Book review

## Doing Sociolinguistics: A Practical Guide to Data Collection and Analysis

M. Meyerhoff, E. Schleef and L. MacKenzie, Abingdon and New York, Routledge, 2015, Pp. 212, ISBN 978-0-415-69820-7 (pbk), £22.99

Doing sociolinguistics: A practical guide to data collection and analysis, written by Miriam Meyerhoff, Erik Schleef and Laurel MacKenzie, is a very useful guide that can be used as an introductory text for student researchers in classes on research methods. Novice researchers in the field of sociolinguistics need an accessible methodological book to guide them in their data collection and analysis. This edited volume by renowned scholars in sociolinguistics provides readers − and student researchers in particular − a valuable opportunity to learn about the foundational work being done in quantitative and variationist sociolinguistics.

The book is divided into two sections: data collection and data analysis. The first section comprises nine short chapters and the second seven short chapters. It is organised in a coherent narrative style that takes readers through the phases from finding a research topic, collecting and analysing the data to writing the final report. Despite being the product of three sociolinguists' input, the book is so well written, edited and organised that readers may have the impression of a single authorial voice. Each chapter comprises three parts: (1) a brief introduction to the issue, (2) exercises and (3) list of references and recommendations for further reading. By providing exercises in each chapter, the authors challenge their readers to address more complicated issues related to the chapter topic. Moreover, offering a list of more advanced references is very useful for readers who may want to go beyond the scope of the book.

In the first section, Chapter 1 provides a practical introduction exploring how to find a research topic that will be viable and interesting for both the researcher and audience. To achieve this task, especially daunting for novice researchers, the authors offer six ways of
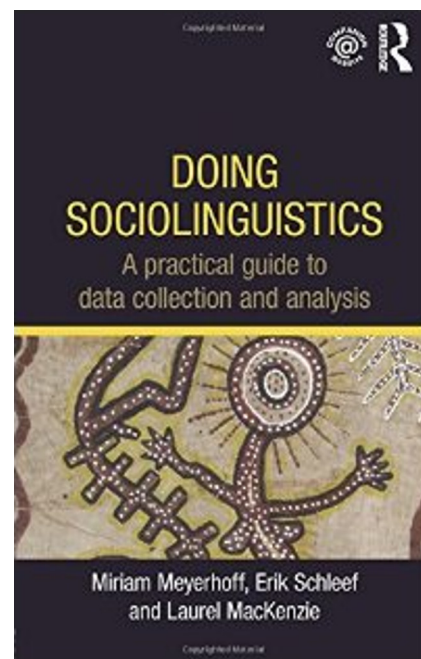
identifying an appropriate research topic. Career is one such way, as finding a related research topic can be valued as benefiting one's professional and career goals. However, the ideas raised as potential research topics based on professional interests are usually broad and need narrowing. Second, researchers may read in their related field and find a specific area that has not been touched upon in existing publications. Third, the researcher's attention may be grasped by observing a real-life phenomenon, giving rise to a wish to identify why/how this is happening and providing another path to finding an applicable research topic. The fourth means is assessing claims made by some authors or papers, checking, for instance, the validity of the data on which such claims are based. Fifth, researchers may seek to challenge a theory, testing it against particular issues. Finally, researchers may find it easier to examine the conclusions of recent research papers, in which the authors tend to recommend future directions of study resulting from their research. For all these six options, the research topic identified should motivate and create interest for the researcher. Once a researcher finds a research topic, it is necessary to draw up a research action plan setting out how this research will be done and over what period, based on the researcher's ability.

After finding a viable and motivating researchable idea, the authors take the readers to the next step in Chapter 2, namely narrowing their research topic by deciding on their focus and how they will investigate the subject of inquiry. In this respect, researchers need to define the variables and constructs/concepts of interest. The authors go into considerable detail concerning variants and defining the envelope of variation. Another important element is determining the research sample, specifically who the participants will be and how many are considered sufficient (based on the amount of data to be gathered from each) and the method of sampling, whether random or purposive; these are issues taken up in later chapters in greater detail. Such decisions of course apply whether the study is qualitative or quantitative. Illustrative examples of how to decide on the size of a sample are also provided.

Obtaining ethical approval to do the research and how researchers secure and archive their data are issues addressed in Chapter 3. Following this, before collecting data, researchers need to secure their access to the research site and also decide on their sample. The authors then provide the readers with four chapters (5−8) on available sources of data they can employ in their data collection process: (i) interviews; (ii) observing and recording naturally occurring speech; (iii) using an existing corpus rather than looking for new data; (iv) conducting questionnaires and surveys to gain a large-scale sample, potentially conferring generalisability. Perceptions and attitudes concerning language, for example, can be studied either directly or indirectly, an aspect on which the authors elaborate in Chapter 9.

The second section is devoted to discussing how data are analysed. The authors begin this section with the first phase of analysis, transcribing oral data into analysable written text. Depending on the aim of the researcher, a relevant transcription convention should be used, as discussed in Chapter 10. Following transcription, the authors discuss the process of

identifying and categorising the data in a logical and coherent way. Chapter 11 includes important information regarding what to include and exclude from the data as relevant and appropriate and whether the researcher is conducting etic or emic coding. As a follow-up, in Chapter 12 the authors go into further detail regarding the analytic stages in the tradition of quantitative variationist sociolinguistics (i.e. dependent and independent variables and testing variables for statistical significance). In Chapter 13, the authors set out how researchers assure clarity and honesty and minimise the possibility of redundancy in presenting their data using appropriate graphs. Chapter 14 goes further and discusses the process of analysis of multiple independent variables via cross-tabulation and checking interactions for significance. Information on how to use multivariate analysis is also offered. In Chapter 15, the authors touch briefly on the analysis of data from mixed methods and how to deal with the combination of qualitative and quantitative data.

The last chapter of this book is dedicated to highlighting how researchers transform their research findings into a coherent and logical research paper. This can be done by dividing the research paper into sections, namely, introduction, literature review, methodology, results, discussion and conclusion. Last but not least, researchers need to choose a suitable title and write an informative abstract.

On the whole, *Doing sociolinguistics: A practical guide to data collection and analysis* is a book that is easy to read and of great benefit, especially for novice researchers. Although it cannot be considered an extensive book, it not only provides a useful guide, but also points to further reading resources for those who want more information. The inclusion of exercises at the end of each chapter is another valuable resource for both instructors and student/novice researchers, enabling the latter to assess their understanding. Indeed, having such a methodological book edited by well-known figures and devoted to the field of sociolinguistics is a very useful resource for novice researchers. I would highly recommend reading this book together with Meyerhoff's (2015) *Introducing sociolinguistics*.

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Reference

Meyerhoff, M. (2015). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. Abingdon/ New York: Routledge.