

Insight into the Role of Interaction in Language Acquisition: Vygotsky's Interactionist Theory of Language

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Received:01/09/2023

Accepted:05/10/2023

Published: 06/24/2023

Abstract

Psychologists' theoretical implications have led to several studies investigating L1 and L2 acquisition. This research examines Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) interactionist view of language acquisition and draws on a critical review methodology to assess the relevance of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory in L1 and L2 acquisition. To assess whether Vygotsky's (1978) theory of language acquisition is effective, the selected articles will be critically examined. This research indicates that the articles under review prove the validity of Vygotsky's (1978) arguments. However, they did not address how children from non-western cultures and those with disabilities acquire language, on the one hand, and the role of self-regulatory speech in language acquisition, on the other hand. Though Chomsky's (1965) Universal Grammar and Skinner's (1957) behaviourist theory have inspired scholars, linguists, and researchers to examine L1 and L2 acquisition deeply, Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory explains how social interaction is crucial to a child's cognitive development. The theory's emphasis on learner-centeredness may significantly empower language teachers if implemented wisely into the L2 Curriculum. To maximize the effectiveness of social interaction in L2 learning, more profound and longitudinal research on the integration of zone of proximal development and scaffolding into teaching is required. Though teacher and peer interactions in L2 learning have been studied empirically, the types of social interactions that enhance language acquisition need to be assessed. Educators, researchers, and scholars must investigate how social interactions affect the cognitive and linguistic development of learners. Educators, researchers, and scholars must investigate how social interactions affect the cognitive and linguistic development of learners.

Keywords: Language acquisition, scaffolding, socio-cultural, Vygotsky's Interactionist Theory of Language, zone of proximal development

Cite as: Alharbi, J. M. (2023). Insight into the Role of Interaction in Language Acquisition: Vygotsky's Interactionist Theory of Language. *Arab World English Journal*, 14 (2) 281-294.
DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol14no2.20>

Introduction

Until the beginning of the 1970s, the correlation between child's language acquisition and socialisation had been a relatively unexplored area (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017). Instead of analysing language acquisition through the compound sociocultural and psycholinguistic lenses, linguists and researchers put the focus on a separate discussion of such issues as human mind and language learning, child's socialisation, and culturally specific skills for communication. Researchers have previously overlooked the significance of context and language in social interactions by children. Yet since the 1970s, a decisive step has been taken in the direction of a theoretical and empirical reconsideration of the role of interactions in early language development. In the light of this reconsideration, new models and theories of language acquisition based on the juxtaposition of cultural, social, and linguistic processes have been developed by scholars (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017). A famous Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934) explicitly criticised the behaviourist stances on language acquisition and proposed a more unified socio-cultural perspective on child's cognitive and language development (Crawford, 1996). His major criticism referred to the scholars' attempt to separately investigate higher mental functions and processes (Vygotsky, 1997). This approach to investigation complicates understanding of higher mental functioning because, instead of perceiving it in integrity, scholars focus on the analysis of its component elements.

The psychologist's theoretical implications have evoked great interest among researchers and have paved the way for the emergence of studies investigating L1 and L2 acquisition in light of these implications. The aim of this research is to gain insight into Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) interactionist view of language acquisition by exploring his social development and interactionist theoretical implications. The psychologist's interactionist stance was brought to the fore while formulating the sociocultural theory of language development and was later evolved into interactionist theory that occupied a middle position between the behaviourist theory and the nativist theory (Rudd & Lambert, 2011). The literature review that follows will give shape to Vygotsky's (1978) social nature of learning and the relationship between the social world and child's cognitive development. It will define the key theoretical concepts and clarify the terms used in the context of the present research. Moreover, through the discussion of some related theories, the attempt will be made to identify the differences between these theories and Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory. The subsequent critical review will assess the empirical evidence on Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) theoretical implications. Given that the psychologist did not undertake empirical testing of his assumptions because of his reluctance to predict human behaviour, on the one hand, and his early death, on the other (Nam, 2005), such review is of great significance to validate or disprove Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) observations.

Based on the chosen research methodology, the present research has four main objectives: 1) to gain profound insights into Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory of language, 2) to critically assess the psychologist's theoretical assumptions on the role of interaction in shaping child's cognitive and linguistic skills, 3) to assess research supporting Vygotsky's (1987) interactionist theory as a teaching method into L2 classrooms and 4) to evaluate the effects of scaffolding techniques in language acquisition in L2. In line with these objectives, the following research questions will be addressed:

- 1) To what extent are the processes of cognitive and linguistic development affected by social interaction?
- 2) To what extent do social context influence language acquisition, as per Vygotsky's theories?
- 3) To what empirical evidence justifies the integration of Vygotsky's (1987) interactionist theory into L2 teaching?
- 4) To what extent does scaffolding in L2 teaching facilitate the acquisition of language skills?

The present research attempt to assess the relevance of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory for L1 and L2 acquisition. In the process of conducting a critical review, the focus will be put on the research that has the greatest contribution to the field of language acquisition. The chosen articles will be examined through a critical lens to determine whether Vygotsky's (1978) theory is effective in explaining the phenomenon of language acquisition.

Literature Review

Two theories, which are closely related to Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) theory and are normally mentioned as the theories that have changed the realm of language acquisition, are the nativist theory and the behaviourist theory (Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014). Each of these three theories focuses on a particular aspect of learner's cognitive and linguistic development. The nativist theory highlights the child's aptitude for language learning, implying that a child is born with the brain structured for language. Promoted by the American linguist Chomsky (1965), this theory posits that every child has an innate set of language rules known as universal grammar (Azabdaftari, 2013). However, what should be taken into consideration is that the child still needs to rely on an adult speech to choose the grammatical principles from universal grammar that are specific to a certain language (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1984). Hence, the adult language provides the child with necessary linguistic knowledge. A crucial aspect of Chomsky's (1965) theory is the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) that helps the child construct sentences and communicate. Due to the LAD, the child successfully recognises speech sounds, organises linguistic events into specific classes, and assesses a linguistic system (Azabdaftari, 2013). The device functions as follows: the child receives specific language data (input) and uses the LAD to produce an output.

In its turn, the behaviourist theory developed by Skinner (1957) underlines the impact of social environment on the development of language skills (Schieffelin & Ochs, 1984). Specifically, following this theory, language acquisition occurs through the child's imitation of adult speech and through the mechanisms of operant conditioning (Sturdy & Nicoladis, 2017). In terms of Skinner (1957), operant conditioning is a method that draws on the system of reward and punishment to change the child's behaviour. Delving deeper, the child's acquisition of linguistic forms depends on whether the child receives positive or negative reinforcement. Given the aforementioned discussion, the major difference between the nativist theory and the behaviourist theory is that the former reinforces the idea of child's deduction of rules from speech and the use of these rules for the construction of sentences, while the latter supports the hypothesis of child's repetition of words and utterances after adults. While the stimulus-response theory and the nativist theory provide rather reasonable explanations for language acquisition, their shortcomings have encouraged researchers and scholars to be in search of alternative theories (Azabdaftari, 2013). In particular, the behaviourist theory that revolves around the idea of learned responses fails to give a detailed account of how the language functions or clarify how the child learns complex grammar

rules and syntactic constructions without competent adult instruction (Owens, 2008; Sturdy & Nicoladis, 2017). Moreover, the fact that the child creates their own utterances, despite constant exposure to a Motherese way of communication, undermines Skinner's (1957) belief in the child's imitation of adult speech (Pinker, 1994). Likewise, adults do not intentionally slow down their speech to develop child's vocalisation and rarely give feedback to the child's construction of sentences (Owens, 2008).

In a similar vein, Lin (2017) criticises Chomsky's (1965) theory, asserting that the linguist's use of English data puts into question the universal grammar hypothesis. To prove it, researchers need to extend the sample and include about 8000 world languages into the analysis. Azabdaftari (2013) goes further by claiming that generative semanticists oppose Chomsky's (1965) idea of an idealised speech community, which fails to devote sufficient attention to contextual aspects in communication. What ensues from this particular criticism is the impossibility of deducing the meaning of an utterance without knowledge of a context. This assertion contrasts sharply with Chomsky's (1965) view that the human brain has particular linguistic properties that are not changed by contextual effects. Bruner (1983) also challenges Chomsky's (1965) concept of LAD, asserting that this concept is fully inconsistent with the evidence gathered from the cases of feral and deprived children. As is evident from these particular cases, the child does not acquire language skills in the absence of social interactions. The mentioned example reveals that the LAD is stimulated by adults with whom the child interacts. In general, being dissatisfied with the nativist theory and the behaviourist theory, language teachers have started penetrating deep into the theoretical assumptions that provide clues on the genesis of mind (Azabdaftari, 2013). This is just the case with regard to Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) social development and interactionist stances that, as will be shown further, bring to the fore the idea of the human mind as a by-product of cultural and social processes. Using the strong sides of behaviourist and nativist theories, Vygotsky's (1978) theory draws on the constructivist approach to learning to generate a more comprehensive picture on language acquisition.

Stepping into the Terrain of Vygotsky's Interactionist Theory

Before proceeding to the critical analysis of Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) views on social development and the role of interactions in language acquisition, it is essential to outline the main arguments of his theoretical implications. Given that the psychologist put much effort into the exploration of higher forms of person's mental behaviour, he was especially interested in researching the correlation between social relations and the development of higher functions in an individual (Azabdaftari, 2013). As language occupies the central place in this development, Vygotsky (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) devotes particular attention to the child's acquisition of language skills. In the process of his investigation, Vygotsky (1997) finds out that there are two functions of the linguistic sign: indicative and symbolic. While the indicative function helps the child concentrate on the object, the symbolic function allows them to gain insight into the abstract aspects of objects and learn to think in a conceptual way. Both functions contribute to the child's development of a conceptually-based mental system (Azabdaftari, 2013).

The central premise on which Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory is based is that children's language skills are shaped through their interactions with more knowledgeable others (Rudd & Lambert, 2011). While, according to Vygotsky (1978), biological factors give impetus to the emergence of elementary processes in a child, the evolution of such mental activities as

problem solving, logical thinking, intentional memory, and voluntary attention largely depend on different socio-cultural factors. Hence, in the opinion of Vygotsky (1978), child's social and cultural learning always precedes language acquisition. An important aspect of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory is the concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) that specifies the difference between the child's development without adult assistance and the child's development under the support of adult carers and advanced peers. By applying this concept to L2 learning, the role of the language teacher is to fill the lacuna between the learner's existing knowledge and expected knowledge. Thus, Vygotsky (1978) devotes sufficient attention to instructional scaffolding, claiming that it enhances children's high levels of reasoning. An important implication from Vygotsky's (1978) notion of ZPD is that language comes first to thought.

Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding is further borrowed by Bruner (1983), who claims that the child needs scaffolding at the initial stages to acquire knowledge of new concepts. In Bruner's (1983) terms, a caregiver or teacher relies on a Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) to facilitate early language development of the child. In the process of using this system, a caregiver or teacher designs collaborative learning tasks, adjusts a language to child's needs, gives a feedback during communication, and prepares samples for imitation. However, according to Bruner (1983), teacher's support and structured interaction should be decreased when the child develops independent thinking. What can be gleaned from Vygotsky's (1978) and Bruner's (1983) assertions is that language learners should be provided with challenging tasks to maximise their learning opportunities and acquire good language skills. For all that, as Crawford (1996) points out, complex tasks are better resolved within a collaborative environment. In such an environment, the learner actively participates in learning, while the teacher changes their views on teaching and adjusts their methods and strategies to meet the child's needs. The result of this reciprocal learning is the teacher's sharing of responsibility for language acquisition with the child (Crawford, 1996).

Taking a discussion of Vygotsky's (1978) theory a step further, it is essential to bring into a sharp focus his concept of private speech. Overall, Vygotsky (1987a, 2012) distinguishes among three types of speech used by the child in the process of growth: social speech, private speech, and silent inner speech. Judging from this distinction, the child's earliest speech is social and it fulfils the functions of constructing simple utterances and expressing emotions. At the age of 3, social speech is gradually evolved into egocentric private speech. The central claim of the concept of private speech is that it is a phenomenon responding for child's complex mental activity and self-direction (Vygotsky, 1987, 2012). In light of this claim, private speech is a middle stage between the child's thinking for oneself and child's communication to others. By relying on private speech, the child learns to develop the strategies that are necessary for their development, improves their imagination, and becomes aware of the ways to overcome obstacles. An interesting finding of Vygotsky (1987a) is that private speech helps the child increase their social competence and outperform the peers who do not widely use this kind of speech.

Moreover, Vygotsky (1987a) draws parallels between the extent of social interactions and the development of private speech in the child. In more precise terms, the child brought up in the family with a high socio-economic status more readily develops and internalises private speech than the child living in poverty because of a more linguistically and cognitively stimulating environment. According to Berk and Landau (1993), two crucial conclusions may be deduced from Vygotsky's (1987a) analysis of private speech: 1) the child starts extensively using it during demanding and complex tasks; 2) the reliance on private speech ensures task success and development of self-control.

Penetrating deeper into Vygotsky's (1987b) line of argument, child's thinking not only evolves from practical activity but is also reinforced by speech. To put it differently, language helps the child exceed the primitive mental state and develop higher mental functions. Viewing thought and language as separate systems at the initial stages of child development, the psychologist asserts that these systems intertwine when the child reaches three years of age (Vygotsky, 1987a). In contrast to Piaget (1995), who does not attribute great value to egocentric speech and accentuates its gradual disappearance in a child, Vygotsky (1987a) considers private speech as an integral part of child's development and mental activity. With the acquisition of self-regulation, the child starts using silent inner speech instead of private speech. Such internalisation stems from the child's ability to understand people's feelings and thoughts and accept social beliefs, norms, and values (Vygotsky, 1987a, 1987b). The process of child's progression from egocentric private speech to inner speech is unique in every child (Vygotsky, 1987a). The same is true with regard to the outcomes of the child's transformation of social speech into inner speech (Nam, 2005). While egocentric private speech, according to Vygotsky (1987a), resembles social speech in its structure, inner speech is characterised by continual dynamic changes. With inner speech, the child succeeds in organising their thoughts and conveying meanings. Summarising Vygotsky's (1987a) theoretical implications, it becomes obvious that all functions in child's cognitive development make a shift from a social level to an individual level. Given that child's individual development has its roots in the social, the development of higher mental functions requires participation in joint activities (Ameri, 2020).

Methods

The present research draws on a critical review methodology. What is behind the choice of this research methodology is an attempt to assess the relevance of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory for L1 and L2 acquisition. In the process of conducting a critical review, the focus will be put on the research that has the greatest contribution to the field of language acquisition. The chosen articles will be examined through a critical lens to determine whether Vygotsky's (1978) theory is effective in explaining the phenomenon of language acquisition. This is in line with Gheondea-Eladi (2015), who asserts that a critical review methodology allows the researcher to generate a common ground for criticising theoretical and empirical evidence obtained in prior studies. Given that the purpose of this review is to juxtapose perspectives to facilitate understanding of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory, the attention will be paid to the articles with different perspectives. In this regard, the review sacrifices breadth in favour of depth. By focusing on the articles that both confirm and challenge Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) claims, the critical review will produce a balanced discussion of the psychologist's key concepts and will uncover the potential of Vygotsky's (1987) theoretical concepts for L2 teaching.

In more specific terms, the discussion will critically engage with Vygotsky's (1978) arguments and theoretical perspectives to consolidate the existing knowledge and analyse the psychologist's legacy on learners' cognitive and linguistic development. According to Webster and Watson (2002), such a critical engagement with the material reinforces theory development and application of theory to practice. By bringing together the findings from different theoretical and empirical studies and assessing them, the critical review will produce answers to research questions "with a power than no single study has" (Snyder, 2019, p. 339). A deductive approach to research is adopted for this critical review. According to Taylor et al. (2006), this approach is used when the aim of the research is to test specific theoretical implications. In line with DePoy

and Gitlin (2015), the deductive approach generates a complete picture on the application of theory to practice. Given the focus on a deductive way of reasoning, the present research assumes a theoretical truth and integrates this truth into an exploration. Appropriate information on theoretical concepts will be taken from relevant research and academic literature. As Solomon and Draine (2009) assert, a deductive approach provides the researcher with an opportunity to trace how the selected empirical studies either approve or disapprove the hypotheses made by a particular theorist.

Results

The sources chosen for the present critical review expose the functioning of Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) concepts in an L2 setting. The article of Carpenter et al. (1998) has an important contribution to the discussion of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory in several ways. By exposing the findings of two longitudinal studies, the researchers have provided justification for the development of social-cognitive skills in infants aged 9-15 months due to interactions with mothers. Due to the researchers' measures of different aspects of children's behaviour (declarative and imperative gestures, comprehension and production of a language, imitation of actions, gaze following, and joint attentional engagement), they have gained a comprehensive understanding of close relationships between child's social skills and cognitive skills. As is clearly illustrated by Carpenter et al. (1998), the more amount of time the child spends with parents and the more appropriate language for communication is chosen by them, the better is child's linguistic competence. By way of example, the children, who took part in more joint attention activities with their parents had a more extensive vocabulary than the children with fewer episodes of joint attention. Specifically, the infants in the analysed studies produced the majority of words when they played with an object together with their mothers or pointed to the objects to attract attention of adults. Hence, a crucial implication from this particular study is the need for infants and parents to participate in joint engagement and sharing of gestures and gazes. However, the evidence acquired by Carpenter et al. (1998) reveals that joint attentional engagements are possible only when the child starts perceiving adults as intentional agents.

While the research of Carpenter et al. (1998) brings to the forefront the significance of interactions in L1 acquisition, the articles of Kuhl et al. (2003) and Turuk (2008) provide proof of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory in relation to L2 acquisition. In particular, Kuhl et al. (2003) have found the evidence that the American infants between nine and ten months of age developed their L2 phonetic knowledge after the exposure to a live speech, not to a prerecorded speech. By carrying out two experiments, the researchers have revealed that the infants, who listened to native Mandarin Chinese speakers and interacted with them in the laboratory, responded to a foreign language more eagerly than the infants, who listened to audio or audiovisual recordings. Two crucial factors affecting the infants' responses to a foreign language were 1) the speech explicitly directed to infants and 2) the use of several speakers. Overall, the received findings expose the role of social interaction in enhancing L2 learning. As is evident from the findings of Turuk (2008), socially-mediated activities and scaffolding used in L2 language instruction facilitate collaborative learning and, thus, encourage the learner to uncover their full potential. In keeping with Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development, teacher's assistance is pivotal in moving the learner from the actual development level to the potential development level. What ensues from Turuk's (2008) analysis is that the interaction with the teacher in a classroom deepens learner's understanding of the function and structure of L2. The results of Kuhl

et al. (2003) and Turuk (2008) are in consonance with that of Lantolf (2000) and Donato (2000), who clearly illustrate the benefits of integrating Vygotsky's (1978) concept of social interaction into SLA. In particular, the researchers have revealed that peer interaction during focused activities facilitates the children's acquisition of a second language.

The research undertaken by Syomwene (2016) has generated empirical evidence on the need to integrate Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory into L2 instruction in Kenya. The findings received from the observation checklists, document analysis, and the structured and focused group interview schedules have revealed that the strategies and activities used by English teachers in Kenya are inefficient in improving oral communication skills of learners and in developing learners' understanding of new language items. In light of the acquired results, an interactive social setting is a prerequisite to meaningful language learning. The proposal made by the researcher is the inclusion of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory into English course books, teacher training courses, and the English language curriculum. Following Syomwene's (2016) line of argument, the emphasis on purposeful interaction and scaffolding in L2 instruction will provide the learner with an opportunity to achieve a higher developmental level. In this regard, Syomwene's (2016) conclusions are consistent with that of Turuk's (2008). However, Syomwene (2016) goes further by claiming that the English language teacher should reconcile collaboration with the learner and design the learning strategies that increase the learner's developmental level. These aspects are interdependent, given that intensive interaction with the learner allows the teacher to penetrate deep into the ways through which the learner creates meanings. The implications received by Syomwene (2016) are congruent with the view of Nam (2005) that, according to Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory, it is not a specific task but social interactions that are crucial for the development of child's cognitive and linguistic skills. Specifically, it is teacher's scaffolding that helps the learner deepen their knowledge and expand their learning experiences during L2 teaching.

Yet, to a certain extent, the empirical evidence gathered by Ochs (1985) and Schieffelin (1985) challenges Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory. By comparing the examples of language acquisition of Kauli and Samoan children with the data from the studies that identify the positive effects of the interactionist theory on language development, the researchers have clearly shown that the findings of these studies are highly questionable. The fact is that the majority of studies focus on the language acquisition of Western, middle-class children, disregarding the language acquisition in non-Western cultures.

As a result of this emphasis, these studies, according to Schieffelin and Ochs (1984), clearly illustrate that caregivers take into account the child's perspective and adjust their language to the child's needs to maintain a dialogue. An interesting result of Ochs's (1985) and Schieffelin's (1985) investigation is a lack of correlation between a child-directed speech and language fluency. In more precise terms, Kauli and Samoan children become fluent language speakers even without their parents' use of child-directed speech. In these societies, as Ochs's (1985) and Schieffelin's (1985) show, parents are reluctant to simplify their language during communication with children because of the prevalent belief that a person of a higher status does not adjust to a person of a lower status. As such, a child-directed speech is not a necessary requirement for effective language acquisition, while an intentionally simplified speech is not a universal phenomenon (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017). However, the study conducted by Berk (1986) has identified the positive effects of teacher-designed tasks on the formation of child's private speech and has confirmed Vygotsky's

(2012) assumptions on the importance of private speech and task-related behaviours in child's cognitive development.

According to the evidence gained by Berk (1986) from the observation of the first and third graders in a math lesson, task-relevant private speech improves child's attentional focus and reduces tension during motor performance in classroom learning contexts. The results of the study undertaken by Fernyhough and Fradley (2005) both confirm and refute Vygotsky's (2012) hypotheses on child's private speech and task performance. On the one hand, the researchers' empirical evidence is in line with Vygotsky's (1987a) opinion that private speech is a transitional stage between social speech and inner speech. On the other hand, the received findings undermine the psychologist's assertions that private speech diminishes during the early school years and that there is a strong correlation between child's private speech and concurrent task performance. As for the former, the researchers have found that the child continues to use overt self-regulation while fulfilling challenging tasks. The child's return to private speech in various problem-solving contexts signifies that temporary transitions from silent inner speech to private speech are possible. While this particular result provides explanation to the use of private speech in adulthood, profound longitudinal research is necessary to generate conclusive evidence on overt self-regulatory private speech. With regard to the latter aspect, Fernyhough and Fradley (2005) have revealed that the development of private speech has a relation to future task performance.

In contrast to Fernyhough and Fradley (2005), Berk and Landau (1993) have found the evidence of the use of private speech by children with learning disabilities during puzzle solving and academic seatwork in a laboratory setting. Through the comparison of 112 normally achieving children and children with learning disabilities from grades 3-6, the researchers have obtained proof that the latter group of children uses more task-relevant and setting-specific speech than the former group. However, in their study on the development of private speech among the Appalachian children from low-income families Berk and Garvin (1984) have acquired the evidence that challenges Vygotsky's (1987a) view on the correlation between the child's socio-economic status and the use of private speech. While the findings have proved Vygotsky's (1987a) assertion that private speech develops with cognitively demanding tasks, they have revealed that the Appalachian children from low-income families do not significantly differ from the middle-class children (in the prior study of Kohlberg et al., 1968) in the development of private speech. Although the children in this study were slower in shaping their private speech skills, they did not differ in the form of development from the middle-class children. Another controversial aspect of Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) theoretical implications is highlighted by Liu and Matthews (2005). In particular, the researchers assert that the psychologist's ideas of the importance of social interactions for language acquisition can be considered disputable in cases of children with learning disabilities. What is evident from the analysis undertaken by Liu and Matthews (2005) is that there are some social groups that do not benefit from collaboration and active participation in the learning process. This is explained by the fact that children with disabilities differ from normally developing children in capabilities, experiences, ways of communication, and learning strategies. Delving deeper, even normally developing children are different in their cognitive and linguistic development (Caseli & Stefanini, 2006). By way of example, the child may develop at a slow rate, despite constant scaffolding and interactions with the teacher and peers.

Pathan et al. (2018) accentuate the limitations of Vygotsky's (1978) notion of ZPD, stating that the psychologist analyses the ZPD in general and does not evaluate the use of this concept in

a classroom environment. According to Piaget (1995), there is a risk that the child, who is not prepared for interactions with more knowledgeable others, will start imitating the behaviour of adults and borrowing their views. As a result of such experience, the child will fail to develop higher mental functions. This stance of Piaget (1995) becomes even more resonant, if taking into account the fact that the efficiency of learning depends on the child's prior knowledge, personality traits, and the extent of self-esteem. As such, there is a need for language teachers to use individual approaches to the assessment of learners' ZPD (Nam, 2005). The differences in the stances of Piaget (1995) and Vygotsky (1987) are attributed to the scholars' different perceptions of child's cognitive development (Sarem & Shirzadi, 2014). While Piaget (1995) treats cognitive development as an individual act, Vygotsky (1987) opposes the idea of definite stages of child's development and argues for the impossibility of achieving higher mental functions without extensive social interactions. Lambert and Clyde (2000) express another concern with regard to the ZPD, stating that it reinforces the child's dependence on adults and deprives them of active participation in the learning process.

However, this particular view is highly questionable, given that Vygotsky (1997) focuses on the idea that the teacher's role is to create a dynamic and stimulating learning environment for the child but not explicitly affect their cognitive development. What is behind this idea is the transformation of the child into an empowered and self-regulated learner, whilst preserving close interactions with the teacher. Following the line of argument made by Cannella and Reiff (1994), an empowered learner is reflective, autonomous, inquisitive, and enthusiastic. Such a learner engages in communication, poses questions, takes risks, investigates, explores the unknown, acquires new experiences, identifies different perspectives, and resolves complex problems. Cannella and Reiff's (1994) view of an empowered learner expands Vygotsky's (1978) concept of ZPD by implying that learners may engage in interactions with their peers to uncover their potential. The similar opinion is expressed by Nam (2005), who asserts that the recent empirical research (e.g. Anton, 1999) has brought to the fore the evidence of the positive effects of non-expert interactions on L2 acquisition. In the study of Anton (1999), the peers not only engaged in joint activities but also provided effective guidance, thus achieving higher academic levels. As such, the received empirical evidence modifies Vygotsky's (1978) theoretical implications.

Discussion

The study intends to analyze Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) interactionist view of language acquisition to assess the relevance of Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory in L1 and L2 acquisition. As the undertaken critical analysis has revealed, the articles under review prove the validity of the arguments made by Vygotsky (1978), despite the fact that some questions still remain unanswered, especially in relation to the language acquisition by children from non-Western cultures and children with disabilities, on the one hand, and the child's use of overt self-regulatory private speech in challenging learning contexts, on the other. Some inconsistencies identified in the process of critical review are explained by the uniqueness of each L2 setting and the use of different samples and research methods by researchers.

Overall, the basis on which the psychologist builds his interactionist theory of language is strong enough to justify the application of theory to practice. The deductive approach to critical research has produced crucial information that may be used to promote Vygotsky's (1978, 1987a, 1987b, 1997, 2012) theoretical implications. In particular, the discussed evidence suggests that L1 and L2 acquisition is significantly reinforced when children have access to social interaction and

live speech. On the contrary, the lack of social interaction deprives children of the opportunity to develop good language skills. As is obvious from the conducted analysis, mastery of language depends on the child's ability to acquire external social reality and individual subjectivity. When these requirements are met, the child succeeds in generating a grammatically correct and situation-specific speech. While the theory of Universal Grammar by Chomsky (1965) and the behaviourist theory of Skinner (1957) have been influential in inspiring scholars, linguists, and researchers to undertake profound research on L1 and L2 acquisition, it is Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory that has deepened understanding of the crucial role of social interaction in child's cognitive development.

Conclusion

To recapitulate, the articles under review prove the validity of the arguments made by Vygotsky (1978) despite the fact some questions remain unanswered. In particular, the child's use of overt self-regulatory private speech in challenging learning contexts, and language acquisition by children from non-Western cultures and children with disabilities. Given that Vygotsky's (1978) interactionist theory brings together such important aspects as cognitive development, social interaction, private speech, and internalisation, it generates one of the most systematic and comprehensive stances on how the child acquires cognitive and linguistic skills. Although this theory is not ideal and should be used wisely by a language teacher, its implementation into L2 curriculum may significantly empower language learners because of the theory's emphasis on learner-centeredness. However, to maximise the effectiveness of social interaction in L2 learning, more profound and longitudinal research on the integration of the concepts of ZPD and scaffolding into teaching is required. Despite the fact that the discussed empirical studies have addressed the role of teacher and peer interactions in L2 learning, it is important to assess the long-term effects of these interactions on the process of L2 learning and shed more light on the types of social interaction that enhance language acquisition. Taking into consideration the fact that cognitive and linguistic development is a continuous process, it is essential for researchers, scholars, and language teachers to gain understanding of how the learner changes with the expansion of social interactions.

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