IN SEARCH FOR QUALITATIVE INQUIRY IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstrak

Dunia akademik tempat ilmu pengetahuan dihasilkan tidak luput dari tradisi penggunaan suatu metode penelitian yang sudah lama dipakai dan berakar dalam suatu bidang ilmu tertentu. Dalam bidang pemerolehan bahasa kedua, penelitian kuantitatif dalam paradigma positivisme sudah menjadi tradisi sedangkan penelitian kualitatif dalam paradigma konstruktivisme baru mulai menunjukkan keberadaannya. Artikel ini membahas keberadaan penelitian kualitatif dalam bidang pemerolehan bahasa kedua dengan melihat kembali tradisi dan konsep dasar penelitian dalam bidang ini, memaparkan empat strategi potensial dalam penelitian kualitatif dan meninjau beberapa penelitian kualitatif dalam bidang ini, serta menunjukkan arah penelitian selanjutnya untuk bidang pemerolehan bahasa kedua ini.

Kata kunci: *penelitian kualitatif, pemerolehan bahasa kedua*

Any belief or custom that has been long established in a society or community is difficult to change. It will take a lot of efforts and time to convince the society or community of a new belief or custom. This long-established belief or custom is called tradition. Tradition exists anywhere in any form. Even in the academic world, the place of knowledge generation and production, scholars or researchers use particular procedures or methods that have been long established, and tend to be reluctant to use new procedures or methods.

While quantitative research associated with the positivist and post-positivist paradigms has been a tradition and used for a long time, particularly in 'hard' sciences,

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qualitative research associated with the critical theory and constructivism paradigms has just started to bloom particularly in education in the 1980s. As a new belief or custom, it has struggled to gain recognition and existence in the academic world. Guba & Lincoln (1994) point this out: "But in all likelihood, critical theory and constructivism will continue to play secondary, although important and progressively more influential, roles in the near future" (p. 116), which is beginning to happen.

However, the struggle of its recognition and existence in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is still obvious. This article addresses this issue by looking at the research traditions in SLA and revisiting the fundamental concepts in SLA research. Then it explores potential strategies of qualitative research in SLA and reviews several qualitative studies in SLA, and pointing to a glimpse of future research. All of these will be viewed in relation to the area of interaction in SLA.

1. Research Traditions in SLA

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has been much dependent on social sciences, particularly psychology, as the basis of its theories and studies. Davis (1995) confirms this as she notes: "Theorists and researchers tend to view SLA as a mental process, that is, to believe that language acquisition resides mostly, if not solely, in the mind" (p. 427-428). This results in using research techniques and approaches dominant in psychological studies to look at acquisition from a mentalist perspective. Conducting research in experimental settings and using statistical analysis are common in SLA research. Researchers attempt to control variables in order to gain objective data that can be replicated and generalized. In general, the philosophical perspectives of mentalism, behaviourism (studies based on observable behaviour in which findings are interpreted from the external perspective of the researcher observer), and individualism in psychology have been adopted in SLA (Davis, 1995).

SLA researchers (see e.g. Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) commonly understand qualitative research just in terms of the techniques used and data collected. Any research that uses non-quantitative techniques such as open-ended interviews and/or naturalistic data such as conversational analysis, diary studies, classroom discourse analysis, and participant observation is categorized as qualitative research. This definition is of course true, but

limited, as it “ignores the philosophical, theoretical, and methodological considerations involved in conducting any form of qualitative research” (Davis, 1995: p. 432). Furthermore, Davis (1995) emphasises to go back to the origins of qualitative research, i.e., the philosophy, theory, and methods of anthropology, and consider the alternative view of acquisition offered from this field to mainstream SLA studies:

[to view] acquisition not only as a mental individualistic process, but one that is also embedded in the sociocultural contexts in which it occurs. From this point of view, mental processes are not unimportant, but they are situated in a larger sociocultural context that is equally important. In other words, ethnographers and other qualitative researchers take a holistic perspective in conducting research. (p. 432)

In this way, socioculturally oriented qualitative researchers take a semiotic perspective to understand a phenomenon from the participant’s perspective. In other words, an emic perspective is created. However, as Davis (1995) points out: “SLA qualitative researchers, on the other hand, have predominantly taken a psychologically oriented etic (an outsider’s) perspective, such as the traditional case study in which the researcher interprets the acquisition strategies of a L2 learner” (p. 433). In addition, this alternative view gives credit to context and culture for what happens in learning.

Looking more specifically at interaction in SLA research, Hall and Verplaetse (2000b) notice how its role has been examined from different perspectives, from early studies of foreigner talk to the study of the role of the non-native speaker in interaction and on to the study of teacher- and task-based talk in the foreign and second language classroom. However, most of the studies share some fundamental assumptions about the nature of language and learning, and one of which is “the way that additional language learning has been operationalized: as distinct increases in the comprehension or use of grammar” (Hall & Verplaetse, 2000b: p. 6). Consequently, few studies were conducted in the larger social context of real communicative interaction, though the socially constructed nature of language learning has been acknowledged.

2. Fundamental Concepts of SLA Theories and Research Revisited

Researchers in the field of SLA have recently shown concern about the narrow construction of language and learning within the individual mind and begun to search for

theoretical and methodological insights into language and the process of language learning in order to help them conceptualize a broader and more detailed understanding of additional language learning (Hall & Verplaeste, 2000b). For example, studies employing sociocultural principles of language and learning have been conducted with the emphasis on interaction (Hall & Verplaeste, 2000a). In this perspective, Vygotsky, the pioneer of *sociocultural theory*, argues that the sociocultural setting is the primary and determining factor in human mental development with mediation as its key construct (Lantolf & Appel, 1994). This perspective views language as one main symbolic mediation which is learned, and learning is socially mediated and jointly constructed.

In a similar vein, Firth and Wagner (1997) argue for a reconceptualization of SLA in order to enlarge the ontological and empirical parameters of the field. They reveal the imbalance between cognitive and mentalistic orientations, and social and contextual orientations to language, the former being unquestionably predominant. According to them, three major changes in SLA are required in order to redress this imbalance: (a) a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, (b) an increase emic (i.e. participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts, and (c) the broadening of the traditional SLA data base. Furthermore, they suggest for a need to work toward the evolution of a holistic, bio-social SLA, and conclude that

Researchers working with a reconceptualized SLA will be better able to understand and explicate how language is used *as it is being acquired through interaction*, and used resourcefully, contingently, and contextually. Language is not only a cognitive phenomenon, the product of the individual's brain; it is also fundamentally a social phenomenon, acquired and used interactively, in a variety of contexts for myriad practical purposes. (Firth & Wagner, 1997: p. 296).

More recently, Atkinson (2002) proposes a sociocognitive approach to SLA. This approach views "language and language acquisition as simultaneously occur and interactively constructed both "in the head" and "in the world"" (p.525). He argues to conceptualize SLA as a situated, integrated, sociocognitive process in order to understand the complex phenomenon of SLA. In this way, he exposes the sequencing of language and language acquisition as social phenomena, language and language acquisition as cognitive

phenomena, language as a sociocognitive phenomenon, language acquisition as a sociocognitive phenomenon, and second language acquisition as a sociocognitive phenomenon. Among the implications of a sociocognitive view of SLA, Atkinson speculates on research methods, that is, qualitative research approaches will have a central place. Next is an exploration of potential qualitative strategies in SLA.

3. Exploring Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry in SLA

Qualitative studies have been conducted in a variety of disciplines and fields that ask different questions, and consequently yield different strategies and procedures (Merriam, 2002). For example, Creswell (2007) presents five strategies that he claims are popular and frequently used. Of particular interest are grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and discourse analysis, because these strategies may be employed in studies of SLA, particularly in examining the effects on learners in one classroom in a given context. However, as can be expected, each strategy has its central purpose and focus in dealing with research issues, uses certain methods and techniques, results in a specific end product, and contributes to the issues differently. Together, these components represent the strength of each strategy, particularly when suited to the question and properly conducted. Following is a description of each of these strategies, with illustrations.

3.1. Grounded Theory

Grounded theory can be argued to have originated in the discipline of sociology where Glaser and Strauss first introduced it in 1967 and then developed it in subsequent books (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). The term grounded theory itself has a dual meaning: a general methodology and a theory as its end product. As Strauss and Corbin (1994: 273) assert “grounded theory is a *general methodology* for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed”. They also mean the term as “theory that was derived from data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998: 12). Thus, it is the goal of grounded theory studies to develop a theory generated from data, which makes it different from other strategies in qualitative research.

Furthermore, researchers’ creativity is needed in the analysis of data as theory is developed through “the interplay between researchers and data” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p.

13). The data are collected mainly through interviews from diverse participants, selected using theoretical sampling (looking for participants who are able to contribute to the evolving theory). In this case, the researcher takes information from the data and then compares it to the emerging categories until they become saturated. This method of data analysis is called the constant comparative method, and grounded theory research follows a standard format in the process of data analysis, which includes certain coding procedures such as open, axial, and selective coding (Creswell, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Through this process of data collection and analysis, a theory, usually a substantive-level one, is generated as the outcome of the study. Glaser (as cited in Merriam, 2002: 143) explains that “a grounded theory must *fit* the data, *work* in terms of a useful explanation, be *relevant* to actual problems, and be capable of being *modified* by future inquiry.”

In terms of types of questions that fit this methodology, Morse (1994) suggests process questions are appropriate. In this case, studies should explore participants' experiences over time or change that may occur in stages. As Strauss and Corbin (1994: p. 278) elaborate:

Grounded theory researchers are interested in *patterns* of action and interaction between and among various types of social units ... They are also much concerned with discovering *process* – not necessarily in the sense of stages or phases, but of reciprocal changes in patterns of action/interaction and in relationship with changes of condition either internal or external to the process itself.

The question then is shaped around a phenomenon of interest that relates to a particular situation in which “individuals interact, take actions, or engage in a process in response to a phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998: 56). Merriam's book (2002) is helpful in understanding the nature and different strategies of qualitative research, including grounded theory, and in assessing or evaluating a qualitative study. She provides examples of each strategy to discuss and analyze. In this case, she attempts to relate theories and practice together. She includes Brott and Myers' study (2002) as an example of grounded theory research. Brott and Myers' study is concerned with the question of identity as a process, and particularly contributes to an understanding of the development of the professional school counselor identity. The study explores and conceptualizes “school counselors' professional

interactions as defining experiences in the development of a professional school counselor identity” (Brott & Myers, 2002: 154). As a grounded theory study, the researchers selected participants for maximum variation, made use of appropriate coding procedures in data analysis, and generated a substantive theory describing “the context, conditions, and phases for a process identified as the blending of influences” (Brott & Myers, 2002: 154). This study illustrates grounded theory research in practice as it employs several main characteristics explained above, particularly as it developed a theory generated from the data.

3.2. *Ethnography*

Ethnography has its origin in anthropology. Historically, anthropologists such as Boas and Malinowski took the natural sciences as a model, but their work differed from traditional empirical investigation through firsthand data collection and description of existing “primitive” societies (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994). Recently, ethnography has been employed in a variety of social and applied sciences, and as Atkinson and Hammersley observe, this has resulted in “schools” or subtypes of ethnography with different theoretical perspectives. However, they continue to assert that ethnography tends to belong to the interpretive or hermeneutic paradigm rather than to the scientific or positivist one.

The term ethnography itself has been used both as a method and a product, creating some confusion in what is labeled ethnography (Merriam, 2002). As a method, it deals with data gathering procedures in the form of prolonged observation that typically includes “participant observation in which the researcher is immersed in the day-to-day lives of people or through one-on-one interviews with members of the group” (Creswell, 1998: 58). As a product of research, both Creswell and Merriam point out that an ethnography describes and interprets the culture of a social group in a lengthy or thick (highly descriptive) form. In other words, it involves description, analysis, and interpretation of a specific cultural group. Thus, it is the goal of ethnographic studies to present what Creswell calls “a holistic cultural portrait” of a group under study, incorporating both emic (the participant’s) and etic (the researcher’s) perspectives in data analysis. Watson-Gegeo (1988: 576) asserts that:

The ethnographer's goal is to provide a description and an interpretive-explanatory account of what people do in a setting (such as a classroom, neighborhood, or community), the outcome of their interactions, and the way they understand what they are doing (the meaning interactions have for them).

She further elaborates that ethnography is concerned with holism (considering not only the behavior of the group investigated, but also the context in which it occurs and which affects it) and treats "culture as integral to the analysis" (Watson-Gegeo, 1988: 577). This focus on culture is the strength of ethnography and makes it different from other forms of qualitative research.

Nunan (1992) summarizes the characteristics of ethnographic research as contextual, unobtrusive, longitudinal, collaborative, interpretive, and organic. Ethnographic studies are conducted in real situations or the context in which the participants actually live or work, so not in a laboratory. The researcher makes her/his presence known to the participants to avoid manipulation or deception, and stays in the research site for a relatively long time. S/he also includes the participants' perspectives, and analyses the data interpretively. Finally, interaction between questions and data collection/interpretation occurs during the process that makes it organic.

In terms of the types of questions that guide this strategy, Morse (1994) proposes description questions dealing with values, beliefs, and practices of a cultural group. With regard to the issue of language learning, Watson-Gegeo (1988: 582) argues that questions should be framed within the perspective on language learning as socialization rather than acquisition, because this perspective "implies that language is learned through social interaction ... [and] is a primary vehicle of socialization". Hence, the focus is not only on the teaching and learning or acquiring, but also on the context of learning, which suits ethnography. For example, Morita's (2000) study explores the discourse socialization of graduate students through their engagement in oral academic presentations. The focus is on describing and interpreting a cultural and social group of the graduate students in two different courses. The researcher engaged in extensive work in the field for eight months (the duration of an academic year), gathering information through observations, interviews,

and relevant materials to develop a portrait and describe cultural rules of the culture-sharing group.

3.3. Case Study

Case study research has long been employed across many disciplines (Creswell, 2007) and been considered as either a research strategy/methodology (Merriam 1988; Yin, 2003) or an object of study (Stake, 1994). Either way, Creswell (1998: 61) defines a case study as “an exploration of a ‘bounded system’ or a case (or multiple cases) over time through detailed, in depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context”. As a bounded system, what characterizes a case study is not the topic of inquiry, but the unit of analysis which is a single entity (Merriam, 2002). The case can be an individual student or teacher, a classroom, a school or school district, a program, or an event. For example, while Enomoto and Bair (2002) examine a high school in its role in the assimilation of immigrant children, Hebert and Beardsley (2002) give an account of a gifted black child living in rural poverty. Both studies make use of the case study as “a vehicle for in-depth description and analysis” (Merriam, 2002: 8). Furthermore, Merriam (2002) argues that by defining a case study as the bounded system, it allows for other qualitative strategies to be incorporated into the case such as ethnographic case studies or a grounded theory developed within a case.

Depending on the purposes of studying cases, however, Stake (1994) categorizes case studies into three types: intrinsic case study (to better understand a particular case due to intrinsic interest), instrumental case study (to better understand an issue using the case instrumentally), and collective case study (to study more than one case jointly). Case study researchers all begin by purposefully selecting the case to study, which makes them different from other qualitative researchers, and then proceed with questions, data collection and analysis, like other qualitative researchers (Merriam, 2002). Despite different specific purposes, Stake (1994: 245) states that all case study research shares the same main purpose that is “not to represent the world, but to represent the case”, to understand its particularity and complexity. Here, the researcher determines what and how much to be learned from the case and later reports it in a comprehensive description. Due to its focus on a single unit and in response of the issue of generalizability, Merriam (2002) asserts that the reader, in

turn, determines whether the case is transferable to other situations or whether it is applicable to his/her context.

In terms of types of questions appropriate to this strategy, Yin (2003: 9) argues for 'how' and 'why' questions that ask "about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has little or no control". In this way, the researcher attempts to explain or examine contemporary as opposed to historical events as they are, without any manipulation, and trace them over time. Particularly in applied linguistics, Nunan (1992) notes that case studies are used mainly to trace learners' language development, either first or second language. Duff (as cited in Nunan, 1992: 79) gives examples of questions addressed in second language acquisition using this strategy:

How do children manage to function with two linguistic systems at a time when most children are attempting to master one? Why do some learners fossilize in their acquisition of a second language (in some or all domains) while others continue to progress? ... How do learners react to and/or benefit from different methods of instruction?

In the attempt to answer the questions, the case study researcher relies on a full variety of evidence including documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations, which is the unique strength of case study (Yin, 2003). However, Yin further states that due to this multiple source of information, data analysis is the most difficult part in case study. He then recommends a general strategy for analyzing the data based on theoretical propositions, rival explanations, or descriptive frameworks, and several specific analytic techniques such as pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case syntheses.

3.4. Discourse Analysis

The term discourse analysis implies "a unified body of theory, method, and practices" (Gee, Michaels, O'Connor, 1994), but it is used differently in a variety of disciplines, employing different research strategies. Its disciplinary root is linguistics, but sociologists, anthropologists, and philosophers are the ones who began to undertake serious studies about it (Coulthard, 1985). Cameron (2001: 17), viewing discourse analysis holistically, acknowledges that:

It is a method for doing social research; it is a body of empirical knowledge about how talk and text are organized; it is the home of various theories about the nature and workings of human communication, and also of theories about the construction and reproduction of social reality. It is both about language and about life.

In other words, discourse analysis is a broad term that can mean several things including various subject matters and approaches. Thus discourse analysis could be argued as a method of data collection and analysis/interpretation rather than a strategy (Nunan, 1992).

Basically, there are two approaches to discourse analysis in research studies. One emphasizes discourse structure as an object of study or as an end in itself by focusing on its sequential relationships, the other is concerned with discourse as evidence about other aspects of life or a means to some other ends by focusing on its interpretation (Cameron, 2001; Gee, Michaels, O'Connor, 1994). Additionally, as Cameron points out, both approaches use different definitions of discourse. The former that mostly affiliates with the academic discipline of linguistics defines discourse as either 'language above the sentence' or 'language in use', involving language form and function. The latter affiliated with the social sciences (but not exclusively linguistics), influenced by Foucault, defines discourse as practices and argues that "reality is 'discursively constructed', made and remade as people talk about things using the 'discourses' they have access to" (Cameron, 2001: 15).

As a consequence of the different definition employed by each approach, each looks at research issues differently. Though both consider questions regarding verbal interaction and dialogue (Morse, 1994), each approaches the questions with a different perspective. On one hand, research that considers discourse structure as an object of study focuses on the form, meaning, and regularities, and usually attempts to categorize or characterize these regularities (Gee, Michaels, O'Connor, 1994). As Coulthard (1985: 6) states, "one of the major aims of discourse analysis is to discover these rules and to describe the conversational structures they generate". In this way, the researcher collects data from elicitation or naturalistic samples, and analyzes them with a predetermined set of categories (Nunan, 1992). On the other hand, research emphasizing discourse as a means for other ends, uses "discourse analysis as a qualitative research method for investigating social phenomenon" (Cameron, 2001: 13) by focusing on interpretive processes. In this way, as Nunan points

out, the researcher prefers to collect naturally occurring, non-elicited language, and proceeds with a discursive, interpretive type of analysis. However, it is not uncommon for researchers to combine both approaches in their research as one illuminates the other.

Particularly in second language research, initial studies on discourse analysis, known as conversational analysis, emerged from a recognition of the importance of the linguistic input the learner receives (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991), and since then these studies have expanded to include among other foreigner and classroom discourse (e.g. Hall & Versplaeeste, 2000a), and recently to critical classroom discourse (Kumaravadivelu, 1999) that integrates a three-dimensional perspective on discourse: sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and socio-political. Despite the various types of second language discourse research, the goal has been to draw "pedagogical implications from a research base in actual language use" (Poole, 2002), and the typical analysis is to examine overall patterns of interaction. In other words, research on interaction using discourse analysis has been dealt with in great deal in second language acquisition, and it has looked at discourse mainly as language in use, and also as practices.

4. Qualitative Studies in SLA Reviewed

As mentioned earlier, qualitative studies in terms of using qualitative techniques and data in the paradigms of positivism and post-positivism have existed in SLA for quite a long time, and there seems to be calls to carry out qualitative studies toward the critical theory and constructivist paradigms. Of particular interest are a recent collection of studies (Hall & Verplaeste, 2000a) and a special edition of a journal (*Applied Linguistics Vol. 23*, 2002) that in some way respond to the calls differently. Hall and Verplaeste (2000a) collect studies specifically focusing on classroom interaction in second and foreign language learning that share several assumptions about the sociocultural nature of language and learning. In contrast, *Applied Linguistics Vol. 23* (2002) focuses on research methods in conducting microanalyses of classroom discourse, providing three exemplar articles followed by two response papers. This special issue is intended to link research with a metamethodological discussion (Zuengler & Mori, 2002).

Studies of classroom interaction in Hall and Verplaeste (2000a) distinguish from other traditional experimental studies of classroom interaction in the methods of data collection and analysis. Since they believe that "language learning is assumed to be situated within, indeed shaped by, socioculturally framed and locally defined interactional contexts" (Hall & Verplaeste, 2000b: p. 11), the use of ethnographic and discourse analytic methods is primary. As well, careful observation of the contexts of language learning relied on audiotaped and videotaped data from actual classroom contexts and field notes become the primary source of data. There are two studies by Sullivan and Consolo, in Hall and Verplaeste (2000a) that are interesting look at in more detail because their focus is on EFL (English as a foreign language) classrooms.

Sullivan's (2000) focus is on creating and sustaining contexts of language learning in interpersonal relationships. She collected her data from university-level EFL classrooms in Vietnam, focusing on the discourse of one teacher as he uses storytelling and wordplay into his teaching. In terms of the research method, the researcher did not mention a specific type of method, but she was a participant-observer over a period of 9 months, and attended every class meeting during a 2-month period when all classes were observed and audiotaped and some were videotaped. She also interviewed the teacher and students, and did a member checking as she went back to show the notes and transcription for further description, clarification, and analysis. Her findings were responsive to the problem and rich in data as she analysed the discourse, and implications were addressed followed from the data. Though there was no cultural interpretation to be considered as an ethnography study, her study tends to be toward the critical theory/ constructivist paradigm.

Consolo's (2000) study is interesting in a sense that it uses both quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. The study, conducted in Brazil, analyzes the talk of 9 EFL teachers to determine if native speakers and non-native speakers are different in their ability to generate student classroom talk. His data corpus was from two or three EFL lessons with each teacher, observed by a non-participant observer and recorded on audio. In addition, field notes recorded during the observations and questionnaires answered by the students and teachers were collected. The statistical analysis showed little significant difference between the language as produced by native speaking English teachers and that of non-

native speaking English teachers. However, a qualitative analysis suggests that “individual teaching style makes a difference, rather than the teacher’s mother tongue” (p. 105). Although he provides a qualitative analysis of the study and discusses some sociocultural issues, this study is still in positivist/post-positivist paradigm.

On the contrary, one study in *Applied Linguistics Vol. 23* (2002) is interesting as it clearly states its inclination toward the critical theory/constructivist paradigm. Duff’s (2002) study, conducted in a Canadian high school mainstream social studies class, draws on social constructivism views of language learning and socialization. Consequently, she examines the macro- and micro-level contexts of communication within this content-area course. Her study is an example of the ethnography of communication, “a viable, context- and culture-sensitive method for conducting research on classroom discourse” (p. 289). Her data were collected over a 2-year period. In addition to a 6-month recorded classroom observation, she informally observed several other courses, spoke with different administrators at the school, interviewed the teachers and the students on different occasions, attended other school events, and had access to school and course documents. She went through the difficulty in completing ethical review procedures and the unwillingness of potential participants. Problems also arose when videotaping the classroom as not all students consented and the camera itself was distracting, so she did audiotaping as requested by the teacher. Her analysis considers both the local and macro-level contexts that influence the shaping of the discourse, and her conclusion addresses a critical post-structural/post-modern reanalysis of ethnography.

5. Concluding Remarks Toward Future Research

Asking different questions require doing different methods. SLA research has been asking questions about language and learning mainly from the psychological perspective of the individual’s mind, resulting in using quantitative methods in the positivist/post-positivist paradigm. However, different questions have recently emerged from sociocultural and language socialization perspectives that need qualitative methods, such as grounded theory, ethnography, case study, and discourse analysis, in the critical theory/constructivist paradigm as alternatives.

Context at all levels plays an important role in second language learning. It may enhance learning, but on the other hand, it may hinder the learning process. Moving specifically to any study of interaction in SLA, contextual factors consisting of macro and micro factors influence the input/interaction processing. In a larger sociolinguistic context, these factors include the wider society and the language teaching environment, and in a micro context of the classroom, these factors include the teacher and the student as individuals who also belong to the larger context. Analysis of context and outcomes in specific settings is necessary in order to understand how context influences learning.

Of particular interest is an EFL context with adult university students in an Asian setting. In general, English is taught and learned as a foreign language at secondary and tertiary levels of education. Particularly at tertiary educational systems, the importance of English for academic purposes is acknowledged, but occasions to use the language in real life are rare. Here the availability of input to students is limited mainly to the classroom environment, because access to language exposure and use outside the classroom is very little. In addition, as most of the teachers are non-native speakers of English, a question may be raised on the quality and characteristics of their input. In terms of the students who have the same first language and have very limited access to target language use, the question of attitude toward the target language learning is prominent which will in turn affect their language development.

As the macro environmental factor is difficult, if not impossible to change, there is a possibility to intervene in the micro factors such as the input/interaction in the classroom between the teacher and the student, and among students. However, providing a rich linguistic input environment in an EFL classroom remains a question than an answer. Further research is needed to look specifically at how intervention in the micro level may change students' attitude toward their learning, a considerable macro aspect. Such a question needs a qualitative method in the constructivist paradigm. Overall, more other questions need to be explored and answered from this perspective in order to complete the whole picture of interaction in SLA.

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