

VYGOTSKY'S SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY: DISCUSSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT: Second language instruction has taken too much effort, time and energy of researchers, educators and language teaching practitioners for many decades. They have tried to find out what claims or theories that can be adopted in order to improve second language instruction. With the hope of helping language teachers move a step forward in their professional success, this article reviews the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky in terms of its main claims and implications in second language teaching and learning. The main claims of the theory are private speech, activity theory and the role of scaffolding, which contributes to the study of second language acquisition. The theory reveals that scaffolding at the Zone of proximal development can be effective because it encourages learners to engage in the task and do not get frustrated. The six scaffolding strategies present a number of positive aspects for second language teaching and learning.

KEYWORDS: *implications, language learning, scaffolding, sociocultural theory, Vygotsky.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Many studies have been done about second language learning in order to find out claims that can be applied for second language learning improvement. From this perspective, many second language learning theories have been raised in figuring out many factors that can contribute to the success of second language learning. Through many decades, a lot of theories have been found out. One of them is the socio-cultural theory of Vygotsky. This theory has appeared in the 1920s and 1930s by the psychologist Lev Vygotsky who worked in the Soviet Union. This review article will center on a description of the main claims of the Vygotsky's theory, a critical discussion of the claims and the implications of this theory in teaching.

II. VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY: A DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN CLAIMS

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory has some main claims such as private speech, activity theory and the role of scaffolding, which contributes to the study of second language acquisition. The first claim, for Vygotsky, is that private speech reflects an advance on the earliest uses of language, which are social and interpersonal. In addition, he thinks that private speech eventually becomes inner speech, which is a use of language to regulate internal thought. It reveals that the child's growing ability is to regulate his or her own behaviour. The second claim in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the activity theory. Leontiev, one of Vygotsky's successors, developed this concept. The activity theory consists of a series of proposals for conceptualizing the social context within which individual learning takes place. In terms of sociocultural settings, activity, which is offered by Donato and McCormick (1994), is defined as the occurrence of collaborative interaction, intersubjectivity, and assisted performance (Donato & McCormick, 1994, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 148). The third claim in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is the role of scaffolding in learning. One of the concepts that Vygotsky uses to support scaffolding is the 'Zone of proximal development' (ZPD). He defines the Zone of proximal development (ZPD) as the difference between the developmental level of the child as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 146). Above are some of the main ideas taken from Vygotsky's sociocultural theory that many researchers have taken into account.

III. VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY: A DISCUSSION OF THE MAIN CLAIMS

Many second language research studies have appealed to some of key Vygotskian ideas. One of his idea is the private speech will be discussed. From Vygotskian perspective, the role of the private speech is to provide learners with problem-solving and self-regulation in second language learning. Many attempts to apply Vygotsky's theory in second language learning have been done by many researchers. Frawley and Lantolf

(1985) reported a practical study of second language learners of English performing a narrative task that is based on a picture sequence (Frawley and Lantolf, 1985, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 150). They were critical of schema theories of narrative, suggesting that stories are told in a deterministic manner. In telling the story, second learners of English produced accounts which were, as narratives, disjointed and incoherent. Nevertheless, they integrated into their accounts many utterances that involved direct reactions or descriptions of each picture, or the externalization of the task itself. Frawley and Lantolf interpreted through the data that the learners' needs are to impose order on the task by speaking and identifying the task. In Vygotskian terms, they argue that the learners are struggling to move beyond object-regulation toward self-regulation and control over the task. Learners' efforts to gain control are explicitly articulated through their performance because they cannot take self-regulation for granted. McCafferty (1994) argues that many utterances included in the narrative of second language subject are instances of private speech, which reflect object regulation, other regulation, and self-regulation (McCafferty, 1994, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 151). In addition, in this and other studies, McCafferty contrasts the extent of private speech to be found in the narratives produced by learners at different levels of proficiency as well as by native speakers, which indicates that there is a systematic difference between the use of private speech to regulate the task performance, and the degree of task difficulty. McCafferty claims that 'a vygotskian view of private speech affords a valuable window onto the intra-personal processes in which adult L2 learners engage in their efforts to self-regulate in the face of the very complex process of learning as a second language.

Mitchell and Myles (1998, p. 151) think that Vygotskian theorists of second language learning are generally critical of transmission models of communication, in which ready-made messages are passed from speaker to hearer. They are also critical of input and interactional models of language learning in which negotiation of meaning is fundamental, which they view as a failure to get the main characteristics of language use. Platt and Brooks (1994) give a suggestion of more strong view that integrates an understanding of talk, or more specifically, speech activity as cognitive activity. Humans use this cognitive activity to deal with problems, regardless of its communicative goal (Platt & Brooks, 1994, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 151). According to the activity theory, the personal goals with which an individual approaches a particular task or problem may change. Therefore, a language learner, for instance, might approach a conversational task under test conditions with an ultimate personal goal of achieving an accurate performance, even if task designers intend it as a test of fluency. Moreover, the knowledge and skills which learners bring to particular tasks will certainly be different, which depends on the variation of the task itself. To support this claim, the data collected through an identical picture description task in a variety of language learning settings from Coughlan and Duff (1994) reveal that the change of the subject highly depends on the context. It means that the change of the subject depends on how well learners know their interlocutor, and how much time they believe is allocated to the task, etc. It is obvious that learners have a chance to interact with others through an activity. Plato and Brook (1994) think that the learning that has most obviously taken place has to do with task completion and problem-solving. In addition, Donato and McCormick (1994) carried out a longitudinal study in which they took up the perspective of activity theory on the development of learner strategies (Donato & McCormick, 1994, as cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 154). A group of college students of French was required to document and reflect on their own development in the spoken language over the course of one full semester, using performance-based portfolio. Learners were not provided with training. Nonetheless, Donato and McCormick argue that the portfolios provide genetic, longitudinal evidence of development in reported strategy use. In brief, the activity theory can bring some benefits to classroom teaching.

One of the point that Vygotsky emphasizes in this theory is 'scaffolding'. He claims that successful learning involves a shift from inter-mental activity to intra-mental activity. As Wood et al. (1976) claims that scaffolding is known as process of supportive dialogue which directs the attention of the learner to key features of the environment, and which prompts them through successive steps of a problem (Wood et al., 1976, as cited in Mitchell and Myles, 1998, p. 145). Vygotsky's sociocultural theory emphasizes that human intelligence originates from society or culture and the individual cognitive gain happens first through interpersonal (interaction with social environment) than intrapersonal (internalization). Vygotsky also concluded that language develops entirely from social interaction (Lightbown & Spada, 1999, p. 23). He also argued that the child can advance to a higher level of knowledge and performance than he or she might be capable of independently if an interactive environment supports him or her. Vygotsky also proposes the Zone of proximal development which helps children to interact with another one, not by themselves. However, Vygotsky's view is different from Piaget's. Piaget hypothesizes that language develops as a system of symbols to express knowledge acquired through interaction with the physical world. From Vygotsky's view, thought is essentially internalized speech and speech emerges in social interaction. He also thinks that peer interaction and scaffolding can support the second language learning of child learners. One perspective on the role of interaction of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is human mental processing. His theory assumes that all cognitive development,

including language development, arises as a result of social interactions between individuals. Lantolf and other claim that second language learners advance to higher levels of linguistic knowledge when they cooperate and interact with speakers of the second language who are more knowledgeable than they are, for instance, teachers or more advanced learners. Critical to Vygotsky's theory is the notion of the zone of proximal development, the level of performance that a learner is capable of when there is support from interaction with a more advanced interlocutor. This can be examined in a variety of speech strategies used by more advanced speakers to create supportive conditions for second language learners to comprehend and produce language, for example, repetition, simplification, and modeling. According to Vygotskian theorists, there is a difference between this perspective and that of other researchers in terms of interaction second language acquisition. The sociocultural theorists assume that language acquisition actually occurs in the interactions of learner and interlocutor, whereas other interactionist models assume that input modification provides learners with the linguistic raw material that they will process internally and invisibly (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 44). There is still argument amongst researchers about the role of scaffolding in second language learning. However, Vygotsky proposes the ZDP which creates a good opportunity for learners to interact with other people in their learning.

IV. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS: THE ADOPTION OF SCAFFOLDING

The main claims of the sociocultural theory can be flexibly applied in second language instruction. However, this review article puts forward one main claim for implication – that is the use of scaffolding. Scaffolding is an assistance that helps learners to get better in their learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of proximal development can support the role of scaffolding and this concept is perhaps the most famous of Vygotskian Sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1962). The Zone of proximal development is the difference between what learners can achieve through their problem-solving and what they can highly achieve with the help or guidance of adults, teachers, etc. (Vygotsky, 1978). Hartman (2002) mentions that scaffolding can be clues, models, prompts, hints, partial solution, think-aloud modeling, and direct instructions (Hartman, 2002, as cited in Stuyf, 2010, p. 22). In teaching, scaffolding is temporary and learners can help at the right moment and can do the task well. It also notifies that learners do not get frustrated because they can help from other people when encountering difficulties. Teachers, for instance, give learners some clues when teaching learners how to write a paragraph. Clues here mean the ideas that teachers can offer as assistance for learners to think about. Some learners may not have ideas about the topic they are asked to write. Therefore, if possible, teachers can give them some suggestions that they can refer to. In this case, learners can go on with their task and do not get stuck. Scaffolding, however, should be offered when learners begin to learn how to write a paragraph. When they become progressed, teachers do not help them anymore. In teaching, scaffolding can help to encourage learners to participate in their task. In teaching learners grammar, teachers can help them to prompt some sentence structures so that learners can follow. For example, when teaching the first conditional type of sentence, teachers can give learners exercises to practice making sentences using this type of sentence. They give learners half of a sentence, learners will finish the second half of the sentence (*If it is sunny,..... or I will buy a car if.....*). Another example is that teachers can give one student a list of questions and the other a list of relevant answers. However, the answers should give some clues, not a complete answer, like *What is your name? – My name is*. Therefore, scaffolding can be an effective teaching strategy. Teachers can apply this in teaching at the Zone of proximal development. It is because learners get more encouragement to do task better at ZDP. Scaffolding at the Zone of proximal development can be a good teaching strategy because it encourages learners to engage in the task and do not get frustrated. Moreover, Scaffold instruction is individualized, so it can benefit each learner. However, it is disadvantageous for teachers to develop the support and scaffolded lessons to meet each learner's needs, which is really time-consuming. Individualized scaffolding in a classroom with a big number of learners would be hard. Also, in their limited understanding, the authors suppose that scaffolding should be adopted in teaching learners at the pre-intermediate level. It is because learners try to pick up the language by coping and memorizing every language item at this stage, but if scaffolding is used as a pedagogical push, it would enable learners to arrive at a higher level. According to Donato (1994), De Guerrero & Villamil (2000), and Walqui (2006), learners are more likely to become better in learning a language if they are provided with appropriate assistance from their teachers and their peers as well.

Walqui (2006) proposes six basic scaffolding strategies for language teaching, including *modeling*, *bridging*, *contextualizing*, *schema building*, *re-presenting texts*, and *developing metacognition*. In terms of *modeling* strategy, teachers should give learners sample language structures and patterns as to provide support for learners. Take teaching speaking skills, for example. Language teachers can select proper grammar structures and patterns which fit the task taught. The point is to push learners practise using those language features so that they can acquire them in an expected way. For *bridging* strategy, language teachers should create a connection between learners' lives and the course. For *contextualizing* strategy, the use of teaching aids, like video clips or pictures can help learners get a complete picture of what they are acquiring. It is because learning a second language normally occurs without real language environment. Shortening the gap between what learners are

studying and what they encounter in life helps to create a better learning environment. For *schematizing* strategy, learners are required to link the reading techniques with the technique they already have in their mind. Take going shopping in a supermarket, for example. Learners are able to adopt the scanning and skimming techniques learnt in reading skills which can be applied in searching things in a supermarket. For *re-presenting texts*, learners are required to convert any linguistic features found in one form into another one. Take converting a paragraph into an essay, for instance. One last strategy of scaffolding is *developing metacognition*, which fosters learner autonomy and metacognition with the use of modeling strategy. One good example of developing metacognition is the use of self-assessment activities. The above strategies act as scaffolds which help to create better language learning environment for learners. The incorporation of the strategies, however, requires time and much effort for tasks and activities design from language teachers. The adoption of the strategies should be up to the taught language skills and subject matters.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper presents the application of scaffolding at ZDP in language teaching. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is relatively new to second language learning researchers. Though his claims are not too much convincing, they can, to some extent, be applied in classroom practice. In classroom instruction, the role of scaffolding at ZDP can be applied due to the fact that each learner can be assisted with their task. In order to take too much advantage of scaffolding in teaching, the use of scaffolding strategies should be taken into consideration depending on the type of language skills and related tasks. In addition to its benefits, scaffolding can, however, be quite challenging to language teachers. Therefore, teachers can flexibly employ the strategies in their classroom teaching practice.

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