

Mediation Revisited: The Interactive Organization of Mediation in Learning Environments

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This article is concerned with the social organization of mediation in learning environments. It seeks to further articulate the sociocultural notion of mediation in sociointeractional terms, combining insights from the sociocultural approach to cognition and the microinteractionist, especially ethnomethodological approach to social activities. A microanalysis of mediation in communicative 2nd-language classroom activities where the task at hand is the management of interaction itself is presented. The microanalysis stresses the fact that patterns of social interaction, tasks, and social contexts emerge from locally accomplished socioculturally shaped collaborative activities. The analysis serves as a basis for developing a pluridimensional notion of mediation-in-interaction, which accounts for its reciprocity-based, context-sensitive, and culture-related nature.

Abundant empirical evidence has been provided within the sociocultural framework showing that cognitive development hinges not simply on the involvement in social interaction as such, but on particular ways of expert guidance and learner participation (McLane, 1987; Rogoff, 1991; Wertsch & Hickmann, 1987; *inter alia*); it is mediated by social processes. The social situation, thereby, is not reducible to a mere context in which activities, including their cognitive dimensions, take place, but is an integral part of these activities. Learning a specific content or activity inevitably involves learning to deal with the social situation in which that content or activity is being deployed. As a consequence, what is at stake in a social situation of potential learning are always also the learner's and the expert's ways of dealing with the situation as a social interactional encounter. This embeddedness of cognitive development in collective practices not only poses the much discussed problem of the relation between social regulation and cognitive processes but also invites us to investigate the nature of the relation between activities—be they cognitive, interactional, or mediational—and the social situation.

In this article I examine the process of mediation in social interaction from a perspective that comprehends patterns of interaction, tasks, and social contexts as emergent from locally accomplished, socioculturally shaped collaborative activities. In discussing current literature on the subject, I first stress the need to rethink the sociocultural notion of mediation in the light of the functioning of social interaction. I briefly sketch the basic principles of this functioning from an

interactionist viewpoint and say some words about the concept of mediation in second-language research. In a further step, a microanalysis of social mediation in communicative second-language classroom activities where the task at hand is the management of interaction itself will be presented. It will serve as a basis for developing a pluridimensional notion of mediation, which accounts for its reciprocity-based, context-sensitive, and culture-related nature. The discussion will combine insights from a sociocultural approach to development—according to which our cognition is situated in our social activities—and from a sociointeractionist approach to discourse—which considers social activities and their interpretations as being continuously configured by the social agents' interactions.

COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT AND THE CONSTITUTIVE RELATION BETWEEN SITUATION AND ACTIVITY

Mediation and the Construction of Sociocognitive Contexts

The notion of mediation refers to two interrelated ideas that are central for a sociocultural understanding of human cognition and development (cf. Vygotsky, 1978): Higher forms of human mental activity are mediated by tools (objects and symbolic means, such as language) collaboratively constructed by members of a culture, and the development of these forms is rooted in sociointeractional practices within that culture (Cole, 1985; Wertsch, 1991). According to this second idea, cognitive development is fundamentally based on the interaction between a novice and a more capable agent where the latter helps the former to regulate his or her activities (other-regulation). Thereby, the novice becomes progressively capable of planning, controlling and performing a task in a relatively autonomous way (self-regulation).¹

Whereas rich evidence has been provided in developmental research on the impact of sociointeractional factors on cognitive development, little attention has been paid to the ways social interaction and the related coordination of activities and cognitive efforts contribute to *creating* the task at hand, to defining the problem to be solved, and thereby to shaping the very context of learning and development. Perret-Clermont, Perret, and Bell (1991) persuasively illustrated in a series of studies that a subject's engagement in social interaction, in task resolution, in logical reasoning, and hence his or her cognitive development are a function of his or her interpretation of the cognitive dimensions of the task *and* of its social meaning, including interlocutors' expectations, communicative conventions, patterns of intersubjectivity, and so forth. This means that mental functioning, as it is tied to the process of communication, inevitably depends on the social agents' understanding of the (communicative) conventions of the social situation in which they participate (cf. Rogoff, 1982). This is an essential way in which cognition is socially situated. Thereby, neither the task nor the social situation or conventions are stable variables affecting cognitive processes, but are themselves socially constructed through interaction. As a consequence, learners (and experts) participate not only in the resolution of a given problem or task but also in

¹The notion of regulation, as used here, refers to the cognitive control involved in the planification and the accomplishment of tasks. This control is strategic in the sense that it is oriented toward specific objectives (see Frawley & Lantolf, 1985, for a discussion of regulation with regard to discourse tasks). It is mediated through cultural "tools" (i.e., cultural artifacts, including language; cf. Cole, 1994) and through the process of social interaction.

the very construction of the sociocognitive task and the situation in which they are involved (Coughlan & Duff, 1994; Grossen, Liengme Bessire, & Perret-Clermont, 1997; Lave, 1993).

Social Interaction as the Locus and the Object of Development

From this point, we can carry the argument a step further. If we consider that learning is rooted in participating as a social agent in discourse communities (Resnick, 1991) or communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2000), we are led to conceive of mediation not only as being involved in the acquisition of specific and clearly delimited abilities or knowledge, related for instance to solving a puzzle or finding a path through a maze, but also as being a constitutive part of social interaction as complex sociocognitive situation. Social interaction itself, that is, modes of socially coordinating activities in a way appropriate to becoming a valid participant in a (learning) setting, is a constant object of elaboration. In this sense, learning to discuss or defend a position, to solicit help or even to instruct, learning to engage in teamwork or in a collaborative problem-solving task, and many other socioculturally valued interactional competencies are objects of development in themselves, and at the same time are contingent with other objects of learning. In other words, what is mediated in a learning environment are ways of dealing with a specific object of learning as well as of dealing with the situation itself as social practice. Adequately accomplishing a task presupposes knowing how to deal with the sociocultural, including the interactive and institutional, regularities, rules, and values of a given situation; the process of learning (and teaching) therefore hinges on the process of socializing in (and into) the communicative culture of a group or institution. This is the case not only for clearly collaborative activities, such as collaborative writing or collaborative planning of events, but also more generally for interactional problem-solving of all sorts. It is in line with the idea that psychological processes are formed through the mastery of a social languages that reflect and create particular sociocultural settings (Wertsch, 1991, pp. 97–98).

Looking at Social Mediation From a Different Angle

These considerations lead up to an interesting question: How can we conceive of mediation if we take social interaction not only as a place for the development of a specific cognitive ability but also as a task to be accomplished and, therefore, a potential object of development itself? My discussion starts from the two assumptions that have been sketched above:

1. Learning in interaction hinges on ways of dealing with the situation as a sociointeractional encounter and, therefore, involves learning how to deal with it interactively.
2. Learners and experts are active agents collaboratively constructing the sociocognitive conditions of their encounter through their very interaction.

Following this view of learning as a fundamentally communicative activity, I suggest slightly turning around the way we look at mediation-in-interaction and investigating it as a locally contingent and culturally situated activity by which the social situation itself is interactively accomplished. This means looking at mediation not only as a means of collaboratively solving a problem

and creating possibilities for learning but also as an activity that participates in the ongoing construction of the contexts, role-relations, interactional positionings, and reciprocally coordinated activities. It means understanding mediation as constitutive of and constituted by the sociointeractional dimensions of talk.

In what follows, the development of second language interactional competencies will serve as an example for elaborating on these issues. Before turning specifically to second-language learning and empirical data, I want to emphasize what I see as relevant dimensions of social activities for our understanding of mediation.

A SOCIOINTERACTIONIST PERSPECTIVE ON MEDIATION

The very nature of interaction as a collective and dynamic enterprise calls for a reconsideration of the role of social mediation not only with regard to the acquisition of interactional competence, but also to learning to collaboratively resolve a task as part of learning to act socially. In investigating that role, I draw from the sociocultural approach in psychology and the microinteractionist (especially the ethnomethodological) tradition in sociology. It is worth noting that these paradigms show some interesting convergences (cf. Mondada & Pekarek Doehler, 2000). Most fundamental to their intersection is perhaps the central role attributed to the communicative process in the construction of human nature and social reality based on a fundamentally social vision of the individual. The understanding of the social agent as a reality constructor developed in the works of Schutz, Garfinkel, and Cicourel is reminiscent of the sociocultural concept of development, as it implies the idea of knowledge itself as being socially constructed. This convergence is most visible in recent work emanating from the ethnomethodological paradigm which proposes an alternative approach to cognition as “embedded within courses of practical affairs” (Coulter, 1983, p. 128) and insists on its indissociability from the establishment of intersubjectivity.²

Let me briefly list three key elements of a sociointeractionist understanding of social interaction, which will inform the analysis and discussion that follow. The first dimension has already been mentioned and relates to the fact that social interaction is not a predetermined task with a predetermined aim, but an intricate web of specific microsolutions to an ongoing social situation: It is a local *accomplishment* (Schegloff, 1982).

The second dimension is the *reciprocity* of the social agents’ actions and perspectives, understood as the fundamental template of social interaction (Cicourel, 1973; Garfinkel, 1967; Schutz, 1967). Due to this property, we can assume that, contrary to what is considered to be the case in classical problem-solving tasks, the central issue in learning to interact in a community of practice is, in essence, what the learner is capable of doing *with* the other, not what he ends up being capable of doing alone. Also, dialogue as well as collaborative problem solving imply not simply the roles of knower versus not-knower but, for instance, the ones of thematic guide versus follower, of questioner and respondent, of coconstructor of activities, and so on. In the dynamic course of interaction, roles mingle, their boundaries

²The affinities as well as the differences between the sociocultural and the ethnomethodological approach to situated cognition find their expression in recent volumes of collected contributions from both paradigms, such as Chaiklin and Lave (1993), Engeström and Middleton (1996) and Resnick, Levine, and Teasley (1991).

dissolve, and they give place to a reciprocal shaping of mediational processes. In this sense, what is possibly evolving in a didactic encounter as the participants attempt to deal with the social situation is not only the learner's ability or knowledge but also the expert's skill in instructing the learner.

The third dimension is *context-sensitivity*. Interaction as a social process is inherently context sensitive (Garfinkel, 1967). That is, participants collaboratively configure contexts and orient toward those configurations. As a result, the way they interact is not a product from a given basis of competence but a complex social and locally accomplished activity, dependent on the agents' ongoing interpretation of task and situation. This is close to the sociocultural notion, according to which learners' doing is not the product of a capacity given in abstracto, but of locally contingent and sociohistorically shaped interpretation processes relating to (i.e., dependent on and contributing to) situational constraints and demands. As a result, acquisitional issues—and this is again the case far beyond the acquisition of interactional competence—are linked to both the construction of a given context and the communicative conventions, the interpersonal patterns and the social histories in which activities are embedded. Cognitive investment, forms of attention, and forms of participation are socially mediated through these patterns and conventions.

THE CONCEPT OF MEDIATION IN SECOND-LANGUAGE RESEARCH

These properties apply to language learning in a particularly interesting way, as the object of such learning is clearly the very capacity to engage in communicative processes. Although only marginally coinciding with the sociocultural perspective, the locus of language development as viewed in second-language research has shifted during the last 10 to 15 years from a decontextualized individual act of interiorization and processing to the learner's locally situated and socioculturally embedded social interactions. The application of Vygotskian concepts has proven to be particularly enriching for understanding the socio-interactional conditions of second language acquisition, both in the socio-interactionist (see Bange, 1992; Krafft & Dausendschön-Gay, 1993; Pekarek, 1999) and the sociocultural paradigms (see the articles collected in Lantolf, 2000, and Lantolf & Appel, 1994).

Within the field of language development, sociocultural approaches view the learning of a second language as part of the process of learning to participate in socioculturally important activities (see Hall, 1993; Lantolf & Pavlenko, 1995, for second-language learning). Following Vygotsky (1978), scholars such as Ochs (1988) demonstrated that language acquisition (first language, in Ochs's case) and the individual's ability to participate as a competent member in the oral practices of a social group are based on his or her repeated engagement in these practices with more competent members of the group. Language development, like cognitive development in general, is thus understood as profoundly bound to social practices. As a sociocognitive activity, it is intrinsically linked to the establishment of social meanings, social contexts, and social role-relationships. The nature of mediation in language development, as well as in cognitive development in general, consequently hinges on these dimensions. This is of fundamental importance for understanding interaction as a sociocognitive frame for language development, as it is not only the linguistic but also the social and contextual dimen-

sions of discourse that crucially shape the complexities of the communicative tasks presented by a given situation.³

The field of second-language learning can in fact provide some valid insights into more general questions related to learning as a sociocognitive activity. Research from the sociocultural paradigm has for instance shown that the joint management of discourse among students is based on the collective resources of the group and related to the establishment of intersubjectivity (Donato, 1994) and has documented how the classroom community serves as a mediator, defining rules of conduct that value certain forms of agency and involvement (Lantolf & Genung, 2000).

However, with the possible exception of the sociocultural approach, very little second-language research, even in the sociointeractionist paradigm, has used the potential of Vygotskian psycholinguistics to its full extent. Social mediation as well as the related concept of scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) tend to be mainly considered in terms of what the learner is incapable of doing alone, but can accomplish with the help of a more competent speaker. These notions have found one of their most concrete and fruitful applications in the analysis of negotiation sequences relating to problems of intercomprehension (Krafft & Dausendschön-Gay, 1993), particularly those due to gaps in the learners' repertoires (de Pietro, Matthey, & Py, 1989; Py, 1989).⁴ Such studies are based on detailed observations of how the more competent speaker helps the learner to overcome a problem of expression or comprehension, for example by providing a lexical item the learner is looking for. It is hypothesized that these interactional activities reflect cognitive processes that help the learner to develop his or her linguistic repertoire. But there is an evident limitation in the scope of such negotiation sequences. In fact, they mostly concern lexical and partly grammatical elements only, and are therefore closely related to one specific type of competence, which is linguistic competence.

With this in mind, I suggest—far beyond the specific issues of language learning—that when understood in terms of compensation in the case of ability gaps, the notion of social mediation and the related concept of scaffolding lose their explanatory force. A definition of mediation organized around the concept of help accentuates a unidirectional rapport between expert and novice according to which knowledge or expertise is presented by the one to the other. Thereby, only the learner's capacities are seen as potentially evolving, while the expert's competence in instructing and mediating is treated as unchanging. And the possibility that in every collaborative endeavor social interaction itself is part of the task to be accomplished remains unexplored.

The empirical classroom data discussed later will serve as a basis for proposing an alternative view of mediation along the lines outlined above. Focusing on the ability to engage in collaborative processes, the analysis aims to illustrate how various dimensions of social interaction interact in structuring the process of mediation, while being structured by that process itself.

³The importance of this very complexity is expressed in Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development, defined as "the difference between the child's developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 85). The notion suggests that, in order to be efficient, the other's manner of regulating the interaction needs to respect the learner's practical needs and possibilities. In other words, it must neither overestimate nor underestimate his or her capacities.

⁴These studies see negotiation sequences not simply as providing comprehensible input but focus on the detailed interactive processes involved in such sequences. Special attention is paid to the learner's own involvement in the negotiations. See Arditty and Vasseur (1999) and Pekarek Doehler (2000) for critical assessments and more detailed presentations of the sociointeractionist approach to second-language learning.

AN ANALYSIS OF MEDIATION-IN-INTERACTION IN THE SECOND-LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

The Study

The study from which I draw my research was part of the Swiss National Science Foundation's project on the efficiency of the Swiss educational systems (PNR 33).⁵ One of its components was an analysis of audio-taped and transcribed data from 26 advanced level French High School lessons in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. These lessons were specifically designed for communicative language practice. The students were between 15 and 19 years old and had been taking French lessons for 6 to 8 years, 3 to 4 hours a week. French being the second national language in Switzerland, it has an important practical and symbolic value and is much promoted in school. The students had reached a fairly advanced level of competence, especially regarding their lexical and grammatical proficiency, encountering however still significant problems when it came to communicating efficiently within dynamic courses of social interactions.

According to the results of the study that have been reported in detail elsewhere (Pekarek, 1999), communicative activities in the classroom, which often tend to be treated (in research as well as in practice) as a somewhat homogeneous interactional space, present an important variety of interactional patterns. These patterns show recurrent sets of interactional features manifesting typical interactional organizations and offering variable potentials for second-language learning. The patterns cover a continuum that contrasts two poles of communication: a conversational logic based on instrumental language use for the purpose of the exchange of information, ideas, or points of view within a locally negotiated interactional space on the one hand, and a mechanistic logic based on the reproduction of preestablished information within fixed interactive positions and highly predictable interaction patterns on the other. The very existence of both variations and regularities is symptomatic of the classroom as the locus of a school-related communicative culture that is continuously being locally configured. A close look at an excerpt of interaction will reveal how processes of mediation participate in this very configuration.

Mediation in Communicative Activities

A segment of discussion in the second-language classroom. The following example is taken from a classroom discussion about young Swiss peoples' reluctance to speak High German (as opposed to the Swiss-German dialects). The students have previously read an article on this subject. The example illustrates the multiple layers of the teacher's mediational activities by which he contributes to establishing a complex locally managed and collaboratively accomplished social and interactional situation, allowing the students to put to work various dimensions of their communicative competencies.

⁵Title of the study: "Learning French in German-speaking Switzerland: From educational systems to out-of-school contexts" (grant no. 4033-037912; see Lüdi, Pekarek Doehler, & Saudan, 2001).

Ex. (in2eI):⁶

- 1 T: eh . bien {je vais une fois} vous laisser à vous la parole . on va faire un petit
eh . well {I'll for once} give the floor to you . we're going to make a little
 brain-storming un peu ce que vous pensez d'abord tout ce/ tout ce que vous avez compris
brain-storming a bit what you think first all th/ all that you have understood
 de cet article et puis tout ce que vous en pensez< (3s) le titre je crois est assez clair (3s)
of this article and then all you think of it< (3s) the title I think is rather clear (3s)
 je vous laisse la parole (10s)
I give you the floor (10s)
- (un élève arrive en retard et le professeur commente son retard; séquence incompréhensible)
(a student arrives late and the teacher comments on it; the sequence is incomprehensible)
- 2 T: alors (4s) vous n'avez rien à dire> (3s) vous haussez les épaules (à un élève) (8s)
so (4s) you haven't got anything to say> (3s) you lift your shoulders (to a student) (8s)
- 3 cl: (rire)
(laughter)
- 4 G: demandez-moi quelque chose
ask me something
- 5 T: ah oui je vous demande si vous avez ah ben je sais pas je peux vous demander est-ce que
oh yes I ask you whether you have ah well I don't know I can ask you whether
 vous êtes d'accord avec ce titre d'abord déjà
you agree to this title first
- 6 G: oui
yes
- 7 T: oui> . . . c'est-à-dire .
yes> . . . that's to say .
- 8 G: c'est-à-dire . que les: . Suisses allemands ne veulent parler la langue allemande qu'on
that's to say . that the: . Swiss Germans don't want to speak the German language that's
 parle en Allemagne . et les raisons sont là
spoken in Germany . and that's the reason why
- 9 T: oui mais votre opinion vous est-ce que vous êtes d'accord est ce que c'est vrai que vous ne
yes but your opinion you do you agree is it true that you don't
 parlez ne voulez pas parler l'allemand ce qu'on appelle en français le hochdeutsch hein
speak don't want to speak German what we call in French High German ha
- 10 G: on ne peut pas dire ça mais . je pense . en l'école . par exemple en mathématiques on peut
one can't say that but . I think . in school . for example in math you can
 parler le suisse allemand . mais naturellement.eh en allemand . dans: [les cours d'allemand]
speak Swiss German . but naturally . eh in German . during [German courses]
- 11 T: [mhm . oui]
[mhm . yes]

⁶Symbols used in transcript: A, B, C—students; T—teacher; cl—the class; —short pauses; (3s) —pauses lasting several seconds (nb. of seconds); [then] —overlap; no: —stretching of a sound; xx—unidentifiable sequence; { }—hardly understandable sequence; >—rising intonation; <—falling intonation; /—interruption of a word; THE—heavy stress; () —transcriber's comments.

- 12 G: c'est nécessaire de parler l'allemand
it's necessary to speak German
- 13 T: l'allemand oui mhm . . {d'autres avis} . . oui Beat
German yes mhm . . {other opinions} . . yes Beat
- 14 A: moi je trouve que ce n'est pas nécessaire parce que: en allemand . ou en Allemagne on peut
I think that it's not necessary because: in German . or in Germany you can
aussi parler suisse allemand et les autres s: ils eh on les comprend . quand-même . .
also speak Swiss German and the others s: they eh you understand them . nevertheless . .
- 15 T: vous croyez>
you think so>
- 16 A: ah oui s/ si on fait des efforts on a encore les mains . si on: si on a des problèmes . .
oh yes i/ if you make an effort you still have your hands . if you: if you have problems . .
- 17 T: oui xxxx
yes xxxx
- 18 B: {moi je pense} on perd la culture quand on laisse eh: cet cet allemand parce que je trouve|
{I think} one loses one's culture if one lets go eh: that that German because I think
c'est nécessaire eh pour comprendre eh la littérature et puis la politique et cetera
it's necessary eh to understand eh literature and politics et cetera
- 19 T: mhm .
mhm .
- 20 B: et moi je ne trouve pas que les jeunes allemandes . [devraient]
and I don't think the young Germanies . [should]
- 21 T: [allemands]. les jeunes [allemands]
[Germans] . the young [Germans]
- 22 B: [xx]
[xx]
- 23 T: oui
yes
- 24 B: je trouve que (...)
I think it's (...)
(...)
- 28 T: on va peut-être aborder un deuxième point . . c'est eh l'identification< eh Eric a dit
we will maybe touch a second point . . it's the identification< eh Eric said
ehm il a abordé le problème de l'identification entre les Suisses allemands et les et les
ehm he mentioned the problem of the identification between the Swiss Germans and the
Allemands et il m'a semblé entendre que d'après d'après ce que vous avez
and the Germans and I seemed to understand that according to according to what you have
dit qu'il y avait un problème non> . vous pouvez un peu préciser votre votre pensée .
said there was a problem no> . can you explain a bit your your idea
- 29 E: moi je pense à la . . deuxième guerre mondiale
I'm thinking of the . . second world war
- 30 T: oui
yes
- 31 E: et: les . les problèmes maintenant . c'est ce qu'on a . en Allemagne avec le racisme et tout
and: the . the problems now . that's what we have . in Germany with racism and all

ça

that

32 T: oui eh

yes eh

33 E: et . je pense que . eh aussi que beaucoup de chance eh beaucoup de gens ont peur ehm de:

and . I think that . eh also that many chance eh many people are afraid ehm of:

que la que l'allemand que l'Allemagne avale la Suisse .

that the that German that Germany swallows Switzerland .

34 T: mhm

mhm

35 E: et c/ je pense que ça c'est un . . c/ c'est un truc que beaucoup de gens eh . . ont peur de ça

and th/ I think that's it it's a . . i/ it's a thing that many people eh . . are afraid of it

36 T: oui oui donc au fond il y a il y a trois points que vous avez abordés il y a le côté historique

yes yes so in fact there are three points that you brought up there is the historic side

donc deuxième guerre mondiale il y a le côté eh eh maintenant de des des troubles qui

so second world war there is eh eh now the the the troubles that

se passent en Allemagne eh donc eh ici vous avez donné le nom eh le mot racisme et puis

occur in Germany eh so eh here you mentioned the term racism and then

il y a la puissance allemande la puissance économique surtout et politique en Europe hein>

there is the German power the economical power above all and the political in Europe no>

de de de l'Allemagne donc vous dites justement que les gens ont peur que: que l'Allemagne

of of of Germany thus you say that the people are afraid that: that Germany

avale hein> vous avez dit avale la Suisse allemande et la Suisse x mhm {Max}

swallows no> you said swallows the Swiss German region and Switzerland x mhm {Max}

37 H: mais quand on laisse tomber l'allemand c'est aussi une sorte de racisme . je pense .

but when we give up German that's also a kind of racism . I think .

38 T: oui . .

yes . .

39 H: et il y a aussi de des criminels en en Angleterre ou [des]

and there are also criminals in in England or [some]

40 T: [ou des Suisses]

[or some Swiss]

41 H: racistes [ou]

racists [or]

42 T: [oui]

[yes]

43 G: en Amérique du Sud [ou]

in South America [or]

44 T: [oui]

[yes]

45 H: ou en Suisse

or in Switzerland

46 T: oui mhm . . mais c'est vrai que c'est un problème quand même pour le Suisse allemand eh

yes mhm . . but it's true that it's a problem nevertheless for the Swiss Germans eh

j'ai x entendu ça . le Suisse allemand a besoin de se démarquer de l'allemand

- I have x heard it. the Swiss German person needs to distinguish himself from the German pour pour pour affirmer son son son identité . il doit il doit il doit prendre une libre person to to affirm his his his identity . he needs he needs he needs to take a safe distance . justement il y a des causes historiques et des causes eh: d'autres causes peut-être distance . right there are historical causes and causes eh: other causes maybe mais le le Suisse allemand a toujours peur d'être assimilé à l'Allemand à but the the Swiss German always is afraid of being assimilated to the German to l'étranger hein> et x il se il se démarque et le dialecte c'est peut-être une sorte de de de the foreigner no> and x he he demarcates himself and the dialect is maybe a kind of of of refuge pour eh justement eh pour se protéger contre cette emprise allemande oui> refuge for eh just eh for protecting oneself from this German impact yes>*
- 47 K: je pense c'est un peu la pensée c'est un . Bünzli oder .
I think that's a bit the idea that's a . Bünzli no (in Swiss German) .
- 48 T: oui eh on dira petit bourgeois oui oui . mhm . . mais vous savez que c'est une c'est une yes eh one would say petite bourgeoisie yes yes . mhm . but you know that it's a it's a peur et c'est une peur réelle donc eh les sondages les statistiques le montrent hein> oui .
fear and it's a real fear so eh the polls the statistics show it you know> yes .
d'autres avis . oui Daniel
other opinions . yes Daniel
- 49 L: mais qu'est-ce que le Suisse allemand
but what is the Swiss German (i.e., the Swiss German person)
- 50 T: qu'est-ce que c'est le Suisse allemand> . aha oui ça c'est la question que vous avez posé
what is the Swiss German > aha yes that's the question you have brought up (...)

Communicative culture and the reciprocal dimension of mediation (lines 1–5). The beginning of the sequence shows a negotiation of the interaction's organizational pattern. At line 1, the teacher invites the students to present their understanding of the article. He thereby proposes an interactional task that is defined so widely as to apparently contrast with the students' normative expectations with regard to how classroom interaction is to be organized; the students remain silent. When student G at line 4 explicitly invites the teacher to ask him some specific question, G in fact demands a more familiar behavioral pattern, namely the one that puts the teacher in the role of an interrogator and the students in the role of respondents. He thereby also adopts the role of a mediator, giving the teacher clues as to how to initiate the discussion more efficiently. Only once the teacher accepts the student's demand (5T) and, for a moment, puts to work the more classical school scheme of communication does the interaction take a more fluent course and develop into an animated discussion.

What is being negotiated here with the task at hand is not simply the question whether to put forward freely one's understanding of a text or to answer precise questions regarding that text. What is in fact being negotiated is the distribution of the interactional roles between teacher and students and the related communicational organization. The sequence first shows a striking example of how the possibilities for alternative interactional patterns in the classroom can be crucially restricted not only by the teacher's experiences and habits but also by the students' experience of the communicative culture of the classroom. The normative expectations attached to that culture and rooted in the participants' experience of that culture function as reference points for their in-

terpretation of the situation and for their choice and acceptance of specific forms of activities and exclusion of others. In this way, the communicative culture functions as a mediator with regard to substantial sociocognitive dimensions of the tasks that are being accomplished.

The sequence further provides a very clear example of the reciprocal dimension involved in mediation, where a student's intervention guides the teacher to better adapt his task to the students' expectations and thereby leads up to an interactional space which seems to favor the students' active participation through talk. The resulting communicative task, thus, is locally and collaboratively reconfigured on the general background of the classroom culture. And this very reconfiguration, as it implies specific activities to be carried out by the students, is a decisive element in structuring the classroom as a sociocognitive space for interaction and for language development.

Multiple layers of mediation (lines 5–24). In the further course of interaction, the teacher remains mainly in an interrogative position, distributing speaking rights. But he does it in a way that is far from implementing a rigid, predefined and predictable interactional scheme or a reproductive treatment of thematic contents.

Most remarkably, the teacher repeatedly invites the students to explain and to justify their points of view and thereby prevents them from confining themselves to minimalist communicative strategies. The little dialogue that develops between lines 5 and 12 is significant with this regard. After a minimal "yes" response by student G at line 6, the teacher first invites him to explain his point (7T). G provides a short explanation concluding with "that's the reason why" (8G). The teacher, however, further challenges the student by inquiring about his personal opinion (9T). He does this by means of a yes-but construction which exhibits what conversation analysts call the preference for agreement and contiguity (Sacks, 1987, see *infra*). The student, in turn, takes up the challenge and provides further explanations (10G). By being solicited as a valid interlocutor whose personal views are valued, the student is apparently encouraged to invest himself more fully into the discourse activity. Here again, then, activities, ways of dealing with a task, and of transforming that task are intricately related to the social dimensions of talk.

A further noteworthy point concerns the interactional and thematic organization of the segment of discussion. The teacher's questions are systematically oriented toward the students' answers. As a matter of fact, the teacher allows the students' interventions to completely guide the thematic course of the interaction, and he reacts to them by encouraging the students to develop their points of view or by sustaining their talk with continuers or back-channel expressions ("mmh," "oui," l. 11, 19, 23). In that way, the students are not only invited to play an active role of respondents but they are also given occasion to put to work a relatively complex discourse activity that consists of providing explanations (8G), of expressing and moderating their personal opinions (10G, 14A), and of justifying their points by providing examples (10G) or by deploying other argumentative means (14G). Due to the nature of the teacher's challenging communicative strategy, students have the possibility to take major responsibilities in the local management of the thematic developments and to become active coorganizers of the argumentative structure of the discussion. And in order to do so, they put to work diverse communicative resources.

At some isolated moments, the teacher also provides support activity with regard to the linguistic structures produced by the students without, however, interrupting the flow of conversation. This is the case at line 11, where the teacher simply sustains the student's talk by back-channels at a moment

where the student shows signs of hesitation, which might be due to linguistic insecurity (marked by such elements as a pause, “eh,” the reformulation of “en allemand,” which is a germanism for “in German courses,” the stretching of a sound). It is more obviously the case between lines 20 and 23, where the teacher corrects student B’s “allemagnes” (“Germanies”) by suggesting “allemands” (“Germans”), which the student repeats before continuing his point. The little sequence amounts to what has been called other-initiated other-correction by conversation analysts (Schegloff, Sacks, & Jefferson, 1977). This type of correction—which in this case is not necessary for guaranteeing intercomprehension—is typical for classroom situations as opposed to natural interactions (where self-correction is preferred; Schegloff, Sacks, & Jefferson, 1977). It reveals a didactic contract between teacher and students within which the teacher has the role of an expert instructing a novice, thereby visibly treating his interlocutor as a learner. It in fact represents an instance of strong activation of relational asymmetry within an otherwise less prototypical classroom interaction pattern.

In summary, the mediational activities at work in this sequence of interaction between lines 5 and 24 relate to the organizational, social-relational, thematic as well as to the linguistic dimensions of discourse and to a series of support mechanisms that go far beyond providing help. All these contribute to configure the sociocognitive nature of the interactional tasks accomplished by the students. They sustain interactional functionings that allow the learners to play an important role in the management of discourse activities, to position themselves as active agents experimenting their language, taking risks, negotiating intercomprehension and expressing or defending their opinions within a dynamic course of interaction. The sequence shows thus how treating (and mediating) a specific school task is intricately related to organizing social interaction, to establishing participation patterns, and to shaping social roles and identities.

This conclusion coincides with one other interesting observation: in the communicative interactions within some other classes, students engage in an extremely simplistic activity that is far below what they are generally capable of in their second language. This is typically the case when the fixed asymmetrical distribution of interactional roles and a classical question–answer–evaluation structure cut down the students’ responsibility in the collective management of discourse (of its contents as well as of its interactional organization), and suspended any need for taking active social decisions on their part. Thereby, the accomplishment of specific communicative tasks (for instance answering questions) and the enactment of sociointeractional role relations (e.g., interrogator and interrogated) continuously interact to shape the sociocognitive conditions of the situation. These conditions are therefore contingent with ways of socializing into modes of participating in classroom communication: Rather than stemming from the students’ ability to perform more complex discourse tasks, their simplistic activities are rooted in their interpretation of the interactional tasks that are socially distributed and mediated in a way that does not *demand* the students perform above the minimum.

Learning by participating as a responsible social agent (lines 28–50). In the second part of the transcript, the teacher pursues his support strategy, and the students continue to exhibit deep involvement in talk. In the beginning of the segment, the teacher refers back to a former point made by a student and proposes it as a new subtheme of discussion (28T). He thereby openly manifests his interest in student E’s contributions, valorizes what the student has to say, and at the same time invites him to further explain his position, which E does extensively (l. 31–35).

Something similar happens later on, starting at line 36, where the teacher summarizes student E's contribution, and thereby not only structures its content but also points out its richness. Interestingly, this summary first provides the teacher with an opportunity to stress the problems about Germany and peoples' fear of German power as a subtheme of the discussion. And second, it also offers student H (l. 37) the occasion to take up, by self-selecting his turn at talk, one of the subjects brought up earlier by student E (racism, l. 31) in order to produce a counter-argument and disregard the teacher's more general thematic focus.

What follows is an intricate collaborative construction of the position according to which there are problems in every country (l. 39–45). The teacher entirely accepts H's thematic operation and even encourages H in his speaking right, first by means of a back-channel expression (38T) and then by means of an anticipated completion (40T; cf. Lerner, 1996). Note that this completion is perfectly tuned to the syntactic construction of H's turn ("and there are also criminals in in England or"). In providing the additional idea "or Swiss," T displays an orientation to H's current turn not only by repeating H's "or" but also by taking the possible completion point of that turn (after "England") as his starting point. The teacher's completion, therefore, does not appear to constitute a claim for a turn but accompanies the main speaker's contribution and demonstrates affiliation with his purpose.⁷ Student H, however, does not line up with the teacher's overlapping contribution and completes his own turn by "racists" (41H), which is again accepted by the teacher (42T). At this point, student G presents another completion with regard to H's contribution. The placement of this completion is clearly anticipatory, as it disregards the expansion projected by H's "or," produced in overlap with a teacher's back-channel at line 41. G's contribution, however, still ties in in a grammatically and semantically coherent way with what precedes that "or," which again suggests that it is not meant as a claim for the turn at talk but as a support of H's point. And this contribution by G is in fact acknowledged not only by the teacher's back-channel (44T) but also by H's final remark "or in Switzerland." This final remark is itself a completion of G's contribution (note again the repetition of "or"), and it thereby retrospectively treats that contribution as a turn at talk.

The whole sequence between lines 36 and 45 presents an intense joint management of the thematic elaboration of a contribution to talk, namely that "there are also criminals in in England or racists in South America or Switzerland." This is done in perfect respect of syntactic and semantic coherence as well as the main speaker's maintenance of the floor. It is a subtle instance of collective elaboration mainly lead by the students and sustained by the teacher, made possible through the consistent reciprocal orientation and support of the parties involved and their active participation in the collaborative process. It also provides an example of how interactional roles mingle, how their boundaries dissolve, and how the accomplishment of a microtask and the related processes of mediation through various sorts of support are distributed among several parties involved.

After this sequence, the teacher again slightly shifts the topic of the discussion, providing his own point of view on the Swiss Germans' attitude (l. 46 and 48), which in turn gives student K the opportunity to comment on that attitude (l. 47). Note that K's turn follows a preference for agreement and contiguity format and thereby slightly shifts the topic of talk (cf. Sacks, 1987): The ac-

⁷ Although the absence of pauses and the very occurrence of "or" at line 39, and further down at lines 41 and 43 (as well as the overlap at lines 39–40), show that turn transition points are not actually being projected by the speaker, the placement and the syntactic construction of the completions with regard to previous turns suggest that they are designed to occur as part of the current turn and not in opposition to it (see Lerner, 1996, for related issues).

knowledge of the previous point is placed first (“oui mhm”) and the discourse marker “but” introduces a reorientation of the topic. Thereafter, student K in line 47 self-selects a turn in order to comment on the attitude sketched by the teacher and to qualify it as “Bünzli,” which the teacher translates as “petit bourgeois” before further developing his point. Finally, another student challenges the whole discussion group by launching the question of how one can define the typical Swiss–German person (49L). This subject matter is immediately taken up by the teacher and becomes the main topic of the subsequent discussion.

The teacher’s communicative strategy in this second part of the quoted segment consists even more obviously than before in systematically orienting his contributions toward what the students are saying. He thereby not only appreciates the students as interesting interlocutors but he also supports them by various means in their efforts to take important responsibilities in the local thematic structuring of the discussion. It appears that the teacher’s various ways of valorizing the students’ contributions are important means of mediating the discourse task at hand: By positioning the students as interesting interlocutors, the teacher enhances their investment in the activity. The students’ own reciprocal support and completion has parallel effects. In return, the relative discourse autonomy they deploy allows them to position themselves (and to treat each other) as valid social agents, assuming an active role in the interactional management of the discussion and to intensely collaborate with the other students and with the teacher within that discussion. This is an essential way in which communicative activities are places in which processes of socialization and the deployment of communicative and other competencies interact in the construction and the accomplishment of tasks.

Discussion: The Mediational Stance

The way interaction is organized in the quoted segment provides the students with the possibility of engaging in relatively diverse and complex discourse activities. Far from being limited to putting predetermined pieces of information into predetermined slots of interaction, which can often be observed in the classroom, their tasks consist in organizing their discourse in a way as to manage its internal coherence as well as its connectedness with regard to the others’ contribution within a dynamically evolving interaction. What is most important about the example is not the length nor the syntactic complexity of the students’ moves and thus the monologic dimension; it is the dialogic dimension of taking up the interlocutors’ discourse, of working on it, of modifying it in order to make the interaction go on. The complexity of the students’ work is constitutive of the interactional dimension: They are coagents in an interactional space that is locally constructed, and where the way interaction is organized invites them to put to work active strategies of collaboration and to use their communicative resources to do so. In other words, the modalities of the interactional constructions and mediations in turn shape the sociocognitive dimensions of the task and thereby contribute to configuring interactional conditions for the development of second-language communicative competencies through various ways of participating in communicative practice.

What is particularly interesting about this example is that a strong presence of the teacher, and namely his questioning, does not necessarily reduce the students’ initiative, on condition that this presence is directly oriented toward the students’ contributions and activities and not toward a prefabricated scenario (cf. Pekarek, 1999). This is in line with the emphasis put in (neo)Vygotskian approaches on interactivity based on mutual engagement in joined activity (see

Rogoff, 1991, *inter alia*). It reveals the importance not only of responsibilities but also of the sharedness of responsibilities. And it reveals how this sharedness is rooted in the interpersonal dimension of treating each other as valid and hence responsible social agents. Regarding interactional competencies, the gradual acquisition of independent skills means, among other things, developing the means for becoming equally responsible. This is one of the most fundamental ways in which language development is a profoundly social process. It is also a crucial aspect for our understanding of the processes of social mediation, as will become clear in the next section.

The very *reciprocity* that underlies the notion of responsibility also profoundly marks the construction of the teaching and learning space. If, as has become most obvious in the opening section of the quoted example, the classroom is a mutually constructed space, this also means that it is a mutually regulated space. The students, in particular, can play a crucial role in shaping the teacher's processes of mediation. What is at stake, then, is not only the students' acquisition of interactional skills in a second language, but also the teacher's skill as a mediator. If we see competencies not as fixed preexisting inventories for acting and thinking but as variable resources contingent with locally accomplished sociocultural activities, then it appears that, through the process of interaction, all participants are inevitably involved in an ongoing process of development. This is so because interaction always involves the interlocutors' reciprocal orientation to a changing situation and to each other's microactivities.

If then, in the quoted example, the interaction seems to take a dynamic course, this is not simply due to the initial task presented by the teacher, nor to the students' language capacities. It is essentially due to the way the situation is (re-)constructed interactively. This construction, however, is not an ahistorical, radically local product but a socioculturally situated accomplishment. The apparent ease with which the situation is handled, and also its moments of task-renegotiation, suggest that students and teacher are used to the type of interaction they are getting involved in, that their communicative strategies, although locally implemented, also draw from a communicative experience which functions as the canvas on which their ways of interacting and mediating each other's tasks are composed. The *communicative culture* shapes the mediational processes that contribute to configure that very culture; it is part of the mediational tools.

With specific regard to language learning, examples like the one discussed in this article make it very obvious that the complexities presented by second-language interaction cannot be reduced to the mere management of local intercomprehension problems or to insecurities in the linguistic repertoire, and that grammatical and lexical support is only a small part of what social mediation in second-language contexts is about. As a collaborative dynamic enterprise, face-to-face communication presupposes on the part of its participants the constant coordination of their activities, an ongoing mutual adjustment, the local management of discourse, role relationships, and thematic contents, as well as the continuous selection of appropriate linguistic means. This is also true for every interactionally managed task: As different as the cognitive prerequisites, processes, and possible gains involved in reconstructing a puzzle or finding a path through a maze might be from communicating in a second language, these problem-solving processes, if interactionally accomplished, always also involve the social coordination of activities, expectations, and interpretations. This very property calls for a pluridimensional notion of mediation, defined in terms of the management of activities, contents, tools, and social relations. It also clearly suggests that the efficiency of the expert's mediation cannot be reduced to a question of single instances of help directed to a specific object of acquisition (Pekarek Doehler,

2002), but it rather is a function of what we might call a *mediational stance* (or a global attitude, as Hudelot & Vasseur, 1997, put it): a communicative strategy and its continuous adaptation to the learners' levels of competence and to their needs. Such a notion, of which the nature and consequences will be specified later, is needed in order to account for the global, and not merely local, role of the other in cognitive development.

MEDIATION REVISITED

The preceding analysis and interpretations enrich our understanding of mediation as an interactive process. They lead up to a pluridimensional definition of mediation, involving

- A *reciprocity-oriented notion of mediation* that accounts for the fact that what is at stake in social interaction are ways of socially cooperating and of mutually coordinating activities—a notion, thus, that is radically opposed to an unidirectional understanding of the relationship between expert and learner.
- A *context-sensitive and context-producing notion of mediation* that understands mediational processes as part of the methods (in the ethnomethodological sense) by which interlocutors make mutually accessible their understandings of context and coconstruct their teaching and learning environment.
- A *culture-related notion of mediation* that takes into account the mediational role of communicative culture and experience; a notion, in other words, which considers, as Cole (1994, p. 85) put it, cultural schemes (school-related schemes, for instance) as mediators for development.

These elements converge on a *pluridimensional notion of mediation* that not only relates to such things as linguistic or logical (i.e., related to logical reasoning) resources but is also contingent with what we talk about, what we do by talking, who we are for one another, and how we define the situation—a notion, thus, which is concerned with contents, activities, contexts, roles, and cognitive resources. Such a concept of mediation has important consequences for the way we analyze and understand the teaching–learning rapport:

1. In every sociointeractive learning setting, at least two interconnected projects need to be mediated: the learner's and the expert's. The educational encounter is not a simple encounter between an expert and a novice engaged in a single task in which assistance is provided by the one to the other. Rather, it is a complex *reciprocal* construction in which the accomplishment of the learning task is dependent on the expert's activities, and the accomplishment of the teaching task is dependent on the learner's, and in which these tasks are continuously redefined through the very course of activities. The nature and effectiveness of mediation, therefore, inevitably are a function of the mutual actions of teachers and students, of experts and learners.

This is of particular importance if we consider that social interaction is built on the reciprocal actions and perspectives of the social agents and presupposes their constant adaptation to one another as well as the ongoing coordination of their activities (Cicourel, 1973; Garfinkel, 1967; Schutz, 1967). Interaction inevitably and permanently implies a process of mutual regulation as the social agent has simultaneously to act and to react. As a consequence, self- and other-regulation cannot be conceived but in terms of an intertwining and an interdependency that are formed

and transformed at every moment of the interaction's dynamic course (Egli & Pekarek, 1996). If, for instance, the teacher usually plays a leading role in the classroom, the way he does this is always dependent on the students' behavior. This has of course been widely acknowledged in theory. However, the students' role in constructing the teacher's mediational activities and in helping him to adopt these activities to their needs and possibilities has not gained much attention in empirical research. Understanding this role, however, is crucially important for understanding the sociocognitive conditions of learning.

2. It follows from the first point that the processes of mediation not only depend on the definition of the situation and of the task but are also a vital part in their establishment and transformation. As the quoted example has shown, the way repairs are handled interactionally, for instance, may imply ways of treating the other as learner and, as a consequence, of implementing an asymmetrical relationship between a person presenting him- or herself as an expert and another person being treated as a novice. In this sense, social mediational activities can be understood as *context-producing activities*. In this sense also, the notion that the zone of proximal development is coconstructed is perfectly in line with the idea that learners coconstruct their learning environment (cf. Donato, 1994). As a consequence, teachers and students and experts and learners conjointly establish the sociocognitive conditions of their encounter as a more or less favorable learning environment, and the processes of mediation they deploy play a substantial role with this regard.

3. These conditions, however, are not created every day as radically new constructions, but are emergent as part of a shared and continuously built-up *communicative culture*. The communicative culture of the school, including the communicative histories of teachers and students, is a central mediational tool (cf. Cole, 1994) in classroom interaction. Mediational activities take place on the background of the communicative experiences of the social agents involved in interaction. The knowledge about that culture has a structuring effect on expert–novice interactions and therefore is part of the sociocognitive conditions of teaching and learning. In valorizing certain kinds of experience, certain types of participation, and certain forms of action, the communicative culture of the communities of practice in which experts and novices interact provides some of the cultural patterns that support developmental processes, as well as other patterns that are less fruitful with this regard.

4. Because interaction is not a mere exchange of comprehensible messages and their negotiation but is also the means by which self and other are (re)defined and by which social relationships and social realities are constructed, the way learning processes are mediated in the classroom or in other settings is crucially linked to the *socialization* processes taking place in these same contexts. As we have seen, learners' responsibilities with regard to different dimensions of discourse (or, more generally, task accomplishment) are in essence a question of social sharedness and of the learners' positionings as responsible social agents in social activities. Having something to say (or to do) in itself is part of negotiating social relationships and the distribution of rights and duties. Discourse (or task) construction and the construction of identities are two inseparable facets of face-to-face interaction as social practice and as a ground for learning and development. This is a central aspect of instruction as a process of socialization.

In summary, all regulatory processes in interaction—be they related to contents, specific objects or problems, linguistic structures, or discourse organization—also imply a specific type of social regulation of the activities being accomplished. If then second-language acquisition in particular and the development of interactional and other competencies in general presuppose a subtle equilibration of other- and self-regulation, they also demand a delicate management of the

social-interactive positions and the socioinstitutional roles of the interlocutors. This is also why locally coordinated interaction is an extremely difficult task not only for learners but also for their teachers.

In this sense, the extended pluridimensional concept of mediation is linked to a profoundly sociointeractionist view of the acquisitional space and the learning subject. This concept is in line with what Lantolf and Pavlenko (1995) have put as follows: “learning hinges...on the choices made by individuals as responsible agents with a disposition to think and act in certain ways rooted in their discursive histories” (p. 116).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this article was to explore the social organization of mediation with regard to the accomplishment of interactional tasks in general and to the development of interactional competencies in particular. My basic assumption has been that developing an ability through social interaction is inextricably linked to interactively constructing the social situation itself, to understanding its conventions and interpersonal patterns, and to learning to deal with them. The analysis of communicative activities in advanced second-language classes has provided an empirical ground for reconsidering the notion of mediation in the light of the functioning of social interaction.

If we consider that learning as a sociocommunicative activity inevitable involves also acting and learning to act socially, then mediation-in-interaction cannot be reduced to the logical, instrumental, or linguistic (nor to the social) dimensions of social activities; it cannot apply to any level as an autonomous stratum. It presents itself as a reciprocal construction, a conjoint effort having a conjoined effect. And it is embedded in the bidirectional relation between agent and structure, being simultaneously a sociohistorically situated and a socially and locally accomplished reciprocal activity. It is in this sense that processes of mediation-in-interaction can be understood as part of the methods (again, in the ethnomethodological sense of the term) by which members construct learning environments, tasks, identities, and contexts.

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