

THE WHAT AND HOW OF QUESTIONNAIRES IN SECOND LANGUAGE RESEARCH TO COPE WITH TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES: DESIGN, ADMINISTRATION, AND PROCESSING

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Abstract

In their book, Zoltán Dornyei and Jean-Marc Dewaele's *Questionnaires in Second Language Research* offers a comprehensive, reader-friendly overview of the theory of questionnaire design, administration, and processing, made accessible with a detailed how-to guide and concrete, real-world applications. This third edition has been thoroughly revised to reflect advancements in the field and includes recent case studies focusing on the considerations, challenges, and opportunities of online questionnaires at all research stages. In this book, the authors also guide readers on how to use the IRIS database and how to clean, process, and analyze questionnaire data before reporting findings. This is an invaluable resource for SLA, applied linguistics, psychology, and education students and researchers interested in understanding and conducting both qualitative and quantitative questionnaire-based L2 research. This review is a memorial for Zoltán Dornyei, who passed away on June 10, 2022.

Keywords: *IRIS database; L2 research; Questionnaires; second language research; SLA*

INTRODUCTION

A questionnaire, according to Wagner (2015), is a tool used to collect information from respondents as part of a larger survey procedure. It is also possible to refer to the questionnaire as a survey instrument. The main reasons for the prevalence of questionnaires are their relative efficiency and adaptability. Questionnaires are more cost-effective than other data collection methods such as face-to-face interviews, eye-tracking, and neuroimaging. Questionnaires require significantly less time, personnel, and money to administer (see Wagner, 2015; Ruel et al., 2016). In addition, Brown (2001, p. 6) defines questionnaires as "any

written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to respond either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers."

Questionnaires are now widely used in social and behavioral research as well as in studies on the second language (L2). In L2 learning, teaching, and assessment research, questionnaires have been used extensively to collect data on learner and teacher backgrounds, language attitudes, motivation, learning strategies, communicate readiness, and metacognitive awareness, among other relevant and important topics (see Dörnyei & Taguchi

,2009; Gass & Mackey, 2007; Wagner, 2015). As Ruel et al. (2016) note that questionnaires are often used to study factors affecting a dependent variable in causal research, while questionnaires in experimental research can be used for pre-tests, post-tests, or follow-up surveys. For example, questionnaire data serve as an independent variable in studies attempting to establish a predictive or causal relationship between learners' motivational factors and performance on language tests or time spent in L2 learning (e.g., Hu & McGeown, 2020). In contrast, in an experimental research design, the independent variable is manipulated to determine its effect on the dependent variable; in these cases, the questionnaire data can be used as a dependent variable and will be collected using a pre- and post-test design. For example, if the purpose of a study is to determine the effect of a particular instructional strategy on students' attitudes towards L2 learning, the questionnaire measuring those attitudes is the dependent variable (e.g., Webb & Doman, 2019).

Questionnaires are widely used. They are the most common data collection tools in the research world, especially in second language acquisition or applied linguistics. The quality of the questionnaires affects the quality of the data needed to answer research questions. The data is trustworthy and reliable when the questionnaires are well designed. On the other hand, if the questionnaires are poorly designed, the data is meaningless and misleading. In order to create well-designed questionnaires, questionnaire designers must follow certain theoretical guidelines or practical principles. These can be found in the book *Questions in Second Language Research: Construction, Administration and Processing* written by Zoltán Dörnyei and Jean-Marc Dewaele.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The use of different types of questionnaires is one of the most widely used data collection techniques in second language research (L2). The popularity of questionnaires stems from the fact that they are easy to create, highly customizable, and uniquely able to collect a large amount of data in an easy-to-process form. Apparently, only language proficiency tests as a research instrument in the L2 area are used more frequently than self-completed questionnaires. Despite the widespread use of questionnaires in L2 research, the profession does not appear to have an adequate understanding of the theory of questionnaire design and processing.

Dörnyei & Dewaele (2022a) state that the common (and typically untrue) assumption is that anyone with a little intelligence can design a good questionnaire. This situation is comparable to the "pre-scientific" era of language testing (i.e., before the 1950s), when the psychometric qualities of language tests were not sufficiently considered and each language teacher was trusted to create and grade tests and exams without special training. They believe that many questionnaire users are unaware that there is significant relevant knowledge and experience accumulated in various social science disciplines (such as psychometrics, social psychology and sociology) that has the potential to improve the practice of survey research. As a result, it is all too common to find studies that begin with interesting research questions but are flawed due to a poorly designed or poorly processed questionnaire.

This book is designed to be practical. In their own research over the past two decades, they have found questionnaire theory to be extremely useful. In the mid-1980s, Zoltán presented his first questionnaire for his doctoral

thesis. Because his specialty, the study of L2 motivation, is closely related to the use of questionnaires, he has participated as a principal investigator, participant, or supervisor in numerous studies interviewing over 30,000 language learners. His L2 Motivational Self System theory evolved from a large-scale longitudinal study conducted in Hungary (see Dornyei et al., 2006).

In the early 1990s, Jean-Marc spent almost two years transcribing and coding French L2 interviews for his PhD at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. He then decided to use questionnaires to collect quantitative and qualitative data more cost-effectively in the future. In collaboration with Aneta Pavlenko and a computer specialist, he designed the Bilingualism and Emotion Questionnaire (BEQ), which remained online from 2001 to 2003 collecting data on language preferences, language perceptions, and emotions from over 1,500 multilinguals from around the world. In this book, Dewaele claims that the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed and presented in dozens of articles and two monographs. It was the largest online questionnaire in applied linguistics at the time (Dewaele, 2013; Pavlenko, 2005).

Numerous researchers were motivated by the BEQ to modify it for their purposes. With the outbreak of the global pandemic in March 2020, Jean-Marc also discovered an additional advantage in using of questionnaires. Online questionnaires are by definition COVID-safe, so data collection proceeded unimpeded, with increased participation from people stuck at home behind their computers, while researchers who required participants to come to their lab had to interrupt their work.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The organization of the book is easy to understand. The structure and

administration of the questionnaire and the processing of the questionnaire data are dealt with in separate chapter, followed by a chapter on the nature, advantages and disadvantages of questionnaires. Given the importance of internet-based questionnaire management in today's research practice, the authors have devoted an entire chapter (Chapter 5) to summarizing the most important finding about online surveys in SLA research and the associated new challenges and for research. Chapter 6 provides a detailed and technical presentation of various aspects of questionnaire theory by describing the development of three different instruments to measure foreign language enjoyment, foreign language engagement, and foreign language learning boredom. The book concludes with an appendix containing information on freely accessible online repositories for questionnaires and tools for measuring SLT aspects.

In Chapter 1, the authors describe the various kinds of data that questionnaires can provide (facts, attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, values, and self-reported behaviors). They claim that there are three types of data about the respondent: factual, behavioral, and attitudinal. Factual questions—also called "classification" or "subject descriptors"—identify the respondents. Data types typically include age, gender, race, place of residence, socioeconomic status, education level, occupation, and language profile, as well as any other background variables that may be associated with the dependent variables or help interpret survey results. The authors also claim that other information in L2 studies includes learners' learning histories in learning the language (starting age, environment, and school type), time spent in an L2 environment, types of L2 networks, parents' L2 skills may include, or the L2 coursebook used. The authors also describe how behavioral questions are used to determine what respondents are

doing now or have done in the past. The typical questions usually inquire about people's actions, typical behaviors, emotions, lifestyles, and habits. They add that the items in language learning strategy inventories that ask how often a particular strategy was used are perhaps the most prominent such questions in L2 studies. Regarding Attitudinal questions, the authors describe that these questions are used to find out what people believe. Attitudes, opinions, beliefs, interests, and values are all included in this broad category. In the literature, these five interrelated terms are not clearly separated or defined.

This chapter also discusses the benefits of questionnaires (e.g., researcher time, researcher effort, and financial resources) and drawbacks of questionnaires (e.g., easy to produce unreliable and invalid data, simple information and in accurate responses). Kinginger (2020) describes her transformation from a hater to a lover of questionnaires. Her primary initial objection was that questionnaires were vague, universal instruments designed to reduce each person's unique life experiences to a single Likert scale. She rejected questionnaires associated with the logical positivism that dominated studies of second language acquisition in the second half of the twentieth century invoking her firm grounding in postmodernist research.

In this chapter, the authors argue that the essence of scientific investigation is methodically seeking answers to questions, so it is not surprising that the questionnaire has become one of the most commonly used research instruments in the social sciences. Questionnaires are unquestionably the most commonly used data collection instruments in statistical work, with the most well-known questionnaire type—the census. The authors highlight that questionnaires' main

strength is also their main weakness. People appear to assume that anyone with a reasonable level of intelligence can put together a questionnaire. As Oppenheim (1992, p. 1) remarked in his classic book on questionnaires decades ago, "The world is full of well-meaning people who believe that everyone who can write plain English and has a modicum of common sense can produce a good questionnaire."

Blair et al. (2014) claims that using questionnaires effectively requires a range of skills from different disciplines, such as requiring some basic programming knowledge combined with so-called soft skills, namely the ability to persuade people to provide data.

The authors claim that most questionnaire items either require very specific information (e.g., age, gender, language profile) or offer many possible answers, e.g., ticking a box. They point out that questionnaire data easily lends itself to quantitative and statistical analysis. Quantitative research uses openly formulated categories, viewpoints, and models, collects numerical or readily quantifiable to determine the association between these categories and to test the research hypotheses. The authors claim that some questionnaires contain open-ended questions such as "Describe a specific incident in your language class that you particularly enjoyed" (Dewaele & MacIntyre, 2014). This instrument would provide qualitative and exploratory data. However, most experts advise against including open-ended questions in surveys because they do not work. From a qualitative point of view, surveys require the respondents to have a superficial and momentary exposure to the topic.

The authors end Chapter 1 by claiming that the problem with questionnaires from a qualitative point of view is that, as already said, they imply a rather superficial and limited engagement

with the topic on the part of the respondent. The inevitable variety in the number of answers, as well as in the quantity and quality of answers must be taken into account.

In Chapter 2, the authors outline the design of the questionnaire. They claim that self-completion questionnaires are problematic. They admit that respondents are often annoyingly unmotivated, amateurish, careless and dishonest, but it is also a fact that careful and creative questionnaire construction can result in a tool that motivates people to give relatively truthful and thoughtful answers, which can then scientifically be processed. This chapter also provides an overview of these topics and provides numerous practical dos and don'ts to help in creating of effective questionnaires. As Gillham (2008, p. 11) contends, "questionnaires are so easy to do quickly and badly that, in a way, they invite carelessness" (Gillham, 2008, p. 11).

The authors note that creating an effective questionnaire requires a series of steps and procedures, including:

- Deciding on the general features of the questionnaire, such as the length, the format, and the main parts.
- Writing effective items/questions and drawing up an item pool.
- Selecting and sequencing the items.
- Writing appropriate instructions and examples.
- Translating the questionnaire into a target language if it was not originally written in that language (and considering back-translating it).
- Piloting the questionnaire and conducting item analysis (p.14)

To sum up, in the authors' experience, a questionnaire should not exceed four pages and should not take longer than twenty minutes to complete.

In Chapter 3, Zoltán Dornyei and Jean-Marc Dewaele, first look at selecting an appropriate sample and then discuss the different types of questionnaire management and the strategies that can be used to encourage positive questionnaire attitudes and respondent engagement. Finally, confidentiality and anonymity and other ethical responsibilities of survey researchers are discussed. The authors contend that the most common question asked by novice researchers who wants to use questionnaires in their research is, how many people do I need to interview? In terms of measurement, this question can be rephrased as "How big should my sample be?" A second question is, "What kind of people should I choose?" or, in other words, who will my sample consist of?" In this chapter, the authors discuss the various issues of sampling for research purposes in general, including respondent self-selection. They recognize a potential flaw that could jeopardize the validity of the survey: the issue of participant self-selection. This refers to situations where the actual composition of the sample is determined not only by a systematic selection process, but also by factors related to respondents' own willingness to participate.

According to the authors, problems can arise when, for example:

- Researchers invite volunteers to take part in a study (occasionally even offering money to compensate for the time spent).
- The design allows for a high degree of dropout (or "mortality"), in which case participants self-select themselves out of the sample.
- Participants are free to choose whether they fill in the questionnaire or not (e.g. in postal surveys or calls for participation in online surveys) (p.66)

Regarding self-selection, the authors argue that this is inevitable as few questionnaire surveys can be made

mandatory, but it can result in a sample that is not representative of the population. Volunteers and non-volunteers may differ in aptitude, motivation, or other basic characteristics, and dropouts may share some common characteristics that are underrepresented in the sample when they drop out (e.g., remaining participants' overall motivation as unnaturally high). This can reduce the representativeness of the sample which prevents a meaningful generalization.

The authors point out that questionnaires in social research have traditionally been sent by post. In this respect, educational research differs as manual administration is just as important (if not more so) than postal surveys. The authors can distinguish two forms of non-postal surveys: individual administration and group administration. According to the authors, a distinguishing feature of the postal administration is that the researcher has no connection with the respondent other than a cover letter that accompanies the questionnaire. In addition, questionnaires sent by post tend to compete with various forms of newsletter, catalogs, and junk mail, for recipients' attention, and both factors together explain why the response rate of such surveys is often well below 30%. Such a low response rate naturally reduces the reliability of the sample, which is why the authors suggest that when conducting a mail-in survey, the researchers employ a number of specific strategies that have been shown to increase respondents' desire to complete and return the questionnaire.

Chapter 4 describes the next steps in processing questionnaire data. The authors begin by scoring and coding the responses before entering the information into a computer file. The authors, then, examine closed and open-ended objects separately. The chapter concludes with an outline of the many types of computer software that we might use for our

research, the major parts of reporting questionnaire results, and finally the different methods we can use to supplement our survey data with data from other sources. At this point it should be pointed out again that statistical and qualitative data analysis approaches are not discussed in detail in this chapter. These procedures have been discussed in detail in Dörnyei (2007).

In this chapter, the authors share that most data analysis programs handle data numerically rather than alphabetically, and even when programs allow for letter-based data storage, the methods available for handling such data are comparatively large compared to the vast repertoire of statistical techniques available for numerical data are limited answers. Therefore, data processing begins with coding respondents' responses into numbers. They add that closed-ended questions are easier to process than open-ended questions, which require content analysis. The authors suggest that once the researchers have determined the coding specifications, they must proceed with the rather tedious and time-consuming process of entering the data into a computer file. Before doing this, however, they must first create and name the data. The authors suggest that the most common types of questionnaire items are closed-ended questions. The complete processing sequence for such questions consists of several consecutive steps, starting with the initial data check and cleaning through to statistical data analyses.

On part of Chapter 4, the authors suggest that after collecting and analyzing data, the researcher's next task is to record and disseminate the results. This is because, as Ortega (2005, 2019) asserts, every social science field of study, including applied linguistics, has as its ultimate goal the betterment of human life and social justice. Consequently, it is the researcher's responsibility to communicate

these findings and the practical implications of this research in simple, direct, and appropriate language.

At the end of Chapter 4, the authors conclude that survey data can be used for a variety of purposes, each of which may require slightly different types of summaries and reports of the results. A dissertation, for example, must of course meet completely different criteria than the presentation requirement of a performance overview at a teacher's conference. Rather than trying to provide templates for all different uses (such templates are readily available in various author's guide as well as in Dörnyei, 2007, chap. 12–13), the authors focus on three general aspects of survey reports, namely: (1) general guidance on how what to report and how to report; (2) survey-specific technical information that must be included in a professional report to accompany actual results; and (3) presentation methods that can make survey data more reader-friendly and understandable.

In addition, the authors conclude that questionnaires are constrained by the limitations of quantitative research as a methodological approach leaving little room for exploratory, in-depth analysis of complex relationships or for engaging with the subjective diversity of an individual's life offer. The good news about questionnaires, however, is that their adaptability makes them ideal for use in complex research paradigms alongside other data collection methods, particularly qualitative methods (e.g., interviews, observations, and diary studies). This type of integrated approach is known as mixed methods research, and involves collecting, analyzing, and combining quantitative and qualitative data in one project. The authors add that questionnaires can be used in conjunction with a variety of other research methods, e.g., to gather background information about experimental study participants or to

supplement observation data in the classroom. Indeed, recent advocacy for the combined use of multiple data collection methods, in line with the general concept of triangulation, has created fertile ground for the increased use of professionally designed questionnaires as psychometrically sound measurement tools (see Dewaele, 2019).

Chapter 5 addresses more general issues related to the unique characteristics of online versus paper questionnaires. The authors discuss questionnaires aimed at both language learners and language users. There will no doubt be some overlap with the issues raised in previous chapters. The point is that some elements that are less important in paper questionnaires are crucial in online questionnaires and vice versa. As Ruel et al. (2016, p. 2) noted that "E-mail and the web have now emerged as a primary vehicle for questionnaire distribution and data collection,"

The authors argue that when using paper and online questionnaires, the social dynamics are very different. In the former case, an authority figure (researcher, teacher) engages individuals with rights but limited power (the captive group) to complete a specific questionnaire in the interest of scholarship or for gaining academic credit. In the case of an online questionnaire, there is little overt social pressure to fill out the questionnaire. Respondents may see their participation as a favor to a teacher or friend, or may simply be interested in the subject of the questionnaire after discovering it online. The authors argue that for the researcher/teacher, invisibility, also means less social pressure to conform to their expectations, and anonymity implies non-participation.

They add that an online interviewee is not locked in and does not have to leave the room in front of

everyone. A single click is enough to close the window on the screen without fuss, embarrassment, or fear of consequences. The online participant tries less to please the researcher due to of the increased anonymity. As a result, the answers are more likely to be genuine and less likely to be influenced by social bias, as discussed in Chapter 1. The authors add that this distinction from paper questionnaires has two consequences. Due to the lack of social rejection from the researcher, teacher, or peers, only participants who are genuinely willing to provide data will do so. This could have a positive effect on data quality (cf. Wilson & Dewaele, 2010). Ruel et al. (2016, p. 3) suggested that due to increasing usage, there is a growing risky misconception that developing an online questionnaire is easy and that it can be "delegated to administrative assistants (who may have a variety of titles, ranging from secretary to office manager to program analyst and beyond) who may have little or no formal education in the development and implementation of surveys"

In Chapter 5, the authors conclude that pen-and-paper questionnaires are very likely to be completely replaced by online questionnaires with QR codes. Not only are they much easier to distribute and much more economical and efficient in collecting large amounts of data, but they also allow for greater flexibility and the use of authentic material in the instrument, such as embedded video recordings that participants can rate and judge. This fantastic technological advance will benefit the field of second language research.

In Chapter 6, the authors explain how to develop psychometrically sound instruments. In particular, the authors discuss the need, benefits, and methods associated with the development and use of short forms, citing the recent development and validation of the Short-

forms and cite the recent development and validation of the Short-Form Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (S-FLES) by Botes et al. (2021). Zoltán Dornyei and Jean-Marc Dewaele claim as quantitative studies in applied linguistics become more complex, there is an increasing need for short scales that can capture a variable quickly and reliably. As a result, the ability to develop and validate short forms of existing measures is becoming increasingly important.

According to the authors, the original 21-item Foreign Language Enjoyment Scale (FLES) was developed by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). This scale introduces the measurement of positive emotions to the field of applied linguistics. The aim of the measure is the empirical recording of Foreign Language Enjoyment (FLE), a broad positive emotion that is experienced in foreign language (FL) classroom. The FLES has been translated and adapted to different research contexts (see Li et al., 2018), with the FLE quickly becoming a standard variable in studies examining individual differences in FL learning (see Dewaele, 2022). Botes et al (2021) identify three main benefits of using S-FLES: (1) reduced administrative time and associated monetary costs; (2) easy interpretation of results; and (3) strong evidence of the validity and reliability of the measure. However, these advantages depend on the quality of the development of the short form and the resulting reliability and validity of the measure. Botes et al (2021) used advanced psychometric methods to ensure a psychom.

In part of Chapter 6, the authors state that there has been a growing interest in learner engagement in recent years. This is perhaps not surprising given its potential to complement traditional concepts such as motivation in explaining learning achievement in the 21st century educational landscape. The authors note

that engagement is often viewed as an external expression of motivation (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012), and most conceptualizations view it as a multidimensional phenomenon with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Reschly & Christenson, 2012).

The authors argue that many scholars agree that engagement relates to action (Lawson & Lawson, 2013) and that viewing it as ultimately a behavioral concept with underlying cognitive and affective facets creates a clearer dichotomy between engagement and other psychological constructs such as attitudes, self-regulation and emotions. Additionally, it is important to note that engagement relates to both the quantity and quality of learners' participation (Hiver et al., 2021). Learner engagement can vary qualitatively and cannot be viewed as something that learners have "more or less" (Lawson & Lawson, 2013, p. 456). However, since the majority of existing measures of engagement focus on the multidimensional nature of the concept, it is unclear how engagement as a primarily behavioral concept with cognitive and affective underpinnings can be measured while considering its quality.

Researchers need to develop and test a questionnaire that measures the level and quality of engagement in L2 classrooms to address this issue. The authors suggest that quality of engagement may relate to the perceived success and satisfaction of students' participation in an activity. Therefore, an initial questionnaire was designed around three main constructs: intensity of engagement, perception of engagement success and perception of engagement satisfaction. According to the authors, several objectives were considered and four key aspects of the learning process and learning environment were selected: teachers, peers, activities, and materials.

Each of the previously identified key components was then measured in relation to one of these four aspects. Having defined the concepts and established the basic structure of the questionnaire, the author saw the selection of the engagement object to be measured as an additional challenge. Because engagement is highly contextual, it must always have a goal or aspect that engages the learner (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

According to the authors, the successful development of a questionnaire consists of three steps: 1) conceptualization of the target construct, such as foreign language learning boredom (FLLB) (see Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (Li et al., 2021, pp. 23–25); 2) development of an instrument to measure the target construct, such as the Foreign Language Learning Boredom Scale (FLLBS); and 3) tool validation. The overall quality of all sub-processes determines the psychometric property of the final instrument (see Table 6.4, p. 143).

In Chapter 7, the authors create a checklist with the most critical points and recommendations for each phase of the questionnaire survey i.e., how the questionnaire is constructed (17 points); how to administer the questionnaire (8 points); and how the questionnaire data is processed (15 points) (see Zoltán Dörnyei and Jean-Marc Dewaele, 2022a, pp. 151-154).

CONCLUSION AND ARGUMENTATION

The authors emphasize that this book is not intended to be a comprehensive guide to survey research. There are a number of such high-quality books in the social sciences, and in Chapter 1 the authors recommend a few that they have found useful over the years. Instead, they aimed to provide a relatively short and concise outline of the most important factors for the busy researcher.

The authors attempted to write a book that would have been useful to them when they began their own research careers decades ago.

This book *Questionnaires in Second Language Research* written by Zoltán Dörnyei and JeanMarc Dewaele, is the first pioneering methodological guide to developing and implementing questionnaires as reliable and valid research tools in second language research. This provides detailed guidance and concrete real-world applications to provide a comprehensive, reader-friendly overview of questionnaire design, administration, and processing theory.

The only shortcoming of this book is that its specific application to L2 research is rather limited but this ultimately increases the book's applicability to a broader range of method courses. Although this book lacks the depth needed to address some of the issues of questionnaire research, its breadth makes it an extremely useful and instructive overview of the subject.

RECOMMENDATION

The third edition has been revised from the second edition to reflect the increasing use of computer and internet-based surveys and to ensure that it remains relevant as technology is increasingly used in survey research. As per our review or essay, we strongly recommend this book. Although, there is a small weakness, this book is a valuable reference for graduate students and novice researchers in the field of SLA, psychology and education who are interested in understanding and conducting quantitative L2 research using questionnaires/surveys. This book is also easy to read, well organized, full of references and practical advice, and essentially useful.

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