

○ **PATRICIA A. DUFF, *CASE STUDY RESEARCH IN APPLIED LINGUISTICS***

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Case studies are a widely-used research method in applied linguistics today, notably in the context of second language learning, teaching and use. For anyone not acquainted with this qualitative approach, Duff's book serves as an excellent introduction to its distinctive attributes, the associated theoretical issues and to the practicalities of conducting, evaluating and presenting case study research.

In chapter 1, the reader is immediately immersed in the author's study of 'Jim', a Cambodian immigrant to Canada, and his process of English acquisition over a 2.5 year period. This narrative establishes the highly personal and individualist nature of case study research, furnishing insights into the participant's life experiences, the micro-factors that influence the linguistic process under investigation, and the researcher-participant relationship. An evaluation of the case analysis then further foreshadows the theoretical issues and practicalities expanded upon across the next five chapters.

Chapter 2 presents a definition, description and defence of case studies as an inductive, data-driven research method. The definition draws together the "key recurring principles" of various case study descriptions posited in the disciplines of education, psychology, sociology and political science, namely, "boundedness or singularity, in-depth study, multiple perspectives or triangulation, particularity, contextualization and interpretation" (p. 23). Duff next outlines the social science origins of case studies, the general features of qualitative research, and the role of case study research in applied linguistics. Against this background, case studies are characterised as exploratory, descriptive or explanatory "types", relative to the researcher's purpose and underlying philosophy (p. 31). A substantial section of the chapter discusses the advantages and perceived disadvantages of case study method. "Completeness, depth of analysis, and readability", the potential to "generate new hypotheses, models and understandings" about linguistic processes, and the verifications possible in longitudinal case studies, feature in the "pro" side of the argument (p. 43). The main "cons" ascribed to case study research have long been limited generalisability, lack of objectivity and lack of theoretical grounding. Duff argues strongly that case studies do not purport to make general statements about the population at large (pp. 48–53), but "can be seen as a small step toward grand generalisations" (Stake, 2005, p. 448). Secondly, subjectivity, though an inherent characteristic of case studies,

emerges in other types of research as well. Thirdly, the claim that case studies are unguided and atheoretical is uninformed. However, these criticisms need to be taken on board as considerations in contextualising the research objectives, setting up the research design and during the data analysis and interpretation, rather than seen as invalidating fatal flaws.

Chapter 3 showcases the scope of case study research in applied linguistics. It traces the research trends from early structural linguistic and social-psychological investigations to contemporary interpretive explorations of language learning and language behaviour in connection with such factors as identity, agency and language socialisation, to name a few. This thematic diversity is illustrated by many notable examples, among them early studies on the bilingual child (Ronjat, 1913), investigations of individual learner differences (Wong-Fillmore, 1979) and gender in language learning (Norton, 2000). Certainly, Duff need not apologise for the less than “exhaustive” representation in this overview (p. 96). The selection, even if centred on North America, still reflects the multidimensionality of case study research and attests to its contribution in shaping research trends in applied linguistics.

The remaining three chapters guide the reader through the process of organising, conducting and presenting a case study project. In chapter 4, with the aid of a model, Duff first draws attention to the interactive relationship of these phases. She stresses that since the nature of the research problem will influence all subsequent decisions regarding procedures for data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing, researchers must bring to the research design a thorough understanding of their investigative focus and objectives. Readers are then acquainted with some options and strategies for case selection and sampling, which are highlighted as the “most crucial” concerns underpinning the fieldwork activity (p. 114). As mentioned above, these choices will be informed by the theoretical premise and the case study type (e.g. single, multiple, closed, flexible) that are earlier adopted to explore the research questions. Among the considerations for “quality” data elicitation, particular attention is paid to sources of evidence, interview type and method (e.g. structured, thematic, focus group, oral history), observation techniques, triangulation and ethical considerations. The interview event is cast as social interaction between the researcher in the role as interviewer and the participant as respondent, generating “socially-constructed” and “context-dependent” data (pp. 133–134). Here the researcher’s theoretical stance on the meanings, “truth” or knowledge represented therein will have analytical and interpretive implications. Ever mindful of her student audience, Duff produces useful tables of interview tips, question types and interviewer attributes for further clarification, and also comments on the benefits of keeping a research

journal. The ethical issues, discussed in the close of this chapter, centre on the researcher's conduct and responsibilities towards the participants, to ensure they suffer no adverse effects from their involvement in the research project.

Chapter 5 sets out some generally applicable guidelines for the transcription, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of case study data. Included are samples of transcription symbols, transcripts, coding and case analyses (e.g. within- and cross-case) and a summary of evaluation criteria. Here the reader learns, for instance, how to streamline the transcription task by deciding which details (e.g. pause length, non-verbal communication) should be noted to serve the purposes of the study. Such choices will also determine the range and type of transcription symbols to be used. Duff explains that qualitative case studies tend to be associated with *iterative*, *cyclical*, or *inductive* data analysis (p. 159), the process of which effectively begins with data collection. Coding, either manual and/or computer-assisted, is the preliminary analytical step and requires a code; this construct may be derived from themes emerging in words, phrases or statements or have a specific conceptual grounding (e.g. motivation). For an understanding of analytical techniques per se, readers are advised to examine the methods used in case studies relevant to their research interests, but can also refer to interesting examples throughout this chapter. Duff briefly addresses the issues arising for "member checks", the participant review of the researcher's report, and in the last chapter section, defines the evaluation criteria for case studies with respect to validity (e.g. positivist versus interpretive principles) and accuracy. These criteria are grouped into three main areas: sensitivity to readers' needs, use of sound research methods, thoroughness of data collection and analysis (p. 177). The reader is reminded that whatever approaches are adopted, they must again map to the source disciplines, theories and research objectives.

Finally, Chapter 6 deals with the dissemination of the case study results, focusing on the preparation of written reports. This overview begins with audience, publication venue and focus and includes a set of questions designed to aid identification of the target audience, which determines text type and content, and also provides some manuscript specifications. The typical content organisation of social science research reports is illustrated with some examples for articles, a dissertation and other case study reports. Duff also mentions the creative possibilities within the traditional model, and expands on this aspect of the writing process in the sections on stylistic matters and the author's voice. The chapter concludes with suggestions about visual information displays, research ethics, appendices and report evaluation.

This wide-ranging text reads well and proceeds at a lively pace. Particularly engaging are the longer accounts of case studies which draw the reader into the personal dimension

of this kind of project. Sometimes there are moments of information overload, akin to when the richness of data generated in interviews overwhelms case study researchers. Nevertheless, the author has successfully demonstrated that case studies are a versatile, innovative and valuable research method, whose inherent individualistic features do not detract from developing research designs that are just as rigorous and robust as those underpinning quantitative studies. The selected examples, as well as the practical advice, allow prospective researchers to make an informed decision about taking up the case study option. In this way, the book has found its own place amongst the existing literature on qualitative research methodology.

While the text is specifically useful to graduate students in applied linguistics, it would also appeal to budding researchers in the social sciences, and to existing case study *aficionados* who may wish to reflect on and evaluate their own and others' research experiences.

Review by Brigitte Lambert, University of Melbourne.

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