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## **The clue to common research in Translation and Interpreting: methodology**

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Research in the fields of translation and interpreting has hitherto been clearly differentiated by D. Gile, with both a different "history, foci, academic environment and tradition"(see D. Gile's chapter in this volume). However, as he also points out, they also share some methodological issues, and that common interest is the point of departure of this article, which aims to provide a framework within which scholars from both fields might join forces to work towards a mutually satisfying objective.

It is true that the differences between translation research (TR) and Interpreting research (IR) make it difficult to contemplate areas of research in common, but, in our opinion, the clue to bringing research into translation and interpreting closer lies in the acceptance –and the use– by scholars in both fields of a common research methodology.

### **Research methodology**

When referring to "research methodology", many different aspects of research methodology come to mind: the way in which research is carried out, the theoretical approach adopted by researchers, the way in which research is organised/planned, the method used by the researcher to gather/analyse data, etc.

It may therefore be helpful to begin this article by defining what we mean by "research methodology". In our opinion, research methodology may be defined in terms of the "process of research", i.e., the planning and carrying out of each stage of a scientific study. In our opinion, rigor in the research process is what makes a study valuable from the scientific point of view. This, according to Nachmias and Nachmias (1982:22):

“Scientific knowledge is knowledge provable by both reason and experience (observation). Logical validity and empirical verification are the criteria employed by scientists to evaluate claims for knowledge. These two criteria are translated into the research activities of scientists through the *research process*.”

Many scholars in the fields of translation and interpreting do not agree with this idea of "scientific" and even less "science" when referring to their field of study, but this may be because their definition of "scientific" from that of Nachmias and Nachmias.

Figure 1 may help shed some light on what may be termed "scientific research methodology" and the steps it involves:

## Research Stages

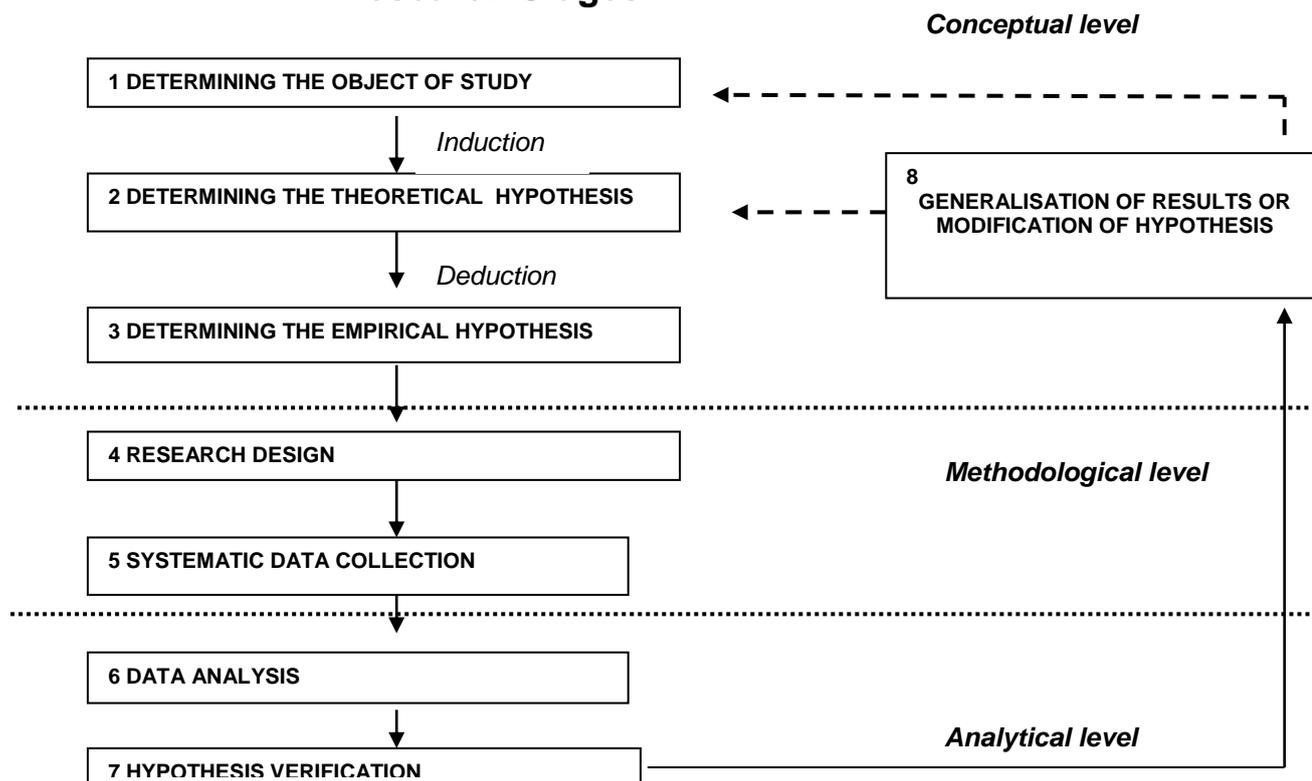


Figure1. Research Stages (adapted from Domenech *et al.*, 1998)

Figure 1 shows the main stages of the cycle through which the research process develops. This process develops through eight stages corresponding to the conceptual, methodological and analytical levels of research.

The process starts at the **conceptual** level; the researcher works with abstract ideas that become specific (still at the theoretical level) at a second stage, before finally becoming tangible/observable at the third stage. Stage one always starts with a problem or question the researcher wishes to solve or to answer, and the tentative solution or answer becomes the hypothesis at stages two and three.

A second level, the **methodological**, is the level at which research is actually designed on the basis of the hypothesis elaborated at the conceptual level. Stage four of the research process includes all the necessary details concerning the study to be carried out, and is followed by the data collection stage, which must be systematic, i.e., using the techniques or measuring instruments proposed at stage four. These techniques or measuring instruments may be very sophisticated (like the neurological instruments used in some interpreting studies) or very simple (as, for instance, an observation chart where the researcher simply takes note of the times the interpreter coughs or closes his/her eyes during an interpreting task; or a table showing the frequency with which certain word combinations appear in a translated text). What is important, however, is that a technique or measuring instrument should be available to systematise the data collection.

In TR and IR multiple types of data may be obtained from multiple sources (translated or original texts, a corpus, questionnaires, interviews, specific tasks carried out in original or artificial contexts by subjects, etc.), nevertheless, even if a "natural"

process, is being observed or described, this observation/description must be rigorous and systematic if the research is to be deemed "scientific", because otherwise the advantages of this methodology cannot be exploited (see "advantages" below).

The third level through which the research process develops is the **analytical** level, where data is collected and analysed in a objective and systematic manner. This systematic analysis will eventually lead to a conclusion and possible generalisation that must lead back into the theoretical framework at the point at which the research started, i.e., the conceptual level. This, in turn, may pose a further problem, which will require another hypothesis, and so on.

By following this cycle, replicability and the possibility of extrapolating results for their application to other (similar) situations is ensured.

### **Advantages of using this method in translation and interpreting research**

We are aware that the definition given of the research process as the means to acquiring scientific knowledge involves a lot of work and thought previous to any study a researcher wishes to undertake, especially before the actual methodological level of the research is attained.

However, if this were to become the methodology of choice when carrying out research in the fields of translation and interpreting, the advantages would be great indeed. To name but a few:

1. It would be possible for any scholar to replicate (and confirm) the results of any study.

For a study to be replicated there has to be, in the first place, a detailed account of the different stages of the research process, something which can only be found in a few of the studies carried out to date in the fields of translation and interpreting (in this respect, see Orozco 2001a).

The importance of replicating research is greater than may seem at first sight, since in our disciplines there have not been, to our knowledge, any replication of studies. This means that the results of all the studies carried out to date could well be refuted by a new study replicating the existing ones and yielding different results.

2. It would be possible to carry out multi-centre research projects with a common research protocol, i.e., it would be possible to compare (and add) the results of different studies, carried out in different places or at different times.

If two studies have a common design, common measuring instruments, i.e., if the research process is the same, one study carried out with subjects, for example, in Finland, could perfectly well substantiate –or even add to- the results obtained in a similar study carried out with subjects of the same characteristics in Spain. Equally well, results obtained using different languages or language combinations may be added to the data analysed, and this affords the possibility of undertaking similar projects in different countries and/or institutions.

Another possibility is that of sharing corpus studies, which could benefit from widening corpus or from more than one analysis of the same corpus.

It is obviously very important that every step be the same within the research process, e.g. the sampling techniques used, the measuring instruments, data analysis, etc.

3. It would allow researchers in the fields of translation and interpreting to work more closely together.

In the first place, studies would be much more accessible for scholars devoted to other issues, because studies in other fields within the same discipline would be more readily accessible. For instance, a translator carrying out descriptive studies in literature translated from English into French would find it easier to identify with the research carried out by a colleague measuring the consequences of time-pressure in interpreting, because this would include a report detailing each stage of his/her research process, from the theoretical level through to the analytical level and the conclusions reached.

Furthermore, there could be common research in translation and interpreting; for instance, scholars from both fields could decide to compare some steps of the process that the translator/interpreter share (e.g. the comprehension phase of the original text).

4. Scholars with little time to spend on research could participate in studies which they would not be able to do without a clear and common methodology.

For instance, academics or postgraduate students who usually have little time to dedicate to research (especially interpreters), could participate in networks in which each of the colleagues interested in the same study develops one of the levels of the study (conceptual, methodological or analytical). This would increase the range of the results obtained, as well as the public that could benefit from them.

### **Problems of applying the methodology proposed**

There are, as D. Gile points out (see his article in this volume), some problems involved in applying the methodology proposed.

In the first place, the lack of tradition and specific training in research in both the translation and interpreting disciplines make it difficult for academics to be able to follow the whole research process explained, particularly at the stage of research design (designing data collecting techniques and measuring instruments or thinking about which data could be extracted and how) and data analysis (using statistics to deal with the data collected).

This problem could be tackled if research methodology was included in the curriculum of the postgraduate/Master and PhD programmes in translation and/or interpreting, including translator/interpreter teacher training courses or seminars. This would be very useful for future researchers in our fields, and would ensure that the next generation of scholars are able to make the most of their studies, but at the same time it would make it easier for current scholars and academics -that see methodological issues very far from their interests right now- to be more open-minded towards the idea of research methodology as something useful and profitable in our fields.

Secondly, it is true, as D. Gile points out, that translation and interpreting research has an "uncertain academic status" and that practitioners tend to think it of limited use. The only response to this attitude lies, in our opinion, in carrying out as much rigorous research as possible, in order to find results that can be applied to the academic world (mainly in the didactics field) and to the profession, as might be the case of finding out and then developing better programmes that train better practitioners or tools that can help those same practitioners.

### **Conclusion**

The methodological model proposed can be applied to **any** field or objective within TR and IR, from the comparison of written translations (including of course descriptive studies and corpus studies) or the statement of theoretical models (that would start and

end in the conceptual level of the research process) to the experimentation with human subjects (translation didactics, interpreting process, study of any step of the interpreting/translation process, etc.). Therefore, any scholar could benefit from the efforts of colleagues that have been interested by the same object of study.

Finally, we agree with D. Gile when he refers in his conclusions to the fact that we should all be open-minded with regard to applying ideas and methods described in IR literature to TR. We would go still further to say that this open-mindedness should be made extensive to research in general, so that we can take as our point of departure the work of others in our field and build on research that has already been carried out, and to undertake research together with colleagues from other specialities/ languages/ disciplines in an interdisciplinary holistic approach to interrelated topics.

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