

## **PEREZHIVANIE (LIVE THROUGH) AS A PHENOMENON AND A CONCEPT: QUESTIONS ON CLARIFICATION AND METHODOLOGICAL MEDITATIONS<sup>24</sup>**

### **Abstract**

This paper is an attempt to show possible ways to unpack the theoretical content of the concept of perezhivanie by clarifying the place and role of this concept within cultural-historical theory and examining the connections of this concept with other concepts, principles, and laws of the theory. There is an important distinction between the two meanings of perezhivanie presented in Vygotsky's original texts — perezhivanie as a psychological phenomena/process which can be empirically observed and studied and perezhivanie as a concept, a theoretical tool for analysis of the process of development. This distinction is an important step forward in developing the generative understanding of the concept of perezhivanie within the cultural-historical theoretical framework. Perezhivanie as a concept is not about a phenomenon how the particular child interprets, understands and relates to a certain situation. Perezhivanie as a concept is not about what the particular child experiences in a particular situation. Perezhivanie as a concept has its own theoretical content within the theory. Questions on clarification and methodological meditations are in line with Vygotsky's ideas on perezhivanie as a concept, which relates to the process of development, the role on social environment and the laws of development.

**Keywords:** Perezhivanie, cultural-historical theory, social situation of development, unit of analysis, drama.

### **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, the concept of perezhivanie has attracted increasing attention by various researchers working within the cultural-historical tradition (Antoniadou, V., 2011, Daniels H. 2008, Mahn H. John-Steiner V. The gift of confidence: A Vygotskian view of emotions. In Wells G. (eds.), 2002, Rieber R., Wollock J., 1997, Smagorinsky P. ,2011).

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<sup>24</sup> This paper is an attempt to improve some ideas of my recently published papers (Veresov, 2016a; Veresov, 2016b; Veresov & Fleer 2016 in press), as well as my keynote speeches (Estoril Vygotsky Conference, Portugal, June 2016, and International Vygotsky symposium, Moscow, July 2016).

Recently published literature signifies an interest to this concept in the field of education. Thus, the research of Brennan is focused on applying the concept of perezhivanie as an analytical tool to study infant adult interactions (Brennan M., 2014) some researchers undertake interesting studies in applying perezhivanie in theorizing play in early childhood (Fleer M., 2013), parent-child interactions and emotion regulation in child care settings (Fleer M., Hammer M., 2013). International Research in Early Childhood Education journal (IRECE) has recently published a special issue devoted to various aspects of understanding and discussions on and around this concept<sup>25</sup>. However, as Veresov and Fleer claim "...an understanding of perezhivanie as a concept remains elusive" (Veresov N., Fleer, M., 2016). According to Smagorinsky (Smagorinsky P., 2011), "perezhivanie thus far remains more a tantalizing notion than a concept with clear meaning" (Smagorinsky P., p. 339). The movement from a tantalising notion to a concept with clear meaning remains a challenge and requires collaborative theoretical investigation. This paper is an attempt to show possible ways to unpack the theoretical content of the concept of perezhivanie. I will briefly present possible ways to discover theoretical content of the concept of perezhivanie. I will do this by clarifying the place and role of this concept within cultural-historical theory and examining the connections of this concept with other concepts, principles, and laws of the theory. In doing this, I will concentrate mainly on Vygotsky's original texts to show the possible ways of developing a generative understanding of the psychological content of this concept.

### **Clarifying meanings: P1 and P2 Clarification 1: Perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1) and a concept (P2)**

In 1931 Vygotsky defined perezhivanie as follows: Perezhivanie (переживание) is a common name for direct psychological experience<sup>26</sup>. From a subjective perspective, every psychological process is perezhivanie. In every perezhivanie we distinguish: firstly, an act, and secondly the content. The first is an activity related to the appearance of certain perezhivanie; the second is the content (composition) of what is experienced (Varshava B., Vygotsky L., 1931, p. 128).

This definition drew from a Psychological Dictionary and reflects the traditional classical meaning of the term perezhivanie as it existed in psychology at that time. This meaning encompasses a variety of psychological phenomena; it is a notion, a phenomenological definition. However, what is important is that the same word might mean a process (act, activity)

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[http://arrow.monash.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository?exact=ss\\_dateNormalized:2016\\*&collection=monash:131008](http://arrow.monash.edu.au/vital/access/manager/Repository?exact=ss_dateNormalized:2016*&collection=monash:131008)

<sup>26</sup> Опыт (опыт) in the Russian original text.

and a content; in other words, perezhivanie is “How I am experiencing something” and “What I am experiencing.” For example, in *The Problem of Environment* (1994) Vygotsky defines perezhivanie as “how a child becomes aware of, interprets, and emotionally relates to a certain event” (Vygotsky L.S. 1994, p. 340—341). Perezhivanie therefore, should not be reduced to emotional experiences and emotional relation to social environment; it is not merely emotional attitude to environment, but rather a complex nexus of psychological processes that includes emotions, cognitive processes, memory and even volition.

In the *Lectures of Pedology in 1933/34* (Vygotsky, 1994) perezhivanie is introduced in a different way: 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 L.S., 1994, p. 343).

The meaning here is radically different from the first one. Firstly, perezhivanie is presented as a concept, not a notion or a definition. Secondly, it is presented in relation to the process of development. Thirdly, it is related to the role of the environment on development. And finally, it has a strong reference to the psychological laws of development. In following sections of this article, I will take this Vygotsky’s quotation as a starting point for clarifications and methodological meditations. I believe this might be a productive way, as the direction of my questions on clarification and methodological meditations is in line with Vygotsky’s ideas on perezhivanie as a concept which relates to the process of development; the role on social environment and the laws of development.

### **Methodological meditation on P1 and P2.**

When these two meanings of perezhivanie in Vygotsky’s original texts are considered, then we have a complex picture. Meaning number one (P1) is a common name of all psychological processes and experiences, which can be labelled an “ontological” or “phenomenological” meaning as it covers a huge variety of phenomena and reflects their ontological status and nature. Accordingly, perezhivanie as a process could be labeled as P1.1 and perezhivanie as content would be P1.2.

Meaning number two (P2) is not about the general name of various psychological phenomena, it is a theoretical concept related to the process of development, the role of environment and laws of development. Here perezhivanie is a theoretical tool, an analytical lens to study the process of development within a system of other concepts of cultural-historical theory. In other words, the meaning of P2 is theoretical. Perezhivanie as a concept (P2) is not about how the particular child interprets, understands and relates to a certain situation. Perezhivanie as a concept is not about what the particular child experiences in a particular

situation. Perezhivanie as a concept has its own theoretical content within the theory. The challenge is to not only distinguish two meanings of perezhivanie, but to distinguish the theoretical, conceptual content of P2 from the phenomenological content of P1.

Perezhivanie as a phenomenon (P1) is completely individual; however, perezhivanie as a concept (P2) is different - concepts have theoretical content and their place within the theory. In other words, in relation to the concept of perezhivanie the question is not about where perezhivanie is located phenomenologically, but how this concept is related to other concepts within the theory. The question is not about ontology, but about epistemology. Perezhivanie as P1 are observable phenomena, that can be captured and collected as experimental or empirical data. Perezhivanie as P2 is a concept, which is an analytical tool; a theoretical lens of the analysis of the role and influence of social reality on the course of a child's development. The following section is focused on relations of the concept of perezhivanie and the concept of social environment and sociocultural genesis of mind.

### **Social, individual and perezhivanie as a prism. Clarification 1: psychological dimension of social genesis of mind**

The process of human development as a subject-matter of cultural-historical theory is the process of sociocultural genesis of mind, the process of "how social becomes the individual" (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 198). However, what are the specific psychological dimensions of this general process? What does it mean from psychological perspectives to understand how social becomes an individual?

The answer, which could clarify this point, is the general law of cultural development: "...every function in the cultural development of the child appears on the stage twice, in two planes, first, the social, then the psychological, first between people as an intermental category, then within the child as a intramental<sup>27</sup> category... Genetically, social relations, real relations of people, stand behind all the higher mental functions and their relations...every higher mental function was external because it was social before it became an internal strictly mental function; it was formerly a social relation between two people (Vygotsky L.S., 1997a, p. 106).

The message is clear: every higher mental function appears not in social relations, but as a social relation. Here "social" is considered not as a factor or a group of factors, but as a source of mental development. The process of psychological development is how inter-psychological becomes intra-psychological; internalization is viewed as intra-lisation (from inter- to intra-), as a process of becoming intra-psychological as a unique combination of higher mental functions

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<sup>27</sup> Inter-psychological and intra-psychological in Russian original text

(psychological systems) of an individual within social contexts. From here, “an individual” is a unique unity of higher mental functions in motion in its dialectical becoming.

### **Clarification 2: perezhivanie and the process of development of higher mental functions.**

What is the place and role of perezhivanie in the process of development? The social becomes the individual, but the dialectical character of this becoming is that only those components of the social environment that are refracted by the perezhivanie of the individual, achieve developmental significance (Vygotsky L.S.,1998, p. 294). In other words, the environment influences the process of development of the individual through the individual’s perezhivanie of the environment. No particular social factors in themselves define the development, only factors refracted through the child’s perezhivanie (Vygotsky L.S., 1994, p. 339-340). The perezhivanie of an individual is a kind of psychological prism, which determines the role and influence of the environment on development (Vygotsky L.S., 1994, p. 341). Social environment as a source of development defines individual development; perezhivanie determines this process.

Taking perezhivanie as a refracting prism, do we mean that perezhivanie is a component of an inter-psychological plane, or it is part of an intra-psychological dimension? Vygotsky’s words confirm that “perezhivanie is an individual attitude to social reality” (Vygotsky L.S., 1994, p. 340-341) which might mean that perezhivanie is a kind of internal (intrapasychological) magic prism which refracts external social influences. However, the whole picture is not as simple. Traditionally, “the social” and “the individual” are considered as oppositions as a psychological dimension of general opposition of external and internal. Cultural-historical theory offers a different vision: it looks at social and individual as a dialectical unity where perezhivanie is an important component. “It is quite native 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 L.S.,1986, p. 314). Perezhivanie as a phenomenon refracts social influences; perezhivanie as a concept in relation to the process of sociocultural genesis of human mind, shows a dialectical unity of social within the individual and individual within the social. Social situation of development is the concept which theoretically reflects the dialectics of social and individual in a process of development of human mind. I will come to this concept in the next section of this paper.

### **Clarification 3: development, contradiction, drama**

Speaking on development, we have to have in mind that the view of development in

cultural-historical psychology originates in German philosophical tradition. Two aspects are important in this respect: (1) development is not possible without dialectical contradictions: contradiction is a moving force of development; (2) development is a process of qualitative reorganization of a certain system. To put it in a simple way - there is no development without dialectical contradictions and there is no development without qualitative reorganization of the system.

However, neither principle of “how social becomes an individual” nor general genetic law of cultural development say anything about contradictions or reorganization. On the contrary, the process of how social becomes an individual look like a linear (or non-linear?) transition from “inter” to “intra” or as a process of transformation of “inter” into “intra”. Yet, we can find something in Vygotsky’s approach that would help. “The basic principle of the functioning of higher functions (personality) is social, entailing interaction of functions, in place of interaction between people. They can be most fully developed in the form of drama” (Vygotsky L.S., 1929/1989, p.59; Original emphasis). The social, inter-psychological form of the child’s higher mental functions is shown as a dramatic interaction between people. It was conceptualized by Vygotsky as a drama that was both intra-psychologically interpreted by the child at the same time as being experienced by the child inter-psychologically (Vygotsky L.S., 1929/1989, p. 69), resulting in the development of the child’s personality. Thus, the “intra-psychological” consists of internalized dramatic social interactions showing that “the dynamic of the personality is drama” (Vygotsky L.S., 1929/1989, p. 67). Here, an abstract dialectical idea of a contradiction as a moving force of development, obtains its concrete psychological content in the concept of the drama of life, as a moving force in the development of human personality (Veresov N., 2016a, p. 248).

#### **Clarification 4: development as reorganisation**

The process of mental development is not a simple linear transformation of intra-psychological to inter-psychological, because development: is not confined to the scheme “more less,” but is characterized primarily and specifically by the presence of qualitative neoformations that are subject to their own rhythm and require a special measure each time” (Vygotsky L.S.,1998, p. 189).

“Neoformation” is a result of reorganisation of the whole system of functions, a new type of construction of consciousness and mental functions (Vygotsky L.S.,1998, p. 190). This new type of construction is the result of qualitative reorganisation of the whole system. Hence: Higher mental functions are not built up as a second story over elementary processes, but are new psychological systems that include a complex merging of

elementary functions that will be included in the new system, and themselves begin to act according to new laws; each higher mental function is, thus, a unit of a higher order determined basically by a unique combination of a series of more elementary functions in the new whole (Vygotsky L.S., 1999, p. 43). Thus, not a new function in itself, or even a new higher mental function, but a qualitatively new structure of functions is what characterizes the result of development.

This dialectical understanding orients research to focus on transformations as an important aspect of the process of development. 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. Developmental transformation is a qualitative change of the whole system where a new component brings reorganisation to the whole system in such a way that the new (reorganised) system becomes a unit of a higher order and begins to act according to new laws. Distinguishing two types of transformations allows us to study the process of social formation of the human mind in two interrelated aspects - 1) as a quantitative change and 2) as a qualitative reorganisation.

### **Methodological meditation on refraction**

Perezhivanie is a prism, which refracts environmental moments and determines the influence of these environmental moments on the course of child development. One could understand “refracting prism” as a metaphor; however, if this is not a metaphor, what methodological consequences follow? I think that perezhivanie as a refracting prism introduces a new fundamental principle, which is the principle of refraction. This new fundamental principle challenges the principle of reflection, a foundational principle of psychology in Vygotsky’s time. The dualistic principle of reflection connects stimuli and responses, external and internal, as two separate domains, whereas the principle of refraction shows dialectical relations of social and individual. The principle of refraction indicates how the same social environment differently affects the unique developmental trajectories of different individuals.

However, if a prism is a metaphor, it specifically challenges a mirror as a metaphor of the principle of reflection; mirror reflects, prism refracts. The light goes through the prism, the child emotionally and intellectually lives through the social situation. In line with this argument is another extract, which highlights the developmental content of the concept of perezhivanie:

To state a certain, general, formal position it would be correct to say that the

environment determines the development of the child through perezhivanie of the environment. ...the child is a part of the social situation, and the relation of the child to the environment and the environment to the child occurs through perezhivanie ... of the child himself; the forces of the environment acquire a controlling significance because the child perezhivayet<sup>28</sup> them (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 294).

Social environment as a source of development of the individual is not something, which exists outside the individual. It exists only when the individual actively participates in this environment, by acting, interacting, interpreting, understanding, recreating and redesigning it.

### **Methodological meditation on contradiction and re-organisation: introducing dramatic perezhivanie**

Is there any concept related to two fundamental aspects of a dialectics of development - (1) its contradictory nature and (2) qualitative reorganization of the whole system of mental functions as a developmental outcome? I think the concept of dramatic (critical) perezhivanie is the answer. First, dramatic perezhivanie is related to the contradictory nature of human development. There is no development without contradictions, dramas and dramatic events being refracted through dramatic perezhivanie. They not only affect the child in a concrete social situation, but can create turning points in the whole course of the child's development. Vygotsky's famous story of three children from one family is an example of dramatic perezhivanie where social drama in the family affected the children developmental trajectories in different ways (Vygotsky L.S., 1994, p. 339-340). Second, dramatic perezhivanie is related to development in such a way, that it becomes a theoretical tool for the analysis of qualitative reorganization of the whole system of higher mental functions. Dramatic perezhivane of a dramatic social situation might reorganise the whole system of child's mental functions. The unique architecture and hierarchy of higher mental functions of human beings is the result of the unique inter-psychological dramatic collisions that have happened in their lives and of the process of human beings overcoming them (Veresov N., 2016a).

There is no development without qualitative reorganization and there is no reorganization of the system of higher mental functions without social dramas refracted through the prism of dramatic perezhivanie. I think this is absolutely in line with Vygotsky's words that the dynamics of personality is drama (Vygotsky L.S. ,1929/1989, p. 67).

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<sup>28</sup> Perezhivayet is a verbal form from the noun perezhivanie.

In other words, dramatic perezhivanie is a theoretical tool for analysis of the complex process of sociocultural genesis of human mind in two key dialectical aspects (1) contradictions and (2) qualitative reorganization. An individual's dramatic perezhivanie makes a social situation into a social situation of development.

### **Social situation of development and perezhivanie as a unit. Clarification 1: what is social situation of development? Zooming out**

Vygotsky defines social situation of development (SSD) as follows: ...at the beginning of each age period, there develops a completely original, exclusive single and unique relation specific to the given age, between the child and reality, mainly the social reality, that surrounds him. We call this relation the social situation of development at given age. The social situation of development represents the initial moment for all dynamic changes that occur in development during the given period. It determines wholly and completely the forms and the path along which the child will acquire ever newer personality characteristics, drawing them from the social reality as from the basic source of development, the path along which the social becomes the individual. Thus, the first question we must answer in studying the dynamics of any age is to explain the social situation of development (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 198).

This core concept in some sense connects two important aspects of development: (1) social environment as a source of development and (2) the process of development as a path along which the social becomes individual. What is highlighted here is that SSD is a unique relation between the child and social reality.

Let us now “zoom out” a little from this particular quotation and look at the whole chapter of the Problem of Age (Vygotsky L.S., 1998) where this concept was introduced. The whole chapter is about the psychological structure and dynamics of age from a cultural-historical perspective where each age is divided into two stages - critical period (age crisis) followed by lytical (stable) period. Three concepts are presented as theoretical tools for analysis of age in terms of its psychological structure and dynamics - (1) social situation of development, (2) age crisis and (3) psychological neo-formations (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, pp. 187—297). From this it follows that SSD is related exclusively to the first period, that is, to the beginning of each age in child development. This means that SSD is related only to critical stages, and critical stages (age crises) are what every age begins with. Age crisis is what stands “at the beginning of each age period” (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p.198). From this, it does not follow that SSD (as an analytical tool) is applicable only when our research is about children whose age is at these age periods of development. From

this however, it follows that SSD is a concept (as Vygotsky puts it) to investigate the dynamics and psychological structure of age in a long-term perspective. In line with what was discussed in the previous section, we now have to come back to the concept of drama and dramatic collision as an inter-psychological form of existence of higher mental functions, according to the general genetic law of cultural development.

Yet, does this mean that SSD exists only in critical periods (age crises)? Is development interrupted when age crises are over? If it is not, what possible ways might there be to advance the concept of SSD in line with Vygotsky's theoretical conception and methodological framework?

### **Clarification 2. What is Social situation of development: zooming in**

Social situation of development existing at times of age crisis (critical stage of age) and in an inter-psychological form of social dramatic collisions, defines long-term developmental trajectories and reorganization of higher mental functions (psychological neoformations). I would call it "macro social situation of development". However, in the child's everyday life there are lots of "micro-dramas" and "micro-crises" which define changes to the child's developmental trajectory from a short-term perspective; however, the reorganisation, of the whole system of psychological functions might be significant. In this sense, every lytical period contains a series of micro-dramas and micro-crises that we can define as "micro social situations of development". They do not necessary relate to age crises and are not specific to the given age but are mostly the result of changes in social environments as the child is always part of a certain social situation (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 294).

Yet, does this mean that every social situation is a social situation of development? What makes social situation into a social situation of development? My answer is that a social situation becomes (or does not become) a social situation of development depending on what components of this situation are refracted through perezhivanie and how they are refracted. Introducing the concept of micro social situation of development provides the opportunity to study the process of development as one of macro- and micro-genesis. This however, brings another question for clarification: what is perezhivanie in a social situation of development.

### **Clarification 3: SSD and perezhivanie**

SSD is neither an attitude of the child to social environment, nor a relation of the child to the social reality; it is a relationship between the child and social environment. Here,

social environment is not taken as an “aggregate of objective conditions existing without reference to the child and affecting him by the very fact of their existence” (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 198). It reflects the influence of a social reality on a child’s development, and at the same time, foregrounds what a child brings to the social environment. SSD is a system, a unity of an individual and social, but individual and social are not components of this system. As discussed earlier, the social and individual in cultural-historical theory are not oppositions, but a dialectical unity, and yet, what is the psychological content of this unity? Are there any ways to study this unity and are there any tools of analysis of the structure and dynamics of this unity? I believe, *perezhivanie* as a concept is such a tool, as *perezhivanie* is a unit of individual and environmental characteristics. Before coming to this point however, it is necessary to explain the difference between three terms, namely “unity”, “unit” and “element”.

There are two terms in Russian - *единство* (unity) and *единица* (unit). The first, *единство* [edinstvo] (unity), is used when we speak about a complex whole, a complex system consisting of a number of parts, components, elements etc<sup>29</sup>. One of the meanings of the second term, *единица* [edinita] (unit), is a part, a component of a certain complex whole. In other words, “unity” (*единство*) is used in relation to the whole, whereas “unit” is often related to the parts of the whole. If we put it in a general way, we could say that a certain system (the complex whole) in its unity (*единство*) consists of certain units (*единица*).

Very often all these terms - parts, components, units, elements - are used as synonyms. Vygotsky however, clearly distinguished two main types of analysis in psychology, which underlie two main approaches to the investigation of mental formations (Vygotsky L.S, 1987). The first is the decomposition of the complex mental whole into its elements. This type of analysis can be compared with a chemical analysis of water in which water is decomposed into hydrogen and oxygen. The essential feature of this form of analysis is that its products are of a different nature than the whole from which they were derived. The elements lack the characteristics inherent in the whole and they possess properties that the whole unity does not possess (Vygotsky L.S, 1987, p. 45).

When researchers approach development of a complex whole, a decomposition of the whole into elements may be unproductive: ...he adopts the strategy of the man who resorts to the decomposition of water into hydrogen and oxygen in his search for a scientific

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<sup>29</sup> For example, in Russian “consciousness is a unity of affect and intellect” is “сознание есть единство аффекта и интеллекта».

explanation of the characteristics of water, its capacity to extinguish fire or its conformity to Archimedes law for example. This man will discover, to his chagrin, that hydrogen burns and oxygen sustains combustion. He will never succeed in explaining the characteristics of the whole by analyzing the characteristics of its elements (Vygotsky L.S, 1987, p. 45). An entirely different form of analysis is the partitioning of the complex whole into units.

In contrast to the element, the unit possesses all the basic characteristics of the whole, and is a “vital and further indivisible part of the whole” (Vygotsky L.S, 1982, p. 15)<sup>30</sup>.

The key to the explanation of the characteristics of water lies not in the investigation of its chemical formula but in the investigation of its molecule and its molecular movements. In precisely the same sense, the living cell is the real unit of biological analysis because it preserves the basic characteristics of life that are inherent in the living organism (Vygotsky L.S, 1987, p. 46).

What does this mean for psychology and psychological analysis? The conclusion Vygotsky drew was that a psychology concerned with the study of the complex whole must comprehend the necessity of analysis by units and not elements. In other words, psychology must identify those units in which the characteristics of the whole are present (Vygotsky L.S, 1987, p. 47).

Let us look at two quotations from Vygotsky’s key works that relate to perezhivanie. The first quotation is from *The Problem of Environment*: Perezhivanie is a unit where, on the one hand, in an indivisible state, the environment is represented, i.e. that which is being experienced - perezhivanie is always related to something which is found outside the person - and on the other hand, what is represented is how I, myself, am experiencing this, i.e., all the personal characteristics and all the environmental characteristics are represented in perezhivanie.... So, in perezhivanie we are always dealing with an indivisible unity of personal characteristics and situational characteristics, which are represented in the perezhivanie (Vygotsky L.S, 1994, p.342).

At first glance, it looks controversial as perezhivanie is presented as a unit (in the first sentence) and as a unity (in the last sentence). However, there is no contradiction here. In a molecule of water, we deal with an indivisible unity of oxygen and hydrogen. This makes a molecule of water a unit of analysis of the whole unity (water). The living cell is a unit of biological analysis as in this unit we are dealing with a unity of the living organism. In line with this, perezhivanie is not the unity of personal characteristics and situational

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<sup>30</sup> Here Vygotsky’s words “далее неразложимыми живыми частями этого единства” were mistakenly translated as “irreducible part of the whole”

characteristics, rather it is a unit a “vital and further indivisible part of the whole”. This unity of personal and situational characteristics retains all the unit’s basic features and qualities. Perezhivanie itself is not the unity, but in perezhivanie we are dealing with an indivisible unity of personal and situational characteristics like in a molecule of water we deal with the unity of oxygen and hydrogen (water).

The second quotation is from *The Crisis at Age Seven* (Vygotsky L.S.,1984).

A unit<sup>31</sup> can be noted in the study of personality and environment. This unit<sup>32</sup> in psychopathology and psychology has been called perezhivanie<sup>33</sup>. The child’s perezhivanie is also this kind of very simple unit<sup>34</sup> about which we must not say that in itself it represents the influence of the environment on the child or the individuality of the child himself; perezhivanie is the unit<sup>35</sup> of the personality and the environment as it is represented in development. Thus, in development, the unity of environmental and personality factors happens in a series of perezhivanie of the child. Perezhivanie must be understood as the internal<sup>36</sup> relation of the child as a person to one factor or another of reality (Vygotsky L.S., 1984, p. 382).

So, there is nowhere that Vygotsky speaks about perezhivanie as a unity of personal and situational characteristics; perezhivanie is presented not as a unity (единство), but as a unit (единица) of the personality and the environment; as an internal relation to reality. Series of perezhivanie bring the unity of individual and environment factors and makes it happen in a process of development in the same way as a living cell in its development creates the unity of a living organism.

The social situation of development is a unique relation of the child to the environment. What makes it unique is the unity of environmental components and child’s personal characteristics. It should however, not be treated as a system which consists of the child and the social environment as interacting elements. Interactions should not be treated as mechanical forms of interaction between elements. Dialectical and holistic understandings require a logic of analysis by units and their organic relations within the whole, rather than a logic of elements and mechanical interactions. Perezhivanie is such a unit.

### **Clarification: perezhivanie as a unit of consciousness**

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<sup>31</sup> Here the Russian word единица (unit) was translated as unity in English edition

<sup>32</sup> The same, unity in English translation

<sup>33</sup> Perezhivanie is translated as an experience in English edition of this quotation

<sup>34</sup> The same, unity in English translation

<sup>35</sup> The same, unity in English translation

<sup>36</sup> Internal relation (внутреннее отношение) was translated as an external relation in English edition of 1998

Perezhivanie was introduced by Vygotsky as a unit of human consciousness. Every perezhivanie is always a perezhivanie of something. There is no perezhivanie that would not be a perezhivanie of something just as there is no act of consciousness that would not be an act of being conscious of something. But every perezhivanie is my perezhivanie. In modern theory, perezhivanie is introduced as a unit<sup>37</sup> of consciousness, that is, a unit in which the basic properties of consciousness are given as such, while in attention and in thinking, the connection of consciousness is not given. Attention is not a unit of consciousness, but is an element of consciousness in which there is no series of other elements, while the unity of consciousness as such disappears, and perezhivanie is the actual dynamic unit of consciousness, that is, the consciousness consists of perezhivanie (Vygotsky L.S., 1984, p. 382).

The English text does not say anything about perezhivanie as a unit of human consciousness, it positions perezhivanie as a unity and therefore the difference between “unity”, “unit” and “element” is not captured in the English translation. The original Russian text gives a fuller picture of perezhivanie. With a more comprehensive reading of unit, unity and elements in the original text, it can be argued that, 1) consciousness is a unity and perezhivanie is a unit of consciousness; 2) attention and thinking are not units since the basic properties of consciousness are not given, they are elements of consciousness, whereas perezhivanie is a dynamic unit of consciousness.

Given that perezhivanie is a unit of the environmental and personal characteristics as discussed in the previous section of this paper (we could name it Unit 1 for clarity), and it was shown by Vygotsky to be a unit of human consciousness (Unit 2), could we conclude that in Vygotsky’s understanding, consciousness and the unity of environmental and personal characteristics, is the same unity? Or to put it another way: is human consciousness and the unity of environmental and personal characteristics one and the same complex living whole? And, if not, how is it possible that perezhivanie is a unit of analysis of both? How is it possible that the same unit is a unit of two different complex wholes (unities)?

We do not have any evidence in Vygotsky’s published texts on the similarity between the two unities. Yet, there is a difference. It seems the way to recognize the difference is to look at a concept as a result of a generalization: “At any stage of its development, the concept is an act of generalization” (Vygotsky L.S., 1987, p. 169). In other words, concepts are the result of generalizing, that is, conceptualizing a certain phenomenological reality. A

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<sup>37</sup> Translated as unity in English edition. (Vygotsky L.S., 1998, p. 294)

concept has its theoretical content however, and conceptualization never happens in an empty space. What we conceptualize is not less important than how we conceptualize.

As we do have two meanings of P1 - 1) perezhivanie as an act, a process of experiencing and 2) perezhivanie as the content, as what is experienced, we might presume that Unit1 is a result of conceptualization of P1.1 and Unit 2 is a result of conceptualisation of P1.2. This difference, the difference between P1.1 and P1.2, might be illustrated by an analogy of thinking - how we think (the process of thinking) is not the same as what we think (the content, thoughts). From here Unit1 is related to the process of experiencing and therefore is a unit of analysis of the unity of environmental and personal characteristics. Unit 2 is a result of conceptualisation of perezhivanie as the content of what happens in individual consciousness and this makes it a unit of consciousness.

### **Methodological meditation 1: why unity and unit?**

The concept of perezhivanie as a unit is of a dialectical nature; it is a theoretical tool for the analysis of dialectical character of development as the the path along which the social becomes the individual. Why however, has Vygotsky rejected the logic of analysis by elements?

What stands behind this methodological transition? When the whole is analyzed into its elements, these characteristics evaporate. In his attempt to reconstruct these characteristics, the investigator is left with no alternative but to search for external, mechanical forms of interaction between the elements” (Vygotsky L.S.,1987, p. 45).

The key words here are “mechanical forms of interaction between the elements”; here Vygotsky speaks about two types of systems (complex wholes) - mechanical systems and organic (living, developing) systems<sup>15</sup> and about two types of connection within these systems - mechanical connections and organic connections. To support this statement, we can refer to Vygotsky’s own words: “Thus, the detection of the significant connection between the parts and the whole, the ability to view the mental process as an organic connection of a more complex integral process; this is dialectical psychology’s basic task” (Vygotsky L.S.,1997, p. 115).

Human mind is not a mechanical system by its nature; it develops as a complex organic system and because of this it should not be analysed by elements and mechanical forms of interaction between the elements. Perezhivanie represents the minimal unit of the whole, the organic unity of the personality and the environment as it is represented in its

process of development. Perezhivanie of a child is what makes a social situation into a social situation of development.

However, one could say that there is a discrepancy here - social situation of development is a system of relationship of child and social environment, but perezhivanie is an internal attitude to social reality and therefore it cannot be its unit. Even more, is perezhivanie as a prism, the same as perezhivanie as a unit? This advance of the concept of perezhivanie, which I present in this paper corresponds to Vygotsky's own claim: ...pedology does not investigate the environment as such without regard to the child, but instead looks at the role and influence of the environment on the course of development. It ought to always be capable of finding the particular prism through which the influence of the environment on the child is refracted, i.e. it ought to be able to find the relationship which exists between the child and its environment, the child's...perezhivanie, in other words how a child becomes aware of, interprets, and emotionally relates to a certain event. This is such a prism which determines the role and influence of the environment on the development of...the child's character, his psychological development, etc. (Vygotsky L.S.,1994, p. 340).

### **In conclusion: a danger of playing with concepts**

The aim of this paper is to initiate a further discussion on the theoretical content and context of the concept of perezhivanie as a possible (and I think, necessary) step forward in the transformation of a tantalizing notion into a concept with clear meaning (Smagorinsky P., 2011, p. 339). In doing this we have to make an important distinction between the two meanings of perezhivanie presented in Vygotsky's original texts - perezhivanie as a psychological phenomena/process which can be empirically observed and studied (P1) and perezhivanie as a concept, a theoretical tool for analysis of the process of development (P2). I think this distinction is an important step forward in developing the generative understanding of the concept of perezhivanie within the cultural-historical theoretical framework.

This paper is an attempt to disclose the theoretical content of perezhivanie as a concept (P2) in two main directions: (1) how this concept perezhivanie is related to the process of cultural development, and (2) what the place of this concept is in the system of other concepts and principles of cultural-historical theory. In other words, the aim of this chapter is to unpack Vygotsky's words that "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 L.S.,1994, p. 343).

Following my way of asking questions on clarification, one could ask: “Why do we need to come back to Vygotsky to reconstruct the original theoretical content of the concept of perezhivanie? Why not to focus on its further theoretical advances?”

My answer could be expressed in the following arguments. Developing the concepts means developing their theoretical content. However, before developing or advancing the theoretical content we should first clarify and describe what is the original theoretical content of the concept we want to develop.

Specificity of concepts of the cultural-historical theory is that they are they are not generalizations of observable and reproducible empirical facts, but theoretical instruments of studying the process of sociocultural genesis of human consciousness in all its dialectical dynamics and complexity. There is nothing empirical in theoretical content of concepts of cultural-historical theory. The theoretical content of each concept can be unfolded in to two interrelated aspects - (1) which fundamental dialectical aspect of the process of sociocultural development of human mind this concept is related to and (2) what are theoretical relations of this particular concepts with other concepts of the theory? For example, the concept of perezhivanie is related to the concept of a social situation of development. Separation of one concept from others eliminates its theoretical content since concepts have their theoretical content only within the theory as a system of interconnected and interrelated concepts. In  $E=mc^2$  the theoretical content of  $C$  does not mean purely the speed of light, it shows that the nature of  $M$  (mass) and  $E$  (energy) is the same despite their empirical difference. Taken from the theory, separated from the theory, the concept becomes theoretically empty and therefore useless as a theoretical analytical tool. Theoretical concepts are not “toys” to play with by changing their contents whatever you like, they are not words with different meanings, they are heavy and powerful tools with definite and strong theoretical content.

Concepts of cultural-historical theory as theoretical tools of analysis of the process of development of higher mental functions reflect dialectical nature and the character of the process of development; they are focused on the discovery of the dialectics of developmental process including quantitative changes, qualitative reorganisations and contradictions. To put this in a simple way, they reflect the complexity of dialectics of development. Fundamental dialectical categories and principles stand behind concepts of cultural-historical theory. The philosophical categories of dialectical contradiction as a moving force of development and the category of qualitative reorganisation is what stands behind this psychological concept of dramatic perezhivanie. Inaccurate playing with this

concept might destroy its dialectical content. Any attempt to develop the theoretical content of the concept should include a serious analysis of how this new improvement enriches the dialectical content of the concept in order to make it a better tool for analysis and the study of the process of development.

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