Classic and Revisionist Sociocultural Theory, and their analyses of expressive language: An empirical and theoretical assessment

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Abstract

This article articulates two approaches to sociocultural theory, Vygotsky's classic approach and a contemporary revisionist approach. We examine: (1) their principle tenets for understanding psychology in relation to culture; (2) how they characterize and explain language in particular; and (3) how they characterize and explain a sample linguistic specimen of two dialogues from a middle-class child and a lower-class child.

I utilize a critical discourse analysis of the dialogues to empirically determine: (1) which of the two approaches better accounts for the discursive differences; (2) which is a more adequate linguistic theory; (3) which is a more adequate approach to SCT; and (4) which is a more viable and progressive social and political philosophy. We find Vygotsky's classic formulation superior on all counts. This article concerns the politics of language, linguistics, and social theory.

KEYWORDS: LIBERALISM; POLITICS OF LANGUAGE; PSYCHOLOGY OF OPPRESSION; SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

'Language is not simply an instrument of communication.' (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990: 73)

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1. Two sociocultural theories/psychologies

Sociocultural Theory, or Sociocultural Psychology, is no longer a coherent 'school' with a shared core of parsimonious principles. Rather, most of Vygotsky's contemporary followers have radically revised his theory – sometimes tacitly. Thus, we currently have his 'classic' SCT alongside revisionist SCT. We shall utilize discursive speech as a test case of the two approaches to SCT. We also examine the social philosophies of the two theories. This includes their political bases, assumptions, and ramifications.

In order to keep the target of our theoretical analysis in focus, we shall begin by presenting the two dialogues that the two theories will ultimately analyze.

2. The problematic of discursive differences

The two narratives come from a single first grade classroom in the US (Michaels, 1986: 105, 108–109). The first includes a white (evidently middle-class) girl, Mindy, talking with her middle-class teacher, the second includes a black (evidently lower-class) girl, Deena, talking with the same teacher.

1.
Mindy: When I was in day camp we made these candles.

T: You made them?

M: And I tried it with different colors, with both of them but one just came out; this one just came out blue, and I don't know what this color is.

T: That's neat-o. Tell the kids how you do it from the very start. Pretend we don't know a thing about candles. OK, What did you do first? What did you use? Flour?

M: Um, here's some hot wax, some real hot wax that you just take a string and tie a knot in it and dip the string in the um wax.

T: What makes it have a shape?

M: Um, you just shape it.

T: Oh, you shaped it with your hand, mmm.

M: But you have, first you have to stick it into the wax and then water, and then keep doing that until it gets to the size you want it.

T: OK. Who knows what the string is for?

2.

Deena: Um, I went to the beach Sunday and to MacDonalds, and to the park, and I got this for my birthday. My mother bought it for me, and um I had um two dollars for my birthday and I put it in here, and I went to where my friend named Gigi. I went over to my grand-mother's house with her and um she was on my back and I and we was walkin around, by my house and um she was heavy. She was in the sixth or seventh grade.

T: OK I'm going to stop you. I want to talk about things that are really, really very important. That's important to you but tell us things that are sort of different. Can you do that? And tell us what beach you went to.

We shall now hermeneutically interpret this empirical specimen through the classic and revisionist approaches to sociocultural psychology. These approaches consist of multiple levels: (1) their tenets for conceptualizing psychology in relation to culture; (2) how they characterize and explain language in general; (3) how they characterize and explain the sample linguistic specimen of Mindy's and Deena's dialogues.

3. The Classic and Revisionist approaches to SCT

3.1. Vygotsky's Classic SCT

Vygotsky's SCT is what I call 'culture-centric.' Humans live by forming culture, i.e., collective institutions, artifacts, and concepts/symbols. These collective products and the social process of constructing them stimulate, strengthen, and support our development and survival. We do not develop ourselves individually (i.e., alone) and secondarily enter social life. Rather we engage in a social construction of cultural factors and we use these shared, social, collective products as our individual means of development, survival, and action. For example, humans developed symbols to communicate with each other to excel at survival activities such as hunting game across large areas. These collective symbolic products became the words that individuals used for thinking.[1]

Vygotsky advocated culture-centric psychology in the following statements: 'The environment is a factor in the realm of personality development, and its role is to act as the source of this development … and not its context.' 'Development is achieved under particular conditions of interaction with the environment, where the ideal and final form of development is already there in the environment and actually exerts a real influence on the primary form, on the first steps of the child's development. *Something which is only supposed to take shape at the very end of development somehow influences the very first steps in*

this development.' 'If no appropriate ideal form can be found in the environment, and the development of the child, for whatever reasons, has to take place outside those specific conditions, i.e., without any interaction with the final form, then this proper form will fail to develop properly in the child' (pp. 348–349; see Lantolf and Poehner, 2014; 43–44). Vygotsky (1994b: 176) describes the depth of the social conditioning of psychology: 'The various internal contradictions which are to be found in different social systems find their expression both in the type of personality and in the structure of human psychology in that historical period.'

'Between man and the outside world there stands the social environment, which in its own way refracts and directs the stimuli acting upon the individual and *guides all the reactions that emanate from the individual*' (Vygotsky, 1971: 252 my emphasis).

'We derive individual functions from forms of collective life. Development proceeds not toward socialization, but toward *individualization* of social functions (transformation of social functions into psychological functions)' (Vygotsky, 1989: 61). 'Once we acknowledge the historical character of verbal thought, we must consider it subject to all the premises of historical materialism, which are valid for any historical phenomenon in human society. It is only to be expected that on this level the development of behavior will be governed essentially by the general laws of the historical development of human society' (Vygotsky 1986: 94–95; Ratner, 2012: 204–207). A. N. Leontiev (1977) further explained: 'Despite all its diversity, all its special features, the activity [*Tatigkeit*] of the human individual is a system that obeys the system of relations of society.'

Vygotsky argued that psychological operations are conducted with cultural artifacts – especially, symbols – that perform psychological work. He called these 'psychological tools'.

> Psychological tools are artificial formations. By their nature they are social and not organic or individual devices. They are directed toward the mastery of [mental] processes – one's own or someone else's – just as technical devices are directed toward the mastery of processes of nature …The following may serve as examples of psychological tools and their complex systems: language, different forms of numeration and counting, mnemotechnic techniques, algebraic symbolism, works of art, writing, schemes, diagrams, maps, blueprints, all sorts of conventional signs, etc. (Vygotsky, 1997a: 85)

Luria (1976: 21) similarly explained that 'Perception depends on historically established human practices that can alter the system of codes used to process incoming information'.

The Soviet philosopher Ilyenkov similarly emphasized that:

> Psychology must necessarily proceed from the fact that between individual con-
> sciousness and objective reality there exists the 'mediating link' of the historically
> formed culture, which acts as the prerequisite and condition of individual mental
> activity. This comprises the economic and legal forms of human relationships, the
> forms of everyday life and forms of language, and so on. (Ilyenkov, 2012: 187)

This sense of psychological tools is central to psychological and sociolog-
ical concepts such as 'collective representations', 'schematas', 'templates', and
'master narratives'. Psychological anthropologists of the 1980s also developed
a culture-centric conception of psychology. Shweder stated, 'Cultural psychol-
ogy is the study of the way cultural traditions and social practices regulate,
express, transform, and permute the human psyche' (cited in Ratner, 2008:
260).

Cultural-psychological tools comprise our 'extended' or 'embodied' mind
– mind that is extended into social artifacts such as artifacts, institutions, and
cultural concepts (Castelfranchi, 2014; Spackman and Yanchar, 2014).

Cultural-psychological tools determine what psychological phenomena
are like, how they operate, and what they can and cannot do – just as you
cannot solve certain quantitative problems without algebraic tools. Cultural-
psychological tools constitute the historical 'mental horizon' or 'mental equip-
ment' of people living in a particular social group in a particular era.

An important amplification of psychological tools as an explanatory con-
struct for SCT/psychology is the construct of 'cultural capital' that was coined
by Bourdieu in the early 1970s (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986; Bourdieu and Passe-
ron, 1990). Bourdieu argued that educational differences are due to differen-
tial exposure to cultural resources or 'cultural capital'. These resources include
books, musical instruments, artworks, visits to museums and concerts, cloth-
ing, utensils, accoutrements, travel, and computers. Cultural resources/capital
are psychological tools that stimulate and support psychological competen-
cies. In this capacity, they are the ultimate zones of proximal development
– on the macrocultural level where they structure the inferior, derived inter-
personal ZPDs.[2]

Foucault's concept of power/knowledge and the microphysics of power
are additional extensions of Vygotsky's culture-centric psychology that are
vital for understanding our discourses: 'The individual is not the vis-a-vis of
power; it is, I believe, one of its prime effects … The individual which power
has constituted is at the same time its vehicle [or agent]' (Foucault, 1980: 98).
Understanding the individual who is embedded in power relations requires
'conducting an ascending analysis of power, starting from its infinitesimal
mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their
own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms of power
have been – and continue to be – invested, colonized, utilized … extended,

etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination.' 'We need to see how these mechanisms of power, at a given moment, in a precise conjuncture, and by means of a certain number of transformations, have begun to become economically advantageous and politically useful' (ibid: 99, 101).

3.2. Revisionist SCT

The revisionist camp of SCT ignores, reverses, and rejects Vygotsky's culture-centered emphasis. They reject the idea of a structured, politically-organized social system, centered around (and congruent with) a political economy that expresses the predominant interests of a particular social class which generates, requires, organizes, and administers particular kinds of subjectivity/psychology.

The major objection to classic SCT is that it is mechanistic and deterministic of psychology; it expunges significant subjectivity, agency, activity, creativity, change, and emancipation. According to revisionists, revitalizing these valuable human characteristics requires diminishing the influence of cultural structures and politics that have supposedly expunged them.

Revisionists have suggested this revitalization through a variety of ingenious modifications to Vygotsky's theory of culture and psychology. They all center around shifting Vygotsky's culture-centered approach to what I call a 'person-centered' theory of culture and psychology. The power of culture to shape psychology is weakened by depriving culture of structure, coherence, meaningfulness, politics, and concrete substance. Culture is reframed as indefinite, unsubstantial, abstract, disjointed, fluid, interpersonal elements that individuals can interpret, define, concretize, organize, select, negotiate, utilize, communicate, express, and even construct and reconstruct – through their own agency, authenticity, creativity, voice, and personal presence.

This person-centered orientation is evident in statements by leading revisionist SCT scholars: Articulating his notion of 'co-constructionism', Valsiner states: 'The logic of the argument supporting the relevance of the social environment in human development is reversed in the co-constructionist paradigm' (Branco and Valsiner, 1997: 37). According to Valsiner's new paradigm, 'most of human development takes place through *active ignoring and neutralization of most of the social suggestions* to which the person is subjected in everyday life' (Valsiner, 1998: 393, emphasis in original). The subject matter of cultural psychology is '*meaningful conduct* of goal-oriented organisms (not only humans) who are in the process of creating their actual life trajectories out of a diversity of possibilities' (Valsiner, 2009: 18). 'What is usually viewed as "socialization efforts" (by social institutions or parents) [is] necessarily counteracted by the active recipients of such efforts who can neutralize or ignore a large number of such episodes, aside from single particularly dra-

matic ones' Valsiner, 1998: 393).[3] Rogoff *et al.* (2007: 509) similarly says, 'Children (and adults) determine when to apply what approach, as they choose and modify standing patterns of interaction' (see Ratner, 2000; Ratner 2012: 406–407, 422). Gonzalez-Rey (2011) similarly says 'emphases on behavior, relations, and the social and discursive origins of human consciousness resist the subject's ability to create and produce his or her own alternatives' (p. 36). 'With subject as the person who actively produces new subjective alternatives within a given social situation, entering in contradiction to standardized rituals, procedures, and values dominant in that specific situation, the subject is *always singular and grounded in his or her own subjective configurations*' (p. 46, my emphasis).

This person-centered orientation is expressed by Sarah Michaels who presented the dialogues of Mindy and Deena, and who interprets them in revisionist terms, as we shall explain. 'Our work on Accountable Talk grows out of a Vygotskian theoretical framework that emphasizes the "importance of social interaction in the development of individual mental processes"' (Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick, 2008). Michaels reduces Vygotsky's political, class-structured, political-economic, historical conception of culture to vague 'social interaction' on the interpersonal level. She associates Vygotsky's social interactionism with Dewey's and Mead's rather than with Marx's – despite the fact that Vygotsky (1997a: 341, 331) said 'Marxist psychology is … the only genuine psychology as a science'. We must 'learn from Marx's whole method how to build a science, how to approach the investigation of the mind'.

Revisionists eschew culture-centric constructs such as cultural capital because they contain concrete content that structures psychology, and are not constructed, defined, organized, selected, and utilized by the individual as a personal act. Indeed, revisionists eschew any substantive definition or theory of culture. Substantive concepts and theories about culture are displaced by superficial, abstract statements that culture is shared activities, or historically accumulated activities. This allows virtually anything to qualify as culture, be studied as culture, and used as culture. Culture has been conceptually eviscerated to allow individuals to define it through their personal goals.

The revisionist, person-centered objection to culture-centered SCT is articulated by Wertsch and Tulviste (2005). The authors object to Vygotsky's prioritizing of political-structural culture in relation to (1) the relation of natural and cultural lines of development, and (2) the relation of individual and society. In both cases, the authors seek to shift the balance of power away from culture and toward nature and the individual.

Regarding #1, Wertsch and Tulviste (2005: 71) state: 'Vygotsky said almost nothing about how the "elementary mental functioning" that grows out of the natural line of development might influence the "higher mental functioning"

that derives from the mastery of cultural tools. Instead, he focused almost exclusively on ways in which cultural forces transform the natural line of development. In accordance with such a view, the natural line provides a kind of raw material whose fate is to be transformed by cultural forces.' Wertsch and Tulviste seek to raise the influence of nature as a substantive, countervailing force to culture.

Wertsch and Tulviste level the same kind of objection against Vygotsky's culture-centric view of individual psychology. Citing Vygotsky's statement that the environment is the source of psychological development, not simply the context in which it occurs, the authors state: 'Such passages in Vygotsky's writings seem to suggest that social and cultural processes almost mechanistically determine the individual processes. This view minimizes the contributions made by the active individual. Among other things, it raises the question of how individuals are capable of introducing innovation and creativity into the system' (pp. 71–72).

This complaint assumes/implies that:

1. Cultural formation of subjectivity is mechanical. It makes the individual an automaton deprived of activity, creativity, and innovation.
2. Activity, creativity, and change are properties of autonomous individuals who are *not* culturally formed. For if they are culturally formed, they are deprived of these. It is important to free individuals of cultural formation if we wish to respect their activity, agency, creativity, freedom, and humanity.

Wertsch and Tulviste utilize their critique of classic SCT to minimize the cultural formation of mind to grant the individual more power, activity, agency, and creativity. They argue that Vygotsky's notion of

> The basic form of action that Vygotsky envisioned was *mediated action*. Such action inherently involves cultural tools, and these tools fundamentally shape it. However, this does not mean that such action can be reduced to or mechanistically determined by these tools and hence by the more general sociocultural setting. Instead, such action always involves an inherent tension between the meditational means and the individual or individuals using them in unique, concrete instances … This account allows for innovation because each concrete use of meditational means by individuals involves some differences from other uses. Indeed, the individuals' use may vary quite radically from previous uses. (ibid., p. 72)

The authors reduce culture to a set of means or tools that individuals can utilize for their own purposes. This is where activity, agency, creativity, and freedom are localized. Valsiner said the same thing earlier. An example of inverting activity from cultural to personal is Wertsch's statement about vis-

itors to the Winter Palace Museum: 'Instead of bringing autobiographical narratives into contact with official culture as part of an attempt to enrich the latter, it seems to us that this [narrative] involves an *escape* from the public memory sphere … These visitors are *refusing* to engage in the museum's public memory space … It is meaning-making *on one's own terms* (Rowe, Wertsch and Kosaeva, 2002: 106, emphasis added; see Ratner 2000, 2002a, b for analysis).

The revisionist approach to psychology is an incorrect description, critique, and alternative to classic SCT. Revisionists claim to be elucidating and advancing Vygotsky's ideas when they are really rejecting and revising them.

Vygotsky's conception of psychological tools was exactly the opposite of Wertsch and Tulviste's. Psychological tools socialize and organize the individual mind; they are not individual devices for evading culture, as Wertsch and Tulviste impute to Vygotsky. 'By being included in the process of behavior, the psychological tool modifies the entire course and structure of mental functions by determining the structure of the new instrumental act, just as the technical tool modifies the process of natural adaptation by determining the form of labor operations' (Vygotsky, 1997a: 85). Vygotsky's objective was to insert culture as a mediation between 'stimuli' and 'the mind' so that *psychology would be a cultural response to a stimulus*: 'in the instrumental act a new middle term is inserted between the object and the mental operation directed at it: the psychological tool, which becomes the structural center or focus, i.e., the aspect that functionally determines all the processes that form the instrumental act' (ibid.: 87). The psychological tool *determines all the processes that form the act*. The psychological tool 'recreates, reconstructs the whole structure of behavior just like a technical tool recreates the entire system of labor operations' (ibid.: 87). The tool recreates behavioral operations; the tool-user's individuality does not.

This is clear in Vygotsky's and Luria's cross-cultural research. They identified systematic cultural differences in the way that educated, collectivized Uzbekis vs. uneducated, peasants reasoned, perceived colors, and identified their self-concept. These systematic differences were traced to different macrocultural factors that operated as psychological tools to organize psychological functions.

Systematic cultural variations in psychology could not exist if individuals everywhere freely chose their own meaning-making mechanisms. Nor could culture persist as a coherent, shared, supportive environment in the face of idiosyncratic meaning-making.

Wertsch and Tulviste convert the psychological tool, or meditational means, from a socializing, structuring cultural mechanism to a free-floating item that allows for individual mediation between cultural factors and responses. This

is a distortion of Vygotsky. Peculiarly, this distortion is often made by scholars who formerly elucidated Vygotsky's culture-centric perspective quite accurately (Wertsch (Wertsch, 1985a, b).

Wertsch and Tulviste are equally wrong to claim that SCT, cultural capital, and the cultural formation of psychology extinguish activity and change. One of the central insights of SCT is that cultural organization, cultural rules, collectivity, sharing, planning, coordination, and unification/coherence, stimulate and support consciousness. The whole point of SCT is to comprehend the cultural basis, features, and function of subjectivity. SCT never denies subjectivity.

Bourdieu emphasized subjective dispositions in his discussion of cultural capital and the habitus. He specifically emphasized the habitus' capacity to innovate within social parameters. Foucault called this 'subjectification'. Consumerism is clearly a culturally-formed set of desires, needs, perception, emotions, and impulses. It exemplifies Geertz's (1965: 203) statement that 'Culture orders action, not by determining it, but by providing the forms in terms of which it determines itself.'

And far from denying social and psychological change, culture-centric, structuralist, reproduction advocates have been social radicals who use their structural critique of society to engage in transformative political activity (see Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Anyon, 1980, 1981, 2011). This is obviously true of the revolutionary Marx, and it holds for Bourdieu, Bernstein, and Lewis. Vygotsky wrote *The Socialist Alteration of Man* where he said 'revolutionary transformation of society is necessary to change the material conditions (production, standard of living, economic opportunities), social relations, educational opportunities, and cognitive and other psychological capabilities' (Vygotsky, 1994b). Ignacio Martin-Baro was another revolutionary psychologist who emphasized the structural oppression of the popular classes by the dominant class (Ratner, 2015). There is no antithesis between cultural formation, and activity and change. The real antagonist of thorough social transformation is individualism (Ratner, 2014a).

Revisionists create a false problem of reification in order to tacitly smuggle in individualistic subjectivity as a solution. We shall see that the solution is as false as the problem. Individuals are not free to personally decide how to utilize free-floating cultural elements. Choices are culturally constrained in their formulation (what we wish to have) and implementation (i.e., whether we successfully realize our wishes).

In fact, social control of behavior and psychology is becoming more stringent and draconian in most countries of the world. Individuals have fewer rights, freedom, and support than before. They are more at the mercy of their bosses, leaders, and impersonal economic forces. Everything we do is moni-

tored, measured, and manipulated. Mystification is intensified and dissent is limited. *DSM-III* pathologizes 'oppositional defiant disorder' (ODD). The official symptoms of ODD include 'often actively defies or refuses to comply with adult requests or rules' and 'often argues with adults'. Since 1980, ODD has become an increasingly popular diagnosis, with an increasing number of these children and teenagers being drugged for this 'condition'. In 2012, the *Archives of General Psychiatry* (Olfson *et al.*, 2012) reported that between 1993 and 2009, there was a seven-fold increase of children 13 years and younger being prescribed antipsychotic drugs, and that 'disruptive behavior disorders' – which includes ODD – were the most common diagnoses in children medicated with antipsychotics, accounting for 63% of those medicated. Glorifying individual freedom in this context is sheer fantasy.[4]

This analysis of SCT theories applies to linguistic style.

IV. The Two Theories' Explanation of Discursive Language in General

IV.A. *Classical sociocultural explanation of linguistic competencies*. Classic SCT regards linguistic expression as a cultural competence that is cultural capital. Discourse style derives from proximate macrocultural factors that are distally organized by economic capital. Discourse style reflects economic capital in terms of the social positions and relations it serves, although it is not reducible to economic capital (see Ratner, 2008).

Basil Bernstein has developed a theory that treats discursive language as cultural capital. Bernstein studied Vygotsky and made Vygotsky's Marxist political philosophy pivotal to his linguistic theory and educational theory, as did Henry Giroux (Apple, 1992; Daniels, 2001, 2012). After explaining Bernstein's sociocultural linguistic theory, we shall demonstrate its usefulness for framing a sociocultural interpretation of Mindy's and Deena's dialogues, in the next section.

Bernstein developed the important insight that language – i.e., discourse – is an important and powerful mechanism of social structure and social control. 'The division of labor of social control is based upon specialized modes of communication (symbolic control). This has created a vast range of occupations dedicated to the symbolic shaping and re-shaping of the population' (Bernstein, 1975: 18). Bernstein (1973, 1977) traces this idea to Durkheim, Vygotsky, and Whorf who all derived basic categories of thought from language and social relations. As Bourdieu emphasized, discursive language is a marker of social class and a perpetuator of social class. For language is adapted to particular kinds of socially positioned activity, which makes it useful as a tool for participating in them. Linguistic codes are demographically distributed to occupants of social positions/classes – just as other forms of cultural capital and economic capital are.[5]

This is an excellent extension of classic SCT to language, for it integrates language with cultural conditions, divisions, politics, and needs. Cultural divisions and needs are built into language, as Vygotsky emphasized about all psychology. This is how language is a form of social control and social class maintenance: 'The relative backwardness of many working-class children who live in areas of high population density or in rural areas may well be a *culturally induced backwardness* transmitted by the linguistic process. Such children's low performance on verbal I.Q. tests, their difficulty with "abstract" concepts, their failures within the language area, their general inability to profit from the school, all may result from the limitations of a restricted code' (Bernstein 1977: 175, my emphasis).

Bernstein's linguistic codes are differentiated into a 'restricted code' of expression which is 'implicit', 'context-bound' and 'particularistic', and 'elaborated code' that is 'explicit', 'context-independent' and 'universalistic'. These reflect differential social roles and affordances of the lower class and middle class that are imposed by the social structure.

The 'public language' of the unskilled and semi-skilled strata has 'short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences', 'a poor syntactical construction' (Bernstein, 1977: 62), 'a low order of generality' (p. 63), a reliance on 'implicit meaning' (p. 63) and 'a very limiting vocabulary' (p. 64). Its poor syntax 'does not facilitate the communication of ideas and relationships which require a precise formulation' (p. 64). This impedes communicating about things that are distant from immediate sense perception and reference. The speech of the 'restricted code' user 'is likely to be concrete, descriptive and narrative rather than analytical and abstract' (p. 94). These linguistic characteristics are linked to a restriction in cognitive powers, individual expression and emotional response (pp. 64–69).

The 'formal language' of the middle class, by contrast, has socially valued qualities which 'public language' lacks. They include 'accurate grammatical order and syntax', 'grammatically complex sentence structure', 'explicit' verbal mediation of 'individual qualification' and a 'language-use which points to the possibilities inherent in a complex conceptual hierarchy for the organizing of experience' (p. 282, fn 3). The 'elaborated code' is verbally explicit conceptual abstractions detached from the here-and-now.

Since language is generated by social class, reflects social class, and promulgates social class, Bernstein's critique of linguistic codes was a critique of social class itself ('stratified society' in his words) and a call for its transformation into a democratic, cooperative social structure ('diversified society'). As he said, 'The basic proposition here is that the structure of social relationships determines the principles of communication and so the shaping of forms of consciousness. It follows that changing the structure of social relationships

can change the principles of communication and so change forms of con-sciousness' (Bernstein, 1975: 24–25). This is the political progressiveness of culture-centered psychology (Ratner, 2012, 2014a).[6]

IV.B. *The revisionist explanation of language in general*. Revisionist SCT ex-plains linguistic differences in person-centered terms. Emphasis is on respect-ing the activity, agency, authenticity, and creativity of the speaker. It is deemed disrespectful, mechanistic, reified, and inaccurate to explain individual speech as organized by, maintained by, socialized by, distributed by, and functional for macrocultural factors (see Ratner, 2008). This approach postulates two dimensions of expressive language: (1) linguistic differences among groups (and individuals) are matters of choice in expression; (2) underlying these dif-ferences are essential, universal, competence levels in discourse.

This is the typical duality that social scientists have developed for deal-ing with cultural differences in behavior. All behavior is regarded as rooted in certain universal mechanisms that allow for superficial cultural varia-tions. Emotions are divided into 'basic' universal processes that allow for cultural differences in rules of expression. Schizophrenia similarly is a uni-versal disorder with minor cultural variations in symptoms (Ratner, 1991: 282–292). Color perception consists of 'basic' categories that allow for vari-ation in the boundaries. Chomsky's universal grammar is construed in the same terms, as is his distinction between competence and performance (Bernstein, 1973/1977: 475). Freitag (1984) explains that Piaget held this view.

Jones (2013) articulates a strong revisionist SCT view of discursive. He rejects Bernstein's culture-centric linguistic codes as being superficial and misleading away from natural, universal, human equality. He eschews them as artificially imposing a quantitative hierarchy of competence levels that pejo-ratively casts non-normative conversational styles as deficient, rather than as simply different but equally competent. Jones echoes Labov's critique of Bern-stein (see Freitag, 1984: 153–154).

Jones complains that Bernstein's codes are culturally-centered rather than person-centered: 'There is no attempt, in other words, at an ethnographic or even empathetic characterization of the linguistic and communicative skills, intellectual powers and ethical commitments of working-class fami-lies and communities in their own terms or from their own point of view' (Jones, 2013: 164). Jones rejects objective assessment of behavior that differs from people's self-definition. As though subjective opinion is the final word about psychology and society. This parallels Wertsch and Tulviste's unwar-ranted complaint that Vygotsky treated psychology as reified and mechani-cally determined.

Jones treats Bernstein's codes as middle class ethnocentric prejudice (p. 165) which dismiss and pathologize behavior that is different from the middle class. Bernstein's codes

> were 'ideological' since they were based on uncritical, unfounded, ethnocentric attributions of high level conceptual power to the conventional literacy practices of particular cultural elites. These practices were then used as a yardstick against which the cognitive differences (i.e. deficiencies) of non-literate subcultures or whole societies could be evaluated. In this light, Bernstein's theory could be placed within a long tradition of trying to establish a 'great divide' between the thinking processes of different social groups. (Jones, 2013: 167)

Jones assumes that the middle and lower classes share universal 'basic' competencies and that Bernstein imposed ethnocentric labels to create the appearance of difference. Pyramidal, exploitive capitalist society does not create different competencies; Bernstein does. If he just stopped pejoratively labeling people, natural equality would emerge within existing society.

Jones distorts Bernstein's rationale for designating the codes. Bernstein sought to identify stultified, oppressed competencies that are imposed by social power in the service of an autocratic, pyramidal class structure and political economy. This is explicit in the title of Bernstein's book *Class, Codes and Control*. His explicit point was to identify oppression in order to change the principles of communication and so change forms of consciousness. Bernstein was a socialist who sought to restructure class society from 'stratified' to 'diversified' (his terms). It is absurd to accuse him of dividing social groups.[7]

Jones argues for a person-centered view of discourse:

> there is no meaning without meaners and so no generalizations without generalizers; an utterance cannot be a generalization *for me* unless I can understand it as such. If I can make sense of a scientific generalization (e.g. 'It is not possible for a lunar eclipse and a solar eclipse to occur simultaneously'), it is not because of some general facility for 'decontextualized language' or 'orientation to context-independent meanings' but because I can contextualize the statement in relation to what I know and understand about the relevant phenomena. Similarly, if a child at school has a problem understanding the 'instructional discourse' there is no reason to explain this by infrequent use of 'decontextualized language', it is enough just to say that the child does not understand what the teacher is saying, perhaps due to lack of the relevant background knowledge or interest in the subject matter.
>
> Bernstein was wrong then to talk about children's language being 'generated by the context'. It would be more accurate to say that the context was being generated by the children in intelligently and successfully attributing relevant meaning to features of the mutually observable environment in the service of communicative goals. (Jones: 170)

This is a rejection of classic SCT; it is pure individualism. Linguistic competence is imagined to be entirely a matter of how an individual reacts to a situation. Competence is not a function of conditions, structures, politics, governmentality, subjectification, or cultural capital. Behavior is a function of what an individual understands and is interested in. If s/he is interested in several things, s/he will relate them. If s/he doesn't relate them it's because s/he doesn't want to! (Culture is a tool kit for individuals to select or deselect as they wish.) There is no particular skill involved that is useful to society or engineered by social administrators. There is nothing beyond the child that organizes his/her competence. Jones has expunged culture from cultural psychology and sociocultural theory.

Jones (2013: 176) concludes: 'The Bernsteinian language deficit position shifts the critical 'spotlight' from the education system itself, as the main communicational mechanism of social stratification, onto the pupil.' This not only inverts Bernstein's culture-centric description of language, it also inverts Jones' own portrayal of Bernstein as culture-centric.

V. Classic and Revisionist SCT on Mindy's and Deena's Discursive Speech

V.A. *Describing and explaining Mindy's and Deena's communicative styles according to Classic, Culture-Centric, SCT.* Classic SCT explains Mindy's and Deena's discursive practices in terms of linguistic codes that are forms of cultural capital. Their discourses are forms of 'linguistic capital' (that we described earlier). They are organized by, suitable to, and demographically distributed to particular social positions/roles (see Ratner, 2008, for discussion of this position). Indeed the girls' language competencies sustain the class structure itself by positioning them within its established social roles. Discursive language is a form of social control. 'Language is not simply an instrument of communication' (Bourdieu and Passseron, 1990: 73). Habermas emphasized that 'language is also a medium of domination and social force. It serves to legitimize relations of organised power' (Wodak, 1995).

The dialogues confirm Foucault's culture-centric analysis that 'a statement describes [reflects] the specific position of the enunciating subject'. 'What we have called "discursive practice" … is a body of *anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area*, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function. … The statement itself does not create meaning, rather, statements involve [invoke] a network of rules … that determine what is meaningful' in a particular socio-cultural-historical position (cited in Bacchi and Bonham, 2014: 180, 185, 187, my emphasis; see Foucault 1991). This is the perspective of 'critical discourse analysis'. 'Critical Discourse Analysis tends to focus upon the ways in which the availability and local-

ized uses of certain discursive constructions maintain and legitimate existing power relations within institutions and institutional practices …' (Sims-Schouten, Riley and Willig, 2007: 103, 108).

Vygotsky explained why language is class-based, class-organized, and class-functional:

> In modern society, every person, whether he likes it or not, is inevitably a spokes-man of a particular class. Since each person's individual experience is conditioned by the role he plays in his environment, and it is the class membership which also defines this role, it is clear that class membership defines man's psychology and man's behavior … We must be profoundly historical and must always present man's behavior in relation to the class situation at the given moment. This must be the fundamental psychological technique for every social psychologist. (Vygotsky, 1997b: 212; Vygotsky, 1994a: 176)

Bernstein emphasizes that social class generates superior and inferior kinds of linguistic capital: 'Class acts crucially on all agencies of cultural reproduction, and therefore on both the family and the school … From this point of view, it must necessarily follow that lower working-class children are today crucially disadvantaged … Class is a fundamental category of exclusion and this is reproduced in various ways in schools …' (Bernstein, 1975: 27–28; Bourdieu, 1977).

Discourse style and educational-linguistic codes are the two discourse styles that closely match Bernstein's criteria for class-based elaborated and restricted linguistic codes.

Mindy's expressive language remains consistently centered on a topic which she describes by using general descriptors that make it clear to others what had transpired. Mrs Jones follows her train of speech and guides her to enhance its explicitness and consistency. There is a give and take between the two interlocutors with each interceding appropriately and building on each other's comments.

Deena's discourse rambles across diverse topics without making their connection clear. Moreover, she fails to develop her thoughts and words, and instead jumps to new topics, leaving the listener unsure about the significance of each one. Mrs Jones does not follow what Deena is saying.

The middle-class child's references use nouns, are specific and 'explicit' (i.e. 'elaborated code'), while the working-class child's references are 'implicit' ('restricted code'). Mindy's middle class discourse refers to the objects, and the characters, by name, not by the indefinite *he, she, it, they*. As a result, she – and the middle-class child in general – can be understood outside the immediate context, without reference to the here and now. By contrast, Deena's working-class speech is implicitly tied to a personal context that she personally expe-

rienced and which she does not frame for others who are not familiar with it (see note 7). It is a simple matter to identify each of the criteria in the specific words of both girls.

Michaels (pp. 109, 111) characterizes Deena's dialogues in these terms:

> Deena begins with explicit temporal and physical grounding by telling without much descriptive detail what she did on Sunday. She then shifts gears radically to object-focused discourse about a small purse she had brought from home, embedding it in person-oriented talk that shifts focus away from her birthday present to playing with a girlfriend (an activity related only temporally, or through association with the purse, to her birthday) … The lack of any lexicalized markers other than 'and' between topics makes the discourse difficult to follow, for someone expecting the account to focus on a single event or object. It sounds as if there is *no topic*, and no point, and that Deena is simply rambling on about trivial occurrences.
>
> [The teacher] Mrs Jones, was looking for topic-centered discourse while Deena was building up a topic-associating narrative account whereby the overall point had to be inferred from a series of concrete anecdotes, without any explicit statement of the topic.

Discursive styles are functional for, correspond to, and reinforce lower and middle-class socioeconomic activities, opportunities, requirements, as Bernstein (1973/1977, p. 478), Vygotsky, Bourdieu, and Foucault emphasized.

Deena's expressive speech is suited to lower-class work – e.g., to working as a sales clerk at McDonald's where she merely informs a customer that a Big Mac contains lettuce, tomatoes, onions, and cheese. This kind of work and speech only requires stringing words together in a list. Logic, coherence, and descriptiveness are not required from the clerks because the information is organized and displayed by management on overhead screens, and the customer knows what the words denote. The work and speech have been routinized and simplified to the point that they require little thinking, reflection, analysis, logic, creativity, or explanation by the clerks. These higher level activities have been expropriated by the corporate owners and managers – just as they have expropriated the profits. They do not want their low level employees to possess them for their own interests and decision-making. This *stupification* is the core of Taylorist management (Braverman, 1998).

This governmentality positively instantiates a *negative (macro) ZPD*, it is not the absence of a positive ZPD. It is the positive socialization of a lower-class *habitus*, not the *absence or neglect* of psychological socialization. Lower class subjects are not unsocialized blank slates waiting to be taught; they have already been taught a habitus that must be remediated. This lower-class habitus, or subjectification, is required and desired by the class system; it is not an accident or oversight that everyone wishes to correct. It is exacerbated by neoliberal educational reforms. It is an internal, psychological means of class seg-

regation that replaces external legal restrictions. Lower-class people are not prohibited from upward mobility, they are psychologically incapacitated from achieving it.

Consider a barista at Starbucks was scheduled to work until 11 p.m. on Friday, 4 July, then report again at 4 a.m. on Saturday, and start again at 5 a.m. on Sunday. She is given three days' notice of what her schedule will be. Along with virtually every major retail and restaurant chain, and 'big box' retailers, Starbucks relies on software that precisely choreographs workers, using sales patterns and other data to determine which of its 130,000 baristas are needed in its thousands of locations and exactly when to send workers home or keep them extra time. This precariousness makes work lives and personal lives unpredictable, uncontrollable, incomprehensible, irregular, unsystematic, illogical, irrational, and impossible to plan – to them. They live for the moment in the immediate, circumscribed, visible, here and now (Kantor and Hidgson, 2013). This catalyzes the fragmented, disorganized, non-descriptive, nonsystematic, illogical, limited speech (and thinking) of these individuals.[8]

In this institutionalized division of labor, logic, regularity, planning, intelligibility, systematizing, predicting, understanding, and creativity have been arrogated to corporate level managers, which Mindy is being trained for.

Mindy's type of speech is required by, inspired by, structured by, supported by, congruent with, and functional for the role of middle-class university education and middle-class occupations. These entail reasoning about large-scale issues (world politics, transnational business), abstract issues (how currency exchange rates affect commodity exports), planning for events far into the future (next year's business plan or research program), analyzing multiple possibilities of action that are available to well-off individuals, and communicating with colleagues around the world in abstract concepts and detailed description about events that are not immediately sensed by all participants. As Vygotsky explained, 'each person is to some degree a measure of the society, or rather class, to which he belongs, for the whole totality of social relationships is reflected in him' (1997: 317).

Mrs Jones' behavior is also culture-centric in that she acts as an agent of class society in encouraging middle-class students like Mindy to acquire and practice middle-class discourse, while discouraging lower-class students like Deena from acquiring this linguistic cultural capital-competence (Bernstein, 1975: 64; see Ratner, 2002: 19–20; Mocombe and Tomlin, 2013). In this sense, the teacher was not a poor teacher, she was a good teacher (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Mrs Jones helps to ensure that only a quarter of college freshmen born into the bottom half of the income distribution will manage to collect a bachelor's degree by age 24, while almost 90% of freshmen born into families in the top

income quartile will go on to finish their degree (*New York Times*, 18 May 2014: MM 26). Three-fourths of community college students (mostly lower class) never earn a degree or certificate (*Wall St. Journal*,18 November 2014: A3).

Of course, the logical, necessary bond between social class and discursive style is a general principle. Some cultural-psychological mobility – upward and downward – is available for a number of individuals. However, on the societal level, upward social mobility has been *declining* over recent decades (Bowles, Gintis and Groves, 2005; McNamee and Miller, 2009).

V.B. *Mindy's and Deena's Communicative Styles According to Revisionist SCT*. Revisionist SCT adopts the personalistic standpoint about culture and language to explain and describe Mindy's and Deena's discursive styles (see Ratner, 2008 for discussion of this position).

Michaels employs the two-level analysis I have described in section IV.B. She initially denotes the two discourse styles as employing different linguistic codes and structures. She then claims that ostensive differences are superficial and untrue because they overlook essential, universal, equality in psychological competence. 'If we take a closer look at this turn, we see that the topics of discourse themselves are not inherently trivial or uninteresting, but rather that the rhetorical style used make it "sound" as if there is no topic whatsoever … The problem with Deena's presentation was more one of discourse form than of content' (pp. 109–110). 'Deena had a sense of what topic-centered discourse *sounded* like and knew this was what Mrs Jones wanted, but did not impose this prosodic framework on her own narrative style and presentations' (p. 111).

According to Michaels, Deena had all the linguistic competencies that Mrs Jones and the middle class demand. Deena simply did not choose to utilize her middle-class competencies. She preferred her lower-class rhetorical style. This is Jones' view of language as a tool kit to be invoked as the speaker chooses.

Accordingly, the social-linguistic gap between Deena and Mrs Jones (and the other middle-class kids) can easily be eliminated by simply encouraging Deena to utilize her latent, universal middle-class competencies. And by encouraging Mrs Jones to perceive Deena's *true* linguistic competence beneath her personal stylistic choices.

However, Michaels presents no evidence to substantiate her claims. She says, for example: 'When I played [tape-recorded] specific sharing turns of Deena's, she was able to verbalize and clarify many of the unstated connections in her discourse' (p. 110). Michaels fails to cite a single example.

Michaels even confuses topical coherence with topical interest. She says that Deena's topics are not uninteresting. However, the point is not whether they are interesting, but how Deena expresses them. Expressing interesting points does not mean she expresses them logically, coherently, or descriptively.

Michaels reproduces a segment where Deena indicates the intonation of narrative. It takes the form of 'blah blah blah, blah blah blah, blah blah blah blah' (p. 111). This is her evidence that Deena had a sense of what topic-centered discourse sounded like. However, this is questionable evidence. Patterns of sound uttered via nonsense syllables are no evidence for topical, coherent, articulate speech. It doesn't matter that Deena may have had a sense of the intonation of articulate discourse. The problem is that Deena provided no logical coherence to the *content* of her narrative.

Michaels similarly attempts to bolster her claim that Deena is a highly competent student by stating that she improved over the school year in literacy-related skills such as handwriting, spelling, and reading (pp. 111–112). This is irrelevant. Deena's inarticulate conversation is unrelated to handwriting and spelling. Similarly, reading comprehension is a different competence from expression. They do not prove that Deena's expressive language competence is high.[9]

Additional pseudo-evidence is Michaels' statement, 'when I asked Deena during the interview what she thought Mrs Jones meant by "tell about one thing", Deena said, "she meant tell about one thing, not 35,000 other things. Like, don't say 'Yesterday I had a fight, I saw some roses.' I take this as a further indication that Deena did indeed have a sense that some topics were related and others were not, and that she was not simply moving from topic to topic in an arbitrary, unmotivated manner"' (p. 110). Deena may understand what Mrs Jones is asking for, but this does not prove she converses in that style.

Finally, Michaels reports a related case of a first grade teacher interacting with a Black girl, Antonia. The girl had written: 'I have a cat and my cat never go to the bathroom when my cousin eating over my house and we went to the circus my cousins names are LaShaun, Trinity, Sherry, Cynthia, Doral' (p. 114). This statement has the restricted, disjointed, inarticulate form of Deena's discourse. It also contains several ungrammaticalities.

However, Michaels asserts that Antonia's expressive linguistic competence is good. It just takes some sensitivity on the part of the listener to apprehend its logic and organization. Michaels reports that the teacher manifested this sensitivity. 'She said she thought that what Antonia had written was an example of topic-associating discourse and seemed very pleased' (p. 114). This is the 'evidence' that Michaels presents! She never analyzes the structure/organization of Antonia's narratives to empirically *demonstrate* their logical, coherent, descriptive, middle class (or universal) linguistic competencies. She simply takes the teacher's unsubstantiated word that they exist.

Antonia's teacher attempted to elucidate logical connections by questioning her: 'what do your cousins have to do with the circus and your cat?' Antonia answered, 'Oh, my cousins always eat over my house, and they sleep over

my house too. And one day last week, we all went to the circus' (p. 114). This response is as disjointed and uninformative as Antonia's original statement. It does not elucidate logical coherence in the original narrative.

Even in response to the teacher's pointed question about the coherence of her statement, Antonia does not explain why she had mentioned the cat in relation to the cousins or the circus or going to the bathroom. Nor does she explain the importance of mentioning her cousins' names. Her attempted elucidation of topic-associated discourse only disconfirms it. Thus, Michaels' research, conducted from the individualistic, liberal, person-centered, revisionist SCT, disproves that position. It supports Bernstein's culture-centered, classic SCT.

Yet Michaels and the teacher imagine that questioning Antonia *had* elicited an explanation of connections in the original narrative. After Antonia answered the teacher's request to explain the relation of the elements, the teacher approvingly said, 'Oh, I see' [the connections]. The teacher then told Michaels, 'You know, it's a whole lot easier to get *them* to make the connections clear, if you assume that the connections are there in the first place' (pp. 114–115). Michaels characteristically cites this statement without question and without evidence.

These educators are claiming that students can express and identify narrative connections and coherence if a teacher believes in them. If students do not articulate logically it must be because (they feel that) the teacher has no faith in them and is insensitive to them. Imagine claiming that students really understand quantum physics and that if they don't express this competence it is because of teachers' insensitivity or lack of faith in them, and that unleashing students' understanding of quantum physics depends upon teachers' belief that students really know it (Ratner, 2011: 108–109)!

Michaels fails to empirically document her claim that Deena possesses a high, universal linguistic competence. Indeed, she avers rigorous methodology. This allows fallacious theories to run rampant. In contrast, Bernstein developed specific qualitative and quantitative metrics to assess the presence, or absence, of particular codes in linguistic specimens. These have been independently documented (Sadovnik, 2001: 9–10; Anyon, 1980, 1981). Freitag (1984: 165) tested 206 Brazilian children (ages 6–9 and 13–16, to identify social class and maturational influences on speech) and found a strong correlation between Bernstein's speech categories and social class. Only 7% of the upper middle-class children utilized restricted or predominantly restricted codes, whereas 21% of working class children did, and 71.5% of slum children did. On the other hand, 70.4% of upper middle-class children used elaborated or predominantly elaborated codes, whereas only 42.1% of working class kids used them, and none of the slum children did. Speech mode was also related

to cognitive development: children who used restricted speech codes functioned at the level of concrete operations, whereas no children using elaborated codes used concrete operations; conversely, elaborated speech codes were associated with stabilized formal operations – with no children using restricted codes able to use formal operations (Freitag, 1984: 168). Rigorous assessment of children's speech repudiates the revisionist claim that children's speech transcends social class, and that lower-class children utilize elaborated codes.

VI. Social philosophies inspire and structure psychological analyses and theories

We have demonstrated errors in revisionist SCT regarding analysis of expressive language, analysis of language in general, and analysis of sociocultural theory. These are all determined by a higher order phenomenon: social philosophy. All social science perspectives (theoretical, methodological, and treatment-oriented) are ultimately grounded in broad social philosophy. This is true for valid and invalid perspectives. It is their social philosophy that makes them scientifically valid or invalid.

Revisionist SCT is rooted in individualistic, liberal, bourgeois social philosophy. Michaels acknowledges her debt to this social philosophy (Michaels, O'Connor and Resnick, 2008). Bourgeois, liberal social philosophy seeks to validate and respect all individuals, just as they are, as being creative, thoughtful, authentic human beings who operate from individual processes (agency, decision-making, self). Laski (1936: 2) describes it thusly: 'There is a flavour of romanticism about the liberal temper. It tends to be subjective and anarchist, to be eager for the change which comes from individual initiative.'

Individualistic, liberal social philosophy leads to a politics of respect and validation of personal agency, authenticity, and creativity (Ratner, 2014b, c; Ratner, 2015a). It glorifies individual acts without recognizing their oppressive origins, content, and function. Criticizing people's psychology is denounced as disrespecting individualistic functions.[10]

This social philosophy generates revisionist SCT's rejection of social structures, systems, and dynamics; and also rejection of constructs and theories that elucidate these, such as cultural capital, reproduction, habitus, politics, governmentality, subjectification, culture of poverty, psychology of oppression, pathological normalcy, linguistic codes, micropolitics, social roles, and macrocultural factors. This social philosophy leads to rejecting and distorting classic SCT. Individualistic, liberal social philosophy de-contextualizes, de-politicizes, and de-historicizes the individual and psychology in order to liberate personal agency and creativity and authenticity from external cultural influences (Ratner, 2009; Sims-Schouten *et al.*, 2007: 102). This produces a

false description of classic SCT, a false critique of it, and a false alternative to it (Ratner, 2009).

Individualistic social philosophy rejects the *idea* of oppression promulgated in social science *constructs* such as political economy, class structure, culture of poverty, reproduction, politics, and linguistic codes. Its solution is to change *intellectuals'* faulty idea of oppression and stop *labeling* people as oppressed. This *nominal change in ideas and terminology* will enable people to exercise their true agency and achieve emancipation. In this tale, there is no need to change real macro factors that really oppress subjectivity. Wertsch, Gonzalez-Rey, and Jones complain about *Vygotsky's* and *Bernstein's concept* of society, education, and psychology; they do not complain about social oppression itself or the CEOs and government officials who promulgate and benefit from it (Ratner, 2011: 108–109).

Liberal, individualistic social philosophy, and its representation in revisionist SCT, avers transforming macrocultural factors through political organization. That is unnecessary because culture has no definite affect on psychology – either positive or negative. It is up to individuals to decide how to psychologically respond to social conditions.

Societal change is additionally rejected by the revisionist assumption that macro factors are inherently oppressive of individual consciousness, freedom, and fulfillment. No kind of social reorganization can overcome this problem. The only solution to social problems is individual change in behavior and meanings.

Macro change is additionally averred under the assumption that the individual is fit, fulfilled, and free to agentively express himself/herself. Change is easy and continual because anyone can always change their ideas or wishes: 'The person as subject is *always subversive* in relation to the dominant current social status … The subject is capable of developing subjective alternatives to dominant norms in *any type of human activity*' (Gonzalez-Rey, 2011: 46, my emphasis). Thus, Jews in death camps, prisoners in Guantanamo Bay, destitute homeless people, are all really active, agentive, creative, subversive – and therefore free – because they can develop 'subversive, subjective alternatives' – which revisionists neither define nor substantiate (see Marcuse, 1972 and Ratner, 2009, for critique). Social transformation is reduced to individualistic acts.

Since everyone freely and creatively chooses how they fashion their personal lives, negative social behaviors such as poverty, prejudice, violence, apathy, and ignorance are construed as chosen life styles, not structural, institutionalized, imposed events. Social change is reduced to helping individuals make different choices, rather than elevated to political action at the macro level.

Bernstein (1975: 27) explains the problem with bourgeois-individualistic, liberal, person-centered accounts of psychology: 'The changes which flow from such theories are usually limited to changes either within the family or within the local teacher-taught relationships. Their assumptions make it difficult to raise a general problematic about the fundamental structure and changes in the structure of the reproduction of forms of consciousness. In other words, they fail to examine how the distribution of power and the principles of social control regulate the distribution of, the reception to, participation in, and change of dominant cultural categories.'[11]

Humanistic social philosophy falsely dichotomizes activity/subjectivity and cultural structures. It denies activity in cultural structures (which leads to construing them as reified and mechanistic), and it localizes activity/subjectivity entirely within the individual. Individual activity/subjectivity is the only and therefore the highest form of activity/subjectivity. Classic SCT correctly situates activity in macro cultural factors. Activity/subjectivity takes the form of macro cultural factors. It can be stunted activity if cultural factors are oppressive. (Oppression does not eradicate subjectivity, it contorts it in oppressive forms. Individuals express oppressed activity; they do not express inherently fulfilling activity/subjectivity. Validating individual activity thus validates culturally oppressed individual activity.) Fulfilling, creative, dignified, respectful, cooperative activity/subjectivity depends upon humanizing macro cultural factors that generate, support, and structure it. The cultural conception of activity calls for social improvement whereas humanist social philosophy calls for separating individuals from culture in order to express their personal, fulfilling activity/subjectivity (Ratner, 2015a).

Revisionist SCT social philosophy is a particularly regressive and remiss form of liberalism – neoliberalism (Gane, 2014). Earlier forms of liberalism acknowledged the cultural psychology of oppression and struggled to reform macrocultural factors to ameliorate it. Head Start, Hull House, and Civil Rights are examples. Although they did not seek to transform the political-economic system, they sought to improve it. SCT revisionists, in general, renounce societal reform and critical constructs that galvanize it.[12]

Individualistic subjectivism additionally renders SCT unscientific (antiscientific, really). In the first place, science is a cultural tool that is open to individual, subjective framing. Scientific thinking can be modified or discarded as the user wishes, without justification.[13]

Second, revisionist SCT regards subjectivity/agency as singular, individual, spontaneous, autonomous inventions that are not bounded by conditions, explained by conditions, or predicable from conditions. 'Subjectivity is not a reflection [of conditions]. It is a production that cannot be deduced from the external circumstances within which human actions take place' (Gonzalez-

Rey, 2011: 47).[14] Free subjectivity is anathema to scientific study – categorization, deduction and generalization.

These anti-scientific aspects of revisionist SCT have led to eschewing concrete, coherent concepts, constructs, theories, and research concerning the origins, content, and organization of culture and psychology. Revisionists produce no progressive, accumulative deepening of empirical or theoretical aspects of psychological or cultural issues.

Adorno (2005: xx) called liberal, individualistic, subjectivistic humanism 'the fallacy of constitutive subjectivity'. It tries to escape culture, but is actually determined by it. Retreating into subjectivity unwittingly retreats into the given cultural psychology of the status quo. Psychology, activity, and agency are conservative forces in this sense; they are not inherently creative or critical. This is why participatory decision-making does not usually overcome the status quo. Emancipatory decision-making requires remediating the cultural content of the subjectivity in concert with transforming macrocultural factors.

Bourdieu (1977: 496) similarly observes that subjectivistic individualism is an illusion (which he calls the biographical illusion) that 'conceals from people the objective truth of the mechanisms and social motives that determine them'.

Our analysis has revealed that social philosophy generates social science theories which generate theories of language which analyze particular dialogues. The analysis of particular examples thus reflects these levels and it has the potential to vindicate or refute them. To understand a particular analysis it is necessary to trace it all the way up the chain of higher levels of generality.

Our analysis has demonstrated that this system of levels must include Vygotsky's classic sociocultural theory, a corresponding linguistic theory such as Bernstein's, Bourdieu's, Foucault's, and Lantolf's, and a guiding social philosophy of Marxism and critical realism. This synthesis will repoliticize the depoliticization of culture and psychology that revisionist SCT has effected. It will realize Foucault's plea that, 'The real political task in a society such as ours is to criticize the working of institutions which appear to be both neutral and independent; to criticize them in such a manner that the political violence which has always exercised itself obscurely through them will be unmasked, so that one can fight them' (Foucault, 2006: 41). This cultural-centric critique is necessary to ensure that freedom of voice is not simply 'freedom to have one's voice heard'; it is also the 'freedom to develop a voice worth hearing' (Hymes, 1996: 64).

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Notes

1.   Madrick (2014) recounts how apparently individual creations and creativity are actually social. For instance, 'While Apple's products owe their beautiful design and slick integration to the genius of Jobs and his large team, nearly every state-of-the-art technology found in the iPod, iPhone and iPad is an often overlooked and ignored achievement of the research efforts and funding support of the government and military.'

2.   Cultural resources and competencies are capital in a metaphorical sense – they are demographically distributed 'investments' that generate benefits and limitations which reflect and reproduce economic capital and the political-economic class structure (Lee and Bowen, 2006). This is pertinent to explaining and describing the dialogues of Deena and Mindy, as I shall explain below.

3.   Thus, intergenerational poverty, crumbling infrastructure, failing schools, institutionalized discrimination, lack of jobs, disenfranchisement and alienation, and even slavery would be neutralized by individual goal-directed acts because they are not single, dramatic events.

4.   'O judgment! thou art fled to brutish beasts, And men have lost their reason.' (Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*)

5.   Bernstein and Bourdieu referenced each other's work, however they had certain minor disagreements (Sadovnik, 2001: 7–8).

6.   Bernstein's linguistic codes-as-cultural-capital were anticipated by Luria's categorization of cognitive categories evidenced by peasants at different levels of education and collectivization in 1930. Peasants who had experienced low levels of these social activities developed cognitive categories that were based on empirical associations of things regarding their practical, circumstantial interdependencies. Luria termed this situational thinking. Peasants at higher levels of education and collectivization formed qualitatively different categories. They were 'taxonomic' categories based upon abstract features of things – e.g., 'both of these are animals'. Luria's findings were replicated 60 years later by Tulviste (Lantolf and Poehner, 2014: 28–31). Luria's objective was to ascertain levels of competence implied by psychological phenomena so that they could be elevated.

7.   Liberals characterized Bernstein as a fascist and a racist during the 1960s and 1970s. They also distorted Bourdieu's reproduction thesis as nullifying subjectivity. Liberals also criticized Luria's cognitive categories discussed in note 6 as unfair to pre-modern people. They also distorted Martin-Baro (see Ratner, 2015a), and P. Frieres (see McKenna, 2013).

Liberal individualists also distorted Oscar Lewis' theory of 'culture of poverty' into an attack on the poor, when, in fact, he identified this cultural psychology of oppression as generated by capitalism, and as requiring the transformation of capitalism as necessary for eliminating poverty and raising the material and psychological level of oppressed people (Kurtz, 2014).

Liberal individualists do not merely ignore social structures (and effects) of oppression; they deny them, and they censure critics who identify them and work to eradicate them. This impedes social change just as much as conservatives do (see Losurdo, 2014; Laski, 1936 for historical discussion of the conservative side of liberalism).

8.   This is pathological normalcy (Ratner, 2014b) and psychology of oppression (Ratner, 2011) which is a form of governmentality.

9.   Actually, the vast majority of Black children (and poor children, in general) manifest a generalized inferiority in academic competencies that corresponds to, and is functional for, their deprived social position and the jobs that are available to them. 85% of Black children are not reading at grade level, in 4th grade, 8th grade, and 12th grade. 94% of black 12th graders do not perform at grade level on math. 'The results indicate that Blacks have more limited skills in processing information from articles, books, tables, charts, and graphs compared with their White counterparts. More perplexing, the students who lose the most ground are the higher achieving Black children' (Tomlin, Mocombe, and Wright, 2013: 359). 'Only 5% of black students meet the ACT's college readiness benchmark in all four subject areas: English, reading, math, and science' (*Wall St. Journal*, 21 August 2014).

Tomlin, Mocombe, and Wright, (2013: 360) aptly explain that cultural differences in competence are expressions of vertical, social inequality, they are not merely expressions of multicultural diversity to be celebrated and validated: 'The Black–White achievement gap in America and the United Kingdom is an epiphenomenon of the dialectic of the global capitalist social structure of class inequality as reinforced by education as an ideological state apparatus of such a system. This … diametrically opposes the position of most contemporary critical theorists of education, who argue for and attempt to demonstrate cultural heterogeneity.'

10.   Even impoverished, uprooted, abused, street children are glamorized in these terms:

> attending to children's 'voices' and experiences through child-centred ethnographic and qualitative research methods, studies now routinely point to [street] children's sophisticated and perceptive appreciation of their social worlds, and their capacities to act upon these understandings. Research now regularly asserts that '[street] children … be taken seriously as social, economic and political actors', or that they must be considered 'as empowered social beings able to construct meaning and effect change in their world'. (Mizen and Ofosu-Kusi, 2013: 364–365).

11.   Because individual activity is culturally formed, the only way to make it belong to the individual is for the individual to control the cultural factors and processes of society. This requires democratic collective activity. This macrocultural level is where genuine individuality, activity, creativity, agency, authenticity, resistance, and freedom exist. Where individuals do not exercise this control, and only express themselves subjectively and personally on the individual level, their activities, choices, agency, and individuality are *not their own*; they belong to social leaders and powers. Cooperativism is individualizing, whereas individualism is de-individualizing. This is the politics of Vygotsky's SCT.

12.   Philosophers and historians of science observe that science may be externally influenced by cultural factors and internally developed from questions within a discipline. Revisionist SCT is purely the former. Its tenets are not derived from internal resolution and advancement of psychological issues. Indeed, it fabricates a problem that cultural-psychology reifies culture and psychology, mechanistically denies subjectivity, and blames individuals for their problems. Revisionist SCT additionally proposes a false solution to this false problem – namely, individualistic subjectivity. Both the false problem and the false solution recapitulate neoliberal, postmodern ideology. In contrast, Vygotsky's classic SCT took up cultural-political issues (Marxism, socialism, dialectics) into an internal development of psychological questions such as reflexology, mechanism, consciousness, development, sociality, and other psychological issues that Vygotsky scientifically worked through, resolved, and advanced.

Revisionists adopt and conform to macro cultural factors such as neoliberalism and postmodernism. They use them as their psychological tools (cultural capital). They do not invent,

resist, negotiate, select, personalize, or transform these macro cultural factors. (Indeed, the fact that revisionists imagine they are not influenced by macro cultural factors blinds them to the fact that they are, and it renders them incapable of resisting or altering them.) Revisionists reproduce mystifying, oppressive elements of the social system (see Ratner, 2015b). Revisionist behavior thus validates classic SCT principles that behavior is structured by macro cultural factors. Revisionist behavior refutes revisionist principles of behavior, that activity is individually and personally produced.

13.   Revisionists do not scientifically ground their approach. They do not define their constructs, argue for them, or empirically confirm them. Revisionists do not define what individual choice is or how to identify it. How do we know it is the individual's choice vs. social reproduction? How much freedom and variation do individuals have in utilizing cultural tools? Where does the content of free choice come from? How is individual choice/agency compatible with social organization and cooperation? How is individual free choice that escapes public culture compatible with cultural psychology as a phenomenon and a discipline? Revisionists never engage in a detailed analysis of choices to prove their character – e.g., Michaels never empirically analyzes narratives.

14.   In other words, poverty, torture, child abuse, and slavery do not necessarily generate any predictable, deducible psychological consequences because consciousness decides how to deal with these 'tools'. This is scientifically refuted by a monotonic relationship between social stress and depression. In one study, 100% of Ss who experienced 4+ stressful events became depressed (Ratner, 1991: 287).

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