



Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research (Second Edition)

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Book Review:

Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research (Second Edition)

by Garry Barkhuizen, Phil Benson, and Alice Chik
New York, Routledge, 2024, 192 pages, 12 B/W illustrations
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Within the diverse range of methodological choices available to researchers, especially those who find their research orientation leaning towards the qualitative research paradigm, narrative inquiry has emerged as a significant yet understated focus for 21st-century applied linguists, undergraduate students, and postgraduate scholars working on their investigations into language teaching and learning experience. This seemingly new methodological development in applied linguistics has drawn its inspiration primarily from sociological and psychological literature (Barkhuizen, Benson, & Chik, 2014) and thanks to the inspiring work of Connelly and Clandinin (1990) and has eventually transitioned into many other domains, including social sciences and humanities (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber, 1998; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Riessman & Speedy, 2007; Webster & Mertova, 2007), even though narrative inquiry has been practiced before (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). With the increasing scholarly contributions and published empirical research, narrative inquiry has evolved into a vital and multifaceted methodology that, while rooted in sociological and psychological foundations, has gained widespread recognition across various disciplines, particularly in applied linguistics, as an optimal investigative route for exploring lived experience of language teaching and learning.

As the authors have mentioned in the introductory note to the new edition, the second edition of *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research* now includes reference to an updated database of more than 300 recently published empirical research dealing with various issues associated with language teaching and learning research. As a graduate in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), a teacher, and a researcher in English Language Teaching (ELT), I found it both fascinating and revelatory to read both editions alike mainly perhaps due to the clear,

concise, and exemplary manner the text is written keeping in the mind new researchers genuinely interested in narrative inquiry but who have not yet been introduced to a formal narrative inquiry methodology demonstrating its adaptability or research conducted using narrative inquiry as evidence proving its methodological proficiency. The first edition of this excellent publication being the core-text that guided my undergraduate research project on second-language learning experience, it is with utmost certainty of its capacity to instruct researchers active in second-language teaching and learning that the second edition of *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research* is reviewed here.

The text is divided into 6 chapters: *Narrative Inquiry in Applied Linguistics*, *Oral Narratives*, *Written Narratives*, *Visual and Multimodal Narratives*, *Data Analysis in Narrative Inquiry*, and *Reporting Narrative Studies*. Each chapter covers a specific area of discussion, and the content is further presented in the text under numbered and logically sequenced subtopics. The coverage of the subtopics contributes to the totality of each chapter. This six-chapter-structure of the text and the orderly way the major sections and subtopics are arranged have made the text a comprehensive guide as it maintains clarity and smooth flow of the text content when transitioning from one topic to the next. At the outset of chapter one, a brief introductory note to narrative inquiry is provided, locating it in the broader context of applied linguistics while discussing the circumstances that led social science and humanities research to adopt inquiry into narratives as a potential research methodology to investigate lived experience in general. The discussion then shifts to the specific drawing the readers' attention to the application of narrative inquiry in language teaching and learning research by introducing the reader to six broad categories of research based on their approach to narrative or narrative inquiry: *language memoirs*, *studies of language memoirs*, *autobiographical case studies*, *biographical case studies*, *studies of multiple narratives*, and *discourse-based studies*. Each category of narrative research is briefly described supported by examples sourced from actual research conducted in the field of language teaching and learning. The chapter then proceeds to brief the reader on the ethical considerations required in narrative research because data for narrative research primarily emanate from human participants and their life stories are often involved in narrative inquiries. In the final part of the chapter, there is a short overview of potential research topics suitable for narrative inquiry, inviting readers to engage and add their scholarly contributions to this emerging field.

Chapter two introduces the reader to one common unit of analysis in narrative inquiries: oral narratives. The authors recognize open interviews and semi-structured interviews as two working data collection instruments frequently employed to elicit oral narratives of language learning and teaching experiences. The opening portion of the chapter outlines different categories of individuals from various language learning and teaching environments who may be potential participants in narrative research. This involves adult language learners from formal settings, mature learners and heritage language learners from casual learning situations, migrants and students studying abroad in informal settings, and pre-service and in-service language educators from formal educational contexts. In addition, the text includes a concise overview of each category of interviewees, and the introduction to each category is further supplemented with examples sourced from empirical research conducted by various scholars. The chapter then proceeds to a discussion on the application of qualitative interviewing in narrative inquiry, introducing the researchers to structured narrative interviews, semi-structured narrative interviews, and open narrative interviews, along with example questions sourced from the interview protocols of actual research. The reader is further guided by the authors on the feasibility of the durations of the interviews in the data collection of a narrative inquiry with a special focus placed on practical constraints the researcher might encounter, particularly when it comes to the elicitation of the

language learning histories of the participants, which could consume a considerable amount of time. The authors, however, cite examples of published empirical research of both cross-sectional and longitudinal nature to convince the reader of the methodological choices available to them in terms of their research design. The chapter contains a separate section on data transcription that discusses the options available when translating and transcribing interviews, especially when data are collected from multilingual participants. The final section discusses ethical issues that surface when the data collection in narrative research involves probing the participants' personal experiences, potentially compromising their emotional vulnerabilities.

Chapter three introduces the reader to another important data type researchers work with in narrative research: written narratives. The chapter presents examples of several different types of written narrative data produced by both language teachers and learners. This includes diaries, language learning histories, reflective teacher journals, and narrative frames. The first part of the chapter outlines various contexts in which such retrospective narrative accounts are written for the purposes of inquiry. This is followed by a description of example empirical studies which illustrate the narrative data types constructed in these contexts. In each instance, the data and the data-collection procedures are described with examples sourced from actual research with the purpose that they serve an instructive purpose for readers guiding them through the methodological terrains of narrative inquiry while providing clarity on how to effectively design, implement, and analyse research in a manner that fosters the reader's understanding and application of written narrative data. The authors conclude the chapter with a brief discussion of some of the challenges and ethical considerations the researchers might face when working with written narrative data given their personal and retrospective nature.

Chapter four offers six example studies on the production and use of visual and multimedia narrative data, featuring photographs, language portraits, arts-based multimodal texts, timelines, digital histories of language learning, and online language learning histories. The initial portion of the chapter outlines various situations in which such narratives are constructed or elicited for investigative purposes. The three studies cited illustrate the narrative data types and their application. In each case the data collection process is described in detail with the purpose that this serves an instructive purpose for readers. The chapter is concluded with a brief discussion of some of the ethical issues that are particularly relevant to the elicitation, use, and storing of visual and multimedia narrative data in narrative inquiries.

Chapter five presents the reader an introductory guide to data analysis and data analysis procedures employed in narrative inquiry research as a qualitative research methodology. The authors begin their discussion with a special emphasis placed on the iterative, emergent, and interpretive nature of qualitative research in general and how it applies to narrative research. In doing so, the authors seem to encourage the reader to establish and work within a broader methodological framework during the data analysis process of their studies. The chapter continues to introduce the reader to various data analysis methods available, including thematic analysis as a more general data analysis method and several discourse-based data analysis methods: metaphors, narrative structure, positioning analysis, and self-authoring theory. The chapter also discusses different approaches adopted in constructing narrative accounts such as biographical approaches, autobiographical approaches, and collaborative approaches. The latter part of the chapter is allocated for a note on maintenance of the systematicity of the findings of narrative data analysis through rigour, trustworthiness, and generalizability given the interpretive and non-objective nature of qualitative research.

Chapter six introduces the reader to the final phase of a narrative inquiry research: reporting. The authors begin the section pointing to the non-straightforward nature of conducting

narrative research and that, for example, planning for the reporting begins at the start of the research process as following the steps of conventional social science research is difficult due to iterative, emergent, and interpretive nature of narrative studies. The authors, however, cite example step-by-step methodologies other scholars had incorporated into their studies when reporting findings to provide the reader with a range of methodological options available for reporting narrative studies. The chapter also discusses six important variables that need to be considered when constructing narrative reports: the participant(s), the research topic, the researcher(s), the audience, the purpose of the research, and the structure of the report. The authors further provide clarity on how reporting varies according to the genre of the academic texts, for example, from reporting in journal articles, term papers, or book chapters to reporting in lengthy documents such as master's level and PhD research.

One standout feature of this excellent publication is the exemplary way it is written providing step-by-step guidance to both seasoned and novice qualitative researchers and even student teachers genuinely interested in conducting narrative inquiries to research language teaching and learning experiences through retrospective narrative accounts. Given the fact that narrative inquiry is still a relatively new qualitative research methodology, the need for a comprehensive research handbook for interested researchers is exceptionally catered to in the second edition of *Narrative Inquiry in Language Teaching and Learning Research*. In addition, the exhaustive task of referencing published empirical research to exemplify the instructional guidelines given in the book, methodological options available for the researchers, and the areas in language teaching and learning open for exploration is particularly commendable.

Even though this text serves an exemplary instructive role in guiding the researchers, the inclusion of a point for reflection or a strategy-building question at least at the conclusion of each chapter would have been advantageous for the reader. The addition of such an extra feature, while encouraging the reader to ponder beyond the text and critically examine the methodology presented to them in the text, would have brought no harm to the expertise with which the text has been authored. Instead, it would have allowed the author to connect with the reader in a more insightful discussion given the confusions and methodological anxieties that typically arise when conducting qualitative research in general. In addition, although existing empirical studies are aptly referenced in the text, adding a recommended reading list at the end of each major topic would have enhanced the reader's comprehension of the theoretical backdrop and the philosophical line of thinking behind narrative inquiry research. In doing so, the authors could have encouraged the researchers to structure their narrative inquiries with a strong theoretical foundation and a rationalised methodology.

The collective efforts of the authors in aligning narrative inquiry with the field of second language teaching and learning, however, are praiseworthy. By consistently citing published scholarly works conducted on language teaching and learning experience, the authors seem to construct a repository of scholarly works related to narrative research while encouraging the researchers interested in narrative inquiry to broaden their research perspective by studying retrospective narrative accounts of language teaching and learning experience. At the same time, when both editions are combined, one can observe that the authors have been striving to formulate a systematic methodological framework for narrative inquiry, a research approach that has been less popular for an extended period, mainly due to the uncertainties that loomed over its methodological uniformity. This comprehensive and reader-friendly work serves as an outstanding introductory guide for researchers who are new to narrative inquiry yet eager to learn and experiment with it, as it establishes a detailed methodological framework to follow when their research design is driven by the narrative inquiry approach.

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