**Roundtable Presentation**

**Current second language learning (SLL) theories and their applications in university EFL classrooms**

1. Purpose:

As English has been becoming the global language and it plays an important role in socio-economic development and international communications within non-English speaking nations, this language has been identified as the most important foreign language that has been learnt and taught at all educational levels, particularly in higher education (HE). English learnt and taught in these countries is called English as a foreign language (EFL), “a contact language between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen foreign language of communication” (Jindapitak, 2015 cited in Firth 1996, p. 240). Like English as a second language (ESL), EFL learning are best understood with reference to SLL theories. This leads me to briefly review current theories of SLL and how they inform EFL practice at the tertiary level.

**2. Content**

2.1 **Current theories in SLL**

It is argued that due to the sharp contrast between ontology and epistemology, the debate around whether language learning is primarily cognitive or social has not come to an end. Many scholars claimed that a gap between the two doctrines is unavoidable and incommensurable. The following is three current theories which are dominant in the field of SLL in general and EFL in particular: the cognitive, sociocultural and socio-cognitive theory.

# **Cognitivism and SLL**

Cognitive theory has its roots in psychologists and psycholinguists’ work and its appearance is the rejection of behaviorism in the mid-20th-century. As acknowledging positivism and post-positivism paradigm, the cognitivists see the world externally to the knower and the learner’s mind is considered an information processor that takes input then processes it and produces output at the end (Cooper, 1993). The digital computer is the metaphorical image of cognitivism, which processes input information based on its structures, not its meaning (Gee, 1998). Learning in this view is “the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill” (Mclaughlin, 1987, p. 133) and it is related to learners’ cognitive mechanism or information processing. A number of models and hypotheses for clarifying the way the second language learnt and stored have been inspired by the cognitive theory such as Krashen’s Hypothesis (1982) with Comprehensive Input Hypothesis-Formula i+1 (*i* is the number of knowledge learners acquired and *1* is a slightly higher level of language). The other models are Mclaughlin’s (1987), Anderson’s Active Control of Thought (ATC) model (1983,1985), O’Malley and Chamot’s (1990), Towell and Hawkins’s (1994). However, the Interaction Hypothesis proposed by Long (1996, 2003) was considered the most prominent model in SLL. In Interaction Hypothesis (IH), Long (1996) agreed with Krashen that comprehensible input is essential to acquire another language. However, he put an emphasis on interactionally modified input as he supposed that to make data comprehensible, there should be an interaction among learners in order to negotiate for meaning. The IH also emphasized much more on Input-Interaction-Output approach and it was revised by Doughty & Long (2003). Although interaction in Long’s IH encouraged the communication with the external factors (Matsuoka & Evans, 2004), cognitivism is criticized for the focus of language itselft and exclusion of social or cultural contexts.

### **Sociocultural theory in SLL**

Sociocultural theory (SCT) in SLL is grounded in Vygotsky’s psychological theory. It was then advocated and developed by James Lantolf, a SLA scholar, in the mid-1990s and has recently been becoming a dominant view in the field of SLL. The sociocultural theory is based on constructivism where learners construct the meaning by interacting with the social environment and determine the reality by the experiences of the knowers. In other words, social and cultural factors play a vital role in accumulating knowledge and these elements shape learners’ cognitive development. Learning in sociocultural perspective is the result of interaction between the learner and the social activities via means of mediation such as historical cultural activities, artifacts, concepts and language (Lantolf, 2009, 2011; Mitchell & Myles, 2004). Learning in this frame, including SLL, involves in social environment and individual. The central concepts of this theory are mediation and Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

### **Mediation**

Lantolf (2008, 2011) defined mediation as indirect activities or tools such as historical cultural activities, artifacts, concepts, forms of technology and language that form some capabilities of higher mental such as critical thinking, problem-solving, creativity, and learning. From this perspective, SLL in general and EFL in particular, as a higher form of mental activity, is also mediated by a variety of tools such as teachers, students, cultural-social context, documents, curriculum, educational policy, technological devices, etc. Learning from this view, including SLL, encompasses two ways of mediation: the interpersonal activity that takes place during face-to-face collaborating and intrapersonal interaction that is related to individual’s mental process (Ellis, 1999; Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

## **Socio-cognitive theory in SLL**

Atkinson is considered the socio-cognitive hybrid in SLL with the first notion of the socio-cognitive in 2002. The socio-cognitive theory developed by Atkinson also placed an emphasis on interaction. Atkinson’ s socio-cognitive approach was primarily based on Gee’s social linguistics, which claimed that “knowledge and meaning are seen as emerging from social practices or activities in which people, environments, tools, technologies, objects, words, acts, and symbols are all linked to ("networked" with) each other and dynamically interact with and on each other (Gee, 1998, p.6). He believes that “neither language acquisition nor language use—nor even cognized linguistic knowledge—can be properly understood without taking into account their fundamental integration into a socially-mediated world” (Atkinson, 2002. p 534). Atkinson’s socio-cognitive approach took advantage of the ideas of Vygotsky toward second language acquisition as well (Atkinson, 2002). He emphasized the vital role of social factors in an individual’s development and valued the participation in the communicative procedure. The socio-cognitive approach to SLL is, therefore, a doctrine that views social interaction or alignment as the main theme of SLL, which contributes to constructing the reality.

* 1. **Current SLL theories and their applications in university EFL Classrooms**

The empirical evidence underpinned by the three current SLL theories mentioned above will be introduced in this section. Viewing language learners as language processors, many studies showed the strategies chosen for learning English such as cognitive (identifying, remembering, storing and retrieving words and sounds) and metacognitive strategy (selecting attention, planning, monitoring and evaluation). These studies demonstrated that learners improved their language skills when applying metacognitive strategy in their learning and developed self-directed learning as well.

**Sociocultural theory in HE EFL education**

Task-based language teaching (TBLT) and Project-based learning (PBL) are communicative activities have been widely used in EFL context. These kinds of activity are underpinned by the sociocultural perspective as they emphasize the active role of learners in constructing knowledge. Recent years have seen a body of research on task-based language in HE EFL context. Examples are the work by Butler, 2011; Dickinson (2010), Gureckis & Markant (2012); Madhkhan & Mousavi (2017), Plews & Zhao (2010). These studies investigated the effects and challenges when implementing TBLT in EFL classrooms in Asian countries such as China, Japan, Iran, and Turkey. The findings indicated that TBLT had a dramatically positive impact on learners’ performance as it provided a learner-centered approach and created a dynamic learning environment for students in comparison with the teacher-centered instruction. Simultaneously, project-based learning (PBL) has been drawn attention by EFL teachers and students as it gets the student to involve in a project by giving them a task, a process, a product and a reflection as well as making them engage in the real world (Nunan, 1992, 2013). The work of Foss, Carney, Mcdonald, & Rooks (2007), Kettanun (2015), Malkova & Kiselyova (2014) and Yuliani & Lengkanawati (2017) showed that PBL enables students to extend not only language skills but also learning autonomy, problem-solving skills, and interpersonal skills.

Technology-enhanced language learning in EFL education is also posited by the sociocultural perspective. It is an increasing trend in HE EFL context in the 21st century and it is considered an effective tool for improving both self-directed learning and collaborative learning that helps learners collaborate with their peers, share their ideas with others and then create language skills in a rich, meaningful way (Bergmann and Sams, 2012; Wilkinson, 2016). A current approach applying technology-enhanced learning in HE EFL classroom today is flipped classroom strategy, which is considered an effective method to increase learners’ language skills, and engagement. By using digital tools such as online resources, web blogs, kiwis or social media platforms in HE EFL classroom, students have truly engaged in a meaningful and communicative learning context, voiced their opinions and enhanced their critical problem-solving skills.

Socio-cognitive in HE EFL education

The issue of corrective feedback (CF) and its consequences on SLL were primarily conducted within the cognitive framework. As socio-cognitive perspective share the common feature with socio-cultural in terms of the way to construct knowledge, activities such as collaborative learning, technology-enhanced learning within this perspective have been applied in HE EFL classroom as well. Since digital tools can help to create environments for students’ interaction and meaning negotiation, computer-based learning or Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) encourage both collaborative learning and self-regulation. A body of research (Hsueh, Liu, & Lan, 2016; Kim & Rissel, 2008; Zoghi, Mustapha, & Rizan, 2014) demonstrated that web-based learning enhanced not only students’ motivation and perceptions but also language proficiency as well.

1. **Educational importance of the study**

It is undeniable that all successful instructions rely on student’s learning as what teachers do and instruct in classroom is to help their students earn the best achievement. However, there is a fact that “most teachers have been trained to teach, not to think about second language learning. Yet everything that is achieved in the classroom depends eventually upon what goes on in the student’s minds” (Cook, 1996, p.1). For this reason, I have a belief that understanding the knowledge of SLL will help EFL teachers know how to construct their lessons and organize their instructions effectively as it is “a valuable complement to the teacher’s other skills and knowledge” (Cook, 1996, p.1).