Introduction: what is a questionnaire?

Due to the ubiquity of questionnaires, most people have a tacit understanding of what a questionnaire is. However, in social sciences research, the term ‘questionnaire’ can have two distinct meanings: interview schedules (see Rolland, Dewaele & Costa, this volume) and self-administered questionnaires (Dörnyei, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992). In this chapter, the discussion will focus solely on questionnaires defined by Brown (2001) as ‘any written instrument that presents participants with a series of questions or statements to which they should react either by selecting from existing possibilities or writing out their answers’ (p. 6).

Brown’s (2001) definition stresses that questionnaires elicit data by providing answers to prompts in the form of statements or questions. A similar design is characteristic of tests. However, what differentiates questionnaires from tests is that the latter are designed with an answer in mind, hence some answers will be pre-judged as correct and others as incorrect. In contrast, the purpose of the questionnaire is to find out the participant’s perspective. Consequently, avoiding questions or statements which in any way may suggest the answer is one of the key characteristics of a good questionnaire.

Most publications so far have concentrated on so-called pen-and-paper questionnaires (Brown, 2001; Dörnyei, 2007; Gillham, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992), which are often designed from scratch by the author, printed out, and posted to potential respondents or administered to a captive audience, such as a class of teenagers, by the research themselves or a research assistant. Yet more often than this, today questionnaires are prepared and administered using online software, which brings a new set of advantages as well as challenges to their design. This chapter will focus on questionnaires in general, with a particular focus on the issues connected with the design of online questionnaires. It is possible to write a whole book on questionnaires; hence, in this chapter, more space is devoted to understanding questionnaires as a method of data elicitation and their design, with only a very short discussion of sampling as a data collection issue.

Why use questionnaires?

There is a plethora of reasons why scholars use questionnaires. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) aptly point out that questionnaires allow for efficiency in terms of researcher time, researcher
Questionnaires

effort, and financial resources. Considering researcher time and effort, using questionnaires does indeed allow researchers to collect a large amount of data with little researcher involvement. This is particularly true when questionnaires are administered to a so-called captive audience, for example foreign language students gathered together in a classroom. In this case, data from numerous participants can be collected within hours. Similarly, a good return on the investment of time and effort can be expected when using online questionnaires, where all the researcher needs to do is send emails to potential participants as well as regular reminders. Even though, as discussed later in the consideration of ethics, quite often access to participants’ email addresses might need to be negotiated, it can still be considered efficient. The quantitative analysis of questionnaire data is also quick, provided that the researcher is familiar with statistics. Further time can be saved if online questionnaires are used as there is no need to input data one by one; instead data can be easily downloaded as a Microsoft Excel file, and from there transformed to whatever format is required.

However, a different picture emerges when designing a questionnaire. Writing items, and pre-piloting and piloting the questionnaire can be very time consuming. This requires an extensive knowledge of the field that is to be researched as well as the sound familiarity with the questionnaire design. Everything down to the smallest detail has to be carefully checked before data collection starts. This is because questionnaires are on a structured end of data collection instruments, which means that the participants can answer only the questions that are on the questionnaire, and there are very few opportunities to further probe their answers (the exception to this is when questionnaire respondents are asked to provide their details if they are willing to participate in the follow-up interview) as there is no opportunity to add additional questions.

Nevertheless, writing questionnaires from scratch is not the only option: more and more tried and tested inventories are being published. The IRIS repository (Marsden, Mackey, & Plonsky, 2016), where research instruments and materials used in previous studies can be found, is worth visiting. Just a simple query, ‘questionnaire’, had 499 hits on 3 August 2018. The major language of contributions is English; however, materials in other languages are also available, and one hopes that, with time, their availability will be greater. Whilst existing questionnaires still need to be adapted to the requirements of a new study and a new group of participants, recycling existing instruments saves a great deal of time.

The cost efficiency of questionnaires is closely connected to their efficiency in terms of researcher time and effort. Compared to traditional pen-and-paper questionnaires, which have to be either mailed or administered by the researchers themselves, the costs connected with online surveys are even further reduced. Rather than paying for the costs of postage or travel and researcher time, the only expense is the subscription to one of the online survey software packages. It is also worth checking whether affiliated universities provide access to online survey software as part of the IT package.

The use of questionnaires might also be a preferred method for potential research participants as it is less intrusive; for example, respondents can decide when the best time for them to complete the questionnaire is. When filling in a questionnaire, they can take as much time as they need. More importantly, compared to other methods of data collection that often involve face-to-face contact with the researcher, the respondents can be anonymous, as in most cases, there is no need to provide identifying data. Anonymity is often of great importance to participants; for example, it regularly happens that when questionnaires are collected from captive audiences, individual respondents ensure that their questionnaire is in the middle of the pile, and, consequently, unidentifiable. Similarly, in online surveys, even if the respondents are promised to be entered into a draw of attractive prizes, few decide to leave their email addresses.
The previous discussion explains why the use of questionnaires is so widespread. Further arguments can be added: for example, Gillham (2007) points out that when we use questionnaires, all the participants answer exactly the same questions and there is no interviewer bias (i.e. providing different answers depending on who conducts the interview). Yet probably the biggest draw of questionnaires is their versatility and the fact that they enable researchers to measure abstract constructs that could not be otherwise measured. The versatility of the questionnaire use is mirrored in recent publications. Even a quick glance at articles from the most renowned journals in language education and applied linguistics published in 2017 (as classified by Rose & McKinley, 2018) reveals an astonishing diversity of the questionnaire use. Questionnaires were used to collect data on language awareness, teacher self-efficacy, technology, feedback practices, attitudes towards English and other languages, TESOL trainee teachers’ perspectives, ELT lecturers’ experience of new research policy, learner beliefs, motivation, understand of linguistic concept, and the effects of language learning environment on students’ perceptions, just to mention a few. Additionally, questionnaires were frequently used as supplementary instruments to collect demographic information, data related to language background, and feedback on the research process.

Having considered the advantages of questionnaires, it is important to also point out their limitations. The main disadvantages are connected to the way questionnaires are completed by participants, participants’ literacy and proficiency levels, issues with the design that can be avoided, and the inherent limitations of the questionnaire design.

A number of disadvantages of questionnaires are related to how they are approached by respondents, some of whom might not be motivated to complete a questionnaire. In the case of online surveys, this often translates into low return rates. Moreover, even participants who finish completing the questionnaire, either online or on paper, might not be sufficiently cognitively engaged in the process, and may simply read and answer questions without giving them proper consideration. Rushing when filling in a questionnaire might mean that the respondents skip some answers, which then needs to be taken into account when analysing data. When online survey software is used, skipping answers can be avoided altogether by ensuring that the system requires each question to be answered (this needs to be done at the design stage). In addition, participants can be prone to ‘acquiescence bias’ (i.e. they have a tendency to provide positive answers if they are unsure how to respond), ‘halo effect’ (they overgeneralise answers in line with their overall impressions), and ‘self-deception’ (i.e. providing answers that respondents would like to be true of them, even though they are not).

The reliability of questionnaire data can be further compromised by respondents’ problems with reading and writing. The most obvious cause cited by other authors of guides on questionnaire design is poor levels of literacy (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010; Gillham, 2007). The discussion here should not be limited to literacy in the mother tongue or the most fluent language but should be extended to consider literacy in a language in which the questionnaire is constructed as societies are becoming much more multicultural, and their members use a variety of languages with varying degrees of proficiency (see Andrews et al., this volume). This point needs to be particularly carefully reflected by researchers in our field, applied linguistics, as language is the focal point of our research.

Completing questionnaires might also be problematic for individuals with specific learning differences, who constitute around 10% of students (Kormos & Smith, 2012). In particular, those with dyslexia (which can manifest itself in problems with reading) and dyspraxia (the symptoms of which include uncoordinated movement and attention and coordination deficits); see Kormos & Smith, 2012 for more details of these two specific learning differences) might need extra support and a more generous time allowance to complete a questionnaire. These
considerations are of particular importance when the questionnaire is administered to a captive audience, particularly in schools. There are two reasons for this. First, it is likely that young participants with learning differences might not want to stand out in their group by not participating in the study together with their peers. Second, as children grow, they develop strategies to overcome their difficulties, hence the role of individual learning differences diminishes with the participants’ age. In contrast, it is less likely that individuals who experience reading problems would voluntarily decide to fill in an online survey. Whereas this can appear to solve the issue with data reliability, it creates an even bigger one: silencing certain groups of people, often those more vulnerable.

Some of the disadvantages of questionnaires can be mitigated by a good design; for example, if the questionnaire is overly long or monotonous, the respondents are likely to develop fatigue, particularly towards the end, which means that they respond to final questions without sufficient thought, skip them altogether, or, in the case of online questionnaires, switch off the questionnaire. However, this can be avoided if the questionnaire is of appropriate length and there is sufficient variation in the types of questions.

Similarly, poor questionnaire design – and poorly designed questions in particular – might also lead to participants providing skewed responses due to ‘prestige bias’ (i.e. the participants attempt to answer questions by guessing which answers are desired by the researcher). Another danger is students providing responses to items that are simply not relevant in the context. An example of this can be seen in the question item in Table 27.1.

Whereas this question is perfectly reasonable in most context, not all potential respondents are assigned homework. In this case, their answer might indicate something different than the answer of the respondent for whom this question is relevant. They might choose one of the negative answers as they indeed never skimp on their homework. Some will feel confused and choose the ‘neither agree nor disagree’ option, and some others will want to present themselves in a good light and choose one of the positive options.

The biggest criticism aimed at questionnaires is that the data collected are very superficial. Even the most complex concepts are often measured by a relatively small number of simply worded statements, which are responded to in a very narrow way, with few or no opportunities to elaborate. Consequently, questionnaires, which tend to be highly structured, are not suitable for enquiries that are qualitative in their nature. Yet, at the same time, the weaknesses of this instrument are often side effects of its strengths, making it suitable for quantitative investigations.

**Questionnaire design**

*Introduction and cover emails*

Items are the most crucial part of any questionnaire. They usually take form of questions or statements to which the participants respond. Hence, writing items is discussed in detail in the

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**Table 27.1 Irrelevant questionnaire item**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither agree nor disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To be honest, I often skimp on my English homework:
next subsection. Of course, a questionnaire containing only a string of questions is far from complete and unlikely to yield good-quality data. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) point out that a professional questionnaire should have a brief title, introduction, instructions about how to respond to questions, and a ‘thank you’ note.

A clear introduction is key to ensure that the questionnaire gets a good response rate and that the data are of high quality. The introduction indicates who is collecting the data and for what purpose, makes it clear what will happen to the data after they have been collected, clarifies the rights of the participant to withdraw, and stipulates whether the data collected will be anonymous and confidential.

Gillham (2007) specifies that questionnaires come complete with a cover letter, which also contains all the aforementioned information. Although not an integral part of the questionnaire per se, informative cover letters (or emails as is often the case with online surveys), are the first point of contact between the researcher and the potential participant, who by reading the email makes an initial decision about whether to participate. Hence, if the cover email is written in jargon and is overly long, the respondent is likely to think that the questionnaire will be written using the same style and therefore, they are unlikely to engage with it. Cover emails, being separate from the questionnaire, can be easily separated from the questionnaire, as the potential participant might click on the link but not actually fill in a survey open in a new window until much later. Hence, it is crucial to restate all the information in the introduction, otherwise the participants might drop out.

**Writing items**

Items, in the form of statements or questions, are the crucial part of the questionnaire. Without appropriate items, the researcher will not be able to collect good-quality data. Hence, designing items is often the most time-consuming aspect of questionnaire design. Items are strictly related to the topic, yet there are some aspects of item writing that are universal. The first rule is that questions should be written in plain language that is free of jargon. To achieve this, it is useful to ask a number of non-specialists to fill in the questionnaire and comment on the items. In terms of simplicity, shorter items work better than longer ones. Similarly, statements including negative constructions (do not, will not, cannot) are more difficult to process; hence, it is best to avoid them, if possible. This does not mean that no negatively worded items should be used. In fact, it is the opposite as a mixture of negative and positive items will help to keep the reader cognitively engaged. Yet, rather than using negative constructions, it is preferable to use adjectives, nouns, and verbs to add the negative meaning to the statement. For example, ‘I do not like’ can be replaced with ‘I dislike’. Another trap that novice questionnaire designers might fall into are double-barrelled questions. These statements are often impossible to answer as they contain more than one question. An example is ‘Do you always do your English homework on time and diligently?’, which asks about the time frame, in which the homework is completed as well as the manner of this completion. Finally, it is reasonable not to write questions that are likely to yield the same answers from the participants: for example, everybody who knows a bit about the UK would agree that ‘English is the most important language in the UK’.

Writing items is a complex skill, and even the most experienced questionnaire writers can, unbeknown to them, skew the results by an unfortunate choice of wording. This is especially tricky when measuring abstract constructs such as beliefs, attitudes, or interests. Using scales consisting of multiple items is a solution to this problem. In this way, the result is a composite of a number of answers; hence, any particularities in the wording of individual items are likely to be evened out. Furthermore, the analysis of multi-item scales enables the researcher to get
rid of items that are not tapping into the same construct. For this reason, it is best if at least four items comprise every scale.

One of the key decisions that the questionnaire writer has to make is how the items are to be answered. The most commonly used types of questions are discussed in the next section.

**Choosing response types**

Broadly speaking, questionnaire items can be divided into closed- and open-ended. Closed-ended items are those that the participants respond to by choosing one of the answers provided. These include items that are answered using Likert scales, semantic differential scales, numerical rating scales, as well as true–false items, multiple-choice items and rank order items. Close-ended questions comprise a bulk of most questionnaires. These responses are generally easy to code and then analyse. Due to their structured nature, respondents can answer them relatively quickly and with ease. In contrast, open-ended questions require the participants to provide a response in their own words. These include short, specific responses; clarification questions; sentence completion; and short answer questions. As providing written responses to open-ended items is more time-consuming and requires a lot of cognitive effort, they are sparsely used in questionnaires. Nevertheless, they play a crucial role as they can be useful to collect data that are more difficult to pre-structure, hence allowing the questionnaire to provide answers to exploratory questions. Regardless of which response type is chosen, clear instructions – whenever possible illustrated by an example – are required. More details on the most commonly used response formats are provided next.

**Likert scales**

One of the most frequently employed closed-ended items in the questionnaire are Likert scales. These allow respondents to indicate a level of agreement with a statement by choosing from responses ranging typically from ‘strongly agree’ to ‘strongly disagree’. The scales differ in length from three to even nine response options. Short three-point scales, in particular those presented by means of smiley faces (😊😊😊), can be successfully used when working with children. Longer scales (five- and six-point scales) that offer more shades of meaning are, however, the most common and, at the same time, the most debated. For example, the item ‘I am interested in English’ can be answered choosing one of the following options: strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; strongly agree.

In this case, the respondent can choose a neutral ‘middle’ option (neither agree, nor disagree). This might be a genuine answer, in particular if the respondent is not studying English. However, if the respondent is currently enrolled or has been at some point learning English, the response might be related to the participants’ cultural background, for example Chen, Lee, and Stevenson (1995) found that East Asian students were more likely to choose a neutral option than their North American counterparts. The neutral response can be also a result of lack of cognitive engagement with the items if participants have low motivation or ability (Krosnick & Presser, 2010).

In response to the issues with odd-numbered questions, many research decide to provide a range of options without a middle point, such as this: strongly disagree; disagree; slightly disagree; slightly agree; agree; strongly agree.

The respondent would then be forced to choose among positive or negative options. As the prompt ‘I am interested in English’ is likely to be addressed to somebody who is in some way involved in learning English, it can be expected that they have some more or less formed
attitudes. Hence, having no middle option will force the participants to think about the question. Yet, there is a danger that the participant will make up the answer on the spot, which can affect the quality of data. Similarly, if the participant is forced to provide answers that they do not fully agree with, they might not finish the survey. For a more in-depth discussion of the odd/even Likert scales dilemma and the optimal scale length, see Krosnick and Presser (2010).

Whereas Likert scales were originally designed to measure attitudes (Likert, 1932), derivatives are extremely versatile and can be used to measure frequencies, likelihood, and importance. Even though the responses are coded using numbers (1, 2, 3, 4), this does not necessarily mean that the distance between the differences between the two responses are comparable: for example, when learners answer the question ‘I practice the sounds of second language’ by choosing one of the following options in Table 27.2, The differences between choosing options 1 and 2, and options 2 and 3 might not be the same in practice. Consequently, whatever is measured, it is important to provide respondents with a full range of answers, rather than just the two most extreme points, as this might affect the interpretation of the results.

**Semantic differential scales**

When using semantic differential scales, respondents mark their response on a continuum of two opposite adjectives/statements. Semantic differential scales allow researchers to measure different aspects of the same concept, avoiding at the same time writing multiple questions. A good recent example of a use of semantic differential scales was Hessel’s (2015) measurement of ideal L2 self, where every statement was followed by five 11-point items that reflected the properties of the ideal L2 self, as in the next example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>I will be someone who can have close friendships with English-speaking people.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I desire this very much</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I imagine this very often</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is very likely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is already true of me now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I work very hard at this</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Compared to Likert scales, there is no need to spell out the ‘in between’ answer options, hence the number of options can be bigger. When this type of question is used in online surveys, however, the researchers need to be mindful that a large number of options might not always be clearly visible to respondents, depending on the browser or the device used. Hence, checking what the survey looks like before launching it is crucial. The use of longer scales might be also cognitively more demanding to respondents.

Semantic differential scales are similar to numerical rating scales, which allow participants to respond to the item by choosing a number on a scale; for instance, the respondents are asked to evaluate the importance of knowing foreign languages on a scale of 1 to 10, where 10 codes the ultimate importance.

**Table 27.2 Numbered Likert scale**

| 1 Never or almost never true of me | 2 Usually not true of me | 3 Somewhat true of me | 4 Usually true of me | 5 Always or almost always true of me |
**Binary response items**

Binary response items, such as true/false or yes/no allow participants to provide the most basic response to the question, hence they are suitable for use even with children. However, as Dörnyei (2007) warns, the data collected this way might be overly simplified or overly distorted.

**Multiple-choice items**

Multiple-choice items allow participants to choose one (or more) of the response options provided. They often represent a good alternative to short-answer questions: for example, rather than asking learners to list where they learn English, the researcher can provide a list of options that can be ticked when applicable. Quite often, the last option is ‘other’, which can be easily followed up with a prompt asking the respondent to specify. In this way, the question appears as semi–‘open-ended’ and the participants feel that their contributions are valued but, at the same time, the effort necessary to answer the question is minimised, so the chances that the participant finishes the questionnaire increase.

**Rank order items**

Rank order items are answered by ranking the answer options. To answer such questions, the participant needs to focus on the question. However, their limitation is that they might force the respondent to rank two or more options even though they perceive them as of the same importance/value.

**Open-ended questions**

Even though open-ended questions are not used as much as close-ended questions in questionnaires, it is rare that the questionnaire does not have any items of this type. This is because open-ended questions, by allowing respondents to voice their opinions, conveys the message that their contribution is truly valued. If the respondent is not fully satisfied with a range of answers for close-ended items, they can release their frustration by giving more detailed accounts in the space provided, rather than abandoning the questionnaire altogether. Consequently, it is important that every questionnaire has a comments section, usually towards the end, where their respondents are invited to leave comments on the questionnaire, and to elaborate on their answers. It is also useful to supplement multiple-choice item answers with the option ‘other’, which, when chosen, prompts the reader to provide a short answer. Another case where open-ended clarification questions can be helpful are binary response answers, where, according to a response provided, the respondent can be asked for extra elaboration, the reason behind the answer, and so on. Finally, space for comments can be added after blocks of questions, so that the respondent can add comments quickly, without having to remember them until the end of the questionnaire.

**Final ‘thank you’**

Respondents invest time and energy into filling out a questionnaire. It is important to show appreciation and thank the respondents for their participation. This also gives the opportunity to ask for any comments as in Figure 27.1.
When designing a questionnaire, it is necessary to think about its layout and length as both of these factors will affect the potential response rate (Dörnyei & Taguchi, 2010). Designing the layout of online survey is relatively straightforward as the survey applications often provide users with very attractive and reader-friendly default options. These include the choice and size of font, the spacing of items and answer options, and the formatting of headings. In spite of that, the survey might not be easy to fill in on all types of hardware and using different internet browsers. Hence, it is recommended that before the survey is launched, the researcher considers what type of device is likely to be used when filling in the survey (computers, laptops, tablets, mobile phones) and pilots it on a range of potential devices and browsers.

Length is another factor that might discourage potential participants. In online surveys, length is a rather abstract concept, as, in fact, a whole online questionnaire could be on one long page or, in contrast, every question could be presented on a separate page. Yet, it is probably better to avoid the two extreme alternatives, designing pages that are not overly long, so as to avoid excessive scrolling. It is perhaps better to describe it in terms of how much time the completion of a survey is likely to take; for example Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) specify that this should not exceed 30 minutes. Yet, it is important to remember that the overall time invested in completing the survey is likely to depend on motivation and interest of the participant in the topic investigated.

Assessing how long it will take to fill in an online survey is pretty tricky for the participants. The number of pages can be indicative of length but, as mentioned earlier, pages can vary considerably in length, which is misleading. In this case, it is good to give the participants as much information about the length of the questionnaire as possible and make them feel that they are in control, in order to ensure that they complete it. This could be achieved by a number of steps. First, make sure that the participants are aware how many pages there are in the questionnaire. A good idea to keep the participants motivated is to include a progress tracker, which provides the information on the percentage of the questionnaire pages completed. Second, ensure that a similar amount of content is included on different pages of the questionnaire. Participants might be put off if the initial pages require them to put in a lot of effort. Similarly,

![Figure 27.1 The “thank you and final comments” page](image-url)
it is rather confusing if some pages are content heavy and others are not, as it leaves the participant wondering about the length of the remaining page, which might lead them to drop out.

**Post-design**

Once the first draft of the questionnaire is ready, it is time to pilot it, collect data, and analyse. Some issues connected with data collection and, to a lesser extent, data analysis have been discussed in relation to the design of the questionnaire and questionnaire characteristics. For advice on piloting the questionnaire, see Oppenheim (1992); detailed information on data collection can be found in Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010); and Pallant (2016) offers a good starting point for data analysis in SPSS.

Decisions on whom to include in the study and whom to exclude are some of the most important considerations when collecting data using questionnaires. Without appropriate sampling, data from even the most meticulously designed questionnaires might be of little scientific value. Oppenheim (1992) and Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) provide a detailed discussion of different sampling approaches (see also Miyahara, this volume). Overall, the more structured the sampling design, the more likely it is that the findings can be generalised to the overall population.

There are some studies in applied linguistics that adopt rigorous sampling: You and Dörnyei’s (2014) sample of more than 10,000 learners of English was stratified to include students from different types of schools as well as different regions (rural vs. urban) and geographical locations in China; Dörnyei and Csizér (2002) sampled 8,593 13/14-year-olds, ensuring that all geographical regions of Hungary were equally represented; and Iwaniec and Dunn (2018) used two-stage cluster sampling to first identify a representative number of schools and then identify students from the Madrid region. Yet, more often than that, researchers rely on participants that they have easy access to; hence, research in which university students participate is very common, swiftly followed by studies on captive audiences such as school pupils, which might affect the representativeness of findings. Representativeness might be also an issue when it comes to online surveys as control over who participate in the study can be very limited. In both cases, it is important to provide a detailed description of the sample, which can help with establishing its representativeness.

**Ethics**

In studies using questionnaires, ethics is often overlooked due to the relatively large distance between the participant and the researcher. However, it is crucial to consider this. As mentioned in the section on design, the introduction should contain key information that allows the participants to make an informed choice about their participation, such as the aim of the study, what the data will be used for, and how to contact the researcher, if there are any concerns. Most questionnaires promise the respondents will be anonymous. This is often helped by the fact that many privacy laws restrict access to email addresses and personal details of potential participants by external researchers. Instead, they rely on administrators of relevant mailing lists to forward the cover email to group members. Yet, in some cases, the respondents are encouraged to leave their email addresses to participate in follow-up research (or prize draws to raise the return rate). In this case, it is vital that the researchers clearly specify what the email addresses will be used for. In this case, email addresses should be separated from the rest of the data as soon as possible. The anonymous nature of the data means that it may be impossible for a participant to withdraw from the study once the questionnaire has been
submitted, hence the introduction should contain a statement specifying that by submitting the questionnaire respondents agree to participate in the study.

Conclusion

Questionnaires are versatile data collection instruments that have been, and will always be, widely used in applied linguistics. They represent one of the most frequently used methods of data collection by scholars at every level of their career, starting from novice to very senior researchers. Questionnaires enable scholars to objectively measure a great variety of abstract constructs and collect background data. The use of specialised online software increases the time-, effort-, and cost-effectiveness of questionnaires even more. Yet, in order to collect good quality data, instruments need to be carefully designed. In the design process, researchers need to be aware of the limitations of this instrument and the pitfalls in the writing of individual items, as well as the need to validate newly developed instruments. This might be particularly challenging for junior researchers, who often need to complete their research within a very short timespan. This highlights the need for the high-quality research instruments to be freely shared among the scholarly community. One of the initiatives addressing this point are data collection instrument repositories such as IRIS (Marsden et al., 2016). The questionnaires available in this repository were prepared by specialists in the field, and they have been previously piloted and used in published research. Such instruments will still need to be tailored to the new context, yet this can be done much more quickly than designing a questionnaire from scratch. However, ideally, even such instruments should be validated for the use in a new context if the research findings are to be reliable. Hence, there exists a need to expand the pool of available instruments, and for the validation of the existing instruments in new contexts.

References

