***Revisiting Vygotsky’s Concept of Seeming Regressions: Living Process of Second Language Development***

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**Overall:**

Reading your narrative review, it seems that you are still in an exploratory phase regarding the topic. As such, I felt some guidance would be more valuable to you than a traditional academic review at this stage. This should assist you to revise your paper and make your valuable contribution appealing to a worthy journal and more digestible for your readership.

Your ideas, while of exciting potential, are still far from concrete when communicated within the manuscript. Your close engagement with the impressive sweep of literature you have studied has given you a deep knowledge of the field typical of someone embarking upon entering the formal academic playing field. This depth of knowledge is not necessarily shared by the reader, and you need to guide them through this information. Some general statements within the text show that a considerable amount of information assumes what the reader might already know. This places a great deal of additional effort on the reader in their attempt to follow the logic of your argument development. When we have been in the forest of a Ph.D. for many years, it is sometimes hard to see the wood for the trees as it were. Writing publishable academic papers is a challenging endeavour that encompasses many different skills that take quite a bit of practice, patience, and revising. You need to bite smaller chunks of the arguments at a time out of your vast knowledge, take your reader by the hand and guide them slowly through your thought process. You want your paper to have an impact, so you need your reader to be able to go through your paper quickly and fluidly. This will assist them in easily and effectively understanding, as well as seeing the potential usefulness of your ideas, and how they could be used for their own work. You want to avoid overloading the reader cognitively and forcing them into a laborious hermeneutic exercise with overly dense information. You could even think about this as applying Vygotsky’s notions of zones of proximal development and scaffolding on the micro-level of your paper.

Pretend your audience is a postgraduate student. You can assume some knowledge and a decent literacy level, but you have to almost teach the content to your reader as your paper progresses. You don’t want your reader to be trying to remember what a term such as *prezhivanie* is, wracking their brain to work out what it means from the context, or having to read another paper to try to understand it before they can carry on reading your paper. It is more useful to define your concepts in extremely simple terms and immediately situate them in terms of your paper explaining how you utilize them. The person who is first being introduced to or doesn’t understand the term or has forgotten what it means will thank you for the former and find the latter interesting; the person who knows the term will skim over the definition without skipping a beat and find your application in your specific context of this idea they know well interesting. One aspect of narrative reviews to remember is that quite often academics make use of them so that they do not have to go and read each of the papers first – but perhaps sample those of primary interest – which your review would have identified.

Take your reader step-by-step through your thought process, and don’t overload any one paper. Don’t be intimidated by your audience being composed of high-level academics that have extensive publication lists. Most of them aren’t as smart as you think they are, and even if they are, they should not have to prove this while reading your paper. Your key objective is to write a paper that is immediate and accessible. In academia, you should aim to publish as much as possible in your field, within your particular niche. This actually gives you more space to work with smaller parts of your overall idea into many different papers. With the amount of information that you have contained in this paper, you could produce at least two more effective and focused papers out of this very complex manuscript.

**Narrative Literature Reviews:**

The primary aim of a published literature review is to clarify a topic by sifting through the available literature and making judicious use of the sources to support a contention that there is a gap to be explored or problems that have not properly been engaged with previously. Essentially, your paper is contending that Vygotsky’s conceptualization of regression as part of a circular development process has been neglected as a potentially useful theoretical framework for considering second language acquisition and development. In your paper, this beneficial and relatively simple idea is sometimes bogged down by obscure terminology and vague expressions, which unfortunately convolutes your academic tone, and lowers your voice. Ultimately this has led to this important argument not being as clearly communicated as it could be.

As you know, the goal of the abstract is to offer the reader a snapshot of the paper – its content, structure, argument, and findings. This provides the reader with the cognitive baggage necessary to approach the manuscript with less effort on their behalf. Having a clear abstract is also essential for your own writing process. You should even be able to state exactly what your paper does in one sentence. One way to tackle this is to imagine presenting your ideas at a conference. You would only have a predefined amount of time to engage with your audience and make sure that they follow each step of your thinking so that they can move to understand your overall argument.

**Suggestions for Improvement:**

I would suggest restructuring the abstract along the following lines using simple, bold statements:

*It is well-documented that in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) learners often find themselves at an impasse in their progress towards near-native fluency. Discussions of this developmental plateau in the scholarly literature on SLA have been dominated by the notion of linguistic fossilisation. The frequent casting of SLA as a linear evolutionary process implied by concepts like “impasse”, “plateau”, and “fossilisation” is a potential blind spot that limits our perspective on the process of second language development. This narrative literature review aims to expand the theoretical horizons of SLA scholarship by exploring the potential application to SLA of developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s notion of “regression” as part of a circular as opposed to linear, or revolutionary as opposed to evolutionary, conceptualisation of development.*

You could then write a second paper to cover the other focus of the current paper. The abstract of a potential second paper could be something along the lines of the following:

*The concept of linguistic fossilisation dominates discussions of the inevitable breaks or interruptions of progress towards near-native fluency in the process of language acquisition. The focus of existing scholarly literature is the development and nature of this fossilisation, usually conceived of as a constructed interlanguage in the learner’s mind that confines and limits the language learner’s development trajectory. The limit of these ontologically-focused models is that they overlook the phenomenological dimensions of language learning and the role played by negative affect in the face of slow or interrupted progress towards fluency. Arguably, the notion of linear progress in developing second-language capacities is a psychologically damaging discourse that discourages acceptance of the inevitable ebbs and flows of fluency over a lifetime of learning. In this review paper, I aim to unpack this bias in the literature and propose an alternative conceptual framework based on developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky’s notion of “regression” as a natural part of a circular learning process. In particular, I examine the effects of the individual cognitive and affective dimensions of regressions on developmental trajectories by conceptualising them as a form of catharsis.*

Naturally, this is your work, hence I may not have fully grasped the primary points of exactly what you want to do in my suggested examples of a model abstract for each paper, but these should assist you in fine-tuning your current abstract, as well as your paper. After you have developed two abstracts, you should tease the two strands of your existing paper and write two more incisive and concise papers. There will naturally be some overlap between the two, but this doesn’t matter, provided you use different words to avoid self-plagiarism.

When writing your papers, remember to never lose track of your central argument. As you know, the goal of a literature review is not to merely restate the work of others but to situate your own perspective within that work. It should be clear in every paragraph how you harness the ideas to particular effects. Currently, there are lengthy descriptions in your paper without these being immediately obvious as to how and why you are using the ideas, rejecting them, or why they need nuance. Writing two shorter papers, each with a clearer focus will help you achieve this since you will have the space to engage with the ideas more thoroughly and contextualise them within a more targeted scope.

Another crucial point going forward that will help make your paper more concrete is the use of examples. For example: What does regression look like? You look at some papers that bring the theoretical concepts home in the actual language-learning context, but they are few and far between, and you could provide them with more detail and definition by making use of additional examples. Pedagogues are generally quite practical people. We are concerned with improving our teaching and helping our students achieve their goals or potential. Even if your paper is about interrogating those goals, it should still bring the theory to bear on the pedagogue’s task and the learner’s experience. You can even make up examples and illustrations where appropriate, although it would be useful to locate true examples. What matters is that the reader can make the conceptual leap from the theory to a mental image of the situation playing out in the real world. Currently, this version of the paper is too dense to adequately achieve this in its current form. Still, if you split this into two papers, you would have the opportunity to unpack the ideas more effectively with illustrative examples and look at/cite more grounded literature to bring your review back to earth.

**Choice of Academic Journals:**

Whether you decide to produce two separate papers or try to streamline this paper by grounding it and cutting out redundant information, I suggest you re-evaluate your choice of journal and look for higher-quality journals specifically focused on SLA so that your paper finds its intended audience. Your paper will likely get lost in the sea of open-access journals if you do not spend enough time going through the options with a discerning mindset. There are a few things to look out for when it comes to identifying a suitable journal, firstly, take a look at the scope on the journal’s website. The journal *Languages* is incredibly vague and publishes papers on every facet of linguistics, with 80 papers in its latest issue and it only opened in 2016. I would propose rather work to clarify and streamline your paper/s and help them find a more worthy home for publication. I suggest you choose a top journal first – perhaps one from your own reference list. Preparing your manuscript to a high enough standard to stand a chance in a top journal will force you to refine it and improve its overall quality. If it is accepted with revisions from top people, you’ll end up with a published paper of which you can truly be proud. Suppose it is rejected on your first submission attempt, which is highly likely and part of every academic’s progression. In that case, you will receive incredibly useful feedback from top experts in the field, which you can use to produce a second draft to submit to another journal. Just a little tip - it never hurts to cite authors published in the journals you are gunning for to improve their citations.

Please refer to the document, where you will see more detailed suggestions on specific points in the comments. I have also provided some colour coding to help with my suggestion to divide the paper into two papers if you choose to take that route.

Best of luck, and I look forward to seeing the revisions of this incredibly interesting contribution to your field.