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*Iranian Journal
of
Language Teaching Research
(Book Review)*



Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Research,
Gary Barkhuizen, Phil Benson and Alice Chik. New York,
Routledge (2014). Xiii + 132 pp., ISBN: 978-0-415-50934-3.

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As a volume in *Second Language Acquisition Series: Theoretical and Methodological Issues* (edited by Susan Gass and Alison Mackey), *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Research*, coauthored by Gary Barkhuizen, Phil Benson and Alice Chik, is an invaluable resource for beginner researchers who desire to behold the world of learners and teachers from an interior vantage point. The 'research manual' (p. xii) has been written in accessible language and provides ample advice (by drawing on 175 published studies and concrete examples) on the basic processes and procedures through which a narrative piece of research can be carried out and reported. The book takes a practice-to-theory approach to the presentation of its contents and aims to make the journey of narrative research less unpredictable for the novice researcher by mapping out procedures followed by established researchers in the field. In addition to a short Introduction (serving as preface), and an Index, the volume consists of six chapters covering both oral and written narrative investigation; besides, there is a chapter devoted to multimodal narratives. Except for the first chapter, other chapters begin with an *introduction* and end with a *conclusion*.

The first chapter of the book, *Narrative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics*, is an introduction accompanied by a justification for narrative enquiry in language learning and teaching enterprise. The authors draw on the application of narrative inquiry in psychology and sociology reminding the readers that language teaching is not the only discipline that utilizes narrative in the pursuit of truth. The authors depict narrative inquiry as the most human way of carrying out research which gets the researcher out of the house or office and into the real world of teachers and learners. Research in language teaching and learning, the authors claim, has experienced language memoirs research which has to do with biographical accounts of language learning written for non-academic audience and clearly falls into the domains of biography and analysis of narrative. The other type of narrative research

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is autobiographical case studies which are written for academic readers. Phillion and He's (2007) paper on *Narrative Inquiry in ELT* where they explored the contributions of narrative inquiry in English language teaching by recounting two stories and reviewing the related literature can be regarded as a fine supplementary reading to the chapter.

In the second chapter, *Oral Narratives*, the authors discuss the kinds of narrative inquiry studies in which interviews are used. Secondly, featured studies in which interviews are used are reported and discussed. Different stages of an interview including thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing and analyzing are then elaborated. The format of an interview is broadly categorised as a) *structured* in which the questions to be raised are preplanned in advance and there is usually no flexibility in the course of the interview; b) *semi-structured* where the questions are planned in advance, however, there still is some room for maneuver; and c) *open* where the course of interview is figured out as the interview unfolds.

In the third chapter, *Written Narratives*, the focus is on a written mode of narrative inquiry, which is categorised by the authors into learner diaries, language learning histories, reflective teacher journals, and narrative frames. It is mentioned that learner diaries are autobiographical, introspective documents that record the experiences of language learning from the learners' perspective. Language learning histories, on the other hand, are retrospective accounts of past learning. They are written stories of language learning experiences. Teacher narratives refer to written products which are written reflections on teachers' practices, teaching contexts, emotions and development. There is also a discussion of narrative frame which is a story template consisting of a series of incomplete sentences and blank spaces of varying lengths. The aim is for the respondents to produce a coherent story by filling in the spaces according to their own experiences and their reflections on these.

The fourth chapter of the book is concerned with multimodal narrative inquiry. Narratives constructed using more than one mode of data are called multimodal narratives. These are written narratives embedded with hyperlinks or photographs or oral narratives supported or supplemented by photographs. A technique used in multiple narratives is 'visual elicitation' where the ethnographic researcher provides stimuli for interviews and offers insights to informants' perspectives. The visual texts used are usually photographs and drawings. Multimedia language learning histories are also written forms of data which are retrospective accounts of past learning presented not only in writing but also with images and sound.

Data Analysis in Narrative Research is the topic of the fifth chapter of the book. Qualitative research is the most conducive approach in narrative research and is discussed briefly in the chapter. However, the interested readers are referred to Dörnyei's (2007) chapter on qualitative research. Qualitative research is characterised as being iterative (with its cyclical and spiral nature), emergent or open ended (where new patterns might unfold as the research is on the go) and interpretive or subjective (since the qualitative researcher's personal interpretation of the data has the ultimate say). The analysis mode of narrative data is described as being paradigmatic which refers to similar concepts as thematic, grounded or content analysis in qualitative research. The authors also dedicate some sections of the chapter to discussing 'analyzing narrative discourse', 'metaphors', 'narrative structure', 'narrative in interaction' and 'narrative writing'. There is a general expectation

that data analysis should be thorough-going. This means that all the available data should be analyzed and that data analysis procedures should be applied systematically.

The last chapter of the book discusses how to report a narrative study. When planning and reporting a research paper, decisions have to be made about how best to make claims about the trustworthiness of the research. The authors name six significant variables in planning and preparing a research report (participant, researcher, topic, form, purpose and audience). It is stated that the author of a narrative inquiry, want it or not, will leave a trace of himself in reporting the narrative study; however, how explicit this trace should be is a matter of debate and further discussion. Narrative inquiries usually focus on few participants who are the central characters in any narrative study and the study is about them, their lived and imagined experiences. The researcher can make his presence in the report more visible by using first person pronoun "I" or he can spend a paragraph or two declaring his subjective stance usually by providing a brief biographical sketch of who he is.

All in all, the book is an informative and comprehensive guide to narrative research in SLA. Such a book is really cherished simply because there are few books on narrative research on the market. Few authors have penned a book on researching narratives or doing narrative research, a research approach which can shed more illuminative light on language learning and teaching processes. The advantage of narrative research is that we directly go into the language learner's world, i.e., it is direct inspection and observation of the learner's world. In other fields such as psychology and sociology, there has been an extensive use of narrative research. However, in our field there has been meager attention paid to this Cinderella's strand of research. The positive reviews the book has attracted from pioneers in the field such as David Nunan ('...[the book] contains an ideal balance of theory, advice and rich exemplification') leave little doubt about the value of this book for L2 researchers, both novice and veteran.

A salient drawback of the book is that the authors have not provided sufficient extended examples of how narrative research works. There are a few examples to illustrate the points; however, it would behoove the authors to provide sample studies as different chapters in this book. For example, they could have devoted three or four chapters of the book to the most famous and groundbreaking narrative research studies in our field to set an example for the novice researchers and to act as a template for the lay researchers. The place of a concluding chapter is also missing at the end of the book where future directions for narrative research could be highlighted.

References:

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