



Reconsidering interiorization: Self moving across language spacetimes[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Sociogenesis addresses a pervasive problem in psychology given by Cartesian dualism that assigns the mental an inner locus apart from material activity. Aligning ourselves to the ongoing critical discussions of interiorization in psychology, we explore the crucial notion of space by highlighting language as sociocultural and dialogical activity performed by other-oriented individuals. We discuss space in terms of the “language spacetime”, a symbolic, embodied formation of mutually positioned speaking and listening selves. This leads beyond the “inside-outside” container metaphor and allows for a reformulation of interiorization. Interiorization is conceptualized as a continuous series of different, though mutually related movements between self and other and self and self that lead to and are supported by specific formations in language activity: reversion, transposition, and decoupling. Along a short passage of a video-based interview, we trace the reversion of dialogical positions within the addressivity constellation of the two interlocutors, their interactive creation of a heterotopic spacetime, and the decoupling of one speaker’s psychological activity from the concrete here-and-now and the present other by moving and acting into this new sphere. Interiorization appears as a movement at the border of past, present, and possible future(s).

1. Introduction

A pervasive problem in psychology lies in partitioning interiority and exteriority, which sets the mental into another realm than the material. This dividing entails a fundamental opposition between the individual and the social that develops along the lines of uniqueness versus commonality, of privacy versus publicness, and of creativity versus entrenchment. As is well known, this problem was instituted by Cartesian philosophy establishing the modern notion of mind (Gillot & Friedrich, 2010). The dividing leads to two parallel lives: “A person therefore lives through two collateral histories, one consisting of what happens in and to his body, the other consisting of what happens to his mind. The first is public, the second is private” (Ryle, 1949, p. 11).

1.1. Sociogenesis

In this context, the idea of sociogenesis offers an alternative view of the mind. Sociogenesis emphasizes social activities as the source of individual minds. It claims the social foundation of individual higher psychological functions, offering an account of the relation between the social and the individual. Sociogenesis is a cornerstone of psychologies

that view the individual as related to others and understand individual psychological processes through socio-cultural activities. Influenced by Janet’s work, Vygotsky developed sociogenesis in a highly influential way (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1988). Cultural-Historical Theory (Yasnitsky, van der Veer, & Ferrari, 2014) continued this idea as central to human development. Emphasizing the otherness of self stemming from its dialogical constitution, Dialogical Self Theory (Hermans & Gieser, 2012) also significantly relates to Vygotskian theory in understanding the self’s development.

Sociogenesis is able to challenge the dualisms established by Cartesianism by tracing individual psychological processes to common, public, meaning-making activity. The individual creative mind originates in the social sphere with its symbolic and material activities; it is bound to praxis and otherness.

However, the concept of sociogenesis does not come without pitfalls. First, it is challenged by the danger of replicating the internal-external partition in terms of separate containers evoking “a ‘spatial’ transportation or transmission of some external material inside the individual brain” (Arievitch & van der Veer, 1995, p. 115). In accounts of sociogenesis focusing on internalization, the ‘inner realm’ of psyche is not principally contested but might even be reinforced. If the ‘inner

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realm' is translated to the individual brain, sociogenesis becomes a further instrument of contemporary individualism as localizationism – the “unmediated truth of the matter” (van Ommen, 2016, p. 1).

The resulting second challenge is to develop a non-mentalistic account of the mental, refusing the Cartesian “particular inner locus” as the site of mental activity but still acknowledging the “reality of the psyche” (Friedrich, 2010). Along with Arieviditch and Stetsenko (2014), we are critical of sociocultural approaches that “stay away from conceptualizing the mind, subjectivity, internalization, and other processes habitually associated with the individualist and mentalist views” (p. 220). In fact, the reality of the experience of thinking and the specific form of activity referred to as individual psychological processes need be kept and not dissolved into the social, for example, by replacing it with “appropriation” (Packer, 1993).

Our aim is a notion of sociogenesis that does not empty out its very sociality by working on the base of a non-individualist and dialogic view of human beingness. Our critical discussion of interiorization aligns with ongoing critiques especially in sociocultural psychology since the 1990s, as well as in philosophies formulating an anti-mentalistic standpoint (Ryle, 1949; Wittgenstein, 1968). Our tool in this discussion is language. Viewing the pragmatics of language as not ceasing in psychological processes (as if in becoming psychological, language had to become structural, devoid of its social event quality), we consider the role of voices and positions for interiorization and also observe voices and positions while thinking and speaking, specifically in symbolic-dialogic forms. The account we offer presents the concept of space as the main conceptual node articulating how exactly the individual is related to reality, to others, and to herself – for this is what sociogenesis is about. The conceptual node ‘space’ entails language as the very means of interiorization which, in contradistinction to internalization, is a semiotic activity.¹

1.2. Language

Although our language psychological framework (Bertau, 2011a, 2011b; Karsten, 2014a, 2014b) builds on Vygotskian thinking and Dialogical Self Theory (DST), we are critical of how both Vygotsky and DST treat interiorization and aim to advance a different conceptualization that develops the dialogical aspects of Vygotsky's concept. This interpretation is in many points in accordance with the work of critiques raised in sociocultural approaches (e.g., Arieviditch & Stetsenko, 2014; Arieviditch & van der Veer, 1995; Wertsch, 1993a). The distinctive aspect of our approach is our use of the dialogical language framework for analyzing interiorization. The materially experienced symbolic forms of the language activity are key to interiorization.²

¹ In contrast to internalization, Vygotsky's concept of interiorization stresses the role of socially developed signs, specifically, language signs. Interiorization thus entails otherness and conceives of the historical and societal reality of the subject. Theories of internalization have an individualistic tendency, as Kobbé notes, they do not consider societal conditions and, in the end, construct a fictive subject beyond the socio-economic realities of concrete individuals (see Kobbé, 1998, p. 671). Our deconstruction of the notion of space key to interiorization seems to make this term superfluous, calling for a new term. Principally agreeing with this reasoning, we nonetheless stay with the term for two main reasons. First, the term is widely entrenched in the psychological community and cannot be replaced easily; it is in this sense a useful heuristic and provoking term that leads into discussions about its conceptual volume. Second, the term hints at the cultural-historical dominant and prevalent praxis of self; thus still in place in our imaginations (a safe place to be) and our practices in education, in science (as model and way of being a scientist), and in self-reflection exercises of different kinds. As such, the term permits a view precisely on its cultural-historical construction.

² Costall (2007) criticizes the dualism repeated in mediationism and points to the issue of materiality as most important: “If we are going to make sense of *mediation*, ...we will need to find a place in our theories of both meaning and mediation *before and beyond* the realm of representations and symbols, and take their materiality much more seriously” (p. 120, emphasis in the original). Our notion of language activity aims precisely at such a broader, material, and sensorial notion of the symbol with a clear anti-representationalist stance (general theory in Bertau, 2011a, b; 2014a; ontogenesis of the symbol in Gratier & Bertau, 2012).

It is important to counterbalance the almost absolute focus on meaning we observe in present-day psychology, where praxis is secondary to thinking, and where thinking seems to consist exclusively of meaning. This focus evades the issue of *how*, by what kind of utterance-forms meaning-making is concretely performed and experienced. It serves Cartesian dualism by allotting meaning to the immaterial. In contrast, experienced meaningful forms *are occurring*; praxis is their public reality. These forms are then not vessels for immaterial language meanings. Rather, an utterance-form has its own content that resides in its producing a specific relation to the communicative reality. The words crystallize a certain evaluation of the performed meaning by virtue of their form moments: intonation, lexical choice, and arrangement of words (Friedrich, 1993; Vološinov, 1983b).

Form is crucial in de-mentalizing the mental for it re-publicizes it, thereby undermining the idea of two lives, mental life being non-public. In this regard, we note the concentration on meaning in Vygotsky (1987)³; this might indeed have led Vygotskian scholars to take an individualist stance toward the development of mind and to disregard social practices (as noted by Arieviditch, 2008). Considering the forms of language activity is a means to counterpoise this neo-Vygotskian reading. Highlighting the materiality of language activity aligns with conceptualizations of mental development on the grounds of object based forms of external activity (e.g., Gal'perin, 1973, 1974). Language activity, then, cannot be played off against object based material activity (Arieviditch, 2008).⁴

1.3. Space

Space is both contested and reclaimed by dialogical thinkers. It is contested for rejecting a reified notion of self, locating any psychological aspect as ‘inside’ a container-body thus dismissing process in favor of substance (Rogoff, 1990; Shoter, 1997; Taylor, 1991). DST explicitly reclaims space in order to reject the mentalistic reduction of Descartes' immaterial *res cogitans* in favor of an “extended self” that belongs to space. This extension leads to view the other as an “intrinsic part of a self that is extended to its social environment” (Hermans & Hermans-Konopka, 2010, p. 7). The self is conceived as a metaphorical space analogously with the external, three-dimensional space: “the self, like the outside world, is spatialized” (Hermans, 2004, p. 297). The dynamic “self space” (Hermans, 2001) consists of located I-positions. The I “moves from one position to another” whereby these positions are “not only inside the person but also outside, not only here but in the so-called outside world” (Hermans, 2004, p. 298).

By replicating a physical space of distances as interior space, DST repeats the problematic idea of distinct entities in a container: the self containing I-positions. The other is absorbed into the self-space as a position resulting in a positional space of juxtaposed entities. This

³ Vygotsky's focus on meaning determines his understanding of the triad of external speech – internal speech – thought. The mediational element is viewed semantically: “To a significant extent, inner speech is thinking in pure meanings” (1987, p. 280). In contrast, Vološinov (1983a,b) stresses language form, his triad comprises the utterance – the form of the utterance – the thought. The mediational element is form, which is not an exclusively linguistic phenomenon for it is the concrete contact to social reality. Vološinov's form notion is leading for our framework; as mentioned in the text, according to Vološinov form is intonation, word form, and arrangements of words. For more details see Bertau (2014d, 2011a), Bertau and Tures (2018, in press), Friedrich (1993).

⁴ Gal'perin (1973, 1974) considers speech (language activity) as a necessary moment in the transformation of a material form of external activity into a mental form of the same activity (e.g., calculating). Hence, language activity has a specific function for this transformation. Conceptualizing language as activity allows highlighting its alignment with different collaborative activity types in humans, such as work activity and learning activity. Language activity can be subordinated to *material* activity with objects on the one hand and to *materialized* activities with graphic, schematic, symbolic representations on the other hand (a difference stressed by Gal'perin, 1974). Language activity can accompany material/materialized activity in a significant way, or it can replace it. These different mediational relationships can function as interwoven developmental moments – exactly Gal'perin's approach.

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