

## The Importance of Sociocultural Theory in Language Learning Acquisition and EFL Classrooms

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**Annotation:** This article considers the role of sociocultural theory in human development and language learning process which are now considering one of the problematic issues in teaching. It presents some information according to Vygotskiy and other scientists' researches on this topic and try to explain it more in detail. Furthermore, it claims some effective approaches that can be implemented in the EFL classrooms. Finally, the article ends with my own view points on this matter and some implications in order to apply language learning.

**Keywords:** sociocultural theory, psychology, learning, development, interaction, mediate.

Over recent decades, sociocultural theory plays a great role on the learning and teaching profession. The theory determine learning which includes second language classes where knowledge should be taught in socially mediated activities. To be more precise, in sociocultural approach, learning second language should be cooperative work and it should not be taught individually. This approach was first applied and systematized by L.S.

Vygotsky and his coworkers in Russia in the nineteen twenties and thirties. While some psychologists were busy with developing simple explanations of human behavior, Vygotskiy was investigating more complicated approach about it through a wide range of subjects which including the psychology of art; language and thought; and learning and development which consist of a concentration on the education of students with special requirements.

However, his research was put an end to for about 20 years and did not become attainable again until the late fifties and early sixties. After that sociocultural approaches have been developing by many scholars in over a dozen countries. In the last 25 years there have been a great deal of interpretations of Vygotskiy and his collaborators work which leads to various perspectives on this theory.

They believe that language can be best understood when it is investigated in its historical development which is closely connected with cultural contexts and other symbol system of the target language according to Lantolf (2000) one of the basic notion of the sociocultural theory is that human mind is considered to be mediated. Furthermore, Lantolf argues that Vygotskiy point out a significant role for understanding between world and human themselves in their mind.

Moreover, according to Vygotsky (1978, Lantolf 2000) if a child would be in sociocultural environment, he or she is demanded multifarious tasks and engages with his world through the tools. Vygotskiy claims that the child in his early ages, completely depended on other people, usually their parents who is considered to be an instructor to teach them what to do, how to do, and what not to do. Parents are the first representative who lead the child into cultural possess especially through the language. So that to be appropriate with these notion the child attains knowledge through communication and interaction with people as the first step (interpsychological

plane), then after a little period, he incorporates and internalizes this knowledge using his personal view to it. (intrapsychological plane)

This concept of Vygotsky from social to personal property does not like only a copy, but knowledge which might be learnt through communication or interactions. Vygotskiy states that this can also occur in educational places like schools and universities between students and teachers. For instance, learners do not only copy teacher's skills or competence but also they learn teachers offers and suggests that is given during the process of teaching. Moreover, Vygotsky (Lantolf 1994, 2002) argues that consciousness does not include in the complex aspects of understanding human behaviour in the field of psychology. In his view, the consciousness is considered as the difference between human and other creations around the world and links person's knowledge to his/her behaviour. It develops human beings interaction with reality that is based on socio historical practices in the process of their life. An addition to this, Lantof (1994) states that everything related to metacognition such as planning, voluntary attention, logical memory, problem solving and evaluation helps to understanding consciousness in the field of teaching. Furthermore, Williams and Burden (1997) argue that sociocultural theory provides not only teaching with theoretical point of view just with instruction and rules, but also through practical view like learning to learn, improving competences and strategies to continue to learn which helps learning more meaningful and relevant to the individual and make him/her developing as a whole person.

Besides, they claim that education must be established through the type of explicit and implicit information based on constructive society's knowledge and its beliefs which should be in a straightforward way of learning interaction between teachers and student.

It is believed that the sociocultural theory represents mostly the act of learning in its view. Williams and Burden (1997) also claims that this theory mainly based on the complex unit of studies in every sphere of teaching and it refuses teaching competences or knowledge which presented in separately. What's more, the theory highlighted the role of learners in any kind of active meaning of learning and problem solving situation which is occurred between learners, teachers and tasks. (addresser –message- addressee). According to Ellis (2000) this theory believes that learning should be in interaction not through interaction. In fact, this is one of the best methods in the process of teaching language. At first, teachers give a helping hand to students in order to understand new subjects or tasks, later the tasks are learnt and analyzed in detail by the students to get more self confidence on that subject. Due to the fact that social interactions are confirmed as mediate learning. Also, Ellis states that successful interaction is occurred in mediate condition when students scaffold the new tasks. However, importance of Vygotskiy's sociocultural theory is that it describes human learning process as a social mediated process and it is originated in among the people or culture. Furthermore, it states that in the development of human cognition there is a vital role of social interaction. For this reason, every subject should be learned in two levels. First, in terms of interacting with others, and then integrated into individual's mental structure by asking more detailed questions or having much communication between addresser and addressee. According to these two levels, every child has cultural development based on the first social interaction. (interpsychological) and then individual level. (intrapsychological). This kind of way of perception is connected with voluntary attention, logical memory and the formation of concepts and all the higher functions are taken place between individuals. (Vygotskiy, 1978, p 57). Another significant aspect of Vygotskiy's theory is that it emphasizes cultural influence and importance of interaction with peers and adults in the process of child development. To be more precise, Vygotskiy suggested the "zone of proximal development" which involves the difference between the attempts that child take on their own and the aid that is given by adults or older ones. For instance if a child has a difficulty with writing tasks he or she can learn it from the samples of

adults or older ones and later he/she is able to do it on their own. The help of the adults and older ones is called scaffolding. According to McKenzie, (1999) scaffolding provides the following advantages:

- a) It provides clear directions for students
- b) It clarifies purpose of the task
- c) It keeps students on task
- d) It offers assessment to clarify expectations
- e) It points students to worthy sources
- f) It reduces uncertainty, surprise and disappointment
- g) It delivers efficiency
- h) It creates momentum

That is said that, through giving a helping hand from adults to children is play a supportive role in child's development in mentally. What's more, the "zone of proximal development" expresses the learners cognitive knowledge but it is not enough to fully develop (Briner, 1999). In a scaffolding a teacher or more experienced peer is able to provide the learner with more complex skills and intellectual knowledge through collaborative learning, discourse, modelling, and scaffolding. Moreover, Vygotsky argued that learning through the cultural tool such as computers, books and traditions is one of the crucial way of obtaining knowledge. These items might be fruitful to understand the cultural value in their life. As an illustration for cultural influence to learning, it can be seen that in the USA children attend school from their early six till eighteen and gain the fundamental knowledge from different subjects like math or physics, while in some countries like Brazil most children learn math through buying and selling candies in the streets.

### **Conclusion**

To recapitulate briefly, involving sociocultural interaction into the EFL classrooms will give profound shift to language acquisition. In other words, language learning process is more fruitful when there is interactive method of learning. For that, teachers should try to involve scaffolding and collaborative approaches in order to make their students more conscious on the target language learning. In addition to this, scaffolding is play a great role to eliminate negative emotions like frustrating and discouraged which they might experience during the learning process when they have challenging tasks. Another means of instructional scaffolding is that at the beginning of the situation teacher has a great role, then it gradually moved to students which gives advantages in the language learning later.

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