



## Review Article

### **An Overreview of the Sociocultural Theory and Vocabulary Development**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Vegotesky theory is a paramount for the vocabulary development with its multidimensional approach, which has the impact on the cognitive affective contextual aspects and social interaction. Socio-cultural theory (SCT) is the mental development of specific sphere human. It also concerns mediation and the different kinds of mediation tools adopted and valued by society. This paper highlighted that learning as a mediated process in social in origin and then becomes individual as a result of linguistically mediated interaction between the child and more experienced members of the society including parents, teachers, and peers. The relation of mediation of SCT and environment is to enhance vocabulary development in teaching EFL students. It also helps EFL students to use the target language in their daily life. With the help of this theory, the students can master vocabulary and improve their language. This theory focuses on the interaction with the students and shows the social environment. It links the learners with the trainer, if a child/student gets a guidance in an appropriate way he/she can learn more and can enhance his/her capacity of learning. This study tried to look at the influence of SCT on learning and teaching vocabulary. Consequently, This study recommends the use of the SCT while teaching EFL Libyan learners to enhance English language vocabulary.

**Keywords:** Vegetosky theory; scaffolding; ZPD; EFL students; mediation

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#### **Introduction**

“The aim of any foreign language teaching and learning is to develop competence of a foreign language learner to make him/her competent in establishing successful communication” (Al-Dersi, 2013). This means looking at the elements for increasing communication competence is important. Grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading, and so on

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can increase learners' communication competence. However, vocabulary learning could be the important element while teaching and learning another language. In other words, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed. Without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed" (Alqahtani, 2015). In addition, several studies revealed that students' vocabulary difficulties are the most serious and disruptive obstacles to their communication (Gass & Selinker, 2001). This indicates that vocabulary is the gate for entering the new language world.

Consequently, vocabulary learning is an integral part of language pedagogy (Alqahtani, 2015; Swain, 1995; Swain, 1985) and developing vocabulary is an indispensable part of language learning (Alqahtani, 2015). Thus, teaching and learning vocabulary should be addressed in the right way (Swain, 1995). For vocabulary development, many researchers recommended more studies to develop vocabulary knowledge for learners. For example, researchers should find more and appropriate strategies to develop learners' vocabulary (Al-Shuwairekh, 2001; Saigh, K., & Schmitt, 2012).

Since the goal of language learning and teaching is to help students communicate in an understanding and easy way, SCT could be the suitable one to be used for EFL Libyan learners. According to the researcher's experience, the best method which should be used must be associated to real culture and situation of learners, because ignoring learners' lifestyle and culture could demotivate them to learn. Additionally, the teaching and learning scenario for EFL Arab learners is a traditional-based method and teachers play the main role in teaching the learners (Fareh, 2010). Hence, SCT which means that teaching and learning language must be through interaction between teachers and students, students and society all together, (Vygotsky, 1978), could be the appropriate teaching theory. In other words, SCT is one of the important tools and techniques to teach vocabulary to EFL student in classroom (Vygotsky, 1978).

Vocabulary development received a little attention in the field of research. According to (Alqahtani, 2015), Vocabulary has been neglected from the field of research for many decades. In the field of vocabulary acquisition, another challenge is always facing EFL learners. This challenge must be addressed to improve students' vocabulary acquisition because it is related to students' productive vocabulary size and their receptive vocabulary size (Nation, 2013). Also, many studies used various methods in order to enhance students' vocabulary to solve this problem (Nation, 2013).

Since vocabulary knowledge is an integral part of language learning, and Arab students of English language (EL) face problems in learning new vocabulary items (Alqahtani, 2013). In addition, many students also complain about forgetting the newly learned words (Nation, 2013) and they have problems in language production such as their vocabulary might be rich, but their language production remains poor (Swain , 1995). In addition to that, many scholars have discouraged learning vocabulary by memorizing new words (Al-Dersi, 2013). Therefore, this current study aims to investigate the impact of social culture theory on EFL Libyan students' vocabulary and how socio-cultural theory could help EFL Libyan students to enhance their vocabulary.

Many studies highlighted the socio-cultural theory as a suitable strategy for enhancing students' learning (e.g., (Behroozizad , et al, 2014; Juffs & Friedline, 2014; Chernova & Mustafina, 2016; Lantolf, et al., 2015). Learners' interaction provides many opportunities that help students increase their vocabulary acquisition (Ellis & He,1999). As recommended by Juffs & Friedline (2014), the study looks at cultural influence which linked to learning and behavioral outcome data is needed. An experimental study was conducted by Ellis & He (1999) to identify the various effects of “premodified input, interactionally modified input, and modified output on the comprehension of directions in a listen-and-do task and the acquisition of new words embedded in the directions”. The instruments used pretest and 5 posttests. The findings revealed that the pre-modified and interaction-ally modified input groups had no difference, but the modified output group had an advantage associated to interaction.

An investigation made by Juffs & Friedline (2014) for the effect of socio-cultural aspects in how adult learners of second language (L2) used the tools of web-based language learning. The population of their study included Arabic and Korean L2 learners divided as 21 Korean-speaking and 41 Arabic-speaking learners. The instruments employed were both quantitatively such as on-line gloss look-ups and mouse-click and qualitatively such as interview, class observations, and questionnaire. The study found that the activity theory had a valuable significance in understanding how the vocabulary-learning tools used by learners. Besides, Behroozizad, et al. (2015) investigated for the importance of SCT among learners in order to understand learning EFL. The study found that applying SCT in the classroom while teaching EFL could help learners improve their communication skill. In addition, Lantolf, et al. (2015) highlighted the role of SCT and how it develops teaching a language.

Moreover, another study by Chernova & Mustafina (2016) aimed at understanding the view of Vygotsky that is related to the cognitive development was conducted. The findings indicated that implementing the communication collaboratively with peers or adults contributes to the self-regulation development. In addition, the use of socio-cultural theory and its aspects made the language of the classroom highly interactive. In addition, a study based on the socio-cultural theory of SLA by Lantolf & Poehner (2015) ensured the importance of this interaction in learning process of any language. It stated that the socio-cultural theory mediates learning a language because of involving the interaction and social context.

The researcher' best knowledge, there are limited studies which tried to focus on vocabulary development in general because many studies looked at the vocabulary acquisition among learners. In addition, the above-mentioned studies focused on the effect of SCT on language learning more than learning vocabulary, but this present study will focus on its impact of vocabulary development among EFL Libyan learners.

The main goal of socio-cultural theory is interaction in teaching and learning any language Vygotsky (1978). This current paper found that implementing socio-cultural theory in learning vocabulary could be the best method to enhance students' vocabulary. The reason of the importance of SCT is its linking between the societies such the environment and the culture while learning a new language.

### **Vegotesky socio-cultural theory**

Socio-cultural theory plays an integral role in cognitive development of a child Kozulin (2002). It directly focuses on social interaction specifically adults (Ellis & He, 1999). VT highlights the integration in a dynamic way.

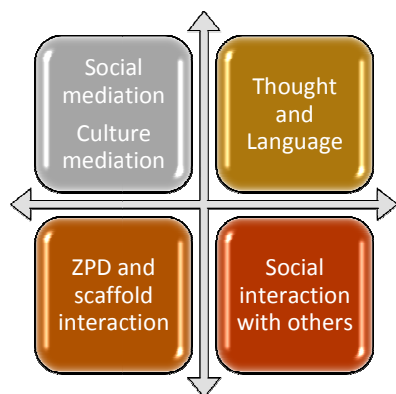


Figure 1.1. Components of socio-cultural theory

In this theory, it focuses not only on teaching or training but the more knowledge other (MKO) can be acquired by anyone such as computers, peers or friend or classmates. The theory explains about the way of teaching of a child in a deferent way. It exhibits that a child can achieve more with the other direction and with other supervision, which name as (Zone of Proximal development). Lantolf (2000), Shayer (2002), Wertsch (1985) claim that Vygotsky's introduction of the notion of the ZPD was due to his dissatisfaction with two practical issues in educational psychology.

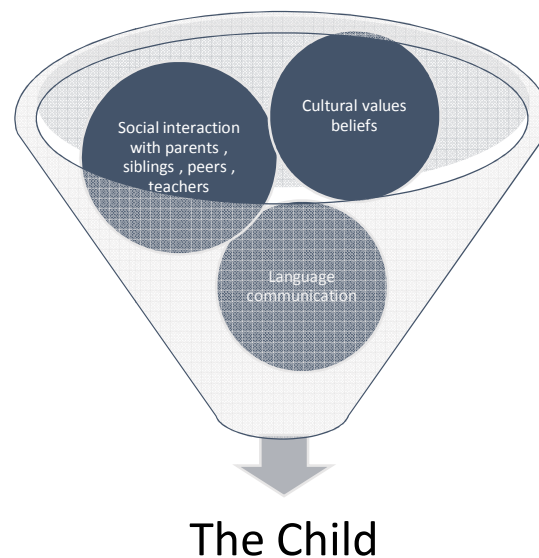


Figure 1.2 sociocultural theory

### **Scaffolding**

Scaffolding is the method that the experts or adults used to assist the child in learning by the experience and expertise of their own or by graphical and visuals. Gibbons (2002) mentioned that Scaffolding guides the teacher to assist a child in an appropriate way to complete the task. Scaffolding is very helpful for a learner, because it helps students\children in achieving their target. Due to its step by step procedure, a learner feels more comfortable with this strategy. Donato (1994) stated that they do not frustrated because the task will be given in an explicitly way to make student \ child to learn in a free environment which is without pressure and stress.

## Mediation

Mediation is defined by Kozulin (2002) as it plays an important role to enhance the cognitive development. Moreover, it is the view of behaviorist which offers complementary perspective. It is stated that if human used the mediators then it will easily modify into the atmosphere, which helps a student to feel comfort and easy to interact (Vygotsky, 1978). The same study, Vygotsky (1978) declares that mediation has its own impact which effect the relation between environment and human. The two phenomena used as a technique of an activity 1) social organization 2) culture from of mediation, where we can use the Language. For example, how people convert the social mediation into psychological function.

## Reciprocal Teaching

Reciprocal teaching is known as a tool utilized to encourage and help students to improve their understanding during teaching process (Spörer, et al., 2009). (see figure 1.5) which means that the students will take the role of the teacher inside the classroom to teach her/his classmates as a teacher. By doing this strategy the student will be motivate and maybe this learning strategy could improve their language skills.

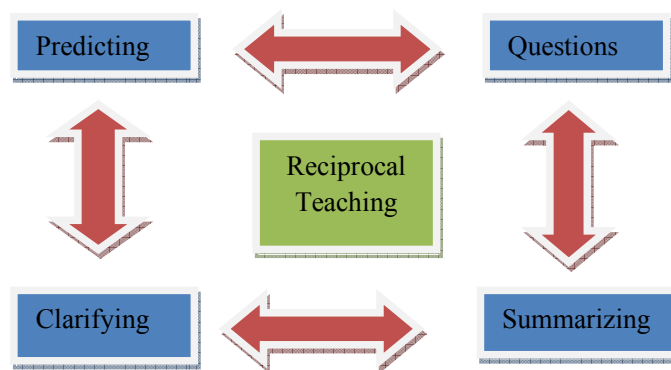


Figure 1.3 Reciprocal teaching

Reciprocal teaching is the best way to improve students' reading comprehension skills during process of teaching (Shayer, 2002). Besides, individual learning can happen in social interaction once the learner provided assistance from experts such as friends, classmate and technical tools in the “Zone of Proximal Development“ (Vygotsky, L. 1978).

### **Principle of Vygotsky**

The Vygotsky's own principles are the main guidance to understand his theory. How the learning and teaching another language involve in the learning process. They are also known as Vygotskyian framework. These principles are three basic principles underlined into Vygotsky's (1978) framework.

- 1) Language is an integral part which revolves in cognitive development
- 2) Learning can be split with social context and social environment
- 3) The logic of this theory is children learn by themselves and they build their own knowledge.

This theory is the best tool for teaching Lantolf, et al. (2015), where a child learns by his/her own and acquires knowledge. However, it is an essential part of social culture theory which is a process of socially-mediated activity. The effective learning tool place when there is participation from both teaching and learning as well and in this participation the social culture and social environment effect and it has its own impact on child learning. In the other hand, the positive effect of this VT theory is the child with his\her owns interaction and teaching plays a role of mentor, and in other words teaching means mentoring the child

### **Conclusion**

This conceptual paper addresses to the concept of mediation suggests that human relations with the world are not direct but "mediated" by physical and symbolic tools. It also gives a model of learning with Vygotsky socio-cultural theory to enhance the vocabulary for EFL Libyan students. The paper tries to show the relation of mediation of SCT with EFL students and it tries to focus on the development of vocabulary in EFL Libyan students. We recommended that the teacher should apply this theory to enhance student's vocabulary development. Previous studies exhibit a very good relation with students' vocabulary and it is very beneficial and advantageous for EFL students to learn and teachers to teach while using this theory.

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