Sociocultural and Second Language Learning Research: An Exegesis
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Sociocultural theory (SCT)
It “proposes that humans attain the capacity to voluntarily control or regulate their memory, attention, perception, planning, learning, and development, as they appropriate mediating artifacts, including language, as they are brought into culturally specified and organized activities” (p.335)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)
- It “is a projection of a person’s developmental future in the sense that what one can do in cooperation with others today one can do alone tomorrow” (p.336). Vygotsky believes that “the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it” (p.336).
- Imitation is the key to developmental activity; it is not a mechanical activity, but the ability to step from something one knows to something new with the assistance of other. Therefore instruction influences development.
- SCT and L2:
  o Learners need to collaborate with speakers of the second language who are more knowledgeable than they are to advance to higher levels.
  o Learners are able to “collaboratively construct knowledge of an L2 in the absence of an expert knower” (p.336).

ZPD and Krashen’s i+1- Differences:
1. Krashen’s theory: input-output relationship, abstract symbol manipulation, and an autonomous individual. VS. Vygotsky’s theory: rejects the autonomous individual as well as cognition being exclusive and invisible.
2. Krashen’s LAD. VS. Vygotsky’s “man [sic] controls his brain and not the brain the man” (p.337).
3. Krashen- language acquisition which is a sequential and predictable process. VS. Vygotsky- human development which is a revolutionary perspective.

Autonomous Knower and Internalization
- SCT “argues for a necessary dialectic relationship between the individual and the social…[it] is not a sociolinguistic theory of language use; it is a psychological/psycholinguistic theory that explains human mental function on the basis of situated sociocultural activity that is mediated in large part by communicative practices” (p.341).
- SCT “recognizes the centrality of human individuals… as continually active material and historical beings that dialectically emerge from, and at the same time, remain part of, sociocultural communities” (p.341).
- Through internalization in the ZPD the “activity between individuals or individuals and culture artifacts is transformed into intramental activity” (p.341).
L2 learners “construct mental representation of what was at one point physically (acoustic or visual) present in the external form” (p.342).
- “people… not only rely on others to mediate their learning and development, they also rely on themselves, but they do so in ways that are derived from their interpersonal experiences as sanctioned by their sociocultural communities and the specific activities they promote” (p.342).

**Longitudinal Studies and the Genetic Method**
“Vygotsky understood the role of time psychological research. He proposed four genetic domains as sites where psychologists can observe mental functioning” (p.344), the most relevant for L2 research are:

1. **Ontogenesis**: “concerned with the cultural development of the individual through the internalization social relationships and cultural artifacts”. (p.344)
2. **Microgenesis**: “focuses on “short-term formation of a psychological process” such as what occurs “when an investigator is trying to train a subject to criterion before beginning the ‘real observations’” (p.344)

**Activity Theory and Task-Based Learning**
- “Activity theory holds that all higher forms of human activity arise as a direct consequence of motives and goals” (p.345)
- SCT studies that deal with learners’ motives and goals agree that one can not predict learners’ performances on a task. It is not a guarantee that a certain activity will occur at the same point in time by different people or by the same people at a different time.
- ‘ Given the unstable nature of tasks and the unpredictability of learning outcomes, activity theory and task-based approaches to L2 research and teaching are incommensurable at least with regard to task-based concerns with determining which features of a L2 will be learned and which will not during a particular task. That is because learning depends heavily on the significance a learner places on the different activities he/she participates in’ (p.346)

**SCT and a Theory of Language**
- “Perpetual process in which movement towards a complete structure of some kind is constant but completion is always deferred” (p.348).
- In this theory, the process is communication and the structure is grammar.
- Grammar here is “never fixed, never determined, but constantly open and in flux” (p.348).
- “This does not mean that grammar is not systematic… its systematicity arises from memory of things past- we mold and shape the language as we move through various discursive activities” (p.349)