

CONSTRAINTS TO PEER SCAFFOLDING

LIMITAÇÕES NA COLABORAÇÃO ENTRE PARES

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ABSTRACT: Several studies, usually carried out in settings that are conducive to interaction, demonstrate peers can provide mutual scaffolding effectively. In contrast, this article focuses on constraints to peer scaffolding which, possibly, happened because of participants' demotivating learning environment. Analysis is based on the video and audio recordings of the performance of two beginning Brazilian students carrying out two oral tasks in an EFL class. Task one consists of an information gap and task two, of a communicative drill. The following constraints were identified: 1) the less capable peer's object-regulation, 2) the more capable peer's hindrance to scaffolding, 3) the more capable peer's lack of L2 knowledge. These hindrances can be explained by the students' pervasive and frustrating foreign language learning experience in the Brazilian public school and by the lack of socialization into scaffolding.

Keywords: sociocultural theory; scaffolding; the zone of proximal development.

RESUMO: Vários estudos, geralmente conduzidos em ambientes que favorecem a interação, mostram que colegas podem colaborar mutuamente e de modo eficaz. Entretanto, este trabalho aborda obstáculos à criação desse tipo de andaime que podem ter ocorrido devido ao ambiente desmotivador dos alunos utilizados na pesquisa. A análise é baseada em gravações de áudio e vídeo do desempenho dos alunos em duas atividades orais em uma aula de inglês como língua estrangeira. A atividade um consistiu em uma lacuna de informação e a dois, em um *drill* comunicativo. Os seguintes obstáculos foram encontrados: 1) a regulação pelo objeto do aluno menos capaz, 2) dificuldades do aluno mais capaz em promover andaimes, 3) falta de conhecimento de inglês do aluno mais capaz. Esses empecilhos podem ser explicados pela experiência onipresente e frustrante desses alunos em aprender inglês na escola pública brasileira e pela sua falta de socialização na colaboração entre pares.

Palavras-chave: teoria sócio-cultural; andaimes; zona de desenvolvimento proximal.

INTRODUCTION

Interaction and its features such as collaboration, scaffolding and furtherance of second language acquisition have been widely investigated (DONATO, 2004; LONG and PORTER, 1985; PORTER, 1986; PICA, HOLLIDAY and MORGENTHALER, 1989). In particular, scaffolding and the zone of proximal development (ZPD) are well-known concepts in L2 learning studies based on sociocultural theory. Initially used by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) in an analysis

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of children-tutor interaction, scaffolding was soon associated with Vygotsky's notion of ZPD.

Donato (1994) was the first to employ the term mutual scaffolding based on his research on peer interaction. Since then, several studies in the literature (ANTÓN, 1999; DICAMILLA and ANTÓN, 1997; GUERRERO and VILLAMIL, 2000; OHTA, 1995, 2000, 2001; VILLAMIL and GUERRERO, 1996) have remarked the beneficial aspects of mutual scaffolding to learning. These studies frequently utilized university students who can be motivated to learn as participants.

In contrast, because the students of the present research originate from a different setting (Brazilian public schools) and have a dissimilar profile, their relation with interaction and with scaffolding turned out to be quite distinct from what is usually detected by the literature. In other words, these students belonged to a different educational activity system. In this sense, the present paper fills two gaps Donato (2004) pointed out about studies on interaction: it considers the social historical conditions of the interactions and utilizes younger learners as participants.

Hence, this paper aims to call attention to the need of conceptualizing scaffolding and the ZPD in an activity theory perspective by analyzing constraints to scaffolding construction in two interactions of two eighth graders from a Brazilian public school. Although the data is limited in size, they unveil an aspect so far scarcely studied: the role of scaffolding in adverse learning settings and in demotivating participants' perspective.

1. SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND THE PHILOSOPHICAL PRINCIPLE OF ACTIVITY

Psychology during L.S. Vygotsky's lifetime focused on product and its descriptions – a stimulus was given to the individual and his/her responses were described. Vygotsky believed that only a process-focused approach could properly investigate consciousness and the higher mental functions. This approach addresses the ever unfolding development occurred by individuals' use of certain mediational means to solve a problem. This process constitutes the genesis, or history, of these functions. The genesis of psychological development occurs in society, which provides the tools¹ as cultural heritage for people to act upon the world (VYGOTSKY, 1978). Marx (1845) names socially organized human mediated acting upon the world practical activity. Thus, psychology should have consciousness as its object of study and the philosophical construct of activity as its explanatory principle.

To conclude, the concept of activity founds Vygotsky's methodological principles and his theory of psychological development. As a consequence, Vygotskian concepts such as ZPD and tool mediation, scaffolding included, should be seen in an activity perspective. In other words, Vygotsky's constructs cannot be conceived as finished products, as "tools for result" (NEWMAN and HOLZMAN, 1993) mechanisms that because

¹ Tools are artifacts to aid the realization of a task. For example, a string attached to a finger and fingers are tools to assist recollection and simple calculations, respectively.

of its detachment from social activity are applied universally. Rather, they should be seen as “tools and result” (NEWMAN and HOLZMAN, 1993), unfolding processes, affected by and created in activity which will lead to contingent explanations and post-defined features. What I argue in this paper is to approach both ZPD and scaffolding as contingent, tool and result constructs, constituent of and constituting the practical activity of which the interactants are part.

In the next section, I will discuss the term ZPD, the definitions of scaffolding and how both terms are related.

2. THE ZPD CONCEPT AND ITS RELATION WITH SCAFFOLDING

Vygotsky conceived ZPD as a reaction to Psychology’s tendency to define development as past development, what the person can do alone. In contrast, for Vygotsky, development was future development – the potential progress the person can make - promoted by another person’s assistance. The difference between what the person can do alone and the future development, was called ZPD by Vygotsky (1978, p.86). This notion implies that learning should be ahead of development so that it can guide the individual to new knowledge and transformative practices (broad view) (KINGINGER, 2002; NEWMAN and HOLZMAN, 1993). According to Newman and Holzman, the association of scaffolding with the ZPD reinforced its limited interactionist view (p.70). The former became a tool to move the learner in the zone.

Both psychology (CLAY and CAZDEN, 1990; FORMAN and CAZDEN, 1985; MCLANE, 1987; STONE, 1993; WERTSCH and HICKMANN, 1987) and L2 learning literatures frequently associate ZPD with scaffolding. Scaffolding is a type of interaction that occurs in the ZPD or that can construct it. However, it is important to remark that these two concepts were conceived in different epistemological grounds: of development. This concept lies in a dialectical, sociocultural perspective which conceives mind as semiotic mediated and socially originated.

Wood et al (1976, p.90) define scaffolding as “(...) the adult ‘controlling’ those elements of the task that are initially beyond the learner’s capacity, thus permitting him to concentrate upon and complete only those elements that are within his range of competence”. The features of good scaffolding are the following: recruitment, reduction in the degrees of freedom, direction maintenance, marking critical features, frustration control and demonstration. According to these authors, recruitment refers to the act of making the less capable person interested in the task. Reduction in the degrees of freedom regards the simplification of the task to make it easier to be carried out. Direction maintenance aims to keep the less capable person focused on the task and marking critical features consists of making corrections in the less capable interlocutor’s performance. Frustration control is the control the more capable peer has on his assistance to prevent the less capable learner from being frustrated. Finally, modeling or demonstration refers to the provision of an explanation or performance of what the less capable interlocutor is supposed to do.

Therefore, what Wood et al (1976) demonstrated was how scaffolding was aligned with the actual level of development of the person but not how it led to more development. Despite the fact the authors found a good metaphor for the assisted interaction and facilitated the comprehension of an interactionist view of ZPD, they ignored the role of language in the process, the regulative tools employed towards these children and how this assistance could lead to development – to make them deal with the task by themselves – over time.

Like Wood et al (1976), Bruner (1978) also conceives scaffolding as an interaction between an expert (usually an adult) and a novice (often a child), with the expert being aware of his/her responsibility to scaffold the novice.

Stone (1993) contributes to the understanding of the term by pinpointing the semiotic mechanisms (conversational implicatures, prolepsis, gestures, eye gazes, pauses) and interpersonal dimensions (participants' sharing the same perspective on the task and respecting each other's perspective, the less capable person's acceptance of the more capable peer's assistance, the meaningfulness of the task to interactants) involved in scaffolding. Hence, this author expands the notion of scaffolding.

McLane (1987) studied peer constraints on scaffolding in child-child interactions while they did a jigsaw puzzle. She analyzed how social interaction assisted individual mental functioning in tutorial sessions of 3 ½ years old children with either their mothers or with 5 ½ year old youngsters. Unlike the mothers, the 5 ½ year old children did most of the pick-up and placement of the pieces and did not address to the model. The reasons given by the author were that the 5 ½ year old children did not have the expertise to scaffold: they did not know how to assist and how much assistance to provide. Another possible factor was that the children had a different situation definition of the task from the mothers. The latter were aware they had to teach their children while the older children seemed to have seen the task more as a game or correct completion of the task.

In L2 sociocultural theory based studies, Donato (1994) was the first to reconceptualize the term. To him, scaffolding involves not only the unidirectional form of assistance but also mutual assistance among peers (DONATO, 1994, p.51). It is relevant to remark that Donato(1994)'s analysis of peer scaffolding is grounded on an interaction whose participants had considerable experience working together and were motivated to learn (p.40).

These aspects contributed to successful mutual scaffolding. By the same token, other studies in the area also analyzed interactions in which mutual scaffolding was successfully constructed, and as result, it led to development in the learner's ZPD. These studies utilized university students as participants, who tend to be motivated to learn a foreign language. In addition, this language is usually chosen by the students rather than imposed on them to be studied. From the 16 studies on scaffolding mentioned in this paper and on collaborative interaction reviewed by Donato (2004), only three of them (KIM and HALL, 2002; PLATT and BROOKS, 2004; SWAIN and LAPKIN, 2003) employed non-university students. The first employed children; the second, university students and high schoolers, and the third, adolescents. Furthermore, they occurred in an experimental setting, which does not resemble a typical class.

Different from this literature, the present data come from students who are inexperienced with pair work, with speaking in a foreign language, with the tasks given and with scaffolding itself. Moreover, their learning environment (English class in a Brazilian public school) discourages interest in learning a foreign language. These aspects explain the scaffolding that barely occurred in the interaction analyzed. Hence, the types of scaffolding that happened in these two situations differ exactly because they are part of distinct activities.

The investigation of unsuccessful scaffolded interaction can be revealing for two reasons. Firstly, there are educational environments such as the Brazilian public school system which are not conducive to language learning, and by extension, to scaffolding (ALMEIDA FILHO et al, 1991; ALMEIDA FILHO, 2001; CAMPANI, 2006; CONSOLO, 2002; NEVES, 1996). They strongly affect students' motivation to learn and do not prepare them to perform interactive types of exercise and even less to apprehend the role of scaffolding in it. Secondly, sociocultural theory advocates that development should also be studied in moments of breakdown (VYGOTSKY, 1978).

By approaching peer scaffolding in a non-typical language learning/ research environment the study aims to emphasize the importance of conceiving ZPD and scaffolding as components of a practical activity students are engaged in, and as a result, possibly offer a broader understanding of what happens in peer interaction, of ZPD and of scaffolding construction and of how development occurs within the zone.

3. THE STUDY

The data comes from an exploratory study which aimed to investigate the effect of different oral tasks on the students' oral performance. Students were Brazilian eighth graders taking an extra curricular communicative-based EFL course for the very first time. Students chose their own partners to do the oral tasks and frequently worked with different peers throughout the course.

I was the instructor of this course, whose classes were offered twice a week and lasted for one hour and a half. *Headway Elementary*² course book was adopted for its communicative oral exercises which would foster more oral interaction among students. All pair work exercises were given after vocabulary and grammatical explanations. The data consist of audio and video recordings of the first two oral tasks carried out by Ad and T³. Both recordings occurred on the same day of class, with some minutes between them.

The extra-curricular classes differed strikingly from their regular English classes in the public school. The students had a 50 minute English class once a week as their school subject. These classes comprised mainly reading and translation exercises with extensive

² Soars, L. and Soars, J. (1993) *Headway Elementary: student's book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³ T and Ad are fictional initials.

focus on decontextualized grammar instruction. In contrast, my classes were communicative and highly focused on speaking and listening exercises.

The first exercise was an information gap which was given to students after numbers and *wh-* questions were reviewed. To do the exercise, I had previously provided the nationalities for several countries. Each student had two cards. One card contained complete information about three people's names, ages and nationalities. The other had missing information about origin and age that had to be filled out by asking questions to the peer. The questions to be asked and the template for the answers were written on the board for students' reference (*how old is ———?*, *She/he is ——— (years old)*. *Where is he/she from? He/she is from ———*) as well as the countries and the nationalities.

The second exercise was a communicative drill that focused on the use of the possessive adjectives *his* and *her*. In the Brazilian Portuguese variation these students spoke it is possible to use *your* (*seu, sua*) for both second and third person pronouns; thus, students tend to use *your* also in place of *his/her* when they speak English. For this reason, this exercise was designed to make students differentiate second and third person possessive adjective pronouns. The task led students to ask about famous people's names, creating an environment for the correct use of *his/her*. A student holds a picture of a famous person and asks the partner the following: *what is his/her name? His/her name is* The other partner should answer the following: *His/her name is....* Although communicative drills might seem uninspiring, they are frequently found in textbooks and consequently utilized by teachers. This fact constitutes one more reason to investigate the interactions prompted by these very tasks.

Despite the fact task 1 was more demanding, it was given first to the class. It was so because the instructor followed the textbook content. First the textbook focused on how to ask questions about name, age and nationality and later focused on how to ask questions about others' names where the third person singular pronouns would be needed.

4. THE ANALYSIS

Based on the analysis of the initial interaction of the students, the following constraints to peer scaffolding were found: 1) Ad's object-regulation, 2) T's limitation to scaffold such an object-regulated partner, 3) T's lack of L2 knowledge.

1) Ad's object-regulation

Grounding on Vygotsky's concept of self-regulation, Wertsch (1979) proposed two preceding stages of control in human development: object and other-regulation. The person is object-regulated when the object controls the person (in Ad's case the objects are the task and the FL). This phase is followed by the other-regulation stage in which the person can be guided by another capable peer. It is in this condition that scaffolding and ZPD occur. In the self-regulation stage, the person is autonomous for that particular task and does not need more assistance.

English and the information gap task regulated Ad. One indication of his being object-regulated by the FL is his strange mispronunciation of words which hindered interaction and, consequently, scaffolding.

(1)⁴

46 Ad: ((...)) *how {ow} China {ti na}*⁵

47 T: *hum?*

48 Ad: *{ow} China {ti na}*

49 T: ((...))

50 Ad: *how {hu} old China {ti na}*

Another indication of Ad's being object regulated by the L2 is his lack of response to T's error corrections.

(2)

08 Ad: *a idade? (...)* *she is ... quarenta e quatro*
the age? (...) *she is ... forty-four*⁶

09 T: *he né?*

he isn't it?

10 Ad: *she is quatro quatro*

four four (*he tries to pronounce the Portuguese numbers with an English pronunciation*)

(3)

36 T: *é... oh pera aí .. how old Yo and Xing* (*names of people from the exercise*)
oh hold on .. how old Yo and Xing (*names of people from the exercise*)

37 Ad: *China {ti na}*

38 T: *China {tòaina} não how old*

China {tòaina} no how old

39 Ad: *China {tò i na}*

40 T: *how OLD*⁷

41 Ad: *how old {oi} China {tò i na}*

42 T: *age! how old age!*

43 Ad: *how age é China {ti na}*

how age is China {ti na}

44 T: *age idade* (*low tone of voice*)

age age (*the second one said in Portuguese*) (*low tone of voice*)

⁴ The number between parentheses indicates the excerpt while the numbers before the initials indicate the turns.

⁵ The phonetic transcription is provided only for the mispronounced sounds and it is boldfaced.

⁶ Underlining indicates translation from Portuguese to English.

⁷ Capital letters indicate emphasis.

45 Ad: ((...))
 ((laughs))((...))

In example two we can see that T provides the correct form of the personal pronoun but Ad does not notice it and keeps using the wrong form (*she*). In excerpt three, Ad does not fully correct his pronunciation of the country *China*. The confusion in this episode is caused by a reverse of the order of questions. T started the task asking about nationality (01: *where is Pedro from?* / 19: *where is Debora? where is Debora?*) and Ad answered appropriately in 02 (*Argentina*) and 24 (*Mexico*). When T chooses to ask about age first (36: *how old Yo and Xing*), Ad is still in the frame of first question about nationality, second about age” provides the wrong answer (China). Hence, he incorporated a script of the task, which T was not following. Ad’s adherence to this frame indicates that he is object-regulated. Ad lacks necessary L2 knowledge which prevents him from decoding T’s questions and prevents him from relating the questions addressed to him to the correct answers on his card. He was not able to make meaning with the L2; he was just reproducing pieces of information in a pre-established order. Hence, Ad was not only object-regulated by the L2 but also by the task which he seemed not to have understood. A possible reason for Ad not having understood the task is his inexperience with information gap exercises since these tasks were rarely given in his regular English classes.

The third indication of Ad’s object regulation is his odd L1 realization of the number 44 in excerpt two, line 10. This fact may represent an extreme stage of object (L2)-regulation being transferred to L1. Ad knows how to say the number 44 in Portuguese and its realization in English as four four would be a common strategy for an English student, who does not remember numbers above 10. Instead, he splits the number into “quatro quatro”. This split could indicate his necessity to reduce degrees of freedom, set stages, separate things into smaller parts so that he could understand what he was saying better. Obviously, the use of both languages indicates his attempt to overcome his difficulties.

The fourth signal of Ad’s object-regulation refers to his use of L1 to check his understanding of T’s questions:

(4)
 05 T: *how old is Pedro? how old is Pedro?*
 06 Ad: *a idade? (low tone of voice)*
 the age? (low tone of voice)

and answers:

(5)
 32 Ad: { **faivtik** }
 33 T: *five, fifty { faivty } five .. não twenty-five (T nods)*
 five, fifty { **faivty** } five ..no twenty-five (T nods)

34 Ad: *vinte e cinco*
twenty-five

Ad also used the L1 to give an answer:

(6)

53 T: *eu tô perguntando a idade age! how old is Yo and Xing?*

I am asking about the age age (in English)! how old is Yo and Xing?

54 Ad: *cinquenta (low tone of voice)*

fifty (low tone of voice)

The fifth indication of Ad's object-regulation is his lack of necessary L2 knowledge to complete the task. Below Ad does not know the number *two* and, for this reason, tries to make hypotheses:

(7)

93 T: *how old ... two .. two years old*

94 Ad: *dezesete?*

seventeen?

95 T: *TWO! cê tá falando de quê?*

TWO! what are you talking about?

96 Ad: ((...)) *da idade*

((...)) about age

97 T: *de quem?*

whose age?

98 Ad: *Manuel, Manuel*

((laughs))

99 T: *two years old*

100 Ad: *dezesete?*

seventeen?

101 T: *TWO years old*

102 Ad: *dezoito? ? deixa eu vê aí bicho (T shows his card to Ad and Ad writes)*

eighteen let me see (T shows his card to Ad and Ad writes)

103 T: *two years old*

((laughs))

104: T: *two years old*

(Ad keeps looking at his material and makes a face indicating he didn't understand what was going on)

105 Ad: *dezoito, entendi*

eighteen, I understood

T repeatedly mentions the answer (93, 95, 99, 101, 103) but Ad does not follow him. Instead he keeps guessing (94, 100, 102, 104). Through the video it can be seen that Ad constantly looks at his materials, and seems not to understand what is happening. *Seventeen* and *eighteen* are just random guesses to pretend commitment to the task. He was so object-regulated that he did not provide conditions for a ZPD to be created through T's assistance. In addition, T does not offer a graduated help (ALJAAFREH and LANTOLF, 1994) because he kept saying the word *two* without doing anything else, besides emphasizing it. I will address this issue later when the quality of T's assistance is discussed.

The sixth signal for Ad's object-regulation is his inability to form a complete and expected sentence.

(8)

83 Ad: *(cleans his throat) Manuel (name of the person of the exercise)*
((laughs)) nationality ((laughs)) eu enten
(cleans his throat) Manuel (name of the person of the exercise)
((laughs)) nationality ((laughs)) I unders

Instead of asking the correct form *where is Manuel from?* or a possible interlanguage form *Where Manuel is from?*⁸ he just said *Manuel nationality*.

After poorly asking about information of the three names on his card, Ad wanted to end the oral exercise.

(9)

135T: *ou, problemático ou* [Ad: *what it is problematic*]
136T: *é com os erros que se aprende*
we learn with the mistakes
137Ad: *quê qué quer dizer término ((...))* [T: *o quê?* [Ad: *término*
how do we say we are done? [T: *what?* [Ad: *we're done*]
138T: *quê?*
what?
139Ad: *término quê qué quer dizer término em inglês?*
we're done. How do we say we're done?
140T: *término? (0,5⁹) não sei, pera aí.*
We're done? I don't know. Hold on.
141Ad: *e obrigado? Obrigado*
and thank you? thank you

⁸ In Portuguese interrogative sentences are constructed just by means of rising intonation. For this reason, Brazilian students have difficulties in inverting the copula or auxiliaries in questions.

⁹ The number in parentheses indicates how long the pause was.

142T: *thank you*

143 Ad: *thank you*

144 T: *thank you*

He was not concerned with the quality of his performance, with what he learnt or not, with being scaffolded or not, or with the problems he had during the exercise. What mattered (the motive¹⁰ of his learning activity) was to complete the task, to comply with the school norms he had already internalized (be disciplined, do what one is told to do) rather than to learn English. Thus, although Ad and T performed the same action (to do the oral tasks) they had different motives, and consequently were engaged in different activities.

We could say that in 143 successful scaffolding occurred and that Ad seemed interested in English and its learning at that moment. However, this single instance of scaffolding does not invalidate our claim of his demotivation and of a predominant unsuccessful scaffolding in the interaction. I interpret this interest as a desire to deliver a performance with less mistakes. Students' concern to perform well (good pronunciation, error free) in the recording at least for some seconds was frequent in the data. Moreover, his disinterest towards the exercise, expressed previously through laughs, is now revealed by attempts to play with the recorder and the mike:

(10)

145 Ad: *((laughs)) (he gets the mike nearer his mouth)*

146 T: *nó.. Ad ou não brinca não*

Oh AD don't play with that

147 Ad: *thank you (0,5) E ((a classmate)) thank you ((laughs)) (Ad gets the mike nearer his mouth)*

One could also argue that Ad is not interested in this particular exercise but he could be interested in learning English. Yet, his behavior throughout the course proved the opposite; he dropped out some weeks after its beginning and while he was present he was distracted and disinterested.

In sum, Ad is object-regulated by the L2 as can be seen from the mispronunciation of words, the absence of uptakes, lack of necessary L2 knowledge to complete the task and the use of L1. He is also object-regulated by the task as is evidenced by his close adherence to a frame of question and answer (cf. the analysis of excerpt three). Therefore, the task was beyond Ad's ZPD. As a result, Ad's production in this first interaction is restricted to speaking in L1, to make incomprehensible utterances which leads to T's constant use of comprehension checks (*hum?*), mixed with constant laughs from him and Ad. Due to Ad's high degree of object-regulation, T is not capable of continuing to provide much assistance.

¹⁰ The motive is the driving force of the activity and it originates in biological or socially organized needs.

2) T's limitation to provide scaffolding

Firstly, I will characterize T's scaffolding and then discuss how Ad's object-regulation imposed limits on T's ability to scaffold. T scaffolded Ad mainly by means of keeping directions (11 T: ((laughs)) *não .. pô fala em inglês Ad por favor/ no, come on, speak in English, please*¹¹ / 59 T: *não, falando sério/ no speak seriously* / 114 T: *come on .. (addresses to Ad) / 143 T: *nó.. Ad ou não brinca não/ oh Ad, don't play*) and marking critical features (09 T: *he né?/ he isn't it?* / 42 T: *age! how old age! / 88 T: *Spain { spein} (0,5)*). In contrast, reducing degrees of freedom (74 T: *origin or age? / 95 T: TWO! cê tá falando de quê?/ what are you talking about?*) and modeling (53 T: *eu tô perguntando a idade age! / I am asking about age! how old is Yo and Xing?*) were infrequent.**

T's assistance is also contingent (occurring when Ad indicated he needed it) and graduated (from less explicit to more explicit forms of aid). In excerpt (3), as T notices, Ad does not understand his corrections. T first uses emphasis (40), then L2 explanation of the question (42), followed by an attempt to explain the question in L1 (44) (see also excerpt (6) line 53). Despite this scaffolding, T was not able to keep assisting an object-regulated partner, who needed the most explicit forms of help. An indication of T's inability to keep scaffolding is seen through the video. In the excerpts above, T neither points to the questions and answers on the board or to their textbooks and notebooks nor even calls the teacher.

In the following excerpt, T again shows contingent help (66) in the pronunciation of the word *China*. However, T does not provide Ad with the explanation he needed, that is, that the country the partner said should be converted into the corresponding nationality to be written down on the card.

(11)

- 64 T: *não [Ad: ((...))] T: *espera, deixa eu perguntar*
*no [Ad: ((...))] T: hold on let me ask**
- 65 Ad: *China { tò i na }*
- 66 T: *China, { ò aina } China { t òò aina } (0,5) teacher*
- 67 P(the teacher): *hum?*
- 68 T: *é Chinese ?*
is it Chinese?
- 69 P: *yes, ê né? aqui é um é?*
is it an E? Is it an E here?
- 70 T: *é*
yes
- 71 P: ((...))
- 72 T: *agora... you can ask me*
now you can ask me

It seems that in (67) (68) T loses his desire to provide assistance. T here was already self-regulated (he knew the right answer to be written on the card) but he did not provide

¹¹ Underlining means translation in English.

explanations to help Ad. What mattered was to check his own knowledge and to carry out the task. He probably gave up because of many unsuccessful attempts. T knows how to carry out the task and has the knowledge needed for that but he does not know how to deal with a partner in such a stage of object-regulation. For example, he does not even try to write something on the notebook or make gestures. At this moment of the interaction, T withholds correct information and scaffolding from Ad.

His inability to scaffold is also manifested in his appeal to the teacher's assistance as a last resource.

(12)

103 T: *two years old*

((laughs))

104 T: *two years old*

(Ad keeps looking at his material and makes a face indicating he didn't understand what was going on)

105Ad: *dezoito, entendi*

eighteen, I understand

106 T: *não cê tá gravando minhas risadas tudo*

no, you are recording all my laughs

107Ad: *tira pera aí então*

take it out (referring to the microphone) then

108T: *não*

no

109Ad: *laughs*

110 T: *come on .. (addresses to Ad) ele tá confundindo o two com o dezoito ... (addresses to the teacher)*

he's confusing two with eighteen (addresses to the teacher)

At other moments T is regulated by Ad's state of object-regulation:

(13)

129T: *nossa, tô confundindo tudo com você*

gosh I am confusing everything with you

130Ad: *Michael { M itòae l}*

131T: *Michael { maikow} two years old*

132Ad: *nationality*

133T: *ou, cê tá perguntando o quê? [Ad: nationality [T: pergunta ((gets angry))*

what are you asking about? [AD: nationally [T: _____ ask

((laughs)) (1,0)

134Ad: *what old (Ad looks at the board and frowns)*

135 T: *ou, problemático [Ad: what*

it is problematic [Ad: what

Another manifestation of T's inability to scaffold is T's constant laughs which frequently distracted Ad from doing the exercise. Through the video it is noticeable that T laughs more than Ad and for many times Ad laughs motivated by T.

(14)

76T: *Japan*

77Ad: *Japan (looks at the board)*

78T: *fala ((laughs looking at other classmates)) olha aí*

speak ((laughs looking at other classmates)) look there

Ad turns back, writes something in his notebook and starts laughing

Both: ((laughs)) (14,0)

((...)) Ad makes faces to another classmate

I interpret these laughs as a form of emotional release to compensate their frustration for not accomplishing the task properly. It remains to be studied if this form of behavior is recurrent in interactions where scaffolding is barely established.

In another moment, T has likely embarrassed Ad by evaluating his performance to a classmate right before Ad. Hence, T's behavior is counter-scaffolding.

(15)

91 T: *ele troca palavras, é legal (he talks to the classmate beside him) [Ad: what old*

he changes the words, it's cool (he talks to the classmate beside him) [Ad: what old

In conclusion, T attempted to scaffold Ad but, as the latter was object-regulated, demanding more expert ability to scaffold, he could not manage it. The fact the students had not received specific instructions to scaffold might have led T not to conceive of scaffolding as an action he had to perform in the task.

3) T's lack of L2 knowledge

The previous analysis refers to the first oral task carried out by T and Ad. T's lack of L2 knowledge became a constraint to scaffolding in the second oral task.

(16)

04 T: *WHAT's his name?*

05 Ad: *my name is Fábio Assunção¹²*

06 T: *não tá errado*

no, it's wrong

07 Ad: *Fábio Assunção*

08 T: *My name IS (Ad looks at the board) você tem que falar diferente ..*

you have to say in a different way

¹² Fábio Assunção is the name of a famous Brazilian actor.

09 Ad: *her name ... her name Fábio Assunção*

10 T: *her name is*

11 Ad: *her name is Fabio Assunção*

T is unable to pinpoint for Ad what mistake he made in the utterance (08) due to T's incomplete, unstable, under construction knowledge of the possessive pronouns. If we trace T's use of the pronouns we have the following: ((00) *what's he name?* → *what's his name?* → (10) *her name is* → (12) *what's hers name?* → (19) *what's his name? her name? what's her name?* → (41) *T: his name is Adriana Galisteu* → (43) *T: his name is é/ is Debora Block*)

Ad also shows unstable knowledge of the pronouns: incorrect use in 24 (*what's your name?*) and correct in 26 (*what her name?*), 40 (*Nossa, what's her name?*) and 44 (*what what her name?*)¹³. Based on these examples we can conclude that the expertise is transferable and the knowledge clearly is being constructed by both students at the time they are carrying out the task (see also Ohta (1995) for another example of transferable expertise).

To sum up, in the second oral task T's lack of L2 knowledge impedes good scaffolding. T and Ad were both learning the possessive pronoun system, and, as a result, T could not give more explicit and clear assistance to Ad.

5. DISCUSSION

From the analysis given some issues should be considered. The first issue relates to scaffolding as an activity rather than an external tool to be employed. Donato (2004, p.289) goes in this direction when he claims that “not all group work qualifies as collaboration” and that “different configurations of joint work result in different outcomes”. Although some of the studies on peer scaffolding mentioned earlier acknowledge the concept of activity they did not utilize this concept to interpret their interactions. There is extensive focus on the mechanisms of scaffolding without relating them to the contextual factors that allow them to occur in the first place. Thus, the literature unintentionally can lead teachers to think that scaffolding is a tool *for* result. Also they can apply it without being aware that instruction on how to scaffold can be necessary exactly to enable it in the classroom.

Vygotsky (1978, p.65) employed the expression tool *and* result to characterize how the research method in a Marxist psychology should be: “simultaneously prerequisite and product of the study”. In other words, there is a dialectical relationship between the tools (the method) and the result of the study. However, traditionally, in research, methods are chosen as external tools applicable to any circumstances to gather data and explain them. A typical example of this tool *for* result approach to science is statistical tests.

¹³ There are mistakes in the structure of the questions but not on the use of pronouns.

Cobb (1998), discussing whether the person should be the unit of analysis in psychology, points out that the field should reconceptualize the individual by recognizing its existence as part of social activities and tools, rather than detached from them. Social environments should not be considered a plus sign, something exterior utilized for better comprehension of the individual. Instead, the individual, the social context and the tools constitute an inseparable whole.

By the same token, scaffolding, usually seen in psychology as an “external piece of equipment” (COBB, 1998, p.199) or as a “tool for result” (NEWMAN & HOLZMAN, 1993), must be conceived instead as “integral to the activity” (COBB, 1998, p.199). Scaffolding seems naturally necessary and provided in a pair work task. Nevertheless, the students from this study come from a banking educational system (FREIRE, 1970) which privileges disciplinary control and massive content transmission rather than interaction among students and creativity. Students do what they are asked to and nothing beyond that.

In Brazilian public schools, whose classes usually have 40 to 50 students, achieving the disciplinary control is fundamental to guarantee the instruction. In this context, pair or group work can be seen as disturbing; and for this reason, they are infrequently employed. In addition, studies (ALMEIDA FILHO, 2001; ALMEIDA FILHO ET AL, 1991, CAMPANI, 2006; CONSOLO, 2002; NEVES, 1996) have revealed that in Brazilian public schools the English classes focus on decontextualized grammar or translation exercises. For this reason, the English classes do not provide students with the experience of pair or group work and of scaffolding. As a consequence, students, like T, might ignore scaffolding or see it as an obstacle to finish the exercise in the time allotted by the teacher. To sum up, scaffolding may not be seen as part of the activity of doing the task given by the students. Hence, the broader educational context of English learning in public schools may explain T’s inability to scaffold, his not seeing it as part of the exercise he was doing and Ad’ uninterest¹⁴ in being scaffolded and, ultimately, in learning English.

Ohta (2001) points out that before carrying out these types of tasks students should receive instruction on how to scaffold. They should be equipped with linguistic skills, contingent responsivity (GUERRERO and VILLAMIL, 1996)¹⁵ and ability to work in synchrony with a partner. Above all, language classes should stimulate engagement and interest as they are *sine qua non* conditions for the establishment of scaffolding: learning has to be the students’ goal in the classroom. Due to limitations on the methodology of the study, the later effect of oral tasks on these students’ perception of and performance in scaffolding was not investigated. Yet, certainly a planned socialization, as proposed by Ohta, would probably have expedited their learning.

In sum, scaffolding requires a planned socialization phase if students are inexperienced with this practice. Teachers consciously have to instruct them about its importance for learning and for interaction and about how to achieve it.

¹⁴ Almeida Filho et al (1991) and Consolo (2002) have also detected a considerable level of students’ uninterest in learning English in Brazilian public schools.

¹⁵ Ability to read the partner’s clues for assistance.

The second point to be discussed refers to the relationship between tasks and the knowledge required to carry them out. Although teachers usually expect students to be ready (by their teacher-fronted explanations, previous exercises, homework) to do the task as a practice, the knowledge is also constructed in the doing of the task. T, the expert peer of the interaction, did not employ the templates smoothly. He did not ask the questions properly (22: *where is Debora?*) and made subject-verb agreement mistakes (28: *how old are .. Debora? How old are Debora?*). In the second task, the repetition provided by the drill, rather than being a mere rehearsal of forms, allowed students to figure out the use of the third person pronoun. Thus, although this exercise is not as communicative and as optimal for second language acquisition as the information gap task it proved to be efficient to these learners.

To conclude, the required knowledge to do the exercise, the exercise itself, and the students' goals with the task affected by their learning histories constitute an inseparable unity that will lead to more learning or not. There is no detached knowledge to be just rehearsed in the exercise given. Instead, the knowledge is constructed in the doing of the exercise. Ad could have learned something from this task if he had carried it out for the sake of learning rather than for the sake of completing the task. This corroborates what Lantolf (2000, p.13) says about how tasks are seen from an activity theory perspective: "while task-based instruction could yield positive learning outcomes, there can be no guarantees, because what ultimately matters is how individual learners decided to engage with the task as an activity".

The learners' goals towards a particular task are crucial to make it promote ZPD in its true sense of learning leading to development (NEWMAN & HOLZMAN, 1993). Recognizing that, activity theory pedagogies (DAVYDOV, 1988; GALPERIN, 1978/1992; MARKOVA, 1979; TALYZINA, 1981) aim to raise motivation and goal formation in students as part of their instruction to assure that it actually leads to development.

Raising motivation and goal formation in students leads to the third issue to be discussed: the role of ZPD in the interaction analyzed. The interaction reveals the students' levels of English knowledge. For example, Ad had not learnt the pronunciation of the numbers and how to ask the questions. This signalled he needed more explicit instruction and more work than was given at that time.

Assuming a broad view of ZPD it cannot be assumed that this interaction promoted it. L2 linguistic learning was identified but to claim that it led to the person's whole cognitive development and more active stance towards the world, more is needed to take place. The L2 instruction should not aim just error free performance and communicative competence – what is usually called learning – but meaning making with L2 that can even enable the modification of the relationship of the learner with his/her own L1 – what I call development¹⁶. L2 instruction that promotes development would represent ZPD in its broader sense. Nevertheless, I would attest that it is on the way in Ad-T interactions.

¹⁶ Vygotsky (1987, p.179) claims that "learning a foreign language raises the level of development of the child's native speech". In other words, learning another language brings about development once it affects the speaker's conceptualization of his own mother tongue. Therefore, the sociocultural perspective seeks much more than learning/acquiring foreign language forms/functions/genres.

These two interactions allowed the students to have contact with the L2, to manipulate it, and hence, to be aware of what they knew and did not know about L2. Finally and most importantly, they offered them a new cultural artifact, group work – a practice not fostered in their learning environment. The whole activity (the tasks, the interactions the tasks sparked, the ability students had at that moment elicited by the interactions, students' attitudes towards the tasks and its completion, the contrast between the teaching practices of the extra-curricular English course and the broader Brazilian educational system) provided the possibility for development – assigning new meanings to their educational experience. Their grasping of this opportunity and its subsequent use for the transformation of their own learning remains an open question that could be approached longitudinally.

6. CONCLUSION

Some studies (ANTÓN, 1999; DE GUERRERO and VILLAMIL, 2000; DICAMILLA and ANTÓN, 1997; DONATO, 1994; OHTA, 1995, 2000, 2001; VILLAMIL and GUERRERO, 1996) have focused on how effectively peers can provide scaffolding, while this article aimed to highlight the constraints to peer scaffolding in an adverse learning environment in Brazil. The original concept designed by Wood et al (1976) does not account for contingency, fluidity as an activity peculiar to the interactants. Their model is static, setting a recipe for good scaffolding as if it were a script. Furthermore, the scaffolded interaction given by an adult with clear intentions to scaffold and motivated to learn or interactions whose participants' socialization into group work and into scaffolding has already taken place can differ from peer interactions akin to the one under analysis. In this one scaffolding was not conceived by the participants as part of the task and their goal was just to carry out the exercise. I am not asserting that peer scaffolding cannot promote learning and development; instead, I am calling attention to the fact scaffolding should be seen as part of a larger learning activity which affects assistance to take place or not. In other words, scaffolding cannot be seen as a tool that brings about *a priori* results (learning, ZPD). Rather, it is an action that should be constructed and seen by the learners as an important component of the learning activity and should be studied in its unfolding process.

Although this study presents limited data, it raises provocative questions regarding the influence of social historical conditions on interaction and calls for the investigation on the utilization of and on the construction of scaffolding in adverse learning environments and, ultimately, on the students' perception of the role of scaffolding in these settings.

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FERREIRA - Constraints to Peer Scaffolding

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