

Research within the Field of Applied Linguistics: Points to Consider

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Abstract—Aiming to ensure quality research, the current paper seeks to offer an overview of research within the field of applied linguistics. The paper begins with a brief overview of research within the field of applied linguistics. It then proceeds to highlight a number of essential points relating to research design types, research ethics, and data collection methods. Last but not least, the conclusion sums up the major points pinpointed throughout the paper, making some recommendations for applied linguist researchers to consider.

Index Terms—applied linguistics, EFL, ESL, research

I. INTRODUCTION

What is it that makes a good applied linguist researcher? What does research within the field of applied linguistics require? Aiming to ensure quality research, the current paper seeks to offer an overview of research within the field of applied linguistics, pinpointing some essential issues for applied linguist researchers to consider. The paper begins with a brief discussion highlighting what applied linguistics covers. The paper then discusses a number of research-related issues such as research design types, research ethics and data collection methods, all within the field of applied linguistics.

II. RESEARCH WITHIN THE FIELD OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS: AIM AND SCOPE

It would be helpful to commence the discussion by explaining what applied linguistics is. Both Davies and Elder (2007) believe that applied linguistics deals with sorting out social problems involving language. The main issues/problems applied linguistics usually deals with are how to: teach languages more effectively, enhance the training of translators and interpreters, diagnose speech pathologies more efficiently, evaluate a bilingual programme, set a valid language test, help discuss the language used in a text, decide on the literacy levels of a population study, as well as compare and contrast the acquisition of different languages.

Grabe (2002, p. 10) defines applied linguistics as a ‘practice-driven discipline that addresses language-based problems in real-world contexts.’ Grabe states that to many critics, applied linguistics is not a discipline. According to Schmitt and Celce-Murcia (2002), applied linguistics is using what we know about language, how it is learned, and how it is used, in order to achieve some purpose or solve some problem in the real world. Applied linguistics covers eighteen topic areas as a minimum. These are: language and its acquisition, language and culture, language and cognition, language and the brain, language and media, language and assessment, language and interaction, language and ideology, language and listening, language and instruction, language and reading, language and policy, language and writing, language and speaking, language and society, language and research methodology, language and technology, and language and translation/interpretation. Out of these areas, the dominant area has been second/foreign language acquisition and teaching.

That the term applied linguistics has been shed light on, how can we define research within the field of applied linguistics, based on what we already know? Grant (2010) explains that research in applied linguistics is a process of arriving at answers to questions situated in current understanding, employing a methodologically rigorous way. Research is not about truth but about explanation and utility, that is to say, there is no absolute truth. We do not need to trust the creditability of all previous studies within our areas of specialisation and concern. Instead, we need to gather sufficient data and check it out. Anything we claim to be true should be falsifiable. Research is inspired by enquiry; a question/a number of questions about which the researcher is curious and eager to find logical answers. Research questions, therefore, need to be measurable, answerable, well-formulated, investigative, and appropriate to the field of enquiry as well as to today’s requirements and aspirations. Five main characteristics of research within applied linguistics are: empirical, logical, reductive, planned and imaginative. Empirical refers to investigating research issues and checking out data accuracy. Logical refers to carrying out research and drawing inferences in such a logical manner which will ensure research creditability. Reductive refers to reducing the data we gather to include manageable pieces which a researcher needs for achieving main aims. Planned refers to having a clear plan which can show the way and thus guide the researcher throughout the whole process. Lastly, imaginative refers to powers of imagination which will broaden the researcher’s vision and enrich his/her intuition.

The approaches to defining research in applied linguistics, according to Brown (2007), vary in systematic means: definitions that list the topics of research, definitions that list the types of research, definitions that enumerate the steps taken throughout the process of research, and definitions that cover the aim of research. Accordingly, it would be challenging to come up with one single definition which will cover the aforementioned areas. As far as major types of research in applied linguistics are concerned, Brown believes that they fall into two categories out of which others are derived: secondary and primary. Both library research and literature reviews are subsumed under the heading of secondary research. Primary research, on the other hand, is divided into three sub-categories, out of which other sub-types are also derived: survey, qualitative, and statistical. Survey research includes both interviews and questionnaires. Qualitative research includes both traditions and techniques. And statistical research includes descriptive, quasi-experimental, experimental, and exploratory.

What is it that makes a good applied linguist researcher? Dornyei (2007) argues that becoming a good applied linguist researcher does not necessarily require decades. While working experience and academic experience undoubtedly help, they are not the main prerequisites to being a successful researcher. Dornyei goes on to emphasise that there are four fundamental features which will help achieve excellence: genuine curiosity, common sense, good ideas, and a combination of discipline; reliability, and social responsibility. Serious research will inevitably require some hard work and the only way to maintain creativity is to be driven by our passion for the topic. A high level of common sense helps to keep a researcher's feet firmly on the ground. No amount of sophisticated research design or complex technique can be a substitute for creative thinking that is grounded in reality. Finally, a good researcher needs to be disciplined and responsible, which is normally related to the systematic nature of research.

According to McDonough and McDonough (2005), research in language teaching-branch of applied linguistics- is systematic, uses experimental methods, and involves a hypothesis which has to be tested. Research in language teaching can be divided into two types: basic and applied. Basic research often has no immediate practical utility, whereas applied research requires some kind of applicability. As seen by the two researchers, what makes good language teaching research can be summed up in four features: interest, originality, specificity, and dissemination of both research questions and findings. When designing a research project, researchers have to address the questions of method choice, research main focus, research topics, timeline, time allotment, participating individuals, scope, review of previous studies in the field, and outcome. As far as research design and research methodology are concerned, the criteria of objectivity, validity, and reliability should be met.

In Nunan's view (2005), research in the field of applied linguistics is mainly concerned with enquiry. Research has two components: process and product. The process is about an area of enquiry and how it is pursued, and the product is the knowledge generated from the process and the initial area to be presented. The process component involves: defining a problem, stating an objective, formulating a hypothesis, collecting data, classification, analysis, and interpretation. Research requires undertaking structured investigation, in order to result in a greater understanding of the chosen area. To conduct a research project efficiently, Nunan (2005, pp. 226-227) argues, a researcher needs to keep in mind a set of questions to be used as a guide whilst conducting his/her research. These are:

- Question: Is the research question worth investigating as well as feasible? Does the research question imply a strong causal relationship between two or more variables? What are the constructs underlying the question, and how are these to be operationalised?
- Design: Does the question suggest an experimental or non-experimental design?
- Method: What methods are available for investigating the question? Which of these methods are feasible? Is it possible to use more than one data gathering method? What threats are there to the internal and external reliability of the study?
- Analysis: Does the study entail statistical or interpretive analysis, or both? Is it necessary to quantify qualitative data, and if so, what means suggest themselves?
- Presentation: How can the research be presented?
- Results: What are the outcomes of the research? Does the investigation answer the main question the research addresses? Does the research answer other questions? Are the results consistent with the findings of similar studies?

Pica (2005) believes that second language acquisition research, branch of applied linguistics, enriches as well as expands insight into the process of language learning compared to the study of children acquiring their mother tongue. A common theme throughout second language acquisition research has been the need for longitudinal data. Such data, in Pica's view, make an impressive effect within the field of applied linguistics. The contribution classroom practice makes to second language acquisition research necessitates cooperation and coordination between the two main parties concerned: second language acquisition practitioners and second language acquisition researchers. This cooperation and coordination will be expected to yield in better outcomes. Last but not least, both Hatch and Farhady (1982) emphasise that the three key words in research definition are: questions, systematic approach, and answers. As far as research questions are concerned, both curiosity and interest are amongst the most prominent factors in formulating research questions. Going through previous research will be reflected positively on researchers, in the sense that they will have a better understanding of the topic.

Taken in sum, applied linguistics is mainly concerned with the purposeful applications of researchers' proposed solutions to existing problems within the field of language application studies. Research within the field of applied

linguistics is not done for its own sake, but to generate knowledge and to further our understanding. Anything we claim to be true should be the outcome we gain following detailed exploration, investigation, experimentation, and examination. Absolute truth is a relative issue constantly influenced by factors such as time, culture, context, setting, and so on. Research cannot be about arriving at absolute truth, but about seeking answers to questions and issues of concern scientifically. To answer research questions scientifically necessitates the ability to observe purposefully, analyse thoroughly, and respond carefully whilst taking account of previous studies as a guide prior to, throughout, and following the conduct of a research project.

III. DESIGN TYPES

This part of the paper presents main design types of research as seen by a number of specialists within the field of applied linguistics. To begin with, Copland, Garton, and Richards (2010) argue that the choice between qualitative and quantitative research is more than a choice of research design; it represents a fundamental difference in ways of seeing the world. The researcher's world view accounts for the kind of research question as well as for the way he/she will be conducting the research. What qualitative research is good for, in brief, is discovering something about the world with the ultimate aim of basing our finding on evidence. A qualitative research is good for the kind of investigations and explorations that many applied linguists are interested in carrying out. A qualitative research gives us a philosophical base, a rationale, and a set of techniques for examining a phenomenon about which we already know something.

Grant (2010) differentiates between two main types of research in applied linguistics: experimental and descriptive. Experimental research refers to conducting an experiment which requires investigating the areas concerned within the assigned field. This type of research involves devoting a considerable amount of time and effort to ensure credibility. Descriptive research, by contrast, requires understanding and describing a research topic without having to respond with a field action. Grant goes on to explain differences between some further aspects of research: perception and reality. Perception refers to how people interpret phenomena and findings which in reality may not be accurate. Reality normally refers to what is real in terms of phenomena, findings and so on. Another research aspect contrast which Grant discusses is concerned with process and product. Process is related to how something is performed while product is related to the outcome of (a) certain action(s). Further, Grant differentiates between qualitative and quantitative research. Quantitative research is connected with counting, for instance, grades on language tests. Qualitative research, on the other hand, is related to comparing and contrasting different qualities, for example, the processes of learning new EFL/ESL vocabulary. Grant proceeds to recommend that researchers should not adopt one particular type and neglect others for no justifiable reasons.

Dealing with the different research types in the field of applied linguistics, Brown (2007) presents two major paradigms along with the resulting data types. The two main paradigms are: pure and mixed. The pure paradigm is comprised of exploratory interpretive and analytical-nomological. The exploratory interpretive type requires a non-experimental design and results in qualitative data, while the analytical nomological type requires an experimental or quasi-experimental design and results in quantitative data. The mixed paradigm, on the other hand, includes six types: experimental-qualitative-interpretive, experimental-qualitative-statistical, exploratory-qualitative-statistical, exploratory-quantitative-statistical, exploratory-quantitative-interpretive, and experimental-quantitative-interpretive. The experimental-qualitative-interpretive type requires an experimental or quasi-experimental design and results in qualitative data. The experimental-qualitative-statistical type also requires an experimental or quasi-experimental design and results in qualitative data. The exploratory-qualitative-statistical type requires, in contrast, a non-experimental design and results in qualitative data. The exploratory-quantitative-statistical type also requires a non-experimental design but results in quantitative data. The exploratory-quantitative-interpretive type requires a non-experimental design and results in quantitative data, as well. Lastly, the experimental-quantitative-interpretive type requires an experimental or quasi-experimental design and results in quantitative data.

Dornyei (2007), on the other hand, mentions two types of research: library and empirical. A library research, also called secondary or conceptual, necessitates examining what other researchers have said about a particular issue, and is considered an essential form of enquiry because it would be a waste of time to ignore other researchers' findings and recommendations. Empirical research, also called primary, requires conducting one's own data-based investigation, involving the collection of some sort of data and drawing conclusions based on the gathered data. In applied linguistics, we can find three main types of primary data: quantitative data which is most commonly expressed in numbers, qualitative data which usually involves recorded spoken data that is transcribed to textual form as well as written notes and documents of various types, and language data which involves language samples of various length, elicited from the respondent primarily for the purpose of language analysis.

Commenting on experimental research, Dornyei (2007) believes that the increased use of structural equation modelling makes it possible to make quasi-casual claims about outcomes based on non-experimental, correlation research. Experimental studies in applied linguistics research have also been called intervention research. In applied linguistics, there was a steady stream of intervention studies in the 1960s as part of the methods comparison studies in classroom research, but over the subsequent decades, experiments have become less popular for at least two reasons: many of the topics applied linguists are concerned with are not directly related to treatment or intervention, that is, they do not easily lend themselves to manipulation, and experimental research is rather narrow in scope as only one; few or a

few variables can be altered at a time. Typical applied linguistic venues such as language classrooms are complex environments whereby many factors play a role simultaneously. An experimental design concerning one or two variables may be inadequate to address multivariate patterns and issues. While these limitations are valid, in many situations experimental studies would be feasible and superior to the less-intensive or survey studies that are conducted. A welcome recent trend in this direction has been the emergence of longitudinal investigations of second/foreign language instructional effectiveness.

In Nunan's view (2005, p. 4), the two main types of research in the field of applied linguistics are: qualitative and quantitative. Qualitative research is concerned with understanding human behaviour from the actor's own frame of reference. It can be described as being subjective, discovery-oriented, inductive, valid, and process-oriented. Quantitative research, by contrast, seeks facts without regard to the subjective states of the individuals. It can be described as being objective, verification-oriented, hypothetical-deductive, reliable, and outcome-oriented. Mention of Nunan should not be made without mention of Duff (2002) and Freeman and Long (1994), who also differentiate between quantitative and qualitative types of research within the field of applied linguistics. Duff (2002) explains that quantitative research includes a variety of designs, approaches, and tools such as surveys and correlations. Quantitative research is more scientific, robust, theoretical, and generalisable. Qualitative research, on the other hand, encompasses a broad, expanding assortment of approaches including amongst others, narrative research, life history, content analysis, and so on. Duff goes on to explain that while qualitative research has gained a major foothold in applied linguistics for years, quantitative approaches are still looked at as mainstream. According to Freeman and Long (1994), both quantitative and qualitative research types have a role to play in enhancing our understanding of second language acquisition. What second language acquisition research seeks to ensure is how language teaching can be promoted to enhance learners' language acquisition. To obtain sufficient data for second language acquisition researchers to benefit from, we need to ensure the design of a research methodology which has the ideal combination of attributes to address research questions.

Last but not least, both Hatch and Farhady (1982, pp. 18-30) think that research in applied linguistics can fall into one of these five major designs: pre-experimental design, true experimental design, quasi-experimental design, ex post facto design, and factorial design. A pre-experimental design is not really considered a model experiment because it does not account for extraneous variables which may have influenced the results. A true experimental design has three characteristics: a control group is present, the students are randomly selected and assigned to the groups, and a pre-test is administered to capture the initial differences between the groups. A quasi-experimental design is a practical compromise between true experimentation and the nature of human language behaviour which a researcher wishes to investigate. An ex post facto design is often used when the researcher does not have control over the selection and manipulation of the independent variable. The researcher in such a case looks at the degree of relationship between the two variables rather than at a cause-and-effect relationship. A factorial design is the addition of more variables to the other designs. There are a number of independent variables and the variables may have one or many.

To conclude, a research design type is highly determined by one's research questions. Some research designs can be simple but some can be complicated. If we narrow down our topic so that it is specific, we may be blessed with a fairly simple design. However, for most researches within the field of applied linguistics, especially those conducted in classroom settings, the design may be complex due to settings' circumstances and impositions. In claiming good design, researchers need to justify the choice of the specific research methods logically. An applied linguist researcher also needs to choose a design that allows him/her to share findings as being relevant to other practitioners and other similar settings. In classroom studies, we need to be sensitive to the problems of external and internal validity. A careful choice of research type and design will, therefore, help us avoid many problems and misinterpretations.

IV. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Speaking of research basic requirements, this part pinpoints research ethics within the field of applied linguistics. According to a number of specialists, an essential factor for researchers to consider is that of research ethics. Lowe (2010), for example, explains that research ethics were first developed around medicine. Later on, different disciplines have introduced their own codes. Relating the discussion to social sciences and humanities, specialists use principles to guide good research practice. These principles can be divided into three areas: respect, justice, and beneficence. Respect entails protecting individual's autonomy as well as ensuring confidentiality, justice ensures participants' safety under all circumstances, and beneficence necessitates maximising good outcomes for all research participants. Different research methods raise different ethical questions. Interview studies, for example, may invade the privacy of participants while action research studies often raise more ethical dilemmas than other forms of studies do. Conducting research can lead to taking increased risks. Even studies which seem safe may not be what they seem. Research ethics should always be considered whether during the research design, the research process, or the publishing. In other words, ethical conduct legitimates the entire process. Different disciplines and methodologies face different dilemmas. When it comes to applied linguistics research, harm is not likely to exist throughout the conduct process. Logically speaking, it is always essential to ensure the safety of both the researcher as well as the participants throughout the entire process.

Brown (2007) emphasises that, with subjects' ethical considerations in mind, it would be important to avoid subjects' abuse, whatever kind of abuse it is. In addition, rewarding subjects for their participation would be essential. As far as

analysing responsibilities is concerned, it would be necessary to ensure reporting on the gathered data transparently. Moreover, selecting an appropriate research method would always be crucial. In addition, it would be essential to choose the most appropriate interaction of standards in terms of the purpose of the research project concerned. Research within applied linguistics concerns people's lives in the real world, and therefore, it certainly involves ethical issues. Such issues are more noticeable in qualitative than in quantitative approaches because qualitative research often deals with human private issues; it is concerned with people's views and usually discusses sensitive or critical issues. We cannot deny that ethical issues can often be a hindrance to our investigation. Yet, as human beings, we never accept that research matters more than privacy does. A key ethical dilemma to address, for example, is how seriously we should take the various ethical issues in applied linguistics contexts.

Certain research practices, especially qualitative ones, include elements that muddy the ethical waters. Some examples of such sensitive aspects of research are: the amount of shared information; that is to say, how much information should be shared with the participants about the research so as to avoid causing any response bias or even non-participation. Secondly: relationships, qualitative studies may result in an intimate relationship between researchers and participants, with the former seeking to establish empathy to gain access to the participants' lives. Thirdly: data collection methods, certain methods may remove the participants from their normal activities. Fourthly: anonymity, although ideally participants should remain anonymous, researchers often need to identify the respondents to be able to match their performances on different tasks. Fifthly: handling the collected data, some data collection methods may be a threat to anonymity such as audio recordings and video-taping. Sixthly: ownership of the data, who owns the collected data and who has complete control in releasing information are amongst the very basic questions to address and consider. Seventhly: sensitive information, participants may reveal some sensitive information which is not concerned with the main aim of the study. Eighthly: testing, the misuse of test scores leads to misinterpretations and problems (Brown, 2007).

Similarly, Dornyei (2007) argues that social research concerns people's lives in the social world and therefore, it inevitably involves ethical issues. Such issues are more acute in qualitative than in quantitative approaches for qualitative research often intrudes more into the human private sphere; it is concerned with people's opinions and often targets sensitive intimate matters. Researchers cannot deny that ethical issues are often a hindrance to investigation. As human beings though, we cannot deny that there is more to life than research. Some of the key ethical dilemmas and issues Dornei discusses are: relationships between the researchers and participants, data collection methods, anonymity, handling the collected data, ownership of the data, sensitive information, and informed consent.

It seems difficult to conduct much research without running into ethical arguments (see Burns, 2000; Cohen, et al., 2000; and Glesne, 1999). Many participants, for example, may feel obliged to volunteer for different reasons. Therefore, sorting out all ethical-related problems should be kept in mind at the very outset of implementing research. Seen from Burn's point of view (2000, p. 18), informed consent is the most fundamental ethical principle; participants must understand the nature and purpose of the research and must consent to participate without coercion. Cohen, et al. (2000), and Glesne (1999) also think that informed consent can contribute to the empowering of research participants. Through informed consent, study participants are made aware that participation is voluntary and that they may freely choose to stop participation at any point in the study. To avoid ethical problems, Burns (2000) and Glesne (1999) -amongst other researchers- stress the necessity of codes of conduct. Such codes will ensure that: risks to participants are minimised, the rights and welfare of participants are protected, participation is voluntary, and the subject has the right to know the purpose, nature and duration of the study.

To summarise, research integrity is amongst the most essential aspects for researchers to consider. Ethical problems can relate to both the subject matter as well as the conduct of the research. Ethical problems can result from conflicting values, and may involve both professional and personal elements. This necessitates emphasising a number of issues. Participants, for example, have the right to be informed about the aims of the study, the tasks they are expected to perform, and the potential consequences of participating in the study. Participants' privacy as well as anonymity should also be stressed, for it is a basic ethical principle that the participants' right to privacy be respected and that participants have the right to withdraw from the study. In addition, the right to confidentiality should always be respected. However, we need to make sure that we avoid promising a higher degree of confidentiality than what we can achieve. Referring to participants as numbers rather than names may ensure result confidentiality. Another essential point to consider is the participants' protection from harm, whether mental or physical, that may come to the participants as a result of participating in the research. Not only must we prevent our investigation from causing any harm, but we should also try to ensure that the participants benefit from our research in some way. In some cases, presenting participants with a *warm thank you* letter upon research project completion may be sufficient.

V. DATA COLLECTION METHODS

According to a number of researchers, some of the effective data collection methods which can be employed within the field of applied linguistics are: case studies, classroom observations, diary studies, sample studies using introspection, questionnaires, tests, and interviews (see for example Nunan, 2005; Burns, 2000; and Cohen et al., 2000). Commenting on qualitative and quantitative data collection methods, both Weir and Roberts (1994) think that qualitative methods are often guided by a search for patterns rather than by hypotheses. They can be described as being

descriptive, exploratory, and discovery oriented in terms of purpose. They seek to describe events, attitudes and sets of behaviour in both detail and depth. On the other hand, quantitative methods depend on asking for fixed responses. Quantified data inform us of the frequency with which certain responses are ascribed to the study sample, allowing us to determine whether or not these frequencies are reflected in sub-samples within the data set.

Due to their popularity within the field of applied linguistics research, this part of the current paper is excluded to discussing the two data collection methods of questionnaires and interviews. How can we define questionnaires as a study tool within the field of applied linguistics research? Bloomer (2010) believes that questionnaires are a very popular means of gathering research data. Questionnaires vary in terms of their purpose. Some questionnaires, for instance, are intended to find out about some behavioural aspects on the part of study population. Others are intended to test attitudes. Questionnaires may include a mixture of open and closed questions, or may be exclusive to one of these two formats. Open questions require that informants write a sentence/a number of sentences in response to a given question such as indicating personal opinions. Closed questions, by contrast, require that informants give a very specific answer in response to a given question. Speaking in general terms, closed questions are of an objective type or require a very specific answer such as writing gender type. In Bloomer's view, open questions provide masses of data. Closed questions such as multiple choice questions limit the possible responses, but ought to be written very carefully to make sure that one answer to the given question is only possible. Whatever questioning type is employed, questionnaires should be clear and simple. To ensure effective results through utilising questionnaires, three points should be emphasised: conducting a pilot study prior to the distribution of the questionnaire to avoid pitfalls, providing some covering information for informants to know what the researcher is investigating and why, and addressing ethical issues in such a way that informants' rights are stressed.

According to Copland, Garton and Richards (2010), a questionnaire is an instrument designed to gather information by means of analysing responses to a number of questions. Questionnaires can be used to gather objective and subjective data as well as quantitative and qualitative data. According to the three researchers, a questionnaire is the process of eliciting responses to a set of questions, whether spoken or written. In preparing a questionnaire, the researcher needs to identify his/her aim, generate ideas, select appropriate sample, pilot the questionnaire, distribute the questionnaire to the study sample, analyse informants' responses, and draw conclusions in the light of data analysis. McDonough and McDonough (2005) also believe that questionnaires can serve many research purposes, for example, clarity and precision of data as well as practicality in terms of where to use a questionnaire and how to gather data. Questionnaires can be used in all sizes and shapes. What to include in a questionnaire depends on the kind of information needed, and the kind of analysis proposed. Generally speaking, a questionnaire questions can be: factuality/yes/no, ranked indicating informants' order of preferences, open-ended requiring some written responses such as conveying one's opinion, and scaled asking for degrees of agreement with certain issues.

Seen from Nunan's point of view (2005), using questionnaires would enable researchers to collect data in field settings, and the data themselves are more amenable to qualification than discursive data such as participant observers' journals and free-form field notes. As far as questionnaire items are concerned, Nunan (2005) classifies them into two categories; namely, open-ended items and closed-ended items. An open item is one in which subjects can decide what to say as well as how to say it. A closed item, on the other hand, is one in which the range of possible responses is determined by the researcher. Questionnaires can consist entirely of open questions, entirely of closed questions, or a mixture of open and closed questions. Burns (2000) describes questionnaire items, classifying them into three rather than two categories. These are: open-ended items, closed items, and scale items. Open-ended items provide a frame of reference for respondents' answers, coupled with a minimum of restraint on their expression. Closed items usually allow respondents to choose from two or more fixed alternatives. Scale items are sets of verbal items to which respondents respond by indicating degrees of agreement or disagreement. To avoid pitfalls in questionnaire writing, Cohen, et al. (2000) recommend avoiding leading questions, complex questions, irritating questions or instructions, and questions that use negatives and double negatives. In addition, for a questionnaire to *function* effectively, it has to be valid and reliable. To ensure valid and reliable results, piloting the questionnaire would be of great importance. A pilot has several advantages such as increasing the reliability, validity, and practicality of the questionnaire. A central issue to be considered prior to the official distribution of the questionnaire then is that of involving a representative sample for piloting purposes.

Relating the discussion to interviews as a data collection method, they have always been one of the most common ways of collecting data in the social studies (Garton and Richards, 2010). There are two main types of interviews: directive and non-directive (also known as structured and unstructured). In a structured interview, the interviewer follows a specific agenda as well as controls the flow of the interview along with single details. In an unstructured interview, however, the interviewer does not exclude the interview conduct and details to a number of set issues and questions; instead, interviewees are allowed freedom to discuss related issues and concerns. In almost all cases though, the interview will be based on a specific agenda which has been designed to discuss particular topics, and the interviewer often has a number of set questions prepared in advance. Although structured interviews may not be structured as they seem, the very fact that the interviewer decides the agenda indicates that chances to investigate emerging issues and points may not be possible. The two researchers proceed to explain that the most effective interview approach might be that of the semi-structured interview in which the interviewer has a number of questions to

guide the discussion towards a certain topic, yet also leaves the interviewees adequate space to convey what may be appropriate to them (Schiffrin, 1994).

What are some of the practical considerations to be borne in mind whilst conducting interviews? Garton (2010) argues that timing is an essential factor to consider; it is important that the timing of interview conduct is relevant and convenient to both parties: interviewer and interviewees. Duration is another factor to consider; the time available and the concentration span of the two parties involved should be taken into consideration. A third factor to add is that of the setting: place of interview conduct. Privacy, comfort as well as physical surrounding are amongst the main points to consider in relation to setting. Preparation is also an essential factor contributing to the effective conduct of interviews. In order to make the most of the interview, interviewers have to spend sufficient time in preparing the ground and anticipating any issues/problems that may arise. Further, confidentiality is an important ethical factor to be considered throughout the whole process. There has to be a way of ensuring anonymity. Another fundamental consideration is that of interview-interviewee relationship. The relationship between the two parties involved need not be complicated. An interviewer certainly needs to establish and maintain a relationship of trust and respect (Silverman, 2001).

To sum up, this part of the paper deals with data collection methods which can be employed within the field of applied linguistics, discussing both questionnaires and interviews. As stated earlier, a questionnaire is a common means of collecting data. There are different purposes for utilising questionnaires as a study tool in the field of applied linguistics. If set and conducted properly, a questionnaire can be a powerful method of data collection. To ensure questionnaire effectiveness, a researcher has to bear in mind several issues, amongst the most prominent of which are: purpose, length, item type, sequencing, instructions, politeness, validity, reliability, practicality, distribution procedures, and data analysis. Interviews, on the other hand, require both data collection and data generation. Interviews can also be seen as jointly constructed events involving both interviewers and interviewees. Depending on a researcher's aim as well as study design, an interview has to be constructed, considering all essential factors to ensure appropriate data collection and data generation.

VI. CONCLUSION

The current paper begins with a brief overview of applied linguistics and research within the field of applied linguistics. The paper then presents a number of research-related points for researchers to consider. Commenting briefly on the issues raised throughout the current paper, the author would like to state that applied linguistics seeks, amongst other purposes, to initiate practical, applicable, and credible solutions to problematic issues within the related areas. Research within the field of applied linguistics is seeking answers to questions and issues of concern. The answers cannot be seen as absolute truth, but as relatively true answers, the credibility of which should be investigated and examined in terms of different settings, situations, cultures, and so on. One of the best ways to begin doing something is to fully understand what that thing is. If we want to conduct a research project, therefore, we have to identify what we are going to investigate, why, how, where, when, and for how long. In addition, we need to anticipate the problems we are likely to encounter whilst conducting our research and be prepared to respond, as appropriate.

Research is not excluded to researchers as it involves people. When we involve people, a whole range of considerations arise: how we will involve study subjects, how we will protect study subjects, and how we will report on findings. A good researcher, therefore, has to have a sense of social responsibility, that is, accountability to the field and more broadly, to the world. Regulations concerning research ethics should be adopted. This necessitates ensuring a number of points, for instance, participants should be informed of the possible risks and potential consequences of participating in the study, the extent to which study results will be held confidential, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point. It is the researcher's profound belief though that at the heart of research ethics lies the moral character of the researcher. Applied linguist researchers should not falsify or misrepresent evidence, findings or conclusions to prove what they would love to see; neither should they make use of their professional roles for fraudulent purposes. Therefore, it is essential to avoid each and every factor that is likely to cause an ethical problem or violate the essence of research ethics throughout the whole process. Research is a highly dignified mission and task, which researchers should enjoy the blessing of whilst being *ethically pure*.

Speaking of research design types, we need first to consider our research aims, questions, variables, population as well as sample before adopting a research design. If we do not, then we may endanger the whole research by selecting a design which might not suit the purpose. We need to consider the rationale for the selection of a particular research design. Each and every research design, as is the case with everything else in life, has its positive as well as drawback points. Highlighting both sides in the light of research priorities and requirements would be enlightening. Once we have identified the groups, we need to consider the most appropriate research design that will allow us to feel confident in discussing findings and generalising them beyond our limited study.

To end with, research has to start somewhere; all researchers have to begin with a problem or an issue. If the research is to be practicable, it should have a precise focus. The table below reveals the steps which the author believes; an applied linguist researcher should go through.

RESEARCH WITHIN THE FIELD OF APPLIED LINGUISTICS-ESSENTIAL STEPS

Step	Action
One	Identifying research problem/concern
Two	Formulating research questions
Three	Going through the pertinent literature; analyzing and evaluating
Four	Proposing appropriate treatment
Five	Selecting a research design
Six	Stating study hypotheses in the light of research questions, treatment, and design
Seven	Conducting the study
Eight	Collecting research data by means of appropriate methods
Nine	Analyzing data by means of relevant statistical tests
Ten	Arriving at study findings
Eleven	Making recommendations
Twelve	Suggesting related area(s) of concern for further research

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