

PERSONAL RECOUNTS AND SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM¹

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- **ABSTRACT:** The present article aims at analyzing recounts of personal experiences spontaneously produced by children and teenagers in EFL classrooms. Inserted in the field of Applied Linguistics, this study is based upon the Sociocultural Theory (VYGOTSKY, 1998, 2001), according to which language mediates the social construction of knowledge. Moreover, we regard language as a use-oriented tool in service of social and communicative purposes, as proposed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989). We stand on such theoretical backgrounds as well as on a qualitative perspective (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006) to argue that the analyzed recounts contribute to the social construction of pedagogical knowledge through personal experience, prompting the emergence of meaningful and shared learning in the classroom. Finally, we suggest that social world experience subsidizes the awareness of curriculum issues and, in return, those contents support the construction of students' personal experiences, as proposed by Nóbrega (2003, 2009).
- **KEYWORDS:** Recounts. EFL classrooms. Systemic functional linguistics. Sociocultural theory. Mediation. Social construction of knowledge.

Initial considerations

The interest of this research in the daily life of the classroom comes from acknowledging this space as a social and discursive practice with the potential of generating

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meaning. The classroom is the place where mediation of knowledge construction² occurs, and it brings forth an integration and confrontation of experiences, knowledge, and beliefs that reflect the social roles of the individuals participating in the teaching and learning process.

Thus, the classroom is one of many social events in which individuals participate throughout their lives, and as such, the discourses that circulate in it do not exist in a vacuum (VAN LIER, 1994, 1996), but are the products and the producers of a reality external to the educational environment. Such discourses, which are nested and imbued by social markings, work on the construction of ideologies and identities as well as in the negotiation of meanings and values.

Inspired by the potential that multiple discourses originated in the classroom have in mediating the social construction of knowledge, this article proposes the study of recounts of personal experiences in the English as a Foreign Language classroom³ for children and young teenagers. In addition to demonstrating the relationship that teachers and students develop regarding their individuality and curriculum content (NÓBREGA, 2003, 2009), such recounts are understood here as discursive manifestations of a narrative nature (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008) through which students share their personal experiences. Acting as mediators and scaffolds⁴ in the construction of knowledge, the recounts have the communicative purpose of reporting events involving the narrator, starting from an initial orientation in a sequence of events (MARTIN; ROSE, 2008), so that the student is able to situate her/himself and others in the classroom context.

This research is inserted in the area of Applied Linguistics (AL), whose initial studies have been focused on issues of language teaching and learning, such as the design and evaluation of didactic material, contrastive analyses between first and foreign languages, teacher development, among others (MOITA LOPES, 1999). A more contemporary perspective describes Applied Linguistics as a field seeking to “make sense of social problems in which language plays a central role” (MOITA LOPES, 2006, p.14), shifting its focus from very specific topics in language teaching and learning to broader issues of language use in varying social contexts. In this contemporary perspective, we stress the concern for empowering groups historically silenced by hegemonic worldviews, as well as the use of knowledge from various areas of expertise in the understanding of language issues, a feature that has always been associated with AL.

Aligned with the more recent studies in AL, the topic of our study is related to language teaching and learning. Our focus, however, is on the educational process and the interaction among individuals who participate in it, which corresponds to a concern for social, and not structural, aspects of language. It should be noted that it is

² In this study, we understand *construction* as a social and collaborative process, also referred to as co-construction.

³ As Leffa (2012), we use the terms “second language”, “foreign language” and “additional language” interchangeably, but, to avoid repetition in the text, we use the L2 acronym as an umbrella term to cover the discussed situations in this work. For the first language, we use the acronym L1.

⁴ Concept introduced by Brunner (1976 apud MERCER, 1994) as *scaffolding*. It refers to the support given by the more competent adult/partner so that a child can carry out a task he/she initially would not be able to perform by him/herself.

this contemporary conception of AL which underpins the proposed study, especially with regards to co-participation and multidisciplinary. We believe that the analysis of students' recounts allows the observation of life experiences usually ignored in a school system conventionally focused on the teacher and that often rejects more spontaneous students' discourse, since it considers such discourse unsuitable for production in the educational environment.

Moreover, the analyses proposed here are grounded on theoretical principles concerning learning and language, which are consistent with the assertion made by Celani (1992, p.19) that AL is "the point, then, where the study of language intersects with other disciplines". Therefore, we place our research interests in the analysis of discourse in the foreign language classroom, specifically in the recounts of personal experiences, conceived as potential mediators in the social construction of knowledge.

Language, mediation, and social construction of knowledge

In order to analyze the mediating and functional nature of the recounts in question from an interdisciplinary perspective, we understand language from two complementary theoretical frameworks: (i) the sociocultural theory (DANIELS, 2001; WELLS; CLAXTON 2002; WERTSCH, 2006, 2002, among others), stemming from Vygotsky (1998, 2001), for whom language is a mediating and cultural tool; and (ii) Systemic-Functional Linguistics, as originally seen in Michael Halliday's studies (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989; HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004).

In sociocultural theory, there is an approach to learning in which language has a fundamental role. Such a perspective does not focus on the development of a language theory, but in demonstrating the role language plays in the learning process. As we shall see, according to sociocultural theory, language acts as a mediating tool in the process of social construction of knowledge. With respect to Systemic Functional Linguistics, there is a conception of language as network of possibilities that allows users to make choices in order to convey and build meaning(s). It is a social semiotic theory, according to which language should be analyzed in its contexts of use and according to the functions it plays in social life.

Thus, we believe that a social outlook on language allows for the observation of its relevance in the process of constructing knowledge, and creates a better understanding of the role recounts of personal experiences play as mediating and scaffolding elements in the context of the English language classroom. Learning (including other languages) is therefore understood as a semiotic process involving participation in socially mediated activities (DONATO, 2000). In this sense, we suggest that the recounts are not merely a parallel discourse, decontextualized from the classroom environment, but social practices that build and influence learning in the instructional and interactional context.

As it also pertains to the sociocultural approach, we stress that this perspective provides contributions to the study of language in education, understood here as a way of situating the participants of a pedagogical interaction in the environment in which they are acting. The student, as an agent, builds his/her knowledge and social reality in the interactions, which are realized in social process in which participants create a common knowledge through dialogue. Based on this social view of learning, Vygotsky (1998) states that learning takes place in a particular cultural circle from the interaction with other individuals.

In order to understand whether and how education in the classroom reaches its goals as a process that aims to develop students' knowledge and understanding, it is therefore necessary, as seen in Mercer and Littleton (2007), to conceive learning as a process mediated by dialogue. The relevance attributed to the mediating role of dialogue in the social construction of knowledge, as discussed by the authors (MERCER; LITTLETON, 2007), is paramount within the context of this research, in which we stress the relationship between the construction of knowledge of the English language and personal recounts, which naturally arise in the shared dialogue in the examined classroom.

As with Mercer and Littleton (2007), we argue that social interaction is significant in the construction of knowledge. Therefore, in this study, we understand dialogue as a "cultural artifact" in the social construction of knowledge. More specifically:

Talk with a teacher, and with other students, is perhaps the most important means for ensuring that a student's engagement in a series of activities contributes to their developing understanding of science, mathematics or any other subject as a whole. (MERCER; LITTLETON, 2007, p.102).

We additionally resort to sociocultural theory, since it attempts to explain learning as a mediated process, as pointed out by Wertsch (2006). Thus, the individual is constituted in social relationships with his/her peers (FREITAS, 2000) and it is through investigating the mediating elements that this relationship can be understood. Consequently, we can see that mediation is the starting point for a sociocultural analysis. We believe that in the context of the classroom, "semiotic mediation is the key to all aspects related to the construction of knowledge" (JOHN-STEINER; MAHN, 1996, p. 192).

In this sense, the recounts of personal stories become quite significant for the process of constructing knowledge, since in commenting on their experience, the participants can reach a potential objective (e.g., forming a piece of knowledge) through social interaction and the use of language.

By creating different meanings from its use, language reveals its functional nature, as proposed by Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). According to the systemic-functional principles, language is a social reality, discursively materialized in texts that mold themselves to their use and social communicative purposes (ALMEIDA, 2002).

To meet such aims, language users make choices based on a potential of meanings in such a way that the end meaning results from the choice of what was said over what could have been said (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004). Since language use has its situational and cultural motivations, SFL is theoretically grounded on the notion that language and context are closely linked. As such, because language shapes itself around requirements of use, it is important to observe the characteristics and features surrounding it.

According to Vian Jr. (2013), what distinguishes SFL from other functionalist approaches to language is that this theoretical approach seeks to develop a theory of language as a social process as well as an analytical method for describing linguistic patterns (EGGINS, 1994 apud VIAN JR, 2013). As stated by Vian Jr. while commenting Eggins,

This aspect characterizes SFL as a highly interdisciplinary theory in constant dialogue with other areas [...]. SFL is far-reaching among teaching professionals concerned with social issues and the central role language plays in their daily lives, as well as how the understanding of language development may provide clues to understanding the reality in which they live [...]. (VIAN JR., 2013, p.127).

Accordingly, and in line with the author, we believe SFL, as well as AL, to be intrinsically interdisciplinary and an approach that aims to observe the production of meaning through textual processes of social life (MOURA NEVES, 2001; EGGINS, 2004). Its semantic and functional nature favors language as a creator of meaning, and investigates the role such meanings acquire through the use of language. In its broader perspective, SFL attempts to explain how individuals use language and how language is structured in its different uses (EGGINS, 2004).

Therefore, the proposed convergence of two complementary theoretical perspectives, i.e. the sociocultural theory and SFL, seeks to associate a theory of learning – seen as a social and discursive process mediated by interaction –, to a view of language nested in society and directed to use.

Methodological orientation and data analysis

The data from this study were generated in three classes, herein named Groups A, B and C, of an English course for children and adolescents, located in the south zone of Rio de Janeiro. The data was recorded in audio and video, and the parts selected for the analysis were transcribed according to the conventions⁵ proposed by Atkison and Heritage (1984), incorporating symbols suggested by Schiffrin (1987) and Tannen (1989).

⁵ The transcription conventions can be found in the Appendix.

The three groups varied both in age and proficiency level. Group A, composed of three girls aged between seven and eight years in their first semester of the course, is the one with the most basic English proficiency. Group B, made up of three girls and five boys, aged between seven and nine years, albeit beginners, attended the second semester at the language course. Group C students were eleven-year-olds whose proficiency level was a little more advanced, as such, kids in this group were more familiar with L2. On account of these differences concerning levels of proficiency and, consequently, lexicogrammatical knowledge of each participant, the use of L1 and L2 naturally varied in the discursive production during the classes in which the recounts of personal experiences emerged.

The data include audio and video recordings as well as field notes. The fragments used for the data analysis in this article were taken from a more extensive *corpus*, consisting of recordings of fifteen lessons, five in each group. As selection criteria, we bring to our debate interactions in which the recounts make reference to the pedagogical content. Of these interactions, some were motivated by the content of the lesson itself, while others stemmed from unrelated elements. All of them, however, are in some way related to the course syllabus. From a qualitative and interpretative perspective (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006), this study thus aims to analysis four fragments taken from interactions produced in the aforementioned groups.

The interest in observing the existing relationship between the syllabus content and the recounts produced by participants in the classroom stems from the idea that these discourses seek to reshape previous experience, relating them to the pedagogical context, as is discussed below.

Analysis of recounts of personal experiences and their role in knowledge construction in the English language classroom

The first fragment considered in this analysis of recounts is an instance of the need for students to make sense in the context in which they are placed. The classroom is often, if not always, felt as a kind of abstract and unreal environment where students encounter new lexicogrammatical structures and knowledge. This is even more latent in foreign language contexts, where, in addition to dealing with new concepts, students seem to still need to associate them with their knowledge and L1 experience.

In the first fragment⁶ under discussion, three students from Group A were starting to study animals in English and, after an initial conversation (brainstorming activity), they begin working on the lexical content presented in the textbook: *tiger, monkey, elephant, dinosaur* and *ostrich*. The first four animals were familiar to the children,

⁶ The current draft of this article displays the fragments under analysis in their original state, using both English and Portuguese. There is, however, the English version of the parts in Portuguese in parenthesis and in italics. It is important to note that not all the annotations made following transcription conventions were used because this could have modified the original meaning and compromised the analysis.

who were able to identify them quickly. That is, the students, in the fragment below, did not show major difficulties in recognizing those English words or using them in their oral language production. However, both the semantic concept and the pronunciation of *ostrich* were difficult for the students to understand.

Fragment 1

- 1 Adriana: ok this is an ostrich os-tri-ch
 2 Lurdes: AI que difícil teacher.
 (*Oh, that's too difficult, teacher.*)
 3 Adriana: sabem aquele barulhinho que o ônibus faz quando freia? (.)
 4 tchhh((imitando um ônibus)) então a gente tem que fazer
 5 este barulho no final da palavra os-tri-chh
 (*do you know that sound the bus makes when it brakes?*
tchhh - makes the sound - so, we have to make this sound
at the end of the word ostrich)
 6 Isadora: Ostrichtchhh
 7 Lurdes: [ostrichtchhh
 8 Adriana: YES that's it (.) do you know how to say ostrich in
 9 Portuguese? vocês sabem qual é este animal em
 10 português?
 (*do you know how to say ostrich in Portuguese?*)
 11 Isadora: NO
 12 Lurdes: hum, hum ((negando com a cabeça))
 (*uh-uh - say no by shaking head*)
 13 Adriana: é um avestruz aquele que esconde a cabeça no chão
 (*it's an ostrich, the animal that hides its head in the*
ground)
 14 Isadora: [TEACHER TEACHER posso te contar uma coisa? quando eu
 15 fui no Hotel Portobello lá em Angra tinha um homem que
 19 tinha um carro e levava a gente para fazer um passeio para
 17 () ver os animais (.) ((pega a caneta no chão)) a gente
 18 até passava dentro d'água (.) lá tinha um bicho desses que
 19 botava o pescoço dentro do carro e queria bicar TUDO
 (*TEACHER TEACHER can I tell you something? When I went to*
the Portobello Hotel in Angra there was a man who had a
car and he took us for a ride to see the animals - picks
up pen from the floor. We even drove through water. There
was one of those there, it would put its neck in the car
and try to peck at everything)
 20 Karla: como é que fala teacher?
 (*how do we say it teacher?*)
 21 Adriana: os-tri-ch say it Karla ((risos)) (*laughing*)
 22 Karla: os-os (.) AH teacher não dá não ((risos))
 (*os-os, AH teacher, I can't do it - laughing*)

The first moment of knowledge construction the fragment above refers to the pronunciation of the word *ostrich*, which took place between lines 1 and 7, where the focus of the discussion was on the textbook content. In this excerpt, we see that two students, Lourdes and Isadora, were able to learn the pronunciation of the new word (lines 6 and 7) from the introduction of shared knowledge by Adriana, the teacher: the noise the bus makes when the driver hits the brake (lines 3 to 5). This seemed to have been enough for the students to start building the knowledge concerning the pronunciation of the new vocabulary.

However, as indicated in lines 8 to 12, the explanation provided by Adriana was not enough for the students to understand the concept of *ostrich*. That is when the second moment of knowledge construction begins: the recognition of the animal, and thus the understanding of its concept. Having realized that the students still had problems identifying the word, Adriana introduces a specific characteristic of the animal (*it's an ostrich, the animal that hides its head in the ground*, line 13), which will act as a discursive motivation for the production of the recount by Isadora, between lines 14 and 19. It is from the use of the word 'ostrich' made by the teacher-researcher that the student is able to relate it to her experience, which may have eventually led to the construction of her knowledge.

Isadora's recount of a trip to a hotel located in Rio de Janeiro, when she had the chance to see an ostrich and experience a special situation, is a spontaneous discursive manifestation by the student which suggests a connection between her personal experience and the pedagogical content. In this case, we observe that, in line with the sociocultural theory, the student's recount acts as a mediating element in the construction of knowledge, suggesting that the lexicogrammatical choices made by the narrator of the story work as a link between the student's previous personal experience and the new vocabulary as part of the syllabus content. It may therefore be noticed that there is the need for Isadora to relate pedagogical content to her previous experience. The translation of the word and its correlation with the real world make it possible for the student to understand what was going on pedagogically in the classroom; it was through social practice that the syllabus seemed to make sense. This understanding is also in line with the principles of SFL, which understand language as a continuous process of using previous references for creating new meanings. Although the systemic-functional perspective (HALLIDAY; MATTHIESSEN, 2004) originally refers to the learning of L1, we can infer that the same theoretical framework also applies to the study of foreign languages.

The mediating aspect of personal recounts is also present in the interaction transcribed in Fragment 2 below, which was taken from a class in Group C. At the time, the teacher was working with daily routines and activities. Once the teacher assigned the students the learning task, João started recounting his personal experience, focusing on his daily routine.

Fragment 2

- 1 Adriana: NOW you're going to write about your week for example (.) ((escrevendo no
2 quadro)) (*writing on the blackboard*) on Monday you write seven o'clock
3 swimming classes, on Tuesday at ten o'clock - dentist
4 João: AH <não>teacher
(*Come on, teacher*)
5 Adriana: come on Jo::e don't be lazy ((risos)) (*laughing*)
6 João: lazy?
7 Luisa: pre-gui-ço-so
(*la-zy*)
8 João: você fala isso porque não tem o meu dia eu acordo às sete
9 horas da manhã e faço um mon::te de coisas até tarde de-da
10 noite até almoçar no colégio eu almoço ah, eu não vou
11 escrever tudo isso não () vai dar muito trabalho e-e nem vai
12 dar no meu caderno
(*you say this because your day is not like mine, I wake up at seven in the morning and I do a lot of stuff until late at night, I even have lunch at school, I'm not going to write all of that, it's going to take too much time and won't fit in my notebook.*)
13 Adriana: [Hello you don't need to write e-very-thing write just
14 one thing for each day, ok? Você não precisa escrever tu-di-
15 nho ((risos))
(*you don't need to write everything - laughing*)
16 João: a::h <agora melho::u> posso escrever só sobre hum um dia
17 quinta-feira é-é o dia que faço um montão de coisas vai dar
18 para usar um monte de esses ((risos))
(*that's better, I can write about Thursday, it's the day I do a lot of stuff, I can use a lot of those - laughing*)

In the ESL classroom, activities in which students need to assume a given contextual identity and produce texts based on it are very common (GOUVEIA, 2014). In this case, considering the created scenario (speaking about one's routine), students had to recount their activities regarding the days of the week and time of day. According to Halliday and Matthiessen (2004), it is possible to deduce the contexts in which the students are inserted focusing on the analysis of the given texts. In the case of the ESL classroom investigated in this research, a previous definition of context was given in order to develop the specific textual formats which run through it.

The student seems not to heed the previous definition of context established by the teacher and refuses to participate in the activity, opting to bring his own experience to the classroom. Producing a joke, the learner draws a parallel between the syllabus content about daily routines in English and his own real world experience, making the given context more meaningful to him. Here, the student's recount of his knowledge of the real world, compared to the imaginary of the classroom, acts, according to sociocultural theory, as scaffolding on which João builds his knowledge of the lexical grammatical structure proposed. In interacting with the other participants of the exchange, João makes his recount a two way interaction in which real world (NÓBREGA, 2003, 2009) experience contributes to the building of pedagogical knowledge, and this in turn serves as scaffolding for the building of the student's experience.

The following fragment shows a recount of the personal experiences produced by a student from Group B. As we can see, the recount relates to real facts of their contextual experience.

Fragment 3

- 1 Adriana: hum(.)Bel what kind of clothes do you wear in winter time
2 Bel: scarf, coat, sweater, (.) socks
3 Adriana: What else (.) Lulu?
4 Luciana: hum (.) gloves, gorro, boots AI Adriana uma vez eu fui pra Nova
5 Iorque e tava o ma::ior fri::o eu não tinha bota nem luva nem
6 gorro quase morri acho até que morri mesmo((risos))
(mmm, *gloves, cap, boots.. once I went to New York and it was so cold.. I didn't have boots nor gloves nor a cap and I almost died.. I think I actually died - laughing*)
7 Bel: engraçadinha como é que você tá aqui então heim?((risos))
(you're so funny.. how are you here then? - laughing)

In Fragment 3, we notice that Bel refers to L2 vocabulary to recount a personal experience external to the classroom context. As such, the information built during practice in the classroom maintains a dynamic relationship with the extracurricular context, in a way which strongly motivates the behavior (action) on the part of the student. Just as in the other fragments, the third fragment shows an attempt by Bel in relating the concept of “winter”, and the respective lexicon introduced by the teacher, with her trip abroad to an English speaking country. By sharing her personal experience lived in a context where the language being taught is used, the student builds here knowledge of the curricular content. Bel’s attitude highlights the conception of language as a social and material reality, which conforms to the systemic-functional theory, as well as the mediating function of the recounts in the process of social construction of knowledge. In other words, the social character of language refers us to the student’s use of discursive practice in constructing meaning.

Finally, fragment 4 is of an interaction in a class of Group B, in which the notion of time was being discussed. The activities *get up, go to school, go home* and *play outside* were presented and drawn on the board as a timeline, recounting the activities of the character in the adopted class book *Ben* in chronological order. When it’s time for *Ben* to return home (*go home*), the student named Carol draws a correlation between the imaginary world of the character and her reality.

Fragment 4

- 1 Adriana: when do you play outside Gil ((apontando para o aluno))
(*pointing at the student*)
- 2 Gil: Como assim
(*what do you mean?*)
- 3 Vitor: Quando você brinca
(*when do you play?*)
- 4 Carol: e-eu brinco no colégio eu-eu não brinco depois (.) IH
5 amanhã é dia vinte e dois eu tenho passeio OBA. não posso
6 chegar atrasada () ninguém quer saber pra onde eu vou?
(*I-I play at school, I-I don't play after.. Oh, tomorrow is
the 22nd and I'm going on a field trip. I can't be late.
Do you know where I'm going?*)
- 7 Gil: não, não estou nem interessado teacher o que é que você
8 quer que eu responda
(*no, I'm not interested teacher. What do you want me to
reply*)

This is yet another occasion in which the student recounts her experience, bringing to the classroom situations, attributes, conducts, events, etc., which relate to her real world experience. A clear way of demonstrating this is by considering the classroom as a context in which each participant of this social encounter brings to it their own context from their life experience. From this the possibility of creating a common situational context arises, based on a shared understanding, and formulating the idea of multiple contexts interacting with each other, exchanging information and jointly building the macro sociocultural context. Consequently, there is social cooperation, since each realized exchange, each reported experience, contributes to the cementing of the pedagogical practice; in other words, what it is to be a student or teacher in a determined social context.

The analysis of the data also suggests that the participating teacher often found herself constrained by the institutional expectations commonly found in language schools, that is, the need to speak in L2. Due to this, there was, not in general, the chance to explore in greater depth the recounts of personal experience at the moment they spontaneously arose and mediated the construction of knowledge, as aimed in this work, anchored in sociocultural theory and a sociosemiotic perspective of language. As such, the teacher's position in the dialogue brought in the fragments investigated reveal the intention of reverting back to L2 as soon as possible and returning to the pedagogical agenda. It is important to note, however, that this does not present itself as a problem, but an aspect related to the issues mentioned above: institutional expectations, teaching methodology, and the need of using L2.

The multifunctional character of the recounts of personal experiences

The analysis of the fragments leads us to propose that the four recounts produced in the classroom are the spontaneous personal manifestations of each participant, which can be understood as a way of sharing personal information to establish common knowledge between the participants in the classroom. In this light, language, by means of the recounts, is used in accordance with the sociocultural theory, a function of the creation of shared knowledge. It could be said that a new understanding of the information given in the pedagogical context is created through the recounts of personal experience, in which the use of language in the social construction of knowledge comes about in a predominantly collaborative way.

Accordingly, the participant's experience and their respective recounts are potential mediating resources in teaching/learning as a whole and, specifically in this research, as it relates to English for children and adolescents. In recounting their lived experience, the narrators bring to the context of the class their knowledge of the world, making it vital for the construction of knowledge. As Góes points out (1997, p.17, emphasis of the author):

During the classroom activities, the children focus on the interpersonal relationships present and also shift their attention to other experiences not restricted to the 'here and now'. There are many occasions in which they recount their experiences, bringing as a topic of discussion the personal attributes and conduct, or events that involve themselves or others. Even when faced with situations in which institutional objects are being elaborated, children seek to insert their previous experiences, reverting to an eminently *narrative* approach, relying on memory.

Acting as scaffolding (BRUNER, 1976 apud MERCER, 1994) in the social construction of knowledge, experiences are apparently recounted as a way to build the future from the past; in other words, building new knowledge from previously lived experience. Aligned with Mercer (2000), we also maintain that in order to build a relationship between what was and what will be, we use the resources of past experience to collectively create a new understanding. Therefore, the recounts seem to be a "search" for personal experiences which can act as collaborators in the construction of new knowledge and pedagogical understanding.

By means of the production of recounts, understood here as the contextual foundations in teaching/learning, the narrators seem to search for a (re)contextualization of the knowledge worked in the classroom, allowing for a more significant learning experience for all. It is in the possible (re)contextualization of the pedagogical content that we suggest the recounts act as a link between the different ways of knowing and understanding the world, allowing the participants to build knowledge situated in their experience.

With respect to the analysis of the fragments as a whole, it is apparent that the role played by the participants (teacher-researcher and students) and the classroom are inserted in a social context. After all, as states Van Lier (1994), this pedagogical space does not exist in a vacuum; the students and teachers present there come from somewhere and are going somewhere. The classroom is placed in an institution, in a society, in a culture; what often happens in these environments is therefore determined by the external context. Consequently, in this work, we consider the entire social and institutional context in which the participants find themselves to be essential.

Final Considerations

Understanding the classroom as a social event presupposes a continuous observation of all the social practices that exist within it. The recounts of personal experiences are an important source of knowledge on the part of students and teachers in the environment in which they are acting as social agents. In this article, despite treating only the recounts spontaneously produced by the students, we emphasize that personal living experience of the teachers are also frequently brought to class as scaffolding for the social construction of knowledge in L2.

The recounts of personal experiences can be understood as a mirror of the expectations and knowledge of the world of each participant in the pedagogical interaction. Such recounts, often ignored and wrongly confused with lack of discipline, digression and/or lack of attention, are important individual representations in the teaching and learning process, acting as a bridge between the pedagogical context and the surrounding external world. As such, we should, as educators, pay attention to what is being said in the classroom, promoting a more significant learning experience. We could argue that the dialogues in which the recounts of personal experiences emerge mediate the student's understanding of the pedagogical content. That is, by means of the dialogues which bring stories of everyday situations, the students build the specific content of the English language. Therefore, the foreign language classroom evinces a discursive practice appropriate to the participants of the interaction, having a socially constructed common purpose: the learning of another language. The recounts of personal experiences serve a specific function in the construction of knowledge in the foreign language classroom, acting as potential mediators in the process of social construction of a second language.

The exposition of stories and comments based on the personal experiences of the participants in the classroom seems to seek room for the pronouncements of those whose participation is usually only solicited in the pedagogical context of the institutional situation. Lastly, we emphasize that the teaching-learning of the English language is seen, in this study, as a dialogic process, according to which the students and teachers

are inserted in a social context in which language is a fundamental cultural tool. We maintain that, as such, learning cannot be understood without considering the social and communicative nature of human life.

NOBREGA, A.; AZEVEDO, S.; SOUZA, M. Relatos de experiências pessoais e socioconstrução de conhecimentos em sala de aula de língua estrangeira. *Alfa*, São Paulo, v.60, n.2, p.399-415, 2016.

- *RESUMO: Este artigo tem por objetivo analisar relatos de experiência produzidos espontaneamente por crianças e jovens adolescentes em sala de aula de língua inglesa. Inserido na área de Linguística Aplicada, o estudo está fundamentado na perspectiva teórica sociocultural (VYGOTSKY, 1998, 2001), segundo a qual a linguagem é uma ferramenta mediadora na socioconstrução de conhecimentos, em interface com uma visão de linguagem orientada para o uso e a serviço de propósitos sociocomunicativos, como proposto pela Linguística Sistêmico-Funcional (HALLIDAY; HASAN, 1989). Nessa arquitetura teórica e com base em uma tradição qualitativa de pesquisa (DENZIN; LINCOLN, 2006), discutimos como os relatos analisados atuam na socioconstrução do conhecimento pedagógico a partir da experiência pessoal, tornando os saberes significativos e compartilhados em sala de aula. Além disso, sugerimos que a experiência de mundo colabora para a construção do conhecimento curricular e esse, em retorno, serve como suporte para a construção da experiência particular do estudante, conforme proposto por Nóbrega (2003, 2009).*
- *PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Relatos. Sala de aula de língua inglesa. Linguística sistêmico-funcional. Teoria sociocultural. Mediação. Socioconstrução do conhecimento.*

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Appendix

Transcriptions conventions

...	unmeasured pause
.	descending intonation at the end of speech
?	ascending intonation
,	continuity intonation
-	sudden stop
=	continuous elocutions without pause between them
-----	syllabication
underline	emphasis
ALLCAPS	speech in loud voice or strong emphasis
>word<	faster speech
<word>	slower speech
: or ::	stretching
[beginning of overlapping speech
]	end of overlapping speech
()	speech not understood
(word)	questionable speech
(())	analist's comment, description of non verbal activity
"word"	speech
hh	sigh or laugh
eh, ah, oh, ih, hum, ahã, humhum	pause, hesitation or signs of attention

Conventions based on the studies of Conversation Analysis (ATKISON; HERITAGE, 1984) incorporating symbols suggested by Schiffrin (1987) and Tannen (1989).

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