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

**Abstract**

Unlike the concept of linguistic fossilisation, Vygotskian regressions as living dramatic-dialectical phenomena appear to not receive enough attention in the Second Language Development (SLD) field. To address this gap, the study adopts a narrative literature review approach to expand theoretical premises of the notion by proposing that they should be read in the context of living process development (Vygotsky,1997b: 221). In drawing upon this construct, the study suggests alternative theoretical insights by seeing regressions as living-dramatic-dialectical entities, resulting from clashing and interweaving of a wide range of opposing forces in variable ratios and intensity at times of crisis. In effect, there might be manifold variations of regressive movements that additionally appear to exhibit degenerative-regressive properties comparable to cathartic experiences. Furthermore, during the living process of SLD, dialectically loaded regressions might also impact the individual holistically, creating the so-called L2 regressive-dialectical personality developmental trajectories, impacting both L2 and personality mutually. Departing from political connotations associated with Vygotsky or dialectics, the study interpreted this phenomenon as an individual-cognitive-affective facet to SLD. This requires further research.

**Keywords**:

living regressions, individual variations, Vygotsky, Second Language Development

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The concept of regression in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is usually associated with fossilisation, a lack of progress or a return to an earlier stage of development. Indeed, together with Slinker’s (1972) seminal interlanguage hypothesis, the interest in the better understanding of the complexity of the cessations in learning or the so-called fossilisation phenomena has been ignited. It has subsequently led to an ongoing debate over the existence and causes of fossilisation during Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Shiddiq and Oktaviani, 2022). Successively, a vast majority of this research has centralised its analysis on language properties such as morphology or syntax in relation to the phenomenon of fossilisation against the learner’s ability to achieve a native-like proficiency (Tarone, 2013; Shiddiq and Oktaviani, 2022; Jiang, 2023, March). Furthermore, a vast majority of research has been dedicated to a linear or sequential language development (Dulay and Burt 1973, 1974a, 1974b; Bailey, Madden and Krashen, 1974; VanPatten et al., 2020). Likewise, a considerable amount of literature has been published on the irregularity and uniqueness of Second Language Development (SLD) (see, for example, Piechurska-Kuciel, 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2022).

While this body of study has received significant attention and the above aspects are vital to understanding L2 developmental processes, relatively few studies, to the author’s knowledge, have explored Vygotsky’s concept of regression, despite its significant value (Lantolf and Aljaafrsh, 1995; Lantolf, Kurtz, and Kisselev, 2017; Ableeva 2010, 2018), leaving a Vygotskian vision of the phenomenon not examined in its entirety. Although there is a general consensus among researchers in SLD that from a Vygotskian perspective, regressions constitute an integral and inevitable part of the revolutionary or asymmetrical developmental process (Lantolf and Aljaafrsh, 1995; Ableeva, 2018), “those turning points, those spasmodic and revolutionary changes that are so frequent” still seem to be being ignored (Vygotsky, 1978: 73). As a result, much uncertainty continues as to the role and nature of regressions in second language development (SLD).

Additionally, it seems that there is still a general lack of research into Vygotsky’s regressions as part of inner dialectical crises, dramatic contradictions, cathartic experiences or personality development in relation to SLD. It is pivotal to recognise after Dafermos (2022:16) Vygotsky’s visualisation that the “crisis is incomplete and unfinished”. Similarly, Zhang, Lantolf and Meng (2022: 11) identify that “much is yet to be learned about identity formation using concepts of Vygotsky’s robust and powerful psychological theory”. In this regard, the present study proposes that it might be necessary to move beyond solely linguistic interpretations in favour of a dialectic approach which unifies variables in different degrees, ratios and roles (Raszkowska, 2021) in order to comprehend the inner nature of living regressions in connection to the uniquely individual L2 developmental trajectories. It is because apart from entailing L1 and L2 components, this process seems to contain a nexus of variables such as psychological, social, affective, standing in relation to regressions during a rising crisis. At the intersections of dialectical crossings, it is proposed that regressions may contribute to not only varying L2 pathways but also to the creation, named in this paper, of L2 regressive-dialectical personality. This dialectical dimension of living regressions in SLD has yet to be fully discovered.

By embracing this idea, the current paper attempts to at least partially bridge this gap by exploring the concept of living regressions further, expanding its theoretical potential, while additionally opening new ways of reading their character. This being said, the study suggests that the fundamental and inevitable role of living regressions can only be understood in the light of the “living process of development, a coming into being, a struggle, and only in this form can it serve as a subject of truly scientific study” (Vygotsky, 1997b: 221). It is thus hoped that the study will contribute to this essential body of knowledge in addition to springing further interdisciplinary research in this important area.

With this in mind, a literature review approach has been adopted, following such phases as identification, “recording, understanding, meaning-making, and transmitting information” (Onwuegbuzie and Frels, 2016: 49). In line with Kraus et al. (2022: 2581-2), this type of review, similarly to systematic reviews, represents equally independent and critical studies. By synthesising the selected literature on the topic of regressions with a main emphasis placed on Vygotsky’s understanding of regressions, the study revisits and (re)considers their characteristics to link them with SLD. Being consistent also with Lim, Kumar and Ali (2022), the study hopes to contribute to expanding the current body of knowledge in the field and offer an alternative perspective on this essential issue in connection with SLD.

Before exploring these essential matters further, it is vital to clarify the terminology used. To avoid any disparities between purposeful learning and unconscious language acquisition (Krashen and Terrell, 1983), for the purpose of this study, the term SLD is preferred to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Likewise, the term second language (L2) carries here a loose meaning to denote English as a sole second language as well as one of many. In endeavouring to understand and expand the theoretical potential of Vygotsky’s regressions, the forthcoming section first focuses on the general meaning of the notion across different disciplines. The discussion next moves on to its present forms in the fields of linguistics and SLA with the aim to provide a broader background to the concept and simultaneously recognise their different theoretical stance to Vygotsky’s. The final section is presented in three parts discussed in turns: regressive-dialectical movements, cathartic regressions, L2 regressive-dialectical personality development.

**2. Regression in general**

The term ‘regression’ tends to be contrasted with the idea of progression. It is thus prone to rather negative connotations typically associated with a reversion to a former or even worse stage or condition of functioning. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2022), the term comes from the Latin *regression-, regressio,* meaning return, withdrawal, retreat or “form of repetition”. With such overtones, the phenomenon is omnipresent across a wide range of disciplines. For example, in geology, regression implies the reversal of seawater from earlier submerged land (Allaby, 2020). In statistics, it refers to a statistical method rooted in the Galton universal regression law, initially associated with asymmetric differences identified by Galton in height between parents and their children (Ciaburro, 2020).

By comparison, in psychology, regression, primarily identified by Freud (1955), a 19th century neurologist and psychoanalyst, signals an unconscious and automatic psychological defence mechanism triggered, for instance, by stressful or challenging situations (Colman, 2015; Boag, 2020; Costa 2020). The condition may involve a reversal to ‘protective’ but childish or infantile forms of behaviour (Costa 2020). The examples of this can be tantrums, wetting or verbal abuse (Lokko and Stern 2015). At its extreme, regressions can range from neurological through psychiatric and medical to developmental disorders such as Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) or ADHD (Lokko and Stern, 2015; Clarke 2019; Zhang et al. 2019).

Although Vygotsky as a developmental psychologist was interested in the so-called pathological forms of regressions (Vygotsky, 1998), this category is not the focus of this paper. To this end, this study maintains after Lantolf and Aljaafreh (1995) that permanently degenerative lapses to former stages of development are unlikely to occur in healthy individuals. It is because progress is still seen as a moving forward force despite momentary regressions. Before exploring the potential characteristics of seeming regressions in the living process of SLD in greater depth, the upcoming section briefly addresses the notion of regressions in SLA to distinguish it from Vygotskian regressions.

**3. Regression in SLA**

In the field of linguistics, the idea of regression tends to be associated, for example, with the notion of language attrition to imply a gradual L1 or L2 loss (Yilmaz and Schmid, 2018; Schmid, 2022). In line with Jackobson’s (1941 in Ahlsen, 2013) regression hypothesis, language attrition happens in a reverse order to acquisition. Correspondingly, Selinker’s (1972) hypothesis suggests that some linguistic features deviate from target language (TL) during the learning process. As a result, a mid-way language, coined as interlanguage (IL), is created between first language (L1) and TL to become permanently fossilised (Selinker 1972; Selinker and Lamendella 1979). The idea was echoed in subtly differing theories and terminologies such as backsliding (Selinker 1972; Ellis, 2008), incompleteness or fundamental difference hypothesis (Schachter 1988; Bley-Vroman, 1990), prematurely plateaued (Celce-Murcia, 1991: 462), long-term cessation of interlanguage development (Nakuma 2006), or selective fossilization hypothesis(Han 2013b), to list a few.

Notably, Selinker and Lakshamanan (1992) later suggested that there might also be temporary fossilisation categorised as stabilisation. By the same token, the phenomenon of plateau as a transitory halt in SLA (for example, Han, 2004, 2013b; Shormani, 2013; Yi, 2007; Richards, 2008; Wei, 2008; Lee, 2009; Xu, 2009; Mirzaei et al. 2017, 2020; Shiddiq and Oktaviani, 2022) or the notion of a U-shaped pattern of development in SLA (Ellis 2015**;** Williams **et al. 2022)** that reflects sudden short-term drops and regains in a learner’s linguistic performance **has** become more prominent. **This successively pointed to the occurrence of** non-linearities in SLA reflected in, for example, Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) (De Bot, Lowie, and Verspoor, 2007; Lenzing, Pienemann, Nicholas, 2023), Chaos / Complexity Theory (C/CT) (Larsen-Freeman, 1997; 2019) or more recently Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) (Hiver, Al-Hoorie, and Evans, 2022).

Furthermore, the complexity of SLD appears to increase together with individual difference variations (Larsen-Freeman, 2022). A few such variables worth mentioning here are: physiological factors such as age (Schulz and Grimm, 2019) or gender (Chan, 2021), first language (L1) influences and psychological variables (Mitchell et al. 2019) such as aptitude (Wen et al. 2019), motivation (Dörnyei, 2022; Dörnyei and Mentzelopoulous, 2023), affect (Swain, 2013; Li et al., 2022), anxiety (Misra, 2021) or personality traits (Piechurska-Kuciel, 2020). While these studies provide important insights into the phenomenon of fossilisation, cessations and unevenness in SLD, their theoretical stance differs significantly from Vygotsky’s.

From a Vygotskian perspective, it does not merely matter whether the development, among other things, is linear or non-linear or whether particular linguistic features regress or advance as is the case with SLA. It is also not purely about contrasting the L2 learner’s linguistic abilities against the cohort of native speakers or nativelike abilities. Rather, the revolutionary development suggests that both progressive and regressive movements merge in ongoing transformational changes (Lantolf and Aljaafreh,1995; Ableeva, 2018) during dialectical processes (Vygotsky 1997b, 1999). This testifies of the “growing complexity” of human development (Vygotsky, 1978: 73) within which regressions are unavoidable. Hence, the main emphasis is not placed on separate forces but rather on their ever-changing, dynamic and dialectical relationships that are able to affect the whole developmental system. Vygotsky (1978: 73) clarifies:

… development is a complex dialectical process characterized by periodicity, unevenness in the development of different functions, metamorphosis or qualitative transformation of one form into the other, intertwining of external and internal factors, and adaptive processes that overcome impediments …

It is, however, a “strenuous mental activity”(Vygotsky 1986: 157), not essentially enjoyable (Chaiklin 2003), which demands voluntary and conscious actions on the part of the learner to carry out the “response in new ways” (Vygotsky, 1978: 73). Embedded in this *living* and dramatic process of development, co-existing and influencing each other, opposite variables such as cognition, social or affect may initially clash, generating regressive movements. However, it is crucial to notice after Vygotsky (1978: 73) that:

Where upheavals occur (…) the naïve mind sees only catastrophe, gaps, and discontinuity. History seems to stop dead, until it once again takes the direct, linear path of development.

These are imperative concepts which are worth reviving and revisiting in relation to SLD and as such are in need of further research. The following section proposes that the turning points might correspondingly be interpreted as potential indicators of varying types of living regressive occurrences that should also be considered in relation to L2.

**4. Regressive-dialectical movements: Leaps, Breaks and Turns**

**4.1 Living Dialectical Regressions**

One of the most fundamental concepts introduced by Vygotsky (1997b) was the view of development as revolutionary, that is, non-linear, fluctuating and unpredictable as opposed to evolutionary or the so-called linear development (Lantolf and Aljaafreh 1995; Lantolf, Kurtz, and Kisselev, 2017; Ableeva, 2018). Inasmuch as it is generally acknowledged that changeability and dynamics constitute its integral part, the dialectical-regressive living nature of revolutionary development has yet to be fully unveiled. This characteristic not only points to the irregularity of this type of development but above all to the likelihood of regressions as a result of unexpected crisis (Vygotsky, 1997b) as well as dialectical collisions among opposing variables. Within this dialectical character, regressive instances are likely to occur at times when contrasting living forces clash before being transformed into a unified driving force. Correspondingly, the dialectical nature of living development in relation to L2 regressions as well as L2 regressive-dialectical personality formation remains to emerge in full in the SLD field.

To this end, it is crucial to recall that in understanding the dialectical nature of regressions nonlinearity of the development in itself should not only be studied. Rather, first and foremost “sharp” and unexpected regressive shifts seem to require deeper attention. It is their dialectical synthesis with opposing variables that should be at the core of analysis as part of abrupt and unexpected moves that intersect and alter ongoing “gradual, slow changes” (Vygotsky, 1997b: 100). The existence of the crisis itself does not reveal the root cause of regression. However, the crashing of contradictory forces may point to not only the beginning of the crisis but also potential reasons for it as well as their impact in SLD. Furthermore, it can also indicate the possible arrival of regressions. For the same reason, the dialectical constitution of these collisions in turn seems to indicate there might be existence of not one but a wide range of different regressive categories. This is because relationships among variables at the moment of confrontation may differ in terms of intensity or ratios. In this regard, Robbins’ (2007, 91-92) observation appears to ring true today, that:

the focus is on the interrelationships of developmental growth (and regression) within holarchies. (…) which to date have simply not been understood in their unity.

For example, contemporary sociocultural research into L2 Dynamic Assessment (DA) revealed progressive-regressive reciprocating behaviour (Poehner and Ableeva, 2011; Wang and Zang, 2023). Indeed, Ableeva’s (2018) recent study on Dynamic Assessment (DA) argues that a sole focus on mediation without sufficient consideration of an L2 learner’s responsiveness to mediation, known as reciprocity, may result in an impoverished picture of SLD. In this regard, Ableeva’s analysis revealed varied reciprocating responses of university students learning French at intermediate level to L2 listening tasks. They, namely, included silence, responsive versus unresponsive reactions through both negative and positive as well occasional refusals to accept the mediator’s assistance.

On this basis the variety of reactions during DA can also be interpreted as multidimensionality of dialectical-regressive relationships which potentially give rise to a range of multifaceted regressive-dialectical movements. Subsequently, in view of the fact L2 development appears to “cease or even regress” (Lantolf, Kurtz, and Kisselev 2017: 158) spasmodically and unpredictably, it is possible to argue that “an infinite variety of movements to and fro, of ways still unknown to us, is possible” (Vygotsky, 1986: 254) in SLD. This in turn implies the probability of different developmental trajectories of manifold regressive variations impacting so-called chronological development.

The importance of this cannot be stressed enough, particularly in connection to educational pedagogy alongside psychology of personality as dialectical contradictions possibly with ingrained regressions working together as wholes in SLD. This means the whole development can be affected dialectically and holistically: mind, language, learning and personality (Roth, 2016; Veresov and Kellogg, 2019; Mahn 2018; Mahn and Fazalehaq, 2020). As noted by Veresov and Kellogg (2019: 145), the laws of pedagogy govern laws of human nature, whilst Mahn and Fazalehaq (2020) acknowledge the necessity to move beyond appearances and surfaces to be able to see the reciprocalness and interrelations across systems. Likewise, using Bozhovich’s (2009: 28) terminology, it is in fact about “the real life of each person” during which reversals are unavoidable. On this point, Veresov (2016: 246) calls for an analysis of development based on dialectics rather than dualism. This is echoed by Zhang, Lantolf and Meng (2022) who emphasise the importance of two dialectical unities between the individual and the social environment in understanding formation of identify. From this perspective, the living nature of dialectical regressions might be reflected in subtly qualitatively different developmental pathways that are equally suggestive of the individual-social-cognitive-affective facet to SLD.

**4.2. Dialectical-Dramatic character of regressions**

Given that a collision consists of contradictory substances such as “the innate and the social-historical,” “the greatest drama of development” (Vygotsky, 1997b: 222) transpires. Forasmuch as these contradictory forces co-work dialectically, regressive movements coexist alongside. Additionally, due to the living quality of development, they are likely to obtain a particular psychological content or psychological reality (Vygotsky, 1989; Roth 2016; Versov 2016, 2020a, 2020b, 2021; Gonzalez Rey 2019). Subsequently, a modification in the consciousness is also initiated (Vygotsky 1998; Zavershneva and Veer, 2018; Lantolf and Swain, 2020), affecting personality transformations (Vygotsky, 1998; Bayanova, 2013; Veresov and Fleer 2016; Veresov 2020a, 2020b; Dafermos 2022). As an analogy, once L2 learners as psychophysical beings enter the “authentic drama” (Vygotsky 1997b: 222) of SLD, regressively dialectical travels as part of the dialectical developmental process also begin. These aspects of living regressions should be considered in greater depth as part of varying L2 developmental paths.

In a word, if regressions are placed against this backdrop, it may be observed, they indicate the dialectics of the living opposites, inter alia, social, cognitive or affective to form dialectical entities related with a subsequent crisis and potential reversive responses. More importantly, since this is a living developmental process, it is accompanied by a constant dialectical change. For example, Gonzalez Rey (2019: 28) discusses “subjective sense” as ““snapshots” of symbolic emotional flashes that unfold in a chaotic movement” requiring “a self-regulative and self-generative organization”. As Alnajjar and Elhammoumi (2017: 96) imply, “personality is a dialectical process in constant change”. Equally, it seems that L2 development is a dialectically living process during which regressions impact L2 developmental trajectories consisting of L2 dialectical-regressive swings in constant change.

This is possible because dissimilar yet dialectically loaded elements such as *prezhivanie,* Social Situation of Development (SSD), or cognition interact dialectically and dialogically as aligned with the idea that dramatic interactions between “a personality and social environment become the source of psychological development” (Dafermos, 2022:8). This in turn indicates a need to recognise regressions as highly complex and dialectical entities which, among other things, may not only reveal relapses and recursions (Wink and Putney 2010; Murphy et al. 2015), tidal waves (Zebroski, 1994) or recursive loops (Tharp and Gallimore,1988: 35) but above all the moments of crises resulting in various manifold regressions as a result of potential conflicts between higher and lower psychological functions (Veresov, 2021). When applied to SLD, this situation brings individual developmental pathways that can be named as the individual-social-cognitive-affective facet to SLD. These asymmetrical interconnections are of paramount importance since they stand in correlation with consciousness (Robbins, 2007). “Consciousness,” Vygotsky (1997a: 130) writes, “determines the fate of the system;” however, “[e]ach interfunctional change must be explained by a change of consciousness as a whole”. This paradoxical conflict triggers a transformation in consciousness which can in turn generate developmental growth across the whole system, impacting both language and personality dialectically.

**4.3. Manifold variations of living regressions**

To emphasise this dialectical and dialogic living character of development, Vygotsky (1997b) regularly employed diverse expressions, for example, leaps, turns, breaks, regressions, gaps, zigzags, displacements or shifts. At first glance, the terms appear to denote primarily the idea of irregularity as an integral part of development. However, after deeper inspection, the terminology can equally imply diverse regressive movements which seem to fall into one umbrella term: living or alive as opposed to static or ‘dead’ regressions by virtue of *perezhivanie*, often translated as an emotional or lived through experience (Vygotsky 1994: 339). In contrast, Smagorinsky (2011, 2013) defines it as meta-experience, whereas Kozulin (2016) brings to light an indivisible holistic unity between innermost experiences, understandings, and the given context fused in the concept. Drawing on González Rey’s (2018: 347) words, it is impossible to analyse the external “outside of individual motivation and personality”. Interestingly, Veresov and Mok (2018) highlight the dialectical and dynamic character of *perezhivanie*. It, thus, acts as a catalyst for external experiences to become uniquely subjective (Fleer et al., 2017; Veresov 2020a; McNamara, 2022). This can be metaphorically compared to an electrocardiogram (ECG) of a living heart as opposed to a flat line when a heart stops. Therefore, its role in relation to regressions is absolutely critical as by its virtue it becomes possible to distinguish an intimately different detail for each individual developmental pathway. This aspect of regressions in relation to *prezhivanie* seems to be under researched.

For the same reason, regressions as a dialectically inner-oriented and crisis-linked phenomenon appears to be rooted in the subjective emotional experiences of contradictions. Therefore, a crisis essentially entails for the individual to also live through negative emotions (Blunden, 2016; Lantolf and Swain, 2020; Veresov 2020b; Kim, 2021). Nonetheless, due to its living dialectical nature, it imposes the simultaneous experience of regressions as intrinsically linked with a crisis. In this regard, Kim (2021) expresses the plurality of emotional experiences[*prezhivaniya*] alongside a principal role of positive appraisal of own negative experiences in creating L2 self and motivational processes. For Michell (2016: 5), however, this notion expresses an “intellectual gestalt” and its close relation to personality development.

By the same token, it is sometimes overlooked that the close corelation between thinking and feeling may additionally denote the existence of regressions. For instance, Swain’s (2013: 206) research asserts that apart from being a cognitive experience, L2 learning is simultaneously an emotional struggle in which both “thinking and emoting” are unified. The struggle in turn can involve regressions. In the same vein, Lantolf, Kurtz, and Kisselev (2017) identify regression levels during mediation, emphasising the importance of reciprocity and dialectics. In fact, Lantolf and Swain’s (2020) portrayal of *prezhivanie* as *“*the cognitive-emotional dialectic within the Social Situation of Development” can be taken to suggest the existence of varying living regressions during dialectical process. Similarly, Swain (2013), Poehner and Swain (2016) and Hue and Kim (2021) report on emotional reactions of L2 learners such as frustration, sense of failure or conflicting emotions. However, the dialectical role of regressions, their relation to crisis and opposing variables during this process has not received in depth attention.

Ultimately, the disruption in the formation of concepts also ties closely with the perception of own feelings as well as “self consciousness of the personality” (Vygotsky (1998: 127). Above all, this may cause a transient decrease in the level of performance before a changeover to a higher intellectual functioning (Vygotsky, 1998: 194). More importantly, this simultaneously signals the intersecting and interweaving contracting variables such as affect, cognition, social, alongside personality during which regressions carrying psychological content cannot be non-existent. It may accordingly be assumed that these dialectically living regressions are unlikely not to impact the course of SLD.

It is worth mentioning that the regressions were envisioned by Vygotsky (1999: 53) as seeming to participate in a spiral-like traversal such as their return point is at a crossing point passed previously, however, on a higher plane. This spiral movement is able to unify back and forth in a dialectical way:

But the regression is only a seeming regression: development, as frequently happens, moves not in a circle in this case, but along a spiral, returning on a higher plane to a point that was passed.

Commenting on Vygotsky’s cycle of development, Veresov and Kellogg (2019: 146) recognise that a cycle also accentuates “the idea of opposites which interpenetrate rather than mutually exclude each other” and in this way merge different laws of dialectics. Undoubtedly, within this very complex process, regressions appear not only to be unavoidable but above all able to impact developmental trajectories which requires closer attention in SLD. It may thus be observed that dialectical-regressive fluctuations are likely to contribute to the creation of diverse developmental levels, paths and zones (Zavershneva and der Veer, 2018).

It is worth discerning that *perezhivanie* for Vygotsky (1998: 198) was equally understood as the unit of analysis to decode the Social Situation of Development (SSD) (Veresov and Mok, 2018), namely, the *relationship* between the individual and the environment (Vygotsky 1994: 338) as refracted through *prezhivanie* (Vygotsky 1994: 338). Fundamentally, the SSD does not imply every social situation but rather the one that involves a certain type of dramatic collision, conflict or contradiction (Veresov 2021; Dafermos 2018), which, by default, it is argued, might entail regressive responses (Vygotsky 1997b). Specifically, critical periods, in contrast to stable ones, necessitate “major shifts, with discontinuities” (Dafermos, 2018: 179). The effect can also trigger regressive movements. Vygotsky (1998: 295) clarifies that the crisis is a “turning point”, a change that occurs in the individual as evidenced in experiencing [*perezhivanie*] similar types of situations subjectively, that is, internally differently. As Cong-Lem (2021:5) argues that according to Vygotsky “emotions are constructed on the same basis as of normal psychological functions” and for the same reason are closely linked with neuropsychology.

Noticeably, the turns that arise during the periods of crisis are likely to carry a regressive force as they are not disconnected from disintegrations, dissolutions and breakdowns. It may be noted that once the “*internal* course” of development will complete a “cycle,” the transfer to the subsequent phase will inevitably be a “turning point” (Vygotsky 1998: 295; emphasis mine). It seems overlooked that this appears to point not only to the importance of crisis but also to the dialectical resonance of regressions during the crises as well as their relation to *perezivanie* in regardto L2 courses.

**5. Cathartic regressions or Beauty for Ashes**

Recognising that it is hardly likely to endorse mental growth without *prezhivanie* (Dafermos, 2018), the correlation between affect and cognition is not neutral to SLD as argued, for instance, in such studies as Swain (2013), Poehner and Swain (2016), Lantof and Swain (2020) or Huh and Kim (2021). Yet, it should not be disregarded that both are opposite forces, which can provoke internal tensions and potentially lead to an “internal conflict escalation” (Dafermos, 2018: 178). Inasmuch as the internal contradiction is fundamental for further developmental processes (Dafermos, 2018, 2022; Veresov 2020a, 2020b), it can equally cause a drop in the level of performance, often associated with regressions (Kozulin, 1990a; 1990b). Vygotsky (1997b: 221) remarks that when “the old form is forced out, it is sometimes completely disrupted”. It is further elaborated as:

The transition to a higher form of intellectual activity is accompanied by a temporary decrease in capacity for work. This is also confirmed for the rest of the negative symptoms of the crisis: behind every negative symptom is hidden a positive content consisting usually in the transition to a new and higher form (Vygotsky 1998: 194).

Hereby, the “negative symptoms” may purportedly signal the emergence of periodic regressions during the crisis which should be conquered. The negativity – the inevitable component of the developmental phase, Vygotsky observes (1998), tends to be taken as the end of development. Yet, the contrary is true. Nevertheless, for this not pain free process (Defermos 2018, 2022) not to become a dead end, a transformative step forward, as mentioned earlier requires effort on the individual’s part so that painfully negative content is transformed into positive. Speaking metaphorically, beauty for ashes emerges. Dafermos (2022: 8) compares it to a phoenix-like experience. On the other hand, the overlaps between psychology and SLD (Dorneyi, 2022), the role of positive psychology in SLD (Wang, Derakhshan and Zhang, 2021; Derakhshan, 2022) and motivational dialogue (Lantolf, 2021) cannot be stressed enough in this regard.

Paradoxically, this reversal generates a traverse to a higher plane, provided that “a complex process of overcoming difficulties and adapting” begins (Vygotsky 1997b: 99). This situation can also be compared to “living through the crisis” when an “individual succeeds in regenerating his or her self damaged” (Kozulin, 1990a: 264). To illustrate the idea further, Vygotsky (1971: 237) quotes Christiansen:

A dissonance must be *overcome* (…) horror or fear must find its resolution and purification (…) horror is (…) an impulse to be overcome … And this distracting element must signify overcoming and catharsis simultaneously.

What this appears to indicate is that “impulse” could also be decoded as an affective discharge; whereas the “dissonance” and “distracting element” might indicate initial regressive lapses as part of dramatic collisions or internal conflicts, which more essentially, should be overcome, resolved, purified and catharised *concurrently*.

The Aristotelian concept of catharsis generally infers the release of conflicting, yet purifying emotions. For Vygotsky (1971: 248) catharsis involves “the creative act of overcoming feeling, resolving it, and conquering it.” Hither, the aim is for an affective discharge caused by an internal conflict to be also tempered and subsequently transformed into “intellect emotions” governed by reason (Smagorynski, 2021: 769). In line with Veresov and Mok (2018: 94), it is in catharsis that conflicts can be “resolved” and individuals transformed. Similarly, Lantolf and Swain (2020: 83) argue that catharsis is inbuilt in *perezhivanie*, which can also be taken to suggest that a potential step backward may occur before the individual is able to ‘gather him/herself’ to reflect on the situation and move forward; in this way, possibly involving regressions that can be characterised as cathartic.

In this regard, Blunden (2016: 276) emphasises the multidimensional psychological dimension of prezhivanie as it also involves conquering the painful experience of crisis by “processing” over it, “working over” it and integrating it into one’s personality. Likewise, Veresov (2020a: 48) asserts that it would be a mistake to equate prezhivanie with only “emotional attitude” to the external because inasmuch as it involves emotions, it correspondingly entails cognition/intellect, memory as well as volition. They all form a “complex nexus of psychological processes” (*Ibid*.). In this way, this paradoxical act becomes developmental as it involves dual effect: thinking (cognition) and doing (activity) (Golombek, Olszewska and Coady, 2022). Interestingly, Cong-Lem (2021:7) also reminds that although emotions can be temporary, they are qualitatively different able to impact psychological and personality development.

Irrespective of its multifaced and multidimensional nature, there is no doubt that *prezhivanie* participates activelyin the process of meaning making out of the external, turning it into a uniquely subjective experience. However, most of all, it should not be overlooked that it also comprises dialectical thinking, part of which are contradictions and, by implication, regressions. An example of this is eight-year old Grace’s *perezhivanie* of an L2 situation in Swain et al. (2015) when she initially withdraws by feeling laughed at and embarrassed, yet is able later to overcome it to move forward. This was echoed in Kim’s (2021) study. Referring to Blunden (2016: 276), McNamara (2022) argues when in catharises a “moment of especial clarity” appears, and a new beginning arises. Essentially, seeming regressions appear to have both a dialectical and transitive, yet impactful, character that could also be seen as, inter alia, an early indicator of potentially cathartic regressions.

It is also noteworthy here that the fragmentation of what was formed at former phases (Vygotsky1998: 192) can also be associated with the cathartic aspect of regressions and the negative aspects of the crisis. When “higher unity” disintegrates due to a regressive move (Vygotsky, 1998: 140), the so-called “primitive” or non-mediated response, one of which is an affective discharge, may occur (Kozulin 1990: 216). Vygotsky (1998: 295) emphasises that in crisis, for example, the child from being “obedient and affectionate” can unexpectedly become “capricious, bad and stubborn.” More importantly, as Vygotsky argues (1998: 194) if the negative or regressive aspects of the crisis are dealt with “sluggishly,” this can result in a severe hindrance to the development of affect and volition.

Interestingly enough, primitive responses are not viewed by Vygotsky (1993: 258) as unique personality specifics such as handwriting but rather as characteristics common for all personality types (Kozulin 1990a: 216). More importantly, he considers them as part of both normal and abnormal development with this difference: that the former is only momentary as opposed to the latter since it loses temporarily a “place in the psychological response hierarchy” (*Ibid*.). In this case, the distinction between the will and affect is essential since in ‘primitive’ thinking “the will and affect are identical” (Vygotsky, 1998: 125). The above appear to stand in close relation to varying types of regressive movements that may also occur during SLD. This requires further research.

That being the case, the purpose in recognising and classifying regressive moves can also contribute to the identification of locus of control. For example, Vygotsky (1987: 337) recognises that “[w]hat is disordered in this system in not the intellectual or emotional processes themselves, but their relationship”. This is extremely important when identifying potential causes of regressive responses. Conversely, this process could equally be assisted by helping L2 learners also face challenges, see, hope, and become the initiator of self-change (Chaiklin 2003; Robbins 2007; Lantolf 2021), whilst the teacher could provide appropriate provision and support. For this, however, to happen, exempli gratia, a motivational dialogue (Lantolf, 2021) might assist the transitional process. As suggested by Vygotsky (1987: 353). “Through a transformation, the true volitional process emerges on the foundation of affective action.” In this sense, regressive upheavals should be catharised so that the positive content could emerge.

**6. L2 Regressive-dialectical personality developmental trajectories**

Another important point to consider in relation to regressions is their influence on the formation of L2 personality during the living process of development. In this regard, the idea of L2 personality aims in this paper to not only argue that Vygotsky’s (1997b; 1999) view of inseparability of affect and intellect (Robbins 2007; Smagorinsky 2011, 2021; Lantolf and Swain 2020) closely corresponds to it but above all the dialectical relationships across varying forces. Considering that contrasting variables are not regarded as separate but as everchanging and interweaving entities (Vygotsky 1999), it may be argued that dialectical and holistic synthetical-dialectical systems are formed. They are also present in the living process of SLD. In this way, L2 regressive-dialectical L2 personality may be created.

According to Vygotsky (1999: 244), when “emotions appear in new relations with other elements of mental life, new systems develop, new alloys of mental functions.” As a matter of fact, a dialectical personality constitutes “the higher synthesis of the higher psychic functions” (Teixeira, 2022). Correspondingly, Maidansky (2021: 260) expresses this notion as a “systemic” unity. It is because an individual comprises systems and not merely functions and thereby “[s]ystems are the key to the person” (Vygotsky, 2018:141, cited in Zavershneva and Veer, 2018). Likewise, Teixeira (2022) depicts personality as “the unit capable of dialectically integrating all the functions of human consciousness.”

Within this framework, it can be suggested that the L2 learner is “an integral and active *psychophysical* being” driven by *both* bodily and spiritual needs, not either or (Yaroskevsky 1999: 264, italics mine). Ergo, once a particular psychological construct (Vygotsky, 1987; Veresov and Fleer, 2016; Dafermos, 2018; Veresov 2020a, 2020b) or “affective charge” is acquired, active systems of meaning (Yaroskevsky 1999: 266) emerge. In this way, lived through the eyes of *perezhivanie*, discussed earlier, a particular situation becomes for the L2 learner at the same time a “drama of a personality” (Veresov, 2020b: 182). This can also mean that dialectical entities probably entail a regression-transition shift/traversal and as such regressions may constitute its integral component. This suggests that their effect may often be manifested in *“the unity of the cognitive and the affective-motivational in the activity of personality”* (Yaroshevsky 1999: 265). These dialectical-regressive interactions, similar to chemical interactions, interweave to contribute to the dramatical formation of L2 dialectic personality development.

Although in Vygotsky’s (1998, 1999) view, external and internal worlds are inter-connected, clashes between the two are unavoidable. As discussed earlier, it is likely that a consequent disturbance or dissonance caused by them in seemingly harmonious lines of development can provoke a regressive response. Moreover, the unpredictability and irregularity of conflicts increase the likelihood of the regressive effect on the construction of personality, like L2 developmental character. It is also worth remembering in relation to regressions that stable periods tend to be punctuated by the periods of crisis abruptly and unexpectedly (Versov and Kellogg, 2019). This situation is likely to generate fluctuating and unpredictable regressive reactions to critical phenomenon.

Commenting on Vygotsky, Dafermos (2018: 178-9) asserts that the volatility can lead to dissimilar pathways at each developmental stage and possible U-turns in a personality formation. This view is also supported by Veresov (2020b: 183) who compares these impactful moments to “the turning points of the development of identity”. In contrast, Teixeira (2022: 3l emphasis in original) uses the term “contradictory synthesis of multiple social determinations – the *dialectic of the human*”. For Roth (2017: 372), it is a “dialectical turnover”. Interestingly, Alnajjar and Elhammoumi (2017: 96) evoke that contradictions do not necessarily terminate in “equilibrium” but, on the contrary, can instead provoke other contradictions. As characterised by Dafermos (2022: 7), a crisis is a “moment of a dialectical account” within which such contradictory forces meet as progression and regression meet. As such, it seems, not only inseparate variables, for example, but cognitive, social, affective, are influenced differently but proportionately in diverse proportions and intensity at each stage. More significantly, in essence, this can also suggest that the regression-transition effect may be *both* dramatic and dialectical in its nature. By doing so the L2 development is not merely affected holistically but also is gradually transformed, resulting in diverse developmental paths. Furthermore, since it is a living, not ‘dead’, process of development, changes are ongoing and dynamic.

Rooted in dramatic forms of development, regressions thus appear to contribute to various dialectical trajectories. This recalls “a dialectical and complex process of struggle between man and the world, and within man” (Vygotsky 1997c: 53). However, it is important to emphasise that “crises actually have an internal source and consist in changes of an internal nature” (Vygotsky 1998: 296). Interestingly, Veresoc and Kellogg (2019: 154) notice that “there are even critical moments where the influence of the child on the social situation almost seems to outweigh the influence of the environment on the child.” Hence, the stages of development are governed by their own pace (Roth, 2017; Dafermos, 2018).

On the other hand, this is not the culmination of the process but one step of many towards “the reforging of men” (Vygotsky (1997c: 347) in which development and education merge. According to Roth (2016: ix), Vygotsky’s interest was directed more towards the analysis of psyche rather than just mind alone. With this in mind, L2 personality can also be perceived as a dialectical synthesis of various dramatic and critical regressive-transitive movements. In this sense, the potential role of regressions is not neutral for SLD, especially if the concept of drama is considered, and as such there may also be unique L2 trajectories.

In this regard, it is vital to note that in compliance with Vygotsky’s (Zavershneva and Veer, 2018: 395) conceptualisation, character “emerges from a struggle” and therefore is individual at its core. For the same reason, drama constitutes a fundamental component in understanding L2 dialectical personality which appears to simultaneously reveal the connections between the external and internal interactions in the living process of SLD. This further signifies that both the individual and collective variables meet in a L2 dialectical personality. All in all, it is about the “individualization of the social”, not vice versa as captured by Roth (2016: x). This fact tends to be overlooked. Hitherto, the two should not be viewed as one unit and not separate forces (Minick, 2017). Because of this, L2 dialectical personality together with its regressive characteristics should not be viewed from a dualistic perspective but from the “social-individual” or “individual-social” continuum (Veresov, 2016: 244). Vygotsky (1984c, p.380, cited in Minick, 2017: 52; emphasis mine) writes specifically in relation to personality and environment:

It is incorrect to represent the two as external forces acting on one another. In the attempt to study the unity, the two are *initially torn apart*. The *attempt* is then made to *unite them*.

This can also be taken to indicate that before a positively transformational regression-transition shift to a “higher form of intellectual capacity”, negative symptoms are likely to follow (Vygotsky, 1998: 194). As depicted by Defarmos (2022: 8), “‘dark’ and negative sides of human life may be transformed into their opposites”. However, it is in “overcoming social dramatic collisions (the drama of life), a human being creates his or her unique architecture of personality” (Veresov and Fleer, 2016: 334).

Essentially, Mahn (2018: 62) argues, critical moments uncover neoformations with “different relations and interconnections in the internal thinking/languaging and learning systems.” According to Roth (2017), neoformations involve equally psychological and social changes that impact the individual’s consciousness. Likewise, Verseov (2021: 745-6) the analysis should be placed on a “qualitatively different dialectical unity, not a simple “arithmetic” sum of components”. This may also be taken to suggest that ongoing and new dialectical personality forms may be constructed in varying relations to L2 and other variables in varying ratios and intensities (Raszkowska, 2021) to form unique dialectically-regressive entities.

For example, as revealed in Igorevna and Vyacheslavovich’s (2021) psychodiagnostics research, the formations of secondary linguistic psychological personality are “beyond the limits of speech behavior, [or] speech activity.” Due to psychological connotations, individual neoformations in the personality cause profound changes across such aspects as communication, individuality, motivation or openness to others. This became especially evident in learners for whom SLD was an intensive and integral process. Equally, Versov and Kellogg (2019: 155) confirm that psychological load is able to impact the alterations both in the brain and the nervous system. [[[This is echoed in empirical and theoretical studies of Leontiev, Lebedeva and Kostenko, (2017), Leonova (2019), Taheri et al. (2019), Huh and Kim (2021) or Cong-Lem (2022). ]]]

Specifically, one of the findings reported by Taheri et al. (2019) on a group of 188 Iranian ELF university students was the close correlation between either positive or negative emotions and their impact on the learners’ performing and thinking patterns. It would be interesting to see further research on their relation to regressive reactions. Stressing the importance of utilising psychological capitals in overcoming educational crises in educational settings, Leonova’s (2019) research into 383 students aged between 7 and 18 years old revealed substantial correspondence between the two. This may also be taken as an indicator of regressive movements during these processes that require deeper attention.

Using the concept of perezhivanie as an analytical tool and a grounded theory approach, Kim’s (2021) qualitative empirical study of retrospective autoethnographic L2 learners’ essays also unwrapped the existence of negative experiences and the criticality of positive appraisal in forming “L2 selves”. In another study, L2 identity was placed at the heart of Huh and Kim’s (2021: 161) research into the perezhivanie seen as a “psychological prism” of two female graduates from a non-academic peripheral community college. This echoed the existence of inner conflicts and emotional struggles which impacted their L2 identities differently, resulting in two different pathways.

Arguing that research should also consider a holistic view of both cognition and emotions, Cong-Lem’s (2022) content analysis of Vygotsky’s nominal writings relevant to affect re-emphasise the close corelation between emotion and psychological processes revealing their qualitatively different dimensions standing in relation to evolutional, neurophysiological and sociocultural living contexts. The study demonstrates that this complex notion “remains unsatisfactorily explained until today” (Ibid.,p13). These studies seem to indicate that there are still unexplored aspects of developmental processes, one of which seems to be dialectically driven regressions impacting L2 pathways. It may be conceded after Veresov (2021: 746) that there is a necessity for concrete researchers to “go far beyond the traditional studying of the content of learning.”

**7. CONCLUSION**

In general, this limited in scope study has endeavoured to advance the theoretical aspects of regressions, far from intending to refute the sociocultural premises. On the contrary, in analysing the previous literature and bringing this analysis to SLD, it was hoped to untap other dimensions to this neglected Vygotskian concept in an attempt to contribute to the body of knowledge in the field. The analysis indicates that regressions do not merely point to the asymmetricity of SLD but to their complex dialectical nature rooted in the synthesis of the contraries and this builds in regressive movements which paradoxically become part of multi-layered transformations of a linguistic and psychological character.

The importance of this cannot be stressed enough in relation to the living processes of SLD since reversals appear to not only be part of dialectically dramatic dissolutions and crises but instantaneously become a hallmark for manifold various types of regressive shifts, including cathartic regressions as well as L2 regressive-dialectical personality development. This dramatic-dialectical character of regressions fuses an array of variables such as linguistic, affective, cognitive or social in varying degrees and intensities. Subsequently, the SSD, *prezhivanie* (emotional experience) and cognitive processes become active parts of the process.

In turn, the variability of dialectic regressive moves may indicate the fluctuating and diverse trajectories of SLD that can also be seen as the individual-social-cognitive-affective facet to SLD.

Applying thus the idea of living regressions to SLD, the study also revealed that there might be a degenerative-regenerative nature of regressions with their variations. Therefore, the need to acknowledge their dramatic-dialectical and degenerative-regenerative character should not be exclusively based on a deficient or purely linguistic view of development but rather a regenerative, dialectical and psycho-pedagogical perspective. This approach is hoped to possibly open up new ways of their interpretations in addition to devising appropriate educational support so that the living character of regressions is not mistakenly taken for dead-end regressions. As Vygotsky (1993: 258) argued, the understanding of disintegration is necessary to the understanding of development and vice versa. It is because regressions can mean that “the whole system of personal consciousness disintegrates” (Vygotsky, 1998: 140).

Considering, however, that the scope of this research was limited to a number of selected studies since a narrative review was adopted, decisions would have had to be made on what to include and what to leave out. By and large, more questions than answers have been posed in this paper in the quest for further empirical and theoretical investigation in this area to better understand this imperative aspect of SLD. It is hope that future research will be able to uncover beauty for ashes in this so often negatively burdened and rejected concept, yet unavoidable, so that regenerative periods within regressions are not taken for deficiency.