Research Methodologies in Translation Studies
Gabriela Saldanha and Sharon O’Brien (2014)

Reviewed by Chao Han and Rongbo Fu

The book under review, coauthored by Gabriela Saldanha and Sharon O’Brien, was published by Routledge in 2014, albeit first published by St Jerome in 2013. It aims to promote ‘a discerning and critical approach to scholarly investigation’ by providing both the know-how and new insights into exploring new questions in translation studies ‘through the coherent integration of different methods of research’ (p. v). The reviewers therefore need to ascertain whether the book has achieved the intended goal.

The book has seven chapters, four of which address research methods proper (Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6). The first two chapters (Chapters 1 and 2) explain the background and scope of the book, and outline fundamental principles and ethics for doing research. The last chapter (Chapter 7) is an overview of how to write a research report. As such, these three chapters serve as a frame to contextualize the core, the remaining four chapters, of the volume. This review therefore will first evaluate the formal aspects of the book, before proceeding to its frame (Chapters 1, 2 and 7), and finally the core (Chapters 3, 4, 5, and 6).

Overall, the book has few typographical errors (e.g., ‘… rather pres-existing in the mind of …’ p. 150), and is well structured, with each chapter beginning with a general introduction before in-depth discussion, and finally a summary. Figures and tables are used appropriately, though sparingly, to explain and visualize concepts and processes and to summarize important information. References are formatted consistently and correctly; and the index in the end of the book is also helpful.
The frame

Chapter 1 provides an informative and useful introduction to the book, clarifying the motivation behind the book and the potential readership the book targets, delimiting the scope of the book and acknowledging its limitations, and outlining a four-tiered model of translation studies used to structure the book. It is all the more precious that the foundation-building content in the chapter is presented in an engaging and thoughtful manner. The review identifies with the authors, when they argue for a need of methodology books, specific to translation and interpreting (T&I) studies, and catering to not only T&I students, but also to interested researchers from other disciplines. The authors, though having extensive research experience, thoughtfully demarcate the scope and topics to be discussed, and explain their stance on a descriptive, yet critical-interpretive, approach to empirical research. In addition, the authors concisely describe the organization of the book, based on four perspectives from which translation has been viewed or observed: (a) texts as the product of translation; (b) the translation process; (c) the participants involved in the process; and (d) the context where translations are created and received. This model of translation is compared and contrasted with Chesterman’s and Marco’s models, thereby providing evidentiary justification for the appropriateness, relevance and usefulness of the proposed model, though ‘by no means flawless and complete’ (p. 5).

Chapter 2 is an overview of critical principles concerning doing research, and of ethical behaviors expected of researchers. Although each of the two major topics, especially the one regarding sound research practice, can be easily developed into book-length discussion, the authors manage to address all critical issues and concerns in a single chapter. From the overarching ontological and epistemological considerations to formulation of research questions and hypotheses, from methodological choices to operationalization of a variable, the authors demonstrate their expertise and insight to link these issues into a logical whole. There are three useful highlights in the chapter that are rare in other similar books in T&I studies: (a) recognition of broader philosophical worldviews and their potential impacts on methodological choices; (b) acknowledgement of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods approaches to research and of incompatibility or incommensurability that may arise when qualitative and quantitative methods are purposefully integrated in a single study; and (c) differentiation of quality criteria used to evaluate qualitative (e.g., credibility, warrantability) and quantitative research (e.g., reliability, validity, generalizability).

There are, however, a few imperfections or, blemishes, so to speak. First, regarding the possible philosophical underpinnings for mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, the authors only mention realism or realist
approaches (p. 12), overlooking other recognized epistemological stances such as dialectical pragmatism (see e.g., Creswell, 2013; Johnson and Christensen, 2010) and transformative paradigm (see e.g., Mertens, 2010). Second, despite the discussion of Karl Popper’s notion of falsifiability which postulates that theories can never be proven once and for all, the authors seem to be deterministic regarding hypothesis testing, as they write ‘We are usually interested in disproving the null hypothesis … or the alternative hypothesis (H₁) is true’ (p. 19). Here, instead of ‘rejecting’ or ‘refuting’ a null hypothesis, or deciding that alternative hypothesis can be ‘accepted’, the authors use ‘disproving’ and ‘true’. Lastly, in explaining what a causal mechanism means, the authors use an example of a correlational relationship (p. 36). Although correlation is one of the necessary conditions to establish causality, it is not sufficient (see e.g., Tracz, 1992). Using an example of causation here, perhaps, is more appropriate.

Chapter 7 wraps up the book by offering a brief guide to writing a research report, drawing upon the IMRAD structure (i.e., Introduction, Methods, and Discussion). As the frame of a report, three major sections, including introduction, literature review, and conclusion, are discussed. It is reassuring to see that the authors stress on providing a comprehensive and evaluative review of extant literature, and on making an appropriate claim in the conclusion section, which is evidence-based, modestly phrased, and is able to stand theoretical/empirical falsification. It is also a delight to see that the authors distinguish qualitative, quantitative, and, probably more relevant to language researchers, linguistic data, when it comes to reporting results.

The core

Chapter 3 elaborates three methodologies, i.e., descriptive, explanatory and evaluative, applicable to the investigation of the end product ensued from translation process. In terms of descriptive/explanatory approaches, the authors focus on critical discourse analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics (CL), explaining in great detail the principles and perspectives that characterize the former, and highlighting the basic assumptions CDA shares with the latter. When discussing their methodological strengths and weaknesses in the study of translated texts, the authors also warn against overgeneralizing research findings from discourse analysis of corpus concordances, though a combined use of the two is believed to help offset their respective shortcomings and complement each other. With that, readers are then guided through the procedure where product-oriented research is able to be conducted by grouping CDA and CL together, from research design to corpora building and to analysis. The same is done with research on translation quality assessment
(QA), starting from discussing merits and demerits of existing QA models before moving on to more pertinent concerns in study, such as design, data collection and analysis. The whole chapter constitutes a good repository of key methodologies and resources needed in doing product-oriented research in translation. What readers might find particularly useful is, along with many examples, the plenty of references – regardless of corpus websites or recommended readings – which will prove desirable for those who otherwise have to stumble upon such materials by accident. Despite its depth in elucidation, the chapter is believed to be a bit insufficient in its breath: throughout, CDA and its analytical concepts are selected as, as it were, paragons to apply discourse analysis (DA) to translation studies. However, CDA only represents one – albeit prominent – offshoot of DA, and other paradigms such as traditional functional linguistics or positive discourse analysis (PDA) (Martin, 2004) could have been mentioned at least in passing. This is perhaps a minor flaw worth consideration in the future edition.

Chapter 4 is dedicated to process-oriented translation research, which aims to shed light on translation competence, cognitive processes underlying translating, and interaction between cognition and translated product. This chapter presents a diverse range of methods used to study translation processes, and, consequently, a rich body of relevant information. The authors first highlight potential issues and common topics characterizing three methodological approaches to researching translation processes, including introspection, keystroke logging, and eye tracking. Detailed analysis of each approach is then provided, focusing on design, data elicitation and data analysis. Three complementary methods to study translation processes, i.e. contextual inquiry, personality profiling and physiological measurement, are also discussed in the end of the chapter. In addition, the authors skillfully weave important ideas, key concepts, previous findings, potential controversies and research pitfalls into a coherent line of storytelling, and provide recommendations for future research, where appropriate. Perhaps, the authors could take a further step, in 4.5.3.4 Analysis of linked data, to elaborate a bit more how multiple data streams from eye-tracking, keystroke logging and introspection could be integrated and triangulated in a mixed-methods investigation into translation processes.

Chapter 5 concentrates on participant-oriented research in translation studies, where participants such as translators, translation students, and trainers are of the central concern. Three methods are highlighted: questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups. Strengths and weaknesses of each method are summarized; issues relating to design, sampling, data collection/elicitation, and data analysis are also critically discussed to help readers develop an all-round and in-depth understanding of each method and its application. It is
reassuring that the authors emphasize on language issues regarding the choice of language for questionnaires and interviews and regarding formulation of questions, and on trial/pilot studies to expose potential problems early on. It is also worth noting that the authors devote a section to data analysis in mixed-methods research, which has not received due attention in other similar books.

Despite the informative and critical presentation in the chapter, this review finds several places that need clarification, elaboration, and even reinterpretation. First, regarding reliability of questionnaires, there is a need to accentuate the differences between split-half, test-retest and parallel-form reliability. Technically, the split-half method concerns *internal consistency* of a questionnaire; the test-retest method pertains to *stability* of a given questionnaire administered at two occasions; and the parallel form has to do with *equivalence* of two similar forms of a questionnaire. More importantly, it should be pointed out that ‘a test which is not internally homogeneous may nonetheless have a high correlation with a carefully-planned equivalent form’ (Cronbach, 1951, 300). Equally important is to elaborate that parallel-form reliability coefficients are a property of a pair of tests, not a single test (Cronbach, 1951). As such, the authors’ statement that ‘if the [parallel-form] correlation of scores is high, the questionnaire can be seen as reliable’ (p. 160) could be inaccurate, which may need to be reinterpreted. The parallel-form correlation coefficient between questionnaire A and B is not a unique coefficient for either of the questionnaires; it merely indicates the equivalence of one form to another specific form. Second, it would make more conceptual sense if Cronbach’s alpha was interpreted as the average of all the possible split-half coefficients for a given questionnaire (see Cronbach, 1951). In addition, although it is correct that Cronbach’s alpha ‘goes from negative infinity up to 1’ (p. 159), it would be more useful to stress that the alpha normally ranges between 0 and 1, where zero means no internal consistency; one represents the perfect consistency. Third, when calculating response rate for a questionnaire, it would be useful if the authors mention *sampling frame* first. Otherwise, there is no way to know how response rate could be computed. Fourth, when discussing internet-mediated collection methods, the authors could mention some of the available online survey toolkits, such as Survey Monkey and Qualtrics, so that potential issues such as layout, fonts, and consistency would no longer be big concerns. The next issue is with inferential statistical analysis, especially missing data/non-responses and nonnormality due to small samples. The authors suggest coding non-responses as an outlier (‘99’, p. 196), but could also mention using *data imputation* as an alternative method to address missing data, if appropriate and if possible. Regarding nonnormality, the authors could mention that some basic statis-
tical tests such as $t$ test and $F$ test are fairly robust against nonnormal data. Finally, when describing statistical testing, the authors write ‘ANOVA (or Analysis of Variance) is used for nominal data, while paired $t$-tests are used on ratio or interval data for paired groups with normal distribution’ (p. 200). In fact, ANOVA can also accommodate interval and ratio data (see Field, 2009).

Chapter 6 is general in its focus on research orientation related to translation, i.e. context which subsumes all external or circumstantial factors, inter alia, political, social, economic, ideological, etc. that have potential impacts on individual translators and the target culture. While investigation of contextual factors in translation has been informed by a range of disciplines (sociology and cultural studies being the most substantial), case study is opted for as the only methodology for discussion both because of its popularity across these disciplines and flexibility in data-sourcing. More importantly, the authors aim to dispel the misconception that views case study as a ‘free-form’ research method (p. 206) which imposes no strict requirements or procedures. For such purpose, definition of case is first presented in clear terms, followed by when to use and how to design case studies. Next, volumes of description are used to generalize different means via which data used for case studies can be gathered and managed. Proceeding to the stage of analysis, the authors propose some general principles for data interpretation and offer a few practical suggestions for data organization and computer-aided calculation. This chapter is commendable for its systematic treatment of case study – one of a few publications to the best knowledge of reviewers – as an independent methodological component in translation studies (see also Susam-Sarajeva, 2009). As a form of investigation, case studies deal with almost all kinds of data (except experimental ones) that previous chapters cover and many others that they don’t (e.g., physical artefacts, observation). It follows that conducting a good case study is often premised on a neat command of methods in rest of the book, especially those in product- and participant-oriented research.

All in all, the book is logically structured to bring clarity and orderliness, and presented in a way that inspires critical and in-depth thinking. The authors do not impose their way of doing research on readers, but constantly keep readers informed of why a particular definition/method/approach is preferred/highlighted in the book and alert readers of potential weaknesses, as a result of their way of so doing. With no doubt, the book provides essential know-how about, critical analysis of, and fresh insights into methodological aspects of translation studies for T&I researchers and beyond. It is definitely a valuable and precious contribution to the T&I literature.
References


