4

Sampling
Problematizing the issue

Masuko Miyahara

Introduction: messy endeavor

A quick review of past works in applied linguistics and language learning research indicates that the subject of ‘sampling’ has received neither much attention nor sufficient discussion. In most cases, it is treated as a relatively non-problematic part of the research process, and it is often regarded as a straightforward procedure in the research design, as evident in many practical handbooks on research methods and methodology in applied linguistics and educational research. However, the topic of sampling is in fact a complex and sophisticated matter with significant implications for not only the research process but also the outcome of the study, that requires much thought and discussion. It is understood that empirical research usually starts out by choosing the topic, then framing the research inquiries about that certain subject, and then deciding who/what to research. In many methods books, this process is presented as if researchers follow these stages in the research process quite readily and smoothly in a linear fashion without facing many complications. However, as Rose and McKinley (2017) explain in the editorial introduction of their book on research methods in applied linguistics, “in the presentation of published research as the ‘ideal’, the reader is often made oblivious to the methodological journey of the project and of the compromises made along the way” (p. 5). In fact, Kubota (2017), in her chapter in Rose and McKinley’s (2017) edited volume, draws on her own experience, and candidly discusses the challenges and the politics involved in selecting the research topic and the group of people to study. Just from this example, we can observe how research is indeed a complex journey with countless ups and downs, never a linear process, but rather an iterative endeavor that most often entails thoughts from critical, ethical, and political standpoints. In language education, this is even more so since the subjects are often human participants, the “messiest part of real-world research” (Rose & McKinley, 2017, p. 6).

The aim of this chapter is thus to develop a basic understanding and awareness of the debates and issues involved in making sampling decisions in the process of conducting research in language education. The purpose, however, is not to provide definitive answers, but to identify and delineate the issues that researchers need to examine and consider in choosing their samples. To set the stage, the chapter opens by providing a brief overview of the common understanding of the concept of sampling by presenting the two main lines of thought that are
dominant in present language education, the quantitative and qualitative approach. It will then illustrate how the various sampling strategies are understood and employed in these traditions, and then draw attention to the pros and cons associated in employing them in the research design. The chapter concludes by discussing the issues and challenges in making sampling decisions by referring to the author's own research experience where issues of power, rapport, and the identities of both the researcher and the participant are brought to the fore, and calls for a more socially informed approach to sampling.

Setting the parameters

What is sampling?

Before I begin, I would like to note that in discussing the subject of sampling in the following two sections of this chapter, the two main research paradigms – namely quantitative and qualitative approaches – are juxtaposed to compare the ideas relevant in the two traditions and to highlight and discuss the sampling issues at stake. The polarization is used as an organizing principle to structure the chapter, and it does not indicate that I advocate the quantitative–qualitative divide, nor do I wish to endorse one over the other. My belief is, in line with Lazaraton (2005), that “each highlights ‘reality’ in a different, yet complementary way” (p. 219). Contrarily, readers might notice that most of my recent research endeavors are qualitative, but this is due solely to the nature of my research questions that tend to center around topics such as identity construction, emotions, and researchers’ reflexivity in language learning research.

In any discipline, research begins with the formulation of a specific research question (a problem) or a theoretical proposition (a hypothesis) in a particular context. In empirical research, we then attempt to articulate and then operationalize (Dowling & Brown, 2010) our questions by moving from a theoretical proposition to empirical measurement. In this process, we need to act selectively to decide our own empirical setting (or unit of analysis) to gather our data, which include the “observable information about the world or the direct experience of the world” (Punch, 2009, p. 3). Since it is impossible to study everyone or everything everywhere, it is necessary to make certain sampling decisions including decisions about settings/contexts, size/number of participants, and processes/procedures (including strategies). It is also important to consider that, depending on the research paradigm, the rationale or logic behind the sampling procedure is quite different. For instance, the basic idea behind sampling in quantitative studies is the sample-to-population inference. In its simplest sense, a ‘sample’ is “a smaller group that is actually studied, drawn from a larger population, data are collected (and analyzed) from the sample, and inferences are then made to the population” (Punch, 2009, p. 359). In quantitative studies, a sample is thus understood in terms of representativeness and generalization, where the common central question that has been repeatedly pursued is how representative the is sample to the population (e.g. Dornyei, 2007; Hatch, 2002; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005; Punch, 2009).

In the qualitative tradition, however, neither representativeness nor generalization is the goal. Instead, the focus is on describing and understanding human experiences and to gain an in-depth understanding of the individual or individual cases (Polkinghorne, 2005). The different understandings in the conceptualization of ‘samples’ can be attributed most largely to the ontological and epistemological thinking that underlies each research paradigm (see Table 4.1). That is, the philosophical underpinnings towards reality (ontology), and what the relationship is between the researcher and the reality (epistemology), and the methods used for studying that reality (methodology), which informs each paradigm (Punch, 2009).
Table 4.1 Research paradigms and their philosophical underpinnings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ontology</th>
<th>Epistemology</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Quantitative studies</td>
<td>Reality is out there to be studied, captured, and understood.</td>
<td>Knower is distinct from known.</td>
<td>Experiments, surveys, correlational studies, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(positivist)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Qualitative methods such as interviews, journals, observations, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qualitative studies</td>
<td>Multiple realities are constructed; they are in constant flux.</td>
<td>Knowledge is product of human construction; co-construction between the researcher and participant.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(constructivist, interpretivist)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: adapted Egbert & Sanden, 2014; Hatch, 2002; Punch, 2009

The philosophical orientations and approaches as such inform some of the characteristic features in quantitative and qualitative research that obviously have implications for sampling procedures (for that matter, as well as the entire research design). In the former, since the focus of the research is used to answer questions such as on how many/much and how often, the keywords that are usually associated with studies in this tradition are ‘predetermined and structured’; the main tools employed to collect data are most often inanimate tools such as tests, surveys, questionnaires; and, in its simplest sense, the prime mode of analysis in quantitative works are deductive, and statistical. However, in the latter, since the purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives, outlining the process (more than the end product) of meaning-making, and to provide a detailed description of how people interpret their experiences are crucial elements. In this context, terms such as flexible, evolving, and emergent are highlighted as keywords, and the researcher is the primary instrument that conducts interviews, observations, and writes up the documents. The analytical approach in qualitative studies is inductive, using, quite often, constant comparative methods. In addition, in terms of the findings, it is precise and numerical in the former compared to the findings being more holistic, expansive, and richly descriptive in the latter (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Overview of the types of sampling and sampling strategies

Understanding sampling as such, in current literature there appears to be basically two types of sampling: probability and non-probability. Probability sampling is a generic term that allows the researcher to generalize the research findings from the sample to the population from which it was drawn and is commonly employed in quantitative studies. Some of the main strategies include random sampling, stratified random sampling, systematic sampling, and cluster sampling (for detailed descriptions and discussions of the various probability sampling refer to Creswell & Poth, 2018; Dornyei, 2007; Mackey & Gass, 2005; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015; and Silverman, 2005). The main concern is to obtain a ‘good sample’: that is, a selected set of the population that is representative of the entire population. The issue of representation is crucial since the strength of the reported findings depends on how accurately the sample represents the whole population (Milroy & Gordon, 2003; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2010). Factors such as sample size and access to a randomizable population are imminent factors that require serious consideration in making sampling decisions. But the persistent question that looms in the literature is: how is the sample driven from random sampling procedure ‘sufficiently’ representative? Although various types of sampling strategies such as
stratified random sampling, systematic sampling and cluster sampling have been developed for the purpose of obtaining a ‘sufficiently’ representative sample. Gobo (2004) argues that a simple random sample is not always a representative sample, and asks two central questions:

1. How do we know to which extent our cases (samples) are representative of all members of the population from which the cases were selected?
2. Can we generalize from a few cases (a sample) to a population without following a purely statistical logic? (p. 436).

I will return to the topic of generalization later in this chapter, but, meanwhile, it is useful to keep these two questions in mind.

Non-probability sampling focuses on the individual. It attempts to provide an in-depth account of individual human experience by providing thick descriptions and understandings of their experiences. Thus, instead of attempting to respond to questions such as “how often” or “how much”, it seeks to “solve qualitative problems, such as discovering what occurs, the implications of what occurs, and the relationships linking occurrences” (Honigmann, 1982, p. 84). The most common probability sampling strategy is purposeful sampling (Chien, 1981; Patton, 2015):

it is a purposeful sample that will intentionally sample a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research question under examination. Thus, the researcher needs to determine which type of purposeful sampling will be the best to use. (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 149)

In purposeful sampling, one first needs to decide the attributes that are crucial to the study, and then find the context or participants that appear to meet those criteria. One also need to outline the justifications of why criteria are important to the study. There are a number of sampling strategies that scholars (Creswell, 2013; Miles, Huberman, & Saldia, 2014, etc.) have identified over the years; the most representative is the 16 qualitative sampling strategies in a typology from Miles and Huberman (1994, refer to Table 5.1 in that work). These strategies differ considerably, and should reflect the purpose and the research questions guiding the study.

General descriptions of sampling procedures are thus difficult to summarize, since, for one, there is a great variability in the different traditions in qualitative studies. For instance, in ethnographic study, the sample comprises the community or culture under examination, whose members belong to the cultural group being researched. In this case, the community/group form the sampling frame which can be identified as a purposive sample. Alternatively, grounded theory methodology requires concurrent data collection and analysis; that is, more individuals who display the characteristics can be recruited to the study as the research progresses and preliminary findings emerge. This is commonly termed theoretical sampling. The choice of sampling strategy varies with respect to the type of qualitative research, each of which has its unique focus and methodological strategies. However, whether quantitative or qualitative, sampling is not an isolated activity and it is certainly not independent from other facets of the research design. The crucial point is that as Punch explicates, “The sampling plan and the sampling parameters should line up with the purposes and the research question of the study” (2009, p. 165; my emphasis). He explains further that:

The sampling plan should have a logic that fits in with the logic of the research questions. Thus, if the research questions require representativeness, some form of representative sampling should be used. On the other hand, if the research questions highlight
relationship between variables, or comparison between groups, some sort of deliberate or purposive sampling may well be more appropriate.

(Punch, 2009, p. 252)

The aim of the previous two sections was to provide a descriptive account of some of the terminologies in relation to the topic of sampling. So far, I have presented as if there is a clear set of understandings in making sampling decisions between quantitative and qualitative approaches, and that, therefore, there is a distinct way to choose the samples depending on the camp in which a study identifies itself. However, reality is far from such a clear, definitive, idealistic account. Based on the understandings of sampling discussed so far, the following section attempts to delineate the ‘fuzziness’ revolving around sampling decisions and to explore the various issues at stake in making sampling decisions by centering on the notion of generalization and representation.

Issues in generalization and representation

As illustrated in the previous section on the types and the strategies related to sampling, at its core lies the two different understandings of the concept of generalization and representation informed by their respective philosophical underpinnings. The common understanding of ‘generalization’ in educational studies and language learning research is understood as “the degree to which research claims can be extended to contexts and population beyond the study itself” (Roth & Erickson, 2009, p. 10). In a similar vein, Polit and Beck (2010) frame generalization as referring “to extending research contexts, conclusions, or other accounts that are based on a study of particular individuals, settings, times or institutions than those directly studied” (cited in Maxwell & Chimel, 2014, p. 540). At the risk of simplification, on one hand, in quantitative studies, empirical generalization is closely associated with external validity, while, on the other hand, there exists a variety of interpretation towards the notion of generalization among qualitative scholars. In fact, some argue that the subject of generalization is not a major concern as exemplified in Lincoln and Guba’s (1985, p 110) famous phase, “The only generalization is that there is no generalization”. This claim is based on the understanding that the goal of qualitative research is not to generalize findings, but to seek in-depth understandings of a particular context. Applicability to other contexts is not a major concern in this line of thought since the aim is not to find out what is generally ‘true’ of the many.

In fact, there are issues to be discussed in both spheres concerning the notion of generalizability. For instance, in quantitative studies, statistical generalization is usually used synonymously with generalization in social and educational studies, but as Onwuegbuize and Leech (2010) argue, “many quantitative researchers make generalizations to the target population in a rote, mechanical manner without reflecting carefully on the extent to which their sample is statistically representative” (p. 882). They base their reasoning on the lack of random sampling and the use of inadequate sample size. Referring to Shaver and Norton (1980b) and Glass and Hopkins (1984), they claim that random sampling techniques are not used, and that the sample sizes are often too small to detect any statistical significance. They also point out that it is a rare incident for everyone in the target population to participate, and that researchers are usually confined to generalize the findings from such accessible populations. In a similar vein, Gobo (2004), as mentioned earlier, argues that a simple random sampling does not always result in a ‘sufficiently’ representative sample since for the sample to be truly representative, every member of the population needs to be included, and also, every member has to be chosen from a truly random procedure. Furthermore, coming from a slightly different perspective, Yin
(2003) as well as Schreier (2018) argue that statistical generalization is not the same as empirical generalization on the grounds that although statistics is a tool, “there may be other ways of justifying this conclusion from the sample to the population” (p. 84). Also, in quantitative studies there is the issue of ‘context’. Williams contends that statistical generalization is basically context-free: “the conclusion from the sample to the population applies regardless of specific context and specific circumstances” (2002, p. 127). However, studying human behavior in a context-free research setting is not an option in qualitative studies (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1981).

The subject of generalization also appears to be as contentious in the quantitative works as it is in the qualitative sphere. As mentioned earlier, in qualitative studies the subject should not be a major concern for qualitative scholars (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). It would be simple and clear if we could leave it as that, but a quick overview of recent studies in language learning research of published books and journal articles shows a large number of studies where the author(s) reports the findings by applying it ‘to a wider theory on the basis of how selected cases ‘fit’ with general constructs (Curtis, Gesler, Smith, & Washburn, 2000, p. 1002), or making reference to the setting or the context studied (Maxwell, 1996) or seeking ‘generalization’ from one case to another similar case by focusing on the commonalities evident in the study (Firestone, 1993, etc.). The distinctive point is that generalization is not made to the population in most qualitative approaches, but rather to the specific setting or case. It is reasonable thus to assume that generalization appears to be conceptualized slightly differently than how it is understood by quantitative researchers.

In fact, many academics appear to be in favor of reconceptualizing the notion of generalization for ones more compatible with the philosophical views of qualitative research. For instance, coming more from the field of education, Eisenhart (2009) proposes seven types of generalization in qualitative research: probabilistic generalization, transferability, user generalization, grounded generalization, synthetic generalization, meta-analytical generalization, and finally, theoretical generalization (see Eisenhart, 2009 for a fuller description). Underlying most of Eisenhart’s proposition is the notion of transferability. Transferability is “not to generalize from to an abstract or contextualized population, but to determine whether the findings obtained for one instance or set of instances in one specific context also apply to other instances in another context” (Schreier, 2018, p. 86).

Indeed, many qualitative researchers have suggested the notion of transferability as an alternative for generalization in quantitative studies (e.g. Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Jensen, 2008, etc.). Transferability and generalization differ slightly in that the former “does not require the discovery of the general condition under which a finding or theory is valid; instead it involves the transfer of knowledge from a study to a specific new situation” (Maxwell & Chimel, 2014, p. 543). Lincoln and Guba (1985) note another dimension to the notion of transferability by adding “the burden of proof lies with the original investigator [rather] than the person seeking to make an application elsewhere. The original inquirer cannot know the sites to which transferability might be sought, but the appliers can and do” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 289). This is commonly termed reader or user generalizability. Here, it is the responsibility of the user to provide a thick description of the study’s context, but it is up to the reader to assess the feasibility of context of the study and to another particular situation. Stemming from the notion of transferability is Patton’s (2015) notion of extrapolating: “unlike the usual term of generalization, exploration clearly connotes that one has gone beyond the narrow confines of the data to think about other applications of the findings” (p. 713).

However, the idea of transferability is inevitably grounded in examining the relationship between the sample and population termed as sampling logic (Yin, 2014). The other approach is theoretical generalization, where the purpose is not to generalize to the population, but to form a theory: “the conclusions of [qualitative research] are seen to be generalizable in the
context of a particular theoretical debate rather than primarily concerned to extend them to a larger collectivity” (Davies, 1991, p. 91). Theoretical generalization is associated most often with grounded theory methodology (see Hadley, this volume) or analytical induction.

In the qualitative sphere, there is yet another distinction made among the various types of generalization: internal generalizability and external generalizability (Maxwell, 1992). The former involves generalizability within the setting (including interview settings), institution, individual, and case studies. In contrast, external generalizability refers to generalization beyond the case to other persons or settings. Sampling procedures are greatly connected to internal generalizability since the question of how one defines the parameters of a study is of great concern. As Miles and Huberman (1984) contend: “if you are talking with one kind of informant, you need to consider why this kind of informant is important, and, from there, which other people should be interviewed” (p. 36). I will return to this subject in the next section by referring to my own data.

To sum up, generalization practices within the quantitative paradigm represent one facet of external validity. Generalization highlights the relationship between the sample and the population. The essential question here is how representative the sample is to the population. This has implications for sample size, accessibility, and response rate. Within the qualitative paradigm, only a limited number of participants or settings are examined in detail, and the emphasis is placed on the relationship between our findings and the case in its entire context, or what many term as internal validity. Here, the criteria of saturation (Schwandt, 2001) (vs. thematic saturation, see Bowen, 2008) is the critical point: how do we know that we have enough cases under consideration? There are of course pros and cons, so to speak, of the two traditions. Thus, it is important for researchers to ask themselves what kind of generalization would be most appropriate – meaning what would be congruent to the research questions – and then decide on sampling strategies accordingly.

The purpose of this section was to present how generalization is conceived in both paradigms, and to present the various contentious issues that emerge in both camps. The list is certainly not exhaustive. Especially in qualitative studies, there appear to be various interpretations, and the matter is very much in a state of flux. This is not a discouraging or an academically malicious situation. Rather the more we ponder on the topic, the more issues emerge, and the more it propels us to contemplate further. What would be more important is for people to make sampling procedures and processes as transparent as possible and to provide a rationale or logic for their actions. Finally, I would like to close this section by opposing the general prevalent remark that non-generalizable studies are limited in contributing to the construction or accumulation of knowledge.

Sample study: a qualitative example from a narrative approach

Using data collection from one of my previous studies, I would now like to critically reflect on how sampling was conceived in my research, and to illustrate how the discussion so far applies to my research. In doing so, I focus on the concept of researchers’ reflexivity (Edge, 2011; Mann, 2011), and highlight the importance for researchers to develop and establish a space for critical and reflective thinking to examine their sampling procedures and the implications that they have on the research design. Although there appears to be many definitions of reflexivity, and the term is often confused with reflection, in this chapter, following Finlay (2012), I take reflection to mean thinking about something after the event, and reflexivity, in contrast, to involve an ongoing self-awareness. That is, the former is a more of a descriptive process, whereas the latter pertains to how one positions oneself in the research context, and emphasizes contemplating on how one’s own self could influence the action one takes.
(self-awareness) (Miyahara, 2017, 2019). I hope that this example will help to illustrate that sampling should be addressed with a more socially informed manner.

**Overview of the sample study (Miyahara, 2015)**

The study aimed to shed light on the understanding of processes of L2-related identity construction and development among Japanese English learners at the tertiary level (Miyahara, 2015). Unlike previous language learning research on identity grounded in poststructuralist theory, a notable feature of this study was its attempt to integrate socially and psychologically oriented perspectives on L2 identity formation. Contrary to the poststructuralist theory of identity in language learning research (e.g., Block, 2007; Norton, 2013), the study problematizes the current dominant emphasis on the social dimension of identity in the poststructuralist framework and calls for a more balanced approach. The research contributed in highlighting the instrumental agency of individuals in responding to and acting upon the social environment, and in developing, maintaining, and/or reconstructing their desired identities as L2 users. It offered unique insights into the role of experience, emotions, social and environmental affordances, and individuals’ responses to these, in shaping their personal orientations to English and self-perceptions as English learner-users. The original study helped to show the intricate analysis of past, present, and future dimensions of individuals’ L2-related experiences and trajectories, and how these dimensions are intertwined through the process of narrative construction as participants relate their thoughts, and the researcher represents and interprets their stories.

The research site, a private university located in the suburbs of Tokyo, aims to build a global, multilingual community where a diversity of people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds gather together. Six students, all volunteers, going through their first year of their two-year English language curriculum participated in the study; some have experiences studying aboard, but only for a limited time.

**Sampling procedure: some thoughts**

After I formulated my research inquiry, the next step was to decide my research design, which includes my sampling procedure. Because of the nature of my inquiry, a qualitative approach (particularly in the form of ‘narratives’) appeared to be congruent with my research inquiry. The next phase was to decide my unit of analysis – that is, my sample. My research question was from the beginning directed at ‘Japanese English learners studying at a higher institution in Japan’. It could have been any higher institution for that matter, but owing to the topic of my research, which is ‘identity construction’, the research site was chosen because of its unique multilingual environment and many international students.

The sampling strategy was purposive sampling, in which the researcher chooses the site (context), participants, and the number of participants. The aim was to explore the participants’ voices from their perspectives by listening to their stories, or what would be generally regarded as an epic approach. Congruent with my main research inquiry, the focus was on in-depth understanding and meaning-making of the participants’ learning experiences. Founded on the understandings of narrative studies and the nature of the research inquiry (see Barkhuizen, this volume), sample size was thus not much of a concern. Looking back, the sample extract reminded me of Miles and Huberman’s (1984) arguments on internal generalization:

> Remember that you are not only sampling people, but also settings, events, and processes. It is important to line up these parameters with the research questions as well,
and to consider whether your choices are doing a representative, time-efficient job of answering them.

(p. 41)

As Miles and Huberman note, sampling is not merely about the individuals we are sampling, but the context they are situated in, and their relationship with others in that context as well as the social practices prevalent in that context. In addition, the psychological effects – the power relationships that exist in those relationships – must also be incorporated in the choice of a sample. In conjunction with this thought, some key concepts emerge: researcher-participant relationship, positionality (both claimed and assigned), insider-outsider role, and identity of both the researcher and the participant (see McKinley, this volume, for a theoretical stance in relation to these). Since these factors obviously overlap and are linked together, instead of focusing on each item one by one, my discussion here will be holistic in the sense that they will be considered as a group of interrelated factors.

My vignettes in this sample study helped me to pin down and grasp my position as a researcher. Because of my insider position, it was very clear that I had to be keenly aware of how my presence could shape the research design and my sampling procedure. In fact, I did not foresee the way the participants would re-position me and assign identities as exemplified in my reflexive vignettes. This highlights various viewpoints such as how research identities and the positionalisities that are both claimed or assigned by the researcher and the participants has the potential to influence the research process, and eventually, the final outcomes of the research. In terms of issues surrounding researcher–participant dynamics, whether at the stage of sampling or the actual data collection or other phase of the research process, research is not ‘on or for’ the participants, but rather ‘with’ the participants in mind. This is much like Kubota’s (2017) work, where in collecting selecting participants she faced the dilemma of choosing among a group of privileged populations (studying up), marginalized populations (studying down), or a group that included the researcher (studying across). In the end, Kubota opted for the third approach, one that positions both the researcher and the participant on a more equal footing by establishing rapport with the participants. This I believe is a more proactive approach and empowerment oriented approach to all those involved in the research.

Final thoughts: ethical concerns

There is always the ethical dimension to consider in sampling as in any other stages of the research process. Ethical dilemmas could be accounted for in two phases of the research – collection of data and dissemination of data – but the common theme underlying both stages of the research is the researcher–participant relationship (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Especially with the rise of interest in critical or participatory research where the approach is highly collaborative, ethical issues (see De Costa, Lee, Rawal, & Li, this volume) become an imminent subject for discussion. There is no simple answer to this topic, but we must be constantly reminded that ethical issues concerning sampling are also contentious for the whole of the research; and, therefore, when we discuss ethical matters relevant to sampling, this is also relevant to the entire research design (including analysis and dissemination). There are no specific guidelines to follow (except for the usual, common procedures of obtaining, for instance, consent forms from the participants or submitting documents for the ethic committee, etc.), but researchers need to be conscious of the ethical issues that prevail in the research process based on their philosophical orientations.
Sampling, in my view, is not merely a ‘procedure’ to follow, but one that involves issues of power and identity where political and ethical dimensions intertwine. In addition, these factors should be contemplated holistically; and more importantly, the researcher needs to present their sampling in a clear and transparent manner. Thus, following Gobo (2004), there is a need for a more “new, bottom-up, socially informed and practically driven theory of sampling, representativeness, and generalization” (p. 452). It appears that issues and challenges of research methodology – including quantification, qualification and generalizability – do not belong only to the epistemological or ontological domain, but they should also be conceptualized in terms of identity, power, and legitimacy.

References


