

POTENTIALITY OF VYGOTSKY'S SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY IN EXPLORING THE ROLE OF TEACHER PERCEPTIONS, EXPECTATIONS AND INTERACTION STRATEGIES

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Abstract: This article reviews Vygotsky's sociocultural theory as one of the current frameworks in the study of learning and teaching processes. Arguing that learners' interaction is vital for language learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and that the teacher's perceptions and expectations can foster or discourage this interaction, the article shows how the sociocultural model of learning can provide a suitable theoretical lens through which to explore EFL learner interaction. The literature shows that this interaction has been extensively explored in situ and various empirical reasons have been given for students' willingness to communicate or for their reticence. However, EFL research gives scant attention to the theoretical angle of this practical aspect of the learning process. This article, therefore, seeks to address this lacuna by looking into a learning model that can be utilized as a theoretical lens for studying a practical aspect of EFL learning and teaching, namely EFL students' engagement in classroom interaction.

Keywords: sociocultural theory, genetic approach, teacher perception, expectation and interaction, student engagement

1 Introduction

Research studies show that teachers' perceptions and expectations of students' willingness to communicate (WTC) have been determining factors in the extent to which teachers interact with students (McCroskey & Richmond, 1987). Teachers communicate their expectations through interaction in a variety of forms. One form is output or distributing the opportunity to talk (Rosenthal, 1974). "Without such an opportunity, reticence will be encouraged as the learners' wish to communicate is not stimulated" (Lee & Ng, 2010, p. 303).

Though teacher perception and expectation might be one of a number of reasons why some students engage in or withdraw from communication in EFL classrooms, an issue which has recently been raised (e.g., Parvaresh, 2008), a theoretical framework gap exists in TEFL as regards the relationship of teacher expectations to student engagement (Bordia, Wales & Pittam,

2006). This article is an attempt to discuss the potentiality and relevance of Vygotskian sociocultural theory as the basis for a theoretical framework to explain the relationship between perception, expectation, interaction and WTC. To this end, the article first reviews sociocultural theory and then links it to the study of the above relationship.

2 Why Vygotskian sociocultural theory?

“Students learn through talking” (Boyd & Maloof, 2000, p. 163), so it follows that students must avail themselves of opportunities for self-expression. More importantly, teachers should give students abundant opportunities to speak in class. Verbal communication must be emphasized and encouraged at all times to stimulate students to communicate (Lee & Ng, 2010). With regard to English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, giving students ample opportunity to converse in the classroom is particularly important because the pressure to speak their mother tongue outside the classroom is considerable.

As students’ communicative behaviour has been found to impact and shape teachers’ perceptions and expectations of them (McCroskey & Daly, 1976) and because teachers’ perceptions of students directly influence their actions and behaviour in the classroom (Hardre, Davis & Sullivan, 2008; Hardre et al., 2006), teachers’ perceptions of students’ WTC and their expectations may have an impact on interaction strategies and also serve as predictive precursors of change in teachers’ differential treatment of students in tapping into their willingness to communicate.

As some research in EFL puts the use of the target language by teachers and students at the center of the investigation into classroom activities, a theoretical framework is required which could take into account the importance of language use for language learners. Moreover, it should explain how teachers in their scaffolding roles offer students opportunities ranging from participating and practicing extended discourse to negotiation as both students and the teacher collaboratively work through extended discourse to make sense of an idea or co-construct meaning.

While the expectancy model in the area of psychology has established itself and can be used to explain teachers’ differential treatment in terms of distributing opportunity for different groups of students’ gender, ethnic groups, or students with different characteristics, as Jones, Dindia and Tye (1998) point out, it suffers from its somewhat static view of social interaction. It is naive to assume that learners are just passive recipients. This implies that the theory should hold a dynamic view of social interaction (teacher-student) and take into account the active participatory role of the receivers.

In order to explain why classroom interaction is the way it is, the required theory could address the importance of language use with regard to the context within which language use occurs. This is because, as Halliday (1978) writes, “[t]he context plays a part in determining what we say; and what we say plays a part in determining the context” (as cited in Wells, 1999, p. 8). Students’ communication behavior (willingness or reticence) and the learning opportunities that students offer and are offered create a context in which teachers work. Not only can the required

theory help us explain how cultural historical contexts affect teachers' language use but it should also take into account the intricacy of the contexts within which teachers use the target language.

In short, the theoretical perspective could account for mental processes along with teachers' teaching practices, their interactions and the contexts in which these interactions happen. In the following section, an overview of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) is presented, and then perception, expectation, interaction and willingness to communicate are explained through the lens of this theory. Drawing on the Genetic approach and mediation, this study will show how sociocultural theory relates teachers' thinking, doing, and context together.

2.1 An overview of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory

For Vygotsky, development or "human consciousness is fundamentally a mediated mental activity" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 7). As Lantolf (2000) points out, this is the basic premise of sociocultural theory. Wertesch (1994, p. 204) argues that

Mediation is the key to understand how human mental functioning is tied to cultural, institutional, and historical settings since these settings provide the cultural tools that are mastered by individuals to form this functioning. In this approach, the mediational means are what might be termed as the carriers of socio-cultural patterns and knowledge (as cited in Steiner & Mahan, 1996, p. 193).

Mediation (physical or psychological) is a culturally constructed 'auxiliary device' in an activity that links 'human to the world of objects or mental behavior' (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 418). Psychological tools "invented by the individual in isolation, are products of sociocultural evolution" (ibid). According to Van Lier (1996, p. 4) "language and cognition are interdependent processes"; and "linguistic activity is a means through which human mind is organized and functions" (Lantolf & Appel, 1994, p. 26). The human being uses these tools to regulate the world around him or his own behavior (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). "The tool's function is to serve as conductor of human influence on the object of activity; it must lead to changes in objects. It is a means by which a human external activity aims to master and triumph over nature" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 55). Regulation happens when a person is able to control his higher mental functions, and performs independently. The process of development, in Vygotsky's words (1978, p. 57), is as follows: "Any function in child's development that appears twice or on two planes, first appears on the social plane, then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an inter-psychological category and then within the child as an intra-psychological category". An illustrative example of social interactions (in an EFL classroom context) paving the way for intra-psychological processes is provided on the next page.

In Vygotsky's idea, development occurs as the transformation of inborn capacities entangled with socioculturally constructed mediational means (Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995, as cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). "Through this transformation, or *internalization*, an external operation is internally reconstructed" (Blanton, Berenson & Norwood, 2001, p. 228). Using this principle in the classroom, Wertesch and Toma (1995) explain how the nature of classroom discourse might encourage an active or passive stance on the students' part by assuming that the

stance is mirrored in the student's intra-mental functioning as external operations are internalized. For instance, “if the classroom discourse tries to develop ideas and use them to engender new thinking, therefore students treat utterances as thinking devices and take active attitude toward them by questioning and extending” (as cited in Blanton et al., 2001, p. 171). Modification and reorganizing genetically inborn capacities into higher order forms happens through social interaction. In sociocultural SLA, language learning involves learners appropriating language as a meditational tool and as an object (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). The term “appropriation” stands for learners’ ability to use the mediational tool ‘purposefully and flexibly in particular environments’ as they get to know such a tool ‘sufficiently’ (Grossman et al., 1999, as cited in Karağaç & Threlfall, 2004).

The shift of control within activities from the social to the individual ones happens by means of expanding the students’ ZPD (Zone of Proximal Development). ZPD is defined as “the distance between the actual developmental level, as determined by independent problem solving, and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). This assistance or guidance is termed “scaffolding” by Bruner. Scaffolding enables learners to reach a higher level than they can attain by themselves. It is important to note that ZPD is conceptualized as something that emerges through participation in collaborative activities, not as an attribute of learners (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). In social interactions, Vygotsky argues, “Zones of Proximal Developments” are created. He points out that children’s cognitive development also occurs through guided participation in social interactions with more experienced people, arguing that what children can do with the help of others may be more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone. He maintains that the socially supported activity in the Zone of Proximal Development awakens and provides paths for intellectual development. Vygotsky believes that in social interactions with their parents, teachers and more capable peers, children achieve more sophisticated goals than they do on their own (see Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). For instance, in an EFL composition writing classroom where students have been assigned to work in groups to produce a composition on a topic specified in negotiation between the teacher and students, each student starts to describe to her/his group what s/he thinks should be included in the composition. Other students in the group probe with a set of questions and the first draft of an outline is produced at the end. The students in the group discuss the outline further and additions, deletions, substitutions and movements are made to refine it. When the final draft of the outline is agreed and produced, the students in each group work together and write the first paragraph of the composition to ensure that they all have a clear start on their compositions. Then the students write the rest of their compositions individually. Having completed their compositions, they proofread each other’s writing and also provide each other with suggestions for revision. Finally, the students revise their compositions individually and produce the final drafts. During this process, the teacher monitors the groups and intervenes when necessary to support and guide the students towards mastery of the needed writing skills (adapted from Richards & Rodgers, 2001, pp. 200-201).

Context plays an important role in the interaction between the novice and capable person. “The basic tenet of sociocultural approach to mind is that human mental functioning is inherently situated in social, interactional, institutional and historical context” (Wertsch 1991, p. 86, as cited in Bonk & Kim, 1998, p. 69). Cross (2010, p. 120) states that “an increased awareness of the

situated and socially distributed nature of learning has highlighted the need for a better understanding of the complexities of the contexts within which learning takes place, with a related focus on teachers.” Using the word ‘situatedness’, Donato (2000, p. 47) focuses on the point that “learning unfolds in different ways under different circumstances.” The idea of situatedness is in line with Vygotsky's idea of higher mental functioning that places human consciousness and the functioning of the human brain in the external processes of social life (Blanton et al., 2001).

2.2 The Genetic approach

Vygotsky believes that “all higher mental functions are internalized social relationships” (as cited in Cross 2010, p. 164) and studying actions engenders studying behavior (Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, drawing from his mentor Pavel Blonsky, Vygotsky posits that the history of behavior is the way to reconstruct and appreciate behavior (Cross, 2005). Using the ‘Genetic terminology’, he refers to the “origin of the phenomenon” (Cross, 2010). By emphasizing the role of history in the development of mind and behavior, he claims, “mere description does not reveal the actual causal-dynamic relations that underlie phenomena” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 62). The idea of “history of behavior” or “genetic analysis” is the key principle of the “sociocultural theory”. Genetic analysis involves four levels of analysis, namely Phylogenetic, Cultural-historic, Ontogenetic, and Microgenetic level. The phylogenetic level of analysis refers to human development over the course of evolution as a natural species. The sociocultural or cultural-historic is development over time in a particular culture. The ontogenetic stands for development over the life of an individual and the micro-genetic level is the development over the course of and resulting from particular interactions in specific social settings (Cross, 2006, 2010; Wells, 1999). Language is a basic feature of sociocultural theory as the theory emphasizes the notion of mediation of the genesis of individual’s activity. Through tools and artefacts the human being becomes engaged in social activities. The ontogenetic aspect of development, which refers to the development of the individual across the human lifespan, plays a “mediatory role” between the micro-genetic level and the cultural-historic context as the individual brings into the micro-genetic level their personal trajectory (Cross, 2010, p. 441).

About the potentiality and relevancy of the Genetic approach for investigating teachers’ cognition, Cross (2010) claims that a genetic analytical approach not only sets a framework for analyzing the effect of teachers’ thought processes on their practice but also emphasizes the genesis that lies behind the relationship between thought and practice. In other words, he believes that through such a framework, we can not only focus on the immediate aspect of teachers’ thought, but also go beyond that to see how teachers’ personal trajectory could explain their practice in the socially and culturally constructed contexts, i.e. the cultural-historic level of analysis. The ontogenetic aspect plays a mediatory role in the relationship between the micro-genetic level and the broader cultural–historic context, as teachers bring into the micro-genetic level their personal trajectory - the ontogenetic level. Moreover, he maintains that this approach brings “the threads of inquiry on historicity, context, and practice into a single, unified framework for analysis” (Cross, 2010, p. 439).

3 Perception and expectation through the lens of sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory, as a theory of cognitive development, sees consciousness as the ultimate product of socialization (Rozycki & Goldfarb, 2000). This theory, according to Bernat (2008, p. 13), gives priority to the social aspect of consciousness; in other words, “what impacts the phenomenon is of greater importance for this theory than the phenomenon itself yet both are important to understanding the whole.” As such, the social aspect of teachers’ perceptions and expectations as part of cognitive function is closely related to sociocultural theory.

In this article, we define teachers’ perception as personal knowledge, intuition, image and views of learners. Applying sociocultural theory to the classroom context underscores the fact that teachers’ perceptions cannot be seen as an abstract or stable concept to be used in all contexts. As Vygotsky’s “socio-cultural theory recognizes the central role of social relationships” (1987, pp. 30-31), cultural historical contexts affect teachers’ thinking and the teacher as “social agent, rather than a mere mental processing entity that acts on or reacts to stimuli in the teaching environment” (Cross, 2010, p. 437). In other words, as mentioned earlier, the personal trajectory (the ontogenetic level of the analysis) plays a mediatory role in the relationship between the micro-genetic aspect (the immediate aspect of teachers’ thought and behavior) and the broader cultural-historic context. Sainn et al. (1980) claim that perception is influenced by both the stimuli and personal variables like experience and intention, as well as social needs; the perceiver is not passive in the process of perceiving but is actively engaged in selecting the information and making hypotheses to decide what is actually happening. Moreover, they state that perception provides an individual with a model of his world, helping him anticipate some future events and handle them aptly (as cited in Choy & Cheah, 2009, p. 198-199).

According to Freeman and Freeman (1994), teachers’ perception of learners and learning are one of the most critical and decisive factors in the teaching and learning process, and more clearly, in constructing teaching (as cited in Crookes, 1997, p. 67). These views and aspects are associated with a wider agenda relating to the way teachers see themselves and the work they are doing. Cooper et al. (2004) stated that once one starts to try to find out about teachers’ perceptions of students, the investigation would usually link the researchers to what students have achieved and how knowledge about the students shapes teacher knowledge.

By using a database of adult and child ESL learners’ teachers, Breen et al. (1998) came up with a set of principles, factors and practices on which those teachers had built the basis of their work. By means of class observation and interviews with teachers, they tried to find out the relationship between observed practices of teachers and principles inferred from them. The teachers reported five key principles of their belief about (a) language learning, (b) learners and their needs, (c) classroom learning optimization, (d) the content to be taught, and (e) their role as language teachers. Both observations and interviews showed that teachers were primarily relying on these principles. However, these principles were subject to change and were affected by the characteristics of learners, contextual factors and evaluation requirements. In other words, sometimes these principles were the products of a particular teaching situation. Moreover, the investigation indicated that the classroom contexts were influenced by the way teachers exercised a principle.

Likewise, Lacorte (2005) examined the role of teachers' perceptions of their own pedagogic principles in their teaching activities. The observations and interviews showed that the teachers' practice of communicative approaches was influenced by their own personal theories and experience of both language teaching and learning. Some contextual factors such as classroom management issues, large number of students, and limited teaching resources contributed to their perceptions and practices as well.

Kagan conceptualizes perception and expectation as an element of practical knowledge, claiming that personal knowledge "controls the teacher's perception, judgment, and behavior" (as cited in Mansour, 2009, p. 27). Because perception is an element of personal practical knowledge, the term 'knowledge' needs further explanation. From the perspective of sociocultural theory, Vygotsky believes that true reality does not exist and the only way to come to know the world is 'interpretation'. Knowledge emerges as it is "constructed and reconstructed between participants in specific situated activities, using the cultural artefacts at their disposal, as they work towards the collaborative achievement of a goal" (Wells, 1999, p. 140). "Knowledge, with its historical and cultural geneses, is manifested in particular ways in practice... knowledge is interpretative or co-constructed" (Wertsch, 1998, as cited in Billett, 2001, p. 442). Knowledge is not considered "as a pre-existent product waiting to be exchanged" (Gánem-Gutiérrez, 2008, p. 4).

As Alexander et al. (1991) put it, this embedded knowledge is "the personal product of individuals' histories" (as cited in Billett, 2001, p. 434), influences the conduct of teaching practice and is different from scientific knowledge. Clandinin (1992, p. 125) describes this form of knowledge as follows:

We see personal practical knowledge as in the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body and in the person's future plans and actions. It is knowledge that reflects the individual's prior knowledge and acknowledges the contextual nature of that teacher's knowledge. It is a kind of knowledge carved out of, and shaped by, situations (as cited in Fenstermacher, 1994, p. 10).

Practical knowledge, therefore, is the process of reflection on and self-assessment of experience. Teachers' experience serves as a lens through which they interpret their behavior as well as the behavior of others (Mayer & Marland, 1997). In fact, knowledge aligns with experience. If such experience changes, knowledge may undergo some modification as well. If the experience is challenged by the context, expectations require modification too.

According to the literature (Mayer & Marland, 1997), it is understood that based on the knowledge of students, teachers shape an image of their class, set goals accordingly, and adjust their reactions to individual students based on their perception of students' needs and their situation. Cross (2010, p. 439) states that according to Johnson and Golombek (2002, pp. 1-2) teacher knowledge is "highly interpretive, socially negotiated, and continually restructured". Moreover, he maintains that though the impact of previous experience on cognition is significant, only few studies have explored it.

As Vygotsky's theory claims, consciousness or thinking relates knowledge to actions or behavior (Lantolf & Appel, 1994) and as knowledge is said to determine perceptions,

understanding behavior as displayed in teachers' discourse can lead us to understand the underlying perceptions and expectations. In order to know why teachers use the target language as they do when they are interacting with reticent or willing students, teachers' perceptions and expectations should be re-constructed. However, the relationship between knowledge, perception and expectation is not so much linear as interactive. According to Brophy and Good (1977), expectations influence perception and provide the teachers with the lens through which they "see" what they are expecting to see and not to see. The way teachers believe in or perceive their students' characteristics determines their expectations of them, and leads them to treat students differently in terms of quality and quantity of interaction. In the following section, interaction and willingness to communicate are explained from a sociocultural perspective.

3.1 Interaction and sociocultural theory

From a sociocultural perspective, classroom activities are tied to cognitive development by the premise that learning is social in nature. Classroom activities are in fact classroom discourse, interaction patterns happening either between a teacher and students or among students. 'Student talk' is one of the key concerns of sociocultural theory. Van Lier (2000) believes interaction is more than a source of comprehensible input. Interaction also provides learners with opportunities to use the target language, which is the output (as cited in Swain, 2005, p. 478). In this regard Swain (2005, p. 480) points out that "Socio-cultural theory puts language production in a 'star' role, so to speak."

According to Voloshinov (1973), "Input as understood through socio-cultural lenses becomes production (from students and teachers), which is the essence and purpose of language" (as cited in Mantero, 2003, p. 253). Simply put, language learning and language use are interrelated in the sense that all opportunities for language use are learning opportunities for language learners (see Markee, 2004). While producing language, students use and learn language as a means of negotiating, socially constructing and reconstructing meanings, notions and actions (Mantero, 2003). In other words, "Speaking and writing are conceived as cognitive tools that mediate internalization and externalize internal psychological activity, re-socializing and re-cognizing it for the individual; tools that construct and deconstruct and regulate knowledge" (Swain & Lapkin, 2002, p. 181). Of all output, output in collaborative dialogues is of high cognitive value and significantly contributes to language learning (Mercer, 1995). Empirical studies by Swain (2001) and Swain and Lapkin (2002) showed that it was in collaborative interactions that teachers and students could work together to produce intellectual activities and create conditions for language learning. From this theoretical perspective, learning a language and knowledge construction happen (Donato, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 2002) when learners, who are not mere passive recipients (Wells, 1999, p. 140) but active constructors of their own learning environment (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 162), become involved with their interaction or mediation with tools, with teachers or more knowledgeable peers. However, "this process is asymmetrical and ZPD is evolving" (Yu, 2004, p. 6).

It is necessary to mention that this article does not focus on language learning but rather on teaching practice. This study aims at coming to know how teachers engage, or do not engage, their willing or reticent students in target language use. This is because language use from this perspective paves the way for language learning to occur (Mantero, 2003). Therefore, the role of

opportunities to enter into dialogue and discourse through teachers' interaction strategies is in focus. The significance of creating such opportunities is linked to the pattern of classroom talk. For instance, teachers who favour IRF (Initiation – Response – Feedback; with the teacher initiating exchanges, students responding and the teacher following up or giving feedback) as communication patterns might limit students' opportunity for language use, since IRF typically creates two turns for the teacher and one for the student. However, some teachers make the IRF pattern more dialogic, scaffolding students by tapping into the responses, reformulating and linking the students' answers to their experiences, using high-level evaluation and challenging the students' minds by asking for justifications or bringing up counter-arguments (see Panselinas & Komis, 2009).

As the microgenetic analysis, namely “the short-term formation of a psychological process” or “the unfolding of an individual perceptual or conceptual act, often for the course of milliseconds” (Wertsch, 1985, p. 55), focuses on individuals' practice and thought in the immediate setting (Cross, 2010), it is hoped that through such an analysis the researchers may see how teachers as experts provide opportunities for students or novices to participate and practice extended discourse.

3.2 Willingness to communicate and sociocultural theory

Sociocultural theory is relevant to WTC as a dynamic situational construct for the following reasons: as stated before, sociocultural theory argues that cognitive development happens through interaction; moreover, it assigns language production a star role, so to speak. WTC, indeed, is the reason why students talk. Based on the model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998), WTC is subject to various social, contextual and situational variables. Specific to L2 classrooms, of all situational variables which have an immediate effect on WTC, teacher interaction strategy in terms of opportunity given to students can trigger their willingness to talk. Drawing on Vygotsky (1986)'s general genetic law of cultural development, in their discussion of dialogic (generating new meanings) discourse, Wertsch and Toma (1995) argue that

It is reasonable to expect that when the dialogic function is dominant in classroom discourse, pupils will treat their utterances and those of others as thinking devices. Instead of accepting them as information to be received, encoded and stored, they will take an active stance toward them by questioning and extending them, by incorporating them into their own. (p. 171)

Empirically tested analysis of teacher discourse shows that teacher pseudo interaction could be a major determinant of students' passivity and reticence regardless of their culture (see Cheng, 2000). Using a conversation analysis approach to classroom interactions, Lee and Ng (2010) showed how facilitator oriented strategies (i.e. giving turn allocation rights to students, teachers' referential questions, longer wait times, and content vs. form focused feedback) which make IRF more learner oriented opened up opportunities for learner contribution and consequently reduced students' reticence. In a similar vein, Xie (2010) used Vygotsky's sociocultural theory to explain why some Chinese students are reticent in classroom settings. Emphasizing the role of students' talk as a prerequisite of successful teaching and learning from this theoretical perspective, he explained how the teacher could play a significant role in triggering students' willingness to

communicate by exercising less control over the classroom content. Xie (2010) asserted that teachers' control of interaction styles, their rigid adherence to the lesson plan and lack of learners' engagement at any level other than that of accuracy would contribute to students' reticence.

As the literature shows, some teachers hold low expectations for special groups of students. These low expectations have a significant effect on students' participation and later on their success in terms academic progress in general and language learning in particular. The growing concern is that if teachers are not accurate in their perception, they cannot plan appropriate instruction (Pelletier & Vallerand, 1996; Sarrazin, 2006; Skinner & Belmonts, 1993) in terms of interaction to satisfy students' needs. The situation may get even worse if teachers decide to intervene to help their students on the basis on a mistaken diagnosis. As "students' output gives the information about the learner's ZPD and sets the level of input and input lays down the pathway for the further development of the learner" (Min, 2006, p. 91), this lack of quality or quantity of classroom interactions on the part of teachers based on output from students could trigger students' reticence.

4 Summary and conclusion

This article has attempted to show how sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) can provide a theoretical framework to explain why classroom interaction is the way it is, and how interaction strategies, driven by teachers' perceptions and expectations of students' willingness to communicate, can affect students' willingness to communicate or reticence.

Sociocultural theory is founded on the premise that learning is social in nature and that language plays a key role in learning. While producing language, students use and learn language as a mediator between their own and other's understandings of notions or actions. Therefore, the role of opportunities to enter into dialogue and discourse is important to sociocultural theory. Sociocultural theory is relevant to WTC as it emphasizes the role of interaction in providing learners with opportunities to use the target language; that is, the output. Moreover, this theory emphasizes the role of mediation in the interaction between the novice and expert in the process of learning. Sociocultural theory, thus, describes how the expert or the teacher in the scaffolding role provides opportunities for the students. The idea of mediation in this theory can explain how language as a sociocultural tool mediates the genesis of teachers' practice within the cultural–historic domain.

Additionally, in order to explain why teachers use the language as they do, this theory can address the importance of language use with regard to the context within which language use occurs. Not only can sociocultural theory help us explain how cultural historical contexts affect teachers' language use but it can also take into account the intricacy of the contexts within which the teacher uses the target language. From this theoretical perspective, the teacher is a social agent acting on the teaching environment, rather than merely reacting to it.

Based on the idea of the Genetic approach as a major principle of sociocultural theory, this theory of cognition presents a framework in which thinking and doing interact within socially

and culturally constructed contexts where teachers see themselves involved in the activity of teaching a foreign language as thinking, historical and socially constituted subjects. In other words, this theoretical perspective accounts for cognitive processes along with teachers' teaching practices, their interactions, and the contexts in which these interactions happen. Given that an EFL context is different from other contexts in certain ways, e.g. the absence of English language use outside the classroom, and the fact that sociocultural theory brings the context into the equation of social interaction, self-regulation, mediation by artefacts and the genesis of individual's activity in the process of learning and teaching, this theory and its concepts can provide a lens through which we may scrutinize and thereby gain insights into the practices of EFL teachers and their impact on the students' engagement in or disengagement from interaction.

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