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On the implications of Vygotskian concepts for second language teaching

Behrooz Azabdaftari^{a,*}

^a *Islamic Azad University, Tabriz Branch, Iran*

ABSTRACT

This paper represents an attempt to search for the implications of Vygotsky's approach to 'the genesis of mind' for second language acquisition (SLA). In so doing, the present author has adopted first a retrospective view - what has already gone in the field of foreign language instruction, and a prospective view - what is contingent on the current speculations on SLA while drawing on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (SCT) bearing on the methodology of L2 instruction. Hence, the paper consists of two major parts: the first part casts a rapid glance at the theories and practices of L2 teaching which were in vogue in the past. The second part focuses on the implications that Vygotsky's SCT holds for SLA and, as a sequel, to the training and education of L2 teachers. Vygotsky's approach to the genesis of mind, indeed, entrusts the educationists with a grave task regarding the amelioration of social systems of the community in general, and improving second language methodology, in particular. After all, the shaping of man's mind is an indication of the ways the society has historically and culturally developed.

Keywords: sociocultural variables; second language acquisition; zone of proximal development (ZPD); a whole-language perspective; classroom interaction

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* Corresponding author: Islamic Azad University – Tabriz Branch, Iran
Email address: dr_azabdaftari@yahoo.com

Introduction

Having committed myself onto the paper the main purpose of the present study in the form of the abstract, I cannot help being daunted by the depth and scope of the task of pursuing the resounding ripple effects of sociocultural theory (SCT) on numerous perspectives on second language acquisition (SLA). The gravity of the task lies in the fact that for any research worker intending to speculate about the future trend of SLA, he/she cannot turn a blind eye to what has gone in the years, decades, and even centuries before. This paper intends to treat the topic in two main parts: a) the background literature on second language teaching, and b) the contributions of Vygotskian ideas to SLA. However, in the first part, we, by no means, are to weigh up the form, the type, the source, or the scope of the theories of second language instruction offered as of date. It is an enormous task to try to account for the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the theories involved, many of which are said to be oppositional. The reader is well advised to refer to Long's (1993) *Assessment strategies for second language acquisition theories*. In this paper, the author, Michael Long, while addressing the SLA theory proliferation, has posited the view that there are between 40-60 theories, some of them carrying the captions such as hypotheses, models, frameworks, perspectives, and approaches which are often used in free variation in much of the literature, leaving the reader scratching his head as to the distinctive borderlines setting them conceptually apart. The following quotation from the author (1993, pp. 225-6) will drive home the point aptly:

SLA theories are as diverse as they are numerous: They differ in *form*, with causal-process (Gardner, 1985) and set-of-laws (Spolsky, 1989) prevalent, and are of three basic *types* nativist, both specific (White, 1989) and general (Wolfe-Quintero (1992), environmentalist (Schumann, 1986), and interactionist (Pienemann & Johnson, 1987). They differ in *source*, drawing upon works in linguistics , sociolinguistics psychology, psycholinguistics, and combinations thereof..... They also differ in *scope*, the range of data they attempt to explain. Some address naturalistic SLA only (Schumann, 1978), some instructed only (Ellis, 1990), some both, some children....., some adults some specific linguistic systems, such as phonology or lexicon

Interestingly enough, with regard to the foregoing quotation, we find no clue whatsoever of Vygotsky's sociocultural views, for example 'whole-language teaching', 'the zone of proximal development (ZPD) as a basis for instruction', 'scaffolded learning', 'writing as a social process', 'a Vygotskian interpretation of reading recovery' (Moll, 1999, 206-221) regarding SLA, mainly because Vygotsky lived his short span of life (he died in 1934) when he was 38 years old, leaving behind his legacy of lofty views and ideas in many disciplines such as psychology, language, literature, art, cognitive science, literacy, child language acquisition, mental pathology – the grist for the future researchers' mills.

PART ONE

Retracing the steps of research workers in applied linguistics during the last 60 decades, one cannot help but notice some general trends of SLA development (Azabdaftari, 2000). After the Second World War, structuralism, going with the tide of scientific enthusiasm of the era, was hoisted to the pedestal of worship only to be brought down by the contestant theory of Chomsky's transformational generative grammar. Structuralism was harshly criticized for the chinks in its theoretical armor; the main liability was its eschewing meaning in language study because it was mental, hence unavailable for direct observation. Structural linguistics developed in part as a reaction to the traditional grammar. Traditional approaches to the study of grammar had

linked the study of language to philosophy. Grammar was considered as a branch of logic, and grammatical categories of Indo-European languages were thought to represent ideal categories (Richards & Rogers, 1991). A reaction against traditional grammar was prompted by a newly awakened interest in non-European languages, collecting examples of what speakers said, and analyzing them according to different levels of structural organization rather than according to Latin categories. Thus, language was viewed as a system of structurally relevant elements for the encoding of meaning, the elements being phonemes, morphemes, words, structures, and sentence types. Learning a language was assumed to entail mastering the building blocks of the language, and in pedagogy, the second language learning was equated with learning structural differences between the learner's L1 and L2 as the misconception was that similar items can easily transfer from L1 to L2. This position is evidenced with the following quotation by Banathy, Trager and Waddle (1966, p. 37):

The change that has to take place in the language behavior of a foreign language student can be equated with the differences between the student's native language culture and those of the target language and culture What the student has to learn equals the sum of differences established by contrastive analysis.

The structural linguistics offered the foundation for audiolingual method (ALM) of second language teaching in the decades following up to 1959, the year when Chomsky published his famous critical article *A review of B. F. Skinner's verbal behavior*, heralding a revolution in linguistics in its true sense. In the meantime, the psychology in vogue which was applied in tandem with linguistics was behaviorism. It was going to establish itself as a separate science and to separate itself from philosophy and physiology. Behaviorists in psychology rejected all forms of introspection and went so far as denying the existence of conscious thought as being unobservable. The behaviorist theory of language learning later grew into stimulus-response (S-R) theories of learning, in which the similarity of animals and human learning was compared. Thorndike, for example, maintained the learning in animal and simple learning in humans is a matter of establishing connection between stimulus and its response through trial and error.

The pre-eminence of these mechanistic theories continued until the emergence of cognitive psychology in the 1950s and 1960s, which was preceded by cognitive theories of learning developed in Germany around 1912 by Wertheimer and by Kohler. With structural linguistics and behavioral psychology in defensive position, due to the collapse of their theoretical underpinnings, transformational-generative grammar together with its supportive partner (i.e., code learning psychology) gathered momentum, making a dent on the ensuing linguistic and psychological theorizing, in some cases blazing a trail in language study and language education. Cognitive psychologists began increasingly to question the stimulus-response learning theories upon which teaching techniques rested (Chastain, 1988). Now, they were ready to consider other models such as neurophysical, information-processing, interactional models, for example, scaffolding learning, Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), whole-language learning (Goodman & Goodman, 1999), Activity Theory (Leontiev, 1978,1982), and cultural-historical schooling (Elkonin,1980; Davydov,1977, 1982; Lompscher, 1984, 1985).

The new developments became possible when the shackles of behavioristic thinking in psychology and the structuralist's conception of language were taken off and the innovative view of transformational generative linguistics gave rise to rethinking of language as consisting of both form and meaning, to defining language in terms of rules, to making a distinction between deep structures carrying core rules (common to all natural languages) and surface structures, shaped by periphery rules, relative to each individual language, and indicative of sociohistorical exigencies of the speech community in which it is used. Generative theorists, the contestant of behavioristic approach to language acquisition, were asking deeper questions that probed beneath and beyond scientific investigation. The nativist approach to child language study, an offshoot of

generative theories, led by Chomsky (1968), vehemently supported the view that language acquisition is innately programmed, that we are born with a built-in syllabus that predisposes us to language acquisition, resulting in the construction of an internalized system of language. The nativist approach to language study derives its force from several sources: a) language is *species specific*, biologically determined, b) the child's mastery of native language in a short time despite the paucity of input, and c) four properties of language acquisition device (LAD): 1) the ability to distinguish speech sounds from other sounds in the environment, 2) the ability to organize linguistic events into various classes which can be later refined, 3) the knowledge that only a certain kind of linguistic system is possible, and 4) the ability to engage in a constant evaluation of the developing linguistic system so as to construct the simplest possible system out of the linguistic data that are encountered (McNeil, 1966). With the nativist approach to language study, aspects of meaning – abstractness and creativity – were accounted for more adequately.

Studies of child language acquisition, following the nativist's tradition of inquiry and preceding the communicative approach to second language teaching (Azabdaftari, 1998, 2007), focused on the Universal Grammar (UG), positing that all human beings are genetically equipped with universal linguistic rules. The Universal Grammar, composed of different kinds of universals (Chomsky, 1965), attempted to discover what it is that all children, regardless of their native languages, bring to the task of learning an L2. More specifically, how it is possible that they follow the same route while acquiring a second language. As an example of the nativist's claim regarding a genetically programmed universal grammar, the following two sentences by Chomsky are noteworthy (Ellis, 1980):

- 1) We gave the book *to the girl*.
- 2) We explained the answer *to the girl*.

The two sentences given above share the same surface structure: PRO+VERB+NP+PRE+NP, yet in (1) *to the girl* is indirect object, and in (2) *to the girl* is a prepositional phrase. The question is that how the child finds out that 'give' takes an indirect object, and 'explain' is followed by a prepositional phrase, because the child has never been heard to say: *We explained the girl the problem, though he has been heard to say: 'We gave the girl the book'. The nativists argue that there must be some innate principle that governs the child's language acquisition behavior. The nativist rationalistic approach to language acquisition and the Universal Grammar did not enjoy its celebrity for long. Chomsky's theory of transformational grammar was first attacked by insiders, Chomsky's own students, called 'generative semanticists', who called into question Chomsky's notion of idealized speech community, which discarded contextual meanings of utterances in verbal interactions. While Chomsky, in his attempt to find out specific linguistic properties of the brain, sought the propositional meanings of sentences, unaltered by contextual effects, generative semanticists claimed that any attempt to define meaning without considering the context of language use is doomed to failure. Generative semanticists attached the tribute of psychological reality to utterance/communicative meaning rather than to sentence/propositional meaning, the latter being upheld by Chomskyan school of thought.

The new shift in the interest of SLA studies, indeed, is reminiscent of the form-function discussion in Hallidayan Systemic Grammar and the Discourse Theory. The Discourse Theory, a contestant to both structuralist and transformational grammarians' taxonomic linguistics, advanced a counter claim to the innateness of the principles of language acquisition, arguing that the development of formal linguistic devices for realizing basic language functions grow out of interpersonal uses to which the language is put (Hatch, 1978). To put it simply, a) the language structures are the reflection of the functions they (structures) serve, and b) linguistic universals, as seen by Halliday (1978b), are a manifestation of the types of use we make in face-to-face

interaction. In this outlook, what is universal is not linguistic; rather, it is communicative, i.e. people in natural communication follow certain communicative universals. For example, greeting elicits a response (a universal routine); the response, however, can be in the form of greeting back verbally, bowing, raising the hat, nodding the head, waving the hand, giving a smile, etc. In interactionist approach to language acquisition, the innate property of language learning principles is eclipsed by the significance of input in shaping the verbal behavior of L2 learner. An interesting fact, pointed out by discoursists in SLA, is the fact that input is not determined solely by the speaker; it is also determined by the learner himself (Ellis, 1986). The feedback the learner provides affects the nature of subsequent input by the teacher/speaker. This dialogic nature of interaction in SLA, which is jointly created by the teacher and the student learner, teacher and student group, student and student, is affected by the classroom constraints, and turns the dialogue into an instructive endeavor, reeking of the natural communication among the individuals in the society. Hatch proposes that "We need to look at discourse in order to study how language learning evolves out of strategies used [by interlocutors] to carry on conversation" (as cited in Ellis, 1986, p. 138), a view that is expressed differently by Herder (1980, p. 168); namely, "extending one's action's potential inevitably extends one's language". The cornerstone of Hatch's (1980) argument regarding the process of second language acquisition is negotiation of input – what speakers do in order to achieve successful communication. In first language acquisition, where the rate of development is concerned, researchers have been able to demonstrate that some discourse features have been facilitative (Cross, 1978). Drawing on child language acquisition, some SLA researchers (Selinker 1972; Corder, 1976, 1978a), addressing the development of interlanguage, have expressed the view that some status should be given to the deviant utterances of the learners as institutional/transitional competence. Carl James (1981) argues that attempt should be made to naturalize the L2 learner's utterances in face-to-face conversations by manipulating certain model sentences through repetition, substitution, conversion – the process which is seen in mother-child interaction, and which is termed 'adaptability' by Hymes (1977) and 'elaboration' by Corder (1975). The impact of negotiated input in Discourse Theory, however, remains to be substantiated – how data made available through discourse are sifted and internalized by the learner.

To conclude the first part of this paper, I may recapitulate what I have said so far, SLA has spawned a plethora of theories, models, frameworks, perspectives in its attempt to account for *what* is that is acquired, *how* it is acquired, and *when* it is acquired, and *why* it is acquired (Rutherford, 1982).

It has been observed that a theory comes into prominence during its heyday, only to be pulled down from the pedestal of worship and replaced by the contestant theory. Structuralism, once touted as a scientific approach to L2 instruction was harshly criticized by Chomsky, who no sooner had offered his revolutionary linguistic ideas regarding homogeneity of speech community and idealization of language uses (i.e. one-to-one relationship between form and meaning) than was ostracized by his students – generative semanticists, who highlighted the multiple relationships between form and meaning. Here we may sound a warning note to the effect that a) Chomsky has never directly addressed the questions besetting SLA, and b) Chomsky's research represents an attempt to learn about the working of man's brain, which is species specific. Hence, all that is external to the mental processing of man's mind remains beyond Chomsky's concern. Those who accuse Chomsky of overlooking contextual bearings in language studies are barking up the wrong tree. It is in Vygotsky's studies regarding the genesis of mind that we are wised up to the fact that man's mind itself is the by-product of social, cultural, and historical mechanisms.

Language teachers, having been disillusioned with linguistic contributions to language pedagogy after the setbacks suffered by structuralism and transformational grammar, became too wary of putting their eggs in the linguist's basket, and turned to psychology for pedagogical insights and

came up with some innovative ideas bearing the names such as Community Language Learning (CLL)/Counselling-Learning (Charles Curran, 1972), Suggestopedia (Georgi Lozanov, 1979), The Silent Way (Caleb Gattegno, 1972), Total Physical Response (James Asher, 1977), The Natural Approach (Stephen Krashen, 1982, 1997), all of which are labeled by H. D. Brown (2001, p. 24) as 'designer methods of the spirited 1970s'. It is interesting to note that in the welter of surging body of approaches to second language instruction, the sociocultural approach to second language teaching remains to emerge and nail its colors to the mast in SLA. This final point serves as a link to the second part of our discussion – the challenges and implications of sociocultural theory to second language pedagogy.

PART TWO

As an introduction to this part of the paper, researchers in their attempt to answer '*how* does the learner work on samples of the input data?', and '*why* does SLA take place?' have followed two main trends: i) theory-then-research, and ii) research-then-theory. As noted by Ellis (1986, p. 290), some researchers view SLA amenable to natural science methods of inquiry, which fits in well with the first trend: theory-then-research. This approach is said to constitute a dogmatic thinking. There is also another group of researchers who opt for selecting a phenomenon, collecting data, looking for systematic patterns, ending up with constructing a theory. The second trend does not lead to a comprehensive theory; it provides only some insights into the phenomenon under study. In SLA the second trend is much in vogue. In the meantime, we should bear in mind that there is need for both approaches in SLA, and that no single theory of SLA has the monopoly of the truth regarding language acquisition. That said, we now address the challenges that the sociocultural theory (SCT) has got to meet and the implications that it has to offer for second language pedagogy.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory represents an attempt to investigate the development of higher forms of man's mental behavior. Very briefly, we may say that human psychological functions are mediated by social practices and cultural artifacts (i.e. tools and signs) with language being the most important sign system. Previous research (by both innatists and behaviorists) on human mental functioning assumed a unidirectional relationship between man and nature. That is, humans are the way they are either because of their biological make-up or because of the environment in which they live. In the former, the directionality flows from the brain to the world, and in the latter from the world to the brain (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This dialectical approach, a characteristic feature of sociocultural theory, proposes a bidirectionality in which the elementary functions of the brain, through the culturally rooted mediation of artifacts, both physical tools and psychological/symbolic tools, are transformed and come under the control of the person. The person, in turn, works changes in the environment and creates his world in proportion to the sociocultural conditions in which he/she has thrived.

Before we set ro single out the various implied contributions of Vygotsky or the Vygotskian legacy to second language acquisition, it is noteworthy to note that SCT is, in part, a psychological theory which assigns communicative activities a central role in man's mental development and functioning. Vygotsky (1981, p. 163) has remarked that social relations or relations among people generally underlie all higher functions and their relationships. In Vygotsky's view, the linguistic sign first has an indicative function in the early stages of ontogenesis (individual development), and then takes on a symbolic function. The indicative function of the linguistic sign directs the child's attention to the object; the symbolic function helps him to abstract features of objects and generalize them into culturally determined concepts, hence relating to the world on a conceptual basis. Prior to developing a conceptually-based

mental system, the child's knowledge is grounded in his primary empirical experiences. Once the child begins to think conceptually, his mental activity/rational thought becomes voluntary (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 17).

Salient Features of Vygotskian Perspectives on SLA

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Psychologists have realized that there are two types of metacognition present in human mental activity: those concerned with conscious reflection of one's cognitive abilities, and those concerned with self-regularity mechanisms employed while solving a problem. As Wertsch (1985) has pointed out, the ability to engage in one type of metacognition does not imply the ability to engage in the other. The second type of activity, also labeled 'strategic activity', can be carried out by the individual alone or in collaboration with other individuals. According to Vygotskian theory, the origin of self-regulation processes lies in social interaction. The transition from inter- to intrapsychological functioning takes place in the zone of proximal development, which is the difference between the child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). The concept of zone of proximal development links processes of instruction and acquisition in a single site. Hence, natural approach to language acquisition and methods of language instruction are theoretically incommensurable, and Vygotsky's ZPD (exponent of natural approach to language acquisition) and Krashen's *i+1* (oriented to language instruction), despite a superficial similarity, are different conceptually. Although these two concepts are oriented towards the future; however, in *i+1*, the movement towards the future is certain and predictable, following a fixed route; in the ZPD, the movement towards the future is uncertain, open, and mediated (Dunn & Lantolf, 1998; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 1998). In Vygotsky's view, the only 'good learning' is that which is in advance of development, the view that is in opposition to Piaget's view, in which maturation of cognitive abilities is the prerequisite for language development. The work of SLA researchers on cognitive processes (Ochs, 1986; Watson-Gegeo, 1990; Watson-Gegeo & Gegeo, 1999) is supported and informed by advances in the lines of theoretical and cognitive anthropology. NeoVygotskian scholars (Rogoff, 1990; Wertsch, 1985) have built on Vygotsky's (1962, 1978) argument that children develop higher order cognitive functions, including linguistic skills, through interaction with adults and more knowledgeable peers. Nelson (1996), drawing on schema/script theory (Schank & Abelson, 1977), argue that children's knowledge of language and world develops in the everyday routines in which they participate and from which they construct Mental Event Representations (MERs), that is thematic and script-like representations of behavior and events, some individually and others socially shared. In common with LS researchers, Nelson is concerned with how children acquire language and how language itself structures other kinds of cognitive development. Nelson agrees with Gibson's (1986) argument – an aspect of his 'ecological realist approach,' grounded in research on cognition in early infancy – that infants' perceptual, conceptual, and enactive systems are not simply innate, but *tuned* through experience to the sociocultural world in which they live (Doughty & Long, 2005).

Unit of Analysis

Sociocultural theory clearly rejects the notion that thinking and speaking are one and the same. It also rejects the communicative view of language (see Carruthers & Boucher, 1998), which holds that thinking and speaking are completely independent phenomena, with speaking serving only as a means of transmitting already formed thoughts. Sociocultural theory argues that while separate, thinking and speaking are tightly interrelated in a dialectic unity in which publicly derived speech completes privately initiated thought (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006), a viewpoint that provides the cornerstone for recent work in mainstream cognitive science. Thus, thought cannot be explained without taking account of how it is made manifest through linguistic means, and linguistic activities, in turn, cannot be understood without 'seeing them as manifestations of thought (Bakhurst, 1991, cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2006, p. 7). Indeed, this view reflects Vygotsky's (1973) view regarding the thought and word relationship which is given at the top of chapter 7: "I have forgotten the word I intended to say, and my thought, unembodied, returns to the realm of shadows." (p. 119) Accordingly, to break the dialectical unity between speech and thought is to forgo any possibility of understanding human capacity, as the explanation of water's capacity to extinguish fire will make little sense if oxygen and hydrogen are analyzed separately. According to Vygotsky (1962), the unit of analysis should be of dialectical nature, embodying thought and language. Vygotsky proposed the *word* as a unit of analysis because in the word, the meaning, the central component of thought, and linguistic form are united. Vygotsky (1962) made a distinction between the lexical/ conventional/referential meaning of a word and its *sense*/personal/contextual/pragmatic/inferential meaning. Regarding the question which one of these two meanings has, the psychological reality, i.e., the Vygotskian perspective, like interactionists and discourse analysts, tilts in favor of the second type of meaning, i.e. contextually-based meaning as Vygotsky believes it is in a word's sense that *the microcosm of consciousness is to be discovered*. The conventional meaning of the word, as a behavioral habit, does not ring a bell in the traditional search for understanding mental processes. The particular way in which people deploy words leads us to the intentions of the speaker/writer.

Activity Theory

Vygotsky is credited with the idea that human behavior results from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity. Mind, according to Luria (1973, 1976, a close colleague of Vygotsky's, is not the activity of biologically given brain; it is a functional system formed by the cultural artifacts, the most important one being language (a symbolic tool). Vygotsky argued that if psychology was to understand these functional systems, it had to understand the formation of the activity (i.e. its *history*), and not its *structure*. This perspective has invoked changes in the speculations of SLA researchers regarding task-based language teaching; namely, the same language learning activity by L2 learners can be realized through different motives. For example, the second language teacher may get his students to do a certain grammar exercise in an attempt to introduce them to the working of the target language system, while the students in the class, motivated by their needs, are after, say, gaining admission to a university program. One seemingly single language learning activity, shared by the teacher and his students, is carried out by different motives and goals being in conflict with each other. It is through the Vygotskian Activity Theory, with Leontiev (1978) carrying the torch, that the SLA teachers and ethnolinguists have wised up to the subtleties of the concept of activity and have seen it proper to revise the methods of task-based teaching (see Wertsch, Minick, & Arns, 1984). Lantolf (2000) argues that activities do not unfold smoothly; what begins as an activity can end up as another activity in the course of unfolding. Ellis (2003) believes that the same task results in different kinds of activities when performed by different learners and, also, that it can result in different activities when performed by the same learners at different times. This is because whenever individuals perform a task, they 'construct' the activity in terms of their motives and

goals, which can vary. Donato (2000, p. 44), in the same vein, has derived the following regarding task-based teaching:

- a) Tasks are not generalizable because activities vary according to participants and circumstances.
- b) Tasks do not manipulate learners to act in certain ways because participants invest their own goals, actions, cultural background, and beliefs into tasks and transform them.
- c) A seemingly irrelevant, trivial task can, in fact, supply important forms of mediation, helping students to gain control over language and task procedure.
- d) Teachers need to focus less on task outcomes and more on students' orientation and multiple goals during the conduct of classroom tasks.

In the light of foregoing discussion, teachers have to realize that they need to ascertain what motives learners bring to a task in order to understand the interactions that occur when the tasks are performed. Ellis (2003, p. 184) strikes the same note when he posits the view that much of the task-based teaching research that has taken place to date is seriously at fault. It is generally held that classroom tasks should be structured in such a way that they pose an appropriate challenge by requiring learners to perform functions and use language that enable them to dynamically construct ZPDs (Ellis, 2003, p. 179). To say it differently, from SCT perspective, it is not tasks themselves that create the context for learning, but rather the way the participants carry out the task. As such, the task is simply a tool that can be used by the participants for the teacher to identify where assistance can be profitably provided in order to enable appropriate ZPDs to be created.

My own contention is that language teaching tasks should serve as a means to relieve the language learner of attending consciously to language forms and help him focus on the ways of conducting natural verbal interactions with whoever has the invested interest in the performance of the task at hand. The unitary concept of activity challenges the compartmentalization of social and psychological aspects of language learning. The dividing wall between language and mind in previous schools of psychology disappears in favor of paradigm which allows these to negotiate (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). To put it in other words, individual *versus* society dichotomy is replaced by individual *in* society. This position of Vygotsky's regarding the interrelationship between society and mind is also visible in Vygotsky's belief in the fusion of *content* and *form* when he discusses the aesthetic value of artistic creation in his famous book *The Psychology of Art* (1971). As further evidence to the integrity of Vygotsky's ideas, he disputes the distinction made between the surface performance and underlying competence in social interactions (Mitchell & Myles, 2004). In SCT, knowledge is use, and use creates knowledge. In this view of learning, then, the distinction between 'use' of the L2 and 'knowledge' of the L2 becomes blurred (Ellis, 2003, p. 176). As such, the various terminologies in SLA literature such as inductive/bottom-up approach versus deductive/top-down approach, linguistic competence versus communicative competence, language usage versus language uses, reference rules versus expression rules and so on turn out strange bed fellows in the whole-language view which is the trademark of Vygotskian approach to second language teaching.

Going deeper into the Vygotskian tradition of language instruction, we realize that SCT replaces independent measures of the *accumulation* of knowledge, dominated in cognitive approaches, with an orientation toward *participation* metaphor for learning. The adoption of participation as the prevailing metaphor for learning defies the distinction between cognition and affect, brings social

factors to the fore, and thus deals with an incomparable wider range of possibly relevant aspects of second language acquisition (Donato, 2000).

Collaborative models versus message models of communication

Underling the construct of L2 input and output in modified interaction is the 'message model of communication' which presumes that the goal of communicative language use is successful sending and receiving of linguistics tokens. Dunn and Lantolf (1998) argue that this model is based on the 'conduit metaphor', which presumes that ideas are objects, language is a container, and communication is sending and receiving the exact intended message. In these primitive speculations on production and reception of language, the processes are seen as mirror-image processes in which the speaker's message, as acoustic phenomenon, is carried over to the hearer and decoded as a replica of the speaker's message. According to Sayavaara (1985), this view involves a serious defect. Both the production and the perception of language are creative. The communication between two interlocutors is based only partially on linguistic rules; it is also based on the principles of negotiation of meaning in verbal interaction. As a result, theoretical linguistic model cannot be sufficient for the description of second language speech processing. The linguist's description of the linguistic system functioning in such an interactive process cannot catch the creative aspect, and the rules that are made by participants. The speaker's meaning does not yield to codification because such meaning depends on context, and contexts of language uses are indefinite. In other words, language behavior most often defies linguistic rules; it has its own territory beyond the confines of linguistic sovereignty. Sajavaara (1985, p. 89), also, strikes the same note where he says linguists, in their description of verbal codes, have overlooked: a) the dynamism of the contexts in which the language is used for communication, b) the identities, histories, and systems of beliefs, and c) the requisites of whole-language used for communicative purposes (Sajavaara & Lehtonen, 1979, 1980). It is interesting to note that several decades ago Vygotsky sounded the toll of demise for such a perspective by bringing to light the 'dialogic' nature of verbal interaction.

While teaching approaches informed by cognitive and mentalist theories to the effect that language learners can be understood without taking into account their active and purposeful agency, Second Language Teaching (SLT) highlights the fact that no account of experimental or instructional manipulation can deflect 'the overpowering and transformative agency' embodied in the learner (Donato, 2000). Second language learners come to the classroom with different personal histories, replete with values, assumptions, beliefs, rights, duties, and obligations. This depiction of the learner rejects the picture of an isolated one who is dissociated from the wider cultural institutes and historical conditions within which he has thrived. In SCT, specifically in ZPD, scaffolding is seen as feature of a more general characteristic of 'dialogic discourse contingency'. This refers, according to Ellis (2003), to the way in which one utterance is connected to another to produce coherence. Van Lier (1991, p. 15) interprets '*contingency*' as an essential ingredient making the transformation of social processing into cognitive processing possible. Drawing on this view, Ellis (2003, p. 182) observes that contingency constitutes an important condition for learning through social interaction, and that scaffolding serves as one of the chief means of achieving it with low proficiency learners.

Motivated by such a perspective, researchers in the field have explored different aspects of classroom discourse and how it can contribute to the development of second language learning. For instance, Walsh (2002) has examined the ways in which teachers, through their choice of language forms, motivate or demotivate students' participation in face-to-face classroom communication. Seedhouse (1979) has observed the relationship between pedagogy and

interaction by analyzing numerous extracts from second language lessons and has proposed that it would be preferable for pedagogical recommendations to work in harmony with the interactional organization in the L2 classroom rather than in opposition to it. Murphey (2001) placed conversational shadowing in second language classroom within the Vygotskian sociocultural theory, arguing that interactive conversational shadowing gives rise to the type of conversational adjustments and negotiations that are thought to positively affect language acquisition, the view that reeks of 'reduced register', characterizing motherese/caretaker speech, foreigner talk, interlanguage, pidgin, creole ... , in all of which, some structural and lexical modifications take place in order to make the communication hold on.

In line with child's first language acquisition, the L2 learner's deviations from target language norms, i.e. ungrammaticality and pragmatic and lexical failures, from the sociocultural perspective, are not considered as flaws or signs of imperfect learning, but ways in which learners attempt to establish new identities and gain self-regulation through linguistic means. In SCT, learners' errors are not treated as signs of failure [the belief that was held by behaviorists, nor as signs of success, as Corder (1967) maintained], rather they represent the student's attempts to gain the freedom to create messages (Dunn & Lantof, 1998, p. 427). Regarding the relative effects of different types of negative feedback, Carroll and Swain (1993) have observed that the effectiveness of negative feedback depends, to a large extent, on the type of negative feedback. More recently, some researchers have taken a different stance on the issue of feedback in L2 learning by looking at the question from the perspective of sociocultural theory of learning. Aljaafreh and Lantof (1994), for example, argue that the focus of corrective feedback should be more on the social relationship involved in the context of interaction. That is to say, error correction is considered as a social activity involving joint participation and meaningful transactions between learner and the teacher.

Conclusion

Since 1980s, following proliferation of child first language acquisition in 1970s, the communicative approach to L2 teaching has been in vogue in progressive school settings. As decades went by, a new perspective of L2 instruction tipped the scale at a theory of second language instruction which is informed by Vygotsky's ideas, heralding in radical changes in our accustomed thinking about L2 instruction. Traditionally, L2 learners are generally assigned texts to read, topics to write on, grammar exercises to do, disconnected sentences to translate from L2 to L1 or vice versa, and tests to take at the end of the course. All these students' activities take place under the guidance of the teacher, a central figure, who orchestrates learning activities. This macrodescription of the classroom teaching-learning activities, if not true in some developed countries, concords well with most of the English language teaching classes in the school settings in developing countries including Iran. In these classes connected discourse occurs so rarely that observation barely detects any trace of achievement and hardly can one see any acceptable image of serious interactive teaching even in more effective classrooms. Gallimore and Tharp (1996, p. 175) argue that "if we are to build a theory of teaching, evidence must come from elsewhere than schools". They believe the most effective teaching occurs in other settings of socialization, from child rearing to employee-training programs. From these teaching-learning interactions in non-schooled settings, teachers can derive principles of effective L2 teaching. Such a set of principles, according to the authors, will constitute an integrated Vygotskian theory of education. It is generally held that today, on the whole, contemporary teaching research is atheoretical (Good & Weinstein, 1986). A theory of education must account for and predict how teaching can be informed to make possible the application of Vygotskian perspectives in the field of L2 teaching. A word of caution: interactive teaching cannot be implemented unless the educational system and formal schooling undergo radical administrative changes. The fact is that we teachers of second

language are aware of the theories, principles and methods of L2 teaching but in practice these are given short shrift because social and cultural constraints obstruct the application of progressive educational ideas. It will take rather some long time for the Vygotskian sociocultural theory to make its way to second language teaching classes in developing countries. To do justice to the topic, SLA is indebted to SCT because this theory has generated viable viewpoints and has helped us to think differently about the process of acquiring and using L2.

Vygotsky sounded the clarion call to action at the beginning of the 20th century and we now on the verge of a new millennium hear the resonance of the call in some of the second languages classes, but still there are many more L2 classes that need to toe the mark and act up to the Vygotskian educational principles. This is by no means to claim that this theory is the panacea for all the problems in language teaching. Certainly, there is room for much research in second language instruction. Research in SLA will fizzle once we have the naïve belief that we have sorted out all the problems besetting SLA and have the cure at our finger's tip. Lantolf (2002, p. 113) believes that "four areas are important in SCT and require more explorations when applied in SLA: (1) the function language plays in SLA, (2) the appropriation and use of gestures in an L2, (3) the effectiveness of peer mediation on learning, and (4) activity theory."

Let's keep our ears to the ground for the genuine effects of SCT on SLA. The studies conducted so far in this line are promising, indicating that we are on the right tack. Or is it a will-o'-the-wisp?

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Behrooz Azabdaftari is a professor of English language at Islamic Azad University of Tabriz, Iran and an emeritus professor of Tabriz University. For the past 40 years, he has taught graduate courses in the above universities as well as in Azerbaijan University of Teacher Education. He is an active member of a couple of national and international professional societies and regularly contributes to the academic world by writing books and papers. His recent research has focused on English grammar, pragmatics and Vygotsky's and Luri's contributions to our conceptual world.