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Second Language Research: Methodology and Design
(2nd ed.). Alison Mackey and Susan M. Gass. Routledge,
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Second Language Research: Methodology and Design (Second Edition) is an introductory, yet comprehensive, volume in the field of second language research. The goal of the book as authors put is “to acquaint readers with the basic issues, problems, and solutions involved in conducting second language research” (p. xvi). The volume provides a very readable, practical account of different approaches to research drawing skillfully on published research into second language learning and use, providing the reader with a lot of practical examples from published studies. The book also adds some discussion and data-based questions throughout each chapter and some activities at the end of each chapter aiming to promote better understanding of the concepts. In spite of its many advantages, some suggestions may be made to correct, revise, and improve the volume for the next edition according to Brown’s (2001) textbook evaluation criteria, as shown below.

The volume consists of 11 chapters, 7 appendices, a glossary, a reference list, and a subject index. In comparison with the first edition of the book in 2005, apart from some minor updates, the basic changes are the omission of author index, addition of a new chapter (Chapter 9, Mixed Methods), and some internal reorganization. The chapters follow more or less the same structure. Each chapter begins with the explanation of key concepts, provides exercises to allow the reader to think about the concepts introduced and to get hands-on practice at doing the various activities involved in research, and brings discussions and activities at the end of each chapter that help the audience reflect upon and absorb the concepts. As the writers mention in Preface, the volume can be read non-linearly.

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Chapter 1, *Introduction to Research*, defines research, compares and contrasts different types of research, and provides a typical format of a research article. Finally, it identifies research questions. Arguably, this chapter is the book's most insightful chapter in that it sets the building blocks of the volume.

Chapter 2, *Issues Related to Data Gathering*, introduces ethical issues in research involving human subjects, including the process of obtaining informed consent and the institutional review of research together with the steps to be taken in preparing a research protocol.

Chapter 3, *Common Data Collection Measures*, begins with a discussion of the importance of pilot testing. Next, it provides details about many of the measures that second language researchers commonly use to collect data. Finally, it discusses the use of databases in the second language research field.

Chapter 4, *Coding*, deals with some of the main ways of accomplishing the task of organizing data into a manageable, easily understandable, and analyzable format, once collected. The chapter provides an overview of the various processes involved in data coding. It goes on to present examples of some common models and custom-made coding systems, taking both quantitative and qualitative research concerns into account. Finally, it discusses questions related to how and when to decide how much and what to code.

Chapter 5, *Research Variables, Validity, and Reliability*, focuses on concepts necessary for understanding how to design a second language research study. It begins with an outline of variables and scales followed by descriptions of specific types of validity and reliability. It also discusses sampling, representativeness, generalizability, and the collection of biographical data.

Chapter 6, *Designing a Quantitative Study*, deals with design types in quantitative research. It begins by introducing the materials used along with ways of placing individuals into groups. Next, it focuses on ways of designing a study. This is followed by a discussion of meta-analysis. The chapter also discusses the considerations researchers should take into account when designing a study for a given topic and population.

Chapter 7, *Qualitative Research*, begins with a discussion of the nature of qualitative research and how it differs from other approaches. Next, it outlines commonly used methods for gathering qualitative data. It concludes with a discussion of practical considerations in conducting and analyzing qualitative research.

Chapter 8, *Classroom Research*, addresses common practices in classroom-based research. It begins with a description of classroom observation techniques and a range of observation schemes. It then presents three commonly used introspective measures followed by a discussion of some of the practical and logistical considerations involved in carrying out research in L2 classrooms. Finally, it moves on to a description and discussion of methodology in three areas of L2 research.

Chapter 9, *Mixed Methods*, addresses the why and how of mixed-methods research. The chapter illustrates five different designs of mixed methods: triangulation design, concurrent embedded design, explanatory design, exploratory design, and sequential embedded design.

Chapter 10, *Analyzing Quantitative Data*, presents introductory information about statistics to enable the reader to begin to understand basic concepts. It then focuses on issues and methods of analysis that are common in second language research. The chapter deals with both descriptive and analytic measures.

Finally, Chapter 11, *Concluding and Reporting Research*, provides information about the final stages of research projects including issues such as the audience for the research report. It also offers a checklist for researchers to think about when prepared their manuscripts for publication or presentation.

Following some of Brown's (2000) textbook evaluation criteria, an evaluation of the the volume is in order. Based on his checklist, the following are some of the essential characteristics of quality academic textbooks: First, scope. This volume presents a fairly comprehensive survey of second language research methodology and design. One important element requiring a little more elaboration, however, seems to be a philosophical perspective on what research really is in Chapter 1. In Section 1.2 "Different Types of Research," some more elaborated and yet relatively brief discussion might be added on the nature of second language research while focusing on its modes of inquiry.

Second, sequence and organization. The way most chapters of this volume are organized/sequenced seems natural and logical. The book starts with a broad perspective on what second language research is, covers ethical issues, elucidates methodological considerations in various data collection measures, further moves on to coding and data analysis, and in the final chapter how to prepare and report results.

Third, contents. The volume provides detailed discussions on the pertinent topics and components. In addition, various studies cited in the book are most recent and help to provide readers with updated information/ knowledge about the topics. Chapters 3, 7, and 8 on common data elicitation measures, qualitative research, and classroom-oriented research respectively are especially excellent chapters providing in-depth discussions and clear examples/illustrations. However, the quality of Chapter 4, "Coding," may be rated as average. Section 4.3.2 shows several examples of custom-made coding systems. Descriptions of some examples and coding systems included in the section are not necessarily sufficient.

Fourth, the reader's background and needs satisfaction. As a whole the volume provides adequate amount and level of discussions on L2 research methodology well suited for the needs of graduate students and novice researchers. For example, Chapter 7 presents a detailed discussion on qualitative research methods. While explicating both the advantages and caveats of each method, the chapter helps readers to choose the most appropriate method that can address their specific

research topic/questions well. Questions and skill-building exercises at the end of each chapter are also helpful for many novice researchers.

Fifth, formatting (including general layout, table of contents, chapter headings, glossary, references and indexes). The volume is in general user-friendly and well-formatted. However, some revisions seem in order. For example, Contents needs to be rewritten using a topic outline for all of the headings and subheadings for the sake of unity. After *1.3.3 Introduction*, The Literature Review has not been touched upon. The subheading *8.3 Introspective Methods in Classroom Research* should be corrected as *8.2.2* and as a result the following subheadings need to be corrected throughout the chapter.

Sixth, goals and overall quality. With all the above five aspects considered, the main goal of this volume, i.e., to present a comprehensive survey of second language research methodology and design to novice researchers and graduate students, appears to be accomplished fairly well. In addition, especially because of the fairly comprehensive scope coverage and in-depth/quality discussions in many chapters, I recommend that this book be read by more experienced researchers, as well, as a source of new ideas and inspirations as they always need insights and clues for polishing their research further.

In a nutshell, the maturity of one area of scholarly/scientific research (such as applied linguistics) is measured by the extent of its methodological growth and rigor. From this point of view, many second language researchers are very pleased to see this volume and to realize that the quality of second language research methodology has reached this level and will continue to be refined further.

References

Brown, D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: An integrated approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Addison Wesley Longman.