

DOCTORAL THESIS

Scaffolding and its impact on learning grammatical forms in tertiary Chinese EFL classrooms

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**Scaffolding and Its Impact on Learning Grammatical Forms
in Tertiary Chinese EFL Classrooms**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how expert-novice scaffolding and peer-peer scaffolding may facilitate the learning of grammatical forms in tertiary Chinese EFL classrooms and attempts to illustrate the features of different modes of interactions. It was a classroom research study with a quasi-experimental design, in which Chinese tertiary level students from two intact classes in Hong Kong and Wuhan were both given a task of revising a student's writing, focusing on the learning of the relative clause in three interactional scenarios: student-student (S-S), teacher-student (T-S), teacher-student + student-student (T-S + S-S).

On the basis of the microgenetic analysis of classroom discourse complemented with quantitative results, the study has found that scaffolding in T-S + S-S interaction generates the most effective impact on learning the target form in the three settings, followed by T-S interaction and S-S interaction. The learner's Zone of Proximal Development (hereafter ZPD) could be promoted most effectively in T-S + S-S interaction due to high quality of scaffolding functions, whereas there is little evidence of extension in the learner's ZPD in T-S and S-S interactions due to a lower quality of scaffolding functions. Moreover, the effective use of the seven scaffolding functions, i.e., Recruitment, Simplifying the task, Direction Maintenance, Marking Critical Features, Frustration Control, Demonstration, and Feedback, in T-S + S-S interaction, seems to stretch the tertiary Chinese students' grammatical competence to a greater extent than in the other two settings. More importantly, the findings have highlighted the importance of helping students notice the gap in their knowledge, promoting self-regulated learning of target forms, and encouraging independent learning when the teacher provides appropriate support.

The study has both theoretical and pedagogical significance. Theoretically, it has shown that grammar learning in EFL classrooms does not happen through collaboration or combination of expert scaffolding and peer scaffolding in interaction haphazardly; rather it is the good quality of interaction and opportunities for self-regulation as shown in T-S + S-S interaction that can guarantee learning. Good quality of interaction is constituted of appropriate and proper use of scaffolding functions, support and guidance which allow learners to build blocks through self-regulation and promote their ZPD ultimately. Inadequate or excessive control or management of scaffolding strategies as shown in S-S and T-S interactions only impede independent learning. In addition, the study has ascertained the condition under which a learner's ZPD can be promoted in the classroom context. It answers the concern of what might constitute effective learning in an interactional context in sociocultural theory. Pedagogically, the

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
ABBREVIATIONS	xi
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Background	1
1.1.1 Theoretical Background	1
1.1.2 English Language Learning in the Chinese Context.....	2
1.2 A Brief Review of Literature	3
1.3 Purpose of Research	4
1.4 Outline of the Thesis	5
CHAPTER 2 SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING	8
2.1 Fundamental Concepts of Sociocultural Theory	8
2.1.1 The Importance of Social Interaction.....	8
2.1.2 The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	10
2.1.2.1 The Definition of ZPD	10
2.1.2.2 The Role of ZPD	11
2.1.3 Scaffolding	11
2.1.3.1 The Definition of Scaffolding	11
2.1.3.2 The Role of Scaffolding	12
2.1.3.3 Features of Scaffolding	14
2.2 Research on Scaffolding, ZPD and Second Language Learning	17
2.2.1 Research on Scaffolding in Expert-novice and Peer-peer Interaction	17
2.2.1.1 Research on Scaffolding in Expert-novice Interaction	17
2.2.1.2 Research on Scaffolding in Peer-peer Interaction.....	21
2.2.2 Research on the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)	27
2.2.2.1 Research on ZPD in Expert-novice Interaction	27
2.2.2.2 Research on ZPD in Peer-peer Interaction.....	32
2.3 Research Gap	34
2.4 Research Questions	37

CHAPTER 3 RESEARCH METHODS AND DESIGN	41
3.1 Design	41
3.1.1 Grouping	42
3.1.2 Pre-task Interview	44
3.1.3 Pre-test and Post-test	45
3.2 Participants' Profiles	45
3.2.1 Students' Profiles	45
3.2.2 Teachers' Profiles.....	48
3.3 Pedagogic Task	49
3.3.1 Focus of the Grammatical Form.....	49
3.3.2 The Task.....	49
3.4 Data Collection Procedures	50
3.5 Data Analysis	51
3.5.1 Procedures of Data Analysis	51
3.5.2 Analysis of the Discourse.....	52
3.5.2.1 Identifying Scaffolding Episodes.....	53
3.5.2.2 Coding and Quantifying Scaffolding Types in Episodes.....	55
3.5.2.3 Consistency	56
3.5.3 Transcription Conventions	56
3.5.4 Operational Definitions of Coding Categories.....	57
CHAPTER 4 MICROGENETIC ANALYSIS OF THE CLASSROOM	
DISCOURSE	62
4.1 Scaffolding in Clarifying the Meaning of Key Words, Sentence, or Paragraph.....	63
4.1.1 Scaffolding in Student-student Interaction.....	63
4.1.1.1 Clarifying Meaning at Word Level	64
4.1.1.2 Clarifying Meaning at Sentence Level.....	65
4.1.1.3 Clarifying Meaning at Paragraph Level.....	67
4.1.2 Scaffolding in Teacher-student Interaction	73
4.1.2.1 Clarifying Meaning at Word Level	73
4.1.2.2 Clarifying Meaning at Sentence Level.....	77
4.1.2.3 Clarifying Meaning at Paragraph Level.....	80
4.1.3 Scaffolding in Teacher-student + student-student Interaction	85
4.1.3.1 Clarifying Meaning at Word Level	85
4.1.3.2 Clarifying Meaning at Sentence Level.....	91
4.1.3.3 Clarifying Meaning at Paragraph Level.....	95
4.2 Scaffolding in Noticing the Form	98
4.2.1 Scaffolding in Student-student Interaction.....	99
4.2.2 Scaffolding in Teacher-student Interaction.....	105

4.2.3 Scaffolding in Teacher-student + student-student Interaction	113
4.2.3.1 Teacher Acting as a Facilitator or Encourager.....	113
4.2.3.2 Teacher Acting as a Guide or Supervisor	126
CHAPTER 5 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS	130
5.1 Quantitative Analysis of Scaffolding Episodes.....	130
5.1.1 Quantifying Scaffolding Episodes	130
5.1.2 Quantifying Scaffolding Functions	131
5.1.2.1 Distribution of Each Scaffolding Function in Total Episodes	132
5.1.2.2 Occurrence of Each Scaffolding Function in Each Setting.....	133
5.2 Statistical Analysis of Results from Pre-test and Post-test	137
5.3 Report on the Students' Revised Writings	140
5.3.1 Exemplification of Correct and Incorrect Target Forms in Students' Writings.....	140
5.3.2 Comparison of the Number of Correct Target Forms in Three Settings	141
5.4 Summary of Students' English Learning Experience from Interview	142
CHAPTER 6 DISCUSSION	147
6.1 The Role of Scaffolding when Focusing on Form	147
6.2 The Impact of Scaffolding on Learning the Target Form in the Three Classroom Settings.....	149
6.2.1 Teacher-student + student-student Interaction	150
6.2.1.1 The Most Effective Setting	150
6.2.1.2 The Most Conducive Pathway to Learn Grammatical Forms.....	159
6.2.1.3 High Quality of Scaffolding Functions	161
6.2.2 Teacher-student Interaction.....	171
6.2.2.1 The Second Effective Setting.....	171
6.2.2.2 An Alternative Pathway to Learn Grammatical Forms.....	174
6.2.2.3 Lower Quality of Scaffolding Functions.....	175
6.2.3 Student-student Interaction	181
6.2.3.1 The Least Effective Setting.....	181
6.2.3.2 An Alternative Pathway to Learn Grammatical Forms.....	185
6.2.3.3 Lowest Quality of Scaffolding Functions	187
6.3 Implications of the Study	193
6.3.1 Implications for Sociocultural Theory	193
6.3.2 Pedagogical Implications for Classroom Language Learning	194
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION	198
7.1 Summary of the Findings	198

7.2 Significance of the Study	201
7.3 Limitations of the Study.....	205
7.4 Recommendations for Future Research	207
BIBLIOGRAPHY	210
APPENDICES	226
CURRICULUM VITAE	319