Preface

When I started my PhD research in the mid-1980s, I was unaware of the fact that there was a fierce 'paradigm war' raging around me between two camps of research methodologists: the constructivist/interpretists, who used qualitative methods, and the positivist/empiricists, who used quantitative methods. Had I known about this division at the time, I would probably have been inclined, ideologically, to join the constructivist/interpretist camp. However, as it happened, the main research tool employed in the area of my interest—the social psychology of second language acquisition and attitudes/motivation in particular—was the 'attitude questionnaire'. By using this instrument for my PhD research, I now realize that I was irresistibly propelled into the midst of the positivist camp.

I was so ignorant of these issues that when I was first told—in the 1990s—that I was a 'positivist', I needed to find out what 'positivism' actually meant. I learnt that it referred to a scientific paradigm and worldview that assumes the existence of an objective and independent social reality 'out there' that can be researched empirically with standardized scientific instruments. However, I also noticed that the term 'positivist' was almost exclusively used by people who did not themselves align with this paradigm and that their usage of the term was definitely not positive: it seemed to indicate that someone was a bit thick-headed and had definitely lost touch (and probably also had macho leanings).[1] This was not good news and, to add to my sorrows, not only was I a positivist but what many did not know, I was also a 'positivist traitor': in the mid-1990s I started to conduct tentative qualitative research to investigate the concepts of demotivation and group dynamics in SLA, and over the past decade most of my PhD students have been engaged in either qualitative or—even worse—combined qualitative–quantitative research. I was clearly in a mess.

However, my cheerless story seems to have taken a happier turn recently: I have learnt that I now qualify to be a 'pragmatist' as a researcher, that is, a proponent of a respectable philosophical approach, and the research my students and I have been conducting is 'mixed methods research', deemed commendable and highly sought after in some circles. What a fortunate time to be writing this book!

In the light of the above, I can now admit that the approach that guided me in preparing the manuscript of this volume has been pragmatic in every respect. My practical dilemma has been this: research is a complex, multi-faceted activity, such that it is not easy to provide novice researchers with

relevant procedural knowledge without overwhelming and thus disempowering them. Furthermore, even though acquiring research expertise may well be a life-long process, we simply cannot hold back with our first investigation until we have learnt every relevant detail. Instead, what seems to me the most important thing about doing research is that we get down to it, 'get our feet wet' and as a result get 'hooked' on what is a very exciting activity. So, how can research methodology be taught effectively and what can we do to prevent young scholars from launching investigations that may violate key principles of scientific inquiry?

My answer has been to assume that there exists a basic threshold of research expertise which, once achieved, allows us to embark on the process of doing decent research that we will not be ashamed of when looking back a decade later. We can find an interesting analogy to this idea in the psychoanalytic theory of the 1960s: Winnicott (1965) introduced the concept of the 'good enough mother', which was then extended to parenting in general. The concept of the 'good enough parent' suggests that in order to produce psychological health in the child, we do not need to be perfect; instead, 'good enough parenting' only requires the parent to exceed a certain threshold of quality parenting (including empathic understanding, soothing, protection and love) to promote healthy development (Bettelheim 1987), without necessarily having to be a 'Supermum' or 'Superdad'. Personally, I have always found this notion encouraging and thus, following the 'good enough' analogy, it has been my aim in this book to summarize those key components of research methodology that are necessary to become a 'good enough researcher'.

I strongly believe that the 'good enough researcher' needs to master some knowledge of both qualitative and quantitative research, as well as ways of combining them. In the *Handbook of Mixed Methods in Social and Behavioural Research*, Tashakkori and Teddlie (2003c) point out that perhaps the worst residue of the 'paradigm war' in research methodology has been its impact on students. As they argue, many of our students are as a consequence suffering from a fractured 'dual-lingualism', which represents a split personality in methods of study and ways of thinking. At any given moment, they are asked to be either qualitative or quantitative, and while in each mode to forget that the other exists. This is clearly undesirable and, luckily, applied linguists have by and large steered clear of such extreme positions. I hope that most readers of this book will agree with the need to educate a new generation of 'good enough researchers' who are sufficiently familiar with both qualitative and quantitative methods to be able to understand and appreciate the results coming from each school, and, perhaps, even to vary the methods applied in their own practice according to their particular research topic/question. Thus, I am in full agreement with Duff's (2002: 22) conclusion that 'a greater collective awareness and understanding (and, ideally, genuine appreciation) of different research methods and areas of study would be helpful to the field at large'. Accordingly, the writing of this book has been motivated by

the wish to go beyond paradigmatic compartmentalization by highlighting the strengths of both approaches and by introducing ways by which these strengths can be combined in a complementary manner.

Acknowledgements

1 I was pleased to find out later that Hammersley and Atkinson (1995: 3) shared my perception; as they concluded: 'Today, the term 'positivism' has become little more than a term of abuse among social scientists, and as a result its meaning has become obscured'.