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BOOK REVIEW

Howard, Martin (ed.). *Approaches and Methods in French Second Language Acquisition Research*. (Research Methods in Applied Linguistics, 9). Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 2025, 379 pp., ISBN: 9789027244970.
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Edited by Martin Howard, *Approaches and Methods in French Second Language Acquisition Research* offers a timely and meticulously curated overview of research practices in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), with a specific focus on French as an additional language. Published as the ninth volume in the *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (RMAL) series by John Benjamins, the work joins a growing body of literature that not only documents but critically evaluates methodological practices within applied linguistics. This volume stands out as both an epistemological reflection and a practical resource, providing researchers, instructors, and graduate students with a map of current trends, challenges, and research opportunities in French SLA.

As noted in the introduction, the volume takes shape around two interrelated goals: first, to examine methodological tendencies in the study of L2 French, and second, to reposition French, as a language other than English (LOTE), within the broader SLA research agenda. Given the continued dominance of English in SLA studies, this focus is both refreshing and essential. Howard situates French within major paradigms of SLA, reflecting on landmark projects such as the ESF project (Perdue, 1993), Canadian immersion studies, and more recent longitudinal research initiatives in Europe and North America. He makes a compelling argument that French has historically played a central but under-theorized role in SLA research, and the current volume aims to address that gap by highlighting methodological insights, shortcomings, and the road ahead.

The volume is structured into two main sections. The first, titled "Exploring French Learner Language", is organized thematically around core linguistic domains, from pronunciation and fluency to vocabulary, morphology, syntax, discourse, and pragmatic competence. The second section, "Exploring Learners and Contexts of Learning in Second Language French", moves beyond language systems to address variables such as input, individual differences, child learners, and third-language acquisition. Each chapter offers a blend of literature review, methodological critique, and forward-looking suggestions, creating a strong coherence across otherwise diverse thematic areas.

Chapter 2, by Jeffrey Steele, begins the first section with a detailed review of methods in pronunciation research, addressing French segmentals and prosody. The chapter usefully distinguishes between accentedness and intelligibility, highlighting the implications of each construct for study design. Importantly, Steele emphasizes the benefits of combining auditory and articulatory data and the

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growing role of corpus-based research, while pointing out underexplored areas like ultimate attainment and the interface between pronunciation and other competencies. Annie Tremblay (Chapter 3) shifts the focus to speech perception and word recognition, evaluating the use of tasks such as eye-tracking and lexical decision tests. Her methodological critique is particularly welcome, as perception studies remain less represented in L2 French research compared to production-focused work.

Clare Wright's chapter on fluency (Chapter 4) is especially impactful. It navigates between psycholinguistic measures of temporal fluency and broader sociolinguistic perspectives on spoken performance. Her integration of study abroad contexts, lexical bundles, and interactional fluency dimensions demonstrates the complexity of the construct and the need for multi-layered approaches.

Christina Lindqvist's contribution on vocabulary (Chapter 5) is another highlight. Her discussion of test design, especially in relation to vocabulary depth versus breadth, is pertinent for research on languages like French, where frequency-based wordlists are not as standardized as in English. The critique of using English-based lexical metrics for French learners is particularly astute.

The remaining chapters in Section I, on morphology (Ågren), syntax (Herschensohn & Arteaga), discourse (Leclercq), and sociolinguistic/pragmatic competence (Howard & Edmonds), collectively provide a panoramic view of current research tools and paradigms. Notably, the sociolinguistic/pragmatic chapter underscores the longstanding strength of French SLA research in variationist sociolinguistics, while pragmatics research is still emerging and less developed compared to other target languages.

Section II begins with Simona Pekarek Doehler's discussion of conversation analysis in SLA (Chapter 10), offering a comprehensive look at how L2 French contributes to understanding interactional competence and grammar-for-interaction. This chapter is especially valuable for its demonstration of longitudinal microanalysis, a method gaining traction in SLA but still rare in many studies.

Anita Thomas (Chapter 11) surveys input-related research and instructional contexts, examining the methodological tools used to study implicit vs. explicit learning, input enhancement, and frequency effects. Her overview is both concise and rich in insight, especially regarding ecological validity.

The chapters on individual differences (Arvidsson & Forsberg Lundell), child L2 acquisition (Granfeldt), and L3 French acquisition (Lindqvist) widen the scope by addressing different learner populations and learning trajectories. These chapters introduce readers to newer methodological terrain, such as the role of cognitive variables, cross-linguistic transfer in multilinguals, and assessment concerns in child SLA.

The final chapter by Martin Howard functions as a synthesis of the entire volume. He reflects on both the methodological legacy and future of L2 French research. Among his key takeaways are the need for more triangulated designs, increased attention to underrepresented learner groups (e.g., immigrants, Global South learners), and critical engagement with ethics and participant agency in SLA studies.

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A major strength of the volume lies in its internal coherence despite covering a wide range of topics and authors. This is aided by recurring themes, such as the role of cross-linguistic influence, the balance between ecological and experimental validity, and the challenge of adapting English- centric research tools to French. The inclusion of both well-established and emerging researchers further enriches the scope and relevance of the book.

In conclusion, *Approaches and Methods in French Second Language Acquisition Research* is a significant scholarly contribution that offers both breadth and depth. It fills a notable gap in methodological reflection specific to French as a target language in SLA, and it succeeds in its dual aim of documenting and problematizing prevailing practices. Researchers working on other LOTEs will also benefit from the book's broader arguments about language specificity and methodological adaptation. This volume will be a valuable reference for SLA researchers, teacher- researchers, graduate students, and anyone interested in the methodological architecture of applied linguistics today.

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