

Designing Empirical Research for Translation Studies

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Two parts of my talk

Part I: brief of empirical studies and empirical studies in T&I

Part II: issues found in presenting research for publication

The Empirical approach

- the empirical approach is **inductive** in nature (Popper 2002/1963, p. 44, cited in Kotze, 2019, p. 333), proceeding from observation and description of one or more aspects of a **phenomenon** as these occur in “**the world of our experience**” (Hempel 1952, p. 1; emphasis added); in contrast to “personal theorizing” (Gile, 1990) or “speculative theorizing” (Pochhacker, 2008)
- **Observation** and **description** are the methodological engine, or “focal point and pivot” of the method (Toury 2012, p. 4; emphasis added).
- while **description** is the first & key step of the empirical approach, it is **not its endpoint**: the aim of empirical research is to use observation and description as a means to **establish general principles that can explain and predict the phenomenon under investigation** (Kotze, 2019, p.333; emphasis added).

Empirical studies

of translation and interpreting

Empirical disciplines are devised to account, in a systematic and controlled way, for particular segments of the “real world”. [. . .] Whether one chooses to focus one’s efforts on translated texts and/or their constituents, on intertextual relationships, on models and norms of translational behavior or on strategies adopted in and for the solution of particular problems, what constitutes the subject matter of the discipline of Translation Studies is (whether actually **observable or at least reconstructible**) **facts of real life** rather than speculative entities resulting from preconceived hypotheses and theoretical models.

(Toury 2012, p.xi; emphasis added)

Empirical studies

of translation and interpreting

theorisations derived from empirical studies may form the “input” for subsequent descriptive studies, in which theories may be used to generate hypotheses that can be falsified against empirical data in a deductive approach. In this way, the cyclic interplay between induction and deduction, and empirical observation and theorisation, may lead to increasing refinement and reinterpretation of theory and more sophisticated empirical studies.

(Kotze, 2019, p. 334)

The Empirical Turn in T&I Studies

- The empirical turn in translation studies started in around 1990s.
- The empirical turn in interpreting studies started earlier, epitomized by Daniel Gile's (1990) dichotomy between "speculative theorizing vs. empirical research". But according to Pochhacker (2008, p. 37), there was probably not such a turn, as studies of interpreting were empirical from the very beginning, 'given its strong roots in experimental psychology rather than linguistic or literary theorizing.'

Types of Empirical Studies

- Studies of naturalistic data (observational studies)
- Studies of experimental data (experimental studies)
- Survey studies (questionnaires, surveys, interviews and focus groups)

Types of Empirical Studies

- Qualitative studies
- Quantitative studies

Types of Empirical Studies in T&I

- Product-based: leading to “the formulation of certain ‘laws of translation’ capturing regularities of translational behaviour.” (Kotze, 2019, p. 337), e.g., explicitation
- Process-based: to know “the black box”
- Participant-based: study of the translator/interpreter in relation to product/process, e.g., professionals vs students; novice vs seasoned professionals
- Context-based: study of social and cultural factors underlying Translations, e.g. interpreting in prisons & in the pandemic
- Multiple dimensions

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

The research process

Neunzig (2011, p. 15) outlines the research process as:

designing an experiment, selecting subjects or the object of study, defining experimental and control groups, controlling independent variables, choosing instruments that will measure what we want to measure and which will give us reliable data to analyse.

In today's talk: I define the research process as starting from the moment of forming a research question and finishing at the point of presenting a research for dissemination.

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

The research process

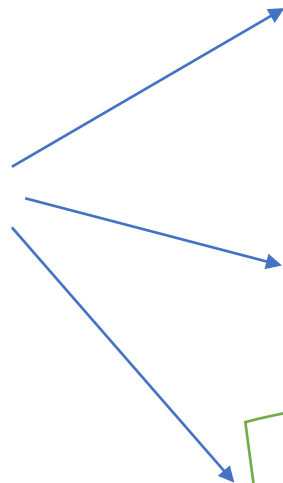
The research inquiry: This needs to be based on comprehensive literature review to show:

Selecting
object of
study (i.e.,
the research
topic)

Under-studied

Not studied

Replication



Conducting empirical studies in T&I

The research process

The research inquiry: This needs to be based on comprehensive literature review to show:

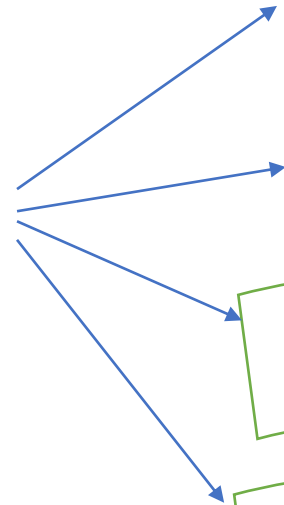
Designing the
research

choosing equipment

defining experimental and/or control
groups

controlling independent variables

Choosing measuring instruments



Conducting empirical studies in T&I

presenting for publication



Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

--- *claim to be empirical, but is not:*

Two papers I reviewed:

- One claimed to be empirical study but read as an extended proposal.
- One claimed to be empirical study, but no methodology, no data, just findings (with & without examples to illustrate) followed by literature review

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

--- *Outdated literature to problematise the status quo:*

In a paper I reviewed recently: the latest work the author reviewed was published in 2011, thus the literature review weakens the major argument & the asked research questions

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

--- *Methodology does not align with research question:*

A paper I reviewed:

The Author's hypothesis to be tested: mother tongue does not matter in medical translation.

But: the research subjects' L1/L2 language background is not clear.

Suggestion: a data verifier

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

--- *Qualitative vs quantitative:*

A paper I reviewed:

The Author aims to find out how native-like conference interpreters sound in reverse interpreting

The author presents each of their research subjects' interpreting from their mother tongue into English qualitatively, without statistical analysis of the overall performance that may lead to the conclusion of whether conference interpreters sound native or not when interpreting from their mother tongue.

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

---data coding: data identified do not match categorisations:

In a study on translation strategies:

The author's definition of amplification: amplification refers to a situation in which extra information is added to the translation for clarification

But: in reporting research findings, some examples provided by the author do not align with the definition of amplification.

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

---*Being empirical for the purpose of being empirical* (Neunzig, 2011):

A paper I reviewed:

The author tested the effectiveness of CAI tools [speech → re-speech into an SR tool → MT → human interpreters interpret based on MT] by comparing interpreters' performance in such scenarios with that in conventional CI scenarios. Although the study is valid, the significance of the research is debatable, because if applied into the interpreting industry, the stage 're-speech into an SR' can be regarded as non-economical and can potentially incur more cognitive load than without it.

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author


---Presenting the data:

Reviewer of my first edited volume:
Use of visual aids: mostly tables, should better vary.

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

Experiences from being a reviewer, editor and author

--- *Strengthening research findings: integrated approach (triangulation or multiple methods)*



My own research:
Reviewer: include the interview data

Conducting empirical studies in T&I

The future

Looking ahead:

[E]ffort needs to be put into validating instruments of data collection, refining experimental designs, using larger and more representative samples, and fostering the replication of studies, allowing for validation or falsification of previously found results. Studies would then have a much greater power of generalization (Albir *et al.*, 2015, p. 7).

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