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Book Review

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Interaction and Second Language Development: A Vygotskian Perspective (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2015), 215 pp. ISBN 9789027213310 (Pbk).

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Sociocultural theory (SCT) is predicated upon Russian avant-garde psychologist, Lev Vygotsky's dialectical psychology. SCT sets out to investigate primarily the complex, dynamic, and processual relationality between culture and biology in engendering human consciousness and its constitutive higher-order functions over time. Higher-order functions are uniquely human due to being mediated, particularized, and actualized in and through socioculturally-constructed and meaning-saturated artifacts including speaking activities (Vygotsky, 1978). SCT holds that cultural-historical symbolic and semiotic systems qua dialogic interactions have a pervasive effect upon germinating and mutating psychological organization of human cognition. This book is volume 44 of the John Benjamins Publishing Company 'Language Learning and Language Teaching' series. As van Compernelle states, the investigation he conducts in *Interaction and Second Language Development: A*

Vygotskian Perspective concentrates on furnishing ‘an account of the role of interaction in L2 development from the perspective of cultural-historical psychology’. More specifically, this book purports to wed two lines of research in L2 studies, namely the interaction-oriented approach and SCT, the originality of author’s perspective- in order to come to better grips with the process of L2 development in a classroom context. While its theoretical complexity and adequacy do not render it a felicitous choice for well-versed scholars in SCT research tradition, the book will be interesting and useful for undergraduate and graduate audiences.

Divided into nine chapters, the volume begins with a short introductory chapter on the role of interaction in L2 development touching upon interaction hypothesis, sociointeractional perspective and Vygotskian SCT and their contribution to an appreciation of what is involved in L2 development. In concluding, *a posteriori* reflection on the monograph and two cardinal themes which run throughout whole discussions in preceding chapters- mediation and joint activity- are examined and elaborated in the context of L2 development. There are four salient features of the book that make it suitable for maturing researchers and pre- and in-service teachers of languages. First, every chapter except introductory and concluding chapters includes data excerpts mainly from author’s own published or unpublished relevant data set which are conducive to illustrating more concretely attentive theoretical issues and notions and for a more engaged and data-driven understanding of discussions. Second, conclusion sections qua ‘pedagogical implications’ vignette seven chapters of the book and are useful recommendations for extrapolating from them any general view about teaching a language in classroom context. Another signature characteristic of the book is that five video recorded interactions out of seven data sessions are available online at publisher’s webpages. Last foreground characteristic of the volume is ‘questions for discussion’ sections which are raised on the basis of analyzed data of each chapter so as to foster awareness and stimulate development of a nuanced appreciation of the related arguments and issues.

Chapter 2, ‘Key concepts and theoretical considerations’, covers pivotal concepts, underpinnings and constructs of SCT as they relate to interactional L2 development and lays a fertile and conceptual ground for discussions in ensuing chapters. Creative appropriation of ideational and physical artifacts - simultaneously means and ends of historical phylogenesis and phylogenetic history- coupled with practical activity germinate and transform human consciousness in time and over time (Karimi-Aghdam, 2016). It should therefore come as no surprise that the author holds that ‘language is at once a psychological tool to be internalized and the means through which internalization may take place’ (pp.12-13).

Chapter 3, concerning the substantial role of communicative interaction in occasioning L2 developmental process, chalks out the difference between the concepts of ‘acquisition’ and ‘internalization’. ‘Acquisition’ is premised on conceiving the role of ‘external’ interaction to trigger and differentiate an internal and inborn language faculty teleologically and maturationally whereas the concept of ‘internalization’ is anchored on conceptualizing ‘dialogic process’ of inter-individual and socioculturally-embedded interaction to regulate an individual’s thinking processes and give rise to emergence of complex higher-order psychological functions.

Chapter 4 discusses L2 interaction and negotiation for meaning - 'in which people work to create, maintain, and repair intersubjective understanding in L2-mediated interaction' (p.84) - contextualized within SCT remit. Co-regulation (i.e., an incessant process of mutually adjusting and functionally regulating communicative actions qua interactional and verbal utterances intersubjectively), mediation sequences (i.e., a three-part mediation-oriented conversational sequence laced with pedagogical overtones to resolve a performance difficulty), and incidental microgenesis (i.e., an unintentional but conscious appropriation of a novel linguistic affordance or refashioning of existing feature qualitatively) are thematic threads running through chapter 4.

Chapter 5 centers on discussing the advantages and potential drawbacks of using L1 in teaching L2 in educational contexts. The point of departure for lack of consensus regarding the role of L1 is to be found in some cognitivist L2 research streams namely, 'input hypothesis', 'interaction hypothesis', 'output hypothesis' and 'negative evidence through feedback' which accentuate the role of exposure- in terms of quantity and quality- to L2 input in bringing about L2 acquisition. Viewed from sociocultural vantage point, the author argues that judiciously drawing upon L1 'can mediate the appropriation of L2 resources' (p.106) and an optimized use of L2 in the classroom context can augment an L2 learner's semiotic repertoire to engage in purposive communicative activity. Chapter 6 provides valuable ways of considering how participation, that is, goal-directed, mediated, reflecting, situated and experiential engagements in and through practical activity- and active reception, that is, an agentive and participatory appropriation of perceivable possibilities afforded in talk-in-interaction- can benefit the process of L2 development.

Chapter 7 explores dynamic assessment in relation to interaction and L2 development. Dynamic assessment is one of the fecund educational offshoots propounded by proponents of SCT which is grounded in dialectical synthesis of assessment and teaching within zone of proximal development (ZPD) of an L2 learner. Mediational procedures and on-going nurturing practices to co-construct potential L2 developmental trajectories are argued to have widespread implications for classroom-based assessment activities in instructional milieux. Chapter 8 deals with the linchpin notion of interactional competence and its underlying dimensions from SCT standpoint. Interactional competence comprises a steadfast core which defines language knowledge as a collective and culture-human centered phenomenon within a situational-cultural hull that emerges spontaneously through many local interactional practices over time. The causal contributions of interactional competence and L2 development are reciprocal and bidirectional in such a way that 'interactional competencies mediate the joint accomplishment of interaction' and in turn 'interactional competencies are mediated by the resources that become available in the joint accomplishment of interaction' (p.171).

The book is engagingly written, with clear empirical evidence for vindicating the author's claims and a wide range of fascinating data from a range of classroom contexts. Situating his arguments well within the garden variety of theoretical and conceptual notions and constructs from SCT research program, the author perceptively analyzes interactional nuances invoking conversation analysis to provide an adequate depiction of processual trajectory of L2

development. The book would have been theoretically more substantive and sophisticated with discussion of the philosophical underpinnings and axiomatic formulations of SCT and conversation analysis along with arguments riveted on commensurability of these two research programs.

Reference

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