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Qualitative and Quantitative Research and Empirical Translation Studies

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Empirical research is based on data systematically derived from perception and observation of aspects of reality. In a research project, data collection, analysis and interpretation of the data entail choices as to the different methods, techniques and procedures which might be the most promising. In TS, many different quantitative and qualitative methods are used. Quantitative methods are based on and proceed from the researcher's ideas and hypotheses about observed dimensions as well as calculable and measurable categories. Qualitative methods are based on interpretations of reports from the experiences and/or actions of individuals. Where focus in quantitative research is on relations between a few isolated variables in larger samples, focus in qualitative research is on relations between many variables that are investigated in smaller samples. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have advantages and limitations, but each mode of research gives its contribution in the attempt to increase knowledge. If we, for example, examine a human body, we can measure height, weight, foot size, blood pressure etc. But as soon as we have to describe a person's complexion, hair colour, feelings or perception of pain, we have to rely on interpretations and reports that are based on experience.

The choice of qualitative and/or quantitative methods has to be taken in relation to the particular research issue(s) under study. Sometimes quantitative methods can be used, like for example in TS, investigating the length of pauses taken or the number of key strokes made during translation processes; in other cases, purely qualitative methods are useful, for example in reports on translation problems or the personal involvement of the translator during the translation process. However, as qualitative data can in many cases be coded and counted and as quantitative data and results always need to be interpreted and explained, both aspects will always be present. In TS, quantitative and qualitative methods can be used in a variety of combinations and triangulations. There is no universally "best way" of combining methods.