

## SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY OF LEARNING TO PROMOTE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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### **Summary**

**Introduction:** In recent years, language learning has been viewed from a very different angle concentrating on meaningful and purposeful interactions, collaborations between speakers. This has accordingly brought a shift from more traditional grammar-based language teachings based on repetitions and drills to communicative language teachings (CLT) based on pair work activities, role plays, group activities and project works. Thus, in the classroom teachers aim to design the curriculum in such a way that they can explore the opportunities of developing communicative competences. The urgency of communicative language teaching is reviewed in a number of corresponding studies such as the Common European Framework of References for Languages (CEFR), The Future of Education and Skills 2030 project by OECD and the Cambridge Life Competencies Framework. While this undoubtedly asserts the necessity of language teaching for communication we also need to understand how it aligns with the cognitive framework of the student in case of formal education. What theory can not only prove the necessity of communication but also pave the way for its development. Considering this, we believe that sociocultural theory of learning by L. Vygotsky can bring more academic understanding to communicative language teaching. This brings us to **the goal of our article**, which is to analyze communicative language teaching (CLT) in the framework of sociocultural theory of learning. For deeper understanding we also search through sociocultural theory of cognitive development.

As our case is within the Armenian educational environment, we refer to the established New standards of foreign language teaching of the RA (2020). It states that the goal of foreign language teaching is to develop an individual who is capable of communicating and realizing oneself in the modern multilingual and multicultural world. [9, p.4] Considering the Armenian context and the international research we justify **the relevance of the article**.

**The novelty of the article revolves around** its unique theoretical approach to communicative language teaching. By researching sociocultural theory, we provide deeper cognitive and sociocultural reasons to the theoretical foundation of communicative language teaching especially in the demand of Armenian educational context. For more practical reasoning we will also provide examples of practical implementation of social context in the foreign language classroom.

**Keywords:** communicative teaching, zone of proximal development, scaffolding, sociocultural theory, method

**The main contents:** The notion of communicative competence was developed within the discipline of linguistics (or more accurately, the sub-discipline of

sociolinguistics) in 1960s. Communicative language teaching is logically promoting communicative competence. It is a complex methodological term but we can explain it with the following aspects of language knowledge:

- knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions,
- knowing how to vary our use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication),
- knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations),
- knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one's language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies) [6, p. 5-8]

Communications between multiple subjects is not just about exchanging verbal clues. One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language. For this, students need to attain a high degree of skills in manipulating the linguistic system to spontaneously and flexibly express a message. They need to distinguish between the forms which they master as a part of linguistic competence, and the communicative functions that they perform. Linguistic system must also be understood as a part of communicative system. Students need to develop a strategy to use language to communicate meanings in concrete situations to use feedback, remedy failure etc. Communication also depends on a number of factors such as the knowledge that we assume the hearer possesses. Another factor is the interpretation of the social situation. Language carries not only functional meaning; it also carries social meaning. To achieve this, we can even use controlled practice so that the student relates to the language. Teachers can place students in situations where students have to use language as an instrument to achieve their goal of communication. This can happen through simulated social interactions, for example through role-playing activities, dialogues, debates etc. [5, p. 1-6]

The classroom is often called an artificial environment for learning and using a foreign language which becomes the teaching medium. We can suggest the following to promote social network as a context:

- Conversation or discussion sessions,
- Basing dialogue and role-plays on school experience,
- Simulations and role playing,
- Debates and discussions,
- Improvisations [5, p.47-63]
- Case studies,
- Hypothetical problems,
- Opinion polls,
- Open-ended stimulus,
- Each one teach one,
- jigsaw
- Student presentations etc. [4, p.40-57]

Now we clearly understand that through methodological literature that communicative language teaching at least for now is the primary goal of language

teaching. At the same time, we have the clear understanding of the importance and the necessity of interactions in developing a student with communicative competence that can be realized in the society. This said, we wanted to delve in the connections among society, interaction and language. To this end, we bring L. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development as a backup for communicative language teaching. Here, we view the societal presence not only as the measurement of how successful the language teaching was, but also we believe that "imitation" of the society in particular setting in the classroom is also a means to teach the language. We look for the ways we can recreate societal reality in the classroom to teach the foreign language to keep the foreign language acquisition as authentic as possible.

Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, believed that the skills needed to reason, understand, and remember all stem from a child's experiences with parents, teachers, and peers. Vygotsky saw human development as taking place on three levels—cultural, interpersonal, and individual. He focused on the cultural and interpersonal levels, believing that our most formative experiences are social. He believed that teachers should play an instructive role, constantly guiding and nurturing their students in order to improve their attention span, concentration, and learning skills, and so build up their competence. This idea had a marked effect on education, stimulating a shift from student-centered teaching to curriculum-centered teaching, and collaborative learning. [2, p. 270]. Basically, Vygotsky's theory suggests that development depends on interaction with people and the tools that the culture provides to help form their own view of the world. There are three ways a cultural tool can be passed from one individual to another: imitative learning, instructed learning, collaborative learning. In this context, language is the tool to do so. Vygotsky believed that language makes thought possible and is thus the basis of consciousness. Language was also seen as the tool of culture which enables social interaction, and thus the direction of behavior and attitudes, and indeed the propagation and development of culture itself. Vygotsky's ideas suggest that student-teacher and student-peer relationships are of prime importance in generating and facilitating new ideas, perspectives, and cognitive strategies. Furthermore, the student apprentice can be seen to be active within their learning environments, attempting to construct understanding where possible, and possibly contributing to or affirming the adopted culture. In turn, this aspect of human development inevitably has influence on the environment itself, and thus a dialectic process in which learning and development is affected by the social world, and the social world changed through learning and development. A second important implication of Vygotsky's views is that rather than deriving explanations of a student's psychological activity (e.g., intelligence and motivation) from the student's characteristics, attention should be given to student behavior and performance when engaged in a social situation. Vygotsky in specific postulated the notion of a zone of proximal development (ZPD) which defines the difference between the child's independent learning accomplishments, and accomplishments under the guidance of a person who is more competent at the specific task at hand. The notion of the ZPD gives importance to the student-centered basis of education, and suggests that the individual progression towards an overall learning outcome will be dictated by the guided and subjective accomplishments of intermediate (proximal) outcomes. The ZPD describes what a student can accomplish with the help of competent support, therefore it describes the actual task that can be effectively supported by the teacher. Students should be given frequent opportunities to express understanding,

and learning tasks fine-tuned by the teacher to address individual capabilities. Such teacher support, which is graduated and task-apportioned based on student needs, has been commonly referred to as scaffolding, which symbolizes strong initial teacher support which is gradually reduced as the student approaches the desired learning outcome. Specifically, scaffolding may range from very detailed and explicit tuition, such as the explanation of procedures and demonstrations, to the facilitation or organization of activities for student self-tuition. Scaffolding has also been interpreted as a mechanism by which sequential ZPD's are used to achieve a learning outcome beyond a child's immediate (starting) potential, and thus the specific learning activities change as the student's competence towards the ultimate task grows. The notion of ZPD also suggests that effective teaching should not only be within the proximate potential of the individual, but should perhaps be at the upper level of the ZPD so as to maintain the student's interest in the activity. [8, p. 32-38] Vygotskian theory stipulates the importance of the mediator (teacher) as extremely important for formal education as a sociocultural activity. Concepts such as scaffolding or apprenticeship appeared as a result of direct assimilation of Vygotskian ideas; others such as Feuerstein's mediated learning experience have been developed independently and only later acquired new meaning in the context of sociocultural theory. [1, p.16] Mediation of meaning is an essential moment in the acquisition of psychological tools, because symbolic tools derive their meaning only from the cultural conventions that engendered them. For example, a foreign language is sometimes taught as a coding system that simply maps the correspondence between foreign words and the words in the native language of the learner. As a result, the student becomes severely handicapped in both comprehension and expression in the foreign language. If, on the contrary, the purpose of foreign language study is mediated as an ability to comprehend and formulate meaningful propositions, students become capable of grasping the instrumental role of the foreign sign system. [1, 24-26] The term *zone of proximal development* is probably one of the most widely recognized and well-known ideas associated with Vygotsky's scientific production currently associated with second-language learning. Relatedly, if asked how the child arrives at the conscious understanding of literacy, the answer is that the child "discovers" it: "The key to whole teaching and learning is the active involvement and enjoyment of children as they play with, manipulate and construct language through exposure to fun, enjoyable, rich, and meaningful literature". [1, p.86]

This brings us to the understanding of the role of the language. Language, in general, is of key importance in Vygotsky's ideas. As we have already understood as Vygotsky put culture in the center of knowledge acquisition and construction, the language here plays the role of communication.

Vygotsky's theory suggests that social interactions can also influence how we learn foreign languages. He aimed to explain the role of dialogue in structuring recognition. Language, in some sort, is the tool of initial instructions given to the child and later on stages of life to the student. Language helps to transfer the information from the teacher to the student. If we reflect this in foreign language education, we can assume that the dynamic interaction between the student and the teacher is the milestone for developing communication: learning happens as a result of the interaction. Learning happens during interaction. At first, children finish a task with the help of another person, learn it and then are able to do the same task alone. In this way, the social interaction is a support to intermediate learning. Sociocultural theory supports the idea that successful interactions

are those during which students are helped to finish new tasks. *Here, we can find interesting correlation with task based-learning.* [7, p. 172-173]

It can be argued that although the students actively shape their own foreign language use and learning experiences, they can construct such experience only to the extent that their sociocultural contexts allow them to do so, and that the construction of this experience is pertinent to that of the learners' identities. Sociocultural theory and language socialization commonly regard foreign language learning as socially constructed in and through interaction in situated activities. L. Vygotsky points out that language as a symbolic tool helps to communicate, direct and organize mental activity, including thinking and learning, thus, language learning in general can occur in 2 ways: interpsychological (with somebody else) and intrapsychological (within oneself). Through social interaction, interactive processes that were initially social become a resource for the student, in other words, social processes enable language to become a cognitive tool for student. This enabling process is called internalization. More specifically, internalization is considered the process by which the foreign language changes from being primarily external or unfamiliar for students as they gradually make steps toward utilizing the foreign language as an interactive and cognitive resource for themselves. The more students have internalized the foreign language, the more independently they can participate in interactive settings. The notion of internalization involves an increasing level of control, or the ability to regulate interaction in the foreign language, and a developing ability to use the foreign language itself as a tool of thought. Linguist van Lier develops an ecological approach to language learning and teaching grounded in the work of Vygotsky. This approach views language learning processes as part of the dynamic interrelationship between students and their environment. He further claims that if language students are active and engaged, they will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action. This is about mastering the language through collaborative interaction. [3, p. 6-12]

As we try to set by this is that foreign language classroom needs to present the social context to stay relevant to the students' needs.

Based on the theoretical part we want to propose some activities to promote CLT with social context emphasis. For the central topic we choose "Challenges of XXI", a text speaking of air pollutions, deforestation, consumptions, the international trade of endangered species, sweatshops from the 12<sup>th</sup> grade "English-ընդհանուր և բնագիւնա-մաթեմատիկական հնություններ" textbook by S. Baghdasaryan, S. Gurjaryants.

### ***Opinion Polls***

*Students answer poll questions regarding social and environmental topics with agree or disagree.*

*Students work in pairs and justify their responses with sentence stems:*

*I agree/disagree because...*

*In my opinion... etc.*

- "Countries need more factories for development. It is more important."
- "We need to cut down forests for apartments."
- "Plastic should be banned."

### ***Jigsaw (15 Minutes)***

*Make small groups to study one topic (air pollution, deforestation, etc.)*

- Each group reads a short adapted text (A2+ level) about their topic making notes for presentation
- When the groups are ready they start to teach each other about their own topic.
- Follow-up: Students write down a suggestion for how they think they can solve the problem

### ***Role-Play (15 Mins) - A Conference Simulation***

- Students act as officials from human rights organizations.
- Situation: One organization is trying to find a way to deal with sweatshops.
- Students have role-cards (for example, “You are a factory owner in China. You think sweatshops are necessary.”)
- Students can prepare key phrases to present their opinions and negotiate solutions.

### ***Hypothetical Problems (10 minutes) – Environmental Dilemmas***

Students work in pairs and discuss: "What would you do if..." situations:

Encourage conditional sentence use: *If I were the mayor, I would...*

- *What would you do if the air in your city got of bad quality one day?*
- *What would you do if your favorite brand used sweatshops?*

Students can encourage further ideas on their own interests.

### ***Debate (10 minutes) – Should We Ban Plastic?***

- Half of the class supports the idea (why we don't need plastic); the other half opposes it (why we need).
- Teams prepare two arguments and present them.
- Teacher encourages rebuttals and structured responses setting rules on how to behave during the debate.

### ***Wrap-Up (5 minutes) – Student Presentations (Each One Teach One)***

- Each student gives a one-minute speech on one problem and a possible solution.
- Peers provide constructive feedback.

These activities display the social context in CLT by encouraging the students to get involved in discussions about real-world issues that affect their lives. We try to come up with activities that are real-life scenarios. Discussions, debate are an essential part of the further social life of students as they generate real-life conversations. Role plays, on one hand, teach students of various cases that they can find themselves. They mirror real-life discussions based on different perspectives when opposite interests clash. Polls are socially relevant and controversial; they are also very practical and common events that students one way or another will come across. Jigsaw is based on collaboration and the ability to teach and explain to each other things that maybe others don't know - a situation that in the future students may be in. Students collaborate to construct knowledge on serious issues to foster a sense of responsibility and critical thinking. Hypothetical problems help to showcase the need for decision-making, civic-minded thinking and engagement with societal issues. In general, we can say that chosen activities encourage civic engagement, democratic values, policy discussions, decision-making, collaborative skills by having students propose real-world actions using the foreign language as a social tool of communication.

**Conclusion:** The current wave of foreign language teaching favors communicative language teaching (CLT). This correlates to communicative competence which itself is the goal of language teaching. CLT is accordingly realized in social context to suffice its needs. However, communication is not a simple act and requires complex input from participating sides. Communication is to happen in an authentic context and its best comprehension is societal. Society in its specific culture is not just the endgame of communication but also its justification. The strong influence of society and communication as one unit, is best described by L. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning. It sets the cultural society as the environment where the learning happens. The role of the cultural is central. Vygotsky states the zone of proximity (ZPD) where students perform tasks with assistance which is very much task-based. This goes to scaffolding which is teachers' support in order to complete a task. The support is gradually reduced so that the student can take full responsibility. The theory highlights the role of the mediator who in our case is the teacher while the language is the symbolic tool of communication. We believe that with the support of this theoretical background we can conclude that the best way to ensure communicative education of a foreign language is to view the classroom as an example of society. We think that the curriculum can be processed to behold the role of the society. This does not necessarily need to be in the form of challenging tasks or projects but even occasional exercises would do. To this conclusion, the article points out a couple of examples.

## ՍՈՑԻՈՆԱԿՈՒԹԱՅԻՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԴԵՐԸ ՀԱԴՐԴԱԿՑԱՅԻՆ ՈՒՍՈՒՑՄԱՆ ԽԹԱՆՄԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՏՔՍՈՒԻՄ

Գաբրիելյան Աննա

ասպիրանտ

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Մադայան Կարինե

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Միջնակարգ դպրոցի ուսուցչուհի

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### Ամփոփում

Հողվածում ուսումնասիրվել է Վիգոտսկու սոցիոմշակութային տեսությունը օտար լեզուների դասավանդման հաղորդակցային ուսուցման համատեքստում: Հաղորդակցային ուսուցումը նպատակ ունի ձևավորելու և զարգացնելու աշակերտների հաղորդակցման համապարփակ հմտությունները: Սոցիոմշակութային տեսությունը ապահովում է ակադեմիական բացատրություն օտար լեզուների արդյունավետ ուսուցման մեթոդական կիրառման համար: Վիգոտսկու տեսությունը հստակորեն մեկնաբանում է ֆորմալ ուսուցմանը անհրաժեշտ երկու շատ կարևոր գաղափարներ՝ պրոբսիմալ զարգացման տեսությունը ու սկաֆոլդինգը: Այս երկու գաղափարները բացահայտում են նաև ուսուցիչ դերը օտար լեզուների դասավանդման գործընթացում: Պրոքսիմալ զարգացման տեսությունը ապահովում է միջավայր, որտեղ աշակերտը իրացնում է ուսումնառությունը, մինչ սկաֆոլդինգը ապահովում է ուսուցչի կողմից տրամադրվող ժամանակակից պահպանը:

կավոր օժանդակություն հետազա ինքնուրույնության համար: Այս երկու գաղափարները մենք դիտարկում ենք օտար լեզուների դասավանդման համատեքստում, քանի որ հաղորդակցային կարողությունների ուսուցման համար անհրաժեշտ է նախևառաջ համապատասխան միջավայր և ուսուցիչ օժանդակություն: Ուսուցիչը հանդես է գալիս որպես միջնորդ, իսկ լեզուն՝ որպես հաղորդակցության գործիք: Խոսելով սոցիոմշակութային տեսության մասին հական է բարձրաձայնել մշակույթի կարևորությունը: Մշակույթը ամբողջ ուսուցման հիմնաքարն է և ձևավորում է աշակերտի ձանաչողական գարգացումը: Եթե մշակույթը, ըստ սոցիոմշակութային տեսության, առանցքային է, ապա անհրաժեշտ է լինում դասարանում ապահովել դրա պատկերային տարրերը: Մշակույթը գտնում է իր արտացոլանքը հասարակության մեջ, ուստի ուսուցումը պետք է ցուցադրի դա: Սա կարող է պատրաստել աշակերտին հասարակական կյանքում ինքնուրույն քայլեր ձեռնարկելուն: Հոդվածում խրախուսվում են մեթոդներ, որոնք ընդօրինակում են հավանական, կենսական հասարակական իրավիճակներ: Սա կապահովվի ոչ միայն ուսուցման արդիականություն, այլև կիսթանի հաղորդակցությանը անհրաժեշտ ուազմավարական հմտությունների գարգացում: Հաղորդակցությունը միատարր չէ, և դրա իրացումը ենթադրում է տարրեր բաղադրիչների միաժամանակյա կիրառում: Դերային խաղերը, բանավեճերը, քննարկումները, գործնական իրավիճակների ուսումնասիրությունները կարող են նման դասերի իրականացման օրինակներ լինել: Հոդվածի վերջում ներկայացնում ենք մի քանի վարժություններ: Մեզ համար չափորոշչային են հանդիսանում օտար լեզուների դասավանդման նոր չափորոշիչները:

**Բանավիրաբեր՝ հաղորդակցային ուսուցում, պրոբիմալ գարգացման տեսություն, սկաֆոլդինգ, սոցիոմշակութային տեսություն, մեթոդ:**

## **СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНАЯ ТЕОРИЯ ОБУЧЕНИЯ ДЛЯ ПРОДВИЖЕНИЯ КОММУНИКАТИВНОГО ПОДХОДА К ОБУЧЕНИЮ ЯЗЫКАМ**

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### **Аннотация**

В статье рассматривается социокультурная теория Выготского в контексте коммуникативного обучения иностранным языкам. Коммуникативное обучение направлено на формирование и развитие у учащихся комплексных коммуникативных навыков. Социокультурная теория дает академическое объяснение методологического применения эффективного изучения иностранных языков. Теория Выготского ясно объясняет две ключевые концепции, важные для формального обучения: зону ближайшего развития и скаффолдинг. Эти две идеи также обозначают роль учителя в процессе обучения иностранным языкам. Зона ближайшего развития создает условия, в которых ученик осваивает материал, в то время как скаффолдинг предоставляет временную помощь со стороны учителя, способствуя будущей самостоятельности ученика.

Мы рассматриваем эти концепции в контексте преподавания иностранных языков, поскольку, прежде всего, для освоения коммуникативных навыков важны соответствующая среда и поддержка преподавателя. Учитель выступает в роли посредника, а язык – в роли

инструмента общения. Говоря о социокультурной теории, необходимо подчеркнуть важность культуры. Культура – краеугольный камень любого обучения, она формирует когнитивное развитие учащегося. Если социокультурная теория считает культуру центральной, то необходимо обеспечить преподавание ее элементов в классе. Культура проявляется в обществе, поэтому преподавание должно отражать ее элементы. Это может подготовить студента к самостоятельным шагам в общественной жизни.

В статье поощряются методы, имитирующие вероятные, жизненно важные социальные ситуации. Это не только обеспечит актуальность обучения, но и будет способствовать развитию стратегических навыков, необходимых для коммуникации. Коммуникация многосторонняя и требует одновременного использования различных компонентов. Примерами таких занятий могут быть ролевые игры, дебаты, дискуссии и анализ кейсов.

В заключение мы предлагаем несколько примеров упражнений, соответствующих современным стандартам преподавания иностранных языков.

**Ключевые слова:** коммуникативное обучение, зона ближайшего развития, скаффолдинг, социокультурная теория, метод.

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