

MODES OF DISCOURSE - WAYS FOR THINKING ACTUAL DEBATES IN SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present paper is to analyze the various types of discourse and the different modes of thinking linked to them. The paper defends the heterogeneous nature of thinking, both in the same culture as in just one individual, linking the differences in thinking more to the different activity setting in which the subjects carry out their actions than to the culture in itself. To demonstrate this, the paper presents a series of episodes which contain different ways of justifying the way in which a task had been carried out. The information was obtained through the observation of Adult Education Students carrying out everyday and formal tasks. The analysis is based on the discursive forms used by the subjects and the ways of thinking that these reflect.

Introduction

It may well be that for sociocultural studies in psychology, the 1990's signal the time for the development of an overall reflection of the work of Vygotsky and the different paths of research his ideas gave rise to. This revision is conditioned by several motives: firstly, Vygotsky's work and the troika was recovered by a series of academics who not only reflected theoretically on his work, but also developed interesting empirical studies based on his main hypotheses (Cole, Scribner, Diaz, ... Rogoff, Wertsch). Moreover, the disintegration of the Soviet Union during the 1980's enabled us to gain a better understanding of the philosophical, psychological and even literary (literary criticism and theory) foundations which supported the work of Vygotsky to begin with and thereafter his followers.

Interest in the sociocultural or historical-cultural perspective grew due to a certain fatigue with rationalist and solipsistic psychology which represented the two main tendencies in Western psychology. These were, firstly, the genetic psychology of Jean Piaget and the Geneva school; and secondly, the human processing of information developed in the United States using the metaphor of the computer.

This crisis in psychology also happened to coincide with a world in which interethnic and intercultural contact was increasing rapidly creating new problems and demanding new solutions. Psychology seemed to be ignoring the increasing social complexity of recent decades as if problems with a social or cultural origin questioned too fundamentally the solipsistic base on which it was grounded.

But the sociocultural perspective has not just been based around the work of Vygotsky and his followers despite the importance of their legacy. In the 1980's there was an opening up of this perspective which brought in other authors and cultural theorists who either complemented and enriched this theoretical base or laid bare some of its contradictions and limitations. Of vital importance has been the incorporation of the main ideas of the Bakhtin circle, mainly by James V. Wertsch (Wertsch, 1991), with the opening up towards symbolic interactionism, etc. This vision, distanced from the work of Vygotsky by the perspective gained from other authors, allows us to uncover some of the contradictions in his work that may coincide with contradictions existing in other social sciences such as anthropology, sociology or pedagogy.

The two faces of the Vygotskian theory

The most important aspect to highlight here is that of the notion of development and the changes that occurred in this throughout the life of Vygotsky himself. Two conflicting visions of human development can be observed here: the evolutionist and sociogenetic vision linked to the idea of progress and the vision combining development and heterogeneity.

The first draws on the traditions of 19th Century thinking which saw historical development moving from one great stage to another through which humanity passed unerringly. Each stage represented a step forward in progress thereby making the previous stage redundant. Let us take, for example, Fourier's Four Movements theory based on Utopian Socialism

in which the development of human and natural phenomenon followed the development of phases of savagery, patriarchal state, barbarism, and civilization. Marx saw history as a process of overcoming, in which the capitalist phase was destined to perish, giving way to a new period in the history of humanity, namely socialism. The theories of psychology and education that have emerged in the 20th Century could be framed within the same vision of human development. Perhaps one case that best represents this is Jean Piaget's, in whose theory epigenetic cognitive development goes through a series of periods characterized by a point of departure — the sensorymotor period — and a finishing point — a period of formal operations —. In most of his work Vygotsky is no exception. This idea — Marxist in origin — of a progression in which the development of human thinking, having passed through several phases, culminates in scientific thinking was what motivated the famous research in Uzbekistan which is so well known we need not go into now (Luria, 1980).

We could call this approach *neo-illustrated*, given that in human development rationality inevitably triumphs. Perhaps where this vision can best be seen is in the analysis of education. It could be said that even today's sociocultural theorys consider the school to be a worthy child of illustration. All of this is basically conditioned by the search for practical rationality and the development of supposedly superior forms of understanding.

A second vision which differs considerably from the first appears to have its origin in Vygotsky's book "thinking and Speech", published a few months after the author's death only to be withdrawn later as a result of Stalinist censorship. In this book, while not abandoning the idea that there are superior forms of verbal thinking acquired after rudimentary ones, Vygotsky defends the coexistence of these heterogeneous forms of verbal thinking in the same individual psyche. The reason why this vision seems to have been sidelined for so long from sociocultural and Vygotskian studies can be found in the limitations affecting its publication which meant that it was published at the end of the 1950's, then first translated into English, and then later into Spanish in the 1970's (1962; 1973). In the first version the censors left out key parts of the book. The definitive copy, which came from Vygotsky's original scripts, did not come out in Europe and the U.S until 1985. In the final version, while explaining the development of the word meaning via the study of the

formation of concepts, Vygotsky opts for the non-disappearance of the most primitive forms of verbal thought, represented by thought in complexes, with the rise of more developed forms of verbal thinking — concepts —. He understands that these distinct forms differ qualitatively in the intellectual operations that they involve, they even differ in the way they are acquired, but they are equal functionally. Vygotsky put it eloquently: “the different developmental forms coexist, in the same way that strata from different geological eras coexist on the earth’s surface” (1993, p.171). Neither the child, nor the adult discard their elementary forms of thinking once they have mastered higher forms. Even in the context of everyday life, these more elementary forms of verbal thought can and usually do dominate. These ideas are well reflected in the thesis on the heterogeneity of verbal thought so clearly put forward by Tulviste (1982, 1987, 1991, ...), for whom new forms of verbal thinking do not replace the already existing ones, but instead correspond functionally with another type of activity and problems.

In the same way as other authors before him have done (Bruner, 1986; Levy-Bruhl, 1975; Vygotsky, 1985) Tulviste defends the heterogeneity of verbal thinking depending on the context of activity. By this we mean that depending on the demands — the needs and the motives prevailing in activity setting — we will develop a way of resolving problems and we will use the necessary tools for that end. Therefore, the existence of different types of verbal thinking must owe itself to the wide variety of activities an individual undertakes in his/her social setting. In this sense, Tulviste comments:

The tendency to make a global opposition between the thinking of people in one culture with that of people in another is misguided. Types of thinking correspond not with different cultures but with different forms of activity. It is not reasonable to speak of primitive and civilized thinking; instead it is reasonable to speak of common sensical (everyday, practical thinking), scientific thinking, artistic thinking, and so forth. The basis for such a division is the functional correspondence between certain types of thinking on the one hand, and certain types of activity and the tasks that emerge and must be solved in the course of carrying out these activities on the other (cit. in Wertsch, 1991; p.102).

The interest of this quotation lies in that it justifies not only the fact that individuals who participate in different activities may have different ways of resolving the problems they are faced with. In addition to this it is precisely because the ways of thinking correspond to different types of activity that in the same individual we may find these different forms of thinking depending on the type of activity they are carrying out. Therefore, a subject who is able to perform different activities will apply different forms of thinking depending on the nature of the activity.

We should remember that both Vygotsky and Tulviste focused on the study of verbal thinking. Most of the research carried out by the Soviet school approached the study of the "word meaning" through tests into the formation of concepts. However, we ought not forget that the choice of the word meaning as a unit of analysis has been one of the points of Vygotsky's work that has received most criticism from both outside and inside the sociocultural perspective. Despite the many advantages that the word meaning has for the study of semiotic instruments that measure higher psychological processes, it is insufficient and erroneous as a unit of analysis of psychological functioning as a whole (Wertsch, 1985). Given this and other limitations, the theorists of the socio-historical approach have opted for a unit of analysis that allows working with Vygotskian hypotheses, something for which his own unit of analysis was insufficient, while also being able to extend them to other areas and problems. We are talking about mediated action as a unit of analysis, formulated initially by Leontiev (1981, 1983) and developed later mainly by Zinchenko (1985) and Wertsch (1981, 1985). Owing to the far-reaching implications that any decision taken over the unit of analysis has, let us now go over, albeit briefly, the discussion that has arisen around this topic.

Action mediated by tools as a unit of analysis

It seems obvious that a theoretical focus of the greatest proportions is stripped of meaning if it does not have an object or unit of study that enables its constitution and development. The unit of analysis chosen is therefore of great importance given that whatever decision is taken will shape the theoretical framework as a whole. So it should not come as a surprise that in the history of psychology a great variety of units have

been established, almost as many as actual paths developed in psychology. Sensations, shape and form, the reflex, behavior, the unconscious, cognitive processes, etc could be given as examples that, according to Zinchenko (1985), confirm this plurality.

However, Vygotsky specified that not every phenomenon can be considered an adequate unit for psychological study. It must meet certain requirements that guarantee its validity as a representative of "everything psychological" and through which an understanding of this everything may be derived. These requirements have been drawn up by authors like Davydov & Radzikhovskiy (1985), Zinchenko (1985), etc. It could be said that the underlying idea is of a holistic vision of the unit of study. First and foremost, it is understood that the unit should maintain and reflect all the basic properties of the consciousness, itself thus becoming the smallest unified and integrated system with its own meaning and capable of changing and developing.

For Vygotsky the word meaning not only met these requirements but also enabled one to penetrate into the close relation existing between thinking and language. The word, by implying a process of generalization, belongs simultaneously and inseparably to the domain of language and to that of thinking. These and other characteristics of the word meaning made it a good candidate for the unit of analysis of psychological functioning. However, Vygotsky could not make the unit of analysis he proposed meet the requirements he himself had imposed (Davydov & Radsikhovskii 1985; Wertsch, 1981, 1988; Zinchenko, 1985). Thus, it does not seem as if it can function like a microcosm of consciousness as it does not include aspects such as the affective and volitive. Nor does it seem that this unit is suitable for looking at the relation between the natural and cultural lines of development as the word meaning only allows the analysis of functions that are semiotically mediated, higher functions that are developed culturally.

In this context, with his interest centred on establishing a unit of analysis of consciousness coherent with the Vygotskian system, V.P. Zinchenko (1985) points to action mediated by tools as a unit of psychological functioning. In a first approach towards the concept of action we could state that this is a segment of human functioning directed towards the reaching of a conscious goal or object (Kozulin, 1986; Wertsch, 1979).

This unit is perfectly compatible both with the theory of activity

developed by Leontiev from where the notion of action was taken, and with Vygotsky's theoretical approach from which he assumed the idea of mediation (Cubero, 1994). Its constance with respect to the theory of activity is clear if we consider that this already included action as one of the levels of analysis. The coherence of Zinchenko's notion with the Vygotskian propositions may be seen on two fronts. Firstly, it meets the requirements imposed by Vygotsky himself for an unit to be considered as such; in other words, it works as a microcosm where all the psychological functions and the relations between them are reflected (Wertsch, 1985). The performance of an action, unlike the word meaning, means that the individual has to bring into play simultaneously functions such as attention, perception, memory, reasoning ... reflecting the relations between them. The second aspect refers to the importance attributed to signs in the determination of the existence of social and psychological processes. The notion of action encapsulates the instrumental value of the word meaning, by being seen as a process mediated by instruments (materials and signs). This last point integrates the units of analysis proposed by Vygotsky (the word meaning and other semiotic phenomena) within his system by assigning them the function of mediators of the action (Wertsch, 1985; Wertsch & Sammarco, 1985).

According to Wertsch (1985), the action has the additional advantage in that it "transcends ... the boundary between the individual and the social" (p. 215). Similarly to the unit proposed by Vygotsky, action does not just refer to intra or interpsychological functioning, instead both are an inherent part of the actual concept of action. Put another way, the action simultaneously encapsulates individual and sociocultural aspects of human life. Individual because it is carried out through the particular behavior of a person. It is also social in two senses; social to the extent that it reflects forms of behavior that are historically organized and defined, and also social because they are acquired through participation in collective groups, through interaction. So action allows us to observe simultaneously the functioning of psychological processes and the projection of culture on these (Ramírez, 1988; Ramírez, Cubero & Santamaría, 1990; Wertsch, Minick & Arns, 1984).

In the characterization of an action it is crucial to consider one last aspect: it is comprised of "external" and "internal" components which therefore makes the distinction of actions along these criteria artificial. It is neither valid, nor of any use to merely reduce human actions to one of

the components of each association, in each action both aspects co-exist, they are the two sides of a coin, two aspects of the same dimension. It is not easy to defend this point of view if, as Rubinstein (1974) claims, we continue to state that internal and individual actions arise as a result of the interiorization of external and social actions. Recognising the social origin of actions does not necessarily mean accepting the existence of purely external or purely internal actions, instead one may understand that a process occurs in which psychological actions of a certain level of complexity (linked more to a specific and present reality) are transformed into actions on a higher level (more generalized, abbreviated and verbalized). It is this process which is referred to as interiorization. The concept stemming from this consideration is, according to Zinchenko (1985), equivalent to the concept of action mediated by tools, in which an action is seen as a process mediated by tools (materials and signs) regardless of the way they are carried out (external or internal).

From what we have been outlining above, the action has become an ideal instrument for studying the relationship between the individual and sociocultural setting (Wertsch, 1991). This reflects the tension between the instruments of mediation that are present and given priority by the culture and the personalized use that the individual makes of them. By analyzing mediated action, therefore, we will free ourselves from the psychological reductionism that individualistic psychology based on the study of an isolated individual ties us to. In addition, we will also be liberated from the sociological reductionism that Vygotsky criticised so insistently for conceiving the individual as reduced to a mere social being. The break-up of both types of reductionism, Vygotsky's main aim, has been one of the fundamental objectives of the historical-cultural approach. Considering a unit of analysis that denies the separation between the individual and his context is of great importance in the attempt to overcome these types of reductionisms.

Action and verbal thinking

If we take the action as the unit of analysis, verbal thinking must be considered in terms of mental actions carried out through the use of language. So the word meaning may either be understood as actions in themselves, when these are purely verbal, or as instruments that mediate

the actions. This change of perspective would imply that the experimental study of the word meaning would demand the creation of situations enabling subjects to exteriorize the actions that reflect the concept or meaning of the term studied.

Returning to the study of verbal thinking connected to the proposed unit of analysis, we should point out the importance of studying the different types of verbal thinking through actions (verbal and non-verbal) that the individual puts into play. Aspects that until now had been marginalized from the study of verbal thinking may be brought back from the new unit of analysis, as may be the case of the use of narrations in the framework of the problem solving. Let us now take a brief look at this.

Bruner, an American theoretician inspired initially by Vygotsky, has approached the idea of different ways of thinking in a similar way in his recent studies about narratives. He defends the existence of two forms of thinking, two different ways of understanding that may complement each other mutually.

Bruner says about this:

“These two ways of understanding have their own functions and their own criteria of correction. They differ fundamentally in their verification procedure. A good story and a good argument have different nature. The two may be used as a way for convincing the other. But which they are convincing are very different: the arguments convince of its true and the stories convince of the similarity with the reality, with everyday life. In one of them, the verification is made by procedures which let us formal and empirical tests. In the other one, the most important aspect is not the true but the similarity (Bruner, 1986; p.23)”.

We believe that both forms of proceeding (form of argumentative thinking and form of narrative thinking) may help to understand problems that have not been resolved in the psychology of reasoning, an area of psychological research which has been closely linked in the past to the exclusive relationship between formal logic and psychology. A good example of this are the studies into processes of categorization and problem solving that are being carried out at the moment in our Laboratorio de Actividad Humana (Cubero, in press) which we are now going to discuss.

Ways of reasoning and activity setting

The study consisted of observing the way in which students who were illiterate and from different educational levels who were attending an adult literacy and education centre in the South of Spain resolved problems of everyday life. The task that was selected, the drawing up of menus, seemed to us to meet the requirements of being a common or everyday task for the subjects taking part in the research despite the fact that it took place in the education centre itself. And this was given that the majority (95%) of the students at the adult education centres were women, from which a sample was taken for the research. For these students one of the main roles in the house was to make up a list each day of what they were going to eat at home, what they needed to buy, cook, etc. The main criterion was that the members of the family should have enough to eat without spending too much money.

The task that they had to carry out was basically a group task. Each of the women taking part in the study was given a set of photographs with the food that was most frequently used when cooking. Each photo showed a different food: some reflected the typical ingredients of Spanish cooking (*olive oil, garlic, onions*, etc); other products of very different types, such as *pulses* and *vegetables*, or *meat, fish*, as well as *milk* and other dairy products. Other types of food that did not need to be cooked were also used such as "*chacinas*" the collective name for different types of *sausages* (*chorizo*, and *frankfurters*, etc). Once the person observed had looked at the set of photographs present she was asked to make a menu for the day. After grouping the different sorts of food on the different courses that made up the menu, the observer asked her to say why she had made that specific combination. The task continued with two more menus: one in which the student was asked not to do the same meals so as to avoid monotony; and another in which the subject was invited to draw up a menu for some guests who were going to be visiting for the day. Having carried out these menus, the students taking part in the study had to classify the different products in a completely new way. In this final phase, the researcher tried to test whether the possible groupings to be carried out adjusted or not to the criteria of classification of the concepts in their different stages of development.

The following episodes come from the final phase of this study; they reflect the moment in which the students participating in the research

discuss the reasons for the classifications they made.

Episode I

(Student. - A.)

A.:

- Eggs, chicken, steak — well, meat — chops, sausage, salami, chorizo, and morcilla (similar to chorizo) because they are meat and contain *lots of calories and high energy content*.
- Cakes, biscuits, etc. because they are *sweet*, contain *lots of calories*, because they are the same sort, they are for *breakfast* and *tea* and you can't eat too many because they are fattening.
- Pears, strawberries, bananas and apples because they are *fruit*.
- These are vegetables: garlic, onions, potatoes — starch — lettuce and green peppers because they are *regulating foods* that are very necessary for the organism.
- Chickpeas, lentils, and bread because they have a high energy content, they are like rice — I can't remember what they are called — because they are *basic foods*, they should be eaten at least once a week.

The student who we will call *M.* describes in the following the groups of food she had carried out:

Episode II

(Interviewer. - I. Student. - M.)

M.:

- I put all the vegetables — potatoes, lettuce, garlic, pepper and onion together because they are all types of vegetable. And also because I keep them together so that when I get something they're all there, you know, if not it's a real pain. Not the potatoes though because of the earth ...
- yeah, and the fruit, that's also a real pain ...
- *I've put them as if I'd been shopping and had to fill up the trolley* and I go to the vegetable stall and then to the fruit. After that I go the fish stall, I buy the fish, then I go to the butcher, buy the meat, then I go to the delicatessen counter and get the sausages. And that's where I get the rice and lentils, milk, eggs and butter.

I.:

- These are with these (referring to the pulses with the eggs and butter).

M.:

- No, these three are derivatives of each other (referring to the milk, butter, and eggs) and also because I get them all in the same place.

- The same with the rice and lentils, because where I go and get them, I get a kilo of each and buy them all in the same place.

- The same with the cakes and stuff. *When I go into the supermarket, everything's in the same place* and I start getting stuff, except the bread because that's delivered to the house, I go and get what I want ...

The contrast between both episodes reminds us again of the enormous differences that may arise between two identical classifications, as a result of the stimuli in each one. But it would be enough just asking them to explain to us the way in which each one of these classifications has been made to discover that the criteria used are completely different.

In the first one we can see that *A* refers to classifying terms such as *meat*, *sweet things*, *furit*, *vegetables*, etc, for a better grouping of the food. In addition, she characterizes them using equally categorial and abstract terms such as *calories*, *basic foods* and *regulating foods*. The different utterances made over the course of the interview present us with a highly conceptual structure. As what is exteriorized through them are concepts, these utterances adopt most appropriate form for expressing them: *the argument*. Let us recall Bruner when he said that every argument is open to verification through formal and empirical tests, *although this is not always necessary, as it has been learnt within the framework of formal education*, the socially approved setting for transmitting scientific understanding.

In the case of the reasons used by *M.* things are moving in a different direction. We have no reason to say that *M.* would not have been able to reason in a similar way to her colleague, but good reasons do not seem to be the best guarantee of demonstration for her, instead she opts for *similarity to real life*. The grouping of the different foods is quite similar to *A.*'s conceptual grouping. A good example of that is that the vegetables and the rice and lentils and basic foods in general are classified together, the same is the case with the meat, fish, and sausages and chorizo etc, or the milk and dairy products, etc. A superficial analysis of

the groupings would not tell us anything special. Only through an in-depth interview does the interviewer discover that things are not as they seem. Where there was supposedly a conceptually organized classification we find a clearly pseudoconceptual grouping that is based on a story: the story of a everyday event. Things are together because they are bought together in the supermarket or because they must go together in the same space in the fridge. And this is what *M.* does: she moves down the paths that this space provides her with. Her strategy consists of constructing a story with all the ingredients that are necessary for her. After reproducing the setting (the supermarket) in which the action (shopping) occurs, she herself moves on setting as the central character. Even a tool (the trolley) is present in this curious scene of virtual reality invented by a setting as old and economic as the word.

These different forms of acting seem to correspond to participation in different types of activity. In the case of *A.* we are talking about a student who is coming towards the end of her education course and so she is accustomed to doing tasks of a formal nature, activities which give her the possibility of carrying out tasks with materials that are used outside the real and specific connections in which they normally appear.

In the second case, *M.* is a student in the first level of her literacy program and as a result the activities of everyday life prevail over the formal activities linked to the education process she has started.

Different ways of reasoning in the same individual

Up until now we have emphasized the differences that exist between the way in which both students proceed. But it is not always like that as we shall see in the following episodes in which, instead of classifying as in the previous cases, both students have to draw up a menu in the event of having guests.

Episode III

(Student. - A.)

A.:

- Well, in the morning I'd give them a glass of milk or coffee, but as there isn't any here, then it'd have to be milk, and some little cakes.

- For lunch I'd give them a chicken in sauce and potatoes, even if it is a plain ordinary chicken I'd put a little sauce on it and it'd look much better, (smiles) well, what do you expect, that the way things are. After that some fish either grilled or baked in the oven, and then for desert I'd give them the fruitbowl with some strawberries and pears.

- In the afternoon for the adults some bisuits and milk is enough, and for the children who need more then, I'd give them sandwich with chorizo, which everyone likes.

- And then for supper, a steak with eggs and a bit of cheese for whoever wants a bit more and a bit of fruit of course, but, and with all that it should be enough, and if you give them any more they'd never leave!

The interview with student M. in carrying out the third menu was the following:

Episode IV

(Interviewer. - I. Student. - M.)

M.:

- Things are a bit tight to have people round, but anyway, when I have relatives round I don't complicate things too much, the most important thing is that they don't leave hungry.

I.:

- Yeah, of course.

M.:

- Well now, breakfast, and they could have come having had breakfast, well I'd give them a glass of milk, some biscuits and little cakes, which is what I normally have at home.

- For lunch a dish with fried potatoes, that's very filling, and there are lots of us, a chicken with garlic to do something a bit special, a plate of anchovies, and some lettuce to go with it, and then some strawberries for desert.

- And for supper as they'd have had quite a lot to eat by then, some tapas of chorizo, sausages, and then some fried fish (two) and some apples for desert, and I think that should be enough.

It is interesting to note how in these episodes there are no differences in

the way they reason. Both put themselves as the principal characters of the action, a clear indication of this being the continued use of the pronoun *I*, in both cases we are given a small section of their lives, and they even reproduce the main issue guiding the domestic economy of the working class in which luxuries or a special menu is valued less than the fact of not going hungry and not spending too much money.

As we mentioned earlier, the capacity to reason with more decontextualized and formal thought does not eliminate forms of thought that occur earlier in the socio-genesis of development. Given that student *A* takes part in two types of markedly different activities, displaying competence in both, reflects two types of verbal thinking that coexist without contradictions between them to be used depending on the problem to be solved. As Tulviste would say, the old problems will continue to be solved with the same tools (Tulviste, 1987, 1991). This is not the case with the second student, for whom her lack of competence in a type of activity in the school setting makes her transfer to a stage of clearly school activity (classification task) the tools that are appropriate for another (kitchen).

These observations seem to support the Tulviste's thesis of the existence of heterogeneity of verbal thinking both in a same culture and in a same individual. If we assume that there are many activities that one can carry out in a cultural setting, and that different subjects may be more able in one activity than in another, this confirms the existence of two types of thinking that coexist in the same culture, with subjects differentiating depending on the type of activity in which they had participated most frequently. This is the case that was described in the first two episodes in which the differences in the way of thinking of *M.* and *A.* could be determined by the participation of *A.* on a setting such as the school in which priority is given to a certain way of task solving involving discussion.

In the same way, we could say that the coexistence of different forms of thought in the same individual is confirmed, owing to the possibility that we have of resolving situations with different tools and ways of thinking depending on the demands of the task, the actual activity setting, and the definition we make of the activity. As occurred in the last two episodes, depending on whether the student defined a situation as one of an everyday task or one closer to the school setting, and given the minimum ability to do so, she could use different types of verbal thinking,

different ways of solving the problem.

This perspective makes it possible for psychology to enter into a field of study that it had previously been barred from: the study of culture. Culture that will be interpreted in terms of a set of activity settings in which individuals develop. And it is precisely these settings that are responsible for the differences and equalities of ways of thinking. Settings that, on the one hand, limit the acting of the subject by giving him/her certain tools and resources and not others, and that on the other hand, is influenced by the particular uses that individuals make of these tools that the culture, the institutions and history have given them.

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