

Research issue, also published under [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org)

## **Qualitative research in TS - interdisciplinarity and intermethodology**

Gyde Hansen, March 2, 2005 – Copenhagen Business School

Qualitative research is based on subjective reports, explanations and interpretations. In TS, we need qualitative methods, but we cannot make do with only specific, private findings that cannot be generalized. According to Gile (2004), "our perception of both 'reality' around us and other people's statements is distorted and limited by our sensory and cognitive limitations". Thus, the question is: how can we push back these limitations and follow the list of norms of the so-called scientific method, especially no. 4. according to the aspiration of objectivity? In other words, how can we, using qualitative methods, move from the individual, subjective level, represented in individual reports and interpretations, to a level of, if not objectivity, then at least subject-independency or inter-subjectivity? Especially regarding the fundamental scientific problem that data have to be gathered and interpreted by an observer, we also have to ask the question: how can bias from observers' effects, i.e. his/her interests, prejudices and attitudes, be minimized or avoided? Additional questions arise due to the complexity of the field "translation". In many projects, the connected whole has to be taken into consideration, because the experimental conditions are complex situations with subjects and their multifarious individual backgrounds. How can we take such complex situations with many variables into consideration without renouncing the possibility of obtaining results that can be comprehended and perhaps replicated by other scholars? Answers can be found in interdisciplinarity, and especially in inter-methodology.

Translation in itself is an interdiscipline (Snell-Hornby 1986: 18), in the sense that the complex phenomenon consists of inseparably connected aspects from different disciplines like linguistics, culture, communication and terminology. In TS, these disciplines are always relevant and thus an inherent part of the research issue translation. But interdisciplinarity can also be understood differently, i.e. as an attempt to adopt methods and ideas from other disciplines bearing some resemblance to the multifaceted TS. Disciplines, such as psychology, sociology, cognitive sciences and health care share our questions as to research methods, because they also deal with complex issues involving individuals' attitudes, behaviour and reports. This kind of interdisciplinarity means that research issues, apart from and in addition to the usually "inseparable disciplines", can be investigated from different angles, using knowledge, methods, tools and techniques from different paradigms and disciplines, which at first glance might seem to have little in common with translation.

Qualitative methods are used in many disciplines in social sciences, psychology, human sciences, and also in natural sciences. Especially in approaches close to empirical research, such as phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, psychology of perception and consciousness studies, great efforts have been made to accommodate qualitative research to some "scientific" norms; a balancing act between the special purpose and conditions of

qualitative research on the one hand, and the requirements of natural sciences as to exactness, reliability, validity and credibility on the other hand. These empirical approaches from other disciplines provide us with useful discussions, attitudes, techniques and procedures. Most important for TS are: precise and transparent description, reflective attitude, communication techniques, coding procedures and combinations and triangulations of methods and data.

## **References**

Gile, D. 2004. Scientific norms. [www.est-translationstudies.org](http://www.est-translationstudies.org): Research issue December 8.

Snell-Hornby, M. 1986. Übersetzen, Sprache, Kultur. In *Übersetzungswissenschaft. Eine Neuorientierung*. Snell-Hornby, M. (ed). Tübingen: Francke. 9-29.