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Towards the definition of a sense barrier
in the activity theory

The article deals with the features of a "sense barrier" concept definition and the features of this concept formation in the activity theory.

Keywords: *activity theory, sense theory, sense sphere, psychological barrier, sense barrier.*

In the native psychological science the turn of the century was marked by increase of the interest in a number of methodological problems, allowing to reconsider and develop the already existing theories and concepts in connection with radical changes in consciousness of both certain scientists and the world scientific community, which were caused by social and political-economical reasons of a world and even planetary scale.

One of the psychological theories most dynamically developing in the last decades is a sense theory which was essentially transformed both in structural and categorial plan.

According to I.V. Abakumova, the thesaurus of this theory already includes such concepts "... as a personal sense, individualized sense, socialized sense, sense attitude, sense motive, the person's sense sphere, sense formation, sense interaction and many other sense containing concepts" [1, p. 10].

However it is untimely to speak about the sense theory as about a complete uniform theory which is completely formed in the native psychological science as the formation process of its categorial apparatus is still far from completion.

There is a whole range of the theories explaining sense constructs within the limits of both psychological approaches and directions and not completely psychological positions and views however including the sense and everything that is connected with it into the research orbit.

The most detailed and developed the sense problematics is presented in the activity approach in which development D.A. Leontiev distinguishes three main stages.

The first stage includes the period from the end of the 1930th to the middle of the 1970th of the XX century. At this stage A.N. Leontiev has entered into psychological use and formulated the "sense" concept (personal sense) as an explanatory concept; he has carried out its comprehensive theoretical and experimental development in a genetic, structural and functional aspect.



The second stage of the sense theory development within the limits of the activity approach was from the middle of the 1970th to the beginning of the 1980th of the XX century; it was characterized by introduction and development by a number of authors (A.G. Asmolov, B.S. Bratus, V.K. Vilyunas, E.E. Nasinovskaya, V.V. Stolin, E.V. Subbotskaya, O.K. Tikhomirov) of new kindred concepts: sense formation, sense attitude, sense construct, operational sense, etc., which marked a transition from an explanatory concept to the differentiated complex of concepts.

At last, the third stage was from the beginning of the 1980th to the present; it represents a stage of integration of these representations and emergence of classifications of sense formations (E.E. Nasinovskaya, etc.), emergence of synthetic concepts, such as "dynamic sense system" (A.G. Asmolov), "sense sphere of personality" (B.C. Bratus), concepts of sense dynamics (F.E. Vasilyuk), sense self-control (B.V. Zeigarnik, V.A. Ivannikov) [3].

Now the sense theory development has an explosive and dynamic character, however a number of the major aspects of the sense theory and sense formation remain little-studied and little-developed. One of such aspects is further development of the categorial apparatus of science and, in particular, the "sense barrier" category.

For the first time in the native psychological science the "sense barrier" term was suggested by L.S. Slavina: "... as a sense barrier we understand such a phenomenon when the child, perfectly understanding and being able to carry out that the teacher demands, in some way doesn't "accept" this demand and persistently doesn't fulfil this demand. In these cases either of pedagogical measures don't exert influence on him/her, though he/she clearly understands what they are directed on and how it is necessary to react to them" [6, p. 10].

In the work she not only suggested the formulation of this concept, but also revealed and described main types of sense barriers at interaction of the adult and the child, and also showed distinctions in the reasons of emergence of sense barriers.

L.S. Slavina has distinguished two kinds of the sense barrier. The barrier of the first kind is in relation to a certain demand. The main reason conducting to emergence of the sense barrier of the first kind is not accounting of the motives which have caused either of acts, behaviors.

The barrier of the second kind is in relation to a certain person. The reason of emergence of the sense barrier of the second kind is a reiteration of the same influences, especially when they are ineffectual. L.S. Slavina has established that the adult's persevering presentation of certain demands which the child internally doesn't "accept" or to fulfil for some reason or other, leads to that he/she ceases to pay attention to them at the best, and at worst he/she starts to disapprove them. In such cases the child retires into himself/herself, puts on "armour" which is not always easy to break by explanations and persuasions.

Analyzing a number of the facts, L.S. Slavina has come to a conclusion that the child in some cases doesn't accept the demands of adults because these demands have no original sense for him/her or may even have the different, opposite sense. In this case it is possible to note the sense barrier manifestation.



Considering sense barriers L.I. Bozhovich has noted that in this type of barriers there are simple divergences in senses when they impart either different meaning, or different personal sense to the same term, opinion, concept.

According to G.S. Frumova, the sense barrier appears when there develops a rejection of dangerous words (sense nests) which remind of any traumatic event, thus they are excluded from consciousness.

M.S. Neimark connected sense barriers with a various relation of different people to the same things. According to these authors, the general characteristic feature of any sense barrier is failure to comply with the demands which can be caused by the discrepancy of senses of the stated demand, requests, order etc. among the partners of interaction, creating an obstacle for their mutual understanding. Studying the reasons of the sense barrier emergence, M.S. Neimark noted, "... the most frequent reason of its emergence is adults' misunderstanding of true motives of the child's behavior, reaction to the result of his/her activity or attributing of the to the child the motives inappropriate to reality" [4, p. 22].

Within the limits of the activity approach there is a large number of the researches disclosing this problem. Theoretical bases of understanding of psychological barriers are in S.L. Rubenstein's works who, emphasizing the interrelation of activity and emotion, noted, "in activity there are usually critical points in which it is defined a result favorable or unfavourable for the subject, the turn or outcome of his/her activity. The person as a conscious being expects the approach of such critical points more or less adequately. When the person approaches to them there is a discharge in the person's feeling, positive or negative, [5, p. 150].

For distinguishing of the "sense barrier" concept from a number of similar concepts it is necessary to note some features of the "barrier" concept functioning in the psychological literature.

First, as many other psychological concepts (temperament, personality, activity, reflection etc.), the "barrier" concept essentially differs in the everyday and scientific-psychological practice.

Secondly, in the scientific psychology the "barrier" concept essentially differs according to substantial characteristics within various theories and schools of sciences.

Thirdly, the "barrier" concept has a universal character and concerns objective-subjective categories of the psychological theory (R.K. Shakurov).

However in the activity theory in the study of psychological barriers the emphasis is not on external, socially conditioning the person's behavior barriers, but on internal, actually generating this behavior. A considerable quantity of both theoretical and experimental studies within the limits of the activity theory was directed on disclosure of the essence of the "psychological barrier" concept, thus various authors treat this concept in different ways.

In the native science in the activity approach context the psychological barrier is considered as a "critical point", impeding the further activity development, causing certain emotional experiences and stimulating emergence of mental activity on its overcoming [2].



Thus, V.K. Vilyunas considers emotions of success-failure as a psychological barrier; N.I. Nasenko considers a condition of mental tension as a psychological barrier; L.I. Bozhovich, B.S. Bratus, G.S. Frumova consider a dominating motive as a sense barrier.

O.K. Tikhomirov points to the connection between the origin of emotional and value relations and the barrier that allows to disclose a principle of the unity of cognitive and emotional processes. He notes that the barrier creates such an internal state of the subject which defines a degree of his sensitivity to certain subjects and phenomena and defines a degree of their attractiveness, thus the attractiveness of the majority of values is in proportion to the size of an obstacle which is necessary for overcoming for their achievement, and the absence of an obstacle depreciates a subject [8].

The "barrier" concept was widely investigated in a context of the problem of volitional regulation of behavior, thus some authors (V.I. Selivanov, etc.) considered barriers as external factors determining behavior, the others: A.B. Kholmogorova, E.S. Masur, V.A. Ivannikov, considered the barrier as an internal formation impeding transfer of a kind of activity to another.

N.A. Podymov considered psychological barriers as the factors impeding activity disintegration, considering barriers as a subjective reflection of the arisen internal difficulty. From his point of view, the psychological barrier of activity is the reflected in the person's consciousness internal obstacle which is expressed in the disbalance of sense correspondence of consciousness and objective conditions and ways of activity. The specific feature of the manifestation of psychological barriers consists in the presence of the person's peculiar reaction to appearing of "critical points" (S.L. Rubenstein), obstructing the further development of activity and causing certain emotional experiences defining a favorable or unfavorable result for the subject.

The special role of the "barrier" concept is distinguished in the system-dynamic model of the activity developed by R.K. Shakurov. He suggests to consider the relations of the person with the world as "an active form of the interaction directed, first of all, on overcoming of various barriers, arising on a way of satisfaction of his/her needs" [9, p. 5]. He considers the barrier as a subjective-objective category.

In his fundamental article "The Barrier as a Category and Its Role in Activity" R.K. Shakurov made an attempt to overcome a gap between external and internal psychological barriers. In his opinion, the concepts "barrier" and "overcoming" are connected with ontogenesis of all mental structures and the barrier carries out an actualizing and dynamicizing role in the person's activity. Considering a number of functional features of barriers, as the main he distinguishes the function of mobilization of internal resources of the individual for overcoming of the environment resistance at the process of satisfaction of his/her needs, "... something that is an insuperable barrier for the weak, isn't the same for the strong. External barriers are inseparably linked with internal; they produce them" [9, p. 6].

Disclosing the essence of psychological barriers, R.K. Shakurov starts with researches of the person's relationship with the world around. According to the author, the main function of mentality is satisfaction of needs of the individual, providing his/



her survival in changing conditions, what in turn is reached by means of an instrumental function (overcoming), which essence, according to the scientist, “consists in overcoming of the environment resistance to the process of the subject’s satisfaction of needs” [9, p. 9].

In this regard R.H.Shakurov suggests to treat the psychological barrier as the external and internal obstacle resisting to manifestations of activity of the subject, his activity.

R.K. Shakurov reveals the essence of psychological barriers from the positions of a functional approach. In his understanding the barrier is a psychological phenomenon (presented in the form of feelings, experiences, images, concepts, etc.) in which there are reflected the object’s properties to limit manifestations of the person’s life activity, impeding satisfaction of his/her needs.

In the analysis of mechanisms of ontogenesis of barriers R.K. Shakurov differentiates them into value (primary) and operational (secondary). He emphasizes an indissoluble communication of the genesis of emotional and value relations with barriers, first of all, value barriers – an absence or shortage of objects of need, with their deficiency. “The barrier creates such an internal state of the subject which defines a degree of his/her sensitivity to certain objects, their attractiveness. Objectively the object may be important as much as it possible, but in presence of the unimpeded access we cool down... Such a thing is with supreme values; their attractiveness is proportional to the size of obstacles impeding satisfaction of the corresponding need” [9].

Any need develops into an action under one condition – if the object satisfying it is separated from the individual by any barrier, R.K. Shakurov considers. In his opinion, barriers play a decisive role in activity construction and dynamization. Valuable barriers actualize a need; they bring it into an active condition. As a result of interaction of the actualized needs with the secondary barriers there are born all other summands of their activity interrelation: expectations, motives, tasks, actions, result. Barriers provide the activity psychogenesis. The sense and purpose of the last consists in overcoming of the barriers impeding satisfaction of needs.

R.K. Shakurov writes on the “barrier” concept definition in a broad sense, “The barrier is always an element of any system, it cooperates with other its elements. The barrier is not simply an object. As a barrier there act not only an existence, but also an absence of an element of the system... In the general form it is possible to define that the “barrier” concept is a relation between system elements which limits freedom of any of them” [9, p. 6].

Considering the problem of barriers through the “attitude” concept, A.G. Asmolov believes (after A.N. Leontiev) that the motive, purpose and conditions of activity implementation cause such units of activity as a special activity, action and operation.

A.G. Asmolov distinguishes four levels of attitude regulation of the person’s activity, therefore, four attitude barriers:

- 1) sense barriers;
- 2) goal barriers;



- 3) operational barriers;
- 4) psychophysiological barriers.

Designating the sense and operational barriers as significant, the author gives their psychological characteristic and lays emphasis on a universal character of the barrier; they are shown at all levels of activity organization, from psychophysiological to social and psychological.

In the research of A.A. Solopov there was undertaken an attempt of distinguishing of “a communicative and sense barrier” concept from “a sense barrier” and “a communicative barrier” concepts, however in this analysis the sense barrier was mainly considered from the social and psychological point of view, without serious analysis from the point of view of such criteria as emergence conditions, structure and functions, regularities of formation and transformation, that points to the complexity and insufficient development of “the sense barrier” concept, both in a general-theoretical and in an experimental plan.

The analysis of the psychological literatures showed that within the limits of the activity theory there is a significant amount of the theoretical and experimental studies promoting the disclosure of the essence of “the sense barrier” concept, however it is impossible to consider the matter completely studied.

A large number of the theoretical and empirical works being based on the “barrier” concept in a varying aspect allows to conclude that the “barrier” concept introduction into psychology is motivated by requirements of the modern science; it carries a considerable heuristic potential.

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