

Research Methods in Interpreting: A Practical Resource Sandra Hale and Jemina Napier (2013)

Reviewed by Chao Han

Since the budding of interpreting research (IR) between the 1960s and the early 1970s, IR has developed by leaps and bounds, moving from what Gile (2011) calls ‘speculative theorizing’ to interdisciplinary substantive inquiries, and from the early ‘interpretive theory paradigm’ to the recent ‘social paradigm’ (Pöchhacker, 2004a, b). Despite this eventful, yet fruitful, history, it would appear that research methodology has been given less attention in IR than it rightfully deserves. Few books or monographs are available, providing a systematic account of and/or guidance to doing IR for novice researchers. As such, the book under review, co-authored by Sandra Hale and Jemina Napier, both experienced interpreting practitioners, educators and researchers, is the first of its kind in the field of IR.

As a ‘practical resource’ and a ‘comprehensive guide’ primarily targeting ‘research students undertaking Masters or PhD research projects’ (p. 210), the book aims to ‘demystify the research process’ by providing readers with ‘an accessible step-by-step guide to conducting research in Interpreting’ (p. 2). Bearing this in mind, the reviewer cannot wait but find out what the book has to offer, and whether the book serves its intended purpose.

Overall, the book consists of eight chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 are largely introductory, contextualizing the book and paving the way for the presentation on research methodology. As a core of the book, Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6 focus on using questionnaire, ethnographic, discourse analytic, and experimental methods in IR. Being a rather separate chapter, Chapter 7 concerns

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research on interpreting education and assessment, and Chapter 8 concludes the book by briefly discussing how to conduct and disseminate research.

Chapter 1 provides a friendly overview of what research is and what can be researched. In particular, the authors discuss how researchable questions can be formulated and how different types of research be conceptualized, as well as justify the importance of doing IR. The reviewer, however, has some reservations about one of the claims made on reliability and validity of quantitative and qualitative research. The authors write ‘... quantitative methods are high in reliability and low in validity and qualitative methods are high in validity but low in reliability’ (p. 12). Although reliability and validity, two notions traditionally associated with (*post*)*positivist*-oriented experimental design (also see Chapter 6), have been adopted as quality criteria for evaluating quantitative research in general, applying them to qualitative research, which is epistemologically related to *constructivist* paradigm, may not seem appropriate (the same issue in Chapter 4), and indeed has sparked heated debate (e.g., Lincoln and Guba, 2000). Given that qualitative researchers advocate subjective and value-bound interpretation of social phenomena and believe in co-construction of local and multi-varied social realities, reliability and validity may not be the best quality criteria for qualitative research. Indeed, qualitative researchers such as Lincoln and Guba (2000) suggest that *authenticity* and *trustworthiness* should be of concern in qualitative research. In addition, as reliability is a necessary, though insufficient, condition for achieving validity, claiming that a study has low reliability and high validity does not make conceptual sense.

Chapter 2 is an informative presentation of possible steps and tools involved in literature review, academic writing, and ethics clearance application. Useful resources, references, examples, templates and suggestions are generously provided to future researchers. One of the highlights, which the reviewer finds particularly useful, is the listing of common flaws in novice researchers’ literature review, which is based on the authors’ extensive supervision experience. Another highlight is the authors’ emphasis on good ethical behavior required of researchers, and their caution of potential ethical pitfalls in IR.

Chapter 3 concerns use of questionnaires in IR, focusing on their design, development, piloting and administration, and on sampling methods and statistical analysis usually used in questionnaire-based IR research. Throughout the chapter, the authors provide concrete examples and relevant exercises to help readers understand how techniques and principles can be operationalized in practice. Nevertheless, the reviewer finds it a bit confusing when the authors discuss the concept of correlation. Normally, correlation is about the degree of *linear relationship* between two *normally distributed* variables. However, the authors state that: ‘Correlation refers to any links that there may

be between questions. It will be important to find out if one variable affects another' (p. 78). It seems to the reviewer that the statistical concept of correlation is expanded to incorporate any potential inter-connections between variables, and even causal relationship. Equally confusing is when the authors suggest performing 'a cross-tabulation and then a Pearson's test' to investigate whether there is a statistically significant relationship 'between age and gender and the dependent variable: attitude towards Interpreting training' (p. 79). While there could be a linear correlation, be it positive or negative, between age and attitudinal scores, it is hard to conceptualize a linear relationship between gender and attitude, given only two levels of the gender variable (i.e., female and male). The reviewer is also wondering what the authors actually mean by performing 'a Pearson's test': conducting a Pearson's chi-square test of independence, or calculating a Pearson's correlation coefficient?

Chapter 4 focuses on ethnographic research in IR, discussing its quality criteria, how data can be analyzed, participants be recruited, and findings be applied in practice. The authors use concrete examples to demonstrate how traditional ethnographic methods have been employed in IR, highlighting their principles, procedures, and analysis. Moreover, three qualitative 'neo-ethnographic' approaches to IR that incorporate ethnographic principles are discussed: interviews, focus group, and case studies. However, saying that focus groups and case studies are 'neo-ethnographic' approaches implies a stretching of the notion of ethnography to excess, especially if applied to focus groups, which are far from what has been called 'naturalistic inquiry'. Once again, the authors inspire readers by suggesting a variety of potential areas and lines of study that could be researched using one of the three neo-ethnographic approaches.

Chapter 5 discusses discourse analysis (DA) as a primarily qualitative research method in IR, which has often been used to examine triadic interpreted interactions in community interpreting. Apart from an array of useful references provided to generalize theoretical and methodological aspects of doing DA, the authors also offer hands-on guidance – coupled with many examples – that could help novice analysts conduct their research in a stepwise manner, from formulating potential research questions to deciding on data for analysis, and from selecting theoretical framework to determining object of study. Moreover, in their discussion of developing and applying interpreting corpora to conduct quantitative DA, they explain how interpreted discourse can be transcribed, based on established conventions and using computer software. What seems a bit regrettable is that: although the authors keep claiming that DA is a diverse practice, they could have epitomized classic discourse analytic theories that have been hitherto used for purpose as such. That way, interested readers may well be benefited when approaching IR from a discourse analytic perspective.

Chapter 6 introduces what experimental research is, and why and how interpreting researchers employ experimental methods in IR. In order to illustrate sound practices and designs, the authors provide critical review of sample experimental studies in IR, which helps readers become aware of potential threats to experimental design. Despite of these explanations and examples, the reviewer finds it difficult to follow the authors' presentation on reliability and validity in the chapter.

On the one hand, while it is understandable that reliability is discussed regarding rater reliability (among other types of reliability such as test-retest, parallel form), as raters are often used to obtain measurements in IR, the authors forget to differentiate two related, yet conceptually distinctive, aspects of rater reliability: rater consensus (i.e., absolute agreement) and rater consistency (i.e., similar rank-ordering). Such differentiation is important, given that the use, estimation, and interpretation of these two forms of rater reliability are different (see e.g., Multon, 2010).

On the other hand, although the authors list various types of validity in 6.4.2 *Validity*, the listing could be categorized and fine-tuned for clarity and comprehensibility. In particular, the first five types of validity, namely: (1) content; (2) face; (3) construct; (4) criterion-related; and (5) predictive validity (the original order in the chapter), pertain to appropriate use and interpretation of numeric scores from a measurement instrument (e.g., a test, a scale, a questionnaire, an inventory), whereas the last two, internal and external validity, concern the degree of sound experimental design in order for credible and generalizable results to be achieved. Technically, internal and external validity have long been the focus of hardcore experimentalists such as Campbell and Stanley (1963), whereas the first five types of validity have been traditionally studied by testing specialists and psychometricians (e.g., Crocker and Algina, 1986; Messick, 1989). Instead of making an explicit differentiation here, the authors seem to lump together these different types of validity, which may cause confusion to readers.

The presentation order of the first five validities could also be re-organized to reflect the historical development of validity theory, or the assumed importance of validity in IR. Chronologically, for instance, criterion validity is first used, followed by content validity, and then construct validity (see Lissitz and Samuelson, 2007). An additional minor issue is the dissection of criterion-related validity and predictive validity. Traditionally, criterion validity consists of concurrent and predictive validity, as both are based on correlation of test scores with some external criterion and only differ in terms of the time at which the two measures are administered. Moreover, it would be beneficial to readers if potential threats to internal validity of experimental design were mentioned, such as history, maturation, instrumentation, and statistical regression.

Chapter 7 concentrates on conducting empirical research on interpreting education and assessment. This chapter may seem unexpected and unfitting initially, given that each of the previous chapters (i.e., Chapters 3 to 6) is dedicated to introducing, conceptualizing, and demonstrating a specific methodological approach in IR. The authors explain that the inclusion of Chapter 7 is to generate empirical evidence to inform interpreting education, which has been heavily influenced by personal experience and intuition, and to respond to an increasing emphasis on educational/teaching scholarship in interpreting education. The authors observe that the methods covered in Chapters 3 to 6 are applicable and suitable to exploring research questions concerning interpreting education, and provide general guidance on planning and designing educational research. Research proposals are also drafted, based on the perspectives of critical theory and post-structuralism, respectively. The chapter ends by sampling and annotating a number of published studies on interpreting education and assessment.

Chapter 8 concludes the book by discussing how to conduct and disseminate interpreting research. The authors encourage readers to combine quantitative and qualitative research for cross-fertilization, and to employ innovative technologies in research design. As for writing-up of research results, the authors remind early-career researchers of positioning themselves and their research, avoiding over-generalization of research findings, and choosing an appropriate style and format for writing theses and/or reports. Particularly, two different approaches to writing theses are discussed: typical traditional theses, and theses by publication (TBP). Although TBP is an acknowledged practice in some countries (e.g., Australia), the format might be unconventional or even unheard of in other places. The authors successfully provide rationales for doing TBP, so that would-be researchers can be better informed. What also delights the reviewer in the chapter is the guidance on how to disseminate research outcomes and how novice researchers could plan their professional career after graduation. Although such guidance is of great importance, especially to early-career researchers, it has not received sufficient attention in the past. Inclusion of such content in the book therefore is a good start, hopefully leading to more fruitful and in-depth discussion.

Overall, the book covers a wide range of topics and issues concerning both qualitative and quantitative research methods in IR. It relates each research method to interpreting research, includes different kinds of well-thought exercises to engage and interact with readers, and provides useful references for further reading. As such, the book achieves its intended goal of providing a practical resource to early-career researchers. However, there is room for improvement. For example, there are a few typographical errors (e.g., ‘Comparison of quantitative and qualitative approaches’ in LIST OF TABLES, ‘...

data analysis package such as nVivo...’ p. 75), missing diacritics (e.g., for Š. Timarová), and misspelled names (e.g., Hyönä, Tommola). A considerable amount of interpreting literature concerns community interpreting, rendering conference interpreting (CI) less represented, even in Chapter 6 where experimental studies have long been conducted to study underlying processes involved in CI. Some technical glitches concerning the presentation of reliability and validity could also be addressed. Let us hope that a new edition of this book will attend to these issues.

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Book reviewed

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