○ **R. BARNARD & A. BURNS, (EDS.),
*RESEARCHING LANGUAGE TEACHER
COGNITION AND PRACTICE: INTERNATIONAL
CASE STUDIES***

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For over two decades, research in second language education has been moving toward an appreciation of the inherent complexity of the teaching-learning relationship. In this book, the editors Roger Barnard and Anne Burns have put together a collection of international case studies that exemplifies this shift. There are eight cases studies, each an insightful account of the chaotic reality of conducting qualitative research on ‘the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching’ (Borg, 2003, p. 81). They show how beyond the challenge of navigating the range of approaches to data collection lies the involved process of implementing methods that illustrate the interplay between language teachers’ mental lives and their behaviour.

In the introduction, the editors outline the two main aims of the book: (1) to ‘fill the gap’ (p. 1) between conventional texts on research methodology and published reports in academic journals, and (2) to promote the importance of language teacher cognition research. In addition, the definitions of key terms and the section mapping out the necessary conditions for conducting good research on teacher cognition provide important information for both newer and more experienced researchers. Following the introduction, Simon Borg provides a methodological overview of recent contributions to studies in language teacher cognition. Borg asks readers to consider what it means to conduct and report on research in a way that can have an ‘illustrative and instructional’ (p.24) impact. His systematic survey of current investigations is more than a review of different methodological approaches and findings. Rather, it is an illuminating categorization of key issues in contemporary studies meant to guide future research.

Each of the eight case studies focuses on a particular approach to data collection. Structurally, the case study chapters include a general introduction to the authors’ investigation, a brief research history of the methods described and a reflection on the effectiveness of the chosen approach. All eight chapters are accompanied by commentary from an ‘internationally recognised researcher and scholar’ (p.4), critically evaluating the authors’ accounts. This unique structure evokes a kind of dialogic tone between the emerging researchers and leading experts. At the end of each chapter are reflective questions

encouraging readers to actively engage with the content. The final section of the book summarises the central themes running throughout the book.

In chapter 1, Judy Ng outlines how she used questionnaires to determine teachers' beliefs about feedback. Her section describes the challenges of using questionnaires as part of a multi-method data gathering project. It is an excellent chapter to open with as it lays out underlying themes found throughout the book. Her report illustrates how the unpredictability of research and the subsequent need for flexibility and resilience often lead to unexpected discoveries. The commentary, by J. D. Brown, picks up on the idea of research flexibility to dispute the view that rigorous investigation means that it is inherently rigid. In fact, the 'systematic principles of research' (p.43) which offer the necessary structure for the evaluation of qualitative studies are more often than not open to adaptation and innovation. Brown also questions the misguided assumption that by simply using a multi-method approach, researchers are enhancing reliability.

Chapter 2 is a report by Nguyen Gia Viet on using narrative frames to capture teachers' beliefs about and experiences with task-based language teaching. Viet explains how narrative frames allowed the voices of his participants to be freely articulated in an open-ended, reflective manner. This chapter also identifies an often unacknowledged reality of research; the fact that the insights gained serve as valuable learning experiences not only for a specific research community or group of participants, but also for the researchers themselves. Martin Bygate's comments, while acknowledging the potential merits of narrative frames in investigating cognition, stress the need to clarify the rationale for wanting narrative accounts. Researchers need to show how narratives can 'help shed valuable light' (p.60) on teachers' thinking in a way that other types of discourse cannot. Furthermore, he encourages researchers to remain vigilant when designing their research tools to ensure that they actually do what they are meant to, and not just become belief-eliciting tools.

In the third chapter, Andrew Gladman reports on a novel use of focus groups to investigate an unusual approach to language instruction, called collaborative interdisciplinary team teaching (CITT). He explains how synergistic interaction, framed within the focus group context, was able to generate a range of topic-relevant responses that captured different teachers' thinking about collaborative teaching. Gladman highlights the innovativeness of his study, detailing how deviations from conventional focus group methods produced rich, unexpected results. Donald Freeman's commentary provides one of the most thought-provoking pieces in the book, questioning a fundamental assumption of qualitative research on cognition: that language, specifically talk, can accurately and honestly represent beliefs and ideas. He centralises the role of context (both of situation and mind) when collecting 'data or information about thinking' (p. 80), and stresses the need for research to consider how the attributes of a particular context affect the data that is generated.

In chapter 4, Le Van Canh provides a detailed account of the administrative and interpersonal issues involved in conducting interviews. His study, exploring the beliefs and practices of Vietnamese teachers of English in regards to grammar instruction, illustrates not only the importance of ‘understanding the culture of the interviewees’ (p.98), but also the need to adapt to the idiosyncratic nature of each participant. His evaluation of how research interviews differ from formal conversations is also informative. The commentary, by Alan Maley, further highlights the challenges of interviewing, looking specifically at logistical, contextual, and methodological considerations. As a final note, he addresses Canh’s concern over the unsurprising nature of the results, pointing out how the value of research often ‘extends well beyond its defined objectives’ (p.106).

Chapter 5, by Simon Humphries, discusses the use of observations to examine the attitudes and practices of Japanese teachers toward new learner-centered textbooks. Humphries argues that observations, in conjunction with interviews, can help produce an accurate picture of what teachers think, as behaviour is as strong an indicator of belief as language. However, he astutely remarks how the act of observing inevitably affects the sought after authenticity of practice, and just as how the act of asking affects the act of thinking, so too can observing affect behaviour. The commentary from Jerry Gebhard, himself an experienced observer, presents practical suggestions for managing the various challenges of observation. Gebhard talks about making informed choices and explains how making good decisions often comes down to luck, support, or experience. He also speaks of how important it is to have the right kind of attitude when approaching observations. For example, feeling genuinely privileged and excited to be invited into a classroom is one way researchers can maintain their sense of enjoyment while at the same time facilitate this potentially intrusive process.

The sixth chapter, by Jinrui Li, reports on the methodological implications of using the think aloud (TA) protocol to describe the beliefs and practices of writing tutors at a New Zealand university. Interested in capturing the cognitive processing involved in assessment, Li’s report focuses on the necessity of finding and implementing the most appropriate data collection procedures. As TA has rarely been used in natural assessment contexts, her study serves as an excellent guide for prospective researchers interested in formal evaluation. Finally, Li’s study is one of the few which points to the emergent role of emotions in connection to cognition. Thomas Farrell appreciates the study’s ingenuity and praises its influence in helping advance approaches to studies on assessment. His idea of using TA to explore embedded beliefs and attitudes in addition to understanding practice reflects his own ability to innovate. Farrell’s commentary is particularly useful, as his critiques of how TA was used in the study are coupled nicely with practical suggestions for managing the method.

In chapter 7, Jonathon Ryan reports on how he used stimulated recall (SR) to identify areas of miscommunication in interactions between first and second language speakers. He maintains that, as an introspective methodology, SR was useful in helping uncover some of the cognitive

processes motivating teachers' actions. Ryan provides the only case in the book that highlights the importance of piloting. The book details how Ryan's experiences trialling SR techniques allowed him to hone his skills as an interviewer and how this training helped manage various problems. Susan Gass focuses her commentary on the validity of data generated from SR and what can be done to make studies using this approach as principled as possible. She discusses the problems of different types of verbalisations, explaining how 'recalls are influenced by more than just a recollection of what a participant was thinking' (p.158).

The final chapter, by Jenny Field, discusses the use of oral reflective journals with University English teachers from Timor-Leste. Field explains how oral journals were able to facilitate 'a freedom of expression' (p.170) in generating data that written journals could not have. However, the method's novelty was occasionally distracting. Jill Burton's commentary asks some hard questions regarding the balance between research responsibility and the desire to accommodate participants. She also challenges Field's definition of a journal and the idea that journal data can be more effective in eliciting cognitive process than other interactive spoken procedures. Burton's final points are directed toward the importance of clear and accurate research writing; ideas that should resonate with readers when evaluating academic research texts.

The book is an insightful evaluation of the trials and tribulations of conducting qualitative research on language teacher cognition. The editors explain that it is intended for MA and PhD students, and perhaps supervisors. Indeed, the book would be a useful resource for anyone working with students in this area, as it demonstrates how even the most considered of studies can benefit from alternative views. Although most of the cases are explicitly concerned with eliciting teachers' beliefs, closer examination reveals that language teacher cognition research involves more than the study of perception. In fact, each study clearly illustrates how a myriad of factors, including context, experience, attitude, and emotions, interplay with the development of cognition in practice. The book also brings to light how the act of conducting research can transcend the process of data collection, analysis, and reporting. As readers, we see how emerging researchers experience change by the inherently reflective practice of research; change that will undoubtedly affect both how they think and behave as professionals. Finally, it is important to keep in mind that this book limited its ambition and focused exclusively on experiences with data collection. But as all researchers know, a sound methodology has as much to do with the analysis of data as with the collection. With that said, the possibility for a future project in a similar vein that looks at how language as data of the mind is analysed would be an intriguing and complementary project.

REFERENCES

- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109.