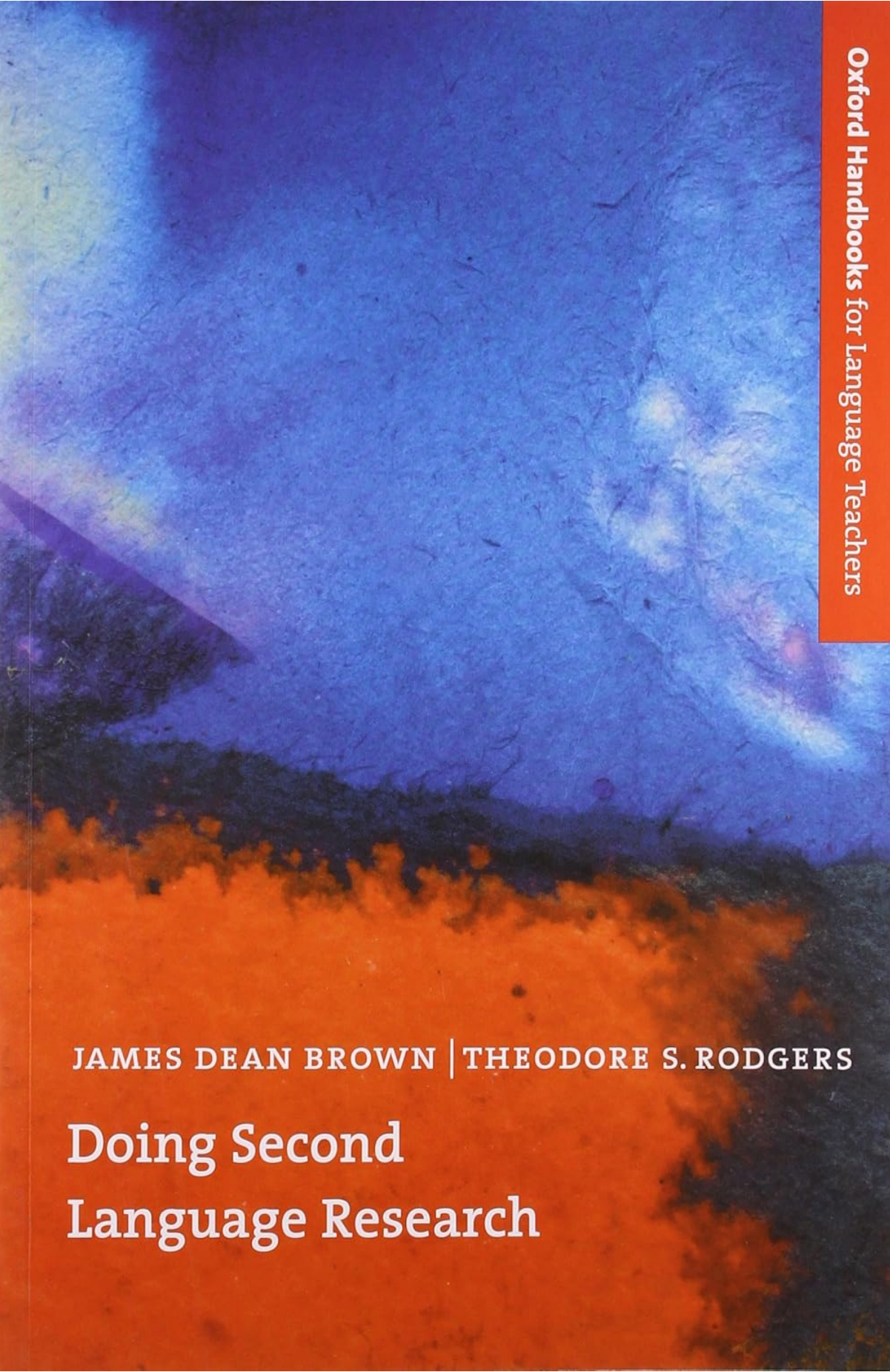




Oxford Handbooks for Language Teachers

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Doing Second Language Research

Doing Second Language Research

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Significance of introspection as a scholarly focus	74
Reflecting on introspective research	75
Summary	78
4 Classroom research: interaction analysis	79
Introducing classroom research	79
Experiencing classroom research	80
Compiling classroom research data	87
Analyzing classroom interaction data	90
Designing your own classroom research	94
Interpreting classroom research	101
Significance of classroom research	105
Reflecting on classroom research	110
Summary	112
PART THREE: Quantitative research	
5 Descriptive statistics research: survey analysis	117
Introducing descriptive statistics research	117
Experiencing descriptive statistics research	118
Compiling descriptive data	122
Analyzing descriptive data	122
Designing your own descriptive research	142
Interpreting descriptive research	147
Significance of descriptive research on teacher beliefs	151
Reflecting on descriptive research	154
Summary	156
6 Correlational research: language learning/teaching attitudes	157
Introducing correlational research	157
Experiencing correlational research	159
Compiling correlational data	162
Analyzing correlational data	166
Designing your own correlational research	180
Interpreting correlational research	184
Significance of correlational research comparing students' and teachers' attitudes	191
Reflecting on correlational research	192
Summary	193

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Once Helen understood that letters spelled words and that words named things, her progress in language development was phenomenal. Within three months after her discovery at the pump and by the time she had turned seven years old, Anne Sullivan had taught Helen to read Braille and to write her first letters. She wrote in square-hand letters, similar to the sample on the previous page.

Exercise 2.2

Below are *randomly ordered samples* of Helen's actual letters to her friends, all written between her seventh and eighth birthdays (June 1, 1887 to February 24, 1888). Her language development is amazingly fast. Helen was both learning English and the conventions of writing during this period, and the samples demonstrate developmental stages in these processes. For the purposes of the exercise, the samples are presented in random order.

- 1 Read the letter excerpts noting their linguistic features. Rank order the excerpts from *earliest* to *latest*.
- 2 Identify and discuss new language features in each letter; for example, a new verb tense, a new sentence pattern, a new pronoun, a new phrase pattern, new patterns of writing mechanics.

Letter excerpts from Helen Keller (*in random time order*)

- A I am happy to write to you this morning. I hope Mr. Anagnos is coming to see me soon. I will go to Boston in June and I will buy father gloves, and James nice collar, and Simpson cuffs. I saw Miss Betty and her scholars. They had a pretty Christmas-tree, and there were many pretty presents on it for little children.
- B Helen will write mother letter papa did give helen medicine mildred will sit in swing mildred did kiss helen teacher did give helen peach george is sick in bed george arm is hurt anna give helen lemonade dog did stand up.
- C I will write you a letter I thank you for pretty desk I did write to mother in memphis on it mother and mildred came home wednesday mother brought me a pretty new dress and hat papa did go to huntsville he brought me apples and candy.
- D helen write anna george will give helen apple simpson will shoot bird jack will give helen stick of candy doctor will give mildred medicine mother will make mildred new dress
- E This morning Lucien Thompson sent me a beautiful bouquet of violets and crocuses and jonquils. Sunday Adeline Moses brought me a lovely doll. It came from New York. Her name is Adeline Keller. She can shut her eyes and bend her arms and sit down and stand up straight. She has on a pretty red dress. She is Nancy's sister and I am their mother.

Exercise 2.8

Consider each of Wode's original research questions listed again below. Write notes for the answers we now have, based on the extract from Wode's article and Table 2.5.

- 1 Is L2 acquired in a developmental sequence?
- 2 Is there an ordered sequence of stages?
- 3 Are the developmental sequences the same for L1 and L2?
- 4 To what extent does the L2 child rely on prior L1 knowledge?
- 5 Under what circumstances and in what situations does L1 knowledge influence L2 acquisition?

Note that a good combination of text and table can not only summarize data efficiently but can also help the reader anticipate what will be discussed next. Based on what you know from Table 2.5 and the accompanying text, what do you think Wode will discuss next in his paper?

Exercise 2.9

Consider one of the tables you have prepared during your data analysis of the Helen Keller letters summarizing some feature of language development in the sequence of letters. Write a paragraph directing a reader to one or more aspects of the table that you think are of particular note. You can write this as if you were in the middle of an article reporting on your study of the letters, assuming prior knowledge on the part of the reader as to what has come before. The easiest way to start is to write something like, 'You will note in Table X, that...'. But you may have a more imaginative way to focus the reader's attention on matters of interest within your table.

Designing case study research

The importance of a thorough literature review

We turn now to another important element in STANDARD FORM reporting that we discussed previously: the LITERATURE REVIEW.

Any research study typically stands on the shoulders of studies that preceded it. In order to acknowledge that debt to previous studies and show where the new study fits into the field, the study often begins with a literature review. This not only summarizes what related studies have been done in the past and what they have shown, but, as importantly, it discusses what *hasn't* been

Exercise 2.16

What questions might arise about the following areas of case study concern?

- 1 The participant (for example: Is the participant also the researcher?)
 - 2 The data collection (for example: How was data recorded and transcribed?)
 - 3 The data analysis (for example: Were statistical measures used?)
-

The believing game

Despite the concerns raised above about generalizability, case studies offer a variety of potential benefits. Bailey (1991: 90) lists these potential benefits under the categories of

- (a) Benefits for language teachers
 - (b) Benefits for language learners
 - (c) Benefits for language learning research
-

Exercise 2.17

Consider either the Helen Keller study or your own twenty-four hour self-study. What benefits might you derive from studies of this sort that would fall within Bailey's categories? Can you think of other kinds of benefit that might flow from such studies?

One characteristic of case and developmental research seems particularly important to us. That characteristic is candor. If the researcher is straightforward with us, discusses problems in carrying out the research, acknowledges confusion about some analyses, and does not try to make the study seem overly important, then we feel we are closer to the actual case situation. We may even feel that we are being given a personal introduction to the participant(s) as well as an honest look at both the methodology and the results of the study. Case study research is often written up in a more conversational style than is quantitative research. A non-pretentious tone is easy to relate to and, again, gives us more of an *insider* sense of what is going on.

Leopold's monumental study of his daughter Hildegard provides an engaging example of a very scholarly study presented in a conversational style, with lots of insights and memorable anecdotes for the reader. We will close this section with a quotation from Leopold's study in demonstration of the above remarks:

suggests that introspective studies more typically involve cognitive tasks than affective/social tasks.

Exercise 3.19

Take one of the mini-introspections you have done, and write answers to the following question:

- 1** Identify the study and code it using the adapted Færch and Kasper system in Table 3.4. Some of the classification categories may not be fully transparent, but do your best to interpret each of the categories, maybe through class or partner discussion.
 - 2** Did the classification suggest any types of introspective research you might not have considered or been aware of before? What were these?
-

Not only is there a variety of types of introspective research, there is also a variety of different uses to which introspective research has been applied. For language teachers, there are a number of payoffs which current work has provided. These payoffs include the use of introspective techniques and findings as:

- 1** language teaching instructional tools, especially in the teaching of reading and writing (Lytle 1982);
- 2** a guide to text and materials writers with regard to readability, etc. (Jacobs 1997);
- 3** a source of insight into pervasive questions of discourse coding (Kasper 2000);
- 4** a source of a classification system of task types (Skehan 1997);
- 5** a guide to the classification of the subject matter of tasks (Cohen 1987);
- 6** an aid to the identification of learning strategies (Chamot 1999);
- 7** a source of insight into how the brain works (Simon 1979);
- 8** a guide to test design and alternative modes of evaluation and assessment (Green 1998); and
- 9** a catalyst for learners sharing effective ways to learn (Rodgers 2000).

Table 4.8 Scaffolding functions in two-person student exchanges

POSITIVE CODES

Recruitment of Interest (RI):

Nominating or initiating topics and identifying of points for discussion.

Modelling (M):

Offering behaviour for imitation. It may involve completion or even explication of a solution already partially executed by the partner.

Feedback (F):

Providing partner with information on a performance as it compares to the required standard. Partner may also assist by highlighting the features of the task that are relevant.

Direction Maintenance (DM):

Keeping each other in pursuit of the task and working towards its completion. It involves deployment of questions and invitation to proceed to the next step.

Group Maintenance (GM)

Maintaining harmony in the group and lowering affective barriers through speech acts. Attempts to control frustration level in self and peer in order to complete the task

Questioning (Q1):

Requesting for verbal response that assists by producing a mental operation the partner cannot or would not produce alone. This interaction assists further by giving the assistor information about the partner's understanding.

Questioning (Q2):

Asking questions for the purpose of clarification as well as requests for help. Requests for help here refer to issues being discussed and not new problems.

Propositional Knowledge (PK):

Contributing new ideas, information or detail recalled that assists in the successful completion of the task.

Task Structuring (TS):

Helping partner and self to participate in the task by structuring. For example, sequencing, segregating or structuring a task into or from components to modify the task.

Negative Codes

Erroneous Feedback (EF):

Giving misleading feedback or inaccurate information offering garbled explanations. Includes pointing out problems and expressing doubt when the solution is already correct.

Assertions without Explanations (A):

Making assertions or categorically stating a point of view without offering any explanation or justification. Repeating a point of view without elaboration.

Lack of Frustration Control (FC):

Expressing overt exasperation with partner or task. This frustration can manifest itself in words or tone of voice.

Inauthentic Questions (NQ):

Posing questions that do not genuinely seek clarification or understanding, including questions asked with no particular purpose beside trying to confirm personal views.

SIGNIFICANCE (that is, being other than a chance, or random, finding). To use Table 6.13, you will need to do the following:

- 1 Decide whether your decision is *directional* (i.e. you can reasonably expect the correlation to be either positive or negative) or *non-directional* (i.e. you have no idea what to expect in terms of the sign of the correlation).
- 2 Decide whether you want to be 99% sure, and set the acceptable level of probability at $p < .01$, or you can accept being 95% sure of your result, and set the acceptable level of probability at $p < .05$.
- 3 Make sure you know how many pairs of numbers were involved in calculating your correlation coefficient.

Once you have all of the above information, you can enter the correct column by finding the two that are directional or non-directional and then the one column that is $p < .05$ or $.01$. You will then need to move down to the row that corresponds to the number of pairs of numbers you used in calculating the correlation coefficient. For example, let's say you observe a correlation of .55 in your data, you know what direction to expect so it is a directional decision, and you are willing to be 95% sure of your result at $p < .05$. You also know that you used 12 pairs of numbers in calculating the correlation coefficient. Looking in the two columns for directional decisions, you find the one column labeled $p < .05$ and go down to the row where $N = 12$. The result? Your critical value is .4973. Since your observed correlation of .55 is greater than your critical value, you can say that the correlation of .55 is significant at $p < .05$, or that there is only a 5 percent chance that your correlation coefficient is due to chance alone. (For more on this concept, see Brown 1988 or Hatch and Lazaraton 1991.)

Exercise 6.13

- 1 A study had 102 students and therefore 102 pairs of scores, the observed r is .31 (the correlation between the number of hours students spend in the language lab and their grades in language courses), the decision is non-directional, and you want to be 99% sure (at $p < .01$) of the relationship. Using Table 6.13, what would the Pearson r critical value be for the study?
- 2 Would the observed r of .31 be significant?

(See the Answer key on page 259 for the answer.)

Limitations of the example evaluation study

As with all research (qualitative research in particular), it is important to recognize not only operational strengths in research methodology, like triangulation and member checking, but also on-site, real-time limitations. In this Tunisian evaluation research, at least the following limitations should be recognized:

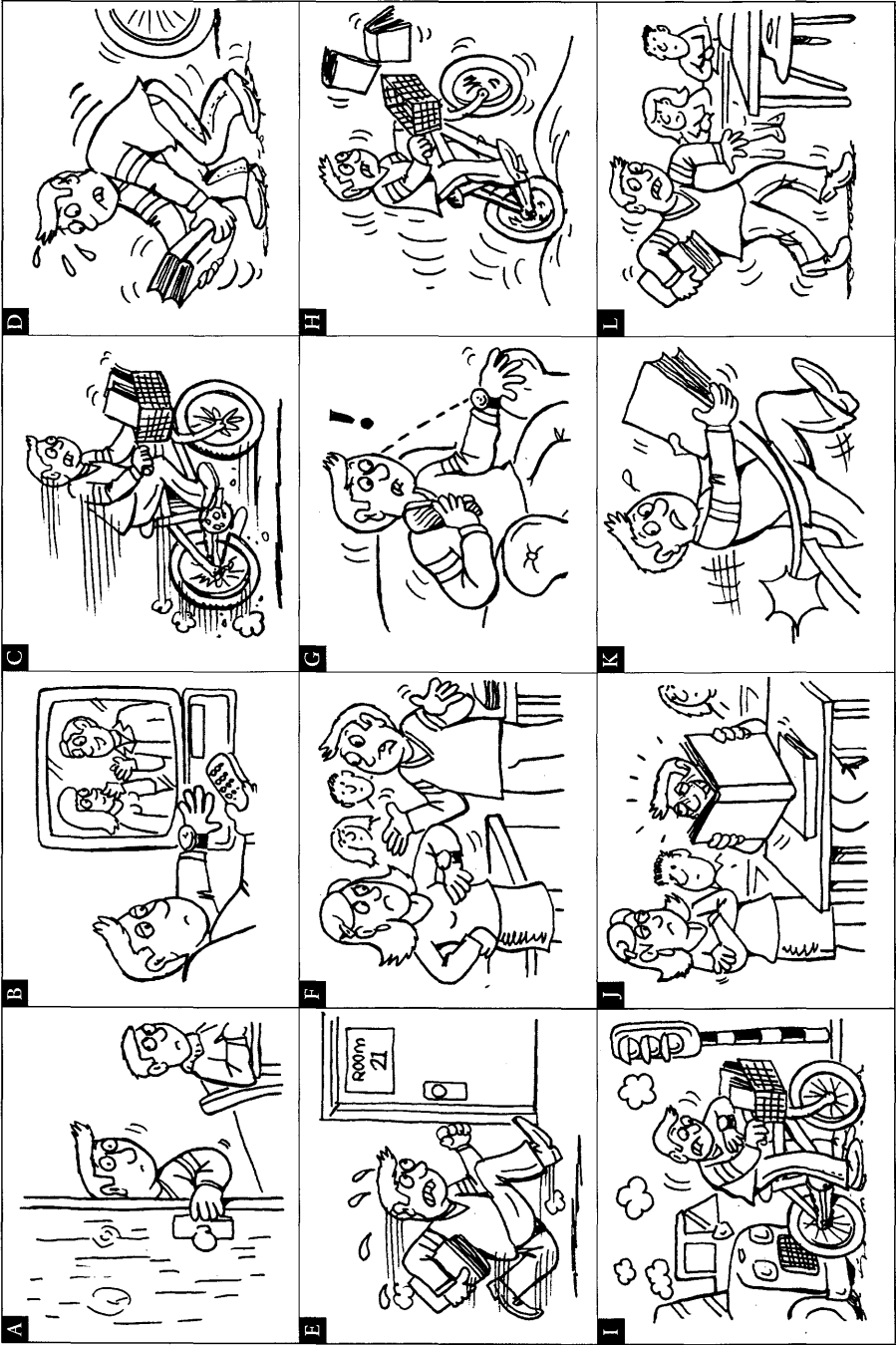
- 1 This study was conducted by a JIJOE (Jet In Jet Out Expert), who knew very little about education in Tunisia when he arrived. Note: an evaluation conducted by an outsider can also be viewed as a positive aspect of this study in the sense that a JIJOE has little or no personal or political stake in any aspect of the educational system in Tunisia, and so may arrive with few partisan attitudes toward any aspect of the curriculum. As such, a JIJOE may have little *credibility* initially, though the *objectivity* of such a person may be very high. (See discussions of these terms earlier in this chapter.)
- 2 All group meetings, observations, and questionnaires were done in the first few weeks of the school year, perhaps before students and teachers were settled into a routine. This certainly all took place before students were used to the new materials and teaching styles they were encountering.
- 3 As a consequence of number 2, the students and teachers were asked to reflect on 'last year's' course. Naturally, memory of what last year was like may be weaker.
- 4 Prolonged engagement is one of the primary underpinnings of really solid qualitative research. This study took place over a period of two weeks.
- 5 Only five sites and ten schools were visited. They may or may not be typical of the 'average' schools in Tunisia. However, it is clear that only urban schools—no rural ones—were visited.

Exercise 8.16

In the Tunisian evaluation study, the researcher used three forms of triangulation: data triangulation, methodological triangulation, and location triangulation (i.e. the first, fourth, and seventh types listed in Table 8.6). Now, we would like you to think about triangulation in terms of your course book evaluation study. The data gathered in this chapter include the following eight items:

- 1 The author e-mail interview with Ted (Exercise 8.3)
- 2 The author e-mail interview with JD (Exercise 8.3)
- 3 Your retrospective essay (Exercise 8.2)
- 4 The student interviews (Exercise 8.4)
- 5 The student Likert-scale questionnaire (Exercise 8.9)
- 6 The student open-ended questionnaire (Exercise 8.9)

Picture set 3: Late for class



to think of ways to apply what they are learning to answering questions that are directly relevant to their professional lives and (future) teaching situations. In fact, if the students are required to do a personal project for the course, the teacher will probably have to spend several one-on-one conferences with each student or group doing a project to guide the research in a useful direction and answer questions as they arise. So, you see, the teacher is as important as ever.

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