Sociocultural Identity Development Scaffolded by Collaboration-Conducive Strategies: A Case of an Iranian EFL Writing Class

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Abstract

This investigation postulates Vygotsky s (1978) concept of zone of proximal development (ZPD) and his related scaffolding metaphor as well as Norton s (2006) principles of sociocultural identity as its theoretical foundation. This research intends to scrutinize the socioculturally-oriented mediational mechanisms utilized in student-student and student-teacher collaborations in an Iranian EFL writing class. Such scrutiny is to reveal the learners sociocultural change in behavior, and how their sociocultural identity is scaffolded and developed through collaborative negotiation in writing. For this purpose, Lidz's Rating Scale (1991) was adopted to delve into the sociocultural-identity-conducive interactions produced by 32 sophomores of English Language and Literature at Shiraz University as they collaborated in writing. The analysis of such scaffolding-mediated discourse provides useful insights into the nature of the learners sociocultural identity development. Particularly, the results provide evidence that dialogic exchanges through linguistic meanson the part of peers and the teacher include some behaviors such as intentionality, joint regard, affective involvement, communicative ratchet, contingent responsivity, intersubjectivity, and L1 use in collaborative writing tasks which play the most significant role in establishing new identities and gaining self-regulation, i.e. developing sociocultural identity.
Keywords: identity, sociocultural identity, collaboration, writing, scaffolding, ZPD

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Introduction

During the 1970s and 1980s, the link between identity and language learning may have been compared to the distinction between social identity and cultural identity. Social identity referred to the connection between the individual and the social world, whereas cultural identity indicated the link between an individual and an ethnic group (Norton, 2006). However, the recent notion of identity conceives of sociocultural identity with respect to larger institutional practices in schools, homes, and workplaces (the social) as well as more grounded practices associated with particular groups (the cultural) (Norton, 2006, p. 25). In fact, most current studies on identity and language learning shares an interest in the complex and dynamic nature of identity, co-constructed in a wide variety of sociocultural relationships, and framed within particular relations of power (Norton, 2006, p. 25). This can promote our perception of the relationship between identity and language learning to the extent that this identity addresses both institutional and group practices, i.e. sociocultural identity (Norton, 2006, p. 25).In other words, the recent conception of identity regards identity as socioculturally developed, so that both institutional and community practices must be analyzed to reveal the identity-conducive conditions under which language learners speak, read, and write the target language (Norton, 2006).

Therefore, in the same vein, the sociocultural view of L2 learning and specifically writing has received extra impetus since the 1990s by an increasing interest in the application of Vygotsky-inspired sociocultural theory (SCT) to second and foreign language research (e.g., Ellis, 1997; Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997; Oxford, 1997; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992; van Lier, 1996; among others). Lantolf (2000, 2002) states that the central and distinguishing concept of SCT is that human mind is always and everywhere socially and semiotically mediated within the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD), or "the domain of knowledge or skill where the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 196). The concept of scaffolding was originally used by Vygotsky (cited in Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997). It refers to the other-regulation process within the

ZPD of a less skilled learner mostly through collaboration by which tutors, parents, teachers, or more skilled peers, prompt or help him or her solve a problem, and is supposedly most helpful for the learning or appropriation of new concepts (Mitchell & Myles, 2004; Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996).

Many studies have addressed different scaffolding features of the collaboration with different characteristics. Anton & Di Camilla (1999), Lantolf & Aljaafreh (1995), Swain (1995), Sullivan (1996), Pata, Sarapuu, & Lehtinen (2005), Williams (2004), and Yelland & Master (2005), among many others, have studied the mediating nature of collaborative dialogue in fulfilling different kinds of tasks. For instance, Anton & Dicamilla examined the use of L1 as a powerful tool of semiotic mediation in providing scaffolded help in collaborative activities. Their study highlighted the importance of repetition, private speech, and the first language (L1) in students discourse (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Dicamilla & Anton, 1997). De Guerrero & Villamil (2000) demonstrated how two students, one as a writer and the other as a reviewer, learn from each other during interaction in a peer-review activity.

Objective of the Study

While studies as such above recognize the importance of collaborative interaction, their focus on negotiation provides an incomplete picture of learners interaction in an L2 classroom setting. In this line of research the objective of studying learners interaction is to uncover how learners and teachers use speaking activity as an identity-conducive tool in a socioculturally-inspired writing task. By looking at learners and teacher s speech as cognitive activity, a more refined psycholinguistic and sociocultural identity-oriented understanding of what really goes on in learners and teacher interactions is achieved (Donato & Lantolf, 1990).In particular, this study micro-analyzes the ZPD of the participants transcribed social interactions to delve into the nature of peer-peer and student-teacher interaction in an EFL writing class in Iran in order to explore how sociocultural identity development may occur. In other words, this study intends to answer the following questions:

1. What are the scaffolding mechanisms in writing which are conducive to sociocultural identity development?
2. What moment-to-moment changes in behavior signal sociocultural identity development during the writing process?

Conceptual Framework

Sociocultural Theory, as Lantolf (2000, 2002) states, deals with the fact that human mind is always and everywhere socially and semiotically mediated within the zone of proximal development (ZPD), or the domain of knowledge or skill where the learner is not yet capable of independent functioning, but can achieve the desired outcome given relevant scaffolded help (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 196). The concept of scaffolding was originally proposed by Vygotsky (cited in Nyikos & Hashimoto, 1997). It refers to the other-regulation process within the ZPD of a less skilled learner mostly through collaboration by which tutors, parents, teachers, or more skilled peers, prompt or help him or her solve a problem, and is supposedly most helpful for the learning or appropriation of new concepts (Villamil & De Guerrero, 1996; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Such collaborative other-regulation   process   may   entail   sociocultural   identity development, which has been characterized by Norton (2006).

Norton (2006, p. 25) elaborates on the recent notion of identity regarded as socioculturally developed, and both institutional and community practices are analyzed to reveal the identity-conducive conditions under which language learners speak, read, and write the target language (Norton, 2006). According to Norton (2006, p. 25), the five principles of the recent sociocultural conception of identity can be specified as follows:

1.   A sociocultural conception of identity conceives of identity as transitional, dynamic and constantly changing across time and place.
2.   A sociocultural conception of identity conceives of identity as complex, contradictory, and multifaceted, and rejects any simplistic notions of identity.

3.   A sociocultural Identity constructs and is constructed by language.

4.   A sociocultural identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes, marked by relations of power that can be either coercive or collaborative.

5.   A sociocultural conception of identity links identity theory with classroom practice.

Statement of the Problem

According to Englert, Mariage, and Dunsmore (2006), a sociocultural approach to writing development seeks to understand how culturally and historically situated meanings, and as a result identities, are constructed, reconstructed, and transformed though social mediation (p. 208). Based on such studies, most existing research on creative writing in L2 to date has focused on SL rather than FL contexts (see Kuiken &Vedder, 2002b, Storch, 2005; Storch & Wigglesworth, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). So an important basis for the current study is to investigate the dynamics of collaborative writing activity among Iranian (EFL) students.

Also, the study deals with the nature of writing process in all phases of writing activity in a group in contrast to many studies reviewed which attend to fewer phases. A thorough investigation highlights the importance of studying markers in identifying the learner s level of regulation in different stages. Moreover, it does not try to elicit only one specific scaffolding behavior but it analyzes all the possible scaffolding strategies employed by the writers in writing processes in relation to sociocultural identity development. This type of microanalysis (Wertsch, 1985, p. 55) of writing process is crucial in understanding how psychological and sociocultural processes are formed in the identity development trend.

Researchers most commonly have attended to the revising stage. One of the drawbacks of peer revisions, however, is that the focus is often on the product of writing rather than the process of writing. In L2 contexts in particular, a number of studies (e.g., Lockhart & Ng, 1995; Nelson & Carson, 1998; Villamil & de Guerrero, 1996) have shown that when students are asked to peer review, they tend to focus

on errors at the sentence and word level. Thus, the process of writing remains a private act, where writers are left to their own devices when making important decisions about their text (Hirvela, 1999).Through analysis it is possible to grasp the process in flight as Vygotsky (1978, p. 68) nicely puts it. What is an important issue in the study of collaborative activity is to understand how it is (in the EFL context of Iran) that the social plane provides a platform for learners to capitalize on the consciousness/awareness stage and work further towards the necessary modification in order to achieve internalization; this movement from the social platform of collaboration and interaction to an awareness stage of necessary modification leading to internalization can be regarded as a cyclical process through which a sociocultural or collaboration-supported identity may gradually be formed.

Method

Context of the Study

Writing classrooms in Iran (an EFL context) has mostly been a place of individual work overseen by an expert writing instructor. As the understanding of the nature of the L2 writing has started to shift away from a completely individualistic perception of this activity towards a view more balanced one between cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, the need is perceived for the increased social interaction between Iranian L2 writing students. Weissberg (2006) has specifically called for the increased integration of interaction in the L2 writing classrooms. Virtually most of the cross-modality research has been conducted with ESL students (Ludstrom & Baker, 2009; Weissberg, 2000, 2006) while foreign language writers (Iranians in specific) have been largely ignored.

Another point which is worth mentioning about the context is the lack of purpose and focus which may be further hampering efforts to produce quality FL writing within this type of language learning environment. Although the writing course assignments may provide a certain measure of extrinsic motivation, these assignments are frequently given when there is no clear audience or purpose of writing outside the FL classroom. So, in this study in-class peer and teacher

collaboration on writing assignments is carried out to see if it can help FL writers to scaffold their composing in different ways and more importantly if it can develop a sense of audience which may fill the gap in the EFL context of Iran.

In sum, a social approach is implemented with the Iranian EFL students whose language instruction has been largely individualistic. In such contexts instructors do not necessarily expect that students be eager to engage with each other in successful, productive peer-composing nor that does this practice by itself necessarily lead students to more closely consider writing purpose.

Participants

Participants of the study comprised 32(male and female) EFL undergraduate students of English Literature studying at the Department of Foreign Languages and Linguistics of Shiraz University. They were all sophomores taking an essay writing course for their BA program. The data was collected in the course of one semester which was up to sixteen sessions. The class met weekly for a period of two hours. None of the students had attended an essay writing course before entering the university.

Materials

Essays: Throughout the semester the participants wrote six essays as their writing tasks. The topics and types of the essays were as follows:

1. Due to financial and social problems, universities are accepting a larger number of students. In what ways does it affect the quality of education? (Expository Essay)
2. What are the advantages of studying abroad? (Expository Essay)
3. Job satisfaction is an important element of individuals well-being. What factors contribute to job satisfaction? (Cause-Effect Essay)
4. Which one do you prefer, a long vacation or a short one during school year? (Narrative Essay)
5. Universities should allow students to study the courses that they want to study. Do you agree or disagree with this idea? (Argumentative Essay)

6. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? Parents should try to stay together for the sake of their children even though they may think living together is impossible. (Argumentative Essay)

Audio-recorded Discourse: The students oral interactions while writing and practicing group essays were audio-recorded in for later analysis. The aim was to elicit information on the way learners benefited from scaffolding behaviors which collaborative writing might have offered them.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

Starting from the second session, the process of writing the expository essay and later the argumentative essay was presented to the class. During the course, the instructor taught the writing strategies within sociocultural approach to the class and continuously asked them to mediate their learning through those strategies.

The activity system model best depicts the mediational and social context of the classroom activities, which includes subject (students attitude toward writing, motivation to write, their goals, and personal and world knowledge), rules (class norms), tools (guidelines and worksheets), object(instructional objective), outcome (the development of written texts), and community (students and teachers in the classroom) and division of labor(the roles to play and the jobs to share in learning activities). Attention was given to process instead of product. This process-oriented approach is intended to change the traditional concept of composing an essay.

The students writing practices in class were all in groups. Each group comprised students of four descending levels of A, B, C, and D in terms of general English proficiency. The researchers analyzed the transcriptions of the audiotaped discourse which included the scaffolding strategies observed in the teacher and peers conversations, mainly based on Lidz s Rating Scale (1991), Wood *et al.* (1976), Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994), and Anton & Dicamilla (1998):

Lidz's (1991) Twelve Component Behaviors of Adult Mediating Instruction

1. Intentionality: Consciously attempting to influence the child s actions.
2. Meaning: Promoting understanding by highlighting for the child what is important to notice, marking relevant differences, elaborating detail and providing relevant information.
3. Transcendence: Helping the child make associations to related past experiences and project himself or herself into the future
4. Joint regard: Trying to see the activity through the child s eyes.
5. Sharing of experiences: Telling the child about an experience or thought that the mediator had.
6. Task regulation: Manipulating the task to facilitate problem solving.
7. Praise/encouragement: Communicating to the child, verbally or nonverbally, that he or she has done something wrong.
8. Challenge: Maintaining the activity within the limits of the child s ZPD.
9. Psychological differentiation: Keeping in the mind that the task is Child s and not the mediator s.
10. Contingent responsivity: The ability to read the child s behavior and to respond appropriately.
11. Affective involvement: Expressing warmth to the child.
12. Change: Communicating to the child that he or she has made some change or improved in some way.

Scaffolding was operationally defined in this work as those supportive behaviors by which one partner in a semiotically mediated interactive situation can help another achieve a higher level of competence and regulation (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999).

To conduct the analysis, the transcribed interaction was segmented into episodes, units of discourse during which the students were on task, that is, dealing with one discrete trouble source or a connected series of trouble sources, or talking about the task, that is, discussing task procedures. Three episodes, one for each stage of writing, are

subjected to microanalysis of sociocultural mediations leading to identity construction.

Results and Discussions

The data presented here comprises threelong episodes of random selection (selected from a larger collection of group discoursesrecorded during a semester), one for each stage (pre-writing, while-writing, and revising).Each episode was subjected to microanalysis, that is, interactionswere scrutinized in order to observe a) sociocultural-identity-conducive scaffolding mechanisms employed by the teacher and students in helping each other go through the composing process, and b)moment-to-moment changes in behavior that might signal sociocultural-identity-formative composing skills through socioculturally mediated assistance. Previously established categoriesand features of socioculturally mediated assistance in the ZPD (mainly those in Aljaafreh &Lantolf,1994; Bruner, 1978; and Lidz, 1991) were utilized. It should be noted that,for the most part, students' interactions were in Persian with English usedoccasionally when referring to the different parts of the text written or whenreading parts of the text. To facilitate understanding, the English version ofthe episodes was produced and presented in each section. In the episodes,words said in English not Persian are **boldfaced** and the words in parenthesis are the researcher's.

Episode 1:
1. A: Let's write the sentences one by one first... **significant issues**...
2. B: shall I write the example?
3. A: No, not right now... it has different parts; first introduction weshould write sentences and then put them together... (in collaboration theyhelp each other time-mediate their task)
4. C: uhum...
5. A: **umm... umm... the especial thing that... o... Umm… it's a big andimportant problem...** (Private speech while writing: semiotic mediation)
6. B**: no, issue, it's an important issue to…**

7. A: **affect lives... Aha,** here we can say...

8. C: Shall we mention the **controversial points**?

9. A: you mean you want to agree?

10. C: I don t know (laughing)... O k enough we don t have time...

11. B: I don t know what we should write in the introduction...

12. A: well, these sentences we're suggesting now...

13. C: first we should mention the topic...

14. A: ok, we did that... now we should state the **opposing view...**

15. B: **although some people think that divorce...** (writing)

16. C: **or divorcing...**

17. A: **or getting divorce** (repeated several times)...

18. B: **may have... may have... may have affect someone's..**

19. A: no, affect is not a good word... **benefit**?

20. C: divorce never has any benefits...

21. B: **getting divorce may...** do we want to say divorce is good or not?

22. A: (laughing) we want to say not to divorce but as an opposing view wesay divorce is good... (this point is negotiated for a few seconds)

23. T (everyone's quiet... teacher is talking about the benefit of indentingthe first sentence of the paragraphs & topic sentence quality related issues)

The first thing to be noticed is the contingent use of L1 by the members ofthe group throughout the collaboration (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994; Anton& Dicamilla, 1998). L1 is a very important semiotic mediation to regulatethe task socioculturally, especially among the L2 learners with the same L1. L1, actually,plays a strategic psychological and sociocultural role both in scaffolding and in establishingintersubjectivity to perform the task, achieve the goals, and thus realize thelevel of the potential development as well as in concocting a preliminary, incipient, collaboration-conducive, and L1-L2-connective identity.

In line with Villamill and DeGuerrero's (1996)findings, regarding the use of L1, in episode 1, it is evident that the subjectsmake use of L1 in order to explore and expand the content, guide theiractions through the task, and maintain the dialogue in representing their incipient identity in collaboration. The episode illustratesthe use of L1

as a sociocultural medium of scaffoldingconducive to the construction of collective identity(Donato, 1994).As mentioned in the conceptual framework section, this process of L1 use in collaboration is in line with what Norton (2006, p. 25) states: Most researchers note that identity constructs and is constructed by language. Also, As Pavlenko (2004, p. 54) argues, Language is seen ِِ as the locus of social organization and power, and as a form of symbolic capital as well as a site of struggle where subjectivity and individual consciousness are produced. Therefore, the use of L1 here may satisfy the third principle of the sociocultural identity development.

At the very beginning (1A), the participant by using the word *let's*wants to recruit (Wood et al. 1976) the interest in the task and direct theothers' attention toward the goal. The word *let's* also entails an initiation ofa sociocultural intersubjectivity among members. Intersubjectivity is defined as being able to go beyond one's own perception and include another's way of thinking as the basis for the construction of collaborative identity (Grossen, 1998; Rommetveit, 1976). The sentence also imlpiesintentionality by which the members become involved in the task and theirattention is engaged. This process may be consistant with Norton (2006, p. 25) fourth principle of sociocultural identity, i.e. identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes, marked by relations of power that can be either coercive or collaborative. As Pennycook (2001, p. 27) notes, The notion of politics I am using here takes as its central concern the notion of power and views power as operating through all domains of life. Power is at the heart of questions of discourse, disparity, and difference.

2B, 8C, and 21B are all requests for clarification that, according to Villamil and De Guerrero (1996), is one of the socioculturally facilitative behaviors in providing peer support during collaboration. Throughout the episode thelearners overtly address the problem of accessing the linguistic itemsneeded to express their ideas and as in 20C, 21B, and 22A the assertions are socioculturally mediated by L1 (the third principle of sociocultural identity), which maybe considered as a way to express idea, ideological stance, and self.

In 15B, in order tosolve the problem of finding the correct form of the verb *divorce*, thepartners resort to the repetition in which all the

members are engaged (16C& 17A). This process may be in line with the fifth principle of sociocultural identity, i.e. the link between identity theory and classroom practice. As Canagarajah (1999, p. 186) notes:

> Learners should be encouraged to become reflexive about their classroom relations since knowledge is socially constructed. Eventually, learners must be encouraged to become reflexive about themselves, - i.e. how their values, community membership, historical background, and subject-positions motivate them to negotiate language and knowledge in particular ways (also cited in Norton, 2006, p.25).

Peers, throughout their collaboration, sometimes, give minilessonson form or content and the others accept and act accordingly (as in 3A &13C). Instructing or giving minilessons is a type of scaffolding mechanismby means of which students exteriorize their expertise and offer each otherknowledge about language though everyone has equal commitment to thecommon task. In other words, minilessons are short and targeted lessonsthat socioculturally teach a particular aspect when the need arises, anddelineate the skeleton of the students de facto collective identity (Lyons & Pinnell,2001). This part confirms the second principle of sociocultural identity, i.e. identity as complex, contradictory, andmultifaceted, and rejects any simplistic notions of identity. As Toohey (2000, p. 16) notes, My research takes a different perspective on learners and learning. I reviewed feminist,cultural and poststructural theorists positions on identity as socially constructed,contradictory, dynamic and entailing power (also cited in Norton, 2006, p. 25).

In 22A, again, the task is socioculturally regulated by L1. As early as episode1, L1 proves to be a very powerful identity-formative mediation and principle (Norton, 2006). Occasional laughing(10C) or humor is an effective sociocultural move to sustain intersubjectivity and collective identity, and attain further affective involvement in the activity. Interestingly, taskregulation is done by all the members throughout the interaction and as theinteraction progresses a symmetrical relationship between the peers, i.e. socioculturally collective identity, is established with all showing signs of self-identification and other-regulation at differenttimes; This may be in

line with the first principle: identity as dynamic and constantly changing across time and place. Indeed, a recurring theme throughout the episodes is that of "transition." Many of the participants may be undergoing significant changes ideologically in their writing process, whether moving from one idea to another, or from one behavior to the next. As Kanno (2003, p. 135) notes, the trajectories of identity development show a gradual shift from a rigid and simplistic approach to a more sophisticated skill at negotiating belonging and control.

Episode 2:

24. A: ↵ **the quality of education is improved..**
25. B: good!
26. A: and↵ (writing)
27. B: they have improved **responsibility**↵
28. A: really? (laughing) no↵   (private speech reveals that it (27B) wasadded to the list)
29. B: **their behavior in work places is more restricted**↵
30. C: it is more rule-based now↵
31. A: what do you mean by rule-based?
32. C: I mean it is more seriously considered now... get it?
33. A: aha, so, **getting employed is more serious…** (writing)
34. B: aha, so **we should say that, you should be qualified enough to be hired in an organization…**
35. B: but still I don t understand what you mean by serious?
36. A: I want to list them just to see what we have later on then we willwrite it↵
37. B: For example we can say that because of increasing number ofapplicants↵   right?
38. C: yes... what else↵
39. A: we can also say that they're independent↵
40. C: does independence make them qualified?
41. A: yes**, they don't rely on their family and… they try to be morequalified...**
42. C: no need to write that part... we had it before...
43. A: no problem... it's just for note-taking... we will put them together later on to make a paragraph↵ ↵
44. B: **there are varieties of jobs...**

45. A: no, it's not a correct sentence... **jobs have different varieties…**
46: C: **they are different variety of jobs…**
47. B: we can't say "**different variety...**"
48. C: **many variations...** (negotiation over the meaning goes on↵) (teacher comes and takes a look at their writing and in L2 they say that it's theoutline) (L1-L2 connection)
49. A: **there are more applications that many of them↵**
50. B: we should use apply
51. A: no... not apply..
52. B: yes, why not, apply for application↵
53. C: **apply for application?** No it can be correct**… apply for a job..**
54. T: (negotiation goes on over using a proper word for a few minutes and teacher again intervenes and everything is settled)

In episode 2, as in the previous one, various forms of "sociocultural negotiation for meaning" moves can be seen; the aim of these moves is to highlight for the members of the groupwhat is important, what should be said, what is proper to say, and above all to adopt their sociocultural posture.These are fulfilled through marking critical features (Wood et al., 1976), that is, highlighting certain relevant features and pointing out discrepanciesbetween what has been produced and the ideal solution (41A, 46C, 47B,48C, and 50B). This is sometimes done through correction on the part of the peer who wants to collaboratively mediate their task at hand; this may be in agreement with the fourth principle of sociocultural identity, i.e. identity construction must be understood with respect to larger social processes, marked by relations of power that can be either coercive or collaborative (Norton, 2006). For instance, through demonstration (Wood et al., 1976), the learner socioculturally models anidealized form of the act to be performed by completing the act or byexplicating the learner's partial solution (33A, 34B, 48C, and 53C).

In 25B, there is an explicit example of praise and encouragement(Lidz, 1991) which is a significant feature of the groups that are socioculturally marked by high degrees of intersubjectivity. One feature of this kind of group canbe pinpointed in the students' sociocultural tuning into the task and making correctionsvery quickly, as if working in an automatic collaboration

mode. This feature can be observed in this group. In other words, as the interaction progresses,a symmetrical relationship between the peers is established with bothshowing signs of self-identification and other-regulation at different times. Verbal andnon-verbal encouragement socioculturally sustains the individuals self-identification and, as a whole, the groups' collective-identification. Minimizing the difficulties the task entails for the members can also be interpreted as praise and encouragement, which seeks to link identity theory with classroom practice (the fifth principle) (Norton, 2006). In fact, learners must be induced to become reflexive about their classroom relations and about themselves since knowledge is socially constructed (Canagarajah, 1999, p. 186).

By seeking each others' approval as in 37B, the members aresocioculturally displaying affective involvement (as previously described) in collaboration. Affective involvement, an indispensible part of sociocultural identity, which is performed through approval, encouragement, and great intersubjectivity also leads to frustration control (Wood et al., 1976), which reduces stress and frustration during problem-solving. Another sign ofaffective involvement can be seen in 28A, which is marked by members' laughing together. Such involvements depict an affective panorama of students sociocultural identity linked to classroom and collaborative practice (the fifth principle) (Norton, 2006).

The word *right*? in 37B also demonstrates an instance of Norton (2006) fifth principle of sociocultural identity development, i.e. the use of'communicative ratchet' (Bruner, 1978, p.254) by the peer in order to makesure that the others do not fall back and the interaction keeps going. Sometimes 'communicative ratchet' entails mediator's re-explanation and reclarificationto avoid learners' falling back. This sociocultural strategy is utilized when thepeer does not seem to be authoritative. It is worth mentioning thatsometimes the tone and persuasive skills of an authoritative peer who is less knowledgeable may cause the others to regress in their thinking, particularly if their level of confidence is low. However, according toLantolf and Aljaafreh (1995), regression is a normal feature of growth in L2 learning and should be expected to manifest itself in identity development. On the whole, there is no doubt that in

collaborative activities certain students' sociocultural attitudes and behaviors are more facilitative than others inproviding support.

Negotiation of the members over the word "application" from 50Bto 53C indicates that collective scaffolding collapses and the talk is notsettled. At the moment, a dialogic assistance (Aljaafreh & Lantolf, 1994), as a sociocultural mediation, isoffered by the teacher who was around observing the groups. This kind ofhelp enjoys the feature of contingency as one aspect of effective scaffolding proposed by Aljaafreh & Lantolf (1994), which sustains the students identity-framing collaboration or classroom practice (Norton, 2006, p. 25).

The teacher is always around to socioculturally regulate the task.As in 23T (Episode 1) and similarly in 50T, teacher's intentionality and meaning scaffolding (Lidz, 1991) keep the interaction going andmake the group maintain goal orientation. The goal of "intentionality" bythe mediator is to promote self-identification and other-regulation and meaningscaffolding promotes understanding by highlighting what is important tonotice, marking relevant differences, elaborating detail, and providing related information. The teacher's presence, wherever the negotiation fails,is also attributed to contingent responsivity (Lidz, 1991), which is the abilityto read the tutees' cues and signals to identify affective andmotivational needs, and as a result, in a timely and appropriate way, to satisfy their self- and other-regulative demands. Through this behavior, the teacher attempts to maintain a distance that would allow the students to make their own decisions. In an implicit way, the teacher is communicating to the students that he is always there to act asa facilitator rather than impose an authorship; an overt facilitator of students lesson-related understandings and a covert facilitator of students socioculturally-oriented identity construction manifest Norton (2006) first principle, based on which the teacher plays a crucial role in students transition to a more sophisticated skill at negotiating belonging and control (Kanno, 2003, p. 135; Norton, 2006, p. 25).

Episode 3

55. A: let me read what the problems are... here it says **the paragraphs aretoo short**↵ I mean two **body paragraphs**... it says that it looks like listingsomething rather than composing↵ then...

56. B: just like an **outline**... yes?

57. A: yes, right...

58. B: so does it mean we should develop the paragraphs?

59. A: yes... and there are a few verb errors... I wanted to say **if the publictransportation be (VE) comfortable...** It says 'be' is incorrect...

60. B: **if public transportation...**

61. C: hey look... let's first read the sentence... **public transportation**↵ **ifpublic transportation** *be* **comfortable…** ok... there is an **'if'** here, it's aconditional sentence...in conditional sentences type 1, we use **V1**, so itshould be **'is'** not **'be'**↵

62. A: but I wanted to say /'age bashe'/ (if be)...

63. C: it's ok, with 'is' it has the same meaning... or better we say **'wouldbe'**... **if public transportation would be comfortable...**

64. A: right... and here it says 'is it a paragraph?'... he means, it needs moredetails↵

65. B: they're too short...

66. A: yes... and...

67. C: this one should be 'ea' not 'ae'...

68. B: and it should be **'next suggestion'** or **'another suggestion'**...

69. A: and it also says **'last'** isn't correct here...

70. B: ok let's read the whole sentence↵ **next suggestion is increasing thenumber of transportation, sometimes waiting… last...**

71. A & C: **last***s*

72. B: (continues) **a long time that everybody…**

73. A: why it is marked **'SE'**? I think it's correct↵

74. B: but I think the structure seems to be Persian↵ isn 't it?

75. C: maybe you're right↵

76. B: so how do you think we can revise it?

77. C: umm↵ **it takes a long time**↵ umm ↵ **it is bothering**↵

78. B: or we can say that **waiting for a bus lasts a long time whichcauses…**

79. C: OK⸱   now the third one⸱   another suggestion is *awaring* people⸱so w hat   s wrong with this?

80. B: yes **'awaring'** means /agaahi dadan/(to make aware)⸱

81. C: But I think the problem is that 'aware' is used to mean /ekhtaardadan/ (to warn)...

82. B: no that's warning... we say for example, I'm not aware of⸱

83. C: so what do you think we should write in place of **'aware'**? I myselfhave written this and I can't think of any other word...

84. A: inform...

85. B: aha yes...

86. C: yes... another suggestion is **informing people**⸱

87. A: and here it is said   that between the third and the last paragraph, which is theconclusion, there should be a transition marker⸱   yeah, I have instantlyjumped to another point... and the last one says the verb **'concern'** is notsuitable⸱   what do you think it should be then?

88. B & C: care⸱   (laughing, as they both simultaneously said the word)

Episode 3 represents the students' sociocultural engagement in another collaborativeactivity, which is happening in the last stage of writing, i.e., revising. The selected episode seemed sufficiently rich and varied to allow the observationof a wide range of behaviors that may occur throughout ZPD that may lead to sociocultural identity development.

As the episode demonstrates, the members of the group seem to haveoperationalized the task successfully, as one of them starts reading the textand no rejection by the others is observed. The choice of the language toconduct the interaction constitutes another sign of the students' efforts attask operationalization. For them, Persian is a sociolinguistic resource thatfacilitates and also integrates both sociocultural communication and linguistic achievement of task goals which is again in line with the third principle, i.e. identity constructs and is constructed by language.

The teacher's only coding the errors and not appropriating thestudents' written texts explicitly according to his own criteria gives thesigns of what Lidz (1991) calls "psychological differentiation," that is,keeping a clear distinction between teacher's role as a facilitator and

the students' role as the author, who are ultimately responsible for the text. In other words, the teacher s psychological differentiation is marked by relations of power that can be either coercive or collaborative, i.e. the fourth principle (Norton, 2006, p. 25).

By collaboration and negotiation over problematic areas, the students seem to show a conscious effort to influence their performance. In addition, teacher's feedback, for this purpose, acts as a sociocultural mediator, which reveals intentionality (Lidz, 1991) whose main goal is to promote self-regulation (the first principle). The feedback provided by the teacher denotes an illuminatingly sociocultural effect as thestudents accept the revision (a type of transition) very quickly and try to pay attention to the parts tobe revised.

In the process of receiving feedback and negotiating the errors, thestudents in the group gain awareness of their performance and in Vygotskyan term, their ZPD is activated and they are susceptible toboth the linguistic advancement of learning and the sociocultural development of self (the first principle).

A glance at the whole episode shows that there is a high degree ofsociocultural intersubjectivity among participants (the fifth principle) as they are totally engaged in the taskand make corrections very quickly (the first principle), which is the collaborative revision toflow very smoothly. There is also a frequent use of pronoun 'we' (58B, 63C,70B, 76B, and 78B) by all of the participants, which denotes the joint regard (Lidz, 1991) and their collective identity (the fourth principle). Their instant comments, jointly constructed, indicatethat they have achieved a state of mutual cognition and a shared sociocultural self that works for their own benefit (the second principle). This shows that they have participated in a common task and have ashared understanding of the situation and are in tune with one another; astate which ends in self-regulation and identity development. It should be mentioned that self-regulation, the control of one behaviour does not reside in immediate stimuli (a case of being object-regulated), i.e. not a *conformative identity* (Hayes-Conroy and Vanderbeck, 2005), nor in another person (a case of other-regulatuon), i.e. not an *assigned identity* (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002), but in internally self-generated cognitive plan, i.e. a *critical identity* (Hayes-Conroy and Vanderbeck,

2005). Not a permannent level of develeopment, self-regulation is relative to the specific task and is best charactrized as the attainment of the individual s potential for development in innumerable endeavours which are realized in complex interatcions with others in one sculture and are mediated principally by language (the third principle) (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999). As the interaction progresses, allparticipants show signs of self- and other-regulation at different ties as inthe previous episodes.

The student in 61C tries to instruct and give a minilesson (Villamil& De Guerrero, 1996). In symmetrical peer interaction, anyone who seems to have the knowledge tends to instruct in order to take control of the areain which, presumably, he feels to be the expert; this illuminates the complex, contradictory, and multifaceted, socially-constructed, dynamic, and power-entailing nature of sociocultural identity development (the second principle) (Norton, 2006). The participants' asking for help (as in 73A, 76B, 79C, and 83C) and realizing that help is available denote an initiation of "disinhibition process" (Donato, 1994) (a type of transition), which is aprocess that makes it possible for the learner to begin and maintain the pursuit of the task goal and control frustration (the first principle).

Some participants scaffold the revision process (collaborative and power-entailing behavior) by identifying microtrouble points (as in 74B), which subsequently induces the collective thinking of the group (Macro trouble points have already been identified by the teacher through coding).

In 74B, the participant also tries to assure theothers perception, which is a scaffolding behavior and is mostly used bynon-authoritative peers. There are also many examples of approval (57A,59A, 64A, 66A, and 80B),which is one of the characteristics of a fluid collaboration (the fifth principle).

Throughout the episode, it can easily be seen that, as the participants formulate and reformulate options, they finally settle on a satisfactory solution. In this process, the social embeddedness of their linguistic development are at work (the third principle). Episode 3 andother revision episodes depict a very clear example of movement within the ZPD, which was evidenced not only by the actions undertaken by the students during the revision itself, but also bythe independent

performance of the writers in their final draft. As noted throughout the analyses, the students incorporated the majority of the behavioral changes towards Norton s(2006) sociocultural identity principles discussed during the interaction.

Conclusion

The above-presented micro analysis of the data has made possible the observation ofthe vast variety of scaffolding mechanisms in the sociocultural interaction among L2 learners as they work jointly. The presence of these mechanisms corroborates their importance as key features of socioculturally mediated assistance in the ZPD, as reported in the theoretical background of the study, and as a result in the development of L2 learners sociocultural identity based on its respective principles stated by Norton (2006). Sociocultural identity development in writing highlights how the social relationship in which the learners co-author texts with assistance from others, such as through scaffolding, is conducive to their identity development. The analysis ofthe observed classroom interaction revealed how the teacher and peers interrelatedly in collaboration with each other mediate and regulate the taskat hand. The teacher and peers working collaboratively disclosed an array of socioculturally supportive behaviors that facilitated the advancement both through the task and through the self.As the students are doing group work activities, the teacher is freed from her traditional role of instructor, corrector and controller. In fact, the teacher wanders round the class, giving help where needed, caring about slow students, discreetly noting down mistakes for remedial work of feedback sessions and encouraging learners, all of which are socioculturally guided and identity-conducive. Some of these behaviors on the part of peers and the teacher included intentionality, joint regard, affective involvement, communicative ratchet, contingent responsivity, and so on.

Another scaffolding mechanism that facilitated the interaction was the contingent use of L1. In fact, L1 was a sociocultural instrument to controlthe task and the self. Anton and DiCamilla (1991) claim that stifling use of L1 in collaborative writing tasks in the L2 classroom may not be wise pedagogical practice because it discourages the

employment of a critical psychological tool that is essential for collaboration. It is worth mentioning that Wells (1998) suggested that the value of using L1 in L2 interactive settings should be judged in the light of the nature of the collaborative tasks involved. That is, the use of L1 would not be favorable in all collaborative situations.

Another important feature that was observed throughout the interactions was the sociocultural establishment and maintenance of the intersubjectivity.This state of shared focus and intention on the part of peers was achieved through their good disposition and their openness to receive help and their willingness to accept their partners' suggestions for their value. There was a high degree of intersubjectivity in the revising stage as the analysis of the data revealed.

The task also, as one of the components of the social network of the class, gave the participants the opportunities to grow socioculturally in aspects of L2 writing and revising as well as in strategic assistance and collaboration, i.e. sociocultural identity. The task allowed the participants to consolidate and reorganize knowledge ofthe L2 in structural and rhetorical aspects and to make this knowledge explicit for each other, and also to reframe and restructure their knowledge of self socioculturally.

On the whole, there is every indication that the peer collaboration can bea true learning experience in the EFL context of Iran but mention should be made of the fact that notall movements within the students' ZPD imply advancement toward the prescribed language and rhetorical forms. The analysis in this work demonstrated moments when the students were unsure or unaware of standard forms or uses of the L2 language and settled on their own creative alternatives. From sociocultural perspective, however, the students were atall times creatively co-constructing their own system of making meaning through words in L2 as well as making meaning of self through collaboration, i.e. collective identity, which may be the manifestation of the third and the fifth principles of sociocultural identity development. In this view, as Dunn & Lantolf (1998) put it, (un)grammaticality, and pragmatic and lexical failures are not just flaws orsigns of imperfect learning but ways in which learners attempt

to establish new identities and gain self-regulation through linguistic means (p. 427).

As the analysis indicates, learning of writing skills, as it occurs in peerinteraction, is a non-linear and dynamic process, and sometimes an irregular process. Irregular in the sense that besides advancement, there is alsopossibility of regression happening. This study probed into the dynamics of scaffolding as it occurs in the L2 peer interaction and student-teacher interaction. The analysis has contributed to a greater understanding of the complex, manifold mechanisms that are at play during the mediated peer-peer and student-teacher interaction and has brought to light behaviors that may facilitate or inhibit growth within the ZPD, i.e. sociocultural identity growth; behaviors that frequently go unnoticed inthe writing classrooms of the EFL contexts. All learning situations presented are unique and so are the peer interactions. However, the analysis undertaken here has implications for all cases of mediated assistance where a ZPD may potentially be activated. Whether or not the scaffolding behaviors can be successfully deployed depends greatly on the application of one of the most important principles of scaffolded instruction: the notion that scaffolding works on a contingent basis.

Implications

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study provides further insight into the important role of socioculturally identity-conducive perspective in a writing class, which might be of interest to language teachers and might lead some to modify current tendencies to sheer teacher-fronted classes. Accordingly, the fact that the L2 learners benefited from the ZPD-based social mediation and discourse scaffolding leading to their sociocultural identity development is expected to play some part in the formation of a theoretical rationale for L2 curriculum development and syllabus design on the macro-level.

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