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## THE UNITY OF THINKING AND SPEECH IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE: A VYGOTSKIAN APPROACH TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

**Abstract:** This article examines the complex relationship between thinking and speech through the lens of L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory and its applications to foreign language education. The study analyzes how Vygotsky's fundamental concepts—particularly the zone of proximal development, the unity of affect and intellect, and the social origins of higher mental functions—can inform effective pedagogical practices. Drawing on extensive analysis of Vygotsky's work and contemporary research, the paper presents a comprehensive framework for developing educational methodologies that foster the simultaneous development of thinking and speech in language acquisition contexts. The research identifies three critical conditions for ensuring the unity of thinking and speech in educational settings: the verbalization of learning content with reflection, the focus on solving cognitive tasks during speech development, and careful attention to curriculum design. The practical implications include specific methodological recommendations for foreign language instruction that emphasize authentic communication, emotional engagement, and developmentally appropriate challenges. This work contributes to both theoretical understanding of the thinking-speech relationship and practical approaches to language pedagogy based on cultural-historical psychology.

**Keywords:** Vygotsky, thinking and speech, zone of proximal development, cultural-historical theory, foreign language teaching, cognitive development, educational methodology, unity of affect and intellect, developmental learning, psychological functions

### Introduction

The problem of thinking represents one of the most complex issues in contemporary science, intersecting numerous disciplines including psychology, linguistics (particularly psycholinguistics), cultural anthropology, and neurophysiology. In recent decades, these fields have increasingly converged with cognitive science, which attempts to explain human cognitive processes through concepts such as information processing, coding systems, algorithmic models, neural networks, and computational analogies.

Prominent psychologists Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) made groundbreaking contributions to understanding the ontogenesis of children's thinking—examining precisely how cognitive processes emerge and develop in the human organism. Their studies have become foundational works in the psychology of children's cognition and language development. The Geneva-based psychologist Piaget is particularly celebrated for his ingenious experimental methodologies used to investigate children's cognitive development and for establishing sequential developmental stages that reveal various aspects of evolving thought processes in children.

The scholarly discourse surrounding cultural-historical psychology often highlights the fundamental theoretical differences between Vygotsky's cultural-historical approach and the general psychological

theory of activity. These distinctions, though sometimes overstated, represent important conceptual frameworks that continue to influence educational psychology and practice.

When applying Vygotsky's theoretical principles to the purposeful development of thinking, we reach an essential conclusion: educational practices must create conditions facilitating the simultaneous development of speech and thinking. Despite this theoretical insight, from preschool onwards, educational systems typically separate the development of thinking and speech into disconnected domains and specialized activities. This fragmentation continues throughout formal education, where speech development is relegated to language classes while mathematical problem-solving is considered primarily as a means of developing logical thinking.

Some misinterpretations of Vygotsky's concepts have led to problematic conclusions, particularly when certain elements are extracted from his holistic theoretical framework. Two such misconceptions are especially relevant to our discussion. First, the relationship between learning and development is often oversimplified, with many educators assuming that development occurs automatically as long as learning takes place. Second, while speech and thinking are indeed connected, they are frequently conflated in educational contexts. For instance, educators commonly assume that children with well-developed verbal skills possess advanced thinking capabilities, or that practicing problem-solving will automatically enhance linguistic competence.

We contend that these misinterpretations have resulted in insufficient attention to the deliberate development of thinking within educational frameworks. To construct educational approaches genuinely based on Vygotsky's ideas—particularly his insights regarding the relationship between thinking and speech—requires a thorough examination of his theoretical corpus.

### **Theoretical Framework**

In the opening chapter of "Thinking and Speech," Vygotsky emphasizes that research units should encompass all essential elements of the whole phenomenon under investigation. This methodological principle allows us to analyze not only the relationship between thinking and speech but also to examine the broader problem of unity between intellect and affect. Since Vygotsky's work comprehensively addresses the relationship between thinking and speech, we can apply his methodological approach to investigate the practical resolution of the unity between affect and intellect.

Extensive research on educational programs focused on integrating affect and intellect has yielded three critical conclusions that can be applied to foster the unity of thinking and speech:

1. The purposeful development of intellectual capacities necessitates pronounced emotional engagement. Correspondingly, deliberate emotional development should aim to enhance rational thinking capacities.
2. Ensuring the unity of affect and intellect requires a holistic approach that transcends any single domain of a learner's life—whether formal educational institutions, family environments, supplementary educational programs, or leisure activities. The objective must be to address the integrated life experience of both children and adults.
3. The unity of affect and intellect fundamentally requires volitional capacity. As G.G. Kravtsov observes, approaches to resolving the unity of affect and intellect "align with developing the volitional sphere." In this context, will functions as a higher psychological function and serves as the foundation for unifying the cognitive and affective dimensions of personality.

Applying these insights to the challenge of fostering unity between thinking and speech suggests three parallel requirements:

1. The purposeful development of thinking requires explicit verbalization of learning content, accompanied by conscious reflection on the learning process.

2. Meaningful speech development necessitates engagement with cognitively challenging tasks and problem-solving activities.

3. To ensure the integration of thinking and speech, careful attention must be paid to curriculum design and content selection.

Educational practices aimed at creating conditions for the unity of affect and intellect have demonstrated that the third requirement—curriculum design—is particularly crucial, as it establishes the psychological foundations necessary for integration.

### **Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development and Its Educational Implications**

The cultural context of child development exerts profound influence on developmental trajectories. Implementing educational processes within the zone of proximal development (ZPD) represents a fundamental principle of Vygotskian psychology.

Within the ZPD, a child or adolescent can accomplish tasks they cannot yet perform independently but can complete with guidance from more experienced individuals. This concept yields two crucial practical and theoretical implications:

1. Learning can only be effective when it occurs within the ZPD. Teaching content that a child can already master independently or that remains inaccessible even with assistance proves ineffective.

2. Educational effectiveness is maximized when instruction operates entirely within the ZPD. Instructional components falling outside this zone diminish overall learning outcomes.

This framework defines the optimal domain for effective learning while acknowledging that other factors may enhance educational processes. Thus, a comprehensive understanding of Vygotsky's psychological system provides the foundation for effective educational practice.

Learning designed to actualize human potential constitutes developmental education. This approach incorporates and leverages developmental patterns, adapting to individual capabilities and characteristics. Vygotsky maintains that while learning and internal developmental processes share unity, they are not identical. Learning and development are interconnected but never follow parallel trajectories. Instead, they exhibit complex dynamic relationships that defy simplistic formulations.

In elaborating his hypothesis, Vygotsky articulated the fundamental genetic law of psychological function development. According to this principle, every higher mental function manifests twice in child development: initially as collective, social activity, and subsequently as individual, internalized mental activity. We propose that this law equally applies to the learning process itself.

Learning plays a crucial role in creating the zone of proximal development, activating and advancing internal developmental processes that would otherwise remain dormant. From this perspective, learning is not synonymous with development. However, when properly implemented, it contributes significantly to children's mental development and facilitates processes that would be impossible without formal instruction. Thus, learning constitutes an essential, universal component of child development—not as a natural phenomenon but as a historically constructed human characteristic.

### **Practical Applications in Foreign Language Teaching**

The psychological and methodological foundations of foreign language instruction based on Vygotsky's theoretical framework emphasize that education should facilitate the development of students' thinking and speech rather than merely transmitting knowledge. This requires creating environments where students actively engage with language in diverse communicative contexts.

We propose several practical recommendations for implementing Vygotskian principles in language education:

1. **Speech-Oriented Teaching Methodology:** Implement approaches that encourage active language production from the earliest stages of instruction. Rather than delaying speaking until after

extensive receptive exposure, engage learners in meaningful communication immediately, scaffolding their participation appropriately.

2. **Active Language Use:** Design learning environments that necessitate authentic language production. Incorporate dialogic teaching, collaborative learning, problem-based activities, role-playing scenarios, debates, project-based learning, and simulations of real-world communication contexts.

3. **Authentic Materials:** Integrate genuine language artifacts (news articles, literature, podcasts, films, social media content) that represent language as used by native speakers in various contexts. This provides learners with models of authentic language use and cultural insights that textbook materials alone cannot offer.

4. **Psychologically Safe Learning Environment:** Establish classroom conditions characterized by trust, mutual respect, and constructive feedback. Normalize error-making as an essential component of language acquisition and encourage reasonable risk-taking in communication.

5. **Cognitive Challenge:** Present language tasks that engage higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, evaluation, and creation. Integrate content-based language learning where students acquire new knowledge through the target language.

6. **Cultural Integration:** Recognize language as a cultural artifact and incorporate cultural understanding into language instruction. This includes explicit teaching about cultural practices and perspectives alongside linguistic forms.

7. **Reflective Practices:** Incorporate regular opportunities for metacognitive reflection on both language learning processes and communication strategies. Guide students to notice patterns, formulate hypotheses about language functions, and evaluate their own progress.

8. **Differentiated Instruction:** Recognize individual differences in learning styles, aptitudes, and developmental readiness. Provide multiple pathways to achieve learning objectives while maintaining appropriate challenge within each learner's ZPD.

### Conclusion

The application of psychological and methodological concepts derived from Vygotsky's theoretical framework to foreign language instruction offers significant potential for enhancing educational effectiveness and learner engagement. By recognizing the fundamental unity of thinking and speech, and by creating learning environments that foster their simultaneous development, educators can implement more holistic and developmentally appropriate language teaching methodologies.

The integration of Vygotsky's principles—particularly the zone of proximal development, the social origins of higher mental functions, and the unity of affect and intellect—provides a robust foundation for language pedagogy that transcends mere linguistic competence to foster cognitive development more broadly.

Future research should investigate specific instructional sequences and assessment approaches aligned with these theoretical principles, as well as explore how digital technologies might be leveraged to create new opportunities for socially mediated learning within the Vygotskian paradigm. By continuing to bridge theoretical insights with practical applications, we can advance language education that genuinely fosters both linguistic competence and cognitive development.

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