

# **Review of 'An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience' written by Kathleen M. Bailey**

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Lee, Kilryoung. 1998. Review of 'An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience' written by Kathleen M. Bailey. *Linguistics*, 6-1, 353-370. Quantitative methodology seems to be inappropriate for some of the language classroom research when the classroom is viewed as the place where personal, dynamic, and context-bound interactions are involved. Recently, qualitative methodology received recognition as a new and viable research methodology. Qualitative methodology is helpful for describing and explaining the complex and interacting factors involved in the personal and social sides of language learning and use in classroom. Bailey (1980) offers a good example of using a technique of qualitative methodology, keeping a diary, and also describing a language learner's affective state. This review will introduce introspective characteristics of diary studies and we will learn that the methodology makes it possible to peek into a learner's emotional state, which is assumed to have considerable influence on language learning. (Yeungnam University)

## **1. Introduction**

Bailey's study, "An introspective analysis of an individual's language learning experience", published in 1980, describes various language learning experiences that a language learner had in a formal instructional setting and analyzes their perceived effects on the learner's attempts to learn a foreign language. In her study, the learner and the researcher who analyzed the learner's learning experience are the same person.

Her study involves keeping a detailed journal, as a methodology of collecting data, while studying French. By analyzing a diary, researchers can get a clearer idea of language learners' learning strategies, their own perceptions, and affective factors that lie unconsciously in their inner thoughts. These are normally hidden or largely inaccessible to an external observer.

Diary studies has been recently used as a research technique of qualitative methodology. Bailey (1980) offers a good example of diary studies, and this review will introduce some characteristics of the technique which are not well-known to Applied linguists in this country. This review will also discuss some questions concerning the technique which is still new. In addition, Bailey describes her emotional state in her language learning process, with the help of the technique. This review will cover her language learning process and discuss findings concerned with affective factors, which are assumed to have considerable influence on language learning.

## 2. Research Question

The research question is not clearly stated in Bailey (1980). She is only trying to investigate how affective factors arising from interaction among people influence an individual's learning a foreign language.

Bailey (1983) said:

The research questions of diary studies were not pre-defined, and open-ended note-taking was the typical data collective procedure.  
(p.69)

That is the case in her study concerned here. When she started writing a diary for her study, she said that she intended to document her language learning strategies. However, she found that her writing was soon overshadowed by entries on her affective response to the language

learning situation and particularly to the interaction of her class. Therefore, I assume, she decided later to conduct her analysis, on the basis of her diary, about the relationship between affective factors and foreign language learning.

### 3. Procedure and Methodology

Bailey kept a diary of her experiences while studying French in a low-level college reading course. She took the course in order to prepare for a required translation exam in the Applied Linguistics Ph.D. program at UCLA. The course, French 2R, met one hour a day, three days a week, for a total of thirty hours in a ten-week period. The course was taught by a female native speaker of French using the grammar-translation method. The lecturer, Marie, was a novice in teaching French at that time, and younger than three of the six students.

Bailey wrote her reaction to the language-related situations in a confidential journal. She included almost every contact with French, for example, homework, French television commercial, conversations with friends, and class parties, so that she could obtain a wide range of reaction to both the formal and informal contexts of learning French. However, most of her journal entries were information regarding the time, the place, her feelings, the input from others involved, and her own perception of her language learning. Specifically, the affective responses to the formal learning situation were so dominant in the journal that they are the main body of her study.

#### 3.1 Qualitative methodology

Much classroom research was concerned with data that were readily quantifiable. That is, most of the research was confined to frequency, counts of moves and transaction, interaction patterns, question types, and the like.

However, a quantitative approach is not appropriate for some language classroom research when the classroom is viewed as the place of social interaction. As Samimy and Rardin (1994) argued, the data of quantitative studies are detached from the subjects and the contexts. If the nature of a social interactional classroom is personal, dynamic, and context-bound, there might be danger that the interpretation of quantitative data would be limited.

Recently, the qualitative approach has received recognition as a viable research methodology among second language researchers (O'Malley et al., 1985). Many researchers use it to describe and explain the complex and interacting factors involved in the social and personal sides of language use and learning in the classroom. Faerch and Kasper (1987) thought that it offered a more balanced position where L2 learning was seen as a process in close interaction between features in the learner and in the environment.

### 3.2 Diary studies

Diary studies are one way of gaining insight into the process of language learning, and the personal and social sides of language use. Bailey and Ochsner (1983) said that the central characteristic of diary studies is that they are introspective. They explained the technique for the second language field:

A diary study in second language learning, acquisition, or teaching is an account of second language experience as recorded in a first-person journal. The diarist may be a language teacher or a language learner--but the central characteristic of the diary studies is that they are introspective. (p.189)

Guba (1978), and Lincoln & Guba (1985) said the diary studies are a form of empirical (data-based) research, enhanced by introspection, in

the tradition of naturalistic inquiry. Grotjahn (1987), in discussion of the methodological basis of introspective methods, classified language learning diary studies as an 'exploratory-interpretive' category, in that they typically utilize non-experimental design, qualitative data, and interpretive analysis. Thus, Bailey's study can also be categorized as an exploratory-interpretive study, and it doesn't need any hypothesis or assumption.

Pioneering work with language learning diary studies is Schumann and Schumann (1977), who cast light on personal variables and kept intensive journals of their experiences in three language learning contexts. F. Schumann (1980) made a further analysis of her original journal data and presented several themes in her language learning. Those studies mentioned above were followed by Bailey (1980), which is the object of the present review. This study of Bailey's made her well-known for diary-study work.

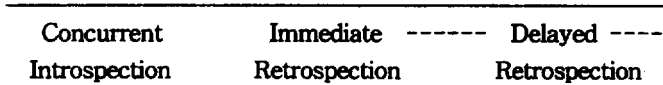
There are some other researchers who value diary study. Brown (1985) said that diary study was one of the best methods for getting at the individual learner variables. Long (1980) pointed out, with diary studies, introspection supplemented other observation work.

However, there are some questionable points regarding diary studies. When we say the diary studies involve introspection, the term "introspection" is a kind of a cover term which entails three different concepts. Fry (1988) explained that the term "introspective data" is held to refer only to data gathered from subjects while they are carrying out a task, whereas "retrospective data" are those collected after the event. In contrast to "introspection" concurrent with the task, he said:

The term 'retrospection' involves a very broad data collection timespan, ranging from immediately after the event (following a language class, for example) to years later (as is the case in the language learning histories). (p.160)

Bailey (1991) illustrated this as a continuum (Fig.1).

Figure 1. Introspection immediacy continuum (Bailey, 1991)



Bailey doesn't reveal in her 1980's study how much time elapsed between the event and the recording, although Bailey (1991) said later "As soon as possible is preferable." Considering Bailey's (1991) illustration (Fig.1), her 1980's study should be labeled immediate retrospection instead of introspection, since she said:

Following my contacts with French, I wrote my reaction to such language-related situations in a confidential journal. (p.58)

Seliger (1983) was concerned with this matter, and Fry (1988) pointed out that all the problems of cognition in introspective data were magnified by the lapse of time between the event and the reporting of it. For example, there might be reduced or distorted data, in case of inconsistency in terms of time of each event.

A concern about several of the diary studies published is the fact that many of the diarists were themselves linguists, experienced teachers or language teachers-in-training. Their perception is, as Mann (1982) said, inevitably affected by their metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness. Likewise, in the Bailey's study (1980), she is not a typical language learner, but a Ph. D student of Applied Linguistics. 0 Lastly, there is a question of whether diary studies are kept in L1 (First Language) or L2(Second Language). Brown (1985) said interactive journals are often kept in L2 because that is the language of the teacher. However, most other diaries seem to have been kept in L1 because learners can

express themselves more fully in their mother tongue, as Bailey (1980) does. Since the rationale of diary studies is to obtain the hidden feeling of the diarist, I think it is important that diaries should be kept in their mother tongue, unless the diarist is bilingual.

#### 4. Findings

In Bailey's study, following the procedure and methodology of her study, she gives some examples of journal entries and shows what she found as themes. Reviewing all these, there are some points to be made. Most of all, Bailey does not include many excerpts from the journal. Even if she keeps saying that there are many references to journal entries, she fails to give, in some events, enough references to convince readers.

During the first and second week of French 2R, Bailey goes into detail about her emotions. At that time<sup>1</sup>, she was very sensitive to her teacher, Marie. Her first impression of Marie was positive:

She seems nice, young, enthusiastic and willing to slow down for the students. --- I was very rusty on the aural activities. However, Marie monitors our puzzled looks and maintains eye contact with the students (p.58).

Bailey's attitude toward the class was positive in the beginning of the first week, and gradually diminished as time went by. On the first day, she was motivated by high hope: "I hope to do well in this course". She was all the more excited with her new teacher. In the second class meeting, she was worried about the class exercise. She said: "Today I felt a little scared. I am so rusty." By the end of the first week, she had made some mistakes and her feeling about the class

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1. The time from the data are recorded after the event takes place.

got worse. She puts it in this way: "I am absolutely worn out. -- I felt so lost!"

Bailey reached the low point early in the second week, and skipped the class on Monday. However, in the middle of the second week, she achieved some minimal success in the class and found she was not as lost as she had thought. This made her feel more confident:

I'm not as lost as I thought. I guess I can't possibly feel any worse than I felt on Monday. Maybe things are looking up (p.60)

She also began to watch the student-teacher interaction as something interesting in and of itself. She seemed to enjoy the group dynamics.

From the third through the sixth week, Bailey realized a growing tension in the class as a whole. During the third week of the course, she made several unsuccessful attempts to rearrange the tables and chairs in the classroom so that the students would be able to see and hear each other better, instead of being so isolated. However, she met with some resistance. She does not explain why other students did not like it and readers will be curious to know why there was some resistance. She said that she just finally quit trying and the class remained in its teacher-fronted, stationary arrangement.

At last, the tension of the class erupted in the seventh week. When Marie was returning the tests, some students complained that Marie gave an unfair and too long test and the class was becoming "an armed camp." Bailey describes the atmosphere when Tom (a student in the class) complained of Marie's way of teaching. The journal says:

Marie listened while he (Tom) explained his point of view. The room was very quiet and Tom's face was tense. I think Marie was surprised (p.61).

Bailey also describes another classmate's complaint. Herbert compared



Marie with another French teacher he had in the last quarter. The journal describes:

He pointed out to her that tests can be devastating if teacher's purpose is to show the students how little they know. He said that last quarter they had enthusiasm for the French 1R class and that people had enjoyed the other teacher's discussion of Paris and life in France, and that Marie should realize what was happening in the class (p.61).

Bailey thinks Herbert's was the most interesting comment, and the one that upset Marie the most was "I think you (the teacher) feel we're not very bright." His remark, Bailey thinks, apparently hurt Marie because Marie returned to it at the end of the discussion. Bailey also realized that some classmates were mad at herself as well as the teacher. They were mad at Bailey:

because I had gotten a 'B' on the test, which was the highest grade. On the test, there was the Biblical passage of Creation story we had to translate. A few weeks before, when we had encountered the phase, *au commencement* ("in the beginning"), I asked Marie if that was how Genesis begins in the French Bible. Marie said she thought so and that she would check. That was it, but part of the translation task on the test turned out to be the first few verses of the Creation story. I was amused to see it on the test and I was able to simply compare my memorized King James Version with the French without having to really work at translating anything. But Robert and Tom were furious (p.61).

Bailey calls this incident of the seventh week as a 'classroom crisis.' However, the atmosphere bounced back from 'an armed camp' when Herbert suggested a social evening, a 'soiree', and Marie seemed

pleased with it. Even if Bailey does not tell us whether they really had a 'soiree', she thinks that the confrontation over the "unfair" test served as the effect of breaking tension that had been building in the class. With the improved atmosphere, Bailey says she showed a high level of personal enthusiasm for studying French. Bailey says:

The level of tension dropped sharply after this crisis and never mounted again... There are numerous references to the improved class atmosphere, humorous instances in the classroom (p.61).

It would be better if she states in more detail how the 'classroom crisis' was resolved and how the resolution influenced the rest of the course.

Regarding the "classroom crisis", Bailey (1991) said that it provided an example of what is known as a 'natural experiment' in ethnography. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) explained that a natural experiment was an opportunity to explore some unusual occurrence. According to them, the unusual but naturally occurring events:

reveal what happens when the limiting factors that normally constrain a particular element of social life are breached. At such times social phenomena that are otherwise taken-for-granted become visibly problematic for the participants themselves, and thus for the observer (p.32).

Bailey (1991) said that the natural experiment of this case allowed her to observe a group of very angry students. That is, Bailey could view their emotional status in class, taking advantage of the rather unusual incident.

## 5. Themes found in language learning experience

Bailey in her analysis finds three themes of apparent or perceived importance: (1) her response to the language learning environment, (2) her preference for a democratic teaching style, (3) her need for success and positive feedback.

She indicates that the physical and social environment seemed to be influential in her language learning experiences. The most obvious example of the first theme was her desire to rearrange tables and chairs so that she wouldn't feel isolated. In addition to physical environment, she seems to think social environment is even more important. She said that she became more positive as she got to know the other students after the 'classroom crisis' was resolved.

As a second theme, she finds that the social climate is directly related to the role of the teacher, and the teacher's democratic teaching style indirectly influenced her long-term motivation for learning French. As evidence, she says Marie was a very democratic person, and even during the class confrontation about the "unfair" test, she asked the students' opinions. Bailey appreciated that Marie was trying to modify her "European" standards to suit their "American" expectations.

She confesses, as a third theme, the fact that teacher encouragement strongly influenced her. In one journal entry, she was glad that Marie was patient with all the students and also encouraged them. When Marie announced that she would speak only in French, Bailey was excited at having an aural task she could actually do.

Regarding the three themes, a more basic theme deeply hidden in her journal would be her 'anxiety' across the three themes, as discussed by Bailey (1983). For example, she expressed her anxiety from the first class meeting. The journal says:

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2. Anxiety is almost impossible to define in a simple sentence. It is associated with feelings of uneasiness, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry (Brown, 1994).

I hope to do well in this course, but sometimes today when Marie spoke French, I actually felt like I was deaf. It was so hard to hear what she was saying. I copied most of the vocabulary that she wrote on the blackboard, even the words and phrases that I already knew (p.59).

It is assumed that copying all the vocabulary on the blackboard is the indication of her worry or uneasiness. After the second class, she wrote about her frustration in the class exercise:

There were times when I was entirely lost. I can't produce any verb endings and my tenses are a disaster --- I was panicked in the class exercise where we had to fill in the blanks with either the past definite or the imperfect. How frustrating it is to be looking for adverbial clues in the sentences when I don't even know what the words and phrase mean (p.59).

Some cases of motivation following her anxiety are often visible in her journal. She was in such a state of anxiety that she saw herself as one of the lowest in the class. However, she was so self-controlled and resolute as to be motivated, while she was in anxiety. In other words, she produced a "rebound effect". She put it in this way:

Today, I felt a little scared. I am so rusty! I am probably the second lowest in the class now. --- I was just scared enough to be stimulated to prepare for the next time (p.59).

At the beginning of the second week, her anxiety became the highest and she decided to skip her class. She wrote:

Today, I skipped my French class. Last night I began reading the assigned chapter, but I got bogged down and discouraged so I quit (p.60).

However, she became resolute to catch up. When she skipped the class in the second week, she went to the library to review instead. The journal says:

I tried to read in the library but I was so upset about the French class that I couldn't concentrate, so I've just been writing in my journal. I *must* get caught up in French or I'll never be able to go back to the class. (p.60)

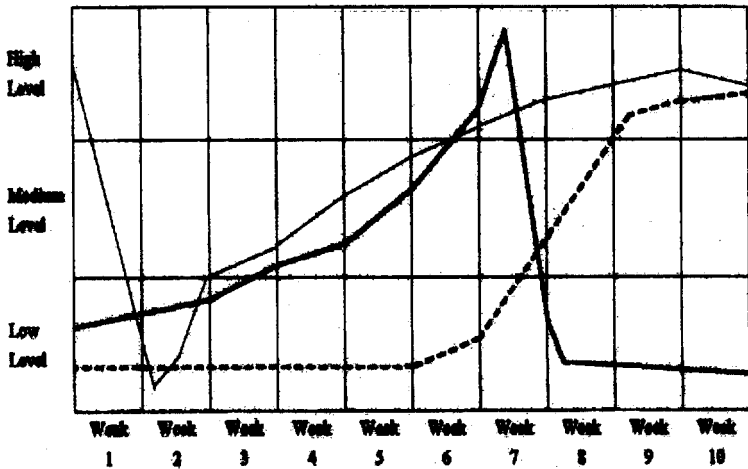
While she was in anxiety, she showed her determination, to the extent that she stressed the word 'must' in italic in the paper.

Competitiveness sometimes caused her anxiety. She felt isolated because the other students in the class knew each other and she was a new comer. This increased anxiety of group dynamics: competitiveness. At the end of the first week in her study, she wrote:

Today my palms were sweating and I was chewing my lip through the entire class. My emotional state wasn't helped any by the blond girl who sat next to me. She had already taken French 3 and was just looking for a three-unit course. She made several comments about how slow the class is, and then decided this isn't the right course for her (p.59).

Bailey presents an interesting graph (seen in Figure 2) about perceived levels of affective factors in the classroom patterns. The line graph indicates her impression of the relative levels of student-student interaction, class tension, and her personal enthusiasm for learning French, as the 10 week progressed. This graph shows how her feelings fluctuated, depending on her emotional response to events in the classroom for 10 weeks.

Figure 2. Perceived levels of Classroom Tension, student-student Interaction, and Personal Enthusiasm for Learning French (Bailey, 1980)



← Weeks of Instruction in French 2R →

----- = Level of student-student interaction during class sessions

↔ = Level of interpersonal tension in the French classroom

———— = Level of my own enthusiasm for leaning French

The graph indicates that Bailey has the low point of her enthusiasm in the second week, when she was so anxious and frustrated as to skip the French class. The parallel lines from the third week to sixth week are interesting, since it means that her enthusiasm and her interpersonal tension may be co-related. This represents her resolution to catch up after the second week. However, we can also see that the level of her

enthusiasm is still high, even when her interpersonal tension became low. It is assumed that she settled down with relaxation and thus became motivated. After the "classroom crisis" of the seventh week, she finally has a high level of student-student interaction, a high level of her own enthusiasm, and low level of interpersonal tension. This graph might look odd in this kind of a qualitative study, but it seems to be helpful for readers to get a quick grasp of how the diarist's feelings progressed as time went by.

## 6. Conclusion

Through the study, it seems to be clear that Bailey's personal classroom experience has a positive as well as negative influence on Bailey's learning a foreign language. Of various events in the classroom, classroom interaction between teacher and students on one hand and among students on the other is important to Bailey. I assume that the former is placed under the second and third theme, while the latter is under the first theme. However a broader and more basic theme covering all the three would be 'the importance of the affective state', concerned with anxiety.

Bailey (1980) indicates that her motivation to learn the target language depends on her affective state. It is interesting that Bailey's anxiety functions rather positively and motivated her in a certain period of time as seen in Figure 2. It is assumed that, as Brown (1994) said, facilitative tension as contrasted with debilitating tension keeps her poised, alert, and just slightly unbalanced to the point that she cannot relax entirely.

This study indicates that emotional influence is important in learning a foreign language. Further question would be how much emotional influence would be the most appropriate for language learners. It would be interesting to examine the anxiety levels of more and less successful students and compare them. If Bailey had some diaries from other

members of the class, she might have observed some important contrasts. Also, another interesting question would be whether the emotional influence can be controlled for successful language learning. What could teachers and learners do about this?

Bailey (1980) is one of early studies with respect to the methodology of diary studies. Her study suggests a type of research methodology that makes it possible to explore many aspects of our emotions which are otherwise rarely accessible. In the sense that a classroom is full of personal, dynamic, and context-bound nature of interaction, diary studies can be useful in classroom research.

The methodology of keeping a detailed journal is still new and the literature is limited. However, Bailey (1980) confesses at the end of her study that keeping a journal seems to hold considerable promise, both as a research tool and as an aid to self-awareness, since it caused a challenging and thought-provoking process.

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