

***Investigating World Englishes: Research Methodology
and Practical Applications***

**Peter I. De Costa, Dustin Crowther and
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Investigating World Englishes: Research Methodology and Practical Applications is a pioneering book in the field of World Englishes (WE), as it is the first book that, to the best of my knowledge, is entirely devoted to the discussion of the set of methodological tools used in the field. This underscores the enormity of the contribution the book makes to the discipline of WE, as there is ‘almost [a] total dearth of coverage of this issue in previous publications’ (p. xii). Therefore, this volume’s effort in bringing together the diverse range of methodologies used in the field of WE in a single collection is not only commendable but necessary and timely, if not overdue.

Since Braj B. Kachru’s works began to push back the frontiers of English studies in the 1980s by instituting the iconic plural ‘Englishes’ (Kachru, 2019), the field of WE has witnessed an exponential growth of interest from across many disciplines. Such cross-disciplinary interest suggests that a wide range of methodologies and theories would be utilised in the study of the different aspects of WE research. This growing heterogeneity of interests, theories and approaches in the field can only be viewed as beneficial if studies are conducted in a systematic and principled manner; that is, the range of methods used in WE

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research, although with roots in different disciplines, must be robust, without which there might be methodological chaos in our burgeoning discipline. Interestingly, this timely volume has come in handy in filling this methodological lacuna.

Since methodology is the ‘link between method and theory’ (p. 177), this volume provides the theoretical underpinnings of the methods it presents. Readers will, therefore, find that the chapters integrate WE theories with methods, helping the volume to tell a more complete ‘story’ of the principles of the *hows* and *whys* of data collection in the field. One way the contributors to this volume have shown the *how* is by demonstrating the methods they explain with studies from leading scholars in the field.

One of the key strengths of this volume to remark upon is its unique structure. The volume is organised into two broad parts. In Part 1, the chapter authors introduce the methods examined in each chapter, provide the theoretical and methodological principles undergirding them, and highlight their strengths and weaknesses. This part also provides information on how each method can be applied, future research directions and a timeline of existing studies which applied given methods from across varieties and domains. I found this ‘timeline’ feature extremely helpful, as it provides the ‘history’ and an overview of the use of each method in WE as well as in contiguous disciplines. Building on the foundation provided in their chapters in Part 1, the (same) authors develop ‘sister’ chapters in Part 2 where they summarise four sample studies to demonstrate *how* the chosen methodology has been employed by WE researchers, with critical comments on the contributions of each work to the field. In sum, while the chapters in Part 1 *tell* the reader how (and why) a given methodology is used in the field, their sister chapters in Part 2 *show* the reader how this is and has been done.

Chapter 1 opens with a fine distinction between ‘WE inquiry’ (a broad application referring to a wide range of approaches related to the study of English worldwide) and ‘world Englishes’ (used in a narrow sense to refer to the study of the localised forms of English chiefly based on the Kachruvian approach) (Bolton, 2018). Based on this distinction, the chapter provides an overview of the three key paradigms in WE inquiry, namely world Englishes (narrowly defined), English as a lingua franca (ELF) and English as an international language (EIL). To demonstrate the commonality shared among these paradigms, this chapter outlines the three key methodologies employed by researchers across the paradigms: corpus, ethnography and survey.

In Chapter 2 (Part 1) and Chapter 5 (Part 2), Sandra Deshors and Tobias Bernaisch illustrate how WE research has been executed using corpus approaches. In Chapter 2, the authors situate corpus linguistics within the field of WE

scholarship, overviewing the key milestones in the development of corpus-based WE inquiry. The corpora discussed in this chapter include the BROWN Corpus (which blazed the trail in corpus linguistics), the Lancaster-Oslo/Bergen (LOB) Corpus for British English, the Australian Corpus of English, the Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English, the International Corpus of English (ICE) and the Global Web-based English Corpus (GloWbE). While pointing out the key contributions of corpus linguistics to the broad field of WE research, the authors argue that corpus linguistics has provoked a methodological as well as a theoretical revolution in WE research to the point of becoming its own subfield within WE inquiry.

The chapter discusses two main corpus-linguistic software packages which have been widely used by WE scholars (i.e., AntConc and WordSmith Tools) and shows the affordances of these analytic tools. Even though corpus-based WE research has been mostly quantitative, the authors recommend that quantitative studies should be complemented with qualitative approaches, since qualitative accounts provide the contextual information of the social meaning of the patterns of usage uncovered by quantitative accounts. The authors also address issues of practical applications such as the criteria for selecting the appropriate corpus, software tools and analytical approaches to use. Finally, the chapter closes with a discussion of future directions in corpus-based WE research and provides a timeline of key corpus-based and corpus-driven WE studies.

The accompanying chapter on corpus in Part 2 (i.e., Chapter 5) illustrates corpus techniques using four studies which the authors consider seminal in corpus-based WE studies: Schneider (2004), Xiao (2009), Szmrecsanyi and Kortmann (2011), and Gries, Bernaisch and Heller (2018). The study background, research questions, method, results, discussion and implications of each study are discussed. More importantly, each study is evaluated in light of its contribution to WE as a discipline. The discussion of these studies follows a developmental sequence: from Schneider (2004) which uses 'a traditional form-based frequentist approach' (p. 85) to Szmrecsanyi and Kortmann (2011), and Gries, Bernaisch and Heller (2018) which involve the use of state-of-the-art regression and classification-based approaches, while Xiao (2009) straddles between the two approaches. Based on this, the authors conclude that this development is indicative of a general methodological shift from form-based, descriptive accounts to predictive models of WE.

The two chapters on ethnography (i.e., Chapter 3 in Part 1 and Chapter 6 in Part 2) examine a range of ethnographic approaches to WE research, including its history, methods and applications. Chapter 3 begins by arguing that since one of the goals of WE inquiry has been to establish the legitimacy of different varieties

of English, ethnography offers WE researchers the tools to focus on the sociology of Englishes in particular local contexts. The chapter authors argue that ethnography and its approaches help to provide the connection between the global and the local in WE research. They discuss two notable sub-areas of ethnography in WE, namely linguistic ethnography (which is concerned with the *what* of English within particular social contexts) and critical ethnography (which interrogates the lived experiences of speakers to uncover power relations).

According to the authors, tools (i.e., methods) informed by ethnography include field observations, informant interviews, artefact collection and analysis, and descriptive surveys. While providing the ethnographic principles behind these methods, they claim that since most ethnographic studies tend to be longitudinal, observations and interviews appear to be the most widely used. Further, they report that most ethnography-informed WE studies tend to take the shape of case studies and that, typically, ethnographic tools play a complementary or triangulatory role in mixed-methods WE research (Ugwuanyi, 2021). The main strengths and weaknesses relating to the use of ethnographic approaches in WE are also highlighted. To help WE ethnographers mitigate the pitfalls, the authors offer suggestions regarding how to tackle the challenges of access, flexibility and triangulation. The chapter concludes with a discussion of directions for future research, suggestions for further reading and a timeline of WE studies employing ethnographic methods, especially those published in the journal *World Englishes*.

In the sister chapter (i.e., Chapter 6), the authors review four sample studies that employed an ethnographic approach. The works summarised are Jourdan (1989; focusing on the local uses of English in Solomon Islands), Matsuda (2003; exploring the attitudes of Japanese English users towards the ownership of English), Cowie (2007; investigating language use in an Indian call centre) and Cogo (2012; examining the multilingual repertoires of a London-based ICT firm). Following the structure of the other chapters in Part 2, these four studies are reviewed in these six sections: study background, research questions, method, results, discussion and implications. By evaluating these studies and identifying what their authors did and failed to do, this chapter provides readers interested in ethnographic methods the chance to reflect more critically on their methodological decisions.

The survey is the last methodology discussed in this volume (Chapters 4 and 7 in Parts 1 and 2 respectively). Chapter 4 discusses the general methodological principles of the survey, providing the history of its use in WE research. Five types of sociolinguistic surveys are distinguished in this chapter: language surveys, regional variation surveys, surveys of language use, language attitudes and perception studies, and acceptability judgements. Taking stock of the extent

of the use of the survey in WE research, the author concludes that the survey is, surprisingly, underutilised in WE. Based on a corpus of over a thousand published articles in *World Englishes* between 1981 and 2017, the author claims that most WE studies using survey are those investigating language attitudes, usually accompanied by recorded stimuli such as matched or verbal guises. The chapter also discusses the strengths and weaknesses of the survey as a methodology as well as practical considerations during survey design. Similar to the other chapters in Part 1, this chapter closes with a section pointing readers to areas of future research and a timeline of 25 survey-based WE studies in *World Englishes*, which the author claims are the only survey-based WE articles published in the journal between 1981 and 2017.

Consistent with the structure of Part 2 of the volume, the corresponding ‘survey’ chapter (i.e., Chapter 7) summarises four key studies carefully selected to represent four different strands of data collection in survey methodology. The first study (Flaitz, 1994) is a questionnaire-only study (i.e., it is not accompanied by any additional stimuli). The second (Matsuura, Chiba and Fujieda, 1999) makes use of a questionnaire accompanied by verbal guise, while the third (Cavallaro and Ng, 2009) uses a questionnaire with matched guise. The aim, according to the author, is to compare how WE researchers have utilised questionnaires with and without additional stimuli. Finally, the author uses the fourth article (Tan, 2015) to demonstrate how questionnaires can be used outside the conventional concerns of sociolinguistics. Beyond the overview of these articles (background, research questions, method, results, discussion and implications) presented in this chapter, the author’s critical comments on the articles help readers to see the extent to which the articles have kept faith with the methodological ethos of the survey and how to avoid common methodological pitfalls in their own studies.

The one-chapter Part 3 (i.e., Chapter 8), which in terms of organisation bestrides Parts 1 and 2, focuses on how WE research has addressed pedagogy. The chapter discusses the WE methodologies commonly used in pedagogical inquiry. First, following a review of 26 studies, the chapter offers an overview of research themes common to pedagogical inquiry in WE research. The review also indicated that there are three methodologies that dominate WE-informed pedagogical investigations, namely ethnographic methods, questionnaires and corpus approaches, acknowledging, however, that most pedagogy-oriented WE studies employ mixed-methods approaches. While using a work apiece to illustrate how these methodologies have been employed in WE-informed pedagogical research, the author contends that a major limitation of this subfield of WE is that there is a tendency towards theory rather than practice (Galloway and Rose, 2014). As a way of out of this, the author offers suggestions for future

research directions which emphasize practice and implementable classroom strategies. The chapter closes with suggestions for further reading and a timeline of 20 empirical studies that examine pedagogy from the standpoint of WE.

Two other sections of the volume deserve some comment: Foreword by Kingsley Bolton and Afterword by Daniel R. Davies. In the Foreword, Bolton places WE in historical perspective, showing how WE has evolved as an influential discipline in social research. Further, the author argues that the vast array of contiguous disciplines that inform WE research have contributed to the interdisciplinary nature of the field, which underlines the need to study WE from a range of methodological as well as theoretical standpoints. On the other hand, the Afterword provides a critique of the three methodologies discussed in the volume, arguing that some methodologies now employed in WE research, especially corpus approaches, tend to emphasise national varieties and native vs. non-native varieties, thereby reinfusing the discipline with nationalist and nativist notions and fallacies, the very position Kachru was dismissive of.

It was in my search for research methods books in WE (while I was designing my doctoral research) that I stumbled upon *Investigating World Englishes: Research Methodology and Practical Applications*, several months before its official release. Surprisingly, it was the only WE methods book I found at the time. Considering the traction which WE has gained in the past few decades, the paucity of research methods books in the field was rather surprising. In this sense, this volume makes a real contribution to WE. What is more, the presentation of the chapters, with pointers for practical applications and exemplifications using seminal works in the discipline, is particularly helpful to novice researchers who need a great deal of guidance in their methodological decision-making. As a practical research guide, both novice and more established WE researchers will find this volume useful.

Nevertheless, no book is faultless. As the editors themselves acknowledged, there are other key methodologies not covered in the volume or those not thoroughly dealt with. For instance, the chapters on survey mention a number of survey-based tools, but discuss only language-attitude questionnaire, ignoring, for instance, Acceptability Judgement Task (AJT), which has been identified as a key survey-based tool in WE research (Ugwuanyi, 2021). Also, there is no mention of methodological tools to address the growing interest of WE researchers studying multimodal sites of WE such as YouTube (Schneider, 2016). However, given the interdisciplinary nature of WE, no single volume would be able to capture all possible methodologies employed in the discipline. It is also surprising that Chapter 4 used survey (a methodology) and questionnaire (a method) interchangeably despite the clear distinction made between methodology and

methods throughout the rest of the book. By so doing, the author discussed only questionnaire while ignoring other survey-based methodological tools. Finally, there was over-reliance on a particular journal for the selection of articles used to illustrate the methods; almost all the illustrative articles in Part 2 and the articles in the timeline in Part 1 come from *World Englishes* journal. Even though *World Englishes* is generally regarded as the definitive journal for WE, there is no doubt that the use of illustrative articles from other leading journals such as *English World-Wide* and *English Today* would have further enriched the volume. Such limited coverage may explain why the volume seems to have missed some important methodologies and why the author of Chapter 4 claims that the survey has been underutilised in the discipline, which paints an incomplete picture of the extent of use of the survey in the field.

In no way do these minor shortcomings make light of the enormous contribution this volume makes to the discipline of WE. As a pioneering effort, the authors have successfully opened up the methodological conversation (to which other WE scholars are free to contribute) and, for this, they deserve to be congratulated.

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