

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to investigate the role and influence of teacher - learner interactions from a sociocultural perspective. The interactions involved three discussion sessions between Thai learners of English and an English native speaker/tutor over the learners' ill-formed verb structures found in oral task performances. The tasks involved producing oral narratives derived from picture stories.

The first chapter in this study begins with an overview of language teaching methods in modern times and the influences that inspired them. A discussion of earlier eras and methods in language teaching sets the table for the arrival of the main course of this study, sociocultural factors in language learning and teaching. This term along with other key terminology is explained following this historical overview. A rationale for the study is then provided, followed by the aims of the study and a list of the research questions. This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the study is significant to language teaching, language learning, the evaluation of evidence in sociocultural studies, and applying appropriate epistemological paradigms to the field of TESOL, especially in regards to sociocultural issues.

Historical Overview of Language Teaching in Contemporary Times

The history of language teaching in the past century can be divided into three main periods involving three separate, but occasionally overlapping, language teaching methods. These methods are described in the following pages in this chapter as *language-centered*, *learner-centered*, and *learning-centered* (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, pp.90 - 92). All three of these methods were influenced by developments in linguistics, psycholinguistics, psychology, pedagogical studies, and events in society. Where appropriate, these influences are delineated in the following pages.

Language teaching was dominated by language-centered methods of teaching for the first half of the 20th century. Methods such as audiolingualism were pre-occupied with the structural system of a target language. Teachers employing them pre-selected and pre-sequenced “linguistic structures (for) form focused exercises in class, assuming that a pre-occupation with form will lead to a mastery of the target language” (ibid., p. 90). An early inspiration for methods such as audiolingualism was the structural school of linguistics which developed in the 1930’s in which “the grammar of a language is described in terms of syntagmatic structures which carry the fundamental propositions (statement, interrogative, negative, imperative, etc.) and notions (time, number, gender, etc.)” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 25).

A sea change in the understanding of what language is and how it works began in the late 1950’s with Noam Chomsky’s publication of “Syntactic Structures” (Chomsky, 1957). Chomsky argued that structuralism “only described the surface structure of the language” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p.25) and failed to account for how speakers of

languages understand meaning differences of separate strings of language which carried the same superficial structure. Take these two sample sentences in English (ibid. p. 26).

John is easy to please

John is eager to please

In the first example, 'John' is the receiver of the action and in the second he is the agent, but such distinctions cannot be gleaned from a simple structural description of the sentences. To handle such distinctions, Chomsky posited two levels of language – a surface structure and a deep structure. The deep structure contained the implicit rules of a language. These rules are not to be confused with prescriptive rules (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2003, pp.15-17) of grammar; they are what speakers of a language tacitly know about their language and language in general. From this tacit grammar, sourced in the mind of the speaker, the surface strings of language can be generated.

The Chomskian revolution in linguistics was a break from the structural school as well as a rejection of behaviorism in psychology. "Language is not a habit structure," Chomsky wrote (cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.65). Perhaps not coincidentally, the broader field of psychology, of which linguistics is sometimes considered a branch, was undergoing something of a revolution itself during this period. B.F. Skinner, the foremost behaviorist in contemporary times, was criticized for assuming that the mind was a tabula rasa or blank slate (Hall & Lindzey, 1985, p. 485). Additionally, given the greater complexity of the human brain to the brains of other organisms, such as rats or pigeons, critics argued that the results of behavioristic experiments could not be extrapolated to human beings (ibid.). Humanistic psychology, developing in the 1960s,

echoed these criticisms, stating that behaviorism “focused exclusively on the objective observation of overt behavior” (Schultz & Schultz, 2005, p. 305). For Chomskian linguistics, this exclusive focus on overt behavior corresponds to attention to surface structure alone. These criticisms, along with the explosive social revolution of the 1960s, were influential in, or correlational to, shifting language teaching away from language-centered methods towards learner-centered methods.

Learner-centered methods are “principally concerned with learner wants, needs, and situations” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006 p.91). This mirrors the humanistic developments in psychology in the 1960s, which shifted focus from behavior to human needs (Schultz & Schultz, 2005 p.312). Moreover, under learner-centered methods, meaning is given as much emphasis as form (Kumaravadivelu, 2006 p. 91), a nod to the Chomskian criticism that language is not merely a set of overt structures, formed from habit, but a mentalistic enterprise which entails “ a relationship between meaning and form” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987 p.27). It followed from these premises that language-centered techniques such as habit inducing, heavy drilling would then be eliminated or marginalized under learner-centered methods of teaching. Nevertheless, learner-centered methods retained elements of language-centered methods. While “meaning-focused” (ibid.) activities were highlighted, linguistic structures were still “pre-selected” and “presquenced” (ibid.) in learner-centered methods. Therefore, the break from language-centered methods was only partial, as learner-centered methods merely added communicative “notions and functions” (ibid.) to the pre-selected and pre-sequenced syllabus of structures.

A popular method or approach (the terms ‘method’ and ‘approach’ have sometimes been used interchangeably) that developed out of this period was

Communicative Language Teaching. No single authority exists on the definition of CLT but Richards and Rodgers (2001) state that it is an “approach that aims to (a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication” (p.155). This definition falls neatly under the wider umbrella of learner-centered methods which sought to balance the teaching of notions/functions with the teaching of pre-selected grammatical items.

From the late 1960s spanning to the late 1980s, some researchers in psycholinguistics began to theorize and/or provide evidence that linguistic features are largely to entirely learned incidentally (Corder, Dulay & Burt, Felix, 1981, Krashen, Wode, 1981, cited by Long & Robinson, 1998, p.18). Krashen (1988) went so far as to claim that error correction was “not relevant” (p.1) and added that second language acquisition was “very similar to the processes children use in acquiring first and second language” (ibid.). Evidence in psycholinguistic research during these periods and bold claims such as Krashen’s helped to usher in learning-centered methods of teaching where attention to meaning in language teaching and learning became the central to the exclusive focus of teaching. Kumaravadivelu (2006) states that “these methods seek to provide opportunities for learners to participate in open-ended meaningful interaction through problem-solving tasks in class, assuming that a pre-occupation with meaning-making will ultimately lead to target language mastery” (p.91).

Krashen and Terrell’s “The Natural Approach” (1983) was a typical example that emerged out of this period. A unit (ibid. p.69) in a Natural Approach syllabus would look something like this:

(Unit) VII. Eating

TOPICS

1. Food
2. Beverages

SITUATIONS

1. Ordering a meal in a restaurant
2. Shopping in a supermarket
3. Preparing food from recipes

The contrast between the Natural Approach and methods discussed previously is stark. No grammatical elements have been pre-selected here. Furthermore, Krashen claims that the only valid role for grammar learning involves the learner's extremely limited use of a Monitor (p.30), a metaphor to describe self-conscious processes to self-repair ill-formed utterances. However, with the attention focused primarily on meaning and functions, it could be argued that the natural approach is still very much a form of communicative language teaching. Krashen himself includes it in a list of other communicative approaches (p. 17).

The natural approach represented the extreme right end of the form to meaning continuum. A later development in learning-centered methods that could be plotted slightly more towards the middle of that line is referred to as Task-Based Learning. Tasks have been defined differently by multiple researchers. Ellis (2003, p.16) summarized these definitions thusly:

A task is a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed. To this end, it requires them to give primary attention to meaning and to make use of their own linguistic resources, although the design of the task may predispose them to choose particular forms.

Notice that while meaning under this definition is still given primacy, form is catered to if it is necessary to carry out the “correct or appropriate propositional content.” Perhaps differences between the degree that form is attended to under the Natural Approach and under task-based language teaching in actual classroom settings will be up to differing teacher interpretations of these approaches and methods.

Task-based language teaching also shares similar features with CLT. However, the crucial difference between attention to form under CLT and TBLT, at least in theory, is that while the former pre-selects linguistic items to attend to and match to meaningful content, the latter allows the linguistic items to emerge from the learners themselves in the performance of the tasks (Kumaravadelu, 2006, p. 93). Another key difference between TBLT and CLT is that the former took much inspiration from research in psycholinguistic studies which investigated the importance of interaction to acquisition. This role will be further explained and elaborated in the rationale.

In concluding this discussion of the methods era, a word of caution is warranted. The preceding descriptions are of the methods, not what teachers actually do with the methods. Moreover, there is overlap between these methods, “particularly during the transitional time when dissatisfaction with one method yields slowly to the evolution of

another” (ibid.). Additionally, some of this overlap is due to the fact that uniform definitions of terms do not exist so that a method or approach such as CLT, depending on how it is interpreted, can be said to bridge two or more of these method eras. In summary, the history of language teaching in the past century has been shown to fall under three broad categories of methods. Trends and research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, and psychology, along with wider events in society, all had influence on the development of the various language teaching methods described above. These methods and their influences, are relevant here in that issues and criticism that arose in these methods, fields of study, and events in society led to the research areas described in this study. In the next section, an overview of key terms utilized in the study will be provided, followed by a rationale, explaining in further detail these research areas and their relevance to the investigation undertaken here.

Overview of Key Terms and Areas of Research

This section begins by defining some key terminology and research areas relevant to the study. These terms and areas of research will be further elaborated in chapters two through five. The areas of research preceding the description of sociocultural terminology include *interaction* and *focus on form* studies. The central focus of this study involves the use of the term *sociocultural*. The other key terms comprise the building blocks of the sociocultural perspective. These terms are as follows: *scaffolding*, *collaborative dialogue*, *zone of proximal development*, *self-regulation*, *internalization*, *microgenesis*, *macrogenesis*, and *role relationships*. These terms are explicated below while chapter two reviews significant research undertaken in these areas.

Interaction Studies refers to the body of work inspired by Long's evolving Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1983, 1995, 1996, cited in Mackey, 1999, p.558). This hypothesis asserts the role interaction between interlocutors (one usually more capable than the other) plays in acquisition of a second language. When comprehension breaks down in dialogue between two or more parties, the parties must negotiate in order to clear up the problem. Comprehension breaks down when either the meaning of an utterance is misunderstood or the form of the utterance is ill-formed or misheard. Long's hypothesis asserts that this interactive and negotiative process is essential to second language acquisition.

Focus on Form represents one path interaction studies can take. It is somewhat of a misnomer, however, as it suggests a regression back to language-centered methods of learning and teaching, where linguistic items are pre-selected and pre-sequenced and meaning is shelved in favor of focusing on the language system. However, Focus on Form as conceived by Long (1998) retains the task-based focus on meaning first while attention to form arises incidentally in the process of performing tasks. "Focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and/or one or more students – triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23).

Interaction Studies and Focus on Form research inspired co-evolving elements of TBLT. They are discussed here as they are components of the sociocultural paradigm. Additionally, they bridge the gap between learning-centered methods discussed previously and the sociocultural paradigm.

The term *sociocultural* as it is used in second language teaching and learning, has its roots in the theories of Lev Vygotsky (1978), a Russian psychologist and linguist. It was Vygotsky's contention that the mind was mediated, that concepts were not developed in the individual mind but through the cultural tools of social interaction (Lantolf, 2000,p.1). One powerful tool of culture is language. Other cultural tools are language related: paralinguistic signs and symbols such as gesture, facial expression, and suprasegmental features such as vowel length, pitch, stress, and tone and volume of voice. In language learning, sociocultural influences then refer to the effect of sociocultural tools on language learning. Usually, the interlocutors in sociocultural studies consist of a mentor and learner or a more capable and less capable peer. It is the job of the mentor or more capable peer to mediate a learner's language development through interaction. One distinguishing feature of sociocultural approaches involves the mentor or more capable peer's finely-tuned *scaffolding* of a learner's language level.

Scaffolding refers to the kinds and amount of help the teacher or more capable peer offers to the learner. An example of scaffolding in focus on form studies is 'recasting', where a learner's ill-formed utterance is repeated but in a correct form by the teacher or more capable peer. However, scaffolding in sociocultural studies involves applying help that is graduated or finely-tuned to the learner's needs as determined by the teacher or more capable peer. In this case, scaffolding help usually moves from the implicit to the explicit, or vice versa depending on whether more precise help is needed or not.

Scaffolding as both metaphor and practice has not gone without criticism as some researchers have argued that "dialogic mediation needs to be viewed as an 'activity' that

is jointly constructed by the participants involved and not as some kind of apparatus that one of the participants applies to conversation” (Ellis, 2003, p.182). Likewise, in a recent critical appraisal of scaffolding, Lantolf & Thorne (2006) state that the metaphor has traditionally conjured up images where “control and power resides primarily with the teacher or expert until such a time as the learner is capable of accepting responsibility for the task or competency at hand” (p.274). Swain (2000, p.97) has suggested that a more apt metaphor to describe dialogic processes is *collaborative dialogue* as it more accurately captures the bidirectional contributions of both partners than scaffolding does. Considering these criticisms, and where appropriate to this study, the term ‘collaborative dialogue’ will be substituted for the term ‘scaffolding.’ However, in appropriate occasions, scaffolding will be retained as a metaphor in this study, as research inspired by the term provides a building block of the sociocultural research discussed and undertaken here. Secondly, scaffolding need not be the exclusive province of the teacher as it can occur bidirectionally as well. In any case, to decide on the precise form of scaffolding, the teacher or dialogue partner must meet the learner or partner in a point along the learning path appropriate to the learner’s needs. This area has been described in the literature as the *zone of proximal development*.

The *zone of proximal development* is defined as “The distance between the actual development 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” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In language learning, the independent problem solving stage starts when the tutor or dialogue partner lets the learner or partner try to notice and correct his or her own errors without intervention.

After this stage, the tutor or dialogue partner applies scaffolding clues, gradually less or more subtle, until the learner or partner is able to notice his or her errors. If the learner is gradually able to notice and correct errors without intervention, or with gradually more subtle intervention, the learner is on his or her way to *self-regulation*.

Self-regulation is “reliance on the self” (Aljaahfreh & Lantolf, 1994, p. 470) and “movement away from reliance on the tutor” (ibid.). Aljaahfreh and Lantolf designed a tool to measure self-regulation in more precise terms. This tool was also adopted for data analysis in this study. It is a five point scale that describes where the learner is situated according to his or her level of self-regulation, 5 being the level at which full self-regulation is attained. This scale is provided below.

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| <p>Level 1. The learner is unable to notice, or correct the error, even with intervention.</p> <p>Level 2. The learner is able to notice the error but cannot correct it, even with intervention, requiring explicit help.</p> <p>Level 3. The learner is able to notice and correct an error, but only with assistance. The learner understands assistance and is able to incorporate feedback offered.</p> <p>Level 4. The learner notices and corrects an error with minimal or no obvious feedback, and begins to assume full responsibility for error correction. However, the structure is not yet fully internalized, since the learner often produces the target form incorrectly. The learner may even reject feedback when it is unsolicited.</p> <p>Level 5. The learner becomes more consistent in using the target structure correctly in all contexts. The learner is fully able to notice and correct his or her own errors without intervention.</p> |
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Figure 1. Regulatory Scale (Aljaahfreh & Lantolf, 1994).

Another term to describe this process and scale regulatory scale is *internalization*. The learner gradually internalizes, or takes ownership of, concepts that were put forward

in social interaction. Vygotsky (1978) claims that “every function in the child’s cultural development appears twice: first, on the social level, and later, on the individual level: first between people (interpsychological), and then inside the child (intrapsychological)” (p.57). For this reason, Ohta (2000) labeled this regulatory scale, “levels of internalization from interpsychological to intrapsychological functioning” (p.75). But this process is not merely behavioristic copying of mental concepts from one individual to another. According to Vygotsky (cited in Aljaahfreh & Lantolf, 1994) social, mediational engagement “transforms the process itself and changes its structure and function” (p.467).

Vygotsky labeled this transformative process as the “genetic law of cultural development” (ibid). Lantolf (2000), paraphrasing Vygotsky, states that “children appropriate and integrate mediational means, primarily language into their thinking activities as they mature”(p.3). This developmental process is not limited to the ontogenetic maturation of children to adults (Aljaahfreh and Lantolf, p.467) but is also observable in sudden or short time frames known as *microgenetic* movements. This latter concept is a salient feature in this study in that “it is in microgenesis that we will search for evidence on the interaction between error correction and L2 learning” (ibid.).

Finally, the concept of *role relationships* connects to the process of self-regulation as how speakers position themselves in relationship to each other in dialogic processes is likely to have influence on progress towards self-regulation. Storch (cited in Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005) identifies “four distinct role relationships: collaborative, dominant/dominant, dominant/passive, and expert/novice” (p.239) and these are further distinguished by “two indexes: equality and mutuality. Equality refers to the degree of

control or authority over the task, and mutuality refers to level of engagement with each other's contribution" (ibid.).

Other key terminology in this study involves issues that are chiefly discussed in methodology and results. Nevertheless, it is important to explain these terms early on as they are peppered into various parts of the study.

As mentioned, the interactions between the learners and the tutor involved discussion of the learners' *ill-formed verb structures*. *Verb structures* in this study are counted as whole verbs or whole verbs within verb phrases. So, the phrase "was sitting" would be counted as having two verb structures – "was" and "sitting." When a verb structure is *ill-formed* it is a form not used in standard English. This contrasts to *well-formed* structures where the form of the verb is used in standard English. The common word 'error' is sometimes substituted in this study for 'ill-formed' for shorthand purposes and 'correct' is sometimes substituted for 'well-formed' for the same reason. Another term used to describe verbs in this study is *verb context*. A verb context is where a verb appears or should appear (for example a place where a learner left out a verb is a verb context). When a learner is missing a verb in a context where it should appear this is also referred to as ill-formed. These ill-formed structures were *negotiated* between the tutor and the learner in this study. Negotiation means the tutor attempts to *assist* the learner to find her error. An assist is a kind of help or a scaffold. The tutor attempts to assist the learner to find the *target* structure or well-formed structure the tutor deems is appropriate. These negotiation *sessions* consist of *episodes* of discussions between the learner and the tutor over ill-formed structures. One episode is one exchange over one particular ill-formed structure. Each session involves the negotiation of all the episodes of one *story*

telling. *Story-tellings* or *narratives* are also referred to as *performances* and these terms describe the learner telling a story based on the picture stories presented to her. *Task performances* can be either a story-telling or an opportunity for the learner to *self-correct* her ill-formed verb structures in writing, while examining a transcript of her story-telling. Self-correction is the same as learner correction, with no intervention from the tutor.

This concludes the overview of key terms and research areas. This overview is vital to understanding the later sections of this study, including the next section, the rationale.

Rationale for the Study

This is a study of tutor learner interactions from a sociocultural perspective. The interactions here involved the negotiation of form, specifically the learners' verb errors. One reason to focus on form is that some research has indicated that without intervention "some linguistic features do not ultimately develop to target like levels" (Harley, Harley & Swain, Vignola & Wesche, cited in Doughty and Williams, 1998, p. 2). The studies by Harley and Swain in particular found that immersion educated children continued to make numerous grammatical errors in speaking and writing, even after years of schooling in immersion programs (Skehan, 1998, p.12). Verb errors were chosen over lexical errors as lexical choices might not be repeated in subsequent tasks; however, verbs of the same structural pattern are likely to be repeated in repeat performances of tasks. Secondly, Thai verbs have no inflected forms (Smyth, 2001, p.350) so struggling with inflection in English is a special challenge for Thais.

In addition to the research issues, a language focus can be important to learners beyond merely helping them to attain target like structures. Some learners might feel a greater sense of self-esteem with an improvement in their accuracy; some might feel more comfortable, a greater sense of belonging to their target language culture, as they make gains in language accuracy and enrichment. Employment opportunities could improve as well, particularly for Thais who are seeking prestigious jobs in the cities (ibid., p.343). Finally, interlocutors will benefit by improved accuracy if their communicative ability was previously either weakened or lacking in nuance due to poor accuracy. Regardless of the reason, the fact that some learners value accuracy as much as meaning

should be enough to motivate teachers to bring a focus on language back into the communicative classroom.

A sociocultural perspective for focusing on form was chosen as it provides an alternative to the 'black box' cognitive model of earlier SLA research (Ellis, 2003, p. 175). The black box is a metaphor for the learner's mind or internal mechanisms of the mind (Ellis, 1994, p. 608). More specifically, it allegedly "contains the knowledge that results in processing linguistic input and then is assessed for output" (Ellis, 2003, p.175). Accordingly, early interaction studies viewed interaction simply "as a way of making input available to the black box" (ibid.). This metaphor and cognitive model had become so dominant in SLA research that for many people it was seen not as a theory but a fact (ibid.). Indeed the name of the field itself, second language 'acquisition' is governed by this computational model which undoubtedly helps to shape or influence research directions. However, despite the enormous influence of computational models there are at least tentative reasons to think outside the black box. Hymes and Gumperz (cited in Kramsch, 2002) demonstrated that "exquisite negotiation of meaning is necessary for successful communication in social contexts" (p. 1). Applied linguists such as Michael Breen and Chris Candlin have asserted that negotiation is essential to any sort of curriculum striving to be communicative. (ibid.). Watson-Gegeo (2004) asserts that "knowledge is situated" (p. 336). Sfaard (cited in Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000) elaborates to suggest that acquisition involves not just the mastery of linguistic items but a process of "becoming a member of a community" (p.155) entailing being able "to communicate in the language of the community and participate in its norms" (ibid.) as the language system will inevitably need some form of social interaction to be made manifest. This is

not to suggest that a computational module, as one aspect of language learning, is now obsolete. But there is a good argument that it is either not complete, needs tweaking, or possibly reshaping in order to capture the real world events of language learners. These real world events include the sociocultural influences that contribute to or possibly govern their language learning experiences.

Aims of the Study

In response to these findings and criticisms, this study investigates teacher - student interaction and focus on form from a sociocultural perspective. Its purpose is to explore sociocultural aspects and effects of a meaning based activity and focus on form approach to teaching and learning. More specifically, the study will examine the scaffolding help provided by the tutor, the responses the learners made in reaction to this help, and the plausible reasons that explain tutor and learner choices. *The study's main purpose is to explore the possible sociocultural reasons the learners progressed or regressed in their learning.* The other questions asked in the study mainly supply quantifying information in support of this question. These aims are restated below as research questions.

Research Questions

- 1 To what extent do learners modify their ill-formed verb structures in repeat task performances, having participated in collaborative dialog?

- 2 To what extent do learners move towards self-regulation in noticing and correcting ill-formed verb structures in repeat task performances?
- 3 To what extent is self-regulation of well-formed verb structures maintained after a delay in task performances of one month?
- 4 What plausible sociocultural reasons can be found to explain the extent to which learners move towards self-regulation?

Significance of the Study

Information gleaned from this study could be helpful to teachers, learners, and researchers of language learning and teaching. Teachers can gain insights into where and what kinds of scaffolding are effective or ineffective for learners. They can extract valuable information about the process of attempting to fine-tune help to a learner's needs. They can raise their awareness of how learners react, both in expected and unexpected ways, to such attempts, due to their own unique sociocultural schema. Such reactions reveal that learners are not empty receptacles but active participants who initiate their own moves, and collaborate with the teacher for mutually satisfactory results. Indeed, they will see how vital a sociocultural perspective is to language teaching and learning, concluding that teaching and learning involve more than the cognitive models provided by theorists such as Krashen (1987). Finally, teachers can read this study as an examination of reflective teaching, as an illumination of an interactive engagement between a tutor and a learner, which in turn could raise their own awareness of how they interact with their own learners in the classroom.

Learners in turn, can discover rich information about the language learning process, of how the specific interactions between the tutor and the learner can be helpful or not to learning. Studies such as these can help learners raise their meta-cognitive awareness, which in turn can help to guide learners in beneficial language learning strategies.

For the researcher, this study should provide another window into a sociocultural perspective of teacher - student interaction. Following this study, they should feel they have been given some extra evidence and tools from which to build their own research. Quantitative data is one example of the evidence but the bulk of the data is qualitative – essentially these are case studies; they tell stories that “explain the reasons for a problem, the background of a situation, what happened, and why” (Merriam, 1998, p.31). Considering this key feature, an appropriate paradigm for evaluating the evidence can be drawn from jurisprudence. In law, “a case is a short story of an incident in which the state acted or may act to settle a dispute” (Burton, 1985, p. 11). This use of the term ‘short story’ “emphasizes that the case has a beginning, a middle, and an end and the story as we can know it is incomplete” (ibid.). An open-ended aspect allows for new information to arise in the ongoing process of telling or analyzing the story as well as in future cases that might shed more light on the issue. Similarly, the case studies presented in this study are incomplete stories – they provide pieces of evidence to the ongoing story of sociocultural perspectives provided elsewhere in the past as well as the larger bulk of evidence that is to come in future studies.

Continuing within the jurisprudence framework, an appropriate metaphor for evaluating the validity of the evidence provided here would be the concept of ‘burden of

proof' where the evidence points more strongly to "one party or the other as to a particular issue" (Mayers, 1963, p. 39). "That burden is to adduce, on that issue, a preponderance of the credible evidence" (ibid.). This is a more tentative procedure than the procedures and standards set for proof in the natural sciences where "certainty" (Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000, p.155) is expected. But in law, conclusions are merely expected to be plausible and lean more one way than another way. Likewise, in qualitative, social science research, conclusions are merely expected to be "plausible to most practitioners" (McBride & Schostack, 2005 p. 5) and in Pavlenko & Lantolf's (2000) words suggest not certain but likely conclusions.

The short story, case study, metaphor - as used in jurisprudence - mirrors how stories are used in case studies in education. Another reason for borrowing this framework from jurisprudence, rather than a model from the hard sciences, is that this study involves a number of variables that cannot all be adequately quantified. It deals with the stories of human beings in interaction which cannot be fully summarized in a set of numbers. Additionally, the very term sociocultural suggests that whatever claims to knowledge are being applied, they will "always be socially situated" (Watson-Gegeo, 2004, p. 336). Finally, following the lead of Thomas Kuhn (1962) paradigms in the sciences shift when anomalies in a theory or methodology are noticed leading to the search for new theories or methodologies to more adequately explain the evidence under study (Pajares, 2007 p. 8). In this case, we are not inventing a new paradigm to explain the relevance and validity of the evidence; we are merely borrowing a paradigm from another discipline, specifically from jurisprudence.

In summary, this study is a story of a tutor and learners in sociocultural interaction. The validity of the evidence gathered in this story is evaluated according to the framework established in jurisprudence, since the jurisprudence framework more accurately captures situated and contextualized variables than do experimental models in the natural sciences. This evidence involves both the product and the process of these interactions. The process resembles two partners learning to dance. These partners will sometimes make obvious and expected moves, supporting, collaborating, gaining in mutual understanding of how the dance is to unfold. But like other people learning to dance, there will be moments of confusion on both sides, as well as awkwardness, falls, regression in sense of confidence, or learning, and unexpected events. Sometimes the more knowledgeable partner will offer too much advice, confusing the more inexperienced partner. Sometimes more advice could have been helpful. Other times the amount of advice will appear satisfactory and the movements of the two parties will flow smoothly and progressively more graceful as the learner gains in confidence and autonomy. Evidence of learning will emerge, leading to opportunities for greater growth and new options for learning.