

Big-Brother and MasterChef research: Let's mash up!

Contemporary research based on empirical evidence can be conducted in two fundamentally different directions: first, by adopting a 'Big-Brother' approach, which analyses data in a primarily qualitative, introspective manner that heavily relies on the researcher's linguistic intuitions; second, by employing a fact-driven (MasterChef-like) methodology that is independent of the researcher's assumptions, leading to findings or conclusions that have to be necessarily supported by empirical testing.

This talk advocates for combining both methods, incorporating introspection (Big-Brother approach) and empirical data (MasterChef approach) in the study of linguistic and literary phenomena. From this perspective, the major steps demanded by the traditional scientific method in empirical language and literature sciences include identifying a niche, being conversant with previous research, retrieving and being aware of the data, selecting optimal analyses and reaching scientifically valid conclusions that corroborate, reject or complement previous findings. Identifying a niche involves pinpointing a specific area of study within the broader field of language and literature that has not been extensively explored or that presents new opportunities for investigation. This requires a deep understanding of the existing body of research to ensure that the chosen niche is relevant and original. Being conversant with previous research entails a thorough review of the existing literature to understand the current state of knowledge in the field. This step is crucial as it helps identify gaps in the literature, recognise the contributions by other researchers and avoid duplicating previous work. It also provides a foundation upon which new research can build, ensuring that it is grounded in a solid understanding of what has already been reported. Being aware of the data involves (collecting and) analysing relevant data that can provide insights into the chosen niche. This step requires meticulous data collection and analysis to ensure that the findings are based on robust and reliable evidence. Selecting optimal analyses means choosing the most appropriate methods and techniques to cope with the data. Finally, reaching scientifically valid conclusions involves interpreting the results of the analyses in a way that is consistent with the data and the existing body of knowledge. This step requires a critical and objective approach to ensure that the conclusions are well supported by the evidence and that they contribute to the advancement of knowledge in the field. The conclusions may corroborate, reject or complement previous findings, that is, situate the new research within the broader context of the existing literature, highlighting how it confirms, challenges or extends what is already known. In summary, the integration of introspective and data-driven methodologies in linguistic and literary research enables a comprehensive approach that unifies the strengths of qualitative and quantitative analyses.