Challenging Difficulties in Understanding Individual Differences in Language Learning: A Phenomenological Perspective

Toshinori Yasuda
Tokyo University of Science

rs.t.yasuda@gmail.com

TOKYO UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE
since 1881

1. **Three Basic Questions**

2. **A Phenomenological Approach**

3. **A Pilot Study**

4. **Future Directions**

1. **Three Basic Questions**

Individual differences (IDs): A major research field in SLA

(e.g., Dörnyei, 2005: Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Griffiths & Soruç, 2020; Skehan, 1989)

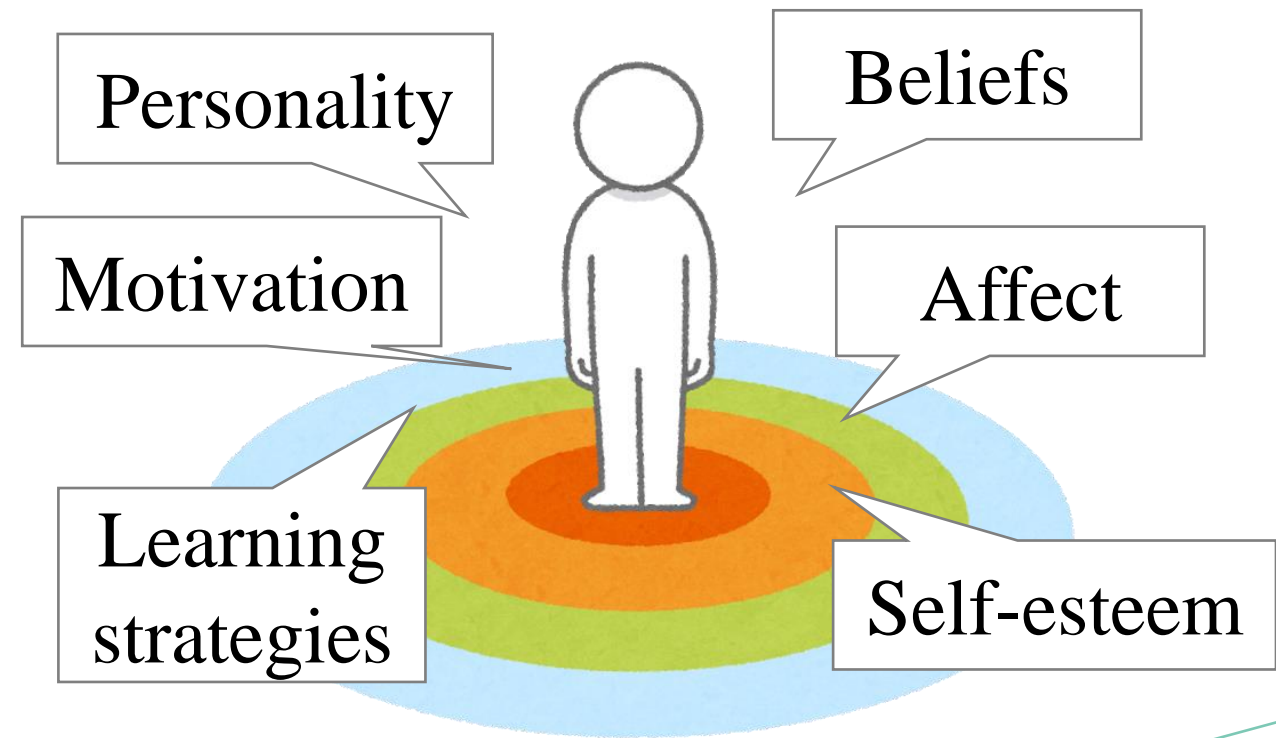|	
Ethnicity/Culture	**Learning style**
Aptitude	**Beliefs**
Personality	**Affect**
Motivation	**Willingness to communicate**
Learning strategies	**Self-esteem**

Q1. How can we have a holistic view?

(e.g., Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Griffiths & Soruç, 2020; Larsen-Freeman, 2017; Csizér, Albert, & Piniel, 2021)

Qualitative research in IDs

(e.g., Li & Liu, 2023; Chan, Dörnyei & Henry, 2015; Gkonou, 2017)

Motivation

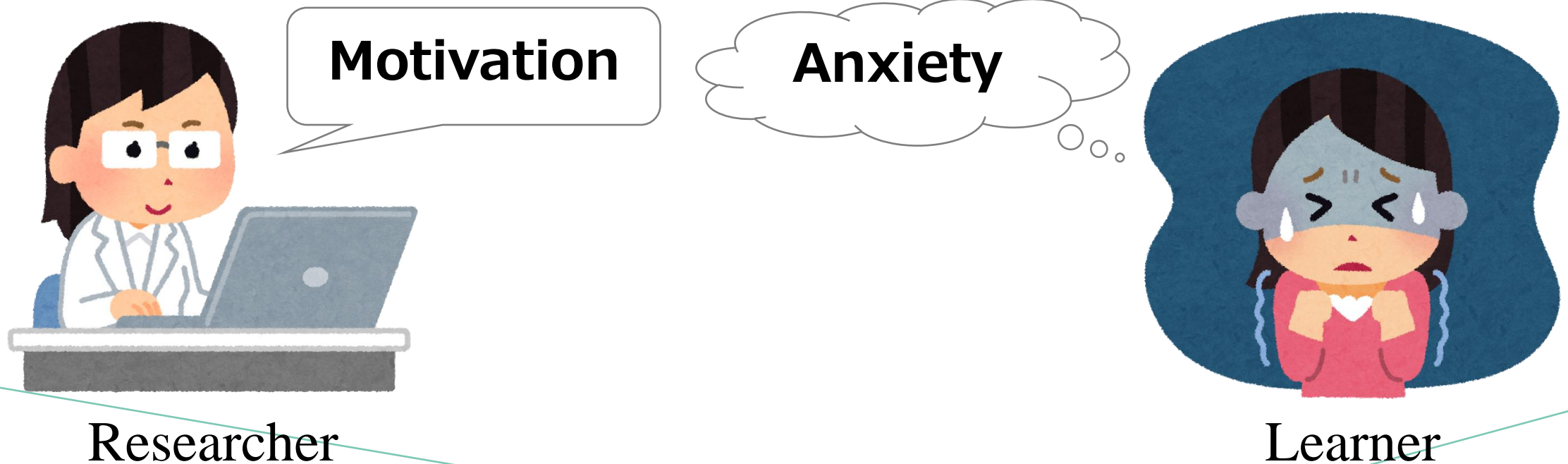**Anxiety**

Researcher

Learner

Q2. How can we describe a learner's authentic experience?

Motivation

Anxiety

Researcher

Learner

If everything is interconnected, how is it possible to study anything apart from everything else?   (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011, p.18)

L2 narrative identity is an integral part of the individual's overall life narrative, responsible for processing past L2-related experiences and constructing future goals.   (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015, p.202)

Insightful discussion on *__thick__* description

vs.

Superficial discussion on *__quick__* description
(Bate, 1997; Geertz, 1973)

Q3. How can we provide a more insightful discussion?

Q1. How can we have a holistic view?

Q2. How can we describe a learner's authentic experience?

Q3. How can we provide a more insightful discussion?

Reflexivity
(Clark & Dervin, 2014)

The author's experiences

✓ B.A. & M.A. in psychology

✓ Psychological counselor for children and families

(Phenomenological approach: e.g., Carl Rogers)

✓ M.A. & Ph.D. in applied linguistics

(Advising in language learning for Ph.D. dissertation)

Q1. How can we have a holistic view?

Q2. How can we describe a learner's authentic experience?

Exploring *subjective experience* **of a language learner**

➢ Understanding how ID factors are connected based on the learner's first-person perspective

Q3. How can we provide a more insightful discussion?

Extracting *essences* **of language learners**

➢ Suggesting a structural framework to give a better understanding of a language learner

2. A Phenomenological Approach

Phenomenology

A <u>phenomenological approach</u> in psychology

Edmund Husserl (1859–1938)

Amedeo Giorgi (1931–)

Limited cases of phenomenological approaches in applied linguistics

1997 – 2006	2007 – 2023

Approaches to Qualitative Research

A		B	
Case Study	225	Discourse Analysis	53
Ethnography	49	Classroom Interaction	49
Longitudinal	19	Conversation Analysis	20
Think-Aloud	16	Corpus Study	6
Narrative	12	Genre Analysis	4
Self-Study	6	Systemic Functional Analysis	1
Stimulated Recall	7		
Action Research	4		
Diary Study	4		
Phenomenology	2		
Total	344		133

Benson et al. (2009)

Dörnyei (2010)

Polat (2012)

Polat (2013)

Namaghi & Rahmanian (2017)
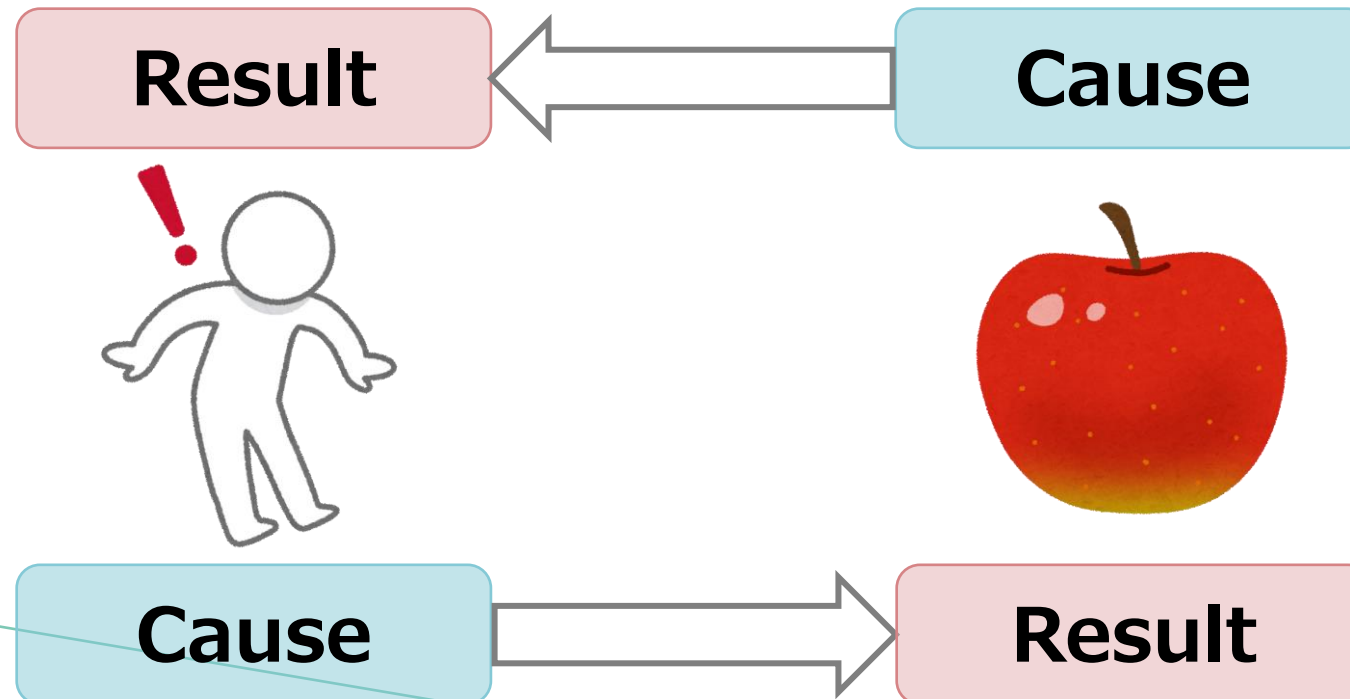
Drood et al. (2020)   etc…

Why???

- Trends in qualitative research?
- Difficult underlying philosophy?

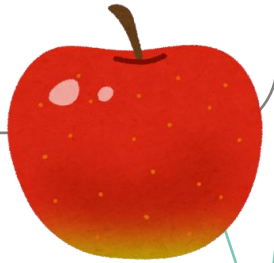**Exploring *subjective experience* of a language learner**

➢ Understanding <u>how ID factors are connected</u> based on <u>the learner's first-person perspective</u>

Phenomenological reduction（現象学的還元）

Exploring *subjective experience* **of a language learner**

➢ Understanding <u>how ID factors are connected</u> based on <u>the learner's first-person perspective</u>

Phenomenological reduction（現象学的還元）

In phenomenology, <u>how a person experiences his or her own truth</u> (i.e., *lived experience*) is the first priority.

(Lewis & Staehler, 2010)

Phenomenology is interested in "<u>the world as it is experienced by human beings</u>…, rather than in abstract statements about the nature of the world in general."

(Willig, 2001, p. 51)

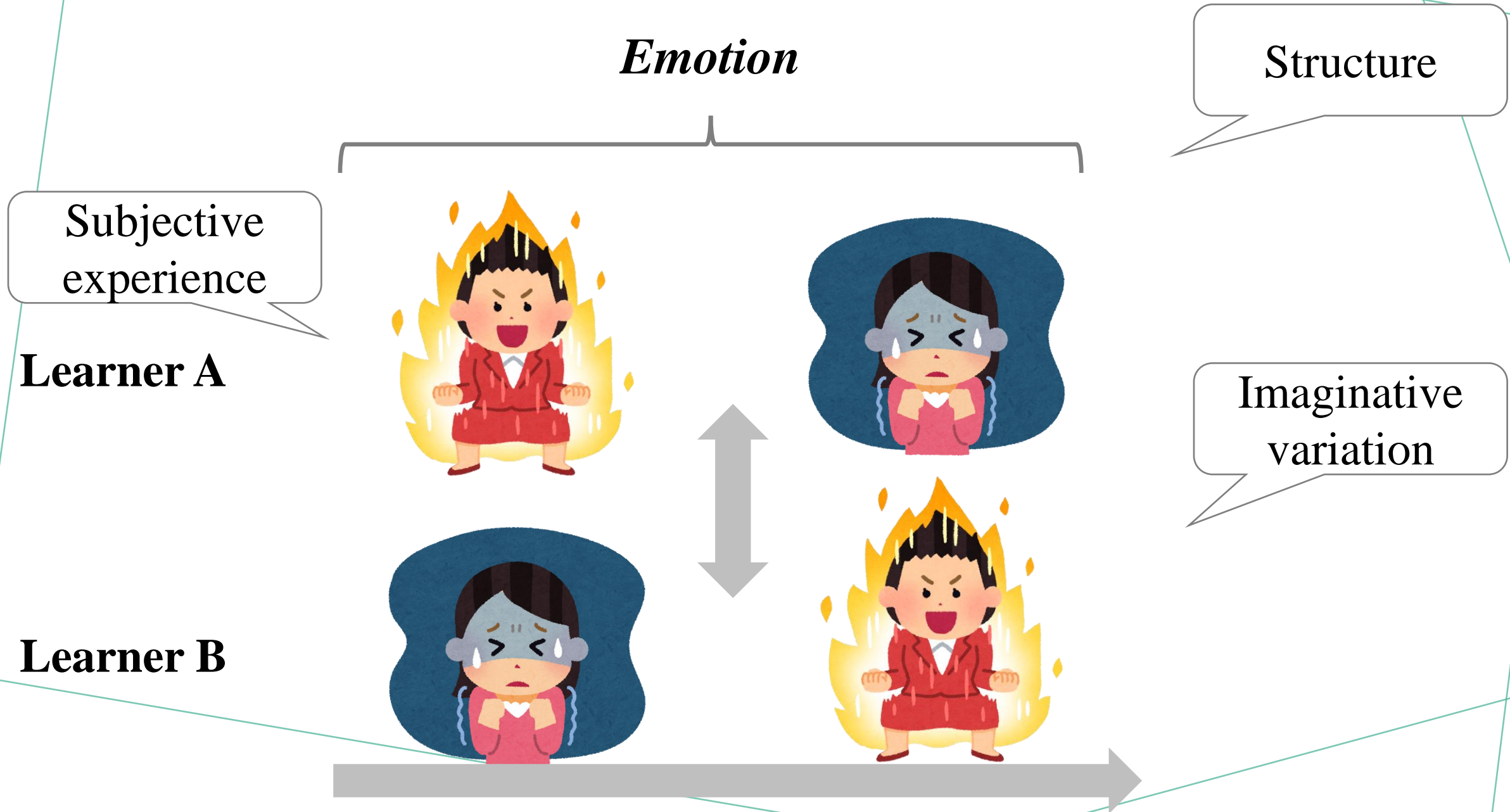**Extracting *essences* of language learners**

➢ Suggesting <u>a structural framework</u> to give a better understanding of a language learner
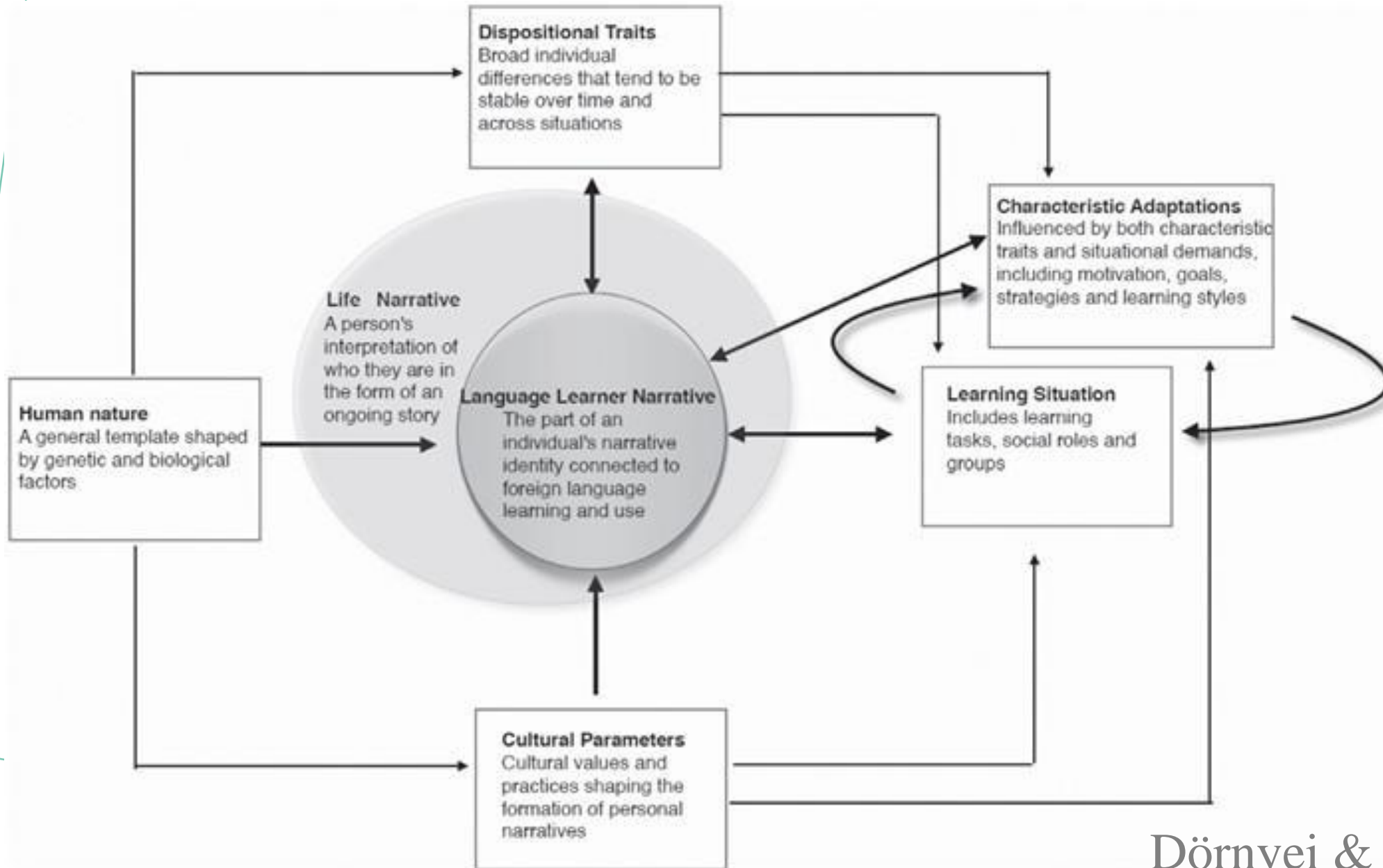
Essential intuition（本質観取）

Seeking an invariant psychological structure using the method of essential intuition. (Giorgi, 2009)

1. Obtaining a description of "subjective experience"

2. Using the method of "imaginative variation"

3. Determining "the structure"

Dörnyei & Ryan (2015)

Subjective experiences

???

???

Emotion

???

???

Environmental & social characteristics

???

???

???

???

???

???

???

???

???

???

Dispositional traits

Human nature

Yasuda (2020)
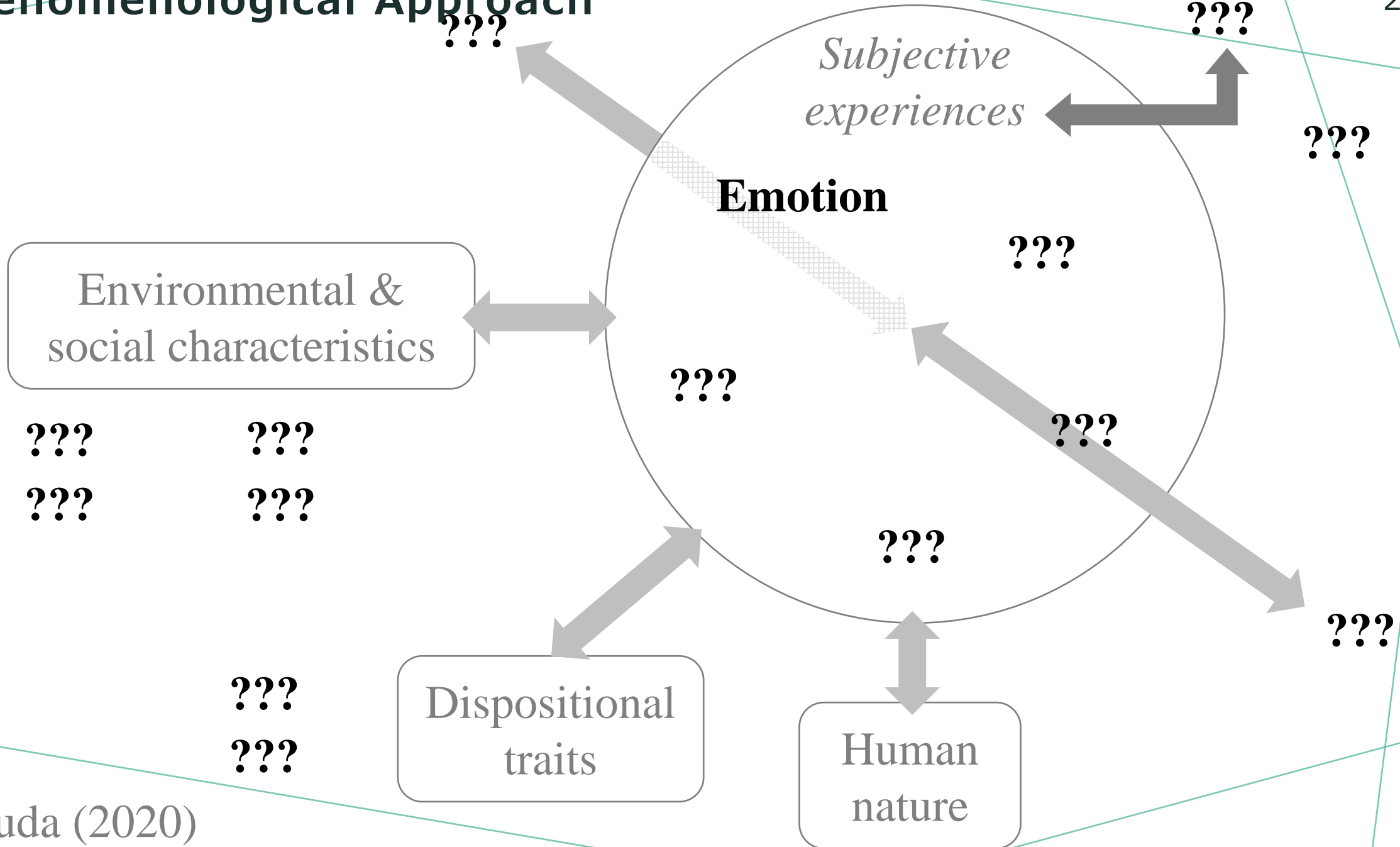
A Phenomenological Approach

*NOT intend to reject other types of research, just a difference of position.

Ontology	Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Methodology	Methods
Facts and phenomena exist independently of people	Objectivism	Positivism	Experimental research	Sampling
Facts and phenomena are entwined in complex contexts	Constructionism	Post-positivism	Survey research	Questionnaire
	Subjectivism	**Interpretivism**	Ethnography	Observation
People construct facts and phenomena	etc.	etc.	**Phenomenological research**	**Interview**
			Grounded theory	Statistical analysis
People interpret facts and phenomena			Action research	Case study
			etc.	Document analysis
etc.				Conversation analysis
				etc.

(e.g., Crotty, 1998; Kara, 2022)

3. **A Pilot Study**

Research Aim

To determine a structural framework that gives a holistic and insightful understanding in individual differences based on language learners' first-person perspectives

Participants

Five Ph.D. students (early career researchers) who have conducted qualitative research in applied linguistics
- ✓ To extract as many structures as possible from their experiences
- ✓ To obtain feedback on the present research project

Data Collection

Step 1: Preparation
- ✓ Preparation for the 1st half of the unstructured interview

Step 2: Unstructured interview
- ✓ 1st half: Participant's narrative regarding English learning with a minimal instruction

  > Extraction of an authentic subjective ex

  Phenomenological reduction

  Phenomenological reduction Essential intuition

- ✓ 2nd half: Q&A dialogue based on the 1st half
  > Extraction of a subjective experience not mentioned in the 1st half
  > Data collection needed for developing a structural framework

Step 3: Questionnaire
- ✓ Questionnaire for factual information (e.g., learning and overseas experiences)

Data Analysis

Phenomenological reduction

Step 1: Drawing a participant's subjective experiences

➢ Coding

➢ Making interpretations

Phenomenological reduction
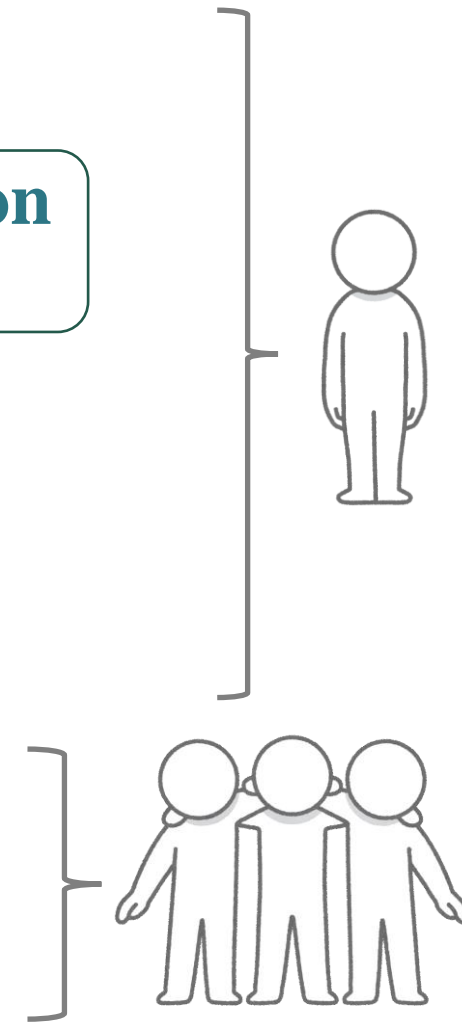**Essential intuition**

Step 2: Determining a structure

➢ Finding variations (e.g., motivation vs. anxiety)

➢ Determining a structure (e.g., emotion)

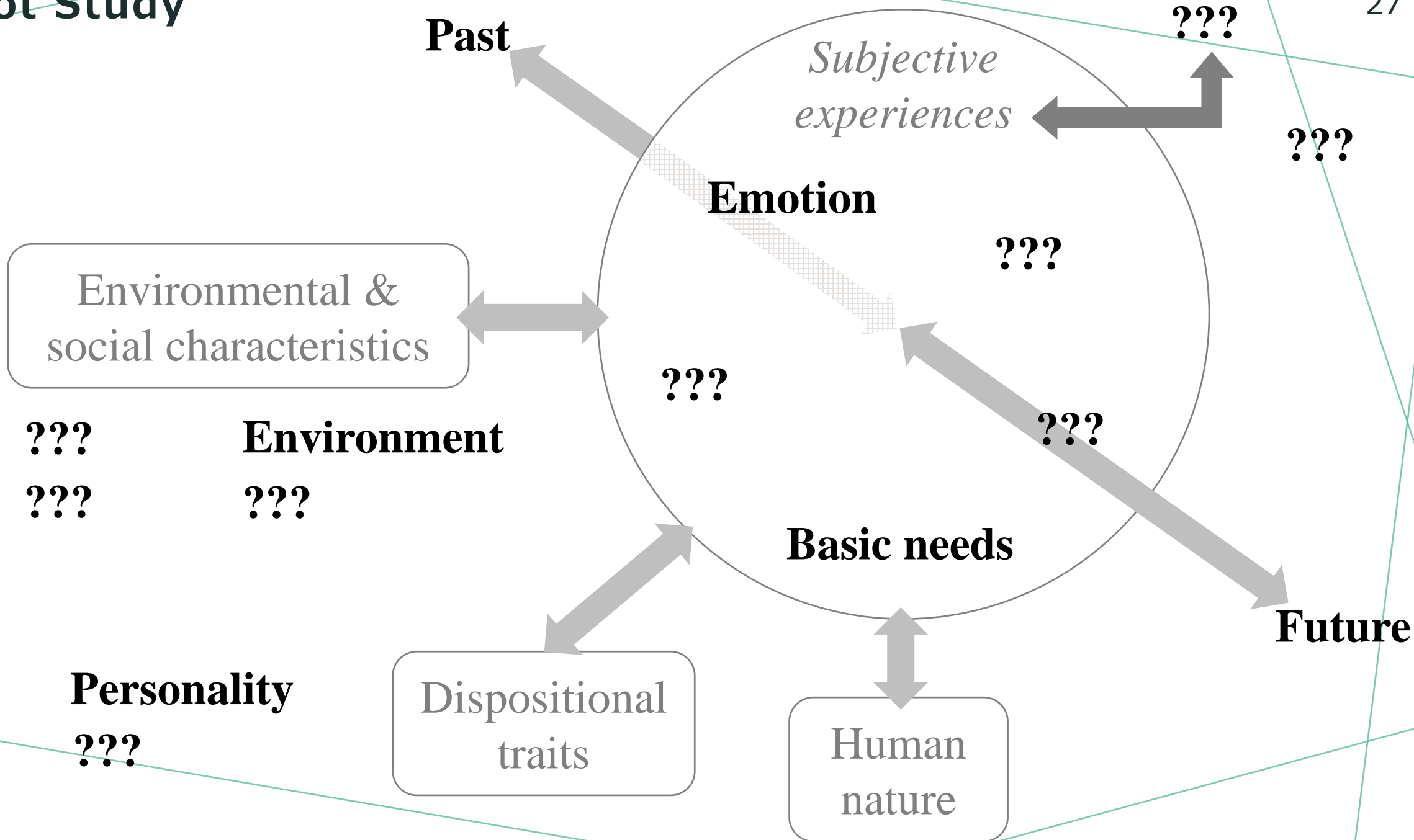 -> multiple structures and links between them

Step 3: Developing a structural framework

➢ Finding similarities from multiple participants

➢ Developing a structural framework to understand IDs

Essential intuition

???

Subjective experiences

???

???

Emotion

???

Environmental & social characteristics

Values Beliefs

Person **???**
??? **???**

Behavior

Basic needs

???

???
???

Dispositional traits

Human nature

Past

Subjective experiences

???

???

Emotion

???

Environmental & social characteristics

???

??? **Environment**

??? ???

Basic needs

???

Future

Personality ???

Dispositional traits

Human nature

Discussion

A structural framework (Zero draft)

Past

Subjective experiences

Meta thinking

Narrative

Emotion

Thought

Environmental & social characteristics

Values Beliefs

Behavior

Person Culture

Environment Policy

Basic needs

Future

Personality Cognitive style

Dispositional traits

Human nature
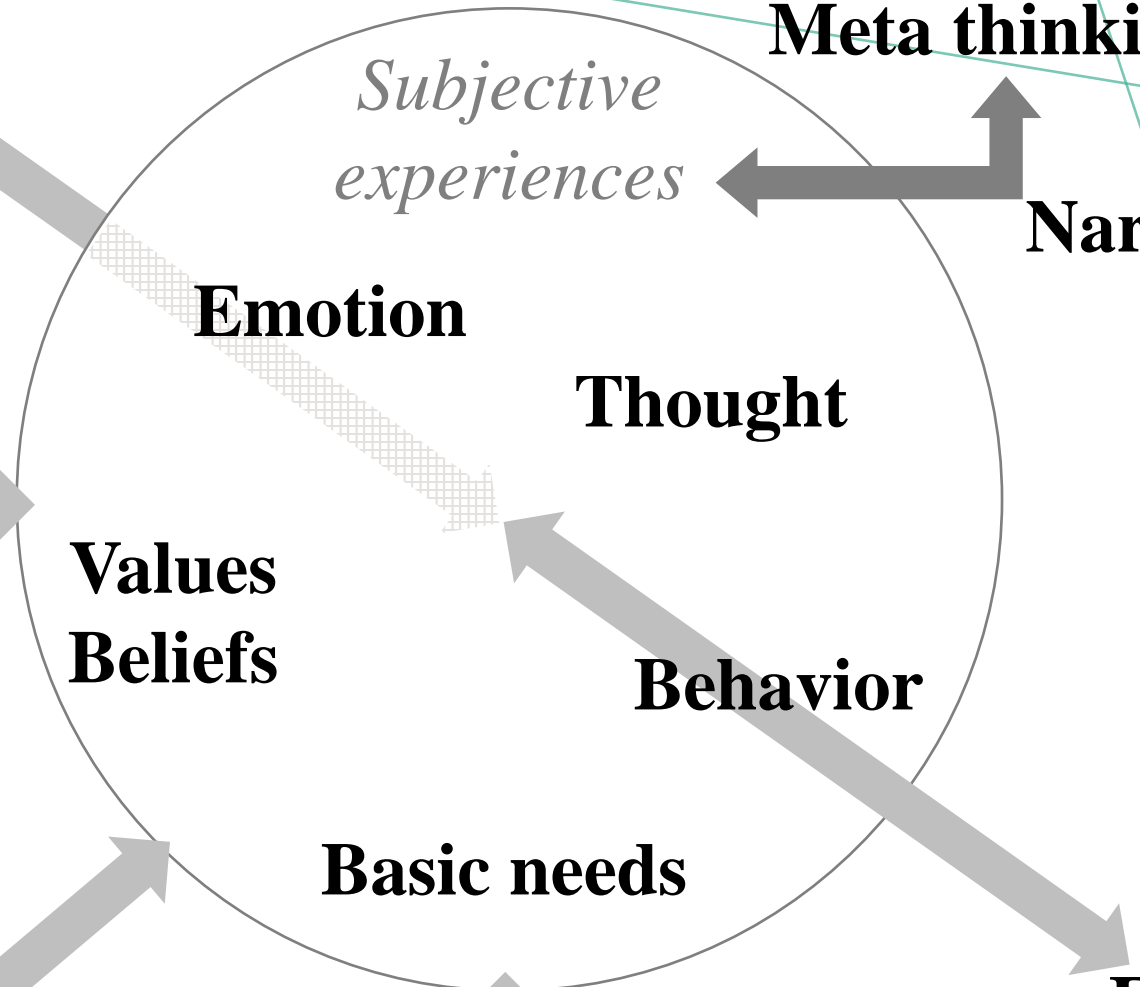
Examples of variation

| Structure	Examples of variation
Basic needs	*Needs for:* Social connection, Overcoming complex, Approval, Self-affirmation, Freedom
Emotion	Motivation, Frustration, Regret, Anxiety, Enjoyment, Boredom, Disappointment, Surprise
Values/Beliefs	Ideal self (from a role model), Ought-to self
Person	Teacher, Friend, Parent
Environment	Studying abroad, Entrance examination
Policy	Education policy in Japan
Personality	Competitive, Perfectionistic, Extraverted/Introverted

4. Future Directions

1. Completing the structural framework

Q1. How can we have a holistic view?

Q2. How can we describe a learner's authentic experience?

Q3. How can we provide a more insightful discussion?
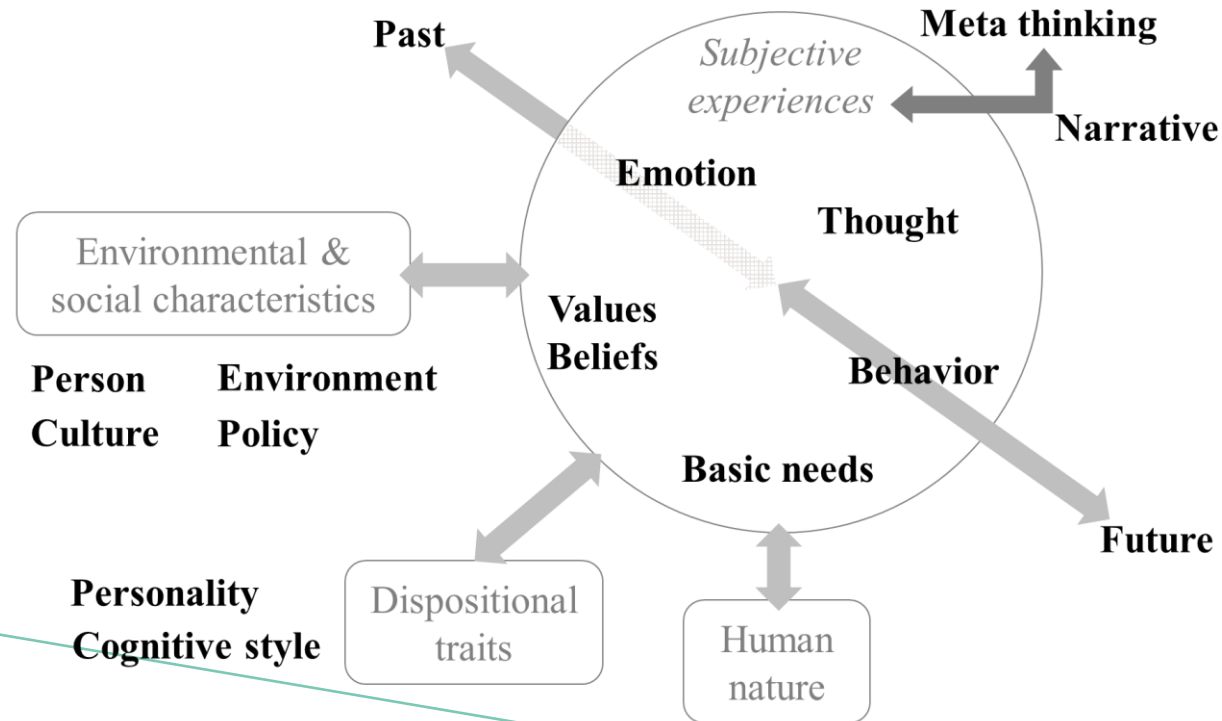
Data collection

Update

Data collection

Update

.
.
.

Complete!
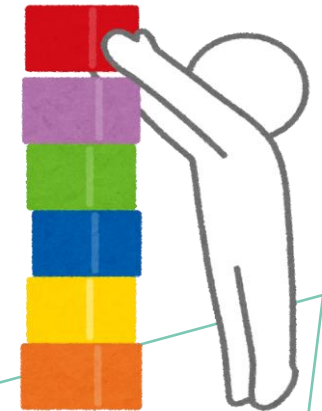
2. Developing a more user-friendly tool to understand IDs (based on the structural framework).

Sentence Completion Test (SCT)

英語の授業 は、高校まではつまらなかったが、大学では楽しい授業が多かった…

英語の先生 に高校の時に出会えたことで、私の人生は大きく変わった…

私にとって英語 _____

受験 _____

幼い頃 _____

私は好奇心 _____

:
:
:

3. Discussing the position of this phenomenological approach in applied linguistics

How to be positioned?

> ➢ Relations to other types of research
>
> ➢ Relations to other theories

How to be scientific?

"The point is to get stable knowledge about human phenomena by any reasonable means possible and not necessarily to follow the specific ways that the natural sciences gain their knowledge…" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 70)

➢ An attitude to find an essence that everyone can agree on

➢ A work to translate the essence into plain words

Presentation Agenda

1. Three Basic Questions

2. A Phenomenological Approach

3. A Pilot Study

4. Future Directions

References

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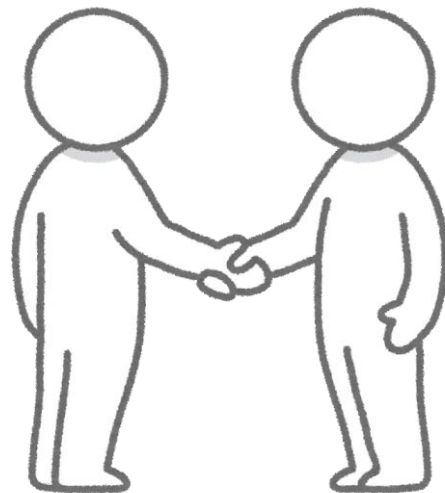Crotty, M. (1998). *The foundations of social research: Meaning and perspective in the research process*. Routledge.

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Thank you very much !

Toshinori Yasuda
Tokyo University of Science

rs.t.yasuda@gmail.com