Book Review

RESEARCH METHODS IN CHILD LANGUAGE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE. By Erika Hoff, ed. First Edition. Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2012. 362 pp. $39.72 (paperback).

Research Methods in Child Language: *A Practical Guide* is edited by *Erika Hoff* who is currently a professor of Psychology at Florida Atlantic University. She is also the author of *Language Development* (2009), co-editor of *The Blackwell Handbook of Language Development* (2007), and *Childhood Bilingualism*: *Research on Infancy Through School Age* (2006). The book, being thorough and insightful, presents a comprehensive survey of diverse laboratory and naturalistic techniques used in the study of different domains of language, age ranges and populations. Throughout this book, the authors cite studies proposing the diverse methods researchers utilize to study child language development, providing explanations of the procedures used and the questions addressed by each technique.

Each chapter contributes to the development of the methods explored and describes the obstacles encountered in refining these methods. The authors present new research methods, for example, the use of functional Near Infrared Spectroscopy (fNIRS) to study the activity of the brain, while also expanding on more traditional ones, such as transcription and coding of speech samples that have been transformed by new hardware and software. The researchers describe the research aims their methods serve, their details of the implementation, and their data type, while discussing the alternative methods available and their attendant (dis)advantages. In many cases, the chapters are part personal travelogue, describing the researcher's journey from the research aim to the method.

Erika Hoff has collected a frequently important and always provocative set of 22 readings on four themes: (i) studying infants and others using nonverbal methods; (ii) assessing language knowledge and processes in children; (iii) capturing children's language experience and language production; and (iv) studying multiple languages and special populations. She opens the book by focusing on laboratory techniques not requiring language production from the participants. In Chapter 1, Fennell describes habituation procedures and their easy-to-complement use in studying infants' discrimination of the smallest meaningful units of sound. In Chapter 2, Piotroski and Naigles describe the 'preferential looking method' (p. 17) used to assess early language comprehension for typically developing and autistic children. In Chapter 3, Swingley describes the 'looking-while-listening' (p. 29) procedure, closely examining children's interpretation of spoken language. Emphasizing the growing expertise in developmental cognitive neuroscience, Kovelman, in Chapter 4, one of the best readings of this book, reviews the brain imaging techniques (e.g. ERP, fMRI and fNIRS) used to peek into the neural activity of infants and older children while processing language. In Chapter 5, Golinkoff and Hirsh-Pasek provide a historical overview of the development of these methods used to study language in infants.

The second part of this book surveys methods assessing language knowledge and processes in children who produce speech. In Chapter 6, Core reviews methods used to assess children's phonological development. In Chapter 7, Pan surveys vocabulary development and its assessment techniques with relative methodological

and logistical (dis)advantages for each. In Chapter 8, Ambridge does likewise for methods of assessing grammatical knowledge, focusing in particular on the 'graded grammaticality judgement paradigm' (p. 118), which allows children to provide graded judgments for sentences and lexical forms. In Chapter 9, Reese, Sparks and Suggate profile the 'story retelling technique' (p. 133) to study different aspects of children's narratives.

The following three chapters introduce three different techniques to uncover children's underlying linguistic knowledge and online processing in different domains. McKercher and Jaswal describe the use of different judgement tasks for studying children's understanding of syntactic/semantic structures (Chapter 10). Vasilyeva Waterfall and Gómez describe the 'syntactic priming paradigm' (p. 162) to explore the nature of early syntactic knowledge (Chapter 11). Trueswell describes 'child eye tracking' (p. 177) technique, inspecting the link between measurements of eye position and children's attention, reference, and sentence parsing (Chapter 12).

The third part is the use of naturalistic methods to capture children's spoken language production and comprehension. This part describes methods used to record, transcribe and codify samples of caregiver–child interaction (Chapter 13), methods used to study the gestures children produce and observe in communication (Chapter 14), the 'dense sampling procedure' (p. 226) and 'dense databases' (Chapter 15), techniques that aim for even more than a dense sample (Chapter 16), and approaches to capturing teacher-child interactions in preschool classrooms (Chapter 17). Chapter 18 has worked among the best, where Corrigan introduces us to the data archive and analysis tools that are the 'Child Language Data Exchange System' (p. 271), which contain a rich and useful set of transcriptions of language production in standardized format.

The fourth part mainly explores how to study populations other than typically developing monolingual children acquiring English. In Chapter 19, Küntay discusses crosslinguistic and comparative language development research, as a flexible framework covering a wide range of research techniques. In Chapter 20, Rumiche and Hoff outline the challenges of research with bilingually developing children, discussing methods for measuring properties of bilingual environments. In Chapter 21, McGregor summarizes unique methodological issues in the study of children with language impairment. In Chapter 22, Abbeduto, Kover and McDufie describe the special challenges and their own methods to measure language in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In sum, this is a useful collection of readings that aims to present a comprehensive introduction to some of the timely questions of child language. Each paper can be an accessible guide to a non-specialist to enlarge their understanding of how researchers depend on an array of tools to better understand children's language skills and knowledge at different levels of development, as the underlying knowledge and language acquisition mechanisms are 'hidden inside the mind of the child' (p. xvi). The writers finally point out a timely word of caution when interpreting the results of any single measure and recognize the importance of a 'multi-pronged assessment' (p. 342) using different measures to tap the same construct.

Furthermore, although at times frustration might be anticipated for the reader since the authors have raised problems more than they have provided solutions, fairly reasoning that some of these fields (e.g. childhood bilingualism) are relatively new, quite paradoxically, researchers can significantly gain insights from these newer trends for their own research. All in all, achieving one of its important aims, this collection has provided more procedural detail about each method than can be included in a

journal article, and it has also proved to be more readable than the necessarily dense prose of an APA-style method section.

Finally, Erika Hoff's book, though perhaps of limited use to individuals interested to learn more about a single method of research, will undoubtedly prove to be an invaluable resource for advanced students beginning research in the field, for established researchers embarking on new directions and for readers of the scientific literature who would like more background on the procedures that yielded the data they are reading about. Furthermore, the information presented throughout the book will be of immense benefits to an institution's library or to a lecturer or supervisor to provide for their students and researchers. Hence, *Research Methods in Child Language* is an essential tool for all in the field of child language.

Alireza Jalilifar and Seyyedeh Elham Elhambakhsh
English Language & Literature, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz, Ahvaz, Iran