



Is There Any Room Left for Interpretivist Research in Education?

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been an enormous surge in efforts to crack open the black box of the translator's mind in an effort to better understand the cognitive processes involved in translation. As recently as the 1980s, the tools at our disposal for investigating these processes were essentially limited to think-aloud protocols, which produced verbal reports rather far removed from the biological domain. It was not long, though, before translation process researchers moved on to using keystroke logging, eye tracking and, most recently, neuroimaging techniques like FMRI and neuronal activity tracking procedures like EEG - all focused on processes of the body rather than the mind, and all of them dependent on quantitative, statistical measures, much like the hard sciences.

A frequently mentioned goal of recent research involving such empirical research methods is that of improving translator education. It is interesting and perhaps no coincidence that the apparently decisive shift towards hard-science style research in this narrow educational domain comes on the heels of a major nationwide trend in the US and elsewhere – we need think only of the No Child Left Behind Program in the US and John Hattie's enormously influential work on effectiveness factors in education – to give precedence to empirical studies in education over qualitative studies. So for those researchers who share an interpretivist epistemology, the question might well arise as to what role, if any, qualitative research can play in the Brave New World of 21st century educational research, in Translator Education as well as other educational domains. This is the question to be addressed in this talk.

An innovative proposal will be presented for arguing persuasively for maintaining qualitative research both in Translator Education specifically as well as in any other educational domain where such research is being threatened by the apparent trend towards scientism – the belief that empirical science can solve virtually all problems.

Keywords: *Translator Education, scientism, interpretivist inquiry;*

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