

Cumming, A.H. (1994). Alternatives in TESOL research: Descriptive, interpretive, and ideological orientations. *TESOL Quarterly*, 28(4), 673-703.

General points:

1. Research orientations encompass a variety of methods.
2. Orientations are often complimentary and overlapping.
3. Each orientation implies different choices and values in formulating a research question; that is, orientations are reflective of certain ideologies.

Summary of Seven Research Orientations

Category/Name	Goal	Methods Used	Values	Limitations
Descriptive/ Analysis of Learners' Language	Describe a learner's competence in approximating TL; analyze <i>interlanguage</i> (Selinker 1972)	Various, both qualitative and quantitative (from ethnography to statistical analysis of sound production)	1. Provides data for needs assessments 2. Provides "important insights" into how L2 develops (677); various studies already done, from L1 influence on L2 to effect of error correction	1. Research limited to what learner knows at that time 2. Must be supplemented with other orientations; may be difficult for teacher to interpret sum total 3. Need for more qualitative studies, longitudinal studies, and studies with children
Descriptive/ Verbal Reports on Learning Strategies	Have the learner describe what happens cognitively as he or she learns (self-reporting, self-observation, self-revelation); the closer the report is to when learning takes place, the better.	The article implies various, although the orientation seems like it could be assessed more effectively by qualitative methods	1. Provides insight into how learners verbalize own learning 2. Provides interesting contrast to questions and interviews, which can elicit beliefs versus actual cognitive activity	1. How much of the cognitive process can the reports really reveal? (Problems of intrusion, retrospection, repressed data, spoken vs. written reports, etc.) 2. Results can vary according to materials, instructions, participants, etc.

Category/Name	Goal	Methods Used	Values	Limitations
Descriptive/ Text Analysis	Describe and evaluate quality of spoken and written texts (both produced by learners and "ideal")	Although the orientation is interdisciplinary, text analysis seems to possess its own method in the form of specific taxonomies, such as that of Halliday and Hasan (1976) and metadiscoursal taxonomies	Helps learners and teachers identify how texts are organized, how they can be improved, and what needs to be learned in L2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Time consuming and complicated for teachers (My comments:) 2. Too subjective? What exactly is the "right" way to produce a text? 3. Is text analysis outdated? What is its relationship to Discourse Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis, which seem more political?
Interpretive/Classroom Interaction Analysis	Describe and categorize instruction and interaction in language classroom	Specific "classroom observation schemes" but encompass different pedagogic/linguistic foci	Gives good information on what really goes on in language classrooms, which often might not be seen by teacher or learners	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Specific schemes can restrict observations, prevent other behaviors from being observed. 2. Observations have not been tested as "valid predictors of learning outcomes" (687)
Interpretive/Ethnography	Describe knowledge and understandings guiding a particular group in a particular context (classroom, community, etc.) , usually from a more "insider" perspective than classroom analysis	Qualitative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Holistic: Creates a "whole picture" (688) of a given culture. 2. Emic: "insider" perspective--researcher attempts to grasp the community's point of view while remaining objective enough to analyze it (also a potential limitation...) 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "Insider/Outsider dilemma" (689): how do you balance being an objective researcher and being close enough to the group to give an accurate report?

Category/Name	Goal	Methods Used	Values	Limitations
Ideological/Critical Pedagogical Approaches	Describe and transform situations of inequity in education; challenge positivistic knowledge	Mostly qualitative: narrative, participatory ethnography, etc.	1. Promotes study of relationships between L2 learning and social factors (race, class, etc.) 2. Promotes research orientations that incorporate more cultural factors, question traditional research	1. (Over) emphasis on political concerns, although this is refuted by author 2. Not much on limitations--perhaps there has not been enough research in this area to generate critiques, or perhaps the author is focused on defending his pet orientation
Ideological/Participatory Action Research	Help to transform participants' lives by having them play an integral part in their own research; also establish a more equal relationship between academic researchers and "subjects."	Various; depends on participants and focus of research	1. Defined and directed by the community, therefore relevant to them. 2. Can help remove the hierarchy existing among various aspects of ESL/FLL (research-curriculum development-teaching-learning-evaluation), as all are involved in the research process (696)	1. What is the role of the academic? (Perhaps as facilitator? I believe there is still a valuable role for the academic to play) 2. What if participants choose an issue outside L2 scope? Is it still relevant for L2 learning? (Should this even be a limitation, given the overall goals of PAR?)

Questions for discussion:

1. What is the difference between an orientation and a methodology? Or are they the same? (See Creswell, p. 5)
2. Which of these orientations is more appealing to you, and why? Which of these orientations struck you as more inadequate? Which ones require more "careful consideration" (Cumming, p. 697) in their implementation?
3. What are some additional values and limitations that you might find in these orientations?