Chapter 17
Dynamic Assessment and Multi-Media Language Instruction

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT Dynamic Assessment (DA) illustrates classroom interactions in which teaching and assessment must be integrated as a single activity seeking to identify learner abilities by actively supporting their ongoing developmental process. DA is based on the Vygotskian notion of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which captures the uniquely human potential to exceed our present capabilities by working in cooperation with others. Moreover, with prevalence of multimedia language learning materials in foreign/ second language classrooms, their design is an important avenue of research in computer assisted language learning. This chapter will present an in-depth analysis of DA's application to particular problems of L2 development. It includes detailed discussions of the core DA theoretical tenets as well as implementing multi-media based DA principles in L2 classrooms. The information can be beneficial for language teacher educators, language testers, students and researchers in the areas of SLA, language pedagogy, and assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Dynamic Assessment (DA) is a relatively new approach to L2 assessment that has been introduced to L2 research and educational community by Lantolf and Poehner (2004) and Poehner and Lantolf (2005). Since 2004, there has been growing support for the use of DA in language pedagogy (Ableeva, 2007, 2008; Antón, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Poehner, 2005, 2008). The authors of L2 publications on DA argue in favor of this qualitative procedure and provide examples of how students benefit from DA-based language instruction. Furthermore, few studies have been done on the different characteristics of multimedia that can enhance reading (Chun & Plass, 1997), vocabulary acquisition (Plass, Chun, Mayer & Leutner, 1998), and even speaking (Borras & Lafayette, 1994).

However, at the level of assessment, a relatively small number of studies have been published that consider the assessment of listening ability (e.g., Buck, 2003; Field, 2008; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Ur, 1984). In this regard, Alderson and Bachman (2003) pointed out that the assessment of listening abilities is one of the least understood, least developed, and yet one of the most important areas of language testing and assessment. While discussing the purposes and the types of L2 listening tests (e.g., achievement, placement tests), Buck (2003) as well as Alderson (2005) articulated the acute need for the creation of new diagnostic listening assessments that will identify specific areas where learners need improvement, and in so doing will better inform the instructional process regarding learners' listening abilities.

Besides, as multimedia technology becomes more accessible to teachers and learners of other languages, its potential as a tool to enhance language skills becomes a practical option. The result is that learners now can interact with textual, aural, and visual media in a wide range of format. With prevalence of multimedia language learning materials in foreign and second language classrooms, their design is an important avenue of research in computer assisted language learning.

Thus, this chapter intended to address the aforementioned concerns articulated in recent L2 research by applying DA to listening instruction. That is, the chapter first sought to elaborate on the effects of DA-based instruction on the development of language proficiency. In addition, it endeavored to compare effectiveness of different approaches to DA, namely interventionist, interactionist, and multimedia mediation. What is noteworthy regarding DA is that due to its reliance on mediated dialogue during the testing procedure, DA permits not only the diagnosis of specific sources of difficulty but also provides insights into the process of listening and promotes listening ability by tracking its development through 'microgenetic analysis', a specific qualitative method, proposed by SCT. Finally, the chapter will discuss the use of multi-media based dynamic assessment in language learning and instruction reporting on a longitudinal pedagogical intervention that will apply DA to listening assessment and instruction.

BACKGROUND

SCT-Based Dynamic Assessment and L2 Pedagogy

Dynamic Assessment, a relatively new approach to L2 assessment, has been introduced to L2 research and educational community by Lantolf and Poehner (2004) and Poehner and Lantolf (2005). Since 2004, there has been growing support for the use of DA in language pedagogy (Ableeva, 2007, 2008; Antón, 2009; Lantolf & Poehner, 2004; Poehner & Lantolf, 2005; Poehner, 2005, 2008). On the basis of this initial L2 DA research, this study adopts the following definition of DA:

Dynamic assessment integrates assessment and instruction into a seamless, unified activity aimed at promoting learner development through appropriate forms of mediation that are sensitive to the individual's (or in some cases a group's) current abilities. In essence, DA is a procedure for simultaneously assessing and promoting development that takes account of the individual's (or group's) zone of proximal development [and his/her responsiveness to mediation]. (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004, p. 50)

In other words, contrary to traditional assessment that focuses on already matured abilities, "DA promotes functions that are maturing" in the ZPD and "foregrounds future development" (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004, p. 54). These manifestations of DA result from its underpinning in such foundational

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