



# Language Teaching Research Quarterly

2024, Vol. 46, 1–6



## Exploring Sociocultural Theory and SLA: A Tribute to James Lantolf

Mirosław Pawlak<sup>1</sup>, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen<sup>2\*</sup>, Hassan Mohebbi<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Adam Mickiewicz University, Kalisz, Poland

<sup>2</sup>College of Professional and Continuing Education, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, China

<sup>3</sup>European Knowledge Development Institute, Turkey

*Received* 14 October 2024

*Accepted* 02 December 2024

---

### How to cite this article (APA 7<sup>th</sup> Edition):

Pawlak, M., Wen, Z. E., & Mohebbi, H. (2024). Exploring sociocultural theory and SLA: A tribute to James Lantolf. *Language Teaching Research Quarterly*, 46, 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2024.46.01>

---

### <sup>1</sup>Introduction

We are very pleased to publish this latest Special Issue in honor of Prof James P. Lantolf. Prof. Lantolf is the Greer Professor Emeritus in Language Acquisition and Applied Linguistics at The Pennsylvania State University. He also served as the Director of the Center for Language Acquisition and the U.S. Department of Education Title VI Center for Advanced Language Proficiency, Education, and Research. Prof. Lantolf is a distinguished scholar in applied linguistics, renowned for his pioneering work in sociocultural theory and second language acquisition (SLA). His five decades of groundbreaking research have significantly advanced our understanding of second language development through the lens of Vygotskian sociocultural psychology (Qin, 2021). Lantolf has authored and co-edited numerous influential books and articles in these areas. His contributions have earned him prestigious accolades, including serving as president of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (2005) and receiving its Distinguished Scholarship and Service Award (2016).

---

<sup>1</sup> This paper is part of a special issue (2024, 46) entitled: In Honour of James P. Lantolf's Contributions to Sociocultural Theory, Second Language Development and Language Pedagogy (edited by Mirosław Pawlak, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen, and Hassan Mohebbi).

\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [wenzhisheng@hotmail.com](mailto:wenzhisheng@hotmail.com)

<https://doi.org/10.32038/ltrq.2024.46.01>

Lantolf's influential work has garnered significant recognition within the academic community, as evidenced by his impressive Google Scholar citations, totaling 35,634 as of 13 November 2024, with numbers increasing every single day. Among his most highly cited works (with over 6,200 citations by now) is his Oxford University Press monograph, *Sociocultural Theory and Language Learning* (Lantolf, 2000). These figures highlight the extensive impact of his research. Furthermore, Prof. Lantolf has been ranked among the "World's Top 2% Scientists List" in communication and textual studies (subfield: languages and linguistics), according to Stanford University's comprehensive citation metrics. This recognition underscores his status as a leading figure in the field, whose work continues to shape and inspire contemporary research and practice in applied linguistics and language pedagogy.

To celebrate Lantolf's significant achievements in applied linguistics and SLA, particularly his contributions to advancing research in sociocultural theory, the three of us (Pawlak, Wen, & Mohebbi) collaborated (through email exchanges) to set out on our plan to guest edit a Special Issue in his honor. As the standard procedure goes, we then circulated a call for papers to all potential authors that we can think of, and inviting papers of all types --theoretical, empirical and personal narrative accounts. We are pleased to report that we received an overwhelming response from scholars worldwide. Among the contributing authors are colleagues who have worked closely alongside Lantolf for many years, collaborators who have engaged in joint research projects with him, and former students who have been benefited and inspired by his mentorship and teachings. Additionally, many other scholars who have been profoundly influenced by his work also contributed. The final collection of selected papers in this Special Issue reflects the broad demographics and the diverse themes of his influence, featuring both theoretical explorations and empirical studies that build on his groundbreaking work. This collection aims not only to honor Lantolf's contributions to sociocultural theory and SLA, but also to highlight the concerted and ongoing endeavors undertaken by a group of devoted scholars to further explore and advance this important topic of academic inquiry.

### **Organization and Structure**

This Special Issue comprises 21 papers (excluding this Editorial) and is organized into two balanced sections based on their themes and article types plus a final synthetic review. The first section (**Part I**) is dedicated to theoretical explorations that provide in-depth discussions and reflections of fundamental concepts and emerging constructs in sociocultural theory. The second section (**Part II**) focuses on empirical studies, featuring data-driven studies that employ qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods to investigate theoretical and pedagogical issues in sociocultural theory and its implications and applications in language learning, teaching and assessment. The Special Issue concludes with a comprehensive and systematic review of Lantolf's five decades of research.

### **Summaries of Papers in Part I**

More specifically, **Part I** of the Special Issue begins with **Smagorinsky's** theoretical exploration to examine the intersections of Lantolf's work with Vygotsky's theories, emphasizing in particular the significance and distinctiveness of learning *through* and *about* languages. Following this, the second paper by **Mahn** presents a retrospective dialogue that takes a close look at the twenty-year journey of *co-discovery* with Lantolf, which highlights

the collaborative nature of their scholarly endeavors. The third paper by **McCafferty** offers the author's interpretations of language and *sociocultural consciousness* in particular, underscoring the profound impact of Lantolf's work on understanding language learning processes.

Then, the fourth paper is **Meng and Zhang**'s collective reflections on Lantolf's influence in *China*, illustrating Lantolf's global reach beyond the US. The fifth paper by **Hayes** offers a sociocultural perspective on foreign language education in the *US state education systems*, providing policy-relevant insights. The sixth paper, by **van Compernelle**, discusses *action ascription and mediation* in interaction from a CA-for-SCT perspective, bridging theoretical and practical considerations. The seventh paper by **Rosborough et al.** explores the creation of *genesis junctures* for teaching and learning a second language, paying homage to Lantolf's contributions. The eighth paper by **Grazzi** bridges the gap between *EFL and ELF* through sociocultural theory, highlighting the adaptability of theoretical frameworks. The ninth paper by **Negueruela-Azarola** discusses the concepts of *chronos and kairos* in transformative research and teaching/testing second languages, offering a temporal perspective on language education. Finally, the tenth paper by **Esteve** emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between theory and practice in language teacher education, advocating for transformative practices that integrate deep scientific knowledge and encourage self-inquiry among educators.

## Summaries of Papers in Part II

Following the conceptual discussions in Part I, **Part II** of the Special Issue shifts its focus to empirical and data-driven studies. The first study, by **Massa**, examines the successful application of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory in a German language learning context in Italy. The second study, by **Shabani and Bakhoda**, explores internalization and externalization within a computerized L2 context from a Vygotskian perspective. The third study, by **(Jie) Zhang**, investigates the development of L2 Chinese learners' conceptual understanding of polysemous verb compounds. The fourth study, by **Poehner and Yu**, draws on the concept of *Perezhivanie* (Lantolf & Swain, 2020) to discuss the role of emotions in L2 development within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), riding on the emotional or affective turn in language learning.

Then, the fifth study by **(Xian) Zhang** reports results and findings on the 'deviated' developmental stages of two Chinese heritage speakers in acquiring the *ba-construction*, offering preliminary counter evidence to the predictions of the Topic Hypothesis (Pienemann et al., 2005). The sixth study, by **Urbanski and Becker**, analyzes the emotional-cognitive development of second language learners through *collaborative efforts*, emphasizing the social aspects of learning. The seventh study, by **Mason et al.**, addresses language teachers' well-being, mindfulness, and the development of a researcher identity, reflecting on the professional growth of educators. The eighth study, by **Xia et al.**, conducts a systematic literature review using the established PRISMA method to identify 10 empirical studies that adopt dynamic assessment (DA) of vocabulary, highlighting the limited and premature development in this area. The ninth study, by **Kareem and Adams**, examines how exposure to translanguaging pedagogy influence Kurdish EFL learners' engagement in collaborative writing during a seven-week intensive academic English writing course, whose results reveal the synergetic effects of translanguaging and collaboration on EFL writing performance. The tenth and last empirical

study, by **Zhang and Meng**, employs the sociocultural concept of dramatic *perezhivanie* as a unit of analysis and a lens to report an autoethnography study of how the first author (Zhang) grappled with her EFL teacher identity crises in transformative contexts, demonstrating potential pathways for EFL teachers to evolve from a divided identity to a whole self.

The Special Issue concludes with a detailed and systematic review by **Lantolf, Panahi, and Mohebbi**, which encapsulates Lantolf's fifty-year research contribution to SLA through sociocultural theory. This review, enriched by Lantolf's own reflections, offers readers a comprehensive overview of his scholarly achievements, seamlessly integrating objective facts and figures with his personal insights.

### **Final Remarks**

To sum up, the broad topics covered by this Special Issue have included not only traditional and classical concepts and paradigms of sociocultural theory such as mediation, collaborative and dialogic learning, dynamic assessment (DA), and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), but also many new and emerging constructs such as dramatic *perezhivanie*, action ascription, genesis junctures, *chronos*, and *kairos*. With these, we hope that this Special Issue stands as a testament to the enduring legacy of Prof. Lantolf, whose work continues to shape and inspire the field of second language acquisition and language pedagogy. We trust that the insights and reflections presented here will not only honor his enormous contributions to the field but also encourage and inspire future research and innovation in both theory and practice. With the advent and increasing popularity of digital technologies and artificial intelligence, future research can further explore digital and AI-empowered mediation and learning, intercultural communication, neurosociocultural approaches, sociocultural dynamics in multilingual contexts, and environmental and ecological perspectives. For now, may this Special Issue serve as a beacon of inspiration, guiding scholars and educators in their future endeavors to build upon the profound legacy of James Lantolf. This represents the true pleasure and ultimate reward in guest-editing this Special Issue in his honor.

### **Table of Contents**

#### **Editorial**

#### **Exploring Sociocultural Theory and SLA: A Tribute to James Lantolf**

*Miroslaw Pawlak, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen, Hassan Mohebbi*

#### **Part I: Theoretical and Conceptual Explorations**

##### **Lantolf, Vygotsky, and Learning Through and About Languages**

*Peter Smagorinsky*

##### **A Twenty-year Journey of Co-discovery: A Retrospective Dialogue with Jim Lantolf**

*Holbrook Mahn*

##### **Reflections on Language and Sociocultural Consciousness**

*Steven McCafferty*

Mirosław Pawlak, Zhisheng (Edward) Wen, Hassan Mohebbi

**Collective Reflections on James Lantolf and his Influence in China**

*Yaru Meng, Yanhua Zhang*

**A Sociocultural Perspective on Foreign Language Education in State Education Systems**

*David Hayes*

**Action Ascription and Mediation in Interaction: A CA-for-SCT Perspective**

*Rémi A. van Compernelle*

**When Deictics are not just Deictics: Pointing Gestures and Second Language Learning (Ommagio a Jim Lantolf)**

*Alessandro A. Rosborough, Lauren E. Johnson, Jennifer J. Wimmer*

**Bridging the Gap between EFL and ELF through Sociocultural Theory**

*Enrico Grazzi*

**It Is About Time: Chronos/Kairos, Transformative Research, and Learning and Development**

*Eduardo Negueruela-Azarola*

**The Pedagogical Imperative for Teacher Educators: A Constructive Reflection**

*Olga Esteve*

**Part II: Empirical Studies on Language Learning, Teaching and Assessment**

**From the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky to its Didactic Application: A Case Study of German Language Learning in an Italian Context**

*Alessio Massa*

**Internalization and Externalization in a Computerized L2 Context from Vygotskian Optique**

*Karim Shabani, Iman Bakhoda*

**Developing L2 Chinese Learners' Conceptual Understanding of the Polysemous Verb Compound Verb-dao**

*Jie Zhang*

**"I Feel Proud of me": Emotions and L2 Development in ZPD Activity**

*Matthew E. Poehner, Lu Yu*

**Developmental Stages in Chinese: The Case of Chinese Heritage Speakers**

*Xian Zhang*

**Understanding Second Language Learners' Emotional-Cognitive Development through Division of Labor Collaboration**

*Kimberly Buescher Urbanski, Mariana Lima Becker*

**Language Teacher Wellbeing, Mindfulness, and the Development of a Researcher Identity**

*Sarah Mason, Alice Chik, Peter Roger*

**Dynamic Assessment of Vocabulary: A Systematic Literature Review**

*Yuwei Xia, Ying Luo, Xiaofei Lu*

**Translanguaging and Collaboration in EFL Writing**

*Nabaz Noori Kareem, Rebecca Adams*

## **Dramatic Perezhivanie-based Analysis of an EFL Teacher's Identity Development: An Autoethnography**

*Yanhua Zhang, Yaru Meng*

### **Final Review and Commentary**

## **James Lantolf's 50-Year Research Contribution to SLA through Sociocultural Theory: A Systematic Review**

*James P. Lantolf, Ali Panahi, Hassan Mohebbi*

### **ORCID**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7448-355X>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9041-6920>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3661-1690>

### **Acknowledgements**

Not applicable.

### **Funding**

Not applicable.

### **Ethics Declarations**

### **Competing Interests**

No, there are no conflicting interests.

### **Rights and Permissions**

### **Open Access**

This article is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which grants permission to use, share, adapt, distribute and reproduce in any medium or format provided that proper credit is given to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons licence, and indicate if any changes were made.

### **References**

- Lantolf, J. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and language learning*. Oxford University Press.
- Lantolf, J. P. & Swain, M. (2020). Perezhivanie: The cognitive-emotional dialectic within the social situation of development. In A. H. Al-Hoorie & P. D. MacIntyre (Eds.), *Contemporary language motivation theory: 60 years since Gardner and Lambert (1959)* (pp. 80-108). Multilingual Matters.
- Pienemann, M., Di Biase, B., & Kawaguchi, S. (2005). Extending Processability Theory. In M. Pienemann (Ed.), *Cross-linguistic aspect of Processability Theory* (pp. 199-251). John Benjamins. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sibil.30.09pie>
- Qin, L. L. (2021). Clear the clouds and see the sun in the world of Vygotsky's ideas: An interview with James Lantolf. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 3(1), 101-113. <https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2021.01.08>