

Dynamic Assessment and Mediated Learning

Toward a Coherent Theoretical
Framework for Developmental L2
Education

Matthew E. Poehner

The Pennsylvania State University
(mep158@psu.edu)

(L2) Teaching & Assessment: Disparate Worlds?

- Newly invigorated research programs: formative assessment (Leung 2004), classroom assessment (Rea-Dickins 2008), teacher-based assessment (Davison, 2004); diagnostic assessment (Alderson 2006).
- Proposals for use of assessment to support student learning: *assessment for learning* (Black & William, 1998), *learning-oriented assessment* (Turner & Purpura, forthcoming), & *interactive assessment* (Hamp-Lyons & Tavares, 2011)

(L2) Teaching & Assessment: Disparate Worlds?

- Existent practices in schools: documentation; legitimacy; leveraging for/as assessment
- Conceptualizing/proposing new practices, innovation
 - Basis?
 1. Theory or theories of assessment? Of learning? Of teaching?
 2. Research findings? (in testing? Classroom assessment? Other?)
 3. (Tacit) assumptions & values (Dewey, Piaget, Vygotsky? Skinner? Krashen?)
- Psychological theory of development, thinking, & learning; coherent framework for educational activity (assessment & teaching & curriculum)

Vygotskian Theory & L2 Development

- Early 1980s, **Vygotskian Sociocultural Theory (SCT)** applied to understanding processes of L2 development (e.g., Frawley & Lantolf, 1985); *mediation, zone of proximal development, internalization* to analyze teaching/learning & L2 development
- Shift in early 2000s toward projects that understand L2 development through intervention (e.g., Negueruela, 2003; Poehner, 2005)
- Aligns w/ Vygotsky's ***genetic method*** of research (understanding psychological abilities through process of formation)
- Responsive to Vygotsky's **dialectical** view of theory/ research & practice: theory provides orientation to practice, must also be responsive to practice; practice as testing ground for theory (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014)

Vygotskian (L2) Developmental Education

- Development of SCT as theory of human psychology in tandem w/ practical work in education
- Human abilities arise through intentional introduction of mediation; transforms psychological activity
 - Language for verbal thinking; concepts for making sense of world
- Schooling as special environment for *artificial development*; access knowledge & understanding that is abstract & generalized, not everyday lived experience
 - Schooling distinct from everyday world but must re-orient us for functioning in world
- Aim of schooling is leading psychological development, not imparting facts

L2 Developmental Education

1. Organizing L2 curriculum around linguistic concepts, not grammar rules
 - Concepts as psychological tools learners use for constructing meaning in L2; gaining control over L2
 - Systemic Theoretical Instruction
2. Engagement in L2 activities w/ learners; participation mediated through dialogic interaction
 - Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) activity -> presence of “mediator” to help learners stretch beyond current capabilities
 - Alignment of mediator contributions to activity w/ learner needs; neither too implicit nor too explicit; optimize learner engagement

ZPD & Teaching-Assessment Dialectic

- Vygotsky -> development as **internalization** (in-growing)/ appropriation of (external) forms of mediation (e.g., concepts, relations, forms of reasoning)
- Dialogic interaction: psychological activity on **intermental plane** of development; precedes internalization, activity on **intramental plane**
- **Actual development** -> abilities already formed through internalization; ZPD -> abilities in process of forming, not fully developed
- ZPD -> instruction can have greatest impact guiding development; **joint engagement in activities beyond learner actual development reveals ZPD (diagnosis, assessment) while also moving development forward (teaching)**

Dynamic Assessment (DA)

- Teaching & assessment integrated through mediation & joint engagement (mediator-learner cooperative dialoguing); **both essential & inherent features of ZPD activity**
- Mediation begins implicit, becomes more explicit depending on learner needs during interaction
- Performance of pedagogical tasks; How much/what forms of mediation required? How responsive is learner? → ***diagnosis of development***, highlight learner emerging abilities; guides continued instructional efforts (tailoring mediation & activities to continually be just beyond *actual development*)
- **Foregrounds assessment function of ZPD activity**

L2 Classroom Teacher's Inventory of Mediating Prompts for DA (Poehner, 2009)

1. Pause
2. Repeat the whole phrase questioningly
3. Repeat just the part of the sentence with the error
4. Teacher asks, "What is wrong with that sentence?"
5. Teacher points out the incorrect word
6. Teacher asks either/or question (negros o negras?)
7. Teacher identifies the correct answer
8. Teacher explains why

Emphasizing Teaching Dimension of ZPD Dialectic

- ZPD activity where systematic tracing forms/levels of mediation not priority; 'diagnosis' functioning to inform next teacher moves but not documented
- Open-ended dialogue, joint activity beyond learner *actual development*; mediation aligned with learner emerging abilities, but focus of activity arriving at new understanding, modeling, gaining access to new 'tools'
- **Foregrounds teaching function of ZPD activity**

Mediated Learning

- Reuven Feuerstein (et al., 2003): (strongly influenced L2 classroom-based DA); broad framework includes sessions devoted to DA & sessions for introduction of concepts, materials, modeling, etc.
- Mediated Learning Experience -> contrasts w/ direct learning; intentional insertion of mediator (& other resources) between learner & object of learning
- Mediating moves along implicit-to-explicit range valuable for diagnosing abilities; also entails efforts aimed at guiding learners toward self-regulated functioning, not easily categorized on implicit – explicit scale
- Feuerstein refers to 'attributes' of ML such as *mediation of meaning; of shared orientation; & of goal-focused behavior*, among others

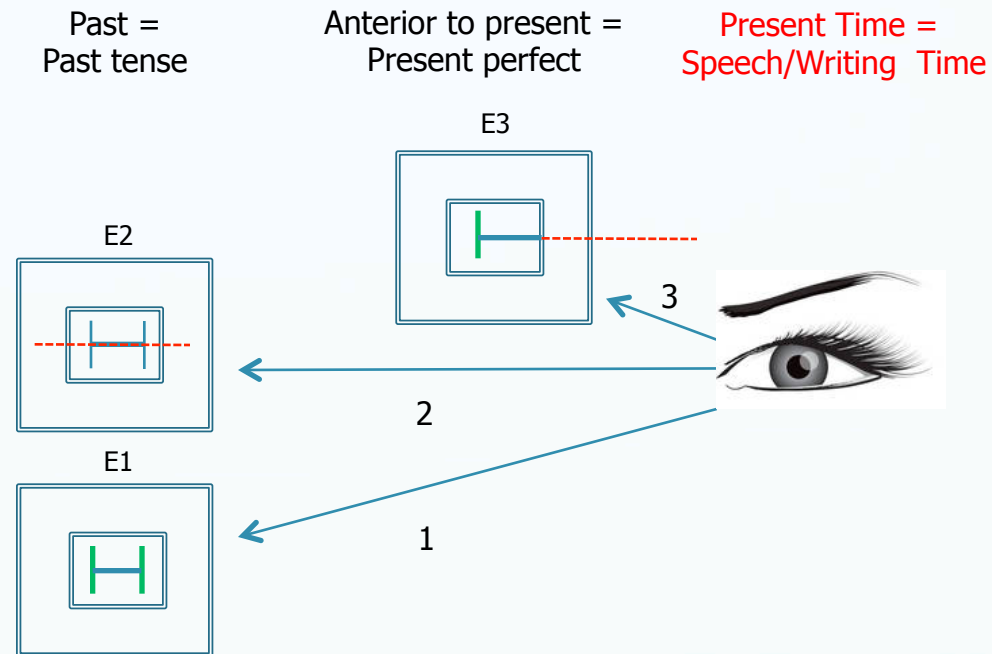
The Study

- Spring 2013; advanced, university-level learners of L2 English (academic focus, esp. writing); Focus: one participant (Nadia, pseudonym) interaction with Mediator.
- Initial independent writing -> difficulties with English tense & aspect system -> 5 individualized (one-to-one) Dynamic Assessment & Mediated Learning sessions
- Psychological tool introduced, verbally explained; learners independently composed personal narratives about language learning experiences; brought to session for revision/discussion w/ Mediator (experienced ESL teacher)
- **Dynamic Assessment:** diagnosing learner understanding of English tense-aspect system to bring events into discourse
- **Mediated Learning:** guiding learner efforts to use psychological tool to mediate thinking about tense-aspect choices in writing (understanding of tool & its relevance to activity)

Psychological Tool

- Language Focus: tense-aspect system from a recalled point perspective (i.e., past simple, past continuous, present perfect)
- Consisted of multiple slides; adapted from and informed by: Gánem-Gutiérrez and Harun (2011), Radden and Dirven (2007), and Yáñez Prieto (2008)

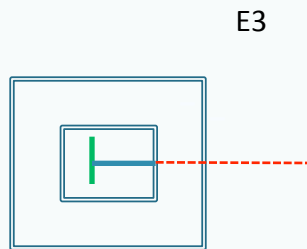
Three perspective frames – Simple past (E1), past progressive (E2), and present perfect (E3)



- 1. Event 1:** Yesterday John cuddled the baby (*simple past E1*).
- 2. Event 2:** Yesterday John was cuddling the baby when the doorbell rang (*past progressive E2*).
- 3. Event 3:** John has cuddled the baby every day this week. (*present perfect E3*).

Frame Elements of Present Perfect (E3)

Aspect – The speaker/writer’s perspective of an event or action



Boundary: green vertical line indicates beginning of action

Timelines

Solid blue line: portion of the action that has already transpired (beginning point of action to the present time)

Dotted red line: portion of the action that has yet to occur and that continues beyond the present time to an indefinite end point

Dynamic Assessment

Line 1: most implicit; invitation to revisit writing (1st sentence)

Line 5: implicit; non-corrective; invokes tool & concept (“timeframe”)

Lines 12 & 13: reference to specific feature of concept/tool (“boundaries”)

Lines 24-26: tying language use to creation of time frame & boundaries (focused reading according to concept/tool)

Lines 36-37: prompts learner evaluation of intended time frame and language used in composition

- Is she able to detect problems in writing?

Lines 46-47: turns task back over to learner; re-orientes learner to revision of sentence

- Is she able to make appropriate corrections?

DA: Diagnosis according to learner responsiveness

- Focus of mediator-learner activity: evaluation & (re-)mediation of learner (written) performance
- At what point is learner able to identify problems and take steps to correct them?
- What understanding of tense-aspect underlies learner performance (specific choices bringing events into discourse)?

**Able to identify (correct) problems at very outset? Able to correct problems at conclusion of interaction? Able to articulate reasons for changes?

**Mediator moves prompt ways of thinking (teaching is feature of activity)

Mediated Learning

Lines 11-21: **Mediation of meaning; Mediation of goal-setting** (thinking-with-tool, invoking specific elements in interpretation of sentence vs. impulsivity)

Lines 11 & 27: **Mediation of sharing behavior** (note also use of 1st person plural throughout)

Line 49: **Mediation of sharing behavior; Mediation of feelings of competence** (ceding floor, validating contributions & also learner as co-participant)

Lines 72-73; 75; 77-79: **Mediation of meaning** (generalizing/ abstracting beyond here-and-now of exemplar sentence; broader meaning & relevance experience & of tool)

Lines 71, 72, 77, 81: **Mediation of feelings of competence** (“great”, “as you said” to validate participation & interpret success)

Mediated Learning: Progressing toward self-regulation

Learner verbalizations during joint activity reveal understanding (diagnosis is feature of activity)

Focus of mediator-learner interaction is not learners' own use of L2 (not elicited learner performance); not errors to be identified or problems to be addressed; rather, use of concept/tool for regulating functioning in L2 (appropriate basis for activity)

Co-constructing (w/ learner) model for how materials may function as mediating tool for understanding English tense-aspect; interpreting instances of language use and making decisions for language production

Present case is joint functioning, goal of ultimately increasingly independent functioning (process of internalization); requires implicit to explicit progression of language performance but also mediation of other features of self-regulated functioning

Conclusions

- Dialectical logic – interrelation of two things; not A or B but understanding unity of A with B; still possible to foreground A or B (Novak, 1968)
- DA & ML together offer powerful framework for education concerned w/ promoting learner development
- More questions to pursue regarding ML: attributes identified by Feuerstein manifest in L2 contexts? Other attributes?
- DA & ML can be used w/ approach to curriculum also rooted in Vygotskian theory (systemic theoretical instruction), coherent *developmental education*
- More work w/ L2 teachers