Group Dynamic Assessment and Transcendence of L2 Listening Comprehension

A major preoccupation in language testing and instruction is the generalizability of current performance to future functioning. In an innovative pedagogical approach, known as Group Dynamic Assessment (GDA), instruction and assessment are dialectically integrated as a single activity that looks for understanding language abilities and actively promoting them (Poehner, 2016). This study applies theoretical and methodological principles of GDA and examines Vygotsky’s (1978) notion of the Zone of Proximal Development and sociocultural theory of cognitive development, and Poehner’s (2016) concept of transcendence (TR) in L2 listening classes.

Following a graduated prompt approach proposed by Campione and Brown (1988), the design comprised four stages: the pretest, an enrichment program (EP), the posttest, and three transfer sessions (TR), i.e. ‘near transfer’, ‘far transfer’ and ‘very far transfer’. 60 randomly selected students who had taken an OPT test were divided into three classes of males and females and received GDA-based instruction. The purpose of using multiple transfer sessions was to reveal the learner’s ability to use (or transfer) newly acquired knowledge to ‘novel problems’ or ‘contexts’. The microgenetic analysis of dialogic interactions revealed the use of an inventory of mediational strategies (e.g. prompting, cueing, explaining and mediating) by the teacher during his coconstruction of ZPDs with the whole class and individuals for sixteen sessions. Comparison of frequency and types of mediations and hints during pretest, posttest and transfer sessions revealed the microgenetic growth of the learners’ ZPD and developmental changes. On implication side, the study suggests the use of GDA as a valid instruction and assessment procedure to trace the learners growing intellectual trajectories and judge about their emerging abilities in innovative contexts.

Keywords: Group Dynamic Assessment, Socio-cultural theory, ZPD, Mediation, Transcendence

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