

A Critical Debate in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory

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Abstract

Firth and Wagner's publication titled "On Discourse, Communication, and (some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA" was published in 1997 in the *Modern Language Journal*, volume 81, no. 3. The SLA community received the publication very well. The paper came out to be the seminal publication due to its innovative ideas. The paper not only challenged the mainstream Second Language Acquisition (SLA) Theory but it also argued for reconfiguring boundaries of the theory as it could explain SLA in a balanced and comprehensive manner. The papers that supported, but they had their own perspectives, and the papers that opposed Firth and Wagner's position accompanied the Firth and Wagner's publication in the same volume and number of the *Modern Language Journal*. This review paper examines the important debate with the following two aims to understand (a) how new perspectives are suggested for approaching SLA phenomenon and theorizing it and (b) how such debates be considered. This review paper is divided into four parts. The first part presents Firth and Wagner's arguments in detail. The second part deals with the objections leveled against Firth and Wagner's arguments by other scholars viewing SLA from the dominant positivist narrative. The third part presents the views of those scholars who support Firth and Wagner but have their own agenda. The final part examines and sums up the debate. The review paper points out that rather than viewing the SLA theoretical debates through "either/or" or "right/wrong" binary, it may be useful to view all of them as opposing, challenging, and competing sides of the same spectrum.

Keywords: *SLA, emic/etic perspectives, input, conversation analysis*

Introduction

Thomas Kuhn, in his seminal book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), writes that when a field of inquiry

can no longer evade anomalies that subvert the existing tradition of scientific practice – then begin the extraordinary investigations that lead the profession at least to a new set of commitments, a new basis for the practice of science. The extraordinary episodes in which

that shift of professional commitments occurs are the ones known . . . as scientific revolutions. They are the tradition-shattering complements to the tradition-bound activity of normal science. (p. 6)

This process of “tradition-shattering” and “tradition-bound” episodes applies to all fields of knowledge including second/foreign language (L2/FL hereafter) acquisition and/or learning (the terms such as acquisition and learning are used interchangeably with the same sense in this paper). Indeed, such episodes are evident in the domain of L2/FL acquisition. For instance, one notices that Behaviorism remained dominant in terms of explaining how one learns a language at an early stage. It implied that one learns a language through stimulus and response mechanism. Innatism competed with Behaviorism by positing that human learns a language because s/he is born with an innate language acquisition device (LAD). Learning a language, from this perspective, is more of an innate/cognitive phenomenon than a culmination of the stimulus and response process. Social Constructionism competes with both Innatism and Behaviorism in the field. Social Constructionism holds that since a human being is a social animal, learning and cognition is not only social but also contextual. From this position, language learning initiates from and within a society/situation. Language learning is more a social and contextual than an isolated cognitive phenomenon (Hall, 1997; Lightbown & Spada, 1999). These various perspectives not only explain SLA from various angles but also challenge each other.

Such debates rooted in various paradigms are not free from acute tensions, academic quarrels, and paradigm-shift contentions. This paper is about such a paradigm-shift conflict. Specifically, the paper reviews the debate initiated by Firth and Wagner’s seminal publication titled “On Discourse, Communication, and (some) Fundamental Concepts in SLA.” It was published in 1997 in the *Modern Language Journal*. The present review paper examines the debate with the aims to understand how such contests be considered and how new perspectives are suggested for approaching SLA phenomenon and theorizing it. The paper is divided into four parts. The first part presents Firth and Wagner’s arguments in detail. The second part deals with the objections leveled against their arguments by other scholars. The third part presents the views of those scholars who support Firth and Wagner. The final part examines and sums up the debate.

Firth and Wagner's Argument (1997)

Firth and Wagner's paper "examines critically the predominant view of discourse and communication within second language acquisition (SLA) research" (p. 285). The first part of their paper introduces the research problem their paper is going to address. That is, they aim at critically reviewing the mainstream perspectives of "communication" and "discourse," which, according to them, are "individualistic," "mechanistic," and, which "fail to account in a satisfactory way of interactional and sociolinguistic dimensions of language" (p. 285). They hold that their "critical assessment" of these "core" concepts "is in part, a reaction to recent discussions on theoretical issues within the field," which, according to them, vie for the need for "theory culling" and "quality control" on the base of "established" and "normal" scientific standards (pp. 285-286).

Notwithstanding agreeing that "many findings and theories in SLA have been important and even groundbreaking," they call for a "reconceptualization of SLA as a more theoretically and methodologically balanced enterprise that endeavors to attend to, explicate, and explore, in more equal measures and, where possible, in integrated ways, both the *social* and *cognitive* dimensions of S/FL use and acquisition" (p. 286). In fact, their call vies for three such modifications: "(a) a significantly enhanced awareness of the contextual and interactional dimensions of language use, (b) an increased emic (i.e., participant-relevant) sensitivity towards fundamental concepts, and (c) the broadening of the traditional SLA database" (p. 286).

The second part of their paper substantiates their call for the "reconceptualization." It looks into the history of the field and marks out "the origins of the perceived imbalance" (p. 286). Taking Chomsky's ideas of "formalistic, context-free, 'grammatical competence'" as irresistible, they hold that, this led the field to focus upon only cognitive aspects (p. 287). Although this produced some fruits, it overlooked "the social and contextual" aspects, and was "heavily in favor of the individual's cognition, particularly the development of grammatical competence." Consequently, this resulted in an "imbalance of adopted interests, priorities, foci, methodologies, perspectives, and so on, resulting in distorted descriptions of views on discourse, communication, and interpersonal meaning – the quintessential elements of language" (p. 288).

The repercussions of this focus are discussed in detail in the third and fourth parts of their paper. Specifically, the third part points out the influences of the repercussions in the established domain of communication strategies in SLA. By quoting the studies of Faerch and Kasper (1983), Poulisse (1993), and Kasper and Kellerman (1997) and

drawing upon Rampton (1997), Firth and Wagner take issue with the concept of *learner* (emphasis added), who, according to them, is not only taken “at the expense of other potentially relevant social identities,” but also “viewed as a defective communicator.” Thus, “the focus and emphasis of research – a reflection of the quintessential SLA ‘mindset’, [. . .] – is on the foreign learner’s *linguistic deficiencies* and *communicative problems*” (p. 288).

Referring to Poulisse and Bongaert’s (1990) study in this context, Firth and Wagner hold that they “see social processes being interpreted from the perspectives of cognition.” In the perspective of the study, Firth and Wagner argue, “explanations are not sought in terms of interactional or sociolinguistic factors.” The scholarship of this area, they think, takes “communication . . . as a process of transferring thoughts from one’s mind to another’s,” which is founded “upon the mechanistic” and “telementational” concept of message exchange.” In addition, critiquing an excerpt from the Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) study, Firth and Wagner write that “[their] assessment seems to be based on an etic view that sees language encoded in a “marked” (e.g. L1) form as an indicator of difficulty for the speakers,” which, they continue, shows “learner-as-defective-communicator mindset.” By viewing the excerpt through the lens of the adjacency pair of conversation analysis framework, they offer an alternative analysis. They hold that “[m]eaning, from this perspective, is not an individual phenomenon consisting of private thoughts executed and then transferred from brain to brain, but a social and negotiable product of interaction, transcending individual intentions and behaviors” (p. 290).

The fourth part of their paper continues exposing the repercussions in the “input modification studies,” conducted from Long’s interactional framework. Before discussing these studies, Firth and Wagner showcase their views on the superior status of native speaker (NS) and the inferior one of the non-native speaker (NNS). They hold that in SLA in general and in such studies in particular: (i) “the NS is a seemingly omniscient figure . . . and the warranted baseline from which NNS data can be compared”; (ii) thus, “NNSs are unproblematically viewed as NNSs’ subordinates, with regard to communicative competence”; (iii) researchers “approach the NS and NNS interactions . . . as inherently problematic encounters”; (iv) the terms (i.e., NS and NNS) are taken as homogenous and with “clear cut distinctions between them” in favor NSs; (v) “the identity categorizations NS and NNS are applied exogenously and without regard for their emic relevance” (p. 292). In the conclusion, they lament that, even “‘comparable’ NS interactions” are employed as “baseline data” for the studies which explore NNS – NNS interactions from this framework (p. 292).

Furthering their argument, they subsequently look into the “extraordinarily influential concept of inter-language (IL)” and the studies conducted through this framework. They show that the same type of bias exists in these studies too. The concept of IL is conceptualized as “a system” which is supposed to predict the transitional phase of NNS for reaching to the point of an ideal NS. Drawing upon Rampton (1997), they lament that despite the fact that the variables such as “social relations,” “identities,” “task,” “physical settings,” and “both global and turn-by-speaking-turn agenda” impact one’s language, “IL studies remain locked into a pattern” employed by the interactional studies. Firth and Wagner posit that studies such as these gloss over the fact that NNSs and their interpretations of NSs’ turns may be recipient-oriented and local in their orientations of their turns (p. 293).

Continuing their argument, they investigate the input modification studies. Referring to the Larsen-Freeman and Long’s (1991) study, they show their concerns at the validity of their claims founded upon a baseline, which, according to Firth and Wagner, rests “on the built-in assumption that a baseline form of interaction would be different from foreigner talk solely as a result of involving NS” (p. 294). In addition, they hold that the researchers not only overlook the impact of experimental settings upon NNSs’ utterances but also exhibit that their assigned identities of NNS as “information gatherer” and NS as “information provider” gloss over the other social identities of NNS in their interpretations (p. 294).

Before concluding their paper, they expose the pervasiveness of the same “mindset” in the study of Gass and Varnis (1985a). In addition to offering an alternative interpretation from a conversation analysis perspective, Firth and Wagner question their discourse model which is based on an assumption that a normal “form of discourse . . . is free of misunderstanding and . . . unaccepted input routines.” They view that “[m]isunderstandings and repair sequences [in Gass & Varnis] are not aberrations.” They are rather “integral parts of the progression of normal, conversational discourse” (p. 295). They wrap their argument up in the fifth part by calling for reconfiguration of the SLA field in both theory and methodology (p. 296).

Objections Levelled against Firth and Wagner

Firth and Wagner’s criticism of the mainstream SLA was destined to receive criticisms since they challenged the dominant and established concepts. There are three major respondents, whom Firth and Wagner criticized, who sought to defend their positions and tried to present the other side of the coin that Firth and Wagner did/could not see. Unlike Firth and Wagner who viewed and explained SLA from an emic/social

constructionist perspective, these three argue largely from cognitivist and/or etic perspectives of SLA. I shall briefly present their key arguments one by one below.

Poulisse (1997)

Poulisse divides her response to Firth and Wagner into two parts: The first part defends the methodological concerns Firth and Wagner show; and, the second one critiques the Firth and Wagner discussion about communication strategies in general and her study in particular.

In the first part, for instance, she believes “no matter what paradigm one uses, psychological or sociological, it makes good sense to follow” etic/theoretical assumptions and the practices “of coding, quantifying, and replicating results.” Therefore, she argues that etic theoretical frameworks help a researcher code data according to his/her purposes. Quantification “may serve to give an empirical validity. Replicating results is “useful” in terms of establishing “reliability.” Researchers need not only “describe” but also “explain” and “predict.” Experimental studies follow manipulation of variables mechanism; they “can contribute to both psycholinguistic and sociological research.” Lastly, the search for “universal and underlying features of language processes” is “useful.” These all, she concludes, have rendered “very sound and fruitful” results in the SLA field (pp. 324-325).

The second part of her paper shows a set of comments. First, she holds that “there is a good reason” to take “learners’ deficiencies and communicative problems”; for, they are “relatively frequent” in their speech, “and hence of interest of researchers of SLA and L2 use.” She thinks that this does not necessarily “mean to say that L2 speech is full of problems, degenerate, unsuccessful, or inferior to L1.” Second, referring to Firth and Wagner’s critique of her study (i.e., Poulisse and Bongaerts’ (1990)), she argues that Firth and Wagner “do not distinguish between the strategic and automatic types of transfer” employed in their study. Also, she defends that they do not take into account certain contextual factors. Third, discussing the Faerch and Kaspers’ study (1983), she argues she does not object to Firth and Wagner’s take on “meaning” as constructed and negotiated in conversation. She, however, thinks it “incorrect to say that meaning does not lie in the speaker” (p. 326). Finally, taking into account the Firth and Wagner’s discussion on input modification studies, she argues that “it makes perfect sense to compare” the behaviors of NS and NNS. However, this does not imply that “NNS are defective communicators.” She writes that “the most important identity is that of L2 learner” rather than others in order to validate one’s research in SLA. In

the end, although she appreciates Firth and Wagner's call, she believes that we should not "throw away the baby with bathwater" (p. 327).

Gass (1997)

Gass also responds to Firth and Wagner's articles and divides her response into three parts. The first part deals with the framework and scope Firth and Wagner critique; the second with "learner as deficient communicator"; and, the final one discusses the Firth and Wagner's interpretation of her data.

She begins the first section by outlining the interdisciplinarity of SLA stating that there are many ways "to [approach] the field"; and, she implies that Firth and Wagner have done the same (p. 84). What strikes her "odd," however, is the major fact that goal of her inquiry of over more than a decade "has never been to understand language use per se (i.e., use is not end in itself), but rather to understand what types of interactions might bring about what types of changes in linguistic knowledge" (p. 84). Dismissing the confusion created by Firth and Wagner "between *learner* as opposed to *user*," she argues, "the approach that Firth and Wagner advocate is not actually part of SLA, but part of the broader field of L2 studies." Therefore, she writes that "[t]he research question central to SLA that I and others ask is: How do people *learn* a L2? – The question is not: How do people *use* a L2, unless the latter question is a means of getting the former" (p. 85).

Discussing why *learners* are taken as communicatively deficient in her second part, she argues, "being unable to communicate in L2 is not viewed as something as derogatory" as Firth and Wagner imply. She argues that "the emphasis in SLA is not deficiencies qua deficiencies. Rather, the emphasis is on the nature of linguistic systems qua systems of learners . . . this is the whole point of looking at learners systems" (p. 85). She argues that the other social identities of a learner are not pertinent to the main research problem "which is, how are L2s acquired and what is the nature of learner systems?" Finally, she justifies using baseline data by holding that since SLA is concerned with learning a language; they "reflect data from those who are not involved in *learning*" (p. 86).

In her third part, she critiques the Firth and Wagner's critique of her and others' studies. First, she holds that they "point to specific examples" where she does not see eye to eye with their take on the issues. They do not "cite the entire example [of her study] that is analyzed" in another study. Defending her model of discourse from Firth and Wagner's critique, she argues that "we did not claim that NS discourse does not have" triggers, pauses etc. They conceptualized their model as "the top horizontal progression as that part of the discourse that moves along

without “interruptions” for clarification.” She concludes her response by taking Firth and Wagner’s position as “somewhat perplexing” and unaccountable to the question of language being “an abstract entity that resides in the individual” (p. 88).

Long (1997)

Long’s response may be divided into two parts. The first may be taken as his comments on the issues raised by Firth and Wagner; and, the second one may be viewed as his critique of Firth and Wagner’s assessment of his study. This may perhaps be the severest critique of Firth and Wagner’s position.

Long discusses many points about the Firth and Wagner’s call from the interactional position of SLA. For example, he echoes Gass in terms of distinguishing L2 *acquisition* from L2 *use*, implying that Firth and Wagner seem more concerned with the latter than the former. In this context, he writes, “the very nature of SLA beast” as “most SLA researcher view the object of inquiry” is “internal, mental process: *the acquisition of new linguistic knowledge*.” He adds that the importance of context in learning a language varies according to different theoretical frameworks. However, what seems “ironic” in Firth and Wagner is that the very “villains” Firth and Wagner “claim have ignored context are among those who have most often explicitly focused on at least some dimensions of it in their work” (p. 318). He believes that Firth and Wagner’s position has “very little” to offer to mental processes of learning.

In the second part of his response, he comments on Firth and Wagner’s critique of his and others’ studies. He argues that “NNS label” employed by him and others is “relevant” to the purposes of their research. He still maintains his claim, scathingly critiqued by Firth and Wagner, that “certain kinds (not any kinds) of interaction with NNSs are the necessary and sufficient condition.” He agrees that there is not any “normal or standard way of talking”; he adds, that’s why “it is incumbent upon researchers to collect comparable baseline data...from NS-NS dyads, not just NS-NNS or NNS-NNS dyads” (p. 320). He adds that most of the generalizations made by Firth and Wagner are specified in his and others’ studies. Thus, Firth and Wagner misinterpret them. He dismisses their critique of experimental settings by saying that “over 20 years and dozens of studies show that findings in “laboratory” and “natural” settings have generally been very similar.” Thus, their charges are “unsupported” and “baseless” (p. 321). Having challenged their position in terms of “methodology,” “verifiability,” and “relevance,” he concludes his response by referring to Firth and Wagner’s position as “strawman arguments” and “sweeping claims,” founded upon “unfortunate,” “irrelevant,” and

“misleading” information of those whom Firth and Wagner have referred for supporting their arguments (p. 323).

Support of Firth and Wagner’s Call

In addition to these three who defend their positions and attempt to exhibit what lies on the other side, there are four others who largely support Firth and Wagner’s call. Since these supporters maintain Firth and Wagner, which implies that they see eye to eye with them, I shall also briefly present what their views are before summing up the debate.

Rampton (1997)

Rampton finds himself “in line with Firth and Wagner.” His aim is to take the issue further from there where Firth and Wagner “leave off,” as to make SLA more accountable to the realities of “late modernity” (p. 330). Taking their call, Rampton holds that contemporary sociolinguistics is looking into the postmodern realities of “fragmentation, contingency, marginality, transition, indeterminacy, ambivalence and hybridity,” as found in the today’s social groups; SLA should also “carry the right conceptual kit” accordingly.

Arguing that the mainstream modernistic SLA, being concerned with “universal” and “disembedded cognition, value-free inquiry,” has “shown very little interest in the context sensitive, value-relevant, interpretive methodologies that fit more comfortably with late modern assumptions” (p. 330). In this context, he argues that, Firth and Wagner “have a lot to offer in helping us to escape from our analytic prejudices about people, groups, speech acts . . . but it is not only ethno-methodological discourse analysis that manages this discourse.” He holds that others have also done this too while referring the field of dialectology. But, SLA as being preoccupied with modernistic agenda, as he implies, has not kept pace with the issues. Thus, he feels SLA needs to “reconfigure itself methodologically” and theoretically as to better explicate and address the issues and phenomena of later modernity.

Liddicoat (1997)

Liddicoat also sees eye to eye with Firth and Wagner’s call for a balanced SLA in terms of theory and methodology. The author mainly focuses on the importance of social, emic perspectives for SLA and echoes Firth and Wagner in his response. For instance, from this social, emic perspective, he argues that language interactions cannot be understood without taking into account their natural contexts of occurring. He holds that SLA, therefore, should be a balanced field by looking into these contexts in order to offer sound interpretations of language learning. In addition, discussing the implications of Firth and Wagner’s call, he

underlines the role and importance of naturally occurring data. He emphasizes “the need for a more sophisticated understanding of what is meant by interaction and of the relationship of interaction and social context,” and, “the need for an appropriate level of analysis and appropriate data.” Summing up his response in Firth and Wagner’s favor, he writes that “[w]hat Firth and Wagner propose in their call for rebalancing the field of SLA requires not only a rebalancing of the theoretical stance of the field, but has far reaching implications for the ways in which research in the field is designed and carried out at practical levels” (p. 316).

Hall (1997)

Although Hall’s reply supports Firth and Wagner’s call, she offers “an alternative approach to the study of SLA” rooted in Vygotskian ideas (p. 301). Unlike the Firth and Wagner’s emic approach towards SLA discourse, which largely relies on ethnomethodological and conversation analytical underpinnings, she offers sociocultural view based upon the work of Vygotsky and others, and compares it with the psycholinguistic tradition of SLA. According to this approach, she, for instance, holds that unlike the cognitive assumption that “language learning consists of a hierarchy of . . . linguistic systems,” it is “inextricably linked to the culturally framed and discursively patterned communicative activities.” Thus, learning a language “originates in our socially constituted communicative practices.” Language learners are “active and creative participants in what is considered a socio-cognitively complex task” (pp. 301-304). Above all, her major argument is that language learning, thus cognition too, is more sociocultural than purely mental or internal phenomenon. And, one can reconfigure one’s SLA research and pedagogy focusing upon the principles of this theory (p. 305).

Kasper (1997)

Although Kasper deems Firth and Wagner’s assessment of “taken-for-granted concepts in L2 research” as “well-taken,” she finds some of their positions “problematic.” For instance, Kasper agrees with Firth and Wagner on “[tightening] up” of transcription practices of interactional data, she also thinks that one is invariably driven by one’s research purposes and theoretical commitments; as was Sacks, for instance, to substantiate his claim of social orderliness. Thus, she does not seem to find any fault with any emic or etic theoretical frameworks. Rather, she holds that “a more data-loyal presentation could obscure the purpose at hand, which is to demonstrate a structural relationship between utterances in adjacency pair.” Arguing for the “three way dependency – theory shapes transcripts, transcripts shape results, the results shape theory,” she agrees

with Firth and Wagner that “in L2 research, this circle of dependencies has not always received the attention it deserves” (p. 308).

In addition, critiquing Firth and Wagner’s concerns about the learner, she writes, “perhaps such terms [should] be seen more indexical than referential in function”; and, the “researcher has theoretically or empirically motivated reason to believe that such variables [social class etc.] may influence L2 use and learning in some way.” Finally, being “comfortable with essentially cognitivist definition of SLA,” she holds that Firth and Wagner’s “paper has in fact very little to say about L2 *acquisition*” (p. 309). She ends on a note favoring the employment of CA tools into “language socialization approach to SLA” (p. 311).

A Way to Take

After going through the debate, one ends up having multiple views about Firth and Wagner’s call for reconfiguring the field of SLA that, Firth and Wagner think, should be based upon a balanced sensitivity towards context, naturally occurring data, data analysis, and the research participants from whom data are collected. Interestingly, the Firth and Wagner’s ethnomethodological and conversation analytic position seems relatively “irrelevant” to Poulisse (1997, p. 327), “perplexing” to Gass (1997, p. 88), and “strawman arguments” and “sweeping claims” to Long (1997, p. 323).

On the other hand, those scholars who support Firth and Wagner seem to have their own agenda, except Liddicoat (1997). For instance, Rampton wishes SLA take into account the late modernity phenomena emerging due to globalization and other sociological processes. Hall (1997) exploits this opportunity to present a sociocultural view of SLA rooted in Vygotskian thought. Finally, Kasper (1997) supports what is in her favor (i.e., CA transcription practices) and critiques what is not. She advocates conversation analysis for a “socialization approach to SLA” (p. 311). Thus, what one has are either up-front opponents and/or partial supporters. What unites the partial supporters, however, seems to be their collective concerns against the positivist, cognitivist and/or mentalist underpinnings of SLA that form the dominant narrative in SLA theory.

One who may be following this critical debate with zeal to know its logical conclusion may be saddened to learn that the conclusion of this debate and alike may not be simple, straightforward, and linear. Theoretical perspectives do not only become dominant but also comfort zones that get hard to be shaken and forsaken. An inquisitive researcher, however, may wish to know why a phenomenon, namely cognition and/or language, seems mental to some and social or sociocultural to others. S/he may wish to understand why some scholars view *language learning*

phenomenon through *acquisition* and/or *learning* and some through *using* lens. One may wish to learn why one sees learner as NNS, who is invariably comparable to NS, and others see NNS as active and self-sufficient from within. One may wish to understand why one prefers quantification, universalization, and experimental settings, and others specificity, natural settings, and contextualized milieu.

In fact, Gass (1997) and Long (1997) may help in directing the curious researcher that this is due to the theoretical frameworks one situates oneself into in the field. The theoretical frameworks frame researchers to view and explicate phenomenon accordingly. The question, however, emerges whether these frameworks of SLA are brand new. One may argue that the frameworks may, indeed, not be new. One may trace their roots in the philosophical and sociological macro-theories such as positivism, constructionism, structuralism, social functionalism, post-structuralism, etc. One may also trace such paradigm-shift conflicts at macro levels in philosophy (i.e., the mega conflict of “I think therefore I am” vis-à-vis to “I am therefore I think”) (see Crotty, 1998; Foucault, 1966/1070).

The only peculiarity that one may note is the fact that these macro theories are applied in the burgeoning sub-fields (i.e., SLA) of knowledge in order to problematize the established concepts and explicate in an innovative manner the time-wise emerging phenomena. With the application, new perspectives are brought into life. This process of bringing new perspectives into life, in effect, produces refinement and balance in both theory and methodology that later affords to offer sound solutions and logical explanations. The evolutionary process should be taken as *must* and should be allowed to *continue*.

By following this line of argumentation, one may, thus, expect that some imminent scholars shall, for instance, challenge the Firth and Wagner’s position too in future exactly the way they challenge the traditional etic and cognitivist approaches in the growing field of SLA. The continual debate should offer new vistas to approach phenomena and explicate them accordingly. We may, therefore, want to believe what Kuhn says that “We may, to be more precise, have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigms carry scientists and those who learn from them closer to **the truth** (emphasis added)” (1962, p. 169). Changes of paradigms may not get closer to the truth. Thus, we may, perhaps, have to train ourselves to believe that rather than taking each perspective as getting closer to *the* truth, we may want to take each perspective as one of the possible explanations of *one of the myriad hues* of the same spectrum/truth.

Consequently, this position may offer the following points rooted in the philosophy of pragmatism as discussed by Dewey (1929). First, it may help us see unique characteristics of each analytic and/or methodological perspective that offer an explanation from a certain angle. Second, one may think that what an analytic and/or a methodological perspective may not explain, another analytic or methodological perspective, if combined with other perspective(s), may explain in ways that may end up offering sound, balanced, and sophisticated explanations. Last but not the least, it may, thus, help us to not only embrace diversity/complexity but also taste its synergizing fruits. Above all, the major implication we may want to reach at is rather than viewing SLA issues such as discussed above in binaries and taking each binary as *the correct*, we may need to view them as opposing, competing, and complementary sides of the same spectrum offering possible explanations from various angles. As a result, the implication may help to appreciate complexity involved in second language acquisition/learning phenomenon.

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