

Considering Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Lev Vygotsky in the concept of Space

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Background

This article comes on the eve of my teaching *Curriculum Studies 489: Creativity and Critical Thinking—Makiguchi, Ikeda, Bakhtin and Vygotsky*, a newly developed graduate-level course for pre- and in-service teachers in the DePaul University School of Education. Located in Chicago, Illinois, the DePaul University School of Education is grounded in the conceptual framework of preparing “Urban Professional Multicultural Educators” to teach in Chicago Public Schools, the third largest public school district in the United States. The course has a twofold goal. On one hand it asks pre- and in-service teachers to apply the philosophies of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi (1871 – 1944), Daisaku Ikeda (1928 -), Mikhail Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) and Lev Vygotsky (1896 – 1934) to current curriculum in their chosen discipline (e.g., mathematics, social studies, science, etc.) and K-12 level(s). On the other it asks them to locate confluences in those philosophies.

This consideration of Makiguchi and Vygotsky is an example of my own application of these goals in the context of my discipline, second language education. It is thus an extrinsic approach to Makiguchi scholarship, as it necessitates what Makiguchi scholar Andrew Gebert calls “reading Makiguchi’s silences,” or the practice of considering what Makiguchi might have stated in the context of issues about which he did not write. For example, Makiguchi was largely silent with regard to second/foreign language education. In fact, he argued that in the context of meaningful and useful education for the daily lives of students such as children of tenant farmers or working class merchants, it is “some kind of disaster that foreign language courses...are not discarded” (CW, 6: 362; cf. Bethel, 1989, p. 188). However, in his writings on Japanese language education, a topic he is less known for addressing but which he examined throughout his professional life, he suggests that educators consider national Japanese education as if it were a foreign language, namely English, as doing so would provide the proper lens for understanding the contextualized meaning of words, sentences, paragraphs and whole texts (see CW, 7). Beyond such statements, we are left to imagine what he might have thought with regard to second and foreign language education in a contemporary context by looking for clues in his treatment of Japanese national language education and possibly other less obviously connected areas.

Why Vygotsky?

My coupling of the abovementioned early and late contemporaries from Japan and the Former Soviet Union, none of whom ever met, as the focus of a new course is not happenstance. Readers of *Soka Education* (and its forerunner, *Soka Education Research*) are assuredly aware of the connections between Makiguchi and Ikeda. Elsewhere, I have written briefly about Makiguchi and Ikeda (in press (a)) and Makiguchi and Bakhtin (in press (b); see also Hatano, in press). Here I briefly examine Makiguchi and Vygotsky. As a graduate student in the University at Buffalo Graduate School of Education, I began reading Vygotsky's philosophy under the tutelage of Prof. Vladimir Ageyev, a graduate and former faculty member of Moscow State University's psychology department—where Vygotsky taught. Ageyev studied under and worked with Vygotsky's contemporaries and disciples. Around the same time, I began reading English translations of and scholarship on Makiguchi's work (e.g., Bethel, 1973, 1989, 2002; Ikeda, 2001; Makiguchi 1964). I immediately found similarities in my reading of both men's ideas, which I presented in Ageyev's class and later at national and international conferences (2006, 2007a, 2007b). While I was presenting my understanding of Makiguchi's ideas in relation to Vygotsky's, I admittedly wondered if similarities really existed or if I had just desired to find them. Although I could read Japanese and was aware that Makiguchi's works spanned 10 volumes, I had read only the English translations and secondary scholarship. Around the time I began presenting my take on Makiguchi and Vygotsky, the influential journal *Educational Researcher* published a series of point-counterpoint articles in which scholars debated the compatibility of Dewey's and Vygotsky's theories with regard to pedagogy and cognitive development (Glassman, 2001; Glassman & Wang, 2004; Gredler & Shields, 2004; O'Brien, 2002; Prawat, 2002). As scholars had also (and have since) convincingly compared Makiguchi with Dewey (e.g., Bethel, 1973; Bullough, 1989; Hickman, 2002; Ikeda, 2001; Ito, 2007) before the Dewey-Vygotsky debate, I felt emboldened in my attempt to locate confluences in the ideas of Makiguchi and Vygotsky. In other words, if Makiguchi and Dewey had been compared, and Dewey and Vygotsky had been compared, a logical next step was to look at Vygotsky alongside Makiguchi.

But there is another, more immediate reason why I have chosen to focus on Vygotsky in relation to Makiguchi. Recently, the effusion of "space" as a topic in second language literature and in literature concerning Vygotskian philosophy, which has greatly influenced the field of second and foreign language education, has become more noticeable. For example, in a special issue of *Mind, Culture, and Activity* (a journal dedicated to the ideas of Vygotsky and other socioculturalists influenced by his work) guest editors Vadenboncoeur, Hirst and Kostogriz (2006) indicated,

Part of our interest in sociocultural approaches, derived from Vygotsky's works, is due to their ability to respond to the call of critical geographers such as David Harvey (2000, 2001) and Edward Soja (1989, 1996) to re-establish a role for space and spatiality in research. In particular, we are intrigued by concepts that may lend themselves to discussions around what sociocultural approaches

offer the spatial turn in the social sciences. (p. 167)

“Space” as these scholars discuss it is the sociocultural space(s) wherein meaning is constructed. It is here where I wish to bring in the work of Makiguchi. After beginning to look at Makiguchi in the original Japanese, I think much of his work in human geography and even more from his lesser-known work in community studies brings the recent discussions of “space” and second language into clearer focus, particularly with regard to the few areas where he discusses “space” and Japanese national language education. While Vygotsky’s ideas have become increasingly influential in education in general and language education in particular, Makiguchi’s contribution offers much to the discussion.

Makiguchi and Vygotsky

In order to properly apply theories from earlier eras to current practice, it is important, as Ageyev (2003) argued about Vygotsky’s and Goulah and Gebert (in press) demonstrated with regard to Makiguchi’s, first to understand them in their original cultural, temporal, and geographical context. Vygotsky was a developmental psychologist who developed cultural-historical psychology; Makiguchi was an educator, principal, educational philosopher and Buddhist war resister who developed value-creating pedagogy and wrote extensively on geography and community studies. It may seem Vygotsky shared little with Makiguchi; however, scrutiny of both men’s lives reveals many resemblances. As contemporaries, both knew of and occasionally referenced Dewey; Vygotsky started the journal *Verask*; Makiguchi began the newspaper-journal *Kachi Sozo* and the journal *Shinkyō*. Vygotsky founded academic institutes to further his study; Makiguchi founded the Soka Kyoiku Gakkai (Value Creating Education Society) based on his pedagogical theories and the principles of Nichiren Buddhism to ameliorate social ills perpetuated by the educational system of the day. Both men were, to differing degrees, persecuted because of their religious beliefs, Vygotsky early in life (Blanck, 1990), Makiguchi late in life (Bethel, 1973; Goulah & Gebert, in press; Ikeda, 2001). Pedagogically, unlike much of the present dominant tendency in the United States, both men advocated child-centered, co-constructed or cooperative learning rather than transmission of knowledge from teacher to student (Bethel, 1989; Goulah & Gebert, in press; Lidz & Gindis, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978, 1997). Neither subscribed to biological determinism. Both stressed process over product and supported purposeful activities that targeted personal and social significances (Bullough, 1989; Makiguchi, 1981-1988; Wells, 2000). Both men’s governments suppressed their work; the Soviet government banned Vygotsky’s work from 1936 to 1956 (Blanck, 1990; Robbins, 2003) and Japan’s militarist government discontinued by order publication of *Kachi Sozo* in 1942 and imprisoned Makiguchi as a thought criminal in 1943 (Makiguchi, 1981-1988; Murata, 1969). Finally, like Vygotsky, Makiguchi advocated a dialogic over authoritative means for learning and focused on elementary learners.

Beyond these striking similarities, however, lies a confluence of thought that has profound implications for the direction of language learning and education in the United States and abroad. One area

is in the conceptualization of “space” and language. In the following section, I address current views of Vygotskian approaches to “space” and language education and suggest how Makiguchi’s ideas in community studies may offer insight in identified problem areas. My goal is not to provide a definitive argument, particularly with regard to connections between Makiguchian and Vygotskian philosophy, but to spur future conversation.

Space and Language

Kostogriz (2006) argued that the abovementioned special issue of *Mind, Culture and Activity* “is an attempt to put ‘space’ on the agenda of sociocultural research in education because, as the contributors demonstrated, meaning-making and learning are obviously spatial phenomena and space is implicated in pedagogical practices at all levels” (p. 176). In other words, Vygotsky (1994) argued that the learner’s sociocultural and cultural-historical environment (read: “space”), made up of people and artifacts, directly affects learning and development. According to Lee and Smagorinsky (2000), the core of Vygotskian sociocultural theory includes learning “first on the interpsychological plane between a person and other people and their cultural artifacts, and then appropriated by individuals on the intrapsychological plane” (p. 2). Coloring Kostogriz’s perspective of “space” is the impact of globalization, whereby goods, capital and people move across physical spaces, reshaping them (and social spaces) with respect to coloniality, immigration policy, and language rights (not to mention the mainstays in language/culture education of race, gender, and socioeconomics). In Kostogriz’s application of a Vygotskian approach to “space,” the social culture of acceptance or exclusion, the familiar or unknown, nativeness or foreignness are formed through signs and symbols that mediate people’s development, that is that people read in a way that, to Kostogriz, has not allowed for dialogic interaction whereby the self of dominant society is not recreated in the “space” of the nondominant other. For example, large numbers of non-English speaking immigrants in the United States face exclusionary laws regarding their language practices. The most striking example is the federal No Child Left Behind Act’s mandated use and acquisition of English for educational purposes. The implication is that immigrants’ native language and attendant sociocultural practices and norms lack value or agency. Kostogriz’s argument is informed largely by his readings of “space” present in contemporary views of human geography (Barnes & Gregory, 1997). Within this view, Kostogriz (2006) argues that to properly understand the social space education must focus on the local:

It is from this perspective that changing the politics of scale in education becomes central to changing the topology of pedagogical places. By shifting the focus on regions, districts, communities, schools, and classrooms as the nodal points of new knowledge—power networks, we can observe globalization from below as a sociocultural project of knowledge and meaning transformation. The local scales of pedagogical practices are more agile forms of social organization and semiotic representation that are able to respond rapidly to changes. (p. 179)

I would argue that scholars engaging in such a Vygotskian approach—of which I consider myself one—must also consider Makiguchi's contributions in this area.

In volume 4 of his complete works, *Research into the Methods and Content of Geography Instruction* (1916/1983-88), Makiguchi reiterates arguments he established in his groundbreaking work, *The Geography of Human Life* (1901/1983-88), stating that the two halves of natural geography and human geography constitute two sides of one whole. Moreover, he argues that both sides must be examined and tapped to provide the fullest potential for students' learning and development. Such a view was rare when Makiguchi wrote it. In this holistic perspective Makiguchi places primary importance on the "space" of the local community. In other words, examining the local community is a means to understanding human geography and human life. Makiguchi began this focus on the local community in *The Geography*, furthered it in *Research into Community Studies as the Integrating Focus of Instruction* (1912) and expanded in *Research into the Methods and Content of Geography Instruction*. To tease out the relation of Makiguchi to the argument Kostogriz presents, it is first important to understand what Makiguchi means by local community, particularly with regard to educational contexts. In a chapter titled "General Conceptualization of Geography of the Local Community," he writes,

While the recent advocacy of community studies, coming finally and after so little progress in the field is rather puzzling, based on what I have seen, current pedagogues' research regarding this subject stops at mere generalization without reaching examination of its content.

More than the necessity of community studies or its goal, the pressing question of education that we return to in the context of community studies is what is its contents. If the contents of community studies is soundly researched, then the important aspects of time, equipment, scope and so forth can also be accordingly determined. The reason scholars' opinions within debates on community studies are divergent with respect to its instructional time, scope and so forth is because research on its contents is insufficient.

If that's the case, then to ask what the contents of community studies are we must analyze it into at least two or three essential elements. In other words: What is the local community that constitutes the object of community studies? What is the scope of the local community? What are the essential elements of the local community? What is the means of directly observing those elements? While answer to the question of what is the local community that is the object of community studies may seem all too evident, it is in fact extremely ambiguous. In some cases it means an entire country, in other cases it is one region, in still other cases it is a single city or village. The boundaries of its scope vary depending on how we are using the term (*kyodo*). When combining them as in our preparation for practical subjects, if we ask as a departure point, What is the local community we directly observe, we can define it ourselves. Broadly speaking, I think it is appropriate to say the most common

operational meaning is the children's birthplace, the place where they live, or the place they set up as the basis of life. After all, the children were born on that land, they grew up on that land, and surely we can point to that land as the place in which they live. I believe we should use at least this meaning of local community as a starting point in the context of school subjects. Now, if we consider this from a different perspective, I think it is correct to say the scope of things which children can directly observe. In that case, local community means one city or village or one region. Its scope expands and contracts based on the development and progress of transportation systems. Accordingly, it is not particularly meaningful to attempt to define local community in purely spatial terms. If this is so, we must scrutinize (one step) more deeply the question of how to delimit the scope of the local community.

The nature of the local community that constitutes the object of community studies, simply speaking, is the land where the school exists. I think it is correct to define it that way because in that sense the boundaries of that scope also directly influence the physical and mental (aspects of the) lives of children. This can be roughly defined as the range to which children's ability to directly observe phenomena extends. It can be referred to as the "scope of direct observation." (CW, 4: 231-32)

So what does this mean? The Vygotskian approach Kostogriz presents suggests that cultural signs and tools are appropriated in the social space, which leads to understanding of accepted norms and fundamental concepts. Makiguchi argues that such understanding—learning—happens in the context of the physical, geographic space of the local community *and*, thereby, in the social space of the local community. This aspect of the social is present in Makiguchi's conceptualization of learning to be gained in the activities related to physical spaces such as industry, morals, art, religion and human perspectives (e.g., CW, 1 & 2). Indeed, returning to *The Geography*, Makiguchi never considered it meaningful to think about physical surroundings separate from the social. So what are the implications of such an understanding on language and identity in the dialogic negotiation between the self and other? For this answer, I believe Makiguchi offers insight in *Research into Community Studies as the Integrating Focus of Instruction* in a chapter titled "National Language Instruction that has Strayed from the Family and Practical Aspects of Daily Life."

There is no need to explain here that national language instruction includes both the content of thought and the forms of presenting/expressing thought. In the area of content instruction, as I have already stated in each previous section, children's surroundings should be the prime point for directly observing foundational concepts.

In the same way it hardly bears repeating, the area of the form of language composition should also be based on the current language of communication children hear in their daily surroundings...

...Suffice it to say simply that community studies is important in national language studies. In this sense, this proposed community studies is different from the kind of preparatory subject that

serves to order and organize foundational concepts about which I wrote earlier; however, with regard to the point of having students directly observe various phenomena in the local community there is no difference in the least. (CW, 3: 33-34)

In the above passages I believe Makiguchi provides important insight into the use of “space” as Kostogriz presents it. If globalization moves people across physical spaces in a way that redefines social spaces of acceptance and exclusion, particularly with regard to language rights and identity, Makiguchi’s view of looking at the local community would indicate a reversal of the externally imposed, non-dialogic view. In other words, if everyone in the local community, however that group of individuals defines it, speaks and values the language(s) present within it as a means of learning and development, then imposed language “policy” loses value. Kostogriz (2006) argued, “The space of a nation is becoming a complex mixture of supra- and subnational forces that operate on different spatial scales, disturbing the frameworks of nation-state modernity implicit in what counts and is validated as knowledge and knowing” (p. 179). He continued that Vygotsky “operated with an abstract spatial notion of social environment (*sotsial’naya sreda*) that, I would argue, carried an abstract meaning of sociohistorical formations. The social forms of environment such as the state, family, and school were conceived by Vygotsky as determining behavior and consciousness” (p. 181). Makiguchi argued that such concepts as state, family and school could be gleaned from studying the local community in progress, but that such study also developed in students an understanding and, in some cases, valuation of the local (e.g., CW, 5 & 6). It is this second aspect from Makiguchi that strengthens the Vygotskian approach Kostogriz puts forth. Kostogriz (2006) argues,

In the production of new social spatiality, for example, the space of the state becomes ideologically purified and presented as a self-conscious pursuit of the goals of the larger community. The problem with this conception of historical development is particularly explicit when the ideological sphere of a multicultural state becomes reduced to the culture of dominant groups and homogenized in the project of nation building. (p. 181)

In this sense, Makiguchi’s focus on the local community takes on importance, particularly in light of his argument that the language of content students should draw upon is the language they hear in their daily lives in the local community. In a city like Chicago that has large communities of Spanish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Polish, and Russian speakers, to name a few, who struggle with identity in the reality of state-mandated devaluation of their home language and attendant sociocultural practices in the context of education, Makiguchi’s perspective grounded in the physical space of the local community provides an empowering approach to the interface of the social space Kostogriz presents. Such a perspective warrants further examination.

Conclusion

In this article, I presented a brief consideration of the life of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi with that of his Former Soviet contemporary Lev Vygotsky. I also briefly examined both men's philosophies with respect to current discussions of "space" and dominant and nondominant views of language and identity. This article merely scratches the surface in these areas and is therefore offered to begin a dialogue on Makiguchi and Vygotsky's philosophies. In particular, further examination is necessary that considers application of Makiguchi's ideas to the on-going discussion of space in the social sciences.

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