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Bringing Vygotsky and Bakhtin into the Second Language Classroom: A Focus on the Unfinalized Nature of Communication

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ABSTRACT

Human development theories have influenced diverse areas of instruction, including second language teaching and learning. Acknowledging the importance of the bidirectional influences between theory and practice, the present paper grounds second language learning within the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin as they pertain to linguistic development. Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin endorsed a communication-based language learning based on their social primacy view of development. In addition, both theorists emphasized the dialogical nature of language and consciousness. This worldview allowed them to expand the scope of context to include multiple participants and perspectives in creating and understanding the meaning of any linguistic construction. The role of the teacher as a human mediator is emphasized in guiding the language learning process in the second language classroom with special attention to the instruction of pragmatic competence.

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The nature of language instruction has varied to a considerable degree depending on the underlying theories of human development that provided guidelines for effective teaching and learning. For example, behaviorist theories have led to audiolingual methodology in language classrooms that focus on the stimulus-response mechanism of learning (Hadley, 2001). Because learning is based on reinforcing the stimulus-response associations, pattern drills are encouraged without explanation of underlying linguistic principles. Directly opposed to behaviorist accounts of learning are theories that focus on the innate cognitive capabilities of individuals. These theories focus on the inherent language acquisition capabilities of individuals with minimal attention to environmental stimulation. Instructional methods based on this theoretical camp focus on helping students generate their own language rules by moving from what the students already know (from their native language) to the unknown (new rules or old rules used in new situations).

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The relationship between theories of development and instructional practices are not simple or unidirectional as the previous description may have implied. Theoretical foundations of learning may have a sound empirical basis, yet educators may not make the best use of such theories in planning their classroom instruction. On the other hand, even outdated theories, or theories that have proven to have given false pictures of human development, may contain elements that are conducive to effective instruction. Finally, not only do theories inform practice, but classroom instruction also contributes to modifying and expanding current theoretical paradigms.

The purpose of the present paper is to focus on a specific theoretical perspective on human development and to derive implications for teaching in second language classrooms. The theoretical framework chosen for investigation is based on the works of Vygotsky and Bakhtin and focuses on the importance of communication in language mastery. Although the relationship between theory and practice is always bidirectional, current work will focus on conceptual analyses of theory to inform practice and relegate the empirical work of examining actual classroom instruction for future research agenda.

With the purpose of providing theory-based instructional implications, the paper begins by outlining the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin as they relate to L2 development. Although, there are many similarities in the ways Vygotsky and Bakhtin viewed language learning, the theoretical framework of each thinker will be presented separately in order to highlight the major conceptual constructs in their works. Following an overview of the theoretical perspectives will be a section delineating the instructional implications. The paper concludes with a summary of major conceptual issues and a guideline for future research that extends the analyses outlined in current work.

2. Communication Based Theoretical Framework

Before embarking on explicating the theories of Bakhtin and Vygostky, a note on the usage of terminology is in order. Generally, the term second language acquisition (SLA) is used to refer to both processes of naturalistic and untutored acquisition as well as formal and tutored learning (Ellis, 1985). The focus is on how people learn an additional language (L2) after they have acquired their primary language (L1) in various contexts. In the present context, the focus will be on learning the L2 in formal instructional contexts where teaching and learning processes occur in an integrated and dynamic ways. In addition, there will not be a strict distinction between second and foreign languages, as the focus is on learning an additional language in instructional settings.

2.1. Vygotsky's Contribution

The Soviet and Russian developmental and educational psychologist Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896-1934) is the originator of what is now widely known as the sociocultural theory of human development (Kozulin, 1998; Wertsch, 1991; Wertsch, 1998). This theoretical framework has had a significant impact on enhancing our understanding of the nature of human learning and consequently led to implications for instruction in a variety of domains. Within the field of second language learning, the sociocultural theory offered ways to conceptualize the mechanism underlying how people learn a new language and what factors promote this process (e.g., Eun & Lim, 2009; John-Steiner, Panofsky, & Smith, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

The major tenet of the Vygotskian sociocultural theory is that uniquely human mental functions (i.e., higher psychological processes) originate in the social plane in which actual human interactions and relations take place. This view has been espoused by Vygotsky (1978; 1987) in what is now well known as the general genetic law of cultural development. This law states that any function in the cultural development of a child first appears on the intermental plane (i.e., between people) and later on the

intramental plane (i.e., individual mental plane). The development of language, primary or foreign, follows this cultural developmental route of internalization.

One of the fundamental issues within this view of development is to address the mechanism whereby the transition from the intermental to the intramental occurs. The explanation provided by Vygotsky and other socioculturally oriented researchers (e.g., Kozulin, 1990; 2003; Wertsch, 1991) is the mechanism of mediation. Mediation refers to socially meaningful activity that transforms impulsive, unmediated, and natural behavior into higher mental processes through the use of instruments or tools (Minick, 1987). Kozulin (1990, 2003) further noted three basic types of mediation. The first is mediation via symbolic tools such as language and other sign systems. The second is through technical and material tools, from simple use of paper and pencil to enhance memory functions to using advanced technological tools such as computers to solve complex problems. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there are human mediators. Mediation, as a mechanism of internalization, presupposes the presence of human mediators, as any developmental process would originate in meaningful exchanges between people (John-Steiner, Panofsky, & Smith, 1994). As Valsiner and van der Veer (2000) maintained, meaning, in its turn, requires participation and communicability.

The fact that human behavior is mediated by language underlies the phenomenon of polysemy (i.e., multiple meanings and interpretations). When people engage in social interactions, the meaningful aspect of their interchanges guides the mediation and thus the internalization process. The meaningful aspect, in turn, is subject to various interpretations depending on a host of contextual factors. This is why Vygotsky was preoccupied with semantic level analyses as well as being fascinated with the theatrical techniques and stage directions (Kozulin, 1990) that gave emphasis on interpreting and expressing multiple meanings inherent in the speech of the actors.

Before concluding a brief excursion into Vygotsky's theory of development, it is important to note that the process from intermental to intramental should not be construed as a mere transition from outer to inner. As Leont'ev (1981) noted, internalization is a process whereby the internal plane itself is constructed. Rather than a direct transposition of intermental functions from the social plane to the inner plane, internalization involves the construction of the inner plane itself. In addition, although the image of planes (i.e., intermental/outer and intramental/inner) may suggest an overly strong spatial metaphor (Cox & Lightfoot, 1997), the concept of internalization should be understood as a time-dependent process. When people interact on the social or intermental plane, more competent participants lend their consciousnesses to the less capable participants (Bruner, 1986) in anticipation of future performance. More specifically, what is jointly achieved within the intermental plane is expected to serve individual functioning once it becomes internalized. People interact with each other with this anticipation in mind. The concept of experts guiding the development of novices until internalization occurs has been termed as the zone of proximal development (ZPD) by Vygotsky (1978; 1987) and has been translated into various implications for instruction and assessment in various academic domains (e.g., Daniels, 2001; Eun, Knotek, & Heining-Boynton, 2008; Hedegaard, 1988; Newman, Griffin, & Cole, 1989).

2.2. Bakhtin's Contribution

There are many similarities between Vygotsky and Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin (1895-1975) in the ways they brought about a paradigm shift (Kuhn, 1996) in the fields of psychology and linguistics. Both revolutionary thinkers were especially interested in the role that language plays in the development of specifically human traits, namely, those higher mental processes that are involved in the formation of consciousness (Bakhurst, 2007; Holquist, 1990; Leont'ev, 1997; Veresov, 1999; Vygotsky, 1997a; Wertsch, 1985). In the preceding section, it was noted that the interrelated concepts of internalization, mediation, and meaning are central to understanding Vygotsky's theories of human development. With Bakhtin, the

interrelated core constructs become: communication, utterance, dialogue, speech genres, and unfinalizability.

In reconceptualizing language development and its relationship to consciousness formation, both Vygotsky and Bakhtin were concerned with units of analyses. For both, the selection of units of analyses became the most basic and fundamental step in formulating a methodology toward a comprehensive study of linguistic development. As mentioned before, Vygotsky's emphasis on the semantic meaning of speech led him to adopt word meaning (Vygotsky, 1987) as the unit of analysis. With similar rationale, (i.e., focus on meaning) Bakhtin (1986) chose the utterance as his basic unit for linguistic (or rather translinguistic) analyses.

In contrast to traditional linguistics' focus on the sentence as the basic unit of analyses, Bakhtin's focus on communication led him to view utterance as the proper unit of investigation (Morson & Emerson, 1990). As Bakhtin (1986) emphasizes many times throughout his writings on the speech genre, an utterance is always situated as a link within a complex chain of communication. Any utterance is at once a response to previously uttered word and an anticipation of future word. Based on this conceptualization, Bakhtin argued that one of the constitutive features of the utterance is that it is always oriented toward an active and responsive understanding of the other.

Because any utterance is always implicated in an ongoing communication and posits at least two participants, Bakhtin's view of language is fundamentally dialogic. Even when a person is talking to him/herself, this person is engaged in dialogic interactions. This is because, even the innermost spheres of individual human consciousness retains a dialogical nature (Bakhtin, 1981; Eun, 2008; Eun, Knotek, & Heining-Boynton, 2008; Vygotsky, 1987). This is in accordance with the social primacy view and relates to Vygotsky's concept of internalization. What goes on in human consciousness is the result of incorporating other people's words and actions. Furthermore, even the act of talking to oneself or thinking silently presupposes the potential responses of others (Clark & Holquist, 1984).

Dialogue represents another critical feature of utterance, which is the boundary marking by the change of speaking subjects. Whereas the boundaries of sentences are marked by grammatical choices (e.g., period, exclamation mark, etc.), the boundaries of utterances are always marked by the change of speakers. This feature is most conspicuous in a real communicative situation where two people are engaged in taking turns speaking. The boundary as indicated by a change of speaking subject also presumes a response. One participant ceases to speak in anticipation of a potential response from the other participant.

An emphasis on language as it is actually used (i.e., communication), led Bakhtin to conceptualize another important aspect in his theoretical framework, namely, speech genres. Speech genres are defined by Bakhtin as those stable generic forms of utterance as manifested in live speech communication between people (Bakhtin, 1986). Speech genres allow people to have a sense of the speech as a whole from the very beginning by providing regularity to communication. The genre of greeting, for example, will make people predict compositional structure and speech length that are unique to this type of genre. As soon as the first word is uttered, people base their comprehension and response on the type of speech genre. Without speech genres, Bakhtin (1986) argues that communication would be almost impossible. Fortunately, speech genres are given rather than being created anew each time there is a need for communication.

The concepts of utterance, dialogue, and speech genres are based on Bakhtin's fundamental worldview of unfinalizability (Morson & Emerson, 1990). It has been noted that Bakhtin repeatedly emphasized that the utterance is always embedded in an infinite chain of communication. Furthermore, any utterance is always dialogic in nature because it is both a response to a past utterance and anticipates future utterance. This is why Morson (1986a) argued that the only way one can claim a sole authorship of an utterance is in a purely physiological sense. The relationship between the concept of speech genres and

unifinalizability lies in the fact that genres are necessarily social and historical (Morson, 1986a). Therefore, as society and history keep changing, so do speech genres. Speech genres are anything but a closed system. As social relations and their embodiment in communication change, so do speech genres. Furthermore, the transformation process is an ongoing one.

Against the background of the foregoing brief theoretical sketches, the next section will explore specific implications these theories provide for language classrooms. In the process of applying the theoretical tenets into the teaching and learning of a second language, the theories will be further explicated.

3. Implications for Second Language Classrooms

As the preceding overview of the theories revealed, both Vygotsky and Bakhtin endorsed social primacy (Holquist, 2002; Leont'ev, 2002) in their accounts of language development. Giving social plane a primary role, both scholars emphasized the social interactions that occur between two or more people and the importance of the role of meaning in those interactions (John-Steiner, 2007). Stressing the dialogical nature of utterances, Vygotsky and Bakhtin focused on studying communication as reflected in real human interactions. As Newman and Holzman (1993) pointed out, social interaction based on communication requires understanding of intentions and purposes.

3.1. Multiple Opportunities for Social Interaction

Given the primary role social interaction plays, students learning second languages should be given ample opportunities to interact with each other and their teacher in the target language. The developmental mechanism provided by Vygotsky is that of mediation and internalization. What is carried out in the social plane, namely, between people, gets internalized to serve individual mental functions. Greenfield (1984) has pointed out that the internalization of dialogue between participants plays a significant role in second language acquisition.

Bakhtin (1986) also emphasized the importance of the communicative function of language where both participants (i.e., speaker and listener) play active roles. Focusing on the active roles of listeners as they creatively respond to the speaker, Bakhtin criticized the one-way transmission model of communication where the speaker sends a message that the listener passively receives. The listener is not a passive recipient of the topic of the speaker's utterances. Rather, the listener always creates his/her own understanding of the topic. Furthermore, the speaker anticipates the listener's responsive understanding in constructing his/her speech.

As the foregoing depiction illustrates, communication involves complex interpersonal and cognitive processes as it drives learning in second language classrooms by pushing students to actively create meaning based on their dialogic interactions. Both Vygotsky and Bakhtin posit at least two active participants in these communicative social interactions. In his formulation of the zone of proximal development, Vygotsky (1978; 1987) originally emphasized the importance of the human mediator (i.e., the more competent other) in leading the development of the less competent. However, even the less competent participant does not respond passively. As Bakhtin would argue, even learners at their beginning stages create their own understanding of the utterances in the target language and respond according to their generated understanding. In this process, their language development proceeds.

3.2. Communication as the Goal of Linguistic Interaction

The preceding section on the importance of social interaction may have presented a picture that any type of dialogic interactions enhances L2 development. However, when considering that Vygotsky emphasized the meaningful aspect of speech and that Bakhtin focused on the intention of the speaker and the responsive understanding of the listener, it becomes clear that not any type of verbal interaction will support the learning of an L2. In order for dialogic interactions to lead L2 development, they have to be based on meaningful communications in which speakers have a clear purpose and listeners respond with creative understanding. This is why Bruner (1986) pointed out that learning a language involves learning how to express intentions in congruence with the culture. Bakhtin (1986) adds that learning a language also involves anticipating the response of the other to one's spoken intentions and purposes.

In emphasizing the importance of the role of the others in communication, Bakhtin (1986) maintained that one of the essential features of utterance is its addressivity, or its quality of being directed to someone. When people speak with a purpose, that purpose includes the addressee to whom the speech is directed. The potential addressee, to a greater or lesser degree, participates in determining the purpose of communication. The speaker tries to anticipate the creative and active response of the addressee to his/her purposes and intentions of speech.

Even in situations where the speech is directed at oneself (i.e., egocentric speech), Vygotsky (1987) maintained that the speaker always has a potential listener in mind. With ingenious experiments, he was able to show that the instances of the usage of egocentric speech dropped significantly when children thought they were in surroundings where their speech could not be comprehended (e.g., when children were among the deaf or when they were among children who spoke a different language). As these theoretical insights imply, Bakhtin and Vygotsky were in agreement that language development proceeds from engaging in meaningful communication that has a clear intention and that anticipates a response from the addressee.

When devising communicative activities for the teacher and students to engage in, the most important consideration should be in determining the purpose and intention of the communication. As a negative example, asking questions when the answer is already known by the questioner or choosing random topics of conversation that do not make sense to the participants will not lead to L2 development. A more conducive approach would demand that students and the teacher use the target language to get meanings and intentions across and necessitate a response from each other. There are numerous topics that could serve these purposes while fulfilling the goals of the wider curriculum (e.g., textbook coverage, preparing for an external text, etc.).

3.3. Dialogue Based on Multiple Voices and Perspectives

Although both Vygotsky and Bakhtin shared a common dialogic view of language, they differed in their specific understandings of the dialogue. As a proponent of Marxist dialectics, Vygotsky sought a synthesis through the dialogue. Bakhtin, on the other hand, abhorred any sort of dialectics (Morson & Emerson, 1989; 1990) and therefore opposed synthesis within the dialogue. Dialogue, for Vygotsky, served as a unifying function of contradicting voices and perspectives. For Bakhtin, dialogue served to highlight the diverse multiple voices and perspectives that resist any form of synthesis and unification.

This difference of worldviews led many researchers (e.g., Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999; Daniels, 2001) to characterize the fundamental difference between Bakhtin and Vygotsky to lie in how they define the relationship between the self and the other. Vygotsky sought to merge the differing voices within dialogic interactions via logic and reason. Bakhtin preferred to maintain the diverging perspectives as unmerged. He poignantly asks what the self could gain from the other if it were to merge with the self (Bakhtin,

1990a). For Bakhtin, differing and even contradicting worldviews were a source of enrichment for all participants engaged in the dialogue. For Vygotsky, the merging of contradicting perspectives is what drives higher understanding for all those involved in dialogic interactions.

When dialogue is the center of language activity, with two or more participants involved, the issue of multiple voices and perspectives must be resolved. In resolving this issue, the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, may be seen to enrich each other, rather than standing in direct opposition. Bakhtin was certainly not advocating a type of relativism where anything goes. Similarly, Vygotsky was not arguing for any sort of dogmatism where one perspective has a clear authoritative role. More than likely, both thinkers would be in agreement that the issue of whether voices merge or not should be based on the agenda of the dialogue and not on other criteria such as authority. Clearly, even Bakhtin would acknowledge that there are instances where one is clearly a more competent other and the less competent would benefit from merging with the more competent and Vygotsky would condone the presence of multiple unmerging perspectives if the goals of dialogic interactions require them.

3.4. *Explicit Instruction in Pragmatics*

One context in which one voice should be privileged over others is in cases where one person clearly possesses more knowledge and the goal of the dialogue is to share this knowledge among all participants. One area of L2 in which the teacher might have more knowledge than his/her students might be pragmatics.

Pragmatics refers to the area of linguistics where the main concern is in determining the meaning of language in context. Based on an overview of the theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin, it is clear that polysemy (i.e., multiple meanings and interpretations) of language is the rule rather than exception. Students learning L2 must also know how and when to appropriately use certain forms to convey certain meanings under certain conditions in addition to mastering the lexicon and grammar of a language. The acquisition of pragmatic competence may pose significant challenges for L2 learners as this area of linguistic competence may significantly differ from what they know based on their L1. Therefore, aspects of speech that may come naturally for L1 speakers (e.g., intonation, certain idioms) have to be explicitly explained to L2 learners.

Focusing on its importance, both Bakhtin and Vygotsky distinguished between two main types of meaning. The Russian term *znachenie*, is roughly equivalent to an abstract meaning that is usually found in a dictionary. In contrast, the Russian word *smysl* refers to unique contextual meaning that is based on a sense of the situation. For both theorists, who emphasized communicative aspects of language, linguistic development mainly occurred through the acquisition of the concept of *smysl*. As both theorists noted, people do not speak from words out of the dictionary. It is through actual human encounters and situational constraints that utterances are constructed. This is why Bakhtin argued that even identical utterances do not give rise to the same meaning. When the context changes, so does the meaning of an utterance. Learning a language means learning how to comprehend these contextual changes and their associated meanings.

A focus on pragmatics which privileges communication in context led both Bakhtin and Vygotsky to emphasize the important roles expressive intonation and gestures play in conveying and interpreting expressions. Often how one says something means more than what one utters. This is why both theorists were also fascinated with the theater as the stage is a fertile ground for varying contextual variables to impact the meaning of what the actors say. The same words spoken by an actor with an exclamatory tone versus those spoken with a depressing intonation will yield dramatically different meanings.

Students attempting to promote their pragmatic competence must also cope with mastering various speech genres. As it will be recalled, Bakhtin defined speech genres as typical forms of utterances

that give stability and predictability to communication. Speakers frame their utterances in specific speech genres and as such without them communication would be impossible. This is why Bakhtin (1986) went as far as to say that learning to speak a language is to learn to use speech genres masterfully. Students often have trouble speaking in the L2, not because they lack vocabulary or possess deficient grammatical knowledge. More often than not, Bakhtin (1986) argues, the difficulty in communicating in the L2 arises because one lacks skills in choosing and commanding the appropriate speech genre. Certainly, one would not one to frame a formal complaint in the speech genre of greetings. To avoid these mishaps, explicit instruction and discussion of various speech genres would benefit students on their way to mastering L2 pragmatic competence.

3.5. Integrate Literary Works into Language Instruction

Often the introduction of literary works in the L2 is postponed until students have reached an advanced level of linguistic proficiency. This is because literary language is often viewed as an additional source of difficulty (Kramsch, 2001) for language teachers as well as for students. However, as Kramsch (2001) argues, literary texts provide opportunities for the negotiation of multiple meanings between the teacher and the student and among the students themselves. Furthermore, if culture and language are inseparable, then literature, as an essential aspect of culture, is inseparable from language and should be introduced as part of language instruction.

Literary texts also allow an appreciation of the existence of multiple voices and meanings, a feature of language development noted to be critical by both Bakhtin and Vygotsky. The presence of multiple voices and meanings is not confined to oral language contained in everyday interactions between people. The interaction of multiple voices and meanings can also occur intertextually among works of novels, dramas, and literary criticism. Parody, as a dominant form of dialogic encounter between literary texts, may serve to heighten students' awareness of the possibilities of diverse reader responses. As Bakhtin (1986) pointed out, the real potential and meaning of great works may only be revealed by later generations of readers who bring to the process of reading their own sources of interpretation.

Engaging with literary works also provides opportunities for an understanding of the fundamentally dialogical nature of language. Dialogism, a foundation on which both Vygotsky and Bakhtin sought to build their theories, manifests itself not only in the interactions between the characters of literary works but also between the characters and the author, as well as among characters, author, and the reader (Bakhtin, 1990b). This notion of the multiple zones of dialogic contact is what gives meaning and need to the acts of speaking, reading, listening, and understanding.

Viewed from a Vygotskian paradigm, literary works could serve as symbolic tools that mediate the understanding of a second language. Literature provides planes of dialogic interactions to occur among generations of the past, the present, and the future. Through literary works the reader has the opportunity to come to contact with writers of target culture and language. Through their responses to literary works, readers are preparing grounds for future literary criticism.

Literary works appropriate to each proficiency level may be found and must be used to engage L2 students in dialogic interactions from the very beginning. The rationale for postponing literature instruction for advanced language classes loses its ground when considering that literature could serve as an effective mediator of dialogic interaction between the past and the present, the writer and the reader, and between L2 and L1.

3.6. *Embedding Language Learning in the Real World*

There are three interrelated concerns guiding the relationship between the language classroom and the real world. The first is based on one of Vygotsky's fundamental educational principles that instruction should build on students' interests (Vygotsky, 1997b). Vygotsky goes on to argue that the only type of instruction that may arouse student interest is instruction that is meaningful to the students themselves. One of the best ways to structure instruction that is meaningful to the students is to connect it to their real world and lives (Eun & Lim, 2009). The teacher and students could work together to devise classroom activities that are based on what goes on beyond the school walls in students' real lives.

As Bakhtin repeatedly noted, an utterance is a link in a never ending chain of communication. This implies that what students say in the language classroom is both a response to what is happening in their lives and an anticipation of future events outside the classroom. To ignore the larger context that shapes the utterances of students in the language classroom is to render the verbal interactions meaningless. Meaningless communication, as both Bakhtin and Vygotsky would argue, does not lead to language development.

Finally, linguistic interactions in the classroom should be linked to the larger context of students' lives because the study of language and culture are inherently related (Rogoff, 1990). Culture is such a prevalent and dominant feature of language teaching that often teachers do not even feel its presence or need (Kramsch, 2001). However, as Kramsch goes on to argue, for language teaching to be successful, cultural context has to be an explicit feature of the instructional process. One of her suggestions for classroom practices is to vary the cultural context of language use. This method allows students to experience and express a variety of meanings and to become aware of the cultural and contextual variations.

4. Conclusions

The theories of language as endorsed by Bakhtin and Vygotsky are grounded in dialogism. This worldview led both thinkers to view communication as the basis for language and consciousness development. Communication occurs between two or more people engaged in purposeful interactions. The meaningful dialogue that is carried out between these people on the social plane becomes internalized to serve individual functions. Students of L2 must, therefore, be given ample opportunities to engage in meaningful exchanges that involve topics that are relevant to their lives. The dialogic interactions must be guided by respect for multiple voices and perspectives with opportunities for the interpenetration of points of view (Emerson, 1989). The multiple participants and points of view extend to written texts that involve temporally and spatially distant writers and readers. The teacher, as the most important human mediator, must guide, support, and facilitate all phases of dialogic interaction from choosing topics of communication and selecting appropriate literary works and maintaining an atmosphere of mutual respect to providing explicit instruction in areas of L2, such as pragmatics, that may not be naturally acquired by students.

A word of caution is in order lest these instructional principles are taken as the final products of dialogism. Many researchers (e.g., Bernstein, 1989; Cheyne & Tarulli, 1999; Fogel, 1989) have noticed the dialogism of Vygotsky and Bakhtin to be overly optimistic and clement in conveying a picture of how humans communicate and develop together. These researchers go on to note that dialogic interactions may be carried out under constraining and threatening conditions and the multiple voices inherent in any dialogue may lead to catastrophe rather than a chorale. These arguments point to the need to go beyond the notion of the ideal dialogue as being beneficial and to consider the pressures and forces that may operate in any human exchanges. Further research into the mechanism underlying the interaction of

multiple voices and how they impact each dialogue would shed more light on conceptualizing dialogue as the basis for language development studies.

A related issue of multiple voices and perspectives is to determine the appropriate pairing of dialogic participants in the classroom. Should the dialogue take place between equally proficient students or should it be conducted between more competent and less competent L2 learners? Do students benefit more from talking with teachers or from talking amongst themselves? The results from studies delving into these questions (e.g., Donato, 1994; Ohta, 2000) are not conclusive and more empirical evidence is needed from L2 classrooms.

In this context, it seems apposite to relate Bakhtin's comments on the unfinalizability of human communication to research in L2. Any study of L2 learning is linked to a complex chain of ongoing research in this area. Theories and practices continuously inform each other and are expanded and reconceptualized in the process. The dialogic theoretical framework and instructional principles outlined in this paper are but one link in the complex, un-ending chain of exploring the marvelous process of how humans manage to learn a language that is perceived to be spatiotemporally distant.

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