD) as "a completely original, exclusive single and unique relation between the child and reality" (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198). The social environment is the source of development; it influences the child, but what makes the social situation a social situation of development is *perezhivanie* (Veresov & Fler 2017). Therefore, what becomes extremely important in terms of analysis of the influence of environment on child development is "*to find the relationship which exists between the child and its environment, the child's ... perezhivanie*" (Vygotsky 1994, p. 341), where *perezhivanie* (P2) is the unit of analysis of the social situation of the development.

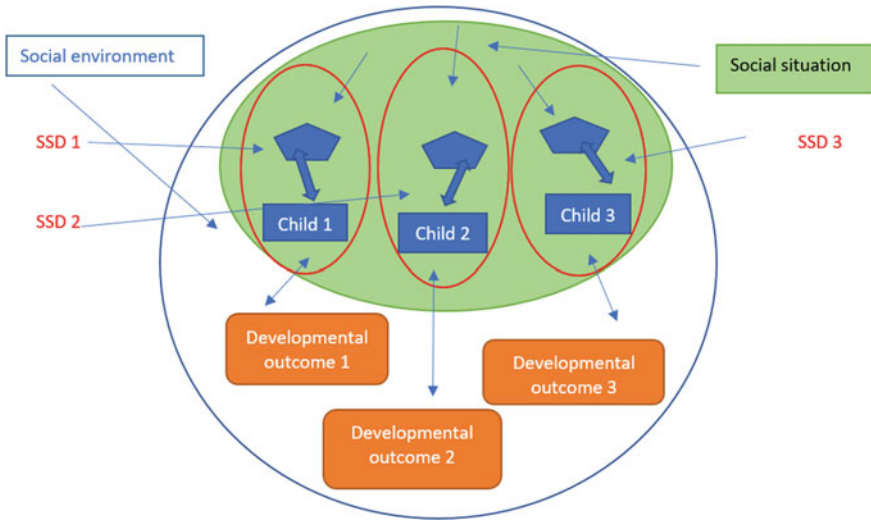


Fig. 4.2 Social environment, social situation and perezhivanie

In brief, the theoretical analysis proceeds in the following way:

- (1) the social environment is objectively existing sociocultural context, independent of the child, which surrounds the child;
- (2) the social situation is a part of the social environment, an ongoing event the child is involved in, a situation some moments of which are being refracted through the child’s perezhivanie (P1) and which therefore influences the child (see Fig. 4.1 as an example);
- (3) the social situation of development is the concept which allows us to study how social environment influences *the entire course of child’s development*, as it allows us to identify *the changes in development* through an analysis of an individual child’s perezhivanie of a social situation—which might create various and different social situations of development.

This is shown in Fig. 4.2 where the social environment (white area) is shown to contain a social situation (green area), which is refracted by the children through three different perezhivanie (blue prisms) making three different social situations of development (red areas) and leading to three different pictures of development and developmental outcomes.

The role of perezhivanie in this process is expressed by Vygotsky briefly in the following way:

The environment exerts this influence ... via the child’s perezhivaniya, i.e. depending on how the child has managed to work out his inner attitude to the various aspects of the different situations occurring in the environment. The environment determines the type of development depending on the degree of awareness of this environment which the child has managed to reach (Vygotsky 1994, p. 346).

Only when they are taken together do the concepts of the social situation of development and of *perezhivanie* (P2) create a conceptual unity, a theoretical dyad for the analysis of the influence of social environment on a child's development, in which the environment is not a combination of influencing factors, but the *source* of development.

4.3.3 *Introducing Dramatic Perezhivanie*

Vygotsky's example of analysis does not include a detailed picture of the social environment of three children; it is not described as a system of factors; it is focused on *the social situation* the family experienced *and social situations of development* and developmental outcomes in three children. However, the character and the nature of a social situation in this example are interesting. The social situation here is a dramatic collision full of external and internal conflicts and contradictions.

I would agree that this is only an example specially selected for the purpose of detailed analysis and presented in a very clear form. A social situation in the form of a dramatic collision is very convenient for analysis as it shows clearly both the characteristics of the social situations of development (as the initial phase) and different pictures of developmental outcomes (as its results).

However, as I am going to show now, it potentially contains opportunities for further theoretical improvements. By this, I mean the concept of *dramatic perezhivanie*. Elsewhere, I have discussed the opportunities this concept might bring to this field of research (Veresov 2016a, 2017, Veresov et al. 2016); here I discuss some opportunities for further theoretical progress or advancement.

Obviously, in Vygotsky's example, children's *perezhivanie* were of a special type. Children's *perezhivanie* were refractions of a dramatic social situation in the family. As a result, it generated serious changes in the development of children. This special type of *perezhivanie* as a refraction of a dramatic collision that children experience can be defined as a *dramatic perezhivanie*. Introducing dramatic *perezhivanie* as a concept is a challenging task, but it opens an opportunity to link on a theoretical level the concept of *perezhivanie* and the principle of development, as

... the basic principle of the functioning of higher functions ... is social, entailing interaction of functions, in place of interaction between people. They can be most fully developed in the form of drama (Vygotsky 1989, p. 59).

This might appear to be a contradiction. On one hand, in Vygotsky's example, the social situations of development did damage the development of three children ("the course of normal development was severely disrupted" in Vygotsky's words). On the other hand, higher mental functions "can be most fully developed in the form of drama". Yet, if we take this challenge as an opportunity for further discussion, I would suggest that the concept of dramatic *perezhivanie* presents an opportunity to resolve this contradiction and enrich the theoretical content and context of the concept of social situation of development.

The concept of the social situation of development was introduced by Vygotsky in relation to the problem of the content and dynamics of psychological age (Vygotsky 1998, pp. 187–297), where each age is divided into two stages—a critical period (age crisis) followed by a lytical (stable) period.

Looking closely at Vygotsky’s analysis, we can identify the key characteristics of a social situation of development (SSD):

- (1) SSD is socially constructed; it is a *social* situation;
- (2) it appears *at the beginning of each age* period as a unique relation between the child and social environment;
- (3) because of this, it appears during the first stage of the child’s age which is the *age crisis period*.
- (4) it is characterized by special types of the child’s *perezhivanie*;
- (5) it leads to *the reorganization of all structure of child’s higher mental functions* at the end of the critical stage of the child’s age
- (6) it might bring positive or destructive *developmental outcomes* depending on how the crisis is resolved.

Coming back to Vygotsky’s analysis of an example of three children, we can find five out of the six characteristics of SSD and the only difference is that in Vygotsky’s example SSD is not related to the beginnings of the age periods of children. From this, two interesting conclusions might follow.

First, social situations of development are not necessarily related to the beginning of age periods (periods of crises), and they might also exist within lytical periods. They are a special type of short-time “micro-social situations of development” in contrast to age-related “macro-social situations of development”. For example, the transition to school is age-related and socially constructed macro-SSD, and family movement to a new city or a country is an example of “micro-SSD”. Vygotsky’s example of three children might be also interpreted as a “micro-SSD”.

Second, though they might appear during the lytical periods, they retain all the basic characteristics of age-related macro-SSDs. Here, the concept of dramatic *perezhivanie* which I am trying to introduce might be used as a theoretical link to connect the concepts of micro- and macro-SSDs. Saying that SSDs (“macro-SSDs”) are associated with special types of children’s *perezhivanie*, Vygotsky did not need to highlight that they are dramatic *perezhivanie*; because in his analysis, they are related to dramatic crises at the beginning of children’s age, they are dramatic by definition. The *perezhivanie* in Vygotsky’s example of three children is also dramatic by their nature. I would suggest that they did bring about different developmental outcomes in the three different children because they were *dramatic perezhivanie*, *perezhivanie* of social drama in which the children were involved.

I would conclude this section with this suggestion: there is a special form of *perezhivanie* (we can call it a dramatic *perezhivanie*) which is a refraction of a dramatic event or situation in a child’s life. This dramatic *perezhivanie* might bring qualitative changes to a child’s mental functions and therefore might change how the child becomes aware, interprets and relates to the sociocultural environment. Social dramatic events, collisions refracted through dramatic *perezhivanie*, might become

micro-social situations of development and produce qualitative changes and “turning points” in children’s individual developmental trajectories.

In this sense, the concept of dramatic perezhivanie is an analytical tool which unfolds the dialectics, the evolutionary and revolutionary aspects of development, as well as dialectics of the social and the individual (Veresov 2016a, b) and this will be discussed in the last section of this chapter. The dramatic character of the social situation of development and dramatic perezhivanie as a refraction do resolve the contradiction I discuss here: the higher mental functions can be most fully developed in a form of drama. Dramatic perezhivanie might bring both positive and/or destructive developmental outcomes depending on (1) the child’s individual characteristics mobilized in his/her dramatic perezhivanie and (2) how the crisis is managed, or in Vygotsky’s own words “on how the child has managed to work out his inner attitude to the various aspects of the different situations occurring in the environment” (Vygotsky 1994, p. 346).

4.3.4 Dramatic Perezhivanie: Possible Implications for Empirical Research

Dramatic perezhivanie and the micro-social situation of development as a theoretical dyad enable the study of the role of social environment on child development during lytical (stable) age periods and lead to the reconceptualization of lytical periods. They are stable and related to quantitative changes which child gradually acquires. However, these age periods also contain opportunities for development depending on the kind of social situations the child is involved and, accordingly, what kinds of micro-social situations of development are created within the child’s social environment. The psychological “mechanism” of development during critical and lytical age periods is the same; the only difference is that macro-SSDs are mostly universal for the majority of children at certain age (e.g., transition to school), but micro-SSDs are related to unique events in child’s life (e.g., transition to a new school or a new country). This creates interesting opportunities for empirical research.

First, Vygotsky’s requirement that “the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development” (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198) is completely applicable to studies of micro-SSDs during lytical periods. Developmental conditions not only exist at the beginning (crisis stage) of age, but also during lytical periods of development. However, the understanding of developmental conditions might be reconceptualized. When the goal of an empirical study is to create and analyse developmental conditions for the child the question might arise—What makes these conditions *developmental* conditions?

It is true that you can take a horse to water, but you can’t make him drink; however, if you take water to the horse, it does not change the situation. Bringing new components into the social environment of the child does not always imply the creation of new developmental conditions, as not every change in the environment creates a

social situation of development. Only those components of social environment which are components of dramatic micro-SSD being refracted through the prism of child's dramatic *perezhivanie* are likely to bring qualitative changes in child's higher mental functions. I could put this even more strongly: dramatic social situations and the dramatic *perezhivanie* of a child as a participant in these situations are not indicators, and they can be considered as developmental conditions. For example, introducing iPads into child's play (Fleer 2013) might or might not create developmental conditions, depending on what micro-social situations of development and what dramatic *perezhivanie* in children this might generate. My suggestion might look as if it is too extreme a development of the theoretical aspect, but what gives me hope is that it resonates with Vygotsky's claim that

One of the major impediments to the theoretical and practical study of child development is the incorrect solution of the problem of the environment and its role ... when the environment is considered as something outside with respect to the child, as a circumstance of development, as an aggregate of objective conditions existing without reference to the child and affecting him by the very fact of their existence. The understanding of the environment that developed in biology as applied to evolution of animal species must not be transferred to the teaching on child development (Vygotsky 1998, p. 198).

4.3.5 *Perezhivanie, Social Situation of Development and Social Subjectivity: Points of Intersections*

Social subjectivity is the key concept in the theory of subjectivity. According to Gonzales Rey, "social subjectivity represents a dynamic and general system organised by different subjective configurations of the different social instances that indirectly take part in? the current dynamic of one concrete social experience" (Gonzales Rey et al. González Rey et al. 2017, p. 240). Social processes, therefore, are no longer seen as external to individuals or as mere factors of influence. They have become part of a complex system, "social subjectivity of which the individual is constituted by it, but is also a constituent" (González Rey 2005, p. 202). This rich and original concept enables us to "capture" the unity of the individual and the social and distinguish it from its processual aspect, in dynamics and interrelations.

It seems that the content of the concept of social subjectivity coincides with the concept of the social situation of development, which also represents a dynamic and unique unity of the individual and the social environment, as I have discussed in the previous section. Yet, it does not prove, from my point of view, the theoretical similarity of these two concepts.

Taken as a dyad (micro-SSD and dramatic *perezhivanie*), this might open new interesting direction for theoretical and cross-theoretical dialogue.

First, according to Gonzales Rey's theoretical vision, social subjectivity is organized by different subjective configurations. Yet, to be organized does not mean that the organization is finished; on the contrary, organization here is a process rather than a result, as social subjectivity only exists in the current dynamics of concrete social

experiences. Social subjectivity exists in a process (or as a process?) of permanent organization.

The concept of social subjectivity provides us with the possibility and the opportunity to look at this organization as a complex process. On the other hand, the process of organization in general might be approached in different ways. For example, it might be viewed as a sort of a process of transformative change. However, not every transformation is of a dialectical nature, and not every transformation is a qualitative change of the whole system. There are transformations which happen within the system as reconfiguration of existing components, parts and elements. Following Hegel's dialectical approach, we could call them "mechanical transformations". Developmental transformation is not a recombination of existing components. Developmental transformation includes qualitative changes of the whole system where a new organ brings reorganization to the whole system in such a way that the new (reorganized) system becomes a unit of a higher order and begins to act according to new laws (Vygotsky 1999, p. 43). In other words, social subjectivity as a system is not only organized by different subjective configurations, but exists in the process of permanent organization, which includes moments of reorganization which bring qualitative changes both to the social subjectivity and subjective configurations.

In this respect, the concepts of dramatic perezhivanie and micro-social situation of developmental as a theoretical dyad might contribute to the studies of the social subjectivity in two ways. First, the concept of social subjectivity enables its study as a dynamic system which is organized by different subjective configurations of different social instances. The concepts of the micro-social situation of development and dramatic perezhivanie enable the study of the process of organization of a system of social subjectivity in two interrelated aspects—(1) as a quantitative change and (2) qualitative reorganization. Second, social subjectivity is organized by different subjective configurations of the different social instances that indirectly take part of the current dynamic of one concrete social experience. Concepts of perezhivanie and micro-SSD as a theoretical dyad enable us to explore how concrete dramatic perezhivanie might reorganize the subjective configuration of an individual. Second, the social subjectivity of which the individual is constituted is also a constituent (González Rey 2005, p. 202) and this constituting is a process of a dialectical nature; it is a unique and complex contradictory process which includes moments of reconstituting, depending on how many and what kind of micro-SSDs were created through individual's perezhivanie of a social environment.

4.4 Dialectics of Development: Overcoming Dualism and Social Determinism

Theory of subjectivity and cultural-historical theories are very close. Gonzales Rey considers the theory of subjectivity as a step forward in the cultural-historical theoretical tradition, driven by some ideas that Vygotsky started to develop at the last

period of his life (Gonzales Rey González Rey 2007, González Rey 2015). I do not completely agree with this (Veresov 2017); however, I agree that these two theories have fundamental common philosophical grounds. These fundamental common grounds challenge (1) the dualistic approach to development and (2) the principle of social determinism. This, in turn, creates a platform and determines possible ways of how these two theories can enrich each other. In this concluding section, I present these two directions in a general way to clarify, to improve and to summarize some items I discussed in the previous sections.

4.4.1 *Dualism, Monism, Dialectics*

In psychology, there is a long tradition of considering a monistic approach as the only way to overcome Cartesian dualism. Thus, Roth et al. (2012) make a general statement that “Vygotsky and Vygotskian inspired scholars recognize themselves as working within a monistic tradition as opposed to the Western dualistic tradition” (Roth et al. 2012, p. 31). However, is monism *the only* possible alternative to dualism? Is there any other way to overcome dualism in psychology rather than by creating a monistic theory? My answer is “No”. I think that there is another way. There is a way of taking dualistic oppositions, but to take them as opposites *in the form of contradiction*, that is to take them dialectically. Applying dialectical method to the study of mental development is another possible alternative to Cartesian dualism.

It is true that Vygotsky considered dualism in the psychology of development as a fallacious direction (Vygotsky 1993, p. 253); it is also true that he addressed Spinoza into find a way of overcoming dualism in the theory, in a way that creates some grounds for considering Vygotsky’s theory as monistic (Roth and Jornet 2017). Following this line of thought, the theory of subjectivity also introduces a non-dualistic vision of human mind, through the concepts of social subjectivity and subjective configuration.

However, this is also true that dialectics and the dialectical method inspired Vygotsky’s theoretical conception of development. Thus, he considered the introduction of the dialectical method into psychology as a crucial task (Vygotsky 1997, p. 3) and was critical of non-dialectical thinking, which dominated psychology at that time (see, e.g., Vygotsky 1997, p. 8).¹⁴ From this perspective, the concepts of social situation of development and dramatic perezhivanie might be used as powerful theoretical lenses to discover the dialectical nature of the process of constructing subjectivity and to analyse the complex and contradictory process of becoming of a human mind. Social subjectivity as a dynamic system is organized by different subjective configurations, and the concept of perezhivanie unpacks the complex and contradictory nature of the process of organization of social subjectivity; that is, it allows us to see the social subjectivity in its dialectical becoming. On the other hand, the con-

¹⁴An extended and deep analysis of relationship of the cultural-historical theory and dialectics is undertaken in Dafermos (Dafermos 2015).

cept of perezhivanie in a theoretical dyad with the SSD enables social configuration to be viewed not only as a result, but as the process, which includes moments of reconfiguration as a qualitative reorganization.

4.4.2 *Social Determinism or Self-Determinism?*

The theory of subjectivity challenges the principle of social determinism understanding the human psyche not as the result of internalized functions and actions, but as a generative system inseparable from the individual.

The concept of social subjectivity is addressed so as to understand the complex subjective configurations of the different social instances and systems of relationships within the more complex systems of social instances that define society. The recognition of a social subjectivity does not entail the definition of social realities as abstract carriers of subjectivity or as fixed entities presented beforehand as living social dynamics (González Rey 2017, p. 186).

The theory of subjectivity considers individual positions and behaviours as part of complex networks of social relationships within which social subjective configurations emerge. In this way, individual and social subjectivities configure each other so that one is always part of the other through specific subjective senses generated in each of these instances (González Rey 2017).

Cultural-historical theory defines social environment as a source of development of higher psychological functions, which might look as a sort of social determinist or social constructivist approach. However, looking from dialectical position, to be the source of development does not mean to determine the course and the trajectory of development.

Social environment as a source of development of the individual does not exist outside the individual. It exists only when the individual actively participates in this environment, by acting, interacting, interpreting, understanding, recreating and redesigning *social situations of development*. Social environment becomes a source of development because of the different types of existing social situations of development *created by an individual* through perezhivanie.

It is quite naive to understand the social only as collective, as a large number of people. The social also exists where there is only one person with his individual perezhivanie (Vygotsky 1986, p. 314).

In this way, an individual's perezhivanie is no less powerful in defining the course of her unique developmental trajectory than the objective characteristics of social environment. Objectively existing components and aspects of a social environment become forces of development only when and because the individual's perezhivanie of certain moments of the social environment creates the unique micro-social situations of development. The conceptual dyad "perezhivanie—social situation of development" highlights the active role of an individual in the social environment and positions the individual as an active participant in the social situation of development. It is the individual who by creating and recreating social situations of development

acquires new personality characteristics; it is an individual who draws them from the social reality and creatively reconfigures them in the process of becoming an individual. Such an understanding is opposed both to dualism and social determinism as

...development is not simply a function which can be determined entirely by X units of heredity and Y units of environment. It is an historical complex, which at any stage reflects its past content. In other words, the artificial separation of heredity and environment points us in a fallacious direction; it obscures the fact that development is an uninterrupted process which feeds upon itself; that it is not a puppet which can be controlled by jerking two strings. (Vygotsky 1993, p. 253)

I think that in this respect both the cultural-historical theory and the theory of subjectivity complement each other. However, there are more questions than answers; there is still a lot of work to do and problems to solve. More theoretical and cross-theoretical discussions, followed or initiated by empirical research, create an agenda and the road map for the immediate future. Deeper understanding of a complexity of development of human mind as Vygotsky put it so many years ago

... is possible only if we radically change our representation of child development and take into account that it is a complex dialectical process that is characterized by a complex periodicity, disproportion in the development of separate functions, metamorphoses or qualitative transformation of certain forms into others, a complex merging of the processes of evolution and involution, a complex crossing of external and internal factors, a complex process of overcoming difficulties and adapting.” (Vygotsky 1997, pp. 98–99)

I hope that taking these challenges as opportunities for a further dialogue will contribute to such a radical change in the dialectical understanding of a complex process of development.

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