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I ARTICLES

QUALITATIVE vs. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON FL TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT. Part 1 of the article contains a discussion of quantitative research projects described as structuralistic, deductive, statistical and objective. Main lines of criticism directed against quantitative research projects are also presented.

Part 2 contains characteristic of qualitative research projects described as holistic, inductive, descriptive and subjective. Theoretical affiliation of qualitative research projects to ethnomethodology, ethnography, phenomenology is also analyzed.

Part 3 deals with possibilities of applying qualitative research assumptions to classroom research in general and to research on foreign language classrooms in particular.

1. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS

The first type of research we would like to analyze in the present paper is most commonly referred to as experimental or empirical. Considering the fact that most projects in applied linguistics and language teaching fall into this category, it seems appropriate to present its main characteristics. They are the following:

a) The quantitative approach is based on two major premises: first that human behaviour is essentially rule-governed and second, that it should be investigated by the methods of the natural sciences (Cohen 1982).

b) The main objective is here to test a theory. Thus, theory construction comes first, followed by the formulation of hypotheses based on empirical consequences of the theory.

c) Theory testing is achieved by means of finding evidence to prove or disprove hypotheses held before entering the study.

d) Research goals, therefore, are to establish the facts and describe them statistically, thus showing relations between variables and arriving at set of predictions.

e) The research design prepared within the conceptual framework of the quantitative research is structured, formal and specific and, as such, forms a detailed plan of operation (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

Research questions pertain to what is observable and measurable. Therefore, factors under investigation have to be translated into operationalized variables, the indicators of which have to be listed in order to permit, data collection.

g) Data collection follows the quantitative, statistical requirements which promote the utilization of quantifiable coding counts and tests based on psychometric principles.

h) Research is carried out on large, stratified samples, preferably arrived at by randomization, with the goal of ensuring the broad generalizability of the results obtained.

i) Outcomes in quantitative research are considered to be more important than the ways leading to them. To put it otherwise, processes are here less interesting for the researchers than products, and in the case of their being of interest, their nature is inferred through products rather than through direct, interpretive, observational studies.

j) Research design common in the quantitative approach is typically experimental or quasi-experimental, with a considerable amount of control over extraneous variables. Diagnostic research projects are based on structured interviews, structured observation, and tests checked for reliability and validity.

The normative type of empirical research can thus be labelled

- quantitative vs. qualitative,
- structuralistic vs. holistic,
- deductive vs. inductive,
- statistical vs. descriptive and
- objective vs. subjective.

Most of the research projects falling into the quantitative category have been criticized for overemphasising generalized categories used in the coded observational systems. Categories of the type "teacher asks questions" and "student responds" are used, which "lend themselves primarily to frequency measurement and say nothing of the unique and qualitative dimensions of classroom interaction" (Sevigny 1981).

It seems appropriate to quote Speier (Speier 1973) who writes, "What is

treated as a relevant problem of study are the types of teacher influence used in the classroom is solved by the quantitative inspection of the amount a teacher talks, a student talks, or the amount of silence of both. But what is amount of talk? The number of words per minute? The number of sentences? Is the teacher's silence equivalent to the student's silence? What is silence? Is it merely the measured interval of time between two uttered sounds? Or might it be something much more subtle, such as unwillingness to speak when called upon to do so, or a pause in the middle of one's remark that clearly belongs to that person and to that remark?"

The general reservation is, thus, connected with the basic feature of quantitative research projects, i.e. with their concentration on measurable facts rather than on their meanings. Reasons for the insufficiency of frequency counts in classroom research are the following:

- the organization is typically being manifested in several locales simultaneously,
- the organization has typically been in existence for some time before the scientist undertook his study,
- many of its features or determinants are only imperfectly inferrable by direct observation (Sevigny 1981).

The strongest attack on the quantitative research tradition has been made by Delamont and Hamilton (Delamont and Hamilton 1974) supported a decade later by a follow-up to their methodological considerations (Delamont and Hamilton 1984).

Here are some of the main lines of their criticism:

- a) Temporal and special contexts are regularly ignored in data collection.
- b) Data collection is concerned with overt, observable behaviour, taking no account of different intentions that might lie behind such behaviour.
- c) This leads to overemphasis given measurable data at the cost of more meaningful qualitative features.
- d) It also leads to the superabundance of data that – in order to be processed at all – have to be linked into broader categories. This renders it impossible to avoid investigating global concepts against the original intentions of quantitative research designers.
- e) Quantitative research projects are based on categories which place arbitrary boundaries on continuous phenomena, thus creating an initial bias.
- f) The most important argument deals with the prespecification of categories. As Delamont and Hamilton put it, "If the category systems are intended to assist explanation, then prespecification may render the explanations tautological. That is category systems may assume the truth of what they claim on the assumption that the teacher is in the same position as the leader of a T-group,

any explanation of "teaching" in other terms is not possible" (Delamont and Hamilton 1974).

What, therefore, becomes indispensable in order to arrive at a less biased corpus of data is the ability to "qualify through the screens of the participant" instead of "quantifying through the screen of the observer", to use Sevigny's terms (Sevigny 1981).

It has been noted (Hutson 1981) that the aim of allowing the researcher to take into account the different viewpoints of various participants is most often attained by anthropological research using emergent methodologies, all of them being most commonly labelled as located within the frames of the qualitative research to which we now turn.

2. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECTS

2.1. Characteristics of qualitative research projects

The second type classroom research is most commonly referred to as anthropological, microethnographical, naturalistic or ecological. Its main characteristics are the following (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

a) Data collection takes place in a natural classroom setting and is carried out by a researcher who, owing to his subjective knowledge of the context gained through a considerable amount of time spent on the premises, supplements information obtained by his personal understanding. Therefore, as Sara Delamont puts it, "anthropological classroom studies are based on participant observation during which the observer immerses himself in the new culture. That is, they involve the presence of the observer (or observers) for prolonged periods of time in a single or a small number of classrooms". (Delamont and Hamilton 1974).

b) Classroom research of the type under discussion is descriptive in nature. Results are presented in the form of narration, rather than in the form of tables filled out with statistical data. Conclusions and interpretations are based on raw observational data, which is considered similar to decision-making processes in every day situations (Hymes 1977). Data collection and presentation is thus qualitative rather than quantitative and is often referred to as anecdotal.

This springs from the tendency to concentrate on interpersonal interaction taking place in the classroom with the aim at noting down minute sequences of events as well as their contents (Tikunoff and Ward 1980). Attention is, therefore, given to what might be considered trivial by representatives of more quantitative approaches. Research reports often contain quotations or ample

accounts of different views of the situation taken by interaction participants. This makes it possible to reestablish the contextual data dismissed or unaccounted for by quantitative research projects (Ericsson 1977).

c) The type of research presently discussed is more concerned with processes than it is with products and findings. The researcher's attention is given to what is going on in the classroom context, to meanings that are ascribed to the situation by the participants, as well as to means by which the final objectives are normally attained. The research objective might, therefore, be formulated as "to find out how things happen", to quote Bogdan, "the day-to-day process of interaction is richly portrayed. This kind of study focuses on how definitions (teacher's definitions of students, students' definitions of each other and themselves) are formed" (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

d) Classroom research is based on a holistic view of social and educational phenomena. The social context in which teaching and learning, take place, viewed in terms of group processes, individual and group expectations, perspectives on participant behaviour, etc., should be analyzed as a whole, due to the fact that its components are strongly interrelated as to render any study of independent variables virtually impossible.

e) Data are analyzed inductively, which means that no evidence is sought to falsify or verify the hypotheses set forth before starting the research proper. No specific categories are built to collect data accordingly, as no distinct views are held by the observer before entering the study. Early prognosis of trends in research data are considered preconceptions which might unnecessarily bias the final results. This is in clear opposition to quantitative research in which hypotheses formulation and category construction are considered indispensable steps in the preparation of congruent and logical research design. The theory thus developed is called "grounded theory" (Glaser and Strauss 1967). To quote Bogdan again, "You are not putting together a puzzle whose picture you already know. You are constructing a picture which takes shape as you collect and examine parts. The process of data analysis is like a funnel: things are open at the beginning (or top) and more directed and specific at the bottom" (Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

f) The main objective of classroom research of a qualitative type is to discover meanings; emphasis is thus given to a detailed description of the participants in teaching/learning processes make sense of their activities as well as to a detailed account of their differing perspectives on the situation in which they find themselves. This is in opposition to the quantitative approach which permitted and encouraged a behavioural perspective allowing the researcher to dismiss participant perspectives as irrelevant to research findings.

The new type of classroom research can, therefore, be labelled

- qualitative vs. quantitative,
- holistic vs. structuralistic,

- inductive vs. deductive,
- descriptive vs. statistical and
- subjective vs. objective.

2.2 Theoretical affiliation

The approach bearing the above characteristic is rooted in the non-behavioural and non-structuralist tradition of psychological and sociological thought. Its theoretical affiliation is to

- ethnomethodology,
- ethnography and
- phenomenology.

Phenomenology, as developed by Husserl, found its way into the social sciences through the work of Alfred Schutz, thus giving rise to a considerable number of new ideas in the field of sociological and educational research. The main theoretical construct in phenomenological sociology is intentionality defined as the process of attaching meanings to an individual's activities according to his system of relevance. Adopting the phenomenological perspective, the researcher is thus interested in subjective aspects of human behaviour rather than in facts, or, to put it otherwise, facts are being investigated inasmuch as they make it possible to understand "the point of view" of the participant in a given interaction. This entails a considerable shift of emphasis from a seemingly objective view of the situation to the reconstruction of a number of subjective views of it, equalling the number of interaction participants, and, in consequence, to the investigation of interrelations between participant perspectives. In educational research, this might be understood as a call for a thorough analysis of the teacher's and individual learner's perspectives on the classroom situation, language learning processes included, as well as for attempts to explain the similarities and differences between these perspectives in order to understand the complexity of their interrelations in the classroom context.

Ethnomethodology can be viewed as one of the applications of the phenomenological approach to sociological studies. The branch of sociological research, thus labelled, groups projects whose aim is to study how people account for facts within particular settings (Seigny (1981), what background expectations they cherish, and upon which definitions and interpretations of their situation they decide to act. The term "ethnomethodology" was coined by Harold Garfinkel after the model of "ethnobotany", "ethnomusic" etc., terms referring to the way tribal groups understand and order their environment

(Garfinkel 1968). Investigating those individual perspectives entails the so-called bracketing process, which consists in suspending researcher's assumptions and world views rather than taking them as a starting point of their research. An illuminating example of individual perspectives can be quoted from Bogdan and Biklen (Bogdan and Biklen 1982): "... it is suggested that it is not the rules, regulations, norms or whatever that are crucial in understanding behavior, but these are defined and used in specific situations. A high school may have a grading system, an organizational chart, a class schedule, a curriculum. People act, however, not according to what the school is supposed to be, or what administrators say it is, but rather, according to how they see it. For some, high school is primarily a place to meet friends, or even a place to get high; for most, it is a place to get grades and amass credits so they can graduate – tasks they define as leading to college or a job. The definitions they have determine their actions, although the rules and the credit system may set certain limits and impose certain costs, and thus effect their behavior. Organizations vary in the extent to which they provide fixed meanings and the extent that alternative meanings are available and created." In educational and applied linguistic research, this might imply a need to pay more attention to the way learners define their situation as pupils of a given school rather than as pure language learners, and to the way a teacher perceives the complexity of his functioning as an employee as well as group leader, rather than merely as a source of linguistic data. It might also be viewed as a call for the investigation of the process of change connected with the formation of new perspectives, redefining situations according to new factors, negotiating meanings in the case of conflicting definitions, the investigation of shared knowledge of participants – i.e. problems set forth by researchers working within the conceptual framework of symbolic interactionism formulated and developed by G.H. Mead and his followers.

Ethnography is another field in which theoretical underpinnings of qualitative research might be sought. The term often considered controversial – refers to participant observation research in which the observer immerses himself in the new culture in order to discover the broad socio-cultural context of the educational process. Projects completed within this tradition are sometimes called "anthropological classroom studies", "ecological school studies" or "microethnographies of the school class" (Delamont and Hamilton 1974). Classroom research thus labelled is well rooted in both phenomenological and ethnomethodological tradition. The school or the school classroom is here treated as a microscopic social system in which linguistic and educational factors are deeply related to the interpersonal structure and should not be analyzed in isolation. The trend can be briefly summarized as an attempt to avoid the decontextualization of linguistic and educational data which had

keeper. In contrast to that, he points out basic features of school life which

previously been promoted as a theoretical short-cut in arriving at broad linguistic or educational generalizations. So far, an approach of this kind has been adopted in purely sociolinguistic research, now it is being promoted in the field of sociology and education. Its basic assumptions seem applicable to the analysis of educational processes leading to foreign language acquisition in the school context. The growing number of socioeducational studies based on the qualitative paradigm led to the foundation of the Council on Anthropology and Education in 1968. Since then, microethnographical methods have been applied not only to research designs on ethnic differences in school, but also to the analysis of differing perspectives of teachers and learners as members of the microcosm of social relations forming the classroom or the school context. Examples of research projects carried out in this vein are multiple and all of them cannot be discussed within the confines of the present article. It would, however, seem appropriate to present here some main trends in classroom research, and to this we now turn.

2.3. CLASSROOM RESEARCH – TRENDS AND EXAMPLES

One of the first research projects based on the assumptions of anthropological and ethnographical studies, completed by L. Smith and R. Geoffrey, was published in 1968. As with most of the early studies prepared within the conceptual framework of qualitative research, it was launched by an anthropologist and a teacher who carried out observations in an urban classroom for a period of six months. Observational data consisted of detailed notes coming from participant observation carried out by the classroom teacher as a co-author of the study, as well as of data coming from notes taken by the other co-author, who was an anthropologist. Data were then supplemented by a considerable number of interviews with the students. The main objective of the research under discussion was to analyze the teacher's decision-making process, his way of setting standards and maintaining classroom discipline. Problems of encouraging learner participation in the school class were also examined. The qualitative nature of the research permitted the author to discover patterns of interpersonal negotiation as, for instance, between the teacher and a group of slow learners.

Rist's "Student Social Class and Teacher Expectations: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy in Ghetto Education" is another project employing a number of ethnographic procedures. The emphasis here was given to the social organization of the school class, to interpersonal behavioural norms and to roles taken by learners and their teachers. Research revealed the nature of the labelling process leading to the distinction between so-called slow and bright

learners on the basis of the degree of their identification with particular groups and social classes as viewed by the teacher.

Still another study of a typically qualitative nature can be found in Brian Torode's "Teachers' Talk and Classroom Discipline", published in 1976, where the author examines ways of maintaining classroom discipline through the use of language. The research revealed the significance of the teacher's ability to clearly define classroom situation, learners' tasks and his own expectations via language.

An important study now functioning as a milestone in qualitative research was completed by Sara Delamont and published in 1976 as "Interaction in the Classroom." John Eggleston describes Delamont's work as "the first distinctively sociological account of life in the classroom." He goes on to say that "She shows how social interaction is influenced by the educational regime and history of the school, the location and architecture of the room, and the perspectives and power positions of teachers and pupils." Here again, a vast number of ethnographical techniques are employed, as data collection comes from long hours of classroom observation rather than interaction analysis category charts, conclusions are based on the observer's interpretation of the nature of the process under examination, wide use is made of quotations and raw observational data, while research itself is open-ended with no hypotheses or rigid research instruments that might prematurely narrow down the research perspective.

An important step in classroom research has also been taken by Peter Woods, who presents an illuminating study of interrelationships functioning in one of the British schools in a publication entitled "Sociology and the School 1983."

Some of the definitions employed by teachers were also investigated by Stephen Richer, who carried out a prolonged observation in the school staffroom. The study revealed among other things, that most teachers consider those students who do not present disciplinary problems to be high achieving ones, and those who do, the low achieving ones. The labelling process and the way individual definitions were worked out were then presented in a publication, "School Effects: The Case of Grounded Theory," published in 1975.

Teachers, their functions, expectations and perspectives, have been subject to qualitative investigations starting from the late sixties. An interesting example of findings pertaining to the subject can be found as early as 1968 in Philip Jackson's "Life in the Classroom". The author suggests that we view the classroom through the perspective of the teacher's "channelling the social traffic in the classroom" (Jackson 1968), thus drawing the reader's attention to the rapidity of the teacher's actions, to his serving as supply sergeant, granting special privileges to deserving students as well as serving as an official time keeper. In contrast to that, he points out basic features of school life which

result from traffic management, e.g. the experiencing of delay as the speed of the group is the speed of its slowest members and as learners have to take turns in using limited resources. Delay is by no means the only consequence of traffic management: others are denial and interruption, since some of the waiting can be in vain – denial often follows delay, while adhering to the time schedule results in a number of activity interruptions. The above description of the classroom context, according to the author, is function of social tradition. The way of coping with institutional demands is, however, idiosyncratic to individual students, whose adaptive styles and reactions to constraints imposed on them is worth investigating.

Adaptive styles and teacher strategies are shaped through initial encounters during which basic role and norm negotiations take place, as has been investigated by Blumer (1969), Hargreaves (1975) and Ball (1980). It has been found that initial encounters consist in testing out the teacher and thus are usually composed of two basic phases: the first stage being passive and observational: the second consisting in opposing the teacher in order to make him clearly delineate his expectations and norms, as well as formulate parameters of control he is seeking to establish over the learner's behaviour (Ball 1980).

It should be noted, however, that some of the teacher's expectations, especially those connected with the tolerable amount of noise in the school class, result from the fact that noise, in the absence of direct observation, serves as a means to assess the teacher's competence by his colleagues and superiors (Denscombe 1980). Some of these expectations, on the other hand, are guided by the teacher's view of his personal effectiveness in terms of attention in class, although it has been demonstrated that overt attention is not always a good indicator of the learner's concentration on a task (Jackson 1969). The amount and the quality of expectations springing from the nature of the subject area taught remains to be discovered.

So far, much has been revealed in the field of teacher strategies adopted within the classroom context. In a study by Waller (1961), the following strategies were pointed out: command, punishment, management or manipulation of personal or group relationships, temper and appeal. Peter Woods takes a slightly different stance by classifying command, punishment and temper as a general survival strategy called domination, labelling all the other strategies as negotiation. Thus, he points out the following survival strategies of teachers:

a) the socialization strategy, i.e. the "teach them right strategy", which aims at the inculcation of the teacher's norms to pupils through various techniques involving identity loss, will-breaking, limiting individual expression and promoting docility and conformity,

b) the domination strategy, i.e. the "keep them down strategy", involving verbal aggression and power conflict aiming at sustaining the teacher's position in controversial situations,

c) the negotiation strategy, also called the "you play ball with me and I'll play ball with your strategy and based on the principle of exchange, e.g. appeals, apologies, flattery, promises or threats,

d) the fraternization strategy, sometimes labelled as the "if you can't beat them, join them strategy", involving instances of isolating oneself from adult interaction and assuming the language and style of the learners in order to establish good relations with the pupils, who will then cause less trouble and feel an increased sense of obligation,

e) the removal strategy, sometimes labelled as the "teaching would be all right if it wasn't for the pupils strategy" and based on spiritual absence or deconcentration demonstrated in failing to pay attention, ignoring problems, wasting time etc,

f) the routine strategy, often termed the "you'll be all right once you get into the hang of things strategy", which increases the social control element by increasing respect for the ritualized order at the cost of developing mainly mechanical skills,

g) the occupational therapy strategy, also called the "it passes the time strategy", based on the principle of increasing classroom control and respect for the teacher through assigning tasks aimed at keeping learners busy rather than leading them to the attainment of particular curricular objectives, and

h) the morale-boosting strategy, often called the "we have to believe strategy", which is found to be a survival procedure accounting for all the former survival strategies adopted in order to neutralize the survival problem by rhetoric and laughter aimed at the increase of teaching staff cohesiveness as a group.

In other research attention has been given to the way teachers as participants in classroom communication take active steps to monitor that system. M. Stubbs, for instance, demonstrated that classroom teachers use language with primarily metacommunicative functions, e.g. for attracting attention, controlling the amount of speech, checking or confirming understanding, summarizing, defining, editing, correcting or specifying the topic. Research, therefore, reveals that most of what teachers do with language consists in monitoring the working of the communication channels, clarifying and reformulating the language used. It also demonstrates that such metacommunication is highly characteristic of teacher-talk and thus can be called radically asymmetrical as students almost never use language to these ends (Stubbs 1976).

The few examples of qualitative educational research presented above have selected to demonstrate the relevance of their objectives to applied linguistics

and language teaching. It seems difficult if not pointless to carry out research on FL school attainment and language teaching/learning processes in isolation from the classroom context which determines most of the tendencies revealed.

The examples have also been chosen to present the basic characteristics of qualitative research projects, as most of the projects discussed above

- use flexible, general designs instead of more predetermined and structured ones
- seem to be based on research designs formulated after some data have been collected, with no more than a list of suggested areas the research might be relevant to, instead of specific research designs with detailed lists of goals, research objectives and research procedures,
- are carried out on small, nonrepresentative samples rather than on large representative ones.
- present data in the form of descriptions rather than in the form of quantifiable coding counts, and
- arrive at data through observation and non-structured interviews rather than through experiments, structured observation and structured interviews (cf Bogdan and Biklen 1982).

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ABSTRACT New findings in the investigation of the functional asymmetry of the brain shed light on many problems of human cognition. Researcher's foreign language (L2), being a kind of cognition, is subject to its laws. The experiments show that by processing verbal information the left hemisphere applies the analytical strategy and the right hemisphere the holistic one. The probabilistic structure of the world makes the holistic way of processing information very efficient; it's strategy corresponds to the principle of least effort. But working with descriptions of highly probable events and thus having the possibility of using the holistic strategy at the first stages of learning L2, the students fail to master the formal grammatical means of the foreign language and are not able to use the analytical strategy where it is necessary; while dealing with scientific texts whose contents is predictable only to a small degree. The analytical strategy, as running counter the principle of economy, is very difficult to develop. A method, aiming at achieving this goal, is proposed.

However powerful a linguistic analysis may be, it cannot account for all aspects of linguistic performance any more than one predicts linguistic performance without knowledge of linguistics.

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The paper "Muttersprachliches gleich Fremdsprachliches Lesen?" (Kärcher, 1987) in the Journal "Zielsprache Deutsch" states: little has been done so far to clarify the specific character of processing written information in L2. Consequently, much is yet to be done about it.

