

# 1 *Setting the Scene*

## 1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter will outline the purpose of the volume and explain my personal commitment to the topic. The chapter will also begin to build a case for more diverse and more active roles for children in applied linguistics research.

Even though more and more empirical research has been targeting young language learners in applied linguistics, almost all this research is conceptualised and interpreted via an adult lens without any serious input from children themselves. The main argument of the volume is that such adult-focussed research could be usefully complemented with alternative methods and approaches which would give children the opportunity to engage in research more actively. Opening up a range of new participatory opportunities would bring many benefits to children, teachers and researchers alike. Such research can promote ‘the wellbeing and flourishing of children’ (Montreuil et al., 2021, p. 12) as well as generating knowledge that is fresh and uniquely different from adult views and representations.

This volume will begin to develop a justification for this argument by discussing evidence emerging from studies across a variety of disciplinary areas in order to incorporate fresh insights into research with children in applied linguistics and to raise awareness about child-focussed research. It is hoped that such cross-fertilisation between distinct bodies of literature relating to different disciplines, such as education, sociology, health care, social work, or climate change education, will lead to sparking new ideas, promoting new debates and inspiring new, creative ways of researching *with* children in applied linguistics.

## 1.2 A Few Key Premises and Why I Decided to Write This Book

This volume has emerged from my experience of engaging with both the theory and the practice of English as a second and foreign language teaching for young learners for over twenty-five years, as well as from inspirational work I have encountered in other disciplines. As a result of this, I have come to believe that the current, largely traditional approaches in applied linguistics research with children could be usefully expanded and supplemented with alternative approaches that encompass a wider range of roles for children.

I would like to start this book by laying down some premises to justify the content and the shape of the volume.

### *Premise 1: Children Are Routinely Underestimated by Adults*

Let me illustrate this first premise with a story that takes me back more than twenty years to when I was working on my own PhD study. With an interest in task-based language teaching, I set out to design some classic ‘spot the differences’ tasks for ten-year-old children learning English in a state school in Hungary. The children were almost complete beginners, despite the fact that they had been learning English for two years at the time of the data collection. As an outsider researcher who had no previous connections with the school and the children, I relied on the English teacher’s help and the textbook to design the linguistic content of the tasks. When I completed the tasks, the teacher said that the tasks looked too difficult and that the children were not going to be able to use them to interact with each other in English. Naturally, I got deeply worried and began to prepare myself for needing to redesign all my data elicitation tools. However, to my delight, and the English teacher’s utter astonishment, when I tried the first set of tasks with the group, the children managed it, skilfully complementing their limited L2 English resources with some miming and code-switching. Over three video-recorded repetitions of practising with the same type of task, they improved both the fluency and the accuracy of their English performance, used gradually less L1, spotted more differences between the pictures, and collaborated more effectively with each other (Pinter, 2006; 2007). The children also seemingly enjoyed interacting with their partners in English. In the lesson breaks many of them created hand-drawn versions of the spot the differences task and carried on playing in pairs to entertain themselves, presumably because they were motivated to do better and better in the repeated task recordings. At the end of the data collection period,

when the children were invited to watch their own video-recorded performances in pairs, they commented that they felt proud of their final performances and wanted to carry on. They expressed their regret that the textbook or the teacher never encouraged them to work with similar interactive tasks that required spontaneous rather than scripted language use.

This experience twenty years ago taught me many important lessons, but perhaps the most important one is that we must never underestimate what children can do if they put their minds to something. I also learnt that language learning, or any learning for that matter, is most effective when children enjoy the process, see the point of it, feel motivated to carry on practising even outside the lesson, and at the end feel that they have accomplished something that others can appreciate and that they themselves can be proud of. These ideas will be picked up and revisited in the upcoming chapters because they link to principles that define children's active participation in research.

### *Premise 2: Children Have Valuable Insights to Share about Important Matters, and We Need to Listen to Them*

Over the decades of working with children, I have been constructing and reconstructing a personal conception of childhood, and, as a result, I have come to see children as resourceful and competent – often more competent than we would first imagine – and full of potential and promise. I have experienced again and again that when children are approached respectfully, trusted to make their own choices and given space to think for themselves, they can act responsibly and will often surprise adults with their contributions. Malaguzzi, the well-known founder of the Reggio Emilia schools, which will be discussed in later chapters, once said: 'All children, whatever their culture, whatever their lives, are rich, better equipped, more talented, stronger and more intelligent than we can suppose' (Cagliari et al., 2016, p. 397). Malaguzzi's own work was with young children in pre-schools, but such conceptions can and must surely be applied to children of all ages. Such views and beliefs about children have resonated with me since the beginning of my career, and over the years these beliefs have grown into a stronger conviction. The need to listen to children and take their views seriously will be one of the cornerstones of the upcoming arguments about child-focused research.

For sure, I am not on my own with these beliefs about children. However, in applied linguistics, and particularly in child L2 education, such beliefs and conceptions are not routinely talked about. In fact, the literature in applied linguistics to date has not explicitly addressed

adult conceptions of childhood and the status of children as language learners. We also have not ‘problematized the role of English in children’s lives’ (López-Gopar, 2016, p. 7) and have not asked serious questions about why and how children might or might not want to learn second or foreign languages. Very few studies have attempted to find out about children’s English language learning experiences other than by asking narrow questions framed by adult perspectives. I would like to argue that we also need to ask open-ended questions to explore children’s views and perspectives about L2 learning and invite them to work with us in a more holistic way. Currently, we know very little about children’s concerns and priorities, and in order to understand children’s perspectives better, we need to develop a genuine space for dialogue and to listen and act on what we hear. Engaging with children in genuine dialogue will be the foundation of their potential active engagement in research.

*Premise 3: It Is of Benefit to Cross-Fertilise Research from Different Discipline Areas with a Focus on Children*

One reason why children’s views and perspectives have not been given much attention in applied linguistics is because the field has been largely driven by the desire to push the boundaries of scientific knowledge about L2 language learning processes in childhood rather than by a desire to ask questions about how the participants themselves might see, benefit from and experience language learning and related research. Recently, scholars such as Crookes (2005), Ortega (2005), Ushioda (2021), and Yates (2005) have all begun to draw our attention to the importance of interrogating our practices in terms of the values of our research, that is, why we do the work that we do, who the true beneficiaries of our research are, and who we might be serving with our research. In a quest to serve the children, as primary beneficiaries of child second language education research, I have turned to work in other disciplines for inspiration. Such an attempt to bring together ideas from a wide variety of traditions and ways of working is challenging but also refreshing. Of course, it is not possible in this volume to give justice to the rich literatures in these discipline areas, and I do not claim to do that. Instead, the upcoming chapters will attempt to introduce some illustrative work to give a flavour of the type of child-focussed research that has been undertaken outside our field. My hope is that researchers interested in engaging children in applied linguistics research will take up the challenge of continuing this exploration, working on building bridges to connect us to scholars interested in children in other fields of study so that we can benefit and enrich each other’s work.

### *Premise 4: Processes of Teaching, Learning and Researching Are All Connected*

The main focus and interest in this volume is on promoting active roles for children in research that takes place in school contexts, emerging from but not necessarily limited to second language (mostly English as an L2) classrooms. In fact, the intention is to explore all kinds of possibilities for researching *with* children, in both short-term and longitudinal projects undertaken by teachers, academic facilitators or by teams of adults and children. The starting point will be to raise awareness about the possibility of inviting children as active participants and to generate ideas about how to involve them in various active roles in second language classroom research. The initial focus will be on possible ways of exploring the L2 classroom, but as will be illustrated in later chapters, projects can grow well beyond those. When children experience researching in active roles alongside adult facilitators, such experience will inevitably have an impact on how they come to think about their everyday teaching/learning experiences. It does not make sense to trust, respect and listen to a child intently only while they participate in a research project but not in everyday teaching. Looking at it from the other side, if children enjoy high degrees of autonomy in less hierarchical institutions, they are likely to be more prepared for active roles in research as well.

Child-centred approaches to learning and teaching emphasise that learners become active enquirers and feel motivated because they are genuinely interested in the selected topic or learning material and sustain enthusiasm for their project in the long term. Having had the privilege of working with children who played active roles in research, I have witnessed the zeal, enthusiasm and deep engagement on the children's part when they were working alongside adults as co-researchers and as novice researchers taking their first steps in child-led research projects (Pinter, 2019; Pinter et al., 2016). These children were keen to work independently on topics that were of interest to them; they were excited to take responsibility and make decisions for themselves; and they showed a huge appetite to take on more and more work and make a difference with their work. These potential advantages of involving children in more active roles in research can naturally cross over to teaching and learning processes.

### *Premise 5: A New Framework Is Needed to Supplement Current, More Traditional Approaches*

There are four possible ways of involving children in research, which are research 'on' and 'about' children as well as research 'with' and

*Table 1.1 Types of research involving children, adapted from Kellett (2010a) and Mayne and Howitt (2015)*

<p><b>Research on children</b>            Children's perspectives are interpreted by adults alone            Typically observations or tests</p>	<p><b>Research about children</b>            Children's perspectives are interpreted by adults alone            Interest in unique trajectories of children            Typically small-scale, longitudinal case studies and other qualitative studies</p>
<p><b>Research with children</b>            ('weaker' and 'stronger' forms)            Respect for children's capacities            Focus on listening to children            Partnership and collaboration            Information sharing, dialogue            Co-constructing knowledge</p>	<p><b>Research by children</b>            Empowering children to undertake their own research            Implementing their own agenda            Holistic engagement from selecting questions to dissemination            Adult guiding and supporting children to conduct their own research</p>

'by' children (Kellett, 2010a; Mayne & Howitt, 2015; see Table 1.1). I will argue that in addition to the more passive roles of 'on' and 'about', we need the more active roles of 'with' and 'by'. This volume will adopt this categorisation throughout the upcoming chapters to describe and analyse what children actually do in different research studies. The categories from research 'on' children to research 'by' children also represent a continuum, and attempting to categorise studies will help to highlight how and when children can move towards more active roles.

Extending the framework with active roles does not intend to replace traditional research or suggest that passive roles are somehow inferior but to add new possibilities to the repertoire of those researchers who are interested in exploring alternatives.

These four separate categories, which also sit on a continuum, will be used as reference points in the upcoming chapters, and returning to these categories will help us to navigate the analysis of different studies.

### 1.3 The Title of the Volume

The title of this volume is *Engaging Children in Applied Linguistics Research*.

When inviting children to participate in research in active roles, they are being recognised as 'experts', that is, experts of their own lives and

experiences. Handing over to them some responsibility in the research process represents a continuum from minimal participation to full participation. This elevation of children to the role of experts – in contrast to traditional research – brings potential political and activist overtones and an explicit questioning of traditional views on hierarchy, power and knowledge creation in research.

Promoting children's active roles in research is also associated with certain educational philosophies and pedagogical practices embedded in learner-centredness, experimentation, inquiry-based approaches, and democratic and inclusive ways of working. However, beyond all that, for many childhood scholars, researching with children or enabling children to become researchers in their own right is bound up with an explicit ethical stance that thrives on a deep commitment that children must be respected as individuals in their own right and as rights-bearing citizens (Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). What this means for some is that conducting our research must serve and benefit the very participants we work with.

Active roles refer to the kinds of research engagement where children's views are taken seriously and their insights are respected. This may mean including children as consultants, helpers or partners in adult-initiated or jointly initiated research, and or it can refer to the possibility of inviting children to undertake their own research. In effect, this volume is dedicated to critically examining what types of participation in applied linguistics may be possible (from weaker to stronger forms of active engagement) and to developing arguments for broadening the currently limited framework for research.

Working with children who take up active roles in research is closely associated with a sociological approach to studying children and childhood, often referred to as the 'New Childhood Studies' (James & Prout, 1990). In the last thirty or more years, the sociological view of childhood has had a tremendous influence on a range of disciplines interested in children, such as law, education, health care, social care and climate change education. This volume's overall aim is to make a plea for research with children as active participants in our field, applied linguistics, where this influence has been largely missing to date. By promoting an alternative way of working with children, this volume aims to open up new, creative possibilities for researchers interested in understanding children's life worlds and their second and foreign language learning experiences, motivations and priorities. Working with children in this way in applied linguistics can also unlock opportunities that can take us beyond the classroom walls, exploring important topics and issues of local and global interest and thus connecting language learning to real-life needs and interests.

## 1.4 Why Is This Book Needed Now?

In the twenty-first century, as part of the global trend of introducing English into primary and pre-primary education, more and more children are learning English in formal school contexts. Almost exactly a decade ago, Ellis and Knagg (2013) estimated the number of young English learners globally to be somewhere around half a billion. This is a staggering statistic, and numbers since 2013 have increased further. Children are learning English in a variety of contexts worldwide, including state schools, private schools, pre-schools and kindergartens of all kinds in both developed and developing countries.

Most children are learning English because it is now compulsory in their schools or because their parents have chosen it for them. Believing that learning English will lead to enhanced life opportunities, parents in some contexts spend huge amounts of money on their children's English language education (Brown & Laufer, 2012; Butler, 2017a). By contrast, English is also taught to children in large under-resourced classrooms in marginalised communities, sometimes in very difficult circumstances, including war-torn areas, refugee camps and other conflict zones. These children's experiences with L2 English and other languages must be vastly different, and yet we know very little about their day-to-day experiences or their perspectives. What sense do children make of the role of English in their lives? What types of learning materials and activities do they find meaningful and purposeful, what it is they enjoy or do not enjoy, and why?

With growing numbers of children learning English worldwide, more and more research is targeting children as second/foreign language learners, as evidenced by publications of the last decade (e.g. Bland, 2016; Butler, 2015; Copland & Garton, 2014; Enever, 2011; Enever & Lindgren, 2017; García Mayo, 2017; Garton & Copland, 2019; Mourão & Lourenço, 2015; Murphy, 2014; Murphy & Evangelou, 2016; Nikolov, 2016; Pinter, 2011; Rich, 2014).

The vast majority of research is 'on' and 'about' children rather than 'with' or 'by' children, meaning that children play entirely passive roles in the research, with the consequence that their language learning experiences are exclusively described through an adult lens. Given that children are passive participants, at times they may even be unaware that research is going on, and their contributions are restricted to following adult instructions to respond to tasks, just like they do every day when interacting with their teachers in their ordinary lessons. Research 'with' and 'by' children, as expected, stands in sharp contrast to this perspective as such options imply a more active, aware and motivated engagement on the part of the child participant and a



different perspective, awareness and intention on the part of the adult. This contrast between passive and more active roles taken up by children will be unpacked and critically examined in the upcoming chapters.

The current status quo is, of course, completely understandable, and there are many reasons why applied linguistics research involving children has not embraced more active roles for children. One reason is that teaching, learning and researching work in applied linguistics is mostly undertaken in a second language. Exploring children's views in depth and encouraging them to participate in research actively may not be possible via the second or foreign language, but instead children may need to 'fall back on' the use of their strongest or dominant language, their L1, or their multilingual repertoire.

Child L2 education as a field is the mirror image of the adult field. As Oliver and Azkarai (2017) suggest, second language acquisition (SLA) as a field is entirely adult-oriented and follows an adult agenda. Initially, the focus on young learners was prompted by the widespread observation that children in immigrant families, as opposed to their parents and grandparents, typically acquire a second language with ease and with better overall outcomes. Inspired by Lenneberg's (1967) theory, a sub-field of adult SLA began to develop, focussing on the impact of age in L2 acquisition. But studies focussing on children tend to employ methods, tools, questions and analytical frameworks inherited from adult SLA studies. To date, much of the work undertaken in the broad field of child second language education is largely derivative of the adult literature, addressing questions mirrored by that literature and using the same or similar approaches and methods (e.g. Philp et al., 2008).

In this volume I argue that we need to broaden the scope of research by incorporating studies that target the unique views and understandings of children about language learning processes, not just as data sources but also as active contributors to research.

Butler (2022) similarly comments that in current child SLA 'we may need more fundamentally unique approaches to child L2 studies, not simple modifications and adjustments of adult-based models' (p. 198). She proposes that 'research with children requires rethinking established research methods and practices in L2 development' (p. 199), and she advocates so-called child-centred views or approaches to research.

This volume embraces one possible interpretation of child-centredness in applied linguistics by suggesting that focussing on children's perspectives and engaging them actively in research are promising avenues to understand many different aspects of child

second language learning as well as child second language learners as whole persons.

We need to consider the following key questions:

- Who should speak for children in applied linguistics and SLA research? Should it be only adults, or is there room for children's perspectives and views as well?
- Is it only adults who can be considered experts, or can children be acknowledged as experts of their own language learning experiences inasmuch as they may have relevant insights to share about what it is like to learn and use their L2 in different contexts?
- If children are seen as experts, is it the adults' duty to consider their expertise in addition to their own?
- If children are experts, can they contribute to research in applied linguistics more actively, assuming different roles, not just passive ones as data sources?
- Who and what is child second language education research for? Who gets to do research in this field? What gets researched focusing on what populations, with what questions and approaches in mind?
- Does the research we do respond to children's needs, priorities, wellbeing and challenges? Is the research relevant? Is it relevant to the children?
- What kind of new research 'with' and 'by' children is feasible? What kinds of participation of children in research might be feasible? With what benefits and challenges?

The central narrative that will run through this volume underscores the argument that child second/foreign language education as a field could benefit from embracing children's perspectives more systematically by opening up possibilities for researchers to explore their learners' views and experiences in different active roles, since attention so far has largely focussed on studies where children were invisible in passive object roles or had limited roles to play as data sources.

Including children's perspectives in research is a commitment advocated by a sociological approach to the study of childhood and children, one that has explicitly positioned children as 'active subjects' rather than just 'passive objects' of adult control and influence. Embracing this shift in perspective by conceptualising children as active, capable subjects whose opinions matter and who are able to speak for themselves is aligned with the principles articulated by researchers working within the (New) Childhood Studies or (New) Sociology of Childhood approach (James & Prout, 1990; Kehily, 2009), which are associated with studying children with a focus on

their ‘rights’, ‘agency’ and the kinds of ‘participation’ that may be possible to achieve in different contexts.

Such a shift towards a focus on children as social actors and a need to uncover their perspectives has been underlined by a number of justifications. First, giving learners a voice in educational policy-making or research is an epistemological necessity in that the reality experienced by children cannot be fully appreciated by adults. Since children inhabit so-called subcultures that are not visible or accessible to adults (Kellett, 2010a), the meanings that they attach to their experiences are not the same as adults’ meanings (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000). From a political/ethical perspective, the publication and the international ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) provided further impetus for reconsidering the status of children as ‘rights-bearing’ citizens whose contributions need to be elicited, listened to and taken seriously in all areas of their lives. From a policy perspective, services, materials and resources for children can be improved when their input is considered. Equally, teaching and learning processes in formal education can be substantially improved when learner contributions are taken seriously both in research and everyday teaching.

Taking children’s perspectives seriously and listening to and acting on their voices in applied linguistics will lead to a better understanding of children’s life worlds, their ecologies, their needs, interests and ever-changing priorities and identities within language learning and beyond. Adult researchers, teachers, teacher educators and policy-makers would benefit from better understanding how children conceptualise language learning and the role of English (and/or other languages) in their lives, what they enjoy and do not enjoy or find difficult, and what they may be interested in exploring in collaborative research projects with adults or on their own.

## 1.5 The Use of Key Terms

To avoid ambiguity, it is essential to explain and justify the intended meaning of some key terms used in the volume.

‘Applied linguistics’ is used as an umbrella term to refer to the broad field, which itself suffers from a lack of consensus regarding its exact definition. In this volume my core concern is with second and foreign language education in childhood, with a focus on instructed learning contexts in classrooms and schools rather than community or heritage language learning, although those contexts may also be able to draw some implications from the content. While it is the case that the majority of the examples in this volume will come from English as

an L2 contexts, the discussion and the principles throughout the book relating to the theoretical, philosophical, methodological and ethical issues could also be made relevant to researching other language learning scenarios. I will use the term 'child second language education' to refer to the narrower field, which I see as nested inside applied linguistics. Again, mostly this will imply English as a second or foreign language as it is by far the most widely taught second and foreign language in schools worldwide. Nonetheless, occasionally, other L2s will also be mentioned.

'Children' rather than 'young learners' is selected for the title, and this is a conscious choice following the core literature that inspired this book, which is the New Sociology of Childhood. Following the definitions used in international legislation, such as by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and UNICEF (2002), the term children will be extended and thus include all minors under eighteen years of age. The age ranges covered in the book thus will include children in pre-schools, primary schools and secondary schools, all the way up to the age of eighteen years of age. Young learners, which is a term used in applied linguistics, tends to describe learners between the ages of five and twelve, an age bracket that roughly covers the primary school years in most contexts but one that chooses to cut off sharply any work either side involving older or younger children. This broad definition, in contrast, helps to emphasise continuity and fluidity in development rather than rigidity and the specific characteristics associated with a specific age range. I am aware that this broad definition of children and childhood is perhaps somewhat awkward and even counterintuitive, but it is more in line with the argument that agency and voice as well as participation are not characteristics of a specific age but of experience and careful training. My selected definition is also more appreciative of the fact that children who share the same chronological age often vary enormously in terms of their abilities, skills and interests, so rigid age brackets may not be as useful as we imagine. Finally, a broad definition allows for the inclusion of a larger variety of studies illustrating how increasingly more sophisticated approaches can be promoted in research with children.

In addition to the labels 'child' or 'children', the terms 'young people' or 'youth' for older children will also be used (Heath et al., 2009), typically referring to those aged fourteen to fifteen or above. According to Skelton (2008) 'young people' is used as a label by these older children to describe themselves, placing themselves somewhere between the binary categories of children and adults. The definition of childhood and children will be further unpacked and discussed in upcoming chapters.

'Research' in this volume covers a multiplicity of different meanings and types of research, from academic research to all kinds of practitioner research, teacher research as well as, and perhaps most importantly, children's research. The various types and interpretations will be elaborated on in the different chapters of the book, including the suggestion that all research may sit on a continuum from high-prestige research in academic journals (research with a capital 'R') undertaken by academics, mostly to generate new theories, all the way to practically oriented research (research with a lower-case 'r') aiming to investigate a practical issue or problem of interest to make a change or take action.

The 'R-r continuum' represents different types of research from more formal to less formal but also represents a potential growth trajectory from less to more sophisticated levels of knowledge, skills and growing expertise in research. Both adults and children sit somewhere on this continuum. New researchers, whether adults or children, start with a rudimentary understanding of research and a limited set of skills and knowledge, but with training and experience over a longer period of time, they can, if they wish to and have the opportunity, develop and move towards more sophisticated levels and types of research engagement.

## 1.6 The Map of the Book

The book is structured as laid out in Table 1.2. This chapter (Chapter 1) has set the scene, introduced my personal motivation to write this book and outlined where the gap is in the child second language literature and why it would be desirable to complement the currently largely adult-focussed research by incorporating children's views and perspectives, in particular by encouraging more active roles for children in research. I have outlined some basic premises that this book is based on and defined the key terms used.

Chapter 2 provides a brief historical overview of childhood and children, illustrating how the concept of childhood has developed over time into our contemporary understanding. The discussion focusses on

*Table 1.2 Structure of the book*

Framing chapter	Introduction of relevant concepts and principles from interdisciplinary literature	Exploration of relevance for applied linguistics	Framing chapter
Chapter 1	Chapters 2–4	Chapters 5–7	Chapter 8

how adults, including applied linguists working with children, need to reflect on the implications of their belief systems and specifically their conceptions of children and childhood when it comes to their work with children, whether it is research or otherwise. The chapter then elaborates on the most notable conception of childhood, which is the natural child, based on developmental psychology and representing a biological, universal view of childhood. The critical views that attacked developmental psychology and its conception of children as universal 'becomings' led to the emergence of Childhood Studies more than thirty years ago. This multidisciplinary, bottom-up approach takes a very different view of children. Rather than passive becomings, children are seen as social constructions, active agents and unique 'beings' worthy of interest in themselves, not just as developing adults. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and its proposal that children are rights-bearing citizens whose voices must be heard will be introduced next, and the discussion will address how the proposed rights can be realised in practice by schools, communities and individual adult researchers in their ongoing work with children. The main contributions of Childhood Studies over the last three and half decades will be summarised to draw attention to some current issues and concerns. Finally, this chapter outlines the main components of the extended framework, which includes possibilities of conducting studies not just 'on' and 'about' but also 'with' and 'by' children.

Chapter 3 explores and critically evaluates the main tenets of Childhood Studies via addressing the key concepts of voice, agency, participation and children's rights. The discussion will start with exploring the challenges of working with child voice, highlighting that voices can never be authentic but instead they are messy and multi-layered, heavily influenced by social, cultural and institutional discourses. Like voice, agency must also be understood within intergenerational relationships. A large part of this chapter discusses the differences between the various definitions and descriptions of participation 'frameworks' (such as Fielding, 2001; Hart, 1992; Lundy, 2007; Shier, 2001) with a view to drawing out actual roles children can take in research studies (such as consultants, partners or researchers in child-led research projects). Similarities and differences between research 'with' children and research 'by' children will be discussed. Three types of studies are identified: (1) those that use participatory tools to elicit children's views and attempt to create more natural and meaningful conditions for children to be able to take some control of the process (although these are still passive roles); (2) studies where children are active participants and work collaboratively with adults as partners, taking over some aspects of the research process, and

finally (3), studies where children become enabled to undertake their own research, which is labelled as child-led research. Addressing opportunities and limitations drawn out of current debates in empirical research will highlight the most important implications and opportunities for child second language research.

Chapter 4 explores how schools and other institutions can embrace a focus on participatory research with children or child-led research, should they wish to do that. First of all, the concept of child-centredness or learner-centredness is explored. Child-centred research is linked to child-centred education and early childhood education, which has a long history emphasising children's agency and freedom to choose, their autonomy, creativity and the importance of dialogue and democratic or horizontal relationships between adults and children. Child-centred approaches to research, such as those inspired by the work of Freire (1970, 1973), have been linked to being participatory in an emancipatory sense. Child-centredness is also rooted in the key articles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) emphasising children's voice and rights. Such an approach promotes active roles for children (e.g. research 'with' and 'by' children), although the Convention on the Rights of the Child messages are not as consistent and unambiguous as we might like. Child-centredness is also congruous with more democratic working patterns and autonomous ways of learning (Little et al., 2017), with autonomy-promoting schools driven by the core principles of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012) and alternative inquiry-based pedagogies (Hatch, 2014; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2009). Schools and institutions that embrace a child-centred approach to teaching and learning and take student voice, students' rights and a democratic way of working seriously will be able to accommodate child-led research or research with children more easily and more meaningfully. At the end of Chapter 4 the alternative framework to research with children promoted in this volume will be revisited to tease out the main opportunities and challenges associated with the framework, including issues not just related to the adult researcher and their belief systems, knowledge, experience and intentions but also those that arise from actual institutional structures and the philosophies of education they embody.

Chapter 5 discusses features of research involving children in applied linguistics. Drawn from comprehensive overviews of the field, the main areas of research interest are highlighted. Then, based on a strategically selected 'slice' of the literature, that is, a survey of child L2 studies in five key applied linguistics journals over a period of a decade (2011–2021), a close analysis of children's status and roles in research

is undertaken. Observations are made about the type of studies (methodological solutions, tools and approaches) dominating the field and about what is missing. Examples of studies in child second language education where children take up different types of passive roles are discussed and analysed. A handful of examples identified in the sample, where the status and the roles of the children have been shifted away from entirely passive roles, will also be discussed. These examples are closely examined to identify the extent of active involvement which does not move beyond a 'weak' form of research 'with' children. The continuum of possibilities, research on/about-with/by children (Kellett, 2010a), is revisited here for further reflection. While the literature sample (with 324 studies) can only be a limited source for this analysis, it is believed to be representative of the existing research in terms of children's status and the roles they play.

Chapter 6 addresses the gap identified in the earlier chapters and asks the following question: Based on the previous chapters and the overview of the field, what kind of research is needed now in applied linguistics? Seventeen studies will be used to showcase children's roles, illustrating varying degrees of active participation. Studies are included in the three main categories identified in Chapter 3. Building on examples taken from other disciplines, such as climate change education, health care, geography or social work, tools and approaches are introduced with a commentary about how these ideas might be incorporated or further built on when addressing research in child second language classrooms and beyond. This chapter offers ideas and raises awareness among researchers about the variety of opportunities for incorporating the new extended framework when working with children in applied linguistics.

Chapter 7 addresses the most important global and local (macro and micro) ethical dilemmas and challenges when working with children, in particular when working with children in active roles. It outlines generic ethical issues relevant to research with under-eighteens and also addresses ethical issues in research when moving from research 'on' and 'about' children to research 'with' and 'by' children. In addition to addressing the origins and main dilemmas of child-focussed ethics, the chapter critically evaluates a selection of existing international ethics guidelines for research involving child participants, potentially relevant for applied linguistics, drawing out challenges, opportunities and tensions. This chapter revisits the key messages of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this time as a point of reference for ethical practice in research. The chapter also addresses the process of securing child consent or assent and discusses good practice regarding securing permissions from other stakeholders.



Ethical issues, specifically when working with multilingual children and families, will be covered as well as how ethical guidelines have to be sensitive to cultural, social and contextual circumstances, making reference to challenging issues in different contexts, including contexts in the Global South.

Chapter 8, the final chapter, summarises the main arguments developed in the book and reiterates the case for promoting the extended framework of working with children in applied linguistics. The chapter discusses the main opportunities and challenges going forward and emphasises that future research with children needs to stay relevant and address children's future needs and realities. Incorporating the extended framework into applied linguistics research would mean rebalancing the current trend in research and serving the communities of children more directly. Future studies where researchers embrace more active roles for children will spark inspired debate and discussion and will have the potential to move the field forward.

## 1.7 Conclusion

While the main purpose of this book is to promote an alternative approach (research 'with' children and 'by' children), it is nonetheless important to make it clear that this approach is seen as complementary, representing an additional 'angle' rather than aiming to replace traditional research 'on' children. A central thesis of this volume is that all kinds of research are needed but that research 'with' and 'by' children is still largely lacking in our field. Opening up these new potential possibilities does not intend to negate or diminish the research knowledge that has emerged and will continue to emerge from the traditional methods. The volume will bring together the core principles and benefits of working with children as active participants in research in any context, from mainstream and 'elite' schools to average and difficult contexts, including contexts where children and teachers lack resources or may face hardship or difficulties of all kinds. The key message of the volume is that no matter what the local circumstances may be, wherever we find ourselves as adult researchers, engaging children in research in active roles is always an option, and it carries the promise or even the very real possibility of improving the lives of all those involved.