

Editorial

Chinese Language Education from the Perspective of Sociocultural Theory: Introduction to the Special Issue

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Abstract

This editorial introduces a special issue on Chinese language education from the perspective of sociocultural theory. It first outlines key concepts in sociocultural theory, including mediation, internalization, regulation, the Zone of Proximal Development, perezhivanie, and activity theory, together with their pedagogical applications in concept-based instruction and dynamic assessment. It then reviews research applying sociocultural theory to Chinese as a second language. The review highlights the need to move beyond using sociocultural concepts as broad interpretive labels and to examine the moment-to-moment processes through which learners internalize cultural resources and develop agency. The editorial then introduces the five studies in this special issue. Collectively, these studies demonstrate how sociocultural theory can guide instructional interventions, technology-enhanced learning, teacher education, and professional development. The editorial concludes by emphasizing that research on Chinese language teaching and learning should contribute to the extension and refinement of sociocultural theory itself, rather than simply applying the theory. It also proposes several important topics for future investigation.

Keywords

Sociocultural theory, Chinese language education, Chinese as a second language, concept-based instruction, dynamic assessment

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, sociocultural theory (SCT) has received widespread attention in the field of second language education, with English as the target language as the primary focus. This growing interest in SCT reflects a broader shift in the research agenda, from a predominantly cognitive and individual-oriented perspective towards a more sociocultural perspective (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008, 2014). Cognitive approaches have primarily focused on how language is learned and taught in relation to learners' attention, perception, and awareness, with an emphasis on information processing in the human mind. Yet an increasing number of researchers have recognized that language learning is also fundamentally situated within social and cultural contexts. Human beings are inherently social agents,

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and their language learning and development are inevitably shaped by their interactions with others and by sociocultural environments. This shift has, in turn, contributed to the growing application of SCT to various areas of second language research and practice.

Scholars represented by figures such as Merrill Swain and James Lantolf have applied SCT to investigate second language teaching and acquisition (e.g., [Swain, 2006](#); [Thorne & Lantolf, 2006](#)). Researchers represented by Karen Johnson and Paula Golombek have used the theory to study second language teachers' professional learning and development (e.g., [Johnson, 2009](#); [Johnson & Golombek, 2016](#)). Yet other scholars such as Matthew Poehner have extended its application to language assessment (e.g., [Poehner, 2008, 2009](#)). Proximately during the same period, research on Chinese as a second language (CSL) has gradually joined the international academic arena. A key requisite for this process of participating in the international scholarship involves understanding, leveraging and contributing to theories that prevail in the international literature, based on empirical findings about Chinese language education. Among others, sociocultural theory has attracted CSL researchers seeking to explore its potential for understanding Chinese language teaching and learning and to connect CSL research with broader international scholarly conversations ([Gao & Pan, 2024](#); [Lai, 2012](#); [Zhang, 2019](#)).

Based on this understanding that SCT is promising for the field of CSL to better understand Chinese language teaching and learning, and to better integrate with the international scholastic community, we have organized the special issue on Chinese language education from the perspective of Sociocultural Theory and present this article as its introduction. In fact, SCT is an umbrella theory that encompasses multiple theoretical concepts and sub-theories. Accordingly, in this introductory article, we will first outline its core ideas and major sub-theories. On that basis, we review how they have been employed and discussed in the existing literature on CSL. We then present the five empirical studies included in this special issue with our commentaries. Finally, we offer critical observations on this collection of articles and prior literature on the use of sociocultural theory across the broader field of CSL.

2 Sociocultural Theory

We use the term sociocultural theory to refer to Vygotsky's ([1978, 1986](#)) and his followers' conception of the social formation of the human mind. SCT is also known as cultural historical theory, emphasizing how human thinking is not a universal constant but a product of individual cultural formation across history ([Lantolf & Poehner, 2023](#)). Since Vygotsky's initial formulations, a range of interrelated constructs, including mediation, regulation, internalization, *perezhivanie*, and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), have been theorized and discussed. More importantly, these constructs are not merely abstract ideas, they have given rise to pedagogical innovations that directly inform language teaching and assessment practice. For example, as the primary praxis-based applications of SCT, Concept-Based Language Instruction (CBI) and Dynamic Assessment (DA) are introduced to bridge the gap between SCT theory and classroom practice ([Lantolf & Poehner, 2023](#); [Lantolf et al, 2021](#)). In that sense, SCT provides not only a way to explain the mind but also informs process-oriented instruction and assessment activities that directly supports learners' future potential.

2.1 Mediation, internalization and regulation

Grounded in a Marxist dialectical framework, Vygotsky argued that human mental processes are both biological and cultural ([1978](#)). The biological side consists of lower mental processes, such as basic memory and perception, shared with other species. In contrast, higher mental processes, such as planning, categorization, and critical thinking, are uniquely human and develop through sociocultural participation. This development is made possible through mediation, where material and psychological tools embedded in a culture act as the link between the individual and the world ([Vygotsky, 1978](#)).

SCT is a theory of mind and learning that recognizes social interaction and culturally constructed artifacts as the primary drivers of human thought. Internalization, a core concept in this framework, describes the transformative process through which socially shared activities are reconstructed into internal mental functions. This transition is operationalized through regulation, which refers to the control and monitoring of activity across three progressive levels: object-regulation (relying on environmental artifacts, such as digital tools), other-regulation (relying on guidance and feedback from “more knowledgeable others”), and finally self-regulation, where learners gain autonomous control over their own cognitive and linguistic behaviours. In this sense, SCT focuses on how the human mind is formed and deployed, individually and collectively, in ways that distinguish human consciousness from all other life forms (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023).

Language, serving as the primary and powerful psychological tool, plays a crucial role in the formation of higher mental functions. It has a dual orientation: an outward one for social communication and an inward one for mediating internal thought (Vygotsky, 1978). For a language such as Chinese, characterized by its intricate logographic writing system (i.e., hanzi) and distinct sociopragmatic norms, this mediational role is especially vital, as these cultural artifacts serve as the essential bridge for learners to access and internalize the target language’s underlying thinking (Chen, 2023; Yang, 2019; Zhang, 2019). From a Vygotskian perspective, higher mental thinking is not a direct reflection of social communication. Rather, it is reconstructed from the diverse cultural resources and artifacts that make social interaction possible in the first place. This process involves a critical shift from “I-you” to “I-me” dialogue (Vocate, D. R., 1994). Through this, individuals internalize what has been acquired and transform it into internal tools to regulate their own thinking and behaviours (Wertsch, 1979; Frawley & Lantolf, 1985). Importantly, mental development is viewed not as a linear path but as a zigzag negotiation that reflects the learner’s struggle to gain autonomy. Central to this development is the human focus on analyzing meaning within dynamic social activities. In SCT, “meaning” is not restricted to symbolic linguistic forms but encompasses the emotional intensity of an individual’s lived experience, a unity of cognition and affect that Vygotsky termed *perezhivanie*.

2.2 CBI and DA in educational practice

The unique deployment of the human mind has profound implications for educational practice. Unlike Piaget’s (1950) developmental theory, Vygotsky argued that formal education should be a process of “artificial development”, that is, the planned, systematic access to scientific concepts accumulated through history (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023; Zhang & Lantolf, 2015). While everyday concepts are derived from concrete, spontaneous experience, scientific concepts are often hidden from immediate reality and require intentional instruction to be mastered. Vygotsky thus advocated for introducing learners to systematic knowledge, enabling them to reshape and internalize their thinking via culturally mediated artifacts. Moreover, this capacity is not only an individual achievement, but a collective endeavour preserved and transformed within social communities.

Inspired by this developmental discussion, Gal’perin (1969) proposed Systemic-Theoretical Instruction (STI), later realized in the L2 field as CBI. This approach emphasized that abstract language concepts must be constructed through materialized actions, rather than via verbal explanation alone. Schemas for a Complete Orienting Basis of Action (SCOBAs) were introduced as one of the tools that make the underlying semantic and grammatical structures visible and operable. The internalization process moves spirally through phrases, from material-based support to languaging, where learners articulate their thinking aloud, and finally to compressed, automated inner speech (Lantolf et. al, 2021). Beyond Gal’perin’s model, Swain (2006) highlighted that “languaging” serves as a cognitive driver, propelling learners from surface-level performance to deep conceptual understanding. CBI is closely connected to the construct of ZPD and its application in DA (Poehner, 2008; Vygotsky, 1978). The ZPD describes a learner’s potential capabilities that are beyond their current level, realized through

collaboration with others in social activities. Based on the principles of ZPD, DA moves beyond static assessment, which only informs past teaching outcomes, to prioritize diagnostic assessment that identifies emerging potential. In this framework, instruction and assessment are integrated into a holistic activity. Through graduated and contingent guidance, where assistance is provided only as needed and gradually withdrawn, learners transform external mediation into internal cognitive development. Ultimately, the withdrawal of assistance in DA signals the successful internalization of learning, marking the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation.

2.3 Research paradigm in SCT

The core principle of the SCT research paradigm is grounded in Marxist dialectics. According to dialectics, reality exists in a state of constant flux, and there is an inherent connection between the object and the process of research. Since the object of research is to explore how higher mental functions are formed and developed over time, the research process must mirror the dynamic and dialectical features of that object. Research methodology cannot be adopted merely as a “tool-for-result” to collect static outcomes; rather, it should be viewed as a “tool-and-result” (Vygotsky, 1978). In this view, specific research methods are not prefabricated tools with fixed functions, such as standardized tests or surveys, but customized tools that serve as both a prerequisite and a product of the research. The process of creating these tools is itself the process of development. When SCT researchers provide a mediational tool, such as an instructional intervention, the result is defined by how learners mobilize that tool to reconstruct and transform their own thinking.

In this sense, unlike psychology and natural science methodologies that rely on dependent and independent variables, SCT opposes reducing reality into separable elements. This is because investigating isolated components might overlook the interconnected functions that elements possess only as part of a whole. Vygotsky (1987) illustrated this point through the example of water: while hydrogen is flammable and oxygen supports combustion, their unity as water serves to extinguish fire. Reducing water to its elements fails to explain its fire-extinguishing role because these elements lack the characteristics as a whole. Furthermore, unlike the nonorganic world studied in natural science, human actions are fundamentally shaped by goals and motives. Instead of variable analysis, SCT methodology seeks a holistic unit of analysis that “possesses all the characteristics of the whole”. Key examples include perezhivanie that is the dialectical unity of cognition and affect and obuchenie, which refers to the inseparable unity of instruction and development.

Guided by this holistic view, Vygotsky proposed the genetic method, which examines the “biography of thought” across multiple timescales. The first timescale of development is phylogenesis, which looks at the history of humans as a biological species; the second one is sociocultural history, which

refers to the evolution of human cultures and communities; the third one, ontogenesis, examines the development of a person, and microgenesis is the fourth timescale. This approach moves beyond studying fully formed mental products to examine the historical process of their development. Especially vital for classroom research is the microgenetic method, which aims to capture the exact moment of development, revealing transformations occurring in “a few seconds, or even fractions of seconds” as learners internalize new cultural resources (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 61). Furthermore, regarding the experimental design, Vygotsky (1978) pointed out the method of double stimulation to “artificially provoke” the process of psychological development. This design provides participants with two distinct types of stimuli: the first is a challenging task that exceeds their current independent abilities, and the second is a mediational tool (such as a symbolic sign or instructional prompt) that participants can use to regulate their thinking and solve the problem. The focus of the research is not on the successful completion of the task as a product. Instead, it scrutinizes the dynamic process of internalization, seeking to capture development as learners gain their agency of learning and thinking (Michel et. al., 2025).

3 SCT in Chinese-as-a-second-language Education

3.1 General SCT applications in CSL contexts

In Chinese language education, SCT has increasingly provided a framework for investigating CSL. Many empirical studies adopt a broad interpretation of the theory, utilizing specific constructs such as scaffolding or mediation to explore the development of linguistic knowledge and skills. These studies highlight how various mediational resources, including peer interaction, first language (L1) use, and teacher scaffolding, facilitate language acquisition. For instance, Zhai (2021) documented how collaborative writing projects mediate not only the learning process but also reflective thinking and emotional changes. Similarly, Luo et al. (2023) demonstrated the efficacy of process-focused teacher scaffolding in enhancing both linguistic skills and motivation. Li et al. (2021) identified four mediational elements, i.e., the self, others, artifacts, and context, as key influences on Chinese learning strategies. Zhang's (2019) doctoral dissertation is one of the few studies that apply SCT systematically, from both theoretical and methodological perspectives. Zhang explored how classroom interactions mediated an English speaker's Chinese learning within a UK university context. The results showed that the teacher and the learner made full use of abundant resources, such as L1 English, gestures, feedback, and communication, to help the learner regulate his linguistic skills and concepts.

However, many of these studies fail to use SCT as a systematic theory of mental development. They often employ SCT constructs as isolated explanatory labels or simply focus on the pedagogical activity itself. To be specific, they may use "mediation" or "scaffolding" as a vague, generalized term for various classroom activities and teacher supports, or simply as a way to categorize different types of assistance. Other studies focus too much on pedagogical outcomes, such as whether a student's language level or learning strategies has improved, while treating the sociocultural perspective only as a way to explain situational factors, i.e. motivation or the specific teaching context. In doing so, these studies did not examine language learning as a true process of cognitive development, missing the way learners actually internalize cultural resources to transform their own thinking. This is also evident from their methodological choices. Some studies still look at final test scores or survey responses of learners' learning, but neglect the detailed, moment-to-moment changes in a learner's mind and how they make new knowledge their own. This approach is different from the Vygotskian genetic method, which seeks to capture development through microgenetic analysis. The essential difference lies in whether the social environment is viewed merely as a supportive background for learning, or as the primary source from which the mental functions were constructed through internalization.

3.2 Empirical research on ZPD and DA

Apart from general SCT applications in CSL contexts, the perspective from ZPD and DA has been recently applied to address challenges in CSL learning. Gao and Pan (2024) provide an example of how group DA (G-DA) can be implemented in writing classrooms to manage the diverse needs of learners. Grounded in ZPD and internalization, mediation was operationalized as teachers' feedback and guidance to help students internalize complex linguistic structures. While static assessment of writing failed to show a significance between groups, microgenetic analysis revealed that DA fostered greater learner agency and self-regulation over time as the need for mediation was reduced. The findings suggest that the G-DA approach is particularly effective for improving grammatical knowledge among lower-proficiency students. This study emphasizes the theoretical value of process-oriented, microgenetic methods in capturing developmental trajectories that outcome-based measures tend to overlook. In Zhang's (2019) study, ZPD was also adopted to observe how external mediation is internalized during cognitive development. As a framework of mediation, scaffolding was provided by the teacher to lower task difficulty, maintain task orientation, and emphasize key grammatical points, supporting the learner

in performing within his ZPD. Moreover, Zhang proposed a co-regulation loop model, showing that learning is a dynamic process where the actions of teachers and students mutually regulate each other.

3.3 Empirical research on CBI

Current empirical research on CBI remains relatively sparse, with interest primarily focused on the acquisition of core grammatical concepts. These studies have addressed persistent challenges such as temporal systems, topicalization, the “ba” construction, and compound-verb structures. As a pioneering application in CSL pedagogy, Lai (2012) taught the Chinese temporal system and aspect markers (e.g., zhe “着” and le “了”) to elementary learners using a CBI approach. After eight weeks of instruction, the elementary learners significantly outperformed an intermediate control group in their command of the target features. This suggests that when grammatical concepts are presented as meaningful scientific concepts, instruction can effectively catalyze linguistic development beyond what is typically achieved through spontaneous daily exposure.

Beyond grammar, research has extended to linguistic thinking, such as rhetorical awareness and metaphorical competence. The findings reveal that providing scientific conceptual schemas i.e., SCOBAs and languaging mediation, facilitates a deep understanding of Chinese semantic logic and cultural connotations. Researchers have also integrated CBI with available resources as scaffolding, for instance, intelligent computer-assisted language learning in Ai’s (2015) study, and systematic writing guidance in the work of Cheng and Chiu (2018). These resources allow learners to use language to express their thoughts and mediate their actions in meaningful and creative ways.

3.4 Teacher cognition, technology, and professional learning

Research from SCT perspectives in the CSL context not only focuses on learners’ language development but also on teachers’ professional learning. Based on SCT and the foundational work of Vygotsky and his student Leontyev (2009), Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) or activity theory views the learning and development of mental functions as a social and cultural activity situated within a system of mediations (Engeström, 1987; Leontyev, 2009; Vygotsky, 1978). Engeström (1987) proposed a model of a collective activity system that includes subject, object, tools, rules, community and division of labour. Consequently, human cognition is never an isolated act but a dynamic interaction with physical (e.g., technology) and psychological tools (e.g., language) within a sociocultural context. Internal contradictions or tensions between different elements within the system are the primary sources of movement and change. For instance, a conflict between outdated learning tools and new learning objects may urge learners or instructors to seek more suitable mediational means. When such tensions become so acute that existing patterns can no longer resolve the issue, it triggers the participants’ ZPDs. In this sense, learning is not a reactive, individual process aiming at completing preset tasks assigned by the curriculum. It is rather a group innovative activity that creates historically new activity structures, tools, and organizational forms by solving systemic contradictions collectively. Drawing on data from CSL teachers’ use and professional learning of Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Peng (2024) constructed an activity system for CSL teachers’ teaching and teacher cognition. Multiple objects were identified, including the development of students’ communication skills, grammatical accuracy, curriculum implementation, and teachers’ own professional growth. A key insight from this study is that teacher cognition is not a static entity but a dynamic “tool-object negotiation process”. When teachers encounter challenges in achieving these diverse objectives, the resulting tensions serve as productive opportunities for expansive learning, allowing them to reconcile the affordances and limitations of their pedagogical tools. In this view, teacher development is a transformative process situated within these systemic negotiations.

4 Overview of the Special Issue

In this section, we introduce the five articles included in this special issue by grouping them into three themes, based on the topics and the specific theoretical concepts or sub-theories they use under SCT. The studies included in this special issue seek to broaden the research landscape, extend the literature from linguistic skill acquisition to advanced technology integration, and shift the analytical focus from individual learner development to the holistic professional growth of teachers.

4.1 ZPD-guided instructional interventions

A central theme in this special issue is the transformation of ZPD into a concrete framework for instructional decision-making. As Vygotsky (1987) noted, the ZPD is fundamentally “an approach to diagnosing development” (Lantolf & Poehner, 2023, p.17), shifting the focus from what learners can do independently to what they can achieve through mediation (Xi & Lantolf, 2021). The studies by Deng (2027) and Zhou and Peng (2027) in this issue provide empirical evidence of how this diagnostic and supportive process is applied to support Chinese language teaching and learning.

In a year-long action research project, Deng (2027, this issue) investigated the efficacy of seven types of instructional scaffolds in an intermediate CSL reading classroom. Using a cyclic action research methodology, the study identified guided previews, active vocabulary learning, cultural practice, and multimodal input as high-efficacy scaffolds that significantly activate learners’ ZPDs. The study’s most significant contribution lies in its conceptualization of the “providing–removing–new scaffolding” cycle. Deng argues that successful reading instruction depends on a teacher’s frequent judgment and decision-making regarding when to withdraw support so that learners can internalize their text processing skills for independent reading.

Focusing on the orthographic complexities of Chinese Internationalized Schools (CIS), Zhou and Peng (2027, this issue) explored Differentiated Instruction (DI) as the “practical carrier” of the ZPD. The study distinguishes between two modes of ZPD: proactive identification, where teachers use diagnostic tasks to provide support, and reactive identification, which relies on informal classroom observation of student confusion. They conclude that identifying the ZPD is a systemic pedagogical decision rather than a teaching technique. For DI to be effective in hanzi instruction, teachers need to offer targeted scaffolding that specifically addresses the semantic and orthographic gaps within each student’s ZPD.

Together, these studies illustrate that in SCT-informed CSL pedagogy, the ZPD functions as a site for praxis, where theoretical principles are brought into actual classroom practice. Regarding methodological development, both studies move beyond the limitations of static assessment designs to adopt process-oriented methodologies. The use of action research and qualitative case analysis aligns with Vygotsky’s genetic method, allowing for a nuanced understanding of the learning process in real time. This approach is particularly suited to capture development on a microgenetic timescale, revealing qualitative transformations in a learner’s thinking that unfold within seconds or minutes. By documenting these moment-to-moment shifts, these studies provide a more dynamic portrayal of how learners internalize linguistic and cultural resources through mediated interaction. Ultimately, these interventions reveal a fundamental shift in the teacher’s role, which moves from a passive executor of lesson plans to an agentic mediator. In Deng’s (2027) project, teachers know exactly when to remove scaffolding to help students become independent readers. Similarly, Zhou and Peng (2027) demonstrate that through “proactive identification”, teachers transform DI from simple individualized tutoring into a systematic pedagogical decision. These studies underscore the teacher’s agency in navigating the learner’s developmental path, emphasizing that successful instruction depends on the teacher’s ability to provide flexible and data-informed support within the ZPD.

4.2 Activity theory and technology-mediated learning

The macro-level perspective on activity theory provides a robust lens through the study of Rao and Zhao (2027, this issue). Rao and Zhao examine the integration of ChatGPT in an advanced CSL classroom, exploring how this new technology shapes the instructional activity and learner cognition. Their study reveals that a learner's internal perception of the Artificial Intelligence (AI)'s role, whether viewed as an "assistant" or a "tool", predetermines their prompting strategies and learning process. Learners who treated ChatGPT as an "assistant" engage in deep pragmatic reasoning through contextual prompts, while learners who perceived ChatGPT as a tool tend to remain limited to the surface level of task completion.

This study moves beyond viewing technology as a simple tool, treating ChatGPT as a mediating artifact that triggers systemic "rules—community" contradictions. When ChatGPT generates content that sounds culturally plausible but unauthentic, it acts as a "deviation probe". This forces learners to think critically about the gap between AI logic and real cultural norms. These tensions work as a driving force for development and change. Moreover, the study redefines teacher expertise in the digital age. Instead of being a simple resource provider, the instructor becomes a "mediator of contradictions" who enters the learner's ZPD. By resolving AI-generated cultural deviations, the teacher guides learners through a "layered alignment", transforming AI drafts into authentic and performable cultural expressions. From a macro perspective, this study proves that learning with AI is a social and collective process. By navigating contradictions, the activity system achieves "expansive learning", which refers to the creation of historically new activity structures and tools through collective problem-solving (Engeström, 1987). In this process, learner agency is reconstructed: instead of passively accepting AI output, students learn to use technology to activate their intercultural competence. This research is in line with the core theme of this special issue, that is, SCT theory as praxis. It shows how sociocultural theory helps us see past the technology to reveal the complex interactions between people, tools, and rules in modern language education.

4.3 CBI and teacher cognition

Moving beyond using SCT to understand and support learners' language development, two studies in this special issue used the theory to examine teachers' professional learning and teacher education. Chen and Qin (2027, this issue) applied the CBI approach to teacher education, particularly to solve the common problem where teachers learn theories but cannot use them in real classrooms. Situated in the context of a teacher education program for training international students to be Chinese language teachers, their study focused on teaching the complex concept of "curriculum organization". To make abstract ideas visible and practical, two tools under CBI were used to facilitate teacher learning, including SCOPA (i.e., Schema of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action) and languaging (i.e., verbalizing thoughts). This quasi-experimental study proved that the experimental group, which followed the CBI approach, clearly outperformed the control group, drawing upon both quantitative and qualitative evidence. Thus, the researchers suggested that CBI is effective in helping teachers turn difficult theories into a clear plan of action.

On the level of microgenetic analysis, Geng (2027, this issue) conducted a multiple qualitative case study to examine how pre-service Chinese language teachers' understanding of AI was transformed in an online teacher education program. By applying a Cyclical Dialogic Interactions (CDI) approach in teacher training, Geng traced the non-linear development of teachers' cognitive change, specifically on their understanding of AI as a tool for online instruction. In this CDI model, teacher educators organize recurring interactions that guide teachers to make explicit their implicit understandings. In particular, this study focused on how teachers navigate the relationship between their "imagination" (an initial understanding of AI) and their "ideal" (a pedagogically grounded vision formed through reflection

and practice). Echoing Zhou and Peng's (2027, this issue) findings, Geng reveals that the tensions, specifically the gaps between a teacher's imagined activity and classroom reality, act as the primary trigger for activating a learner's ZPD.

5 Conclusion

Building on the theoretical and methodological foundations reviewed, we believe that SCT has begun to leave a clear mark on CSL research, evidenced by the diverse application of its different sub-theories and concepts in examining different research topics. However, reflecting the broader SCT L2 research agenda noted by Lantolf & Poehner (2023) and Xu & Long (2020), CSL inquiry must move beyond using SCT merely as an interpretative lens towards adopting its principles as an active means of organizing and transforming pedagogical practice. Currently, its systematic and in-depth application is still in its infancy. For example, many existing studies have utilized constructs such as ZPD and mediation for broad interpretation of data on CSL learning, while there remains a pressing need for empirical research that captures the more dynamic, transformative nature of development. Addressing this issue, a central theme in this special issue is the transformation of key SCT concepts into a concrete, operable framework for instructional decision-making, as shown in Deng (2027) and Zhou and Peng (2027).

Applying SCT to CSL can help explain and support the teaching and learning of Chinese. However, the goal should also be to make a theoretical contribution to SCT itself by supplementing or further developing the theory. For example, in English learning as an L2 in East Asian research, the sub-theory of "written languaging" is successfully advanced by leveraging the regions' exam-oriented and input-insufficient contexts to enrich global understanding of private speech (Xu & Long, 2020). Similarly, CSL offers a unique linguistic and cognitive laboratory. This is because global L2-CBL research has historically focused on morphologically rich Indo-European languages, developing systemic scientific concepts and SCOBAs for the morpho-syllabic writing system (i.e., Hanzi), and thinking in Chinese might refine Vygotsky's developmental model. Given that empirical research and international publications are still relatively new for the field of SCT, pursuing theoretical advancement at a higher conceptual level will need to be built upon to enhance the theoretical depth and empirical methodology of research in our field.

Looking ahead, Vygotskian dialectics open a ground for future inquiry, suggesting many topics are still worth investigating. First, the concept of praxis, which integrates theory and practice, could be further explored. Drawing on insights from language typology and cognitive linguistics that emerge from the practice of teaching and learning CSL, how can we establish and systematize abstract linguistic concepts in Chinese from a CBI perspective for use in CSL instruction? Such work might also offer useful insights and complementary perspectives for the teaching and learning of Indo-European languages. Second, from the perspective of teacher development, professional learning is reconceptualized as a transformative, mediated process within the teacher's ZPD. Rather than transmitting static pedagogical checklists, we can explore how structured professional development can help teachers internalize systematic concepts for reflection and teacher training. Specifically, are there conceptual frameworks that we can draw on, for example, classroom design and management, as discussed by Chen and Qin, or teachers' assessment knowledge and skills? Finally, future CSL research is encouraged to investigate the under-explored concept of *perezhivanie*, a holistic unity of cognition and emotion. Given that CSL learners frequently experience high anxiety and pressure, especially with learning the Chinese writing system (Zhang, 2019; Zhou & Peng, 2027), understanding how cognitive strategies and emotional orientations interact to mediate language internalization is a critical frontier for our field.

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专刊引言

社会文化理论视角下的中文教育

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摘要

本期专刊引言介绍社会文化理论视角下的中文教育: 首先, 我们简要阐述了社会文化理论的几个关键概念, 包括中介、内化、调节、最近发展区、认知和情感的辩证统一以及活动理论, 并在此基础上讨论了相关理论在教学法上的应用, 如基于概念的教学法和动态评估。通过综述前人研究, 我们认为, 社会文化理论并不只是一个用于泛泛解释教学情境的标签, 更多的研究需要考察学习者当下时刻发生的学习活动和过程。这个过程最能体现他们如何将文化资源内化为自己的思维并发挥主观能动性。我们进而介绍了本特刊收录的五个实证研究。这些研究展示了社会文化理论能够如何指导教学干预, 开展技术辅助的学习, 以及进行教师教育 and 专业发展。最后, 我们强调, 中文教育的研究不仅仅是运用社会文化理论解释中文教学中的问题, 还能够帮助拓展和重新定义社会文化理论本身。基于此, 我们提出了一些可进一步研究的话题供参考。

关键词

社会文化理论, 中文语言教学, 汉语二语, 基于概念的教学, 动态评估

杨娟, 芬兰赫尔辛基大学人文学院中文系的讲师。研究领域为第二语言习得、语言教师教育和发展。她出版专著一部, 主持并完成两项重大科研项目。论文发表见于 *System*, 《中国文字》和《汉语教学研究--美国中文教师学会学报》等期刊。

彭越, 香港中文大学课程与教学系的助理教授。研究领域为国际中文教育、语言教师的专业发展、多语现象及多语教育。她的近期研究成果发表在国际顶尖期刊上, 包括 *The Modern Language Journal*、*Language Teaching Research*、*Computer-Assisted Language Learning*、*System* 等。