A Sociocultural Approach to Understanding Students' Interaction in Comprehending an English Text

Kyunghee Choi

(Hanyang Women's College)

Choi, Kyunghee. (2005). A sociocultural approach to understanding students' interaction in comprehending an English text. *English Teaching, 60*(4), 423-439.

The purpose of this study is to analyze role of questions used by a group of Korean university students to understand an English passage. The questions are used in collaborative interactions when they are engaged in a reading task. This paper views the use of questions within the framework of sociocultural theory, based primarily on Vygotskyan psychology. The questions are analyzed in terms of major sociocultural terms such as scaffolding, the zone of proximal development, intersubjectivity and interpsychological and intrapsychological planes. By discussing the role of questions in terms of major sociocultural concepts, the paper tries to suggest how such questions help students better understand the English text as they serve social and cognitive functions. The paper not only discusses some effects of using questions in negotiating meanings in understanding an English text but also suggests some limitations the use of questions may imply when they are used in student-student interactions where expertise lacks.

I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to analyze the roles of questions used by Korean university students engaged in collaborative interactions to understand an English text. The paper is based on the sociocultural viewpoint that the use of questions serves as social and cognitive functions in facilitating and promoting students' learning. The paper analyzes students' interactions to investigate and describe some of the social and cognitive functions of questions in a reading task within the framework of sociocultural theory, primarily based on the Vygotskyan psychology. The paper discusses four issues to understand the roles of questions used by university students to comprehend an English reading passage.

First, the questions are used as powerful and useful tools of semiotic mediation and, thus, provide the participants with scaffolding that enables them to accomplish the task that they

could not do alone (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Donato, 1994; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, 1991). However, it also shows that scaffolding does not always guarantee successful learning when there is not an enough discrepancy in expertise, and no one plays the role of an expert (Wells, 1999). The questions used by the students in my study induced scaffolding that helped them understand the text better. However, since the scaffolding was given by peers, lack of expertise resulted in failure in some interactions. Second, the zone of proximal development applies to all participants not just less skillful and knowledgeable learners. However, the zone of proximal development is not a fixed attribute of the learner. It can be and has to be explained in terms of task-specific dimension (Cole & Engeström, 1993; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wells, 1999). The use of questions induces scaffolding that in turn helps learners reach the ZPD. However, as the first issue discusses, when scaffolding is not appropriate enough, they are not able to reach the ZPD. The zone of proximal development can thus be scaffolding-specific. In addition, it can also be explained in terms of types and characteristics of tasks. In some tasks, students successfully achieve their goals, but in others, they can not. The ZPD is task-specific. Third, the use of questions establishes intersubjectivity that facilitates learning (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; Wertsch, 1985). However, it also suggests that failure of intersubjective agreement that further invites more questions brings about successful learning (Wells, 1999). Fourth, the participants move from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane (Ohta, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, 1991). After completing the interactive reading tasks, some of the learners, reaching the intrapsychological plane, can correctly understand and translate the clauses they could not in the pre-test. However, there are some that do not reach the intrapsychological plane in understanding certain clauses. The paper will discusse some of the assumptions for the failures.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

Strategic questions such as confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks and repetition have been studied by the researchers working on the Interaction Hypothesis (Ellis, 1999). Interactionist theories claim that the use of those devices in collaborative dialogues facilitates second language acquisition as they serve as tools for negotiation of meaning and thus for providing learners with comprehensible input (Ellis, 1999; Gass & Varonis, 1986; Long, 1996; Varonis & Gass, 1985). The researchers and practitioners working within the framework of sociocultural theory argue that the interactionist view is limited with its incomplete picture of learners' interaction (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; Ellis, 1999). Sociocultural theorists and practitioners suggest that, in order

to have a clearer and broader picture of learners' interaction, they need to investigate how learners use the semiotic mediation of language as a social and cognitive tool from the sociocultural perspective. This paper also assumes that a better understanding of the roles of the questions used by learners requires explanations in terms of the major concepts of sociocultural theory such as scaffolding, the zone of proximal development, intersubjectivity, and the interpsychological and intrapsychological planes.

Scaffolding is a support given by an expert such as a mother or a teacher to a novice such as a child or a student (Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; De Guerrero & Villamil, 1994; Donato, 1994; Lantolf, 2000; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, 1991). Sociocultural theory explains that scaffolding helps a novice accomplish a given task that he/she could not do alone. Recent studies have illustrated that a support can be given not only by an expert but also by peers (Donato, 1994). Peer collaboration is collective scaffolding that provides a support for one another. With scaffolding, learners learn certain linguistic forms and meanings that are beyond their current level of proficiency. Besides, scaffolding gives learners not only cognitive supports but also social and affective supports (Ellis, 1999). Wells (1999) who has been studying first language acquisition from the sociocultural perspective argues that when "there is no wide discrepancy in expertise, nor is either student taking on the role of designated teacher" (p. 250). He continues that "there is no deliberate intention to work towards handing over control of the task when the requisite strategies have been mastered" (p. 250). What Wells argues is that the metaphor of scaffolding tends to imply that there is "a deliberate intention to teach" (p. 250), but scaffolding in a collective activity is simply collaboration among peers. In this study, I want to illustrate that collaborative activities do not always give a support to each other where exists no real sense of expertise or no one taking the role of a teacher. The failure of learning can be attributed to a little discrepancy in expertise among the participants. It should be noted that scaffolding does not always guarantee successful learning.

The zone of proximal development is the area between the level of the current ability and the level of the potential ability, which can be reached by the learner with scaffolding (Adair-Hauck & Donato, 1994; Antón & DiCamilla, 1998; DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; Lantolf & Appel, 1994; Ohta, 2000; Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, 1991). As mentioned just above, my study shows that some students fail to understand the English text even though there is collective scaffolding. The failure can be attributed to the fact that the assistance is not given by an expert. If the scaffolding had been given by different people such as teachers or experts, they could have accomplished the task. In other words, the zone of proximal development can be determined by nature of scaffolding. It is scaffolding-specific. On the other hand, Ellis (1999) who has been studying ways to incorporate Interaction Hypothesis and Sociocultural Theory suggests three types of goals:

"(1) goals that the learner can meet without assistance; (2) goals that are completely beyond the learner even if given assistance and (3) goals that the learner can perform if he/she has access to mediational assistance" (p. 20). According to Ellis (1999), the ZPD refers to the area lying between the learner's actual development that can be accomplished by achieving the first goal and the potential level that can be reached by learners, achieving the third goal. Even though scaffolding is given, the learner can not successfully complete the task if the goal of the task falls in the second. It is due to the fact that the goal of the task they are dealing with is outside not only their current level of ability but also their potential ability. Wells (1999) also argues that the zone of proximal development "tends to be specific to the activities in which the participants are involved" (p. 249). In my study, some students that obtained relatively high scores in such a multiple-choice test as TOEFL reading test did not successfully accomplish the goal of reading assignment that requires a thorough understanding of the English text even with the scaffolding given by their peers. In comprehending the English passage, they could understand some sentences correctly with the help of the peers, but there were some sentences and clauses that they could not comprehend even with the scaffolding. The ZPD can thus be determined both by types of tasks and nature of scaffolding. This paper suggests that the ZPD is not only scaffolding-pecific but also task-specific.

Intersubjectivity is a shared perspective of the task in which learners are involved (Antón & DeCamilla, 1998; DiCamilla & Antón, 1997; Wells, 1995; Wertsch, 1985). According to Wertsch (1985), "intersubjectivity exists when interlocutors share some aspect of their situation definitions" (p. 159). In addition, he adds that this shared perspective may occur at several different levels, creating several different levels of intersubjectivity. He argues that during the early phase of child development intersubjectivity can not be established "at the level of verbal formulations and abstract definitions of the task" (p. 161). He goes on saying that communication depends on context-bound signs and is based on a minimal level of intersubjectivity. Wertsch (1985) argues that this communication provides the groundwork for the transition from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. Wells (1999) on the other hand argues that it is important to understand what makes learning possible is not the achievement of intersubjectivity but rather "the very recognition of a failure of intersubjective agreement, and a contesting of the alternatives" (p. 252). In my study, when some of the participants have a little agreement or discrepancy on what they are working on, they continue working harder to solve the problem, bringing a shared perspective and accomplishing the goal. This paper suggests that not only successful establishment of intersubjectivity helps communication and learning possible but also recognition of failure of intersubjectivity in initial stages of task performance can also boost better understanding and accomplishment of a task.

Sociocultural theorists view that there are two perspectives on an individual participation

in activity: they are social and cognitive perspectives (Vygotsky, 1978, 1981; Wells, 1999; Wertsch, 1980, 1985, 1999). According to Vgyotsky (1981), the development of higher mental functions first appears on the social and cultural plane and later moves onto the cognitive and individual plane through the process of internalization. The social and cultural plane refers to the interpsychological plane on which mental and psychological development occurs in interaction with others. The cognitive and individual plane is termed as the intrapsychological plane on which mental and psychological activities occur within individual selves. This transfer of functions and development occurs within the zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1981). In other words, reaching the zone of proximal development can be carried out with the help of others on the social and cultural plane. Once a certain mental activity is accomplished on the interpsychological plane, the child can now move onto the intrapsychological plane in doing at least the same or a similar activity. He/she can now do the work by him/herself. Wertsch (1985) suggests four levels in the transition of functions from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. He explains that when the child reaches the fourth and final level, he/she assumes complete responsibility of the task given, and finally complete intersubjectivity between the adult and the child on situation definition is established. At this point the child does not need other-regulation any more (Wertsch, 1985). That means he/she does not need other's help. As the child moves along this developmental process, he/she moves from being other-regulated to being self-regulated (Wertsch, 1985). My study shows ample evidence that the learners reach at different levels of intersubjectivity therefore in different levels of the transition of functions from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. In the translation of a specific clause, some takes over complete responsibility by becoming self-regulated while others take over partial or no responsibility yet and stay at the level of being other-regulated.

III. STUDY

1. Participants

This study is based on and developed from my previous studies (Kyunghee Choi, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). The source of data for this study came from four collaborative dialogues of two groups of students who participated in one of the two experiments carried out in the year 2002 and the year 2003 respectively. The number of the participants of the two experiments totaled 146 that are consisted of 91 in the experimental groups and 55 in the control groups. Seven participants in this study are all female. One group consisted of two first-year students and one second-year student and the other group consisted of two

first-year students and two second-year students of a Korean university. Their majors, TOEFL reading scores, and translation scores of the pre and post-tests are indicated in Table 1. They enrolled in an English reading class that met once a week for two hours for one semester. The grouping of students was done randomly by the classroom teacher. The composition of the groups remained the same throughout the semester.

TABLE 1
Background of the Participants

Group	Participants	Sex	Year	Major	TOEFL Score (Total: 30)		Translation Score (Total: 15)	
					Pre	Post	pre	post
1	A1	F	1	International Relations	11	21	2	14
	B1	F	1	International Relations	16	19	3	4
	C1	F	2	Eng. Lang. & Literature	21	24	3	13
	D1	F	2	International Relations	19	19	1	5
2	A2	F	1	Eng. Lang. & Literature	22	23	3	12
	B2	F	2	Religious Culture	16	9	2	10
	C2	F	1	Eng. Lang. & Literature	9	21	3	12

2. Task

In class, the teacher/researcher gave lectures on socioaffective strategies and encouraged the students to find out their problems in reading an English text and to ask the teacher and/or peers for help. The students were given two assignments: one was given in the third week of the semester and the other in the eleventh week. The two assignments were translation of the same paragraph (see Appendix) they translated for the pre-test and post-test. The reason for asking them to translate the same paragraph they translated for the pre-test and the post-test was to measure and find out how much they improved in translating the same text after doing their assignments of its translation with the collaborative use of the socioaffective strategies taught and encouraged to use. In addition, the reason for giving the same translation assignment twice was that it was considered likely that the students would improve in analyzing their problems and clarifying their questions as the course progressed. For your understanding, the results of the two experiments indicate that the experimental groups improved in translating the clauses in the paragraph. Their improvements showed significant differences compared with those of the control groups ($p = 0.008; p = 0.000$). More information on the design of the two experiments, the detailed results of the pre-tests and the post-tests, their improvements in interacting with the peers using the socioaffective strategies successfully, and the improvements in translating the text as shown in their assignments are discussed in my previous studies (Kyunghee Choi, 2003a, 2003b, 2005).

3. Method

Audiotapes of the students' interactive dialogues were transcribed verbatim. The interactive dialogues were undertaken during the collaborative work to complete their two different translation assignments. The purpose of analyzing these transcriptions was to learn about the nature of collaborative process and the socioaffective strategies used by the students in collaboration. The following is an analysis of excerpts of the students' collaborative conversations. The words and phrases spoken in English are italicized. The rest is spoken in Korean and translated into English.

4. Analysis

1) Questions and Scaffolding

Throughout the collaborative interaction, socioaffective strategies were used to bring out scaffolded help. The socioaffective strategies the students used include confirmation checks, clarification requests, comprehension checks, and repetitions. The socioaffective questions triggered scaffolding and played various roles in the process of creation and performance of the discourse. The functions of the questions found in the collaborative discourse are included in the list below.

1. To make sure what the listener believes he or she has understood
2. To clarify what he or she has understood
3. To check whether the other interlocutor or interlocutors have understood
4. To clarify whether the speaker and the listener are talking about the same subject
5. To ask for an agreement
6. To find out what the others think about the subject they are discussing or the things the interlocutor has just said
7. To request or to decide who is going to take a next turn
8. To confirm that the other interlocutor is having trouble understanding what they are talking about
9. To express a different opinion
10. To raise a question about the author's intention
11. To suggest that they are having trouble understanding the text
12. To ask what problems the other has

There are many examples that illustrate that the socioaffective questions are used as useful tools, providing the students with scaffolded help that enable them to have better

understanding of the English clauses. Example 1 shows how one participant's clarification request brings about interaction and scaffolding.

Example 1

	C7	*the knowledge he has derived from that experience remains static.*
	C8	*He may remember it when and if another problem of the same sort arises,*
1	B2	Here he may remember it.
2		The ape may remember it.
3	C2	What is 'it'?
4	B2	a problem, the same kind
5	A2	the knowledge!
6	C2	so does it refer to the knowledge?!

Example 1 is an excerpt from the collaborative dialogue of Group 2. This is their second interaction for the second translation assignment. In their first interaction, no one raised a question on the pronoun 'it.' In this second dialogue, C2 asks B2 what she meant by 'it?' In Line 4, B2 answers that it refers to 'a problem.' In Line 5, A2 corrects B2's interpretation. A2 says it refers to 'the knowledge' in the previous clause, not to 'the problem.' In their first assignment, they translated 'it' into '그것' in Korean. For a pronoun, translation does not always reflect learners' correct understanding of what it refers to. However, in this second interaction, as C2's clarification request triggers an interaction and brings about A1's help, they all come to realize what the problem is and share the same perspective of the pronoun 'it', and thus a correct and successful understanding.

However, not all the collective scaffolding brings about successful learning. Example 2 shows that, since there is not a wide discrepancy in expertise, no one can play the role of an expert.

Example 2

	C5	*the apes have no way of continuing in word and thought their separate experiences in the use of tools and techniques*
59	B2	Did you consider thought as a verb? Or as a noun?
60	C2	A verb.
61	B2	Did you think it was a verb?
62	C2	Yes.
63	B2	(eum) But, here
64	C2	But, I think you (to B2) seem to be right.
65	B2	If you think it as a verb, it sounds very strange. You see *thought* is
66		past tense but there is nothing in past tense before *thought*.

67	A2	I thought that too. But after *in word and thought*,
68		*their* follows immediately.
69		*thought their*, it goes like that.
70		I think there must be some kind of a connector between them.
71	B2	Right. There isn't any connector.
72	A2	I think there is something omitted. What is omitted?

The first problem of Group 2 in translating Clause 5 concerns whether *thought* is a noun or a verb. B2 has been explaining *thought* is not a verb but a noun. C2 agrees with B2 in Line 62. B2 continues to explain in Lines 65 and 66 that if *thought* is the past tense of the verb '*think*' then there must be some indication in the clause. However, from Line 67 through Line 70 A2 argues that it is rather odd to have *their* right after the noun *thought*. So, she suggests that there must be a connector between the two words, which she thinks is omitted. In their submitted assignment they inserted a connector and translated as 'The apes have no way of continuing word and thought <u>because of</u> their separate experiences in the use of tools and techniques.' They omitted the preposition *in* and took *word* and *thought* as the objects of the gerund *continuing*, and inserted 'because of' between *thought* and *their separate experiences*, making the whole meaning different from the original text. This problem can not be corrected even in the second interaction. For the first assignment, they had the interaction for 4 minutes and 30 seconds. For the second assignment, they continued their conversation for 3 minutes and 35 seconds. However, they could not see the prepositional phrase *in word and thought*, which is inserted between the gerund *continuing* and its object *their separate experiences*. This is an example of collective scaffolding that could not bring successful learning.

2) Questions and the ZPD

The zone of proximal development applies to all participants not just less skillful and knowledgeable learners. Everyone has his/her own zone of proximal development in a given situation. It is task-specific as well as scaffolding-specific. The zone of proximal development is an integral body that can be determined by individual's current ability, nature of scaffolding, and types of tasks. If the goal of the task is too far beyond the current level of the learner's ability, he/she can not complete the task even with some help of others. Even though one learner can successfully accomplish the goal of a certain task, he may not be able to successfully accomplish that of another task. In Example 3, the student D1 of Group 1 who got the score of 21 out of the total score of 30 in a TOEFL reading test can not understand the meaning of the sentence she is working on even though there is a help from her peer.

Example 3

	C6	*When an ape has disposed of a problem*
	C7	*the knowledge he has derived from that*
		experience remains static.
97	A1	*the knowledge*, try to think this/this/this is the subject.
98		Think *the knowledge* is the subject.
99		Then, think this is the predicate.
100		Let's think *remains static* is the predicate.
101	D1	OK. So, this is the predicate?
102	A1	Right. So, it means the knowledge remains static.
103	D1	Yes.
104	A1	But, if we think this/this modifies something,
105		what it modifies is that knowledge.
106		The knowledge, what kind of knowledge it is, it is
107		the knowledge is this knowledge
108	D1	Does that mean the knowledge disposed of
109		from the experience remains static?

The average TOEFL reading score of the class is 15.09. D1's score is way above the average score. A1 tries to help D1 from Lines 97 through 99. She explains the structure of Clause 7: what the subject is and what the predicate is. D1 makes a confirmation check of her understanding on which one is the predicate. A1 continues to explain from Line 104 through Line 107 that the clause "*he has derived from that experience*" located between the subject *the knowledge* and the predicate *remains static* only modifies the subject. However, D1 confuses *derived* with *disposed of* in the subordinate clause of the sentence. She does not seem to understand the structures of Clauses 6 and 7 and mixes them up as Lines 108 and 109 show. She does not grasp the meaning of the sentence. Her misunderstanding is not only reflected in the dialogue but also in the post-test. In the test, she translated the sentence as "when they have trouble of designing knowledge, their experience remains static." She may be able to do well in a different type of an English task but not this one. In Example 4, she raises a clarification request and contributes to the collective scaffolding and collective understanding.

Example 4

	C1	*Despite, however, the fact that individual apes learn easily and, as*
		individuals, show remarkable progress in the acquisition of knowledge,
42	A1 & B1	the progress that is remarkable
43	D1	What progress?

44	A1	The progress is acquisition of knowledge
45	B1	gaining knowledge
46	D1	in acquiring knowledge

In Line 42, as A1 and B1 simultaneously translate '*remarkable progress*,' D1 asks what progress it specifically means in Line 43. The clarification request further induces A1 to share her understanding that in turn further brings out B1 and D1's understanding and contribution to the collective understanding. In interpreting this particular phrase '*remarkable progress in the acquisition of* knowledge,' D1 shows some degree of successful understanding. However, as in Example 3, there are several clauses and sentences she fails to understand even with scaffolding. Compared to the clauses in Example 3, the phrase in Example 4 has a simpler structure with only one noun accompanied by a modifier. The sentence in Example 3 is a complex sentence in which the subject of the main clause has a clause as its modifier placed before the main verb. My current study has a limitation in the respect of the fact that it is hard to predict what her zone of proximal development is in one task and what her ZPD is in another. However, it is justifiable to suggest that even though there is scaffolding, a learner can not establish the zone of proximal development when the goal of a task is completely beyond the learner's ability.

3) Questions and Intersubjectivity

Intersubjectivity, which is a shared perspective and agreement among participants, is necessary for them to collaborate to accomplish a task. But my study shows that as long as the participants recognize the failure of intersubjective agreement, the failure of agreement or a little agreement makes them further interact to bring a shared agreement and to accomplish the goal of the task eventually. In Example 5, the students of Group 2 discuss the problem concerning parts of speech for the two words *separate* and *distinct*.

Example 5

	C11	*His overt experiences with practical problems are, like those of the ape, separate and distinct.*
29	B2	So man do, they separate and
30		distinct. (3 seconds)
31	C2	do distinct?
32	B2	'doing'/ 'doing' is better.
33		Not being distinct.
34	C2	His overt experiences,

35		but man does not.
36	A2	But, *are* in the front is the verb *be,* isn't it?
37	B2	Yeah.
38	A2	It is not 'do separate.' *are separate*
39	B2	Right.
40	A2	They are separate. It must be this way.
41	B2	Right.

Until Line 31, neither A2 nor C2 raises a question about B2's error. C2 makes a confirmation check in Line 31, but B2 continues arguing that *separate* is a verb. A2 confirms and asserts in Lines 36, 38, and 40 that the verb of the clause is *are*, suggesting that *separate* and *distinct* are not verbs. In Lines 39 and 41, B2 seems to accept A2's suggestion.

Example 6

44	A2	For instance, if there is a sentence, *they are separate*,
45		it means they are separate. They are separate, like this.
46	B2	You should add *–ed*. If they are being separated,
47		it is be + p.p.
48	A2	Well, they are not being separated but are separate.
49		How did you interpret it before?

In Example 6, however, B2 goes on arguing that in order to use *separate* and *distinct* with the verb *be*, they should be used in a passive sentence. She keeps on saying in Lines 46 and 47 that it should be *separated* not *separate* if it has the verb *be*. After this interaction, they exchanged 15 turns and as Example 7 shows they could not reach an agreement.

Example 7

81	B2	Well, well, then, *separate* itself has
82		the meaning of being passive?
83	C2	Do you want me to look it up in the dictionary?
84	B2	being separated (looking up in the dictionary)
85	B2	Well, here isn't *are separate* a little strange?
86		This is the first time for me to see
87		this kind of sentence. Is it to make it sound more
88		informal? (15 seconds)
89	C2	*separate* it has the meaning of do separate

90	B2	Isn't there meaning of being separate? (15 seconds)
91	A2	It is used as a transitive verb,
92		an intransitive verb and also an adjective.
93	B2	Ah! It is an adjective. An adjective, and adjective,
94		it is used as an adjective. Here it is not a verb
95		but an adjective, so there is *are* in the front.

Since they can not solve the problem concerning the parts of speech of the two words, C2 suggests that they look up the word *separate* in the dictionary. By looking at the dictionary, B2 accepts that the word *separate* is not a verb but an adjective. This is an example of the recognition of the failure of agreement that helped the learners to find a way to solve a problem.

4) From Interpsychological to Intrapsychological

Kyunghee Choi (2003a, 2003b, 2005) illustrates in the previous studies that the use of socioaffective strategies that induce scaffolding in the zone of proximal development facilitates students' reading comprehension. Especially, the lower-level-students of the experimental groups did far better in translating the clauses than those of the control groups (Kyunghee Choi, 2003a, 2003b, 2005). The lower-level-students of the experimental groups showed much progress, moving from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. Lower-level students who sometimes need more help from those advanced in the process of learning benefited more from the use of socioaffective strategies. This progress was also possible due to the fact that the translation assignment of the same English text was given twice. During their interactions for the two assignments, they were in the stage of being other-regulated but many of them became self-regulated when they took the post-test. The transition from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane was confirmed in the post-test as they correctly translated many and some of the clauses in the paragraph they could not in the pre-test. The seven students whose dialogues have been analyzed in this paper also show some improvement, moving from the interpsychological plane to the intrapsychological plane. For example, Group 2 translated Clause 11 correctly in their second assignment that was preceded by the interactive conversation. The evidence of their understanding of the clause is further confirmed in the post-test. Each student of Group 2 translated it correctly in the post-test. As Table 1 shows A2 of Group 2 translated 9 more clauses successfully in the post-test than she did in the pre-test while B2 translated 8 more clauses and C2 9 more clauses.

However, not all of the students show the same progress as some of the examples discussed above suggest. Example 2 illustrates that a little discrepancy in expertise among

the participants may result in unsuccessful completion of the task. Example 3 shows that the student D1 whose performance is better than that of other students in another task, that is to understand a simpler English structure, can not reach the level of her potential ability even with the help of her peers. Even though this study has not had chances to experiment whether the student D1 actually does better or worse in many other different tasks, the failure is assumed to be attributed to the fact that the zone of proximal development is task-specific. Depending on nature of scaffolding, types of tasks, and levels of students' current ability, some learners remain in the interspychological plane while others move onto the intrapsychological plane. Two of the seven participants in this study show a little progress with the scores far below the average. They could not benefit from the scaffolding provided by their peers. For the two students, the goal of the task was too far beyond their zone of proximal development. In addition, they could not get a useful and appropriate assistance from their peers since there was not a wide discrepancy in expertise among them and no one could play the role of a teacher.

IV. CONCLUSION

The questions such as confirmation checks, clarification requests and comprehension checks serve their social and cognitive functions. They play the roles in comprehending and translating the English text. Viewed from the sociocultural perspective, the question strategies promote scaffolding and bring about intersubjective agreement in the zone of proximal development. The use of socioaffective strategies helps the learners move from being other-regulated in the interpsychological plane to being self-regulated in the intrapsychological plane. However, the analysis in this paper also shows some unsuccessful learning examples and explains some of the causes of the failure. When no participant can play the role of an expert, the collective scaffolding among the peers does not always guarantee a fruitful result. In the zone of proximal development, the leaner can not always succeed in completing the task if its goal is far outside the level of the learner's current ability. That level can also be determined depending on what kind of task they are dealing with. Development can be explained in terms of moving from the social plane to the cognitive plane. Even though some of the students do not show great progress moving from being other-regulated to being self-regulated, the use of socioaffective strategies is beneficial for language learning.

Therefore from a pedagogical standpoint, this study suggests the important role of using questions in reading in English. In classroom, teachers are encouraged to provide the learners with an environment in which they feel comfortable to ask questions for help and to teach them how to effectively use the strategies. When students interpret a sentence

incorrectly, the teacher should first, remember his/her goal of assisting the students in recognizing their problems and in finding out some of the ways to solve them; second, encourage them to set their goal to solve their problems actively and initiatively; third, avoid giving explanations and directions on the problems but instead use such indirect strategies as elicitation, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, metalinguistic feedback, and repetitions so that they can come up with their own answers and ways to solve the problems. By giving those examples of indirect strategies, the teacher can help the students learn how to use the socioaffective strategies. The socioaffective questions will serve as significant tools of mediation that promote social and cognitive development.

REFERENCES

Adair-Hauck, B., & Donato, R. (1994). Foreign language explanations within the zone of proximal development. *The Modern Language Review, 50,* 532-557.

Antón, M., & DiCamilla, F. (1998). Socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interaction in the L2 classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 54,* 314-342.

Choi, Kyunghee. (2003a). A study on the effects of socioaffective strategies on reading comprehension. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics, 7,* 13-35.

Choi, Kyunghee. (2003b). *A study on effective strategies for reading English – A focus on socioaffective strategies.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Korea University.

Choi, Kyunghee. (2005). The nature of students' participation and the use of strategies for English reading. *English Language and Linguistics, 19,* 113-133.

Cole, M., & Engeström, Y. (1993). A cultural-historical approach to distributed cognition. In G. Salomon (Ed.), *Distributed cognition: Psychological and educational considerations.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

De Guerrero, M. C. M., & Villamil, O. S. (1994). Social-cognitive dimensions of interaction in L2 peer revision. *The Modern Language Journal, 78,* 484-496.

DiCamilla, F. J., & Antón, M. (1997). Repetition in the collaborative discourse of L2 learners: A Vygotskian perspective. *The Canadian Modern Language Review, 53,* 609-633.

Donato, R. (1994). Collective scaffoldiing in second language learning. In J. P. Lantolf, & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotskian approaches to second language research* (pp. 33-56). Norwood, NJ: Ablex

Ellis, R. (1999). *Learning a second language through interaction.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Gass, S., & Varonis, E. (1986). Sex differences in NNS/NNS interactions. In R. Day (Ed.), *Talking to learn: Conversation in second language acquisition* (pp. 327-351).

Rowley, MA: Newbury House Publishers.

Lantolf, J. P. (2000). Introducing sociocultural theory. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 1-26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lantolf, J. P., & Appel, G. (1994). Theoretical framework: An introduction to Vygotskian perspectives on second language research. In J. P. Lantolf & G. Appel (Eds.), *Vygotksian approaches to second language research* (pp. 1-32). Norword, NJ: Ablex.

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. C. Ritchie, & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). San Diego: Academic Press.

Ohta, A. S. (2000). Rethinking interaction in SLA: Developmentally appropriate assistance in the zone of proximal development and the acquisition of L2 grammar. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural theory and second language learning* (pp. 51-78). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Schinke-Llano, L. (1993). On the value of a Vygotskian framework for SLA theory and research. *Language Learning, 43,* 121-129.

Upton, T. A., & Lee-Thompson, L. (2001). The role of the first language in second language reading. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 23,* 469-495.

Varonis, E., & Gass, S. (1985). Non-native/non-native conversations: A model for negotiation of meaning. *Applied Linguistics, 6,* 71-90.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Vytgosky, L. S. (1981). The genesis of higher mental functions. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed. and Trans.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 144-188). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Wells, G. (1999). Using L1 to master L2: A response to Antón and DiCamilla's socio-cognitive functions of L1 collaborative interaction in the L2 classroom. *The Modern Language Journal, 83,* 248-254.

Wertsch, J. V. (1980). The significance of dialogue in Vygotsky's account of social, egocentric, and inner speech. *Contemporary Educational Psychology, 5*, 150-162.

Wertsch, J. V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Wertsch, J. V. (1991). A sociocultural approach to socially shared cognition. In L. B. Resnick, J. M. Levine, & S. D. Teasley (Eds.), *Perspectives on socially shared cognition* (pp. 85-100). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

APPENDIX
The Assignment Text

Despite, however, the fact that individual apes learn easily and, as individuals, show remarkable progress in the acquisition of knowledge (1), apes as a species have never developed a culture (2). There are two reasons for this (3). Lacking language (4), the apes have no way of continuing in word and thought their separate experiences in the use of tools and techniques (5). When an ape has disposed of a problem (6) the knowledge he has derived from that experience remains static (7). He may remember it when and if another problem of the same sort arises (8), but he does not, in between times, ponder over his knowledge and devise means of applying it to further problems (9). Man does (10). His overt experiences with practical problems are, like those of the ape, separate and distinct (11). But because man possesses language (12), he can continue his problem-solving activities beyond the actual physical experience (13) and so develop, in thought and discussion, new applications of his knowledge and improved means of solving problems (14). In short, by reason of language, man's experiences are continuous, not discontinuous as among apes, and so show far more rapid development (15).

Kyunghee Choi
ELT/Dept. of Tourism
Hanyang Women's College
17 Haengdang-dong, Sungdong-gu
Seoul 133-793, Korea
Tel: (02) 2290-2312 / H.P.: 019-523-8914
Fax: (02) 2290-2279
Email: khchoi@hywoman.ac.kr