

BOOK REVIEWS ◊ CRITIQUES DE LIVRES

Projects in Linguistics: A Practical Research Guide to Researching Language, by Alison Wray, Kate Trott and Aileen Bloomer. London: Arnold, 1998. Pp xv, 303. Can \$38.50.

The goal of this book is to provide undergraduate linguistics students with the knowledge and tools necessary to write good essays. As noted by the authors, students are expected to somehow know what good research looks like, how researchers express themselves and where to look for sources, but seldom receive direct tuition in these areas. While an alert student may pick up this knowledge from tutorials, readings and feedback on written assignments, many students will not. Thus the role of this book is to provide students with sources and details of these kinds of information.

Following a useful introduction which focuses the student on such general matters as choosing an area of research, organizational strategies, finding resources, expectations of the instructor, time management, etc., the authors divide the remaining chapters into three sections: areas of study and project ideas; techniques for collecting data; tools for data analysis and project writing. The first part, 'Areas of study and project ideas', comprises roughly half the book and from my perspective is the most innovative part of the book in that it provides a large amount of information not readily available in other single sources. This section provides chapters on the following sub-areas of linguistics: psycholinguistics, first language acquisition and development, conversational analysis, second language acquisition, style in texts, sociolinguistics, accents and dialects of English, structure and meaning, historical linguistics, and language and gender.

Each chapter begins with a brief overview of the kinds of questions the sub-discipline is interested in and then provides a graded and annotated bibliography of text books and a list of the major journals covering the area. Subsequently, it introduces the central themes of the area, providing additional references, and then lists project ideas for each theme. A number of the chapters also have a section on terminology to help students to interpret the field and different researchers' perspectives, e.g., the difference between dialect and accent, language acquisition vs. language development, gender vs. sex, TEFL vs. TESL vs. TESOL.

The chapters are variable in their depth of discussion and in the number of the suggested projects, as might be expected given the difference in the range of issues covered by the various fields and the status of our knowledge about them. For example, the chapter on second language acquisition

suggests 39 different projects corresponding to 11 different themes whereas the chapter on style in texts presents 11 projects for 6 themes. Part of the difference in breadth and depth of chapters results from the somewhat arbitrary division of areas. For example, some projects in 'Language and gender' could have been included in 'Style', others in 'Sociolinguistics'. Similarly, some topics listed in 'Historical' could have been listed in 'Accents and dialects' and vice-versa. In this regard, most of the projects listed in the chapter on 'Structure and meaning' could be reallocated to other chapters.

According to the authors, the chapter on structure and meaning looks at 'some of the research that might fall under the headings of grammar, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics' (110). Of course, many projects listed in other chapters entail research that might also fall under the headings of grammar, syntax, morphology, semantics and pragmatics. Of the four projects listed in the section on sentence structure, two of them could have been included in the chapter on style (compare accounts of an event by different newspapers, and compare the writing of a 9-, 11- and 13-year old) and two included within psycholinguistics (compare the processing of garden path sentences in two languages by native and non-native speakers of the languages, and collect slips of the tongue and account for them structurally). Similarly, several projects in the section on morphology and etymology could have been included in either historical or sociolinguistics, as could some of those listed under punctuation and 'correct' grammar. Even several projects listed under pragmatics and under lexicon and collocation would easily fit in other chapters. Consequently, students should be advised to use the quite adequate index to look for projects on a given topic.

Not only are the suggested projects varied in topic, but also in sophistication. Some could be carried out by first-year university students, or even advanced high school students with little background in linguistics; others could easily be turned into honours or even masters theses. For example, one suggested psycholinguistics project tests whether reading is mediated by phonological processing. This entails creating a number of different kinds of sentences, presenting them on a computer screen, measuring reaction times to them, and then performing statistical analysis on the data. In comparison, a suggested style project looks at whether business letters written today follow the same conventions as those written in the 1930s.

Following the chapters in 'Areas of study and project ideas' is a section on techniques of data collection which provides short chapters on audio and video recording, experiments, questionnaires and interviews, obser-

vation and case studies. While none of the chapters provides in-depth discussion, each presents basic information and helpful hints for the student who may be reluctant or unable to seek help from the instructor. For example, in interview situations, asking direct questions about language 'does not always produce useful results' (183). Or, when recording, get informants to identify themselves on tape so as to have a reference to link their voice and name later. A common thread running through all these chapters is the advice to run a pilot study, rehearsing questions/interview techniques and practicing with equipment before embarking on the real project—things students are all too often apt to ignore.

The last section of the book, 'Tools for data analysis and project writing' includes not only information about tools for analysis and writing, but also a chapter on transcribing speech phonetically and phonemically and one on orthographic transcription. Among the 'tools' treated are the use of computers to study texts, statistics and abstracting services. There are also chapters on referencing, avoiding plagiarism, 'handy hints on writing good academic English' and one on the British Data Protection Act.

As with the section on data collection, this part of the volume can provide only the briefest introduction to the topics treated. Nevertheless, the information included is, for the most part, quite useful for the student with little background. The chapter on statistics, written by Chris Butler, assumes no background and provides a very basic primer of essential terminology and symbols and explains why statistical analysis is needed and how statistics are used in testing hypotheses. While the chapter clearly will not provide students with tools to undertake statistical analysis, it will equip them with rudimentary information to help them interpret the statistics in articles they may read.

In contrast, the chapter on phonetic and phonemic transcription assumes considerable sophistication on the part of the reader, substantially more than could be assumed for many undergraduate students. For example, students are warned: 'Beware of using phonemic script [as opposed to phonetic]: there are hidden implications within it which, if not accounted for, could seriously compromise the validity of your analysis.' (196). How many undergraduate students would understand the significance of the warning? The authors do, however, clarify the issue somewhat two pages later by noting: 'Despite what most of the books imply there is *not* simply one inventory of phonemes for English.' (198). They then provide a checklist of RP English phonemes, and a list of key words which students can use to elicit and analyze data from other dialects.

While overall the book will be quite useful to students, it does have a rather British orientation. For example, the majority of the lower level texts referred to in the chapters are British and to my knowledge not generally used in Canada, whereas many texts which are in use at Canadian universities are not listed. As might be expected in a book written in Britain for British students, the chapter on accents and dialects of English is largely British both in its suggested projects (although some could be easily adapted to the North American context) and in its references. No mention is made of the journal *American Speech*.

In spite of its British orientation and the unevenness in scope and depth of the chapters, each of the major sections provides a great deal of valuable and useful information for any student undertaking a project in linguistics. Consequently, this is a book which should be in the library of any university which offers courses in linguistics.

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