

LIU Ngar Fun

CRITIQUE OF A RESEARCH REPORT

Conrad, Linda. 1985.

'Semantic Versus Syntactic Cues in Listening Comprehension'
Studies in Second Language Acquisition 7:59-72.

This critique's intended audience are teachers who have some basic knowledge of research methodology and are interested in seeing some of that knowledge applied in evaluating a piece of research. This process would heighten awareness of the common pitfalls in conducting and writing up any study and in theory, guard researchers against making the same mistakes. However, it is one thing to know what the mistakes are and quite another not to commit them. Pitfalls could only be avoided if meticulous planning were carried out at the design stage of research. Beyond that stage, redemption is deemed highly improbable.

Taking an in-depth look at a research report and critiquing it can make teachers make aware of possible pitfalls when carrying out their own research. There are two reasons for examining Conrad's article. The most obvious is that it is regarded as a piece of systematic, ex post facto investigation guided by theory and hypotheses; and as such exhibits the kind of procedures common to a lot of research. Its subject matter is also of interest to language teachers. It attempts to explore the process of L2 listening comprehension -whether less proficient listeners attend more to syntactic than to semantic cues. This area of research might have pedagogic implications for language teachers in that given a better understanding of the relative weight of various listening barriers L2 learners encounter, listening instruction can become more focused. I shall examine and comment on all sections of Conrad's report (Abstract, Introduction, Method, etc.) one by one.

ABSTRACT

The abstract should normally be no more than 150 words and should state the *research problem, method and results*. Conrad did a good job covering all three aspects concisely. The research problem was elucidated in the first two sentences. She was interested in finding out whether non-native listeners attend more to syntactic information than natives do as the case is in studies of non-native and native readers. The use of the words "graphophonic" and "similar" is perhaps inappropriate since she was not really interested in the "phonic" aspect of listening and, the "grapho" aspect seems to concern reading rather than listening. She could have organised the abstract better by putting the hypothesis right after the research problem.

As for method, she stated who the subjects were and the procedures for conducting the investigation. She briefly outlined how she collected the data. In this case, it was through the use of a cloze test administered to the subjects after they had listened to a passage. She also mentioned how the test was scored and reference for the scoring procedures was cited. Results confirming her hypothesis were given at the end of the abstract.