Exploring Qualitative Descriptive Methods in Korean Linguistic Studies

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ABSTRACT

The current research aimed to uncover the use of the descriptive qualitative method in Korean linguistic studies, with the main objective of investigating how this method is applied in such research. This study is not merely theoretical but also practical, as it provides guidelines for conducting research in Korean linguistics using descriptive qualitative approaches. The objects of this study were scholarly articles and relevant books, as well as previous research reports selected through purposive sampling, analyzed using a qualitative approach with a library research method and documentation techniques for data collection. The findings reveal six stages in conducting Korean linguistic research with descriptive qualitative methods: problem identification, literature review, determining research objectives, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and reporting of findings. Furthermore, data analysis involves four essential steps, namely data collection, data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions. Although the descriptive qualitative method proves beneficial for research in Korean linguistics, it still presents challenges, particularly the potential subjectivity of researchers during data interpretation. Therefore, this research suggests that future studies should be supported by alternative perspectives, such as quantitative methods or a mixed-methods approach that combines both quantitative and qualitative methodologies in linguistic research.

Keywords: *Descriptive Qualitative Method; Korean Linguistics; Research Stage; Data Analysis; Mixed-Method Approach.*

INTRODUCTION

The Korean language has become increasingly popular in Indonesia, largely introduced through K-Dramas, K-Pop, and Webtoons—cultural products collectively known as *Hallyu* or the Korean Wave (Jang & Song, 2017). K-Dramas and K-Pop, in particular, have shaped the lifestyles of Indonesia's millennial generation, while *K-Style* has emerged as a rapidly spreading trend across the country (Putri et al., 2019). The rising popularity of Korean culture began permeating Indonesian society in the early 2000s (Maulidita & Darmanto, 2024). The surge of K-Dramas and K-Pop during this

period transformed public perceptions of Korea, especially in the entertainment sphere, and established the foundation for a strong cultural presence nationwide (Muliawan et al., 2025; Maulidita & Darmanto, 2024). This cultural wave has since expanded beyond entertainment, motivating Indonesians to pursue employment opportunities in South Korea (Darmanto, Dewi, et al., 2025) and inspiring many to study the Korean language and immerse themselves in Korean cultural practices (Darmanto, Cahyo, et al., 2025). These developments highlight how Korean popular culture has not only captivated Indonesian audiences but also influenced their aspirations, lifestyles, and cultural participation.

For example, watching K-Dramas has also influenced everyday language use in Indonesia, as snippets of Korean expressions are frequently incorporated into casual conversations (Indrawan et al., 2022; Putri et al., 2019). Common phrases such as "annyeonghaseyo," "gamsahamnida," "gomawo," and "gwenchana"—widely used in K-Dramas and K-Pop—have become familiar to many Indonesians.This growing familiarity has not only supported stronger diplomatic relations between Indonesia and South Korea but also facilitated the establishment of Korean language institutions in Indonesia. In fact, the first Korean language study programs were introduced in 2006, offering courses in language, culture, literature, and history (Rostineu, 2021). Millennials, in particular, have demonstrated a strong interest in learning Korean language and Korean culture (Darmanto, Cahyo, et al., 2025). Consequently, research on Korean culture and language continues to expand in both scope and significance.

The Korean language, as an agglutinative language, is interesting to explore in depth. The use of particles such as "josa" and "eomi" can be studied using morphological analysis to identify their functions (Cho & Han, 2002). This study is important because such particles play a significant role in shaping meaning and sentence structure, thus offering deeper insights into how Korean grammar operates. The present research applies qualitative descriptive methods. Although this method has certain limitations such as inconsistency in decision-making, it still provides valuable perspectives on issues in Korean linguistics (Doyle et al., 2020). Through qualitative descriptive methods, the study can describe how Korean language elements—such as "josa" or "eomi"—function in various communicative contexts, both spoken and written, while offering an in-depth analysis of semantic differences.

In Korean language studies, the qualitative descriptive method is frequently employed to analyze morphological and syntactic aspects. Sohn (2001) explains that Korean is an agglutinative language in which morphemes such as "josa" and "eomi" play essential grammatical roles in sentence structures. Yeon and Brown (2019) further emphasize that the use of "eomi" is closely tied to the Korean honorific system, reflecting social hierarchies and interpersonal relationships. This demonstrates the strong link between linguistic forms and sociocultural contexts in Korean. Moreover, Sandelowski (2000) highlights the effectiveness of the qualitative descriptive method in uncovering pragmatic meanings, dialectal variations, and cultural phenomena embedded in language use. Building on these insights, the present study examines the application of descriptive qualitative methods in Korean language research.

The use of qualitative descriptive methods is particularly relevant because it helps researchers to describe linguistic phenomena in detail without quantifying data, thereby allowing greater focus on meaning and function within real contexts. This approach also equips readers with practical insights into how qualitative descriptive analysis can be effectively applied in Korean language studies. It also bridges theoretical inquiry with real-world applications, making the findings more accessible and impactful. Furthermore, it provides diverse perspectives for analyzing Korean linguistics and establishes a valuable framework for approaching such analysis (Doyle et al., 2020). Consequently, this research not only enriches the theoretical study of Korean linguistics and contributes new perspectives to Korean language research, but also offers practical guidance for conducting research in Korean linguistic.

In addition, the qualitative descriptive method is a research approach that focuses on understanding the meaning and context of social or linguistic phenomena. Its primary aim is to describe phenomena as they naturally occur, without manipulation or experimental intervention, resulting in findings that are more narrative than numerical (Creswell, 2014). While this method can be particularly challenging for novice qualitative researchers in producing high-quality studies, research skills tend to develop progressively alongside advances in analytical ability (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). In linguistic research, the qualitative descriptive method is applied to outline language patterns, variations, and the communicative functions of linguistic forms within their contexts of use, often by engaging relevant respondents. Miles & Huberman (1994) emphasize that qualitative analysis enables researchers to present data in depth through processes of reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Furthermore, by incorporating social responses into the analysis, this method allows for the exploration of interrelationships, leading to nuanced and diverse findings.

METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative design by applying the library research method, which involves collecting, understanding, and reviewing theories from various literature sources directly related to the research focus (Adlini et al., 2022; Fadli, 2021). This method allows researchers to build a strong conceptual foundation and to map relevant prior findings that support the analysis of the present study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Zed (2008) outlines four key stages of library research: (a) preparing the necessary tools and materials, such as reference lists, research notes, and literature search instruments; (b) compiling a working bibliography containing a preliminary list of sources to facilitate information retrieval; (c) organizing a research schedule to ensure the systematic search and review of sources; and (d) conducting a thorough review and documentation of literature relevant to the research objectives.

In library research, data collection is conducted through the examination of various sources, including academic books, scientific journals, previous research reports, and other credible documents. The collected literature must then be critically analyzed to assess the relevance of theories and prior findings to the focus of the study. This aligns with (Creswell & Poth, 2017) assertion that library research is not limited to

summarizing references, but also involves evaluating the depth and contribution of concepts to the study's theoretical framework. Through such critical analysis, library research strengthens propositions and establishes a solid conceptual foundation for the investigation (Fadli, 2021).

In the context of Korean language research, the application of library research can be conducted by examining relevant linguistic theories, for example (a) morphology; (b) syntax; (c) pragmatics; (d) semantics; (e) sociolinguistics. The sources reviewed may include Korean grammar books, scholarly articles on Korean linguistics, and previous research on the communication patterns of native or non-native Korean speakers. The results of this analysis can help identify research gaps and be used to formulate the theoretical framework that supports the study's objectives. Thus, the library research approach can be employed to optimally enrich the theoretical foundation of a study.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Basically, the qualitative descriptive method is employed through an approach that emphasizes a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena, which can be presented in words or detailed reports (Walidin et al., 2015; Fadli, 2021). The purpose of this approach is to describe phenomena as they are, without prior manipulation or experimental treatment; thus, the results are more narrative than numerical (Creswell, 2014). As with other studies, the application of the descriptive method emerges as a response to the aims and objectives of the research (Doyle et al., 2020). This study focuses on understanding problems of social relations based on a holistic, complex, and detailed natural setting (Fadli, 2021). For instance, research on politeness strategies can use descriptive analysis to understand variations in word choice and sentence structure across formal and informal contexts. The findings not only provide novel contributions to Korean linguistic research but also are beneficial to practical implications for teaching Korean as a foreign language.

Qualitative research has several key characteristics: (a) it is conducted in a natural setting (naturalistic inquiry), (b) the researcher serves as the key instrument, (c) it is descriptive in nature, (d) it emphasizes processes rather than final outcomes, (e) it employs inductive analysis, and (f) it focuses on the meaning of the phenomena being studied (Fraenkel et al., 2012). In line with this view, Sugiyono (2013) adds that this method is particularly suitable for examining research objects that occur naturally—as opposed to experimental approaches—by utilizing data triangulation in information gathering and producing context-specific findings rather than generalized results. In linguistic research, this approach enables scholars to capture authentic language use as it occurs in real-life communication, such as politeness strategies or speech level variations in Korean. Furthermore, it allows researchers to analyze how cultural norms and social contexts shape linguistic forms, providing richer insights into both language structure and its pragmatic functions.

Qualitative research approaches include six main types of focus: (a) phenomenology, (b) ethnography, (c) hermeneutics, (d) grounded theory, (e) narrative or historical studies, and (f) case studies, as illustrated in Figure 1. Phenomenology can

be used to reveal and understand a particular phenomenon (Fadli, 2021), such as exploring the experiences of Korean speakers in using polite forms of address in daily life. Ethnography is used to understand social research concerning the habitual patterns or language of a particular group (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), for example, studying the communication culture of Korean society, such as speaking habits based on age or social status. Hermeneutics focuses on interpreting the deeper meaning of social behavior or information (Fadli, 2021) such as interpreting a Korean text or dialogue in dramas. Grounded theory is used to examine and even update a theory (Martin & Turner, 1986), for instance, developing a new theory on the patterns of particle usage or verb forms from data. The narrative or historical approach is used to investigate events and construct narratives with accurate interpretation (Daliman, 2012), such as researching the historical development of the Korean language or analyzing the life stories of certain native speakers. Meanwhile, a case study allows researchers to explore specific phenomena intensively and in depth, for example, the use of Korean slang by students in a university.
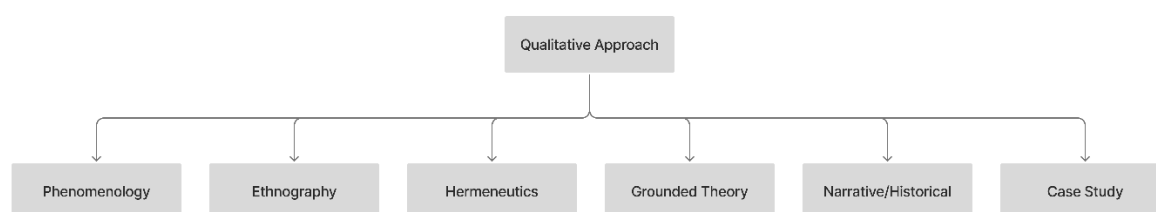

Figure 1. Descriptive Qualitative Approach

According to Creswell & Guetterman (2019), there are several important steps that researchers must follow to ensure the study proceeds systematically. These consist of six systematic steps: (a) problem identification, (b) literature review, (c) determining research objectives, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis and interpretation, and (f) reporting of findings, which are then presented in diagram form in Figure 2. Problem identification involves determining the focus or phenomenon to be studied, for example, in the context of the Korean language, the patterns of politeness levels in Korean greetings. The literature review stage requires researchers to examine relevant literature to review previous studies on the phenomenon and to identify novelty elements that distinguish their own research. Determining the research objectives involves formulating the main goals, such as describing the variation in the use of certain particles in formal and informal contexts of Korean.

Data collection is conducted by selecting appropriate subjects or participants, such as native Korean speakers from different age groups, in order to capture diverse perspectives, or by selecting research objects such as Korean negative utterances found in movie dialogues or in linguistic corpora. The processes of data analysis and interpretation involve examining conversation transcripts or texts to identify linguistic patterns and meanings, followed by drawing conclusions, refining existing theories, or even proposing new theoretical insights. Researchers often employ coding techniques to systematically categorize recurring themes or linguistic phenomena, which helps

enhance the reliability of the analysis. Finally, the reporting stage presents the findings in a descriptive and detailed manner, allowing readers to visualize the research context as if they were directly engaged in it (Sugiarto, 2015). This comprehensive reporting not only supports transparency and replicability but also contributes to the broader academic discourse by bridging theoretical understanding and practical application.
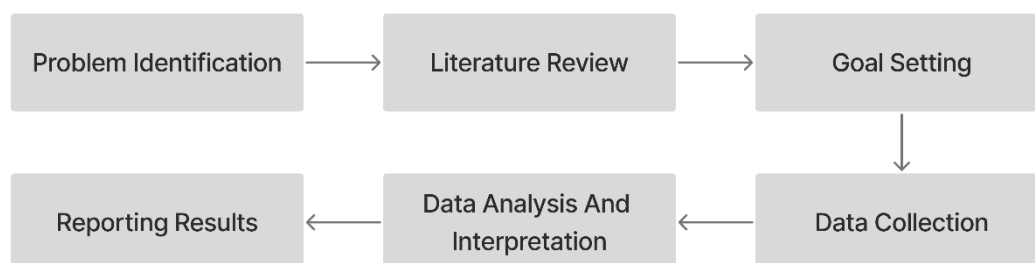
Figure 2. Research Stages (Raco, 2010)

Figure 3 is a diagram proposed by Miles & Huberman (1994) in which it consists of four main points in qualitative research: data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion. Each of these processes plays a significant role in qualitative research.
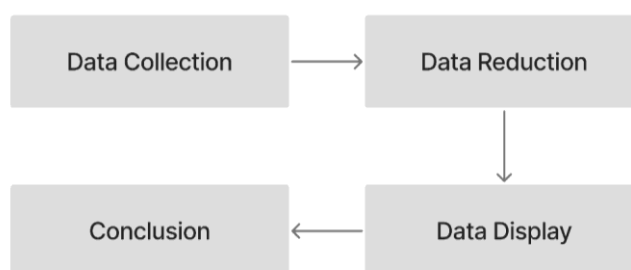
Figure 3. Flow of Data Analysis Components

Data Collection

Qualitative research relies fundamentally on the quality of the data collected (Fadli, 2021). In qualitative descriptive studies, various data collection techniques can be employed, including open-ended individual or group interviews, observation, and the examination of documents or artifacts (Colorafi & Evans, 2016). Documentation is carried out by gathering texts, conversation transcripts, or other language materials relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. Among these, direct interviewing is the most common form of data collection (Kim et al., 2017). Although alternative approaches such as focus group discussions (FGDs) and telephone or online interviews may also be utilized (Doyle et al., 2020). FGDs bring together several individuals with similar characteristics, enabling participants to share experiences related to a predetermined issue (Doyle et al., 2020; Krueger, 2014). Online interviews, by contrast, offer greater flexibility, allowing researchers and participants to engage in discussions without significantly disrupting their daily routines (Doyle et al., 2020).

Surveys using questionnaires, either face-to-face or online, can also be conducted, and by employing open-ended questions, researchers may obtain a broader range of data

(Kim et al., 2017; Seixas et al., 2018). Observation can likewise be used (Sandelowski, 2000) to record language use, such as daily conversations within a particular group or region; however, it cannot serve as the primary data source (Doyle et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2017). Meanwhile, library research complements the researcher's understanding of the linguistic concepts and theories underlying the phenomena being studied. Data collection varies according to the nature and objectives of the research being conducted.

Data Reduction

At the data reduction stage, the researcher sorts the data by selecting information that is interesting, important, useful, and aligned with the research objectives (Fadli, 2021). Subsequently, the researcher systematically categorizes the data or data clusters, separates relevant from irrelevant information, and identifies recurring patterns that may potentially serve as the main themes of the study. The goal is to condense the data into a more manageable form, ready for interpretation and further analysis. Through this process, the researcher is able to summarize the data in depth, eliminate unsupported information, and emphasize the core findings according to the research criteria. Once the reduction process is completed, the overall picture of the phenomenon under study becomes clearer, thereby facilitating the subsequent stages of analysis, particularly in linking the findings to Korean linguistic theories. Below is a sample of data consisting of several sentences in Korean along with their Indonesian translations.

Table 1. Korean sentences and their corresponding Indonesian translations

No	Korean sentences	Corresponding Indonesian translations
1	안녕하세요, 교수님. 오늘 수업 잘 부탁드립니다.	Halo, Profesor. Mohon bimbingannya untuk kelas hari ini.
2	안녕, 오늘 어디 가?	Hai, mau ke mana hari ini?
3	감사합니다. 다음에 또 뵙겠습니다	Terima kasih. Sampai bertemu lagi.
4	고마워! 진짜 맛있다.	Makasih! Enak banget.
5	어제 회의에서 선생님께 말씀드렸습니다.	Kemarin saya sudah memberi tahu guru dalam rapat.

The utterances above will be grouped and coded according to their types; for example, utterances numbered 1, 3, and 5 are coded as FU1, FU2, and FU3 (formal utterances), while utterances numbered 2 and 4 are coded as IU1 and IU2 (informal utterances). This coding process helps organize the data systematically, making it easier to trace specific linguistic features within each category. Furthermore, it allows researchers to quantify the distribution of formal and informal utterances, which can later be correlated with factors such as context, speaker age, or level of formality in conversation. Researchers interested in conducting studies in contrastive linguistics may analyze the similarities and differences between formal and informal utterances in the Korean and Indonesian languages, exploring not only their structural and lexical aspects but also their pragmatic functions and cultural underpinnings. Such an analysis can

contribute to a deeper understanding of how politeness strategies, levels of speech, and sociocultural norms are reflected in the linguistic choices of speakers in both languages.

According to Creswell & Guetterman (2019), qualitative data coding is carried out through several sequential steps. First, the researcher seeks to understand the overall meaning of the data and selects the most important and relevant parts, such as the differences between the greetings 안녕하세요 (formal) and 안녕 (informal) in the conversation transcript. Second, the researcher asks about the meaning contained in the data, for instance, why formal forms are more frequently used when addressing teachers or older individuals. Third, each important sentence is recorded and coded according to its topic, such as formal greeting or informal greeting, which may reflect the participants' social context and the relationships among speakers. Fourth, the list of codes is organized, with similar codes merged and irrelevant codes eliminated to simplify the analysis. This step helps identify the main patterns, such as formal forms are used in official situations and informal forms appear among peers. Finally, the researcher formulates the main themes, such as politeness patterns in Korean greetings, which may emerge from both initial assumptions and new findings discovered during the analysis.

Data Display

Data display is the subsequent stage after the data reduction process, in which the information that has been selected and condensed is organized into a format that allows the researcher to easily understand and draw conclusions. Miles & Huberman (1994) explain that the most commonly used form of data presentation in qualitative research is narrative description, although it may also be presented in the form of charts, matrices, networks, or graphs to illustrate relationships among categories or themes. The primary purpose of this stage is to help the researcher visualize patterns, relationships, and key findings that emerge from the data. An effective data display not only clarifies complex findings but also enhances transparency, enabling readers to trace how interpretations and conclusions are drawn from the analyzed data.

In the context of Korean language research, for instance, data presentation may be carried out through a comparison table between formal greetings such as 안녕하세요 and informal greetings such as 안녕, or through diagrams that illustrate patterns of politeness across different communication situations. Such data displays facilitate the process of verifying findings and ensure that the conclusions drawn are grounded, as they are inductively developed from continuously analyzed field data. Here is an example of a data display in the form of a brief narrative: The data show a consistent pattern in the use of politeness levels: formal expressions such as 안녕하세요 and 감사합니다 are used in interactions with older individuals or those with higher social status (e.g., professors or teachers). In contrast, informal expressions such as 안녕 and 고마워 are used in conversations among peers. This pattern illustrates the social context differences that influence language choice in Korean daily interactions.

CONCLUSIONS

Drawing conclusions is a process that begins from the very start of data collection, where the researcher continuously interprets patterns, relationships, and possible casualties that emerge from the data. The conclusions produced may answer the research questions from the early stages; however, they remain flexible, since research questions in qualitative studies often evolve alongside the ongoing process and fieldwork. This process also involves checking the consistency of findings, considering alternative explanations, and evaluating potential researcher bias to ensure the validity of interpretations (Barrett & Twycross, 2018).

Conclusion drawing is carried out iteratively, meaning that the researcher may need to return to the data to refine or update the understanding gained. In the context of Korean language research, for example, the analysis of politeness levels in formal and informal greetings may reveal new findings such as previously unidentified patterns of language use, thereby providing a clearer description of the linguistic phenomenon. Conclusion drawing can be conducted by presenting preliminary conclusions, performing verification and iteration, and then formulating the final conclusion. The following illustrates an example of a preliminary conclusion, verification and iteration, and final conclusion for research about Korean greetings.

(a) Preliminary conclusion

Based on the initial data from conversations between students and professors, it was found that formal greetings such as 안녕하세요 and 감사합니다 were consistently used when addressing older individuals or those with higher social status. In contrast, informal greetings such as 안녕 and 고마워 were used among peers. At this stage, the researcher assumes that the level of politeness is entirely determined by the age and social status of the interlocutor.

(b) Verification and Iteration

After adding data from follow-up interviews and observations in different situations (for instance, family conversations and workplace interactions), exceptions were found: formal greetings were still used even among peers, particularly when speaking in formal settings such as meetings or classrooms. This indicates that situational context also plays a role in the choice of politeness level, not only age or social status.

(c) Final Conclusion

The final analysis shows that the use of formal and informal address in Korean is influenced by a combination of factors such as age, social status, and situational context. This finding develops previous understandings that only consider age or social status, and introduces a novelty in the form of the significant role of communication situations in determining address choices. This pattern may support the theory of linguistic politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987) while also enriching the study of contemporary Korean linguistics.

Challenges of Descriptive Qualitative Design in Linguistic Research

The use of descriptive qualitative design in research presents several challenges that must be anticipated by scholars. One of the primary challenges lies in the potential subjectivity of the researcher during data interpretation, as this approach emphasizes in-depth descriptions of a phenomenon. The findings rely heavily on the researcher's ability to understand the context and filter relevant information. Without strategies to maintain objectivity—such as employing data, investigator, theory, or methodological triangulation—researcher bias is likely to emerge (Sandelowski, 2000).

Another challenge concerns the complexity of data management and analysis. Descriptive qualitative studies often generate large volumes of data—such as conversation transcripts or lengthy documents—that require advanced skills and significant time to analyze. Nonetheless, electronic tools can be employed to facilitate data processing. To address this complexity Raco (2010), Silverman (2004), and Fadli (2021) propose several analytical steps: (1) repeatedly reviewing the data to gain comprehensive understanding and reduce redundancy; (2) assessing the significance of each piece of information by identifying its key points; (3) classifying or coding data based on shared meanings; (4) identifying major patterns or themes that connect emerging ideas; and (5) constructing an analytical framework that highlights the core findings of the study. This process is strongly shaped by the researcher's intellectual ability and interpretive skills.

An equally important challenge lies in the limited generalizability of findings, since descriptive qualitative research typically yields context-specific results that cannot be readily applied to larger populations (Creswell, 2014). Researchers are also required to present findings in a manner that is both detailed and concise, ensuring that readers can grasp the insights without losing the depth of meaning embedded in the carefully collected and processed data. This requires researchers to balance rich narrative descriptions with clarity and logical organization, so that the results remain accessible to diverse audiences. Furthermore, they must transparently explain the contextual boundaries of their studies, enabling other scholars to interpret and apply the findings appropriately. In addition, the integration of supporting evidence—such as verbatim quotes, tables, or visual representations—can enhance the credibility and comprehensibility of the presented results.

CONCLUSION

As an agglutinative language, Korean features particles such as "josa" and "eomi" that are central to meaning, sentence structure, and honorific systems, linking grammar closely with sociocultural contexts. To analyze these phenomena, researchers frequently employ qualitative descriptive methods, which emphasize describing language use as it naturally occurs without experimental manipulation. This approach is effective for examining morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic features of Korean, offering insights into patterns of politeness, contextual variation, and communicative functions. By bridging theory with real-world applications, qualitative descriptive research contributes

both to the academic development of Korean linguistics and to practical guidance for teaching and understanding the language in intercultural settings.

The descriptive qualitative method aims to provide a holistic understanding of social phenomena in their natural settings and represents findings in words rather than numbers. It is particularly suited for describing linguistic and cultural patterns—such as politeness strategies in Korean—without manipulating variables. This approach emphasizes meaning, process, and context, and relies on the researcher as the primary instrument for collecting and interpreting data. Various qualitative approaches, including phenomenology, ethnography, hermeneutics, grounded theory, narrative studies, and case studies, allow researchers to explore language use from multiple perspectives and to reveal sociocultural factors shaping linguistic choices.

Descriptive qualitative research follows systematic steps: identifying the problem, reviewing relevant literature, defining objectives, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting it, and finally reporting findings in rich narrative detail. Data can be gathered from interviews, observations, documents, focus groups, or linguistic corpora, with coding used to classify utterances—such as distinguishing between formal and informal expressions in Korean. Data analysis involves an iterative process of reduction, display, and interpretation to uncover meaningful patterns. For instance, examining greetings in Korean may reveal how age, social status, and situational context influence the choice between formal and informal forms, thereby contributing new insights into politeness in Korean linguistics.

Despite its value in capturing complex linguistic and cultural realities, descriptive qualitative research faces challenges, including the potential subjectivity of the researcher, the time-consuming nature of managing and analyzing large volumes of data, and the limited generalizability of context-specific findings. To enhance rigor and minimize bias, scholars are encouraged to apply strategies such as data, investigator, theory, or methodological triangulation. Clear coding procedures, systematic data organization, and transparent reporting further improve credibility, while careful interpretation ensures that findings contribute meaningfully to both theoretical understanding and practical applications in fields like Korean language teaching and sociolinguistics.

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