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A VYGOTSKIAN APPROACH TO ELF IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

UMA ABORDAGEM VYGOTSKIANA PARA O ILF NA SALA DE AULA DE INGLÊS

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ABSTRACT: Bridging the gap between academic research on English as a lingua franca (ELF) and English language teaching (ELT) has become a major challenge, especially since classroom English has increasingly been examined as a source of insight into complex phenomena such as second language acquisition (SLA) and deviations from standard norms in learners' use of English. Although applied research shows that teachers often adopt a more open attitude towards the emergence of ELF in authentic intercultural discourse, they still tend to resist changes concerning the legitimacy of learners' non-canonical use of English. Many teachers question whether it is truly possible to distinguish clearly between acceptable ELF features and errors that are simply part of the learning process. Furthermore, they often argue that incorporating ELF into classroom practice poses significant challenges for current assessment criteria. I argue that an integrated approach—combining Vygotsky's (1934/1986) sociocultural theory (SCT) with concept-based language instruction (C-BLI) (Lantolf; Poehner, 2014)—can help teachers support learners in conceptualising linguistic notions (e.g., lexicogrammatical categories such as case, number, gender, tense, mood, and aspect) in a scientific rather than intuitive way. This fosters a deeper understanding of language that goes beyond superficial rule-of-thumb knowledge. From this point of view, language awareness entails that students should understand how cognitive concepts are verbalised in similar or different ways through the lexicogrammar systems of their L1 and English.
Keywords: ELF. Sociocultural Theory. Concept-based Language Instruction.

RESUMO: Preencher a lacuna entre a pesquisa acadêmica sobre o inglês como língua franca (ILF) e o ensino da língua inglesa (ELI) tornou-se um desafio crescente. O inglês em sala de aula vem sendo analisado como fonte de conhecimento sobre fenômenos complexos, como a aquisição de segunda língua e os desvios das normas padrão no uso do idioma pelos alunos. Embora pesquisas indiquem que muitos professores adotem uma postura mais aberta em relação ao surgimento do ILF em contextos interculturais

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autênticos, ainda há resistência quanto à legitimidade do uso não canônico do inglês. Questiona-se se é possível distinguir claramente entre traços aceitáveis do ILF e erros típicos do processo de aprendizagem. Além disso, argumenta-se que incorporar o ILF à prática pedagógica desafia os critérios atuais de avaliação. Defendo que uma abordagem integrada, baseada na teoria sociocultural de Vygotsky (1934/1986) e no ensino de línguas baseado em conceitos (C-BLI) (Lantolf; Poehner, 2014), pode auxiliar os professores a apoiar os alunos na compreensão conceitual de noções linguísticas — como caso, número, gênero, tempo, modo e aspecto — de forma científica, não apenas intuitiva. Essa abordagem favorece uma compreensão mais profunda e consciente da linguagem, que transcende o conhecimento superficial. Assim, a consciência linguística implica que os aprendizes compreendam como os conceitos cognitivos se manifestam de maneira semelhante ou distinta nos sistemas lexicogramaticais de sua língua materna e do inglês.
Palavras-chave: ELF. Teoria Sociocultural. Instrução de linguagem baseada em conceitos.

INTRODUCTION

The idea for this article emerged after a discussion with my MA students about two thought-provoking papers on English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), which I regularly use as introductory readings on the topic. Specifically, Swan's (2012) "ELF and EFL: Are they really different?", and Widdowson's (2013) "ELF and EFL: What's the difference? Comments on Michael Swan", both published in the *Journal of English as a Lingua Franca*. My students and I were particularly intrigued by the following statement by Widdowson (p. 193, emphasis added), which raises a fundamental question for ELF scholars concerned with the pedagogical implications of the spread of English:

> The teaching of English will always need to be pedagogically designed and the contexts of classrooms can never replicate contexts of use: they represent different realities. In this respect, ELF and EFL, however it is defined, will always be different. *The question is how these realities can be most effectively related*.

This paper aims to address this challenge by proposing a blended approach to teaching English as a school subject, one that may serve as a convergence point between two seemingly irreconcilable conceptions: English as an encoded, exonormative lexicogrammar system[2], and ELF as a variable, multilingual and multicultural emergent

[2] This is the variety of English that Swan and Widdowson refer to as English as a Foreign Language (EFL).

language. I argue that a Vygotskian approach to second language development—grounded in sociocultural theory (SCT) and concept-based language instruction (C-BLI)—can help bring about the paradigm shift in English language teaching (ELT) that many ELF scholars advocate. In the following sections, I will begin by introducing Vygotsky's SCT and its contributions to the field of second language development. I will then explore the feasibility of integrating ELF into formal education through C-BLI. This will include a brief overview of two SCT-based pedagogical approaches: Systemic Theoretical Instruction (STI) and C-BLI. I will also present a Scheme of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (SCOBA) I developed as a conceptual mediational tool to support students in internalising tense–aspect combinations in English. Finally, I will discuss the role of Dynamic Assessment (DA) in meeting the requirements of ELF-aware language pedagogy.

1 SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY AND SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHING/LEARNING

Lev Vygotsky (Orša, 1896–Moscow, 1934) was the pioneer of Sociocultural Theory (SCT), a theory of mind that emphasises the crucial role of the socio-historical context in shaping an individual's thinking and personality. As Poehner and Lantolf (2024, p. 3-4) explain:

> Vygotsky reasoned that humans (adults) must be simultaneously animals and not animals. […] He proposed that what makes us unique thinkers is human culture. […] Most importantly, there is one feature that human cultures have developed that animals and young children lack - the ability to speak. Speaking (we include sign language of Deaf communities, as well as writing or what Vygotsky called, written speech) is the key to the formation of human thinking, or what is called in SCT, *higher psychological functions*; that is consciousness.

Furthermore, individual thinking emerges through inner speech, which originates from social speech and represents the highest achievement of human consciousness. In *Thought and Language*, a milestone of his psychological research, Vygotsky (1934/1986, p. 44) asserts that "the social factor [is] the decisive one in child development." He also refers to Piaget (Vygotsky, 1934/1986, p. 13), one of the first scholars to define development as a characteristic of the learner—specifically, the child:

> Like many another great discovery, Piaget's idea is simple to the point of seeming self-evident. It had greatly been expressed in the words of J. J. Rousseau, which Piaget himself quoted, that a child is not a miniature adult and his mind not the mind of an adult on a small scale. Behind

this truth, for which Piaget provided experimental truth, stands another simple idea -the idea of evolution, which suffuses all of Piaget's studies with a brilliant light.

Drawing on Piaget (1969, p. 256, in Vygotsky, 1934/1986), Vygotsky acknowledges that the external environment—and by extension, the social context—plays a crucial role in shaping the child's psychology: "The influences to which adults subject the child do not imprint themselves upon the child as on a photographic plate; they are assimilated, i.e., 'deformed' by the living being who comes under their sway and they are incorporated into his own substance" (p. 19).

Activities carried out within a social context and mediated by cultural artifacts such as verbal language are a fundamental factor influencing individual development. Unlike Piaget, however, Vygotsky argued that "the psychological function of speech does not emerge suddenly from social speech; rather it passes through an egocentric phase in which its formal appearance is social but its functioning is increasingly psychological" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 72). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) also note that, unlike Piaget—who claimed that egocentric speech tends to disappear as children become progressively socialised—Vygotsky believed that "if self-directed speech indeed had a cognitive action, it ought to increase in frequency as children engage in increasingly complex tasks" (p. 72). From a Vygotskian perspective, the child's inner speech consists of pure meaning, which is not yet formally organised. Only when it develops into encoded speech does it become social and externalised as private speech (Flavell, 1966)—that is, a form of intrapersonal communication used to regulate both mental and physical activity. Arievitch and Haenen (2005, p. 155–165) argue that: "Vygotsky's theory emerged out of the social and political context of the first decades of the 20th century and represented a new approach to psychology with tremendous promise." By overcoming the traditional dichotomy between biological and cultural factors, Vygotsky proposed a new psychological framework that integrates both dimensions, wherein development occurs primarily through social relationships and subsequently through mental processes such as *internalisation* (also known as *appropriation*). This refers to the process by which "humans gain control over natural mental functions by bringing externally formed mediating artifacts into thinking activity" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 153). In turn, internalisation presupposes the inverse process of *externalisation*, through a simultaneous, integrated relationship in which the social context provides individuals

with semiotic and cultural material that they reorganise and reintegrate into that same context. According to Valsiner (1997, p. 243, in Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 160), "through this process of externalization, immediate person-environment relationships are constantly being reorganized." The acquisition of verbal language is a case in point, effectively illustrating how the dual process of internalisation and externalisation operates. Vygotsky strongly emphasised the interdependence between language as a tool of social mediation and human experience, both of which play a fundamental role in the cognitive development of consciousness. As Sweeney (2023, p. 5) observes, verbal language is not merely "an external means of interacting with other people but also an internal tool for managing [one's] own higher mental functions such as attention, perception, inhibition, memory, and motivation." McCafferty (2020, p. 46) also notes that: "development first appears through social interaction and then psychologically through internalization, a transformative process, leading to the dynamic interaction of society and the individual." Thus, from the perspective of SCT, language is viewed as the primary mediational tool that enables individuals to interact and connect with both themselves and others. Indeed, for Vygotsky (1934/1986, p. 6-7)

> The primary function of speech is communication, social intercourse. When language was studied through analysis into elements, this function, too, was dissociated from the intellectual function of speech. The two were treated as though they were separate, if parallel, functions, without attention to their structural and developmental interrelation. Yet word meaning is a unit of both these functions of speech. That understanding between minds is impossible without some mediating expression is an axiom for scientific psychology. In the absence of a system of signs, linguistic or other, only the most primitive and limited type of communication is possible.

However, as Bier (2015, p. 72) explains, language serves not only a social function but also a psychological one: "as a psychological tool, […] it enables cognitive and metacognitive interaction with one's self: it helps intramental processes which sort, organize and categorize one's individual thoughts and ideas." Consequently, the verbal language acquired by the child becomes an integral part of their thinking and enables them to formulate ideas. Briefly, Vygotsky (1997, p. 88) referred to his research methodology as the "genetic method", as it investigates the genesis of human mental behaviour and higher cognitive functions within a historical context in which the development of consciousness is mediated by cultural affordances, such as "numbers, charts, figures, art, music, and the most powerful and pervasive artifact of all, language"

(Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 26). Given the cultural-historical nature of language—which mediates human consciousness across diverse social contexts—it follows that all natural languages are fundamentally unique and dynamic, as they are shaped by individually and socially constructed *weltanschauungen* (worldviews). By the same token, if observed through the prism of SCT, the natural emergence of ELF as a variable contact language in multilingual and transcultural contexts (e.g., online communication in the age of Globalisation) should be seen as an artifact through which international speakers co-construct a mediational tool. In this way, English is appropriated by its users as they attempt to communicate and simultaneously express their distinct linguacultural identities. As Karimi-Aghdam and Compernolle (2023) observe, this has significant implications for how we conceptualise second language development, which cannot simply be reduced to learning new vocabulary and a set of structure-based rules of thumb:

> Because languages vary from phonology, to lexicogrammar, to pragmatics, to discourse, and so on, so too do the modes of linguistically mediated thinking that have developed from one culture to the next. Consequently, learning an additional language is not simply a matter of liking new words, grammar, pragmatics, and so forth into existing modes of thinking: learning a new language entails learning to think through a new multi-semiotic system that has evolved along a different cultural-historical timeline. (p. 4)

Karimi-Aghdam and Compernolle's view of second language development reveals compelling parallels with Whorf's (1956) principle of linguistic relativity and Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) theory of conceptual metaphor. However, to prevent possible misunderstanding, it is important to clarify what Karimi-Aghdam and Compernolle mean by the phrase "learning to think *through* a new multi-semiotic system" (emphasis added), in the previous quotation, as opposed to *in* a new multi-semiotic system. Essentially, the authors are not suggesting that second language learning involves slavishly repeating ready-made sentences or mimicking an alien—albeit idealised—native-speaker *weltanschauung* and behaviour. Rather, they argue that second language internalisation (in this case, English) occurs through what Vygotsky calls linguistic *imitation*—a goal-oriented and cognitively motivated process that relies on the brain's capacity to reproduce complex verbal actions, identify their components, and recombine them to produce novel patterns and utterances. As Ohta (2001, cited in Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 171) observes, learners typically "produce imitations that are transformative"—that is,

they do not reproduce language models verbatim. This supports the idea that, although English syllabi and teaching materials are generally designed around Standard English (SE) models, learners naturally tend to deviate from them. This may be primarily attributed to the influence of the learner's native language, which functions as a primary mediational tool in second language acquisition (SLA). Indeed, SLA is a dynamic process in which the learner's L1 and personal *weltanschauung* do not hinder English learning; rather, they contribute to the gradual internalisation and externalisation of the L2 as an additional linguistic artifact. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that linguistic variability is inherent to SLA and manifests in two main ways: a) on the one hand, it reflects how the learner's L2 competence gradually evolves toward higher levels of complexity, enabling them to engage in more demanding communicative activities; b) on the other hand, it demonstrates that the learner's appropriation—or, in Widdowson's (1994) terms, *ownership*—of English naturally emerges from their communicative motivation and unique (re)construction of the L2 in contact situations[3]. Garrett (2004, p. 66) argues that "the study of language contact and contact languages calls for theories and methods that can cope with variability and indeterminacy of specific forms as well as heterogeneity and dynamism in higher level linguistic and cultural systems". Notably, Vygotsky (1934/1986) viewed variability in learning as a natural and essential outcome of social and cultural interaction. Learning is inherently cultural, and social mediation shapes how individuals—particularly in language acquisition—negotiate meaning and use language as a tool for learning. Within the ecosystem of the English classroom, the complementary relationship between teacher and learner—what Vygotsky (1978) refers to as *obuchenie*—enables individual differences to emerge as expressions of each student's cognitive development. From an SCT perspective, the activation of SLA through schooling should primarily focus on practice (e.g., task-based language teaching, TBLT) and at the same time, as Poehner and Lantolf (2024, p. 17) point out, on: "well-organized systematic instruction that presents learners with conceptual knowledge of the language, especially of complex and subtle features that are difficult to appropriate from immersion context outside or inside classroom." As will be discussed in greater detail in the following sections, according to Concept-Based Language Instruction (C-BLI) principles (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006; Poehner; Lantolf, 2024), instruction aims to enhance learners' deeper

[3] For further discussion on language construction and language variability, see Tomasello (1999); Heine; Kuteva (2005); Kohn (2011); and Grazzi (2018).

awareness of second language structures (in this case, English), going beyond superficial "rules of thumb." Through explicit instruction, learners are guided to conceptualise linguistic notions (such as lexicogrammatical categories like case, number, gender, tense, mood, and aspect) in a scientific rather than intuitive way. This may also involve a comparative study of the L1 and L2, encouraging students to identify similarities and differences between the two languages and, in doing so, become aware of how discourse is shaped and meaning negotiated. An important corollary of this systematic metalinguistic activity—referred to by Swain (2006) as *languaging*—is that studying English, or any second language, enables learners to develop a deeper awareness of their native tongue.

In the remainder of this article, I will elaborate on the central topic of how C-BLI can inform ELF studies, particularly in relation to the highly debated issue of addressing learners' non-canonical forms of English, and the pedagogical implications for assessing learners' competencies in an ELF-aware classroom.

2 THE INTEGRATION OF ELF AND C-BLI IN SCHOOLING

Applying Vygotsky's genetic method in second language education presupposes conceiving of the classroom as an artificial environment, a laboratory where students experiment with communication through a new verbal artifact, English, supported by their teachers, peers[4], and available tools (e.g., textbooks, computers, the Internet, AI, etc.). Similarly, Widdowson (2003, p. 113) reflects on the nature of the subject English and points out that:

> We need to recognize that the classroom is a social construct and as such, as any other, has its contexts and purposes, its own legitimate reality. Naturally, like any other social construct, it is dynamic, subject to variation and change […] Nevertheless, locally different though classrooms are bound to be, they share the common feature that *makes* them all classrooms, namely that they are the site for contrived contexts designed to achieve a pedagogic purpose. […]

[4] With regard to the teacher's supporting role—namely, the expert figure who assists and provides scaffolding to the class—Vygotsky (1978, p. 86) introduced the seminal concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which he defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers." The ZPD can be understood as a relational or affective zone rather than a physical space. Goldstein (1999) characterises it as a socially mediated space, shaped by relationships involving sensitivity and trust. In the classroom, this space is co-constructed through interactions among students and between students and their teacher, as they participate in supportive activities that foster learner confidence and positive emotions. The term *proximal* refers to time—that is, to the anticipated next steps in the learner's developmental trajectory.

As far as the teaching of English is concerned, or the teaching of any language, we need to consider what language is appropriate for the classroom on its own contextual terms and for its own purposes.

Today, however, the real challenge for English language teaching (ELT) lies in the unprecedented and rapid changes English has undergone in recent decades, above all as a consequence of Globalisation (Grazzi, 2018b), a complex economic, political, scientific, technological, and cultural phenomenon made possible by the spread of English as the primary linguistic mediational tool for international communication. Although, from a diachronic perspective, the century-long history of English demonstrates that change and variability are intrinsic to the language (e.g., see Jenkins, 2015), what makes the current process unique—synchronically—is above all the speed and creativity of the non-canonical features that are emerging, and the fact that these changes are the natural outcome of the legitimate appropriation and use of the language "among speakers of different first languages for whom English is the communicative medium of choice, and often the only option" (Seidlhofer, 2011, p. 7). Hence, alongside the well-established pedagogical tradition of adopting a monolithic SE model in language education, there exists the reality of an emergent, plurilithic (Pennycook, 2009), and transnational language that is unstable, non-codifiable, and not teachable in the traditional sense.[5] In light of the above, it seems reasonable to conclude that, rather than disregarding the reality of ELF altogether, a reconceptualisation of ELT is advisable, primarily to promote ELF-informed pedagogy as a means of raising teachers' and learners' awareness of the variable ways in which English is used today (e.g., Bayyurt; Sifakis, 2015; Seidlhofer, 2015; Vettorel, 2015). One way this could be achieved, Seidlhofer (2015, p. 26) suggests, is by ensuring that "learners should be made aware of what they are doing. This involves them in relating the English they are learning to the experience of their own language." In other words, Seidlhofer emphasises the importance of students' guided metalinguistic reflection on the use of their L1 and English—starting with social practice (i.e., the pragmatic use of English to carry out communicative activities within the language syllabus) and progressing toward a deeper theoretical understanding of L2 lexicogrammar and discourse systems. From a Vygotskian perspective, this position suggests a significant convergence between ELF-informed pedagogy (e.g., see Cavalheiro,

[5] Jenkins (2015b), for instance, describes ELF as a *glocal* process (Robertson, 1999), that is, a variable, context-bound *multilingua franca*.

2018; Grazzi, 2018b) and SLA, provided that a comparative reflection on the interconnections between learners' use of English and their L1 is conducted. This comparative approach, I suggest, should be integrated into schooling, meaning that students' L1 should not be excluded from the L2 teaching and learning process. In fact, the student's L1 should not be viewed solely as a potential source of negative transfer and error (e.g., see Corder, 1981; Grazzi, 2020; Odlin, 1989; Selinker, 1972), but rather, as previously noted, as a mediational tool crucial to L2 development. From the perspective of SCT, human verbal language is viewed both as a symbolic mediator of meaning and as a tool for regulating cognitive activity. Therefore, learning a new language: "is about acquiring new conceptual knowledge and/or modifying already existing knowledge as a way of re-mediating one's interaction with the world and with one's own psychological functioning" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 5). For this reason, "The reliance on the L1 [is] not necessarily the result of gaps in the learners' L2 knowledge or ability to access this knowledge, but represent[s] the fact that individuals have a much closer psychological link with their L1 as a mediating artifact than they do with their L2" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 295). Hence, the emergence of ELF can be understood as an epiphenomenon that illustrates how learners re-mediate and internalise English through social practice. Widdowson (2013, p. 192, emphasis added) offers a particularly insightful observation in this regard:

> Users make strategic use of the linguistic resources at their disposal, "accommodate, innovate and so on" "to serve their communicative purposes." And this, of course, provides them with the motivation and capability for further learning as and when occasion requires – *learning that is certainly not determined by teaching*. If they have learned somehow to do this, *in spite of the way they have been taught*, does this not at least raise the possibility that we might consider an approach to teaching that goes along with the natural learning/using process rather than against it?

Unlike Vygotsky, however, Widdowson appears to assume that teaching and learning are independent processes rather than interconnected through *obuchenie*. Widdowson (2003, p. 115) argues that learners possess a natural "capability" to develop their own English, regardless of the pedagogical approach adopted. In my view, this position may leave teachers—even those open to ELF—uncertain about their role, which

appears marginal in second language education. Without a solid theoretical framework for reshaping the subject of English in light of ELF studies, most language teachers may be reluctant to take responsibility for what appear to be random and unstructured pedagogical changes. It is therefore not surprising that teachers typically choose more conventional and routine practices (e.g., see Jenkins, 2007; Grazzi, 2013). It is also important to consider that school teachers, in their institutional role, are required to comply with the national curriculum and standardised assessment tests. As a result, their individual freedom of choice is constrained by the institutional conditions under which they must perform their duties. In this context, the idea that teachers could independently initiate a radical shift in ELT seems unrealistic, especially since educational systems and civil servants typically function as transmitters of dominant ideologies. If, instead, we view the roles of learners and teachers through the lens of *obuchenie*, their complementary functions can be reconceptualised as part of the same dialectical process. Within the ecosystem of the English classroom (van Lier, 2004), teachers act as qualified adult mediators, interacting with students through symbolic mediational tools (e.g., language) and material tools (e.g., audiovisual aids, the Internet, etc.) within a ZPD. Their aim is to create conditions for mediated learning experiences (MLEs) to occur (Kozulin, 2024). In addition, Lantolf and Poehner (2014, p. 11-13) observe that

> For Vygotsky, education, when properly organized, can indeed alter our conceptual systems in profitable ways. On this view, education is not merely a matter of acquiring new knowledge (i.e., learning); rather it is a new process of development that results in new ways of conceptualizing the world. […] The function of educational activity is to modify the understanding students have upon entering the school and change them so they align with the best scientific knowledge available at any given time in human history.

These pedagogical principles, I argue, may offer a way to redefine the pedagogical paradigm of the subject English, particularly in light of its status as an international language. In the same vein, Lantolf and Poehner (2014, p. 55) propose what they consider today's pedagogical imperative:

> Education is a primary macro cultural environment where systematic development ought to occur through intentional and well-organized instruction (i.e., *obuchenie*). The test of the theory therefore resides not in its capacity to generate a priori predictions but in its ability to fulfill the responsibility required of a praxis-based theory of developmental education.

As will be discussed later in this article, this point is particularly relevant to C-BLI. The underlying assumption is that, through explicit instruction and the use of appropriate mediational affordances within a ZPD, learners can focus on language concepts and thereby strengthen SLA. Vygotsky's SCT has inspired several scholars, including Gal'perin, who developed a pedagogical framework known as Systemic Theoretical Instruction (STI) (e.g., see Engeness, 2021; Esteve et al., 2021; Gal'perin, 1967, 1970, 1979, 1989, 1992). A synopsis of this approach and its contribution to the development of C-BLI will be the focus of the next section.

3 FROM GAL'PERIN'S SYSTEMIC THEORETICAL INSTRUCTION (STI) TO CONCEPT-BASED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION (C-BLI)

3.1 NOTES ON SYSTEMIC THEORETICAL INSTRUCTION (STI)

Gal'perin developed his theoretical framework based on Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (SCT). In particular, he explored the concepts of "cultural tools, mediation, and internalisation by scrutinising the ways in which the specifically human mental activity is developed" (Engeness, 2021, p. xxvi). This was made possible through his research on psychological functions, "in the sequential order of perception, memory and thinking. These predominant functions affect the development and organisation of human consciousness" (p. xliv-xlv). Moreover, Gal'perin indicates that "the hierarchical organisation of psychological functions can be developed only in humans, and it is inherently connected to the human use of cultural means." (p. xlv) Gal'perin concludes that "higher psychological functions are nothing else but internal operations mediated by forms of communication, and higher psychological functions are developed in the process of mediated social communication during the external activities of humans" (p. xlv). He adopted the so-called *spiral model*, which "indicates students' increasing internalisation of an action while passing through a sequence of levels in mastering a given task" (p. xxvi). Arievitch and Haenen (2005, cited in Engeness, 2021, p. xxvi) observe that the spiral model demonstrates how "the learning process moves forward as gradual improvements

in the quality of action, which can be observed in the steadily growing ability of the learner to orient him or herself in the task and propel him or herself forward while mastering this task." Gal'perin's learning theory consists of three main components: *orienting*, *executive*, and *controlling*:

> The orienting part of a learning activity was considered by Gal'perin a 'managing device' whereas the executive part was seen as a 'working device' transferring the activity from the external plane to the internal. For Galperin, the transformation of the learning activity was described by the measure of its acquisition by learners engaged in the activity i.e. when transferred from the social external to the internal plane. (Engeness, 2021, p. 108)

The third component of learning concerns "controlling the action's execution according to the created plan" (p. x). According to Gal'perin, "learning and development involve engaging in social experience" (p. 110). Like Vygotsky, he believed that it was essential for the teacher to provide guidance to the learner and to foster collaboration between them. Moreover, according to Gal'perin (Engeness, 2021), teachers should aim to enable learners to acquire knowledge that can be applied across multiple contexts. Learning, therefore, should go beyond the mechanical application of rules of thumb and instead provide a solid foundation enabling learners to apply what they have learned in varied, real-world contexts.

3.1.1 Orientation: OBAs and SCOBAs

The orienting phase of Gal'perin's model is particularly significant. It involves the learner's activities in developing mental actions, which are based on a "*generalised scheme of the action*" itself (Engeness, 2021, p. ix). The Orienting Basis of an Action (OBA) is a structural component that provides the necessary conditions, understanding, and guidance for a learner to successfully complete a task. It includes an anticipated representation of the task, a specific orientation system (e.g., rules, signs, or models) required to complete it, and a foundational action plan, ultimately enabling the learner to develop new concepts and mental abilities by internalising external activity. In essence, the OBA serves as a cognitive blueprint and guidance system, enabling the learner to understand, plan, and execute a new action, transitioning from external activity to internal mental processes. In second language use, the effectiveness of the OBA directly affects the quality of verbal action during communicative tasks. OBAs can be generalised and adapted to address new tasks across diverse contexts. More importantly, Engeness (2021, p. ix) notes:

> The *orienting scheme can be created by the teacher* and offered to learners for them to use. By using this scheme, learners are able to solve various tasks, and the process creates a specific attitude toward learning: mastering the target concept becomes a means for achieving the personal success of each individual learner. The orienting scheme can also be *constructed by learners under the guidance of a teacher*. Moving step-by-step under the guidance of a teacher, learners identify the characteristic features of the target concept, and in doing so, create a complete scheme of the orienting basis of the action. When the scheme of the orienting basis has been created, it can be applied by learners to solve various problems.

As will be shown in section 3.2.1, the Scheme of a Complete Orienting Basis of an Action (SCOBA) is a useful mediational learning tool (e.g., flashcards, flowcharts, etc.) that enables students to visualise L2 lexicogrammatical structures through a detailed graphic model or set of instructions designed to guide them in performing a new action. SCOBAs outline the steps and essential features required to successfully complete a task, enabling learners to transform it into a mental OBA—i.e., an internalised cognitive scheme that supports independent performance in future communicative actions.

In conclusion, Gal'perin's STI aimed to develop a pedagogical model that would "explain the process of internalization (i.e., movement from inter- to intra-psychological functioning) that occurs in the development of mental functions in any educational domain" (Poehner; Lantolf, 2024, p. 18). Due to space constraints, a more detailed description will not be provided here[6]. Suffice it to say that STI provided the foundational framework later adapted by Lantolf and his collaborators (e.g., Poehner; Lantolf, 2005; Lantolf; Thorne, 2006; Lantolf; Poehner, 2014; Lantolf et al., 2020; Poehner; Lantolf, 2024) and applied to SLA as Concept-Based Language Instruction (C-BLI). This approach to second language development emphasises systematic knowledge underpinning meaning-based language theories, in contrast to the early forms of Gal'perin's model, which focused primarily on structure. The core components of C-BLI are introduced in the following section.

3.2 NOTES ON CONCEPT-BASED LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION (C-BLI)

C-BLI is "an approach to foreign language instruction that proposes the teaching and learning of linguistic concepts (such as mood, tense, aspect, genre, indexicality, irony) as the base to develop control and awareness over [foreign language] FL performance"

[6] For a comprehensive overview of Gal'perin's Systemic Theoretical Instruction (STI), see Engeness (2021).

(Fernandez, 2022, p. 2). It is "a systematic approach to language instruction grounded in principles of SCT as laid down by Vygotsky and refined by later generations of SCT researchers, including most importantly Gal'perin" (Lantolf *et al.*, 2020, p. 327).

For Vygotsky, "schooling is where scientific, or theoretical, concepts guide development. It brings into consciousness abilities and knowledge internalized in a non-reflective way in the everyday world (i.e., spontaneous concepts)" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 292). Therefore, within the context of the intact classroom (i.e., a full group of students treated as a single unit for implementing C-BLI), "SCT and applied cognitive linguistics develop approaches to instruction that are conceptually based" (Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 303). With respect to the main topic of this article, we may assume that C-BLI enables learners to develop a deeper understanding of—and greater control over— the English subject. This cognitive teaching–learning model is grounded in praxis and in the learner's conceptual understanding of the L2 lexicogrammatical system, moving beyond the study of cursory (and sometimes inaccurate) rules of thumb often found in textbooks. Below is a representative list of key conceptual areas that form the focus of verbal cognition (i.e., the overt and covert verbalisation of explicit linguistic knowledge aimed at supporting the internalisation process), as learners attempt to organise the new language to mediate meaning and perform a range of communicative tasks: spatial relationships; quantity; size; shape; characteristics (e.g., old/new, hot/cold); textures (e.g., smooth, rough); colours; temporal elements; emotional states; negation. As indicated in Sections 1 and 2, a comparative study of how the learner's L1 and English mediate concepts—whether similarly or differently—is advisable. I contend that this approach can shed light on how each student activates their process of L2 internalisation and externalisation through classroom activities, and, more importantly, on the emergence of non-canonical uses of English, which may offer multiple insights into: a) the dynamic assessment (DA; Lantolf; Poehner, 2014) of the learner's current level of competence and their potential progress within the ZPD; b) the student's implementation of learning and communicative strategies; and c) the unique ways in which each learner appropriates and reshapes English (a process that Kohn [2011, p. 80] calls "developing *My English*") to mediate their languacultural identity through variable—yet legitimate—forms of discourse. In short, I propose that by reflecting on learners' pragmatic use of English and conducting a comparative analysis of the interaction between their L1 and L2, teachers may a) make informed decisions about which deviations from standard norms require corrective

feedback; b) guide students to reflect on "how language forms create possibilities for expressing meaning" (Lantolf; Poehner, 2014, p. 223); c) incorporate language variability into the English curriculum; d) connect classroom instruction to the reality of ELF, especially when students engage in authentic international communicative tasks (e.g., web-mediated telecollaboration projects); e) enhance learners' ELF-awareness. In this sense, learners should "exploit their linguistic resources strategically and knowingly" (Seidlhofer, 2015, p. 27); and f) enhance learners' ELF-awareness.

I conclude this brief overview of C-BLI by quoting Lantolf (2006, p. 88), who states:

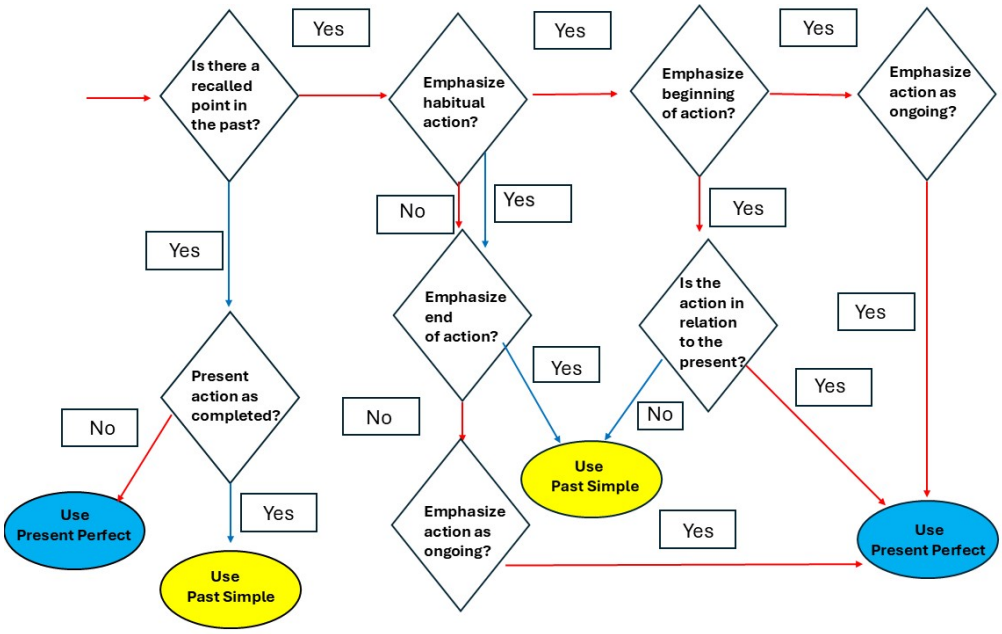
> Conceptual understanding becomes paramount not only with regard to metaphors, schema, lexical networks and the like, but also with regard to the conceptual meaning imparted by the grammatical feature of a language. (…) Rich points between different languacultures become the focus of our pedagogical attention as we seek to help students recognize, cope with and use them as the means for developing new ways of understanding reality.

3.2.1 Tense-aspect combinations in English: A comparative approach

This section presents an example of a SCOBA on tense–aspect combinations in English, which teachers can use in the language classroom. More specifically, it illustrates how the combination of perfective and imperfective verbal aspects with tense may be conceptualised in English. The SCOBA presented here (Figure 1) is based on Negueruela-Azarola's (2003, in Lantolf; Thorne, 2006, p. 311) doctoral research, which included the development of a SCOBA on verbal aspect and tense in Spanish. The aim was to develop a similar SCOBA for British English, with the important caveat that it cannot be all-encompassing. As Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999, p. 175) observe:

> […] teachers need to help learners understand how the English tense-aspect-modality system works in relation to different discourse types and to realize that it operates differently in different languages; that is, the discourse conventions of learners' native language tense-aspect-modality system will likely not transfer positively to English. […] The way past time frames are conventionalized in English is not always obvious to nonnative speakers because boundaries of objective time and tense are conventionalized differently within discourse frames in different cultures.

Figure 1. Perfective/imperfective tense-aspect combinations in British English



Following Negueruela-Azarola, the implementation of this SCOBA should be preceded by a class discussion on the concept of perfective and imperfective verbal aspect. Once the SCOBA has been introduced, students should use it as an orientation tool while engaging in a series of purposefully designed language activities. The ultimate goal of using this SCOBA is to help learners internalise the information it conveys, enabling them to perform language tasks independently.

The focus on perfective and imperfective verbal aspect was chosen due to the challenges this concept presents for Italian learners. As noted in a previous publication (Grazzi, 2018, p. 431–432), a common deviation from SE norms among Italian learners—even at advanced proficiency levels—is the use of the present perfect tense in perfective constructions, where the simple past would normally be expected. The following example was taken from an individual research project conducted during the 2014–15 school year, titled *Intercultural Collaboration: Italy–Finland*:

- Italian high-school student: *I've been to Canada last year with an exchange program and I studied there for 5 months.*

The English present perfect tense and the Italian *passato prossimo* have similar constructions:

- English: Subject + Perfect auxiliary (*have/has*) + lexical verb (-ed participle)
- Italian: (Subject) + Perfect auxiliary (AVERE/ESSERE) + lexical verb (past participle)

While in SE the present perfect is associated with the imperfective aspect, the Italian *passato prossimo* is typically associated with both perfective and imperfective aspects.

This cross-linguistic transfer was likely caused by the superficial structural similarity between the two tense forms. In any case, this did not appear to affect mutual comprehensibility during the online interaction between the Italian and Finnish students, likely because the adverbial phrase *last year* specifies a point in time preceding the moment of communication. Therefore, from an ELF perspective, the Italian student's non-canonical use of English was pragmatically effective within the authentic communicative context of network-based ELT, despite not conforming to standard grammatical norms. This, I argue, may offer English teachers a general operational guideline for addressing learners' deviations from standardised norms, based on a pragmatic evaluation of the performative potential of ELF. Particularly when learners engage in authentic communicative tasks in international contexts (e.g., online interactions) the emergence of ELF forms should be accepted, as long as they do not hinder mutual comprehensibility. Nevertheless, since these activities take place within the school context, a guided reflection on learner performance (i.e., on praxis and variability, in Vygotskian terms) should be conducted, focusing on the differences and similarities between the ways in which the learner's emergent use of English and Standard English express cognitive concepts (e.g., tense–aspect combinations, as shown above). For this purpose, SCOBAs can be a valuable resource, as they mediate "learners' reflection on the L2 [and] may improve L2 acquisition. […] Through saying and reflecting on what was said, new language is constructed" (Swain 2000, p. 113). In short, I suggest that learner performance constitutes the link between the SE model in ELT and the reality of ELF as an emergent contact language. This dynamic relationship unfolds within the ecosystem of the English classroom, where *obuchenie*—the collaborative interaction between teacher and learner—supports cognitive development. As demonstrated, C-BLI can significantly contribute to this aim, as it focuses on developing conceptual understanding of language by systematically teaching meaning-based categories rather than concentrating solely on grammatical structures. More importantly, this implies that learners gradually develop independent control over language by transforming external support into internal cognitive processes. As a result, the individual learner appropriates English, transforming it into an additional mediational tool through which their languacultural identity is expressed, and the language is reshaped to suit their communicative needs. This suggests that variability holds intrinsic value in SLA, and that teachers should align assessment criteria with learning goals, focusing on learners' performance qualities. From this

perspective, Dynamic Assessment (DA) allows teachers to elicit learners' potential to improve and develop competencies within the ZPD, as discussed in Section 3.2. I argue that assessment should be process-oriented—focused on the learner's expected development—rather than retrospective, limited to a static measurement of knowledge acquired up to a given point (typically via standardised testing). "In a DA framework […] instruction and assessment interact as a seamless, dialectical process to simultaneously diagnose and promote learner development" (Lantolf; Poehner, 2014, p. 6). DA is indeed a fundamental component of C-BLI and should be systematically integrated into classroom practice as the teaching–learning process unfolds. Finally, with regard to raising students' ELF-awareness, I suggest that through C-BLI and DA, both teachers and learners can reflect on non-canonical uses of English and realise: a) how learners verbalise lexicogrammatical categories (e.g., case, number, gender, tense, mood, and aspect) while engaging in communicative classroom activities; and b) how learner performance can be improved through teacher and peer feedback within the ZPD.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this article has argued that an integrated approach to ELT—combining ELF studies, Sociocultural Theory (SCT), and Concept-Based Language Instruction (C-BLI)—may offer L2 practitioners and teachers a reliable and promising methodological framework, grounded in the following components:

a. A theoretically informed perspective on cognition and an evolutionary understanding of ELF as a human artifact that mediates social practice in international contexts.
b. A conceptualisation of L2 development that acknowledges the fundamental role of learners' L1 languacultural background as a mediational resource.
c. A cognitive model grounded in praxis and in learners' conceptual understanding of the L2 lexicogrammatical system, going beyond superficial rules of thumb.
d. The dialectical process of second language teaching–learning (*obuchenie*), situated within a Vygotskian Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).
e. The use of Dynamic Assessment (DA) to evaluate learners' L2 performance, with the aim "to promote learner development, not merely to describe what occurs during a single interaction" (Lantolf; Poehner, 2014, p. 203).

As a final remark, I suggest that the integrated approach outlined in this article may also offer a promising opportunity to enhance the effectiveness of Second Language Teacher

Education (SLTE). Following Johnson and Golombek (2011, p. 2), SLTE is grounded in scientific concepts related to human cognition and the role of language as a mediational tool, encouraging teachers to "move beyond their everyday experiences toward more theoretically and pedagogically sound instructional practices."

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