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Understanding Research in Applied Linguistics, Seyyed Mohammad Reza Hashemi. SAMT, Tehran (2014). x + 285 pp., ISBN: 978-600-02-0060-2 (pbk).

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Recently, SAMT (the public organization for researching and publishing academic textbooks in humanities) has witnessed a revival in publishing high-quality books, related to language teaching, under the supervision of Professor Mahmoud-Reza Atai, Kharazmi University, Iran. An instance is *Understanding Research in Applied Linguistics*. As a primer intended mainly for undergraduates in the field, the volume includes five parts with respective chapters. Besides the necessary content, the chapters also include relevant material in the boxes: 'tasks' and 'exhibits' with further materials from other sources, and 'moment of reflection' with quotes and anecdotes to engage and motivate the readers. These useful accessories, within boxes, provide interesting, funny, illuminating, and relevant materials to the readers.

Part I, *Introduction and Background*, contains four chapters that intend to introduce some basic concepts, or "a general background" (p. 5), Chapter 1, *Science and Research*, briefly discusses key issues and assumptions of scientific inquiry, clarifies the concept of research, and highlights ethical considerations. Chapter 2, *The Research Process*, touches upon the steps in conducting a study, e.g., choosing a topic, developing questions, data collection, etc.

Chapter 3, *Applied Linguistics Research*, does not seem to fit in Part I or in any part of the book, however, since it addresses the scope of the field of applied linguistics, rather than a concept in research. The chapter introduces the readers to the different areas of the field in other courses, within which they can find suitable topics for research. Therefore, it should be removed in the following editions.

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Hashemi provides an overview of the concept of paradigm and its major types (namely, positivism and interpretivism) in Chapter 4, *Research Paradigms and Approaches*. Subsequently, he introduces major approaches to research, comparing quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods research.

Part II with five chapters introduces major elements of *Quantitative Research*. Chapter 5, *Quantitative Research Variables*, explores the concept of 'variable', illustrates the functions of variables, and finally discusses measurement scales as the basis for operationalization. Chapter 6, *Quantitative Research Questions and Hypotheses*, presents the structure and types of research questions, including but not restricted to descriptive, causal, and predictive types. It then explains alternative and null hypotheses, and how Type 1 and Type 2 errors might occur.

Chapter 7, *Sampling in Quantitative Research*, introduces the concept of sampling and the factors affecting data quality, e.g., sample representativeness and size, and threats to sampling. It then enumerates different procedures of probability sampling, used in quantitative studies: simple random, systematic, stratified random, (multi-stage) cluster, and banded sampling. Hashemi reiterates that "methodical, contextual, financial, and administrative issues" (p. 98) determine our choice of sampling procedure.

Novice researchers are first recommended to use previously standardized instruments in data collection since their validity and reliability are already established. Then, Chapter 8, *Data Collection in Quantitative Research*, deals with the features, (sub-)types, and administration procedures of instruments in applied linguistics contexts, such as questionnaires (closed and open format questions) and tests.

Chapter 9, *Data Analysis in Quantitative Research*, is a concise introduction to summarizing, displaying, describing, and making inferences from the data. It presents frequency issues, graphs, and descriptive statistics, i.e., measures of central tendency and dispersion. It then links the discussion to normal distribution, statistical significance, effect size, and confidence interval. Next, the chapter introduces parametric and non-parametric tests of inferential statistics with which the researchers can generalize their findings from the sample under study to the target population effectively. The chapter also focuses on statistical analyses for comparing difference and relationship, especially illustrating *t*-test, as an example.

Part III includes four chapters on various features of *Qualitative Research*. Chapter 10, *Major Approaches in Qualitative Research*, briefly discusses ethnography, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, phenomenography, grounded theory, and narrative inquiry for the readers to better understand their application and contribution in the context of applied linguistics research. It then refers to the fluid and dynamic nature of qualitative research questions, i.e., why and how human beings interact.

Chapter 11, *Sampling in Qualitative Research*, regards the research purpose as the major criterion for determining the sample and introduces commonly-used sampling strategies, with examples, ranging from extreme case, heterogeneity, homogeneity, quota, snowball, to convenience sampling.

Both *Qualitative Data Collection* and *Qualitative Data Analysis* are nonlinear in that “data collection may not necessarily precede data analysis” (p. 171). Yet, to clarify the issues, they are respectively treated in Chapter 12 and 13. Thus, Chapter 12 shows how the engaged researchers can utilize interviews and observation flexibly and strategically to collect fluid, subjective, rich, complex, and multi-model data. In contrast, Chapter 13 first mentions that good analysis models should attend to the flexibility of qualitative data and the interpretive aspect of the analysis, and then discusses the features and procedures of typological analysis, grounded theory, constant comparative method, qualitative microanalysis, and indexing.

Part IV includes three chapters on *Research Methods* that can be used in applied linguistics. Chapter 14, *Descriptive Research*, presents various strategies and methods of describing a phenomenon or a process, such as different types of survey research used for different purposes, correlational and causal-comparative research, different kinds of developmental research (longitudinal, cross-sectional, etc.), case studies, and meta-analysis. Chapter 15, *Experimental Research*, firstly introduces key terms and concepts (i.e. randomization, treatment, placebo, etc.) and then the commonly-used experimental designs: pre-, quasi-, and true experimental designs. The chapter also mentions the major features and shortcomings of the respective sub-categories of each design. Chapter 16, *Historical Research*, examines the features of systematicity and objectivity, and of locating, evaluating, synthesizing, and interpreting historical data or evidence. These three chapters are also a common component of other volumes available on the Iranian book market (e.g., Farhady, 1995; or other more recent volumes, e.g., Birjandi & Mosallanejad, 2010). In comparison, the chapters have been noticeably updated and more clearly written in the volume under review.

Finally, there are two chapters in Part V, *The Closing Chapters*. Chapter 17, *Validity in Research*, looks at research validity as a multidimensional issue and makes a distinction between validity, reliability, and generalizability in quantitative research and credibility, dependability, and transferability in qualitative research. It also introduces the factors threatening internal and external validity of quantitative research. Chapter 18, *Writing up a Research Paper*, is concerned with the conventions and guidelines of academic writing. It seeks to familiarize novice researchers and students with academic styles, particularly with APA manual of style. For this purpose, it concisely presents some general guidelines of formatting and referencing. Moreover, the chapter introduces the skeleton of an article and draws the attention of the readers to the essentials of different sections of a research article through real examples in APA style.

Appendices are useful additions to the book in that they provide a select list of the most scholarly and highly-indexed international journals as well as a list of the accredited Iranian journals related to the field of applied linguistics. The appendices will introduce the young Iranian students and novice researchers to the titles of scholarly outlets, *but* not to predatory or fake ones. It is worth praising that the author has not included even one predatory journal in the list. Thus, the students' first introduction to the list of the journals in the field would be to the list of scholarly outlets.

There are a few minor points and recommendations that could be taken into account in future revisions. The first concerns the exemplar studies referred to in exhibits or tasks. Iranian scholars and professors at different universities across the country are working on many domains of language education and publishing high-quality papers in international scholarly journals.

Therefore, the author is recommended to give more room to other studies published by other Iranians throughout the country. The inclusion of such studies in coming revisions would have advantages: It would develop trust and unity among Iranian researchers, professors, and students alike as the volume is intended for them. Furthermore, it would give credit to other researchers throughout the country who deserve to be cited. Also, Iranian students could compare the high quality of research, conducted by distinguished non-Iranian researchers, with that of Iranian professors and researchers who might, by coincidence, use this textbook for the research course.

Secondly, at times, the book gets too jargon-based and way beyond the level of understanding of undergraduate students, the intended readers, who have very little background knowledge and extra reading on the content, e.g., Chapter 4. Besides, a textbook with complex language and too many references at this level might 'frighten the green readers'. As such, it would check the practicing teachers' or researchers' knowledge of the status quo and serve them better, and thus might not satisfy the needs of the undergraduate students as the title suggests, the volume intends to help these very students "gain a basic understanding of theoretical as well as practical aspects of conducting research" (p. 1).

Thirdly, like most volumes on research methodology, the book needs a glossary of key terms (with very simple definitions) to help novice readers or undergraduate students refresh and clear up any confusions while reading. Finally, most of the books published in English in Iran suffer from the lack of editing. Definitely, the current volume would have improved drastically had it been edited by competent English editors.

Yet, this is the book that Iranian instructors, teaching research methodology in language-related areas at tertiary level, might have been waiting for. The volume is thoughtfully and systematically structured and, thus, concisely informative with a clear and reader-friendly style of writing.

References

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