外语教学法丛书之十一

RESEARCH METHODS IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

语言学习研究方法

David Nunan

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National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research
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总　序

近年来随着国内和国际形势的发展，我国对外语人才的需求日益增加，有志于学习外语的学生和社会群体的人数急剧上升，从而使我国外语教学事业蓬勃发展。在这种形势下，外语师资培训和自身建设的重要性与日俱增。在这两方面，当务之急是要了解当今国外外语教学的发展情况，要借鉴国外的最新经验，结合我国的具体情况，大力提高外语师资的水平，使我们的外语教学事业更上一层楼。

有鉴于此，上海外语教育出版社为广大外语教师提供了一套由国外引进的外语教学法丛书。这套丛书所涉及的方面广、种类多，包括外语教学技巧和原则、语法教学、语音教学、阅读教学、写作教学、教学管理、测试、教材选择、第一语言和第二语言习得、儿童英语教学等等。其中绝大多数专著是上世纪九十年代和本世纪所出版。它们反映了当今国外外语教学法研究及相关学科的现状。

这套丛书的最大共同特点，也是与传统教学法类专著的最大不同点在于特别强调理论与实践相结合；更是以实践为主，再以理论去分析评述各种实践活动的优缺点。我们所熟悉的传统教学法类专著，一般都是强调教学原则、教学理论，把各种方法的来龙去脉讲得很详尽；然而如何到课堂上去进行具体教学活动，如何在教学活动中去体现教学原则却不多见。这套丛书则几乎全部是从实践活动着手，以说明对理论和原则的应用。

试举两个例证：

一、斯克里温纳：《学习教学：英语教师指南》，麦克米伦海涅曼出版社，1994。（Jim Scrivener: *Learning Teaching: A Guidebook for English Language Teachers*. Macmillan Heinemann, 1994）

作者前言:“本书旨在帮助你去学习如何更有效地进行教学。它并不给你某一种正确的教学方法。实际上没有任何科学根据可以让我们去描述一种理想的教学方法。我们只能观察教师和学生进行活动的实际,并注意哪些策略和原则更有利于教学。我们没有必要去照搬那些策略和原则,但是要意识到有哪些可能性。”“因此本书并不是告诉你‘就用这种方法’,而代之以‘这几种方法似乎都可行。’主要是由你自己决定用哪一种方法。”

本书共十二章,涉及教与学的关系、教学安排、课堂活动、语言技能等等方面,绝大部分章节都是先介绍该章内容,然后列出各种具体教学活动(tasks),其后是对各项活动的分析评述。例如第六章“说的技能”共有四小节,即 1)为什么要说;2)交际性活动;3)语言交际与流利;4)演戏和角色扮演,每节都提供各种相应的具体活动和作者对各项活动的评述。教师可以根据自己的实际情况选择其中某些活动进行课堂教学。

二、努南:《语言学习研究方法》,剑桥大学出版社,1992。(David Nunan: *Research Methods in Language Learning*. Cambridge University Press, 1992)

作者前言:“传统的语言教学研究方法不是教老师怎样去进行教学的。作者主观愿望就是对教学作出种种硬性规定。这种教学科研基于逻辑推理,并要求教学人员接受采纳。上世纪八十年代以来情况有了变化,如今教学人员对自身进行科研。他们用实验方法对教学进行探索。这种科研由于教学背景不同而不同。教学人员不再依赖已有科研成果,而是对自己的课堂教学采取一种科研态度。本书目的在于 1.促使教学人员认识对自身进行科研的必要性。2.帮助教学人员进行教学方面的科研。”

本书共十章,介绍科研方法的历史背景、实验性科研方法、个案研究、课堂现场观察和科研、自省方法、语言交流分析等等。试以第六章“自省方法”为例。所谓“自省”,就是不仅仅着眼于课堂上的教学实践,而要更进一步去思考教学步骤。教学人员一方面审视自己的教学,一方面回顾课堂教学的具体步骤并提出问题进行研究。这种科研的基础就是教学人员本人的日记、教学日记和其他种种有关

记录，以这些资料为依据进行分析研究，得出结论。

以上两书的内容安排大体上可以概括整套丛书的全貌。换言之，各书的最大特点就是以实践为主，而实践都来自相应的理论并与理论密切结合；其实用性强，可操作性强。有大量的实践举例，还有不少个案研究(case study)，在其后多数有分析评述。这些例证分析、评述给予教师很大的空间去进行思考、探索。各种例证并不是仅仅给教师提供方便，让教师有所参考。更重要的是促使教师结合自己的具体教学情况，通过思考和探索有所发展，制订出切合自己需要并切实可行的教学方法去进行教学。

我相信这套丛书能为促进我国外语教学事业的进一步发展作出巨大的贡献。

李观仪

2002 年 6 月

出版前言

随着我国改革开放的深入和进入世界贸易组织的需要，英语教学在国内有了进一步的发展，对高素质的英语教师的需求量日益增大。为了培养一大批高素质的英语教师，必须有组织地开展师资培训工作。在职的英语教师也必须继续充电，通过种种途径进一步提高业务水平。然而，许久以来，系统介绍英语教学法的专著极为匮乏。因此，上海外语教育出版社特从国外知名出版社，如牛津大学出版社、剑桥大学出版社和麦克米伦出版社引进一批有关外语教学法和第二语言习得研究的学术专著，出版了外语教学法丛书。《语言学习研究方法》(*Research Methods in Language Learning*)就是其中的一本。

本书是讨论语言学习研究方法的一部实用性著作。作者努南(D. Nunan)是麦夸利(Macquarie)大学国家英语语言教学与研究中心的教授。本书全面介绍了语言教学领域的主要研究方法，阐述了在应用语言学和语言教学领域如何进行研究的各种策略和技巧，同时也指导读者如何理解该领域的研究数据、文献和评论。本书对于各种流派的研究方法的阐述深入浅出，特别方便读者理解。作者对于各种方法的评价也能够做到平衡而客观。本书涉及的研究方法广泛，包括各种规范的研究方法、自省法、描述分析法、人种语言学研究法、语言教室内的观察研究方法，案例分析等。本书还介绍了启发诱导式的数据收集方法、人际互动研究法、自省式行为分析研究法等目前比较流行的研究方法以及研究方案评估中应该注意的问题。本收作者认为，自主研究是语言教师的专业性和实践性的重要体现，是语言教师基本素质的重要组成部分。

本书每个章节后附有思考题和研究任务，能够帮助读者通过实践巩固和运用已经学到的知识和研究方法。

总之，本书传授了从收集数据、分析数据、阐释数据到撰写和发表研究报告的一整套研究方法，对于各级外语教师和外语专业的研究生都有很大的帮助，是外语教育领域中一本不可多得的教学与研究参考书。

本社编辑部

To my colleagues in the School of English and Linguistics and the National Centre for English Language Teaching and Research, Macquarie University, this book is affectionately dedicated.

Preface

Over the last few years, two phenomena of major significance for this book have emerged. The first of these is the strengthening of a research orientation to language learning and teaching. The second is a broadening of the research enterprise to embrace the collaborative involvement of teachers themselves in research.

Within the language teaching literature there are numerous works containing, at worst, wish lists for teacher action and, at best, powerful rhetorical prescriptions for practice. In both cases, the precepts tend to be couched in the form of received wisdom – in other words, exhortations for one line of action rather than another are argued logico-deductively rather than on the basis of empirical evidence about what teachers and learners actually do, inside and outside the classroom, as they teach, learn, and use language.

Over the last ten years, this picture has begun to change, the change itself prompted, at least in part, by practitioners who have grown tired of the swings and roundabouts of pedagogic fashion. While position papers and logico-deductive argumentation have not disappeared from the scene (and I am not suggesting for a moment that they should), they are counterbalanced by empirical approaches to inquiry. I believe that these days, when confronted by pedagogical questions and problems, researchers and teachers are more likely than was the case ten or fifteen years ago to seek relevant data, either through their own research, or through the research of others. Research activity has increased to the point where those who favour logico-deductive solutions to pedagogic problems are beginning to argue that there is too much research.

If teachers are to benefit from the research of others, and if they are to contextualise research outcomes against the reality of their own classrooms, they need to be able to read the research reports of others in an informed and critical way. Unfortunately, published research is all too often presented in neat, unproblematic packages, and critical skills are needed to get beneath the surface and evaluate the reliability and validity of research outcomes. A major function of this book, in addition to providing a contemporary account of the 'what' and the 'how' of research, is to help nonresearchers develop the critical, analytical skills which will enable them to read and evaluate research reports in an informed and knowledgeable way.

Two alternative conceptions of the nature of research provide a point of tension within the book. The first view is that external truths exist 'out there'

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somewhere. According to this view, the function of research is to uncover these truths. The second view is that truth is a negotiable commodity contingent upon the historical context within which phenomena are observed and interpreted. Further, research 'standards are subject to change in the light of practice [which] would seem to indicate that the search for a substantive universal, ahistorical methodology is futile' (Chalmers 1990: 21).

While I shall strive to provide a balanced introduction to these alternative traditions, I must declare myself at the outset for the second. Accordingly, in the book I shall urge the reader to exercise caution in applying research outcomes derived in one context to other contexts removed in time and space.

This second, 'context-bound' attitude to research entails a rather different role for the classroom practitioner than the first. If knowledge is tentative and contingent upon context, rather than absolute, then I believe that practitioners, rather than being consumers of other people's research, should adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms. There is evidence that the teacher-researcher movement is alive and well and gathering strength. However, if the momentum which has gathered is not to falter, and if the teacher-researcher movement is not to become yet another fad, then significant numbers of teachers, graduate students, and others will need skills in planning, implementing, and evaluating research. Accordingly, a second aim of this book is to assist the reader to develop relevant research skills. At the end of the book, readers should be able to formulate realistic research questions, adopt appropriate procedures for collecting and analysing data, and present the fruits of their research in a form accessible to others.

I should like to thank all those individuals who assisted in the development of the ideas in this book. While these researchers, teachers, learners, and graduate students are too numerous to mention, I trust that they will recognise the contributions which they have made. One person who deserves explicit acknowledgment is Geoff Brindley, who provided many useful references and who helped to synthesise the ideas set out in Chapter 7. Thanks are also due to the anonymous reviewers, whose thoughtful and detailed comments were enormously helpful. Finally, grateful thanks go to Ellen Shaw from Cambridge University Press, who provided criticism and encouragement in appropriate measure and at just the right time. Thanks also to Suzette André, and especially to Sandy Graham, who is quite simply the best editor any author could wish for. Needless to say, such shortcomings as remain are mine alone.

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1 An introduction to research methods and traditions

> Scientists should not be ashamed to admit . . . that hypotheses appear in their minds along uncharted byways of thought; that they are imaginative and inspirational in character; that they are indeed adventures of the mind.
>
> (Peter Medawar, 1963, "Is the Scientific Paper a Fraud?" BBC Presentation)

This book is essentially practical in nature. It is intended as an introduction to research methods in applied linguistics, and does not assume specialist knowledge of the field. It is written in order to help you to develop a range of skills, but more particularly to discuss and critique a wide range of research methods, including formal experiments and quasi-experiments; elicitation instruments; interviews and questionnaires; observation instruments and schedules; introspective methods, including diaries, logs, journals, protocol analysis, and stimulated recall; interaction and transcript analysis; ethnography and case studies. Having read the book, you should have a detailed appreciation of the basic principles of research design, and you should be able to read and critique published studies in applied linguistics. In relation to your own teaching, you should be better able to develop strategies for formulating questions, and for collecting and analysing data relating to those questions.

The purpose of this initial chapter is to introduce you to research methods and traditions in applied linguistics. The chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book, and highlights the central themes underpinning the book. This chapter deals with the following questions:

- What is the difference between *quantitative* and *qualitative research*?
- What do we mean by 'the status of knowledge', and why is this of particular significance to an understanding of research traditions?
- What is meant by the terms *reliability* and *validity*, and why are they considered important in research?
- What is *action research*?

Research traditions in applied linguistics

The very term *research* is a pejorative one to many practitioners, conjuring up images of white-coated scientists plying their arcane trade in laboratories filled with mysterious equipment. While research, and the conduct of

research, involves rigour and the application of specialist knowledge and skills, this rather forbidding image is certainly not one I wish to present here.

I recently asked a group of graduate students who were just beginning a research methods course to complete the following statements: 'Research is . . .' and 'Research is carried out in order to . . .' Here are some of their responses.

Research is:

- about inquiry. It has two components: process and product. The process is about an area of inquiry and how it is pursued. The product is the knowledge generated from the process as well as the initial area to be presented.
- a process which involves (a) defining a problem, (b) stating an objective, and (c) formulating an hypothesis. It involves gathering information, classification, analysis, and interpretation to see to what extent the initial objective has been achieved.
- undertaking structured investigation which hopefully results in greater understanding of the chosen interest area. Ultimately, this investigation becomes accessible to the 'public'.
- an activity which analyses and critically evaluates some problem.
- to collect and analyse the data in a specific field with the purpose of proving your theory.
- evaluation, asking questions, investigations, analysis, confirming hypotheses, overview, gathering and analysing data in a specific field according to certain predetermined methods.

Research is carried out in order to:

- get a result with scientific methods objectively, not subjectively.
- solve problems, verify the application of theories, and lead on to new insights.
- enlighten both researcher and any interested readers.
- prove/disprove new or existing ideas, to characterise phenomena (i.e., the language characteristics of a particular population), and to achieve personal and community aims. That is, to satisfy the individual's quest but also to improve community welfare.
- prove or disprove, demystify, carry out what is planned, to support the point of view, to uncover what is not known, satisfy inquiry. To discover the cause of a problem, to find the solution to a problem, etc.

Certain key terms commonly associated with research appear in these characterisations. These include: inquiry, knowledge, hypothesis, information, classification, analysis, interpretation, structured investigation, understanding, problem, prove, theory, evaluation, asking questions, analysing data, scientific method, insight, prove/disprove, characterise phenomena, demystify, uncover, satisfy inquiry, solution. The terms, taken together, suggest that research is a process of formulating questions, problems, or hypotheses; col-

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