

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND ALTERITY IN HUMAN COMMUNICATION*

James V. Wertsch
Washington University

Over the past few decades, there have been many discussions in developmental psychology and related fields about the role of communication in development and socialization. In some accounts communication is given a major role, and in others it is viewed as insignificant. At the extremes one can find accounts that essentially reduce socialization to the mastery of communication, on the one hand, and accounts that view communication as simply one manifestation of independently operating developmental tendencies, on the other.

A weakness that plagues many of these discussions is a lack of agreement on the nature of communication. Indeed, the disputes are sometimes bogus because authors jump into the issue of whether or not communication is important without being clear about what communication itself is. This would be of little consequence if solid consensus existed on this matter, but this clearly is not the case.

As outlined in the introduction to this volume, several distinct perspectives, reflecting different historical traditions, guide strands of contemporary discussions about communication. The strands identified there are dialogic accounts, sociological, and conversation analytic frameworks, functional and cognitive linguistic

*The writing of this chapter was assisted by a grant from the Spencer Foundation and by support from the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study in the Social Sciences. The statements made and the views expressed are solely the responsibility of the author.

approaches, and cultural anthropological perspectives. This chapter works from a dialogic perspective and outlines a few constructs that underlie many of our discussions—and misunderstandings—about communication. I begin with a consideration of the senses in which communication may be said to be social, and I then turn to an opposition between “intersubjectivity” and “alterity.”

IN WHAT SENSE(S) IS COMMUNICATION SOCIAL?

Few would disagree that communication is inherently social. To make this point, however, begs the question of what it means for a process to be social. I would like to suggest that there are two basic meanings of “social” that are often at issue in our discussions and that these two senses are all too easily conflated. The first sense in which a process may be said to be social has to do with whether one or more than one individual actively participates in it. In this sense a process is social if two or more people interact to carry it out. For example, if several students and a teacher are jointly involved in the process of interpreting a written text (compare Palincsar & Brown, 1984), the process is social, or more specifically, what I shall term “social interactional.” In this connection I shall distinguish between “social interactional” and “individual” processes, and I shall employ the related distinction between what Vygotsky (1981a) called “intermental” and “intramental” functioning.

A second sense in which a process may be said to be social has to do with the broad sociocultural context in which it occurs. By this I mean that any episode of human action must occur in a specific cultural, historical, and institutional context, and this influences how such action is carried out. For example, we speak of the social context of formal education, the social context of the late 20th century in America, and so forth, and when we do so, the focus is not on the specifics of individual or social interactional processes. Indeed, both individual and social interactional processes occur within virtually any sociocultural setting, reflecting the orthogonality of the two general ways in which a process may be social. I have argued (Wertsch, 1985, 1991, 1998) that it is useful to approach the second general notion of social—the issue of “sociocultural situatedness”—by examining how “mediational means,” or “cultural tools” are employed in human action.

Cultural tools such as “language; various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques; algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; schemes; diagrams, maps, and mechanical drawings; [and] all sorts of conventional signs” (Vygotsky, 1981b, p.137) are provided by the sociocultural context, on the one hand, and they are used by individuals as they operate alone or in social interaction while carrying out unique, concretely situated action, on the other. Because of their intermediary position in this formulation cultural tools provide a mechanism for analyzing the relationship between individual and sociocultural settings; in a sense they make it possible for the sociocultural context to be “imported” into individual mental functioning. Through processes of “mastery” and “appropriation,” cultural tools both

“afford” and “constrain” what is termed “mediated action” (Wertsch, 1998) on the intermental and intramental planes.

I shall use the term “sociocultural,” then, to deal with the level of analysis having to do with how individual and social interactional processes are situated in institutional, cultural, and historical contexts by virtue of the mediational means employed. From the perspective of this second sense of social, human action of the individual, as well as on the social interactional plane are socioculturally situated. Thus, even when an individual sits in solitude and contemplates something, she is socioculturally situated by virtue of the mediational means, or “cultural tools” employed to carry out this action.

The distinction between social interactional and individual processes that I wish to examine is grounded in Vygotsky’s account of “intermental¹⁾” and “intramental” planes of functioning. One of the places where Vygotsky outlined these notions most clearly was in formulating his “general genetic law of cultural development.”

Any function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. This is equally true with regard to voluntary attention, logical memory, the formation of concepts, and the development of volition.... [I]t goes without saying that internalization transforms the process itself and changes its structure and functions. Social relations or relations among people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (1981a, p.163)

An essential part of Vygotsky’s formulation of the intermental and intramental planes is that he viewed them as being inherently related. Indeed the boundaries between the two planes of functioning are quite permeable in his view, and his emphasis was on the transformations between them.

[Higher mental functions’] composition, genetic structure, and means of action [forms of mediation]—in a word, their whole nature—is social. Even when we turn to [internal] mental processes, their nature remains quasi-social. In their own private sphere, human beings retain the functions of social interaction. (Vygotsky, 1981a, p.164)

This statement does not assume that higher mental functioning in the individual is a direct or simple copy of socially organized processes; the point Vygotsky made in his formulation of the general genetic law of cultural development about transformations in internalization warns against any such view. However, it does mean that there is a close connection, grounded in developmental transformations, between the specific structures and processes of intermental and intramental functioning.

Hence from Vygotsky’s perspective, intramental functioning is social first of all because it “retain[s] the functions of social interaction.” For example, many forms of problem solving on the individual level are viewed as being inherently dialogic due to the fact that they derive from participation in dialogic encounters on the

intermental plane (Wertsch, 1980, 1985). And second, mental processes are social in the sense that they are socioculturally situated. As is the case throughout his writings, the key to understanding Vygotsky's claim about this second sense of social functioning is to be found in his analysis of mediational means. Thus language shapes both dialogue and the intramental functioning that derives from it. Indeed language provides an essential link between these two planes of functioning.

The relationship, grounded in mediational means, that Vygotsky saw between the intermental and intramental planes of functioning is reflected in his understanding of the very term "mental function." When used by him, this term applies equally well to social interaction and to individual processes. Thus, one could restate Vygotsky's general genetic law by saying that *one and the same* "function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes." From this perspective, it is as appropriate to predicate of groups as well as individuals terms such as "think," "attend," and "remember." As Middleton (1987) has noted, this is a line of reasoning that was being pursued by Bartlett (1932) in England at the same time that Vygotsky was writing, and today it is a point that is being revisited by investigators who have undertaken studies of "social memory" (cf. LCHC Newsletter, 1987), "socially shared cognition" (Resnick, Levine, & Teasley, 1991), and "socially distributed cognition" (Salomon, 1993).

Indeed, some recent studies go beyond Vygotsky's claims somewhat in their emphasis on intermental functioning as a stable end point rather than a way station to the intramental plane. This line of reasoning has been developed recently in cognitive science and other disciplines (see, for example, Hutchins, 1995). Rather than focusing on how individuals first participate in a cognitive process on the intermental plane and then master this process on the intramental plane, Hutchins has been concerned with problem solving and other cognitive processes that remain very much on the intermental plane. For example, he has analyzed how a crew of a naval vessel operate together as a cognitive system extending "beyond the skin" (Wertsch, 1998) of any individual as they guide the vessel into a harbor. In such cases "distributed cognition" is the endpoint of development, and there is no assumption that it will be taken over on the intramental plane. Of course, this is not to say that development does not occur on the intramental plane in such cases, but it is development having to do with more effective participation in a process that inherently involves social interaction.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND ALTERITY IN COMMUNICATION

Having added some clarity (hopefully) to the senses in which communicative and other processes can be said to be social, I wish to turn to an opposition that comes into play when trying to assess intermental, or social interactional processes. In the view to be outlined here, such processes inherently involve two opposing tendencies: "intersubjectivity" and "alterity." In any particular episode of social interaction

the relative importance of these two tendencies may vary, but both are always at work. Hence, the challenge is to "live in the middle" (Holquist, 1994) and recognize how these two forces are part of an integrated, dynamic picture. Carrying this out is often quite difficult, something that is reflected in the tendency of accounts of social interaction to succumb to the temptation to focus exclusively on one or the other tendency.

As understood here, intersubjectivity concerns the degree to which interlocutors in a communicative situation share a perspective. Ragnar Rommetveit (1979d) has outlined intersubjectivity in the following terms:

The basic problem of human intersubjectivity becomes...a question concerning in what sense and under what conditions two persons who engage in a dialogue can transcend their different private worlds. And the linguistic basis for this enterprise, I shall argue is not a fixed repertory of shared "literal" meanings, but very general and partially negotiated drafts of contracts concerning categorization and attribution inherent in ordinary language. (p. 7)

It is worth emphasizing that Rommetveit's account of intersubjectivity is concerned with social interactional, as opposed to sociocultural phenomena. Indeed Rommetveit warns that intersubjectivity cannot be understood simply by examining the mediational means provided by a sociocultural setting (that is, mediational means in the form of literal meanings of words). This is not to say that word meaning in the form of "very general and partially negotiated drafts of contracts concerning categorization and attribution" does not play a role in the formation of intersubjectivity, but it is to say that a unique level of social interactional analysis must be invoked in order to understand the "negotiations" involved. Furthermore, this level of analysis cannot be reduced to one that focuses solely on the general sociocultural situatedness of action.

In Rommetveit's account, what any particular agent sees going on in a situation is private. However,

it can be talked about and hence—at least under certain conditions and in some cases—become a temporarily shared social reality. The solitary observer may thus try to transform his "private" outlook on the situation into a social reality simply by telling some other person about it. Once the other person accepts the invitation to listen and engage in a dialogue, he leaves behind whatever his preoccupations might have been the moment "silence was transformed into speech" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p.182). From that moment on the two of them are jointly committed to a temporarily shared social world, established and continually modified by acts of communication. (1979a, p.10)

Rommetveit's (1979b) focus on the "architecture of intersubjectivity" (1979c) might seem to suggest that he sees total, or pure intersubjectivity as being possible, but in actuality he rejects such a possibility. Indeed, he views pure intersubjectivity as "a convenient fiction which allows scholars of human communication to pursue

their trade with scientific rigour, formal elegance, and academic success while evading practically urgent and basic existential issues of human intersubjectivity" (original emphasis, p. 148). In Rommetveit's view, pure intersubjectivity is a kind of rationalist dream grounded in the assumption that it is possible to share and transmit "a fixed repertory of shared 'literal' meanings" (p. 148).

Rommetveit (1979a, 1988) and his colleagues (for example, Linell, 1982, 1988) have developed compelling critiques of analyses grounded in assumptions about the transmission of literal meaning and the possibility of pure intersubjectivity. In actuality their critique is concerned more with the role that intersubjectivity plays in an analytic strategy than with the notion itself. The point is not to avoid the notion of intersubjectivity but to avoid viewing human communication solely from the perspective of how it fails to measure up to the false ideal of pure intersubjectivity. Indeed, Rommetveit's analysis suggests that intersubjectivity should be viewed as a tendency that characterizes human communication—a tendency that operates in dynamic tension with other, often opposing tendencies.

This is an approach consistent with ideas outlined by Yuri Lotman (1988) in his analysis of the "functional dualism" of "texts."² The first of the two textual functions Lotman envisioned under this heading is associated with intersubjectivity and can be termed the "univocal" function. It focuses on how it is possible to "convey meanings adequately" (p. 34). According to Lotman "this function is fulfilled best when the codes of the speaker and the listener most completely coincide and, consequently, when the text has the maximum degree of univocality" (p. 34). From Rommetveit's perspective it is essential to keep in mind that such conditions seldom, if ever exist in perfect form in human communication. In a similar vein, Lotman noted that "the ideal boundary mechanism for such an operation would be an artificial language and a text in an artificial language" (p. 34).

Like Rommetveit, Lotman saw major limitations in focusing on artificial languages when trying to understand human communication. Among other things, he noted that such languages do not model "language as such, but one of its functions—the ability to transmit a message adequately" (1990, p. 13). In his view, such a focus introduces a powerful bias into our analysis, a bias which focuses our attention on language as a means for transmitting information and filters out other possibilities, especially the "poetic" uses of language.

From the one position the informational point of view (using 'informational' in the narrow sense) represents language as a machine for transmitting invariant messages, and poetic language is then regarded as a small and, generally speaking, abnormal corner of this system. According to this approach poetic language is seen merely as natural language with an overlay of supplementary restrictions and hence a significantly reduced informational capacity. (p. 17)

Although Rommetveit did not focus on the poetic function of language, the parallels between his cautionary note about focusing on "a fixed repertory of shared 'lit-

eral' meanings" (1979d, p. 7) and Lotman's comments about treating language as "a machine for transmitting invariant messages" are clear.

A related parallel between the lines of reasoning developed by Rommetveit and Lotman can be found in their views about the origins of accounts that focus on the univocal, information transmission function of language. Rommetveit's (1979b) critique of "Habermas' promised land of 'pure intersubjectivity'" (original emphasis; p. 148) focuses on the rationalist ideal of "complete symmetry in the distribution of assertion and disputation, revelation and hiding, prescription and following, among the partners of communication" (Habermas, 1970, p. 143). Lotman traced the roots of the idea of information transmission to similar rationalist and positivistic origins. For example, he argued that one of the principal founders of the information transmission view of language was Ferdinand de Saussure, who "clearly saw the [univocal] function as the main principle of language" (1990, p. 17). In Lotman's view, this is reflected in:

the precision of his oppositions, his emphasis on the universal significance of the principle of arbitrariness in the relation of signified to signifier, and so on. Behind Saussure we can sense the culture of the nineteenth century with its faith in positivistic science, its conviction that knowledge is good and ignorance an absolute evil, its aims at universal literacy, the novels of Zola and the Goncourts. (p. 17)

In sum, an exclusive focus on the transmission of literal meaning and on pure intersubjectivity runs the risk of forcing investigators to view essential aspects of human communication as the "dynamic residuals" (Rommetveit, 1979b) that somehow escape a rationalist analysis. Both Rommetveit and Lotman viewed it as essential not to ground an analysis in the univocal function and then characterize other aspects of human communication in terms of "negative rationalism" (Rommetveit, 1979b)—the failure to live up to the tenets of rationality. The price of taking the univocal function to be "the only function, or even the basic one" is that one is confronted with "a whole number of paradoxes" (Lotman, 1990, p. 12). The alternative outlined by Lotman and followed here is to recognize the role of the univocal function and intersubjectivity in human communication, but at the same time to incorporate these notions into a system of dynamic tensions involving another functional tendency.

This other tendency can be termed the "dialogic function," a function that is closely tied to Bakhtin's notion of "alterity" (Bakhtin, 1979; Clark & Holquist, 1984; Todorov, 1984). In contrast to the univocal function of a text—a function that "requires maximal semiotic ordering and structural uniformity of the media used in the process of reception and transmission" (Lotman, 1988, p. 41), the dialogic function of text is grounded in the kind of multivoicedness that so concerned Bakhtin (1984; see also Wertsch, 1991). According to Lotman:

The second function of text is to generate new meanings. In this respect a text ceases to be a passive link in conveying some constant information between input (sender) and output (receiver). Whereas in the first case a difference between the message at the input and

that at the output of an information circuit can occur only as a result of a defect in the communications channel, and is to be attributed to the technical imperfections of this system, in the second case such a difference is the very essence of a text's function as a "thinking device." What from the first standpoint is a defect, from the second is a norm, and vice versa. (pp. 36-37)

In contrast to the univocal function, which tends toward a single, shared, homogeneous perspective comprising intersubjectivity, the dialogic function tends toward dynamism, heterogeneity, and conflict among voices. Instead of trying to "receive" meanings, which reside in speakers' utterances as envisioned by the "conduit metaphor" (Reddy, 1979), the focus is on how an interlocutor might use texts as thinking devices and respond to them in such a way that new meanings are generated.

Lotman's analysis implies that communication models which focus solely on the transmission of messages cannot be amended in any simple way to deal with the dialogic organization of texts. Following the common practice of making arrows in a transmission model bidirectional might appear to address this issue, but it does nothing to resolve the fact that a single, univocal message is still presupposed as the underlying process. In Lotman's view such a presupposition is not tenable because "The main structural attribute of a text in this second function is its internal heterogeneity" (1988, p. 37).

The kind of heterogeneity Lotman had in mind is a heterogeneity of different perspectives, or "voices" (Wertsch, 1991), and it gives rise to an image of "interanimation" (Bakhtin, 1984) and rhetorical encounter (Billig, 1987). From this perspective the point is that human communication and mental functioning are inherently "multivoiced" (Wertsch, 1991). Utterances and thoughts are inherently tied to other utterances or thoughts (for example, by incorporating, extending, or arguing against them), and hence more than one voice is always present in communicative and mental acts. For Lotman, then:

in its second function a text is not a passive receptacle, or bearer of some content placed in it from without, but a generator. The essence of the process of generation, however, is not only an evolution but also, to a considerable extent, an interaction between structures. Their interaction in the closed world of a text becomes an active cultural factor as a working semiotic system. A text of this type is always richer than any particular language and cannot be put together automatically from it. A text is a semiotic space in which languages interact, interfere, and organize themselves hierarchically. (1988, p. 37)

Lotman emphasized that both the univocal and dialogic functions of text can be found in any sociocultural setting, but one or the other dominates in certain areas of activity or in general during certain periods of history. For example, he argued that in some sociocultural settings the univocal function takes on particular importance:

The mechanism of identification, the elimination of differences and the raising of a text to the status of a standard, does not just serve as a principle guaranteeing that a message

will be adequately received in a system of communication: no less important is its function of providing a common memory for the group, of transforming it from an unstructured crowd into "une personne morale," to use Rousseau's expression. This function is especially important in nonliterate cultures and in cultures with a dominant mythological consciousness, but it tends also to be present to some degree in any culture. (1988, p. 35)

In accordance with his notions about functional dualism, however, Lotman argued that even in such cases where great weight is given to the univocal function the dialogic function of texts continues to exert a countervailing force.

The notion of alterity comes clearly into focus in connection with Lotman's account of the dialogic function. It is a notion that derives from Bakhtin's writings and concerns the distinction between self and other. In this case the Russian term is 'drugosť' (a noun marked for abstractness by the suffix *ost*). As Clark and Holquist (1984) note, this term "hints at the relationship between the words for 'friend' (*drug*) and 'other' (*drugoi*), where *-oj* is the standard adjectival marker added to the root *drug*. This shading suggests the positive values of the other in Bakhtin's thinking" (pp. 65-66).

In Bakhtin's analysis, alterity is a phenomenon to be accepted, positively described, and celebrated rather than associated with some kind of inadequacy or failing, as it might be viewed from a perspective concerned with the univocal function, the transmission of literal meanings, and pure intersubjectivity. For Bakhtin:

To be means to be for the other, and through him, for oneself. Man has no internal sovereign territory; he is all and always on the boundary; looking within himself, he looks in the eyes of the other or through the eyes of the other...I cannot do without the other; I cannot become myself without the other; I must find myself in the other, finding the other in me (in mutual reflection and perception). (1979, p. 312)

According to Clark and Holquist (1984), Bakhtin "conceives of otherness as the ground of all existence and of dialogue as the primal structure of any particular existence, representing a constant exchange between what is already and what is not yet" (p. 65). From a Bakhtinian perspective, dialogue takes on many forms (Clark & Holquist, 1984; Wertsch, 1991), the basic principle being that it involves the dynamic between one voice and another. For example, this is evident in Bakhtin's account of how we understand the utterances of others, a process that would seem to be closely tied to intersubjectivity:

The fact is that when the listener perceives and understands the meaning (the language meaning) of speech, he simultaneously takes an active, responsive attitude toward it. He either agrees or disagrees with it (completely or partially), augments it, applies it, prepares for its execution, and so on. And the listener adopts this responsive attitude for the entire duration of the process of listening and understanding, from the very beginning—sometimes literally from the speaker's first word. Any understanding of live speech, a live utterance, is inherently responsive, although the degree of this activity varies extremely. Any

understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker. A passive understanding of the meaning of perceived speech is only an abstract aspect of the actual whole of active responsive understanding, which is then actualized in a subsequent response that is actually articulated. (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 68)

The fact that Bakhtin allowed for "passive understanding" of an utterance, although viewing it as "only an abstract aspect of the actual whole," suggests that there was room for the univocal function in the picture of human communication he outlined. This search for a way to recognize the simultaneous operation of more than one function was what Lotman was seeking in his account of functional dualism.

The general point to be made about intersubjectivity and alterity, then, is not that communication is best understood in terms of one or the other in isolation. Instead, virtually every text is viewed as involving *both* univocal, transmission aspects, and hence intersubjectivity, as well as dialogic, thought generating tendencies, and hence alterity.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY AND ALTERITY IN DEVELOPMENT

Up to this point, I have sought to maintain a focus on the tension between intersubjectivity and alterity. I say "sought" because it turns out to be quite difficult to avoid slipping into examining one or the other of these constructs in isolation. There are undoubtedly many reasons for this. It seems to me that the methods and the very language we employ tend to create obstacles, or "terministic screens" (Burke, 1969) when we wish to deal with complex interactions, oppositions, and so forth, and as a result we seem to be much better in the social sciences at dealing with unidirectional causality than at complex dialectics. Whatever the reason, I think it is worthwhile examining how intersubjectivity and alterity have been examined in empirical studies of the development of communication.

One of the most instructive lessons from this perspective can be found in research concerned with the Vygotskian transition from intermental to intramental functioning. It is possible to characterize the past two decades of research on these issues in terms of a general trend. The first phase of this research was characterized by a tendency to focus on intersubjectivity, especially in adult-child interaction. For example, Wertsch (1979, 1984) examined adult-child intermental functioning in terms of varying levels of intersubjectivity as part of an attempt to extend some of Vygotsky's (1987) ideas about the "zone of proximal development," and Rogoff (1990) explored issues of intersubjectivity in ontogenesis, tracing it back to the earliest phases of infants' lives.

In this line of research, intersubjectivity was viewed as a kind of metric for examining intermental functioning between adults and young children, and increasing levels of intersubjectivity were associated with higher levels of intramental

functioning in children. Investigators working from this perspective focused on the fact that it is sometimes unclear that children understand even quite basic aspects of the setting in the same way as adults, and increases in age and experience with particular task environments were associated with greater intersubjectivity between adult and child.

In some of their writings, Rogoff and her colleagues (Rogoff, 1990; Rogoff, Malkin, & Gilbride, 1984) combined the two views, arguing that intersubjectivity is both a prerequisite of communication, which occurs between caregiver and infant in early infancy and is negotiated in joint activity between adult and child. On the one hand, there must be some minimal level of shared attention or understanding reflected in what Bruner (1986) has termed "formats" (pp. 48-49) that makes it possible for social interaction to occur at all. In this sense, some level of intersubjectivity is a prerequisite of communication. On the other hand, the adult and child clearly do not view the world in the same way, and hence new levels of intersubjectivity constantly must be negotiated. Such continual negotiation and renegotiation plays a fundamental role in the zone of proximal development (Wertsch, 1984).

While few would dispute that increasing intersubjectivity is one dimension along which children's development occurs, several investigators have recently begun to criticize some of this research for focusing too exclusively on it. As Matusov (1996) has argued, a single-minded focus on intersubjectivity, where it is understood as sharing common understanding, may "limit researchers to study only consensus-oriented activities and to focus on processes of unification of the participants' subjectivities" (p. 26). In a similar vein, Smolka, de Goes, and Pino (1995) have argued that some of the most important developmental landmarks for children may arise through conflict rather than consensus. In the terminology I have been employing in this chapter, this amounts to a critique of focusing on intersubjectivity at the expense of alterity.

A similar point has been made by Goodnow (1990) in her comments about the strengths and weaknesses that characterize various schools of developmental analysis. For example, she contrasts ideas of the "Social Genevans" such as Doise and Mugny (1984) and Perret-Clermont (1980) with Vygotskian analyses. A basic tenet of the Social Genevans is that "the discrepancy or conflict that best sparks cognitive development takes a social form...the discrepancy one responds to most strongly is a difference in opinion or perspective between one's own view and that of another" (p. 278). In contrast, Vygotskian-based accounts "contain a strong emphasis on social interactions, especially those where the more and the less expert combine to work out a shared definition of a situation and to move the novice from a state in which performance can proceed only with help to a state in which performance can be carried through unaided" (p. 279). Again, the contrast can be reformulated in terms of an opposition between alterity and intersubjectivity.

What all this points out is that instead of viewing intersubjectivity and alterity as opposing forces in a single, integrated, dialectical system, there has been a strong tendency to take up one or the other in isolation. The unfortunate results of doing

this include misleading accounts of the development of communication and a tendency to understand theoretical frameworks in terms of unproductive oppositions (for example, Vygotsky examined intersubjectivity, Piaget alterity). While these theoretical frameworks may not rule out taking both intersubjectivity and alterity into account—or may even explicitly state the need to do so, there apparently remains a strong bias in practice to focus on one or the other. To some degree, this may be an issue of how theorists are interpreted by others as opposed to what they themselves have asserted. For example, the Social Genevans and many Piagetians in general would argue that intersubjectivity is a welcome, if not necessary, construct in their analyses, but their writings are nonetheless often interpreted in such a way that social conflict or discrepancy stands alone as the relevant dynamic of development. Conversely, there are passages in Vygotsky's writings where he clearly viewed alterity as an inherent and necessary aspect of intermental and intramental functioning, but as Matusov and others have noted, many recent interpretations of his writings have focused almost exclusively on intersubjectivity.

Any success in overcoming these oversimplifications and characterizations will have as much to do with methods as with theoretical formulation. The problem on both counts is that it is all too easy to slip into either/or oppositions: communication is essentially *either* a matter of participating in intersubjectivity *or* in alterity. While it is relatively easy to make strong assertions about the need to avoid such oppositions, developing methods that systematically avoid this trap is a more difficult task. Indeed, I would argue that it is precisely through the methods we employ that such oppositions slip back into the picture.

Someone who has been quite concerned with these issues and with the task of devising methods that are up to the task of fulfilling the dictates of theoretical formulation is Užgiris (1989; see also Užgiris & Fafouti-Milenkovic, 1985). Her analysis of adult-infant communication as an arena for development grows out of an effort to overcome

a unidirectional understanding of parent-child interaction: It was the parent who actively shaped the child through love and discipline toward behavior patterns acceptable to society, while the child responded more or less pliantly to parental treatment, in keeping with his or her inherent dispositions. (p. 289)

In contrast to this perspective, Užgiris argues that "infants may have the wherewithal to be partners in interaction" (p. 290). This does not mean, however, that she has switched from one side of an opposition to the other, that is, has taken infants instead of adults as the starting point for analysis. Instead, Užgiris argues for the need to "understand that a mother and her infant form a system characterized by mutual regulation and mutual evolution" (p. 290).

In addition to making such claims as general theoretical statements, Užgiris (1989) has tried to provide some concrete methodological proposals for analyzing systems characterized by mutual regulation and mutual evolution. These efforts are

motivated by the observation that new views of infant-adult relations have "not yet produced a commensurate change in the methodological aspects of infant-adult interaction studies" (p. 290). Just as Užgiris has sought to outline methods that will be adequate to interpret interaction in a way that does not reduce it to the contributions and responses of individuals, there is a need to formulate new methods that do not push the investigator into the corner of viewing interaction in terms either of intersubjectivity or alterity alone.

While Užgiris and others have pointed us down the right path in my view, their writings do not offer a final theoretical or methodological solution to these issues. Indeed, I do not believe that anyone has reached this point. For the theoretical and methodological reasons I have previously outlined, this is likely to be an ongoing debate for years to come, a debate in which it is essential to avoid focusing either on pure intersubjectivity or on pure alterity in isolation. We must proceed by assuming that some sort of ongoing dialectic between these poles will have to be part of our most basic theoretical position, and methodological tenets. Only when we employ such methods systematically will we have found a way to "live in the middle" (Holquist, 1994) that promises to provide the kind of approach we need to understand communication as an arena for development.

NOTES

¹ Following the practice of Mimick (Vygotsky, 1987), I shall employ the terms "intermental" and "intra-mental" as translations of "interspikicheskii" and "intra-spikicheskii," respectively. This is more consistent with other translations of the term "psikhicheskii" as "mental" in Wertsch (1981) and elsewhere, but it is a shift away from translation practices followed in Wertsch (1981) and Vygotsky (1978) where the terms "interpsychological" (versus "intermental") and "intra-psychological" (versus "intra-mental") were used.

² As used by Soviet scholars such as Lotman, a text is any semiotic corpus that has significance. It may be verbal (for example, a single utterance, a book length treatise) or non-verbal (for example, a painting, a costume). My focus will be on verbal texts, especially ones that are spoken in the flow of intermental functioning.

REFERENCES

- Bakhtin, M. M. (1979). *Estetika slovesnogo tvorchestva* [The aesthetics of verbal creation]. Moscow: Iskusstvo.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1984). *Problems of Dostoevsky's poetics* (C. Emerson, Ed. & Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1986). *Speech genres and other late essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Ed.; V. W. McGee, Trans.). Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- Bartlett, F. C. (1932). *Remembering: A study in experimental and social psychology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

- Billig, M. (1987). *Arguing and thinking: A rhetorical approach to social psychology*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Bruner, J. (1986). *Actual minds, possible worlds*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Burke, K. (1969). *A grammar of motives*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Clark, K., & Holquist, M. (1984). *M. M. Bakhtin: Life and works*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Doise, W., & Mugny, G. (1984). *The social development of the intellect*. Oxford, England: Pergamon.
- Goodnow, J. (1990). The socialization of cognition: What's involved? In J. W. Stigler, R. A. Shweder, & G. Herdt (Eds.), *Cultural psychology: Essays on comparative human development* (pp. 259-286). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Habermas, J. (1970). Toward a theory of communicative competence. In P. E. Dretzel (Ed.), *Recent sociology*. London: Macmillan.
- Holquist, M. (1994, September). *The reterritorialization of the enthymeme*. Paper presented at the International Conference on "Vygotsky and the Human Sciences," Moscow, Russia.
- Hutchins, E. (1995). *Cognition in the wild*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Linell, P. (1982). *The written language bias in linguistics*. Linköping, Sweden: Linköping University.
- Linell, P. (1988). The impact of literacy on the conception of language: The case of linguistics. In R. Säljö (Ed.), *The written word: Studies in literate thought and action* (pp. 41-58). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Lotman, Y. M. (1988, Spring). Text within a text. *Soviet Psychology*, XXVI(3), 32-51.
- Lotman, Y. M. (1990). *Universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Matusov, E. (1996). Intersubjectivity without agreement. *Mind, Culture, and Activity: An International Journal*, 3(1), 25-45.
- Merleau-Ponty, M. (1962) *Phenomenology of perception*. New York: Humanities.
- Middleton, D. (1987). Dance to the music: Conversational remembering and joint activity in learning an English Morris dance. *Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*, 9(1), 23-38.
- Palincsar, A. S., & Brown, A. L. (1984). Reciprocal teaching of comprehension-fostering and comprehension-monitoring activities. *Cognition and Instruction*, 1, 117-175.
- Perret-Clermont, A.-N. (1980). *Social interaction and cognitive development in children*. New York: Academic.
- Reddy, M. J. (1979). The conduit metaphor: A case of frame conflict in our language about language. In A. Ortony (Ed.), *Metaphor and thought*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Resnick, L. V., Levine, J. M., & Teasley, S. D. (Eds.). (1991). *Perspectives on socially shared cognition*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B., Malkin, C., & Gilbride, K. (1984). Interaction with babies as guidance in development. In B. Rogoff & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *Children's learning in the "zone of proximal development"*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Rommetveit, R. (1979a). On "meanings" of situations and social control of such meaning in human communication. Paper presented at the Symposium on the Situation in Psychological Theory and Research, Stockholm.
- Rommetveit, R. (1979b). On negative rationalism in scholarly studies of verbal communication and dynamic residuals in the construction of human intersubjectivity. In R. Rommetveit & R. M. Blakar (Eds.), *Studies of language, thought, and verbal communication* (pp. 147-162). London: Academic.
- Rommetveit, R. (1979c). On the architecture of intersubjectivity. In R. Rommetveit & R. M. Blakar (Eds.), *Studies of language, thought, and verbal communication* (pp. 93-108). London: Academic.
- Rommetveit, R. (1979d). *The role of language in the creation and transmission of social representations*. Unpublished manuscript, University of Oslo.
- Rommetveit, R. (1988). On literacy and the myth of literal meaning. In R. Säljö (Ed.), *The written word: Studies in literate thought and action* (pp.13-40). Berlin: Springer-Verlag.
- Salomon, G. (Ed.). (1993). *Distributed cognitions: Psychological and educational implications*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Smolka, A. L. B., De Goes, M. C. R., & Pino, A. (1995). The constitution of the subject: A persistent question. In J. V. Wertsch, P. del Río, & A. Alvarez (Eds.), *Sociocultural studies of mind* (pp. 165-184). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Todorov, T. (1984) *Mikhail Bakhtin: The dialogical principle* (W. Godzich, Trans.). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Užgiris, I. Č. (1989) Infants in relation: Performers, pupils, and partners. In W. Damon (Ed.), *Child development today and tomorrow* (pp. 288-311). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Užgiris, I. Č., & Fafouti-Milenkovic, M. (1985). Over het Verband Tussen Methode en Theorie bij Onderzoek naar Ouderkind Interactie [The tie between methodology and theory in the study of parent-infant interaction]. In J. de Wit, H. J. Groenendaal, & J. M. van Meel, (Eds.), *Psychologen Over het Kind* [Psychologists discuss children], Vol. 8 (pp. 132-153). Lisse, The Netherlands: Swets & Zeitlinger.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1981a). The genesis of higher mental functions. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 144-188). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1981b) The instrumental method in psychology. In J. V. Wertsch (Ed.), *The concept of activity in Soviet psychology* (pp. 134-143). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The collected works of L.S. Vygotsky. Volume 1. Problems of general psychology* (N. Minick, Ed. & Trans.). New York: Plenum.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1979). From social interaction to higher psychological processes: A clarification and application of Vygotsky's theory. *Human Development*, 22, 1-22.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1980). The significance of dialogue in Vygotsky's account of social, egocentric, and inner speech. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, 5, 150-162.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1984). The zone of proximal development: Some conceptual issues. In B. Rogoff & J. V. Wertsch (Eds.), *Children's learning in the "zone of proximal development"* (pp. 3-11). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1985). *Vygotsky and the social formation of mind*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1991). *Voices of the mind: A sociocultural approach to mediated action*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Wertsch, J. V. (1998) *Mind as action*. New York: Oxford University Press.