

## **Process in TS. In praise of amateur scientists**

Anthony Pym  
Intercultural Studies Group  
Universitat Rovira i Virgili  
Tarragona, Spain

We need not turn to science because we feel Translation Studies should somehow be a science. The interest in process can ensue from a more profound theoretical problem: in an indeterminist age, there is no substantial basis for equivalence, and yet translational communication proceeds and equivalents are used; minds regularly bridge across languages and cultures. How is this so? The answers must be of an experiential and experimental kind. Practice is solving problems that theory can only pose.

As an interdisciplinary, Translation Studies is thus condemned to intrude into several scientific fields in which we can make no claim to be experts. Process studies involve several such fields: psychology, statistics, and a growing range of electronic measuring tools.

The most practical way of dealing with non-expert status is undoubtedly to seek help from experts, leaving all technical aspects to them, and trusting they will supply the good science. It would be a mistake, however, to place translation scholars merely in the position of clients of knowledge, somehow external to the scientific process as such.

Here we propose that translation scholars should accept the position of the “amateur,” both in the sense of the non-expert (we must recognize our limitations) and the “lover” of science (since etymology extends the invitation, and lovers only have a relative externality to the beloved). This is not quite the same thing as condoning “poor science” or “rough science.” We prefer to seek the nobility of the Renaissance all-rounder, or the studied curiosity of the Enlightenment – both ages where all knowledge could be of interest.

Something like this is what we find if we look at who has turned to science, from the conference interpreters who pioneered research on processes, to the literary scholars who lost their way and have finished up looking at eye-tracking data. Most of us have had at least one passage through relative non-science.

In seeking to affirm a positive amateur status, we adopt positions on several fronts:

- We propose that all translation scholars need basic training in the history, methodologies, and techniques of whatever science our projects require. We have to know what is going on.
- We reject any absolute distinction between scientific and humanistic paradigms: both aspects are needed, from the very moment when a set of data can be interpreted by competing theories.
- We oppose those who invent or manipulate the spurious rules of empiricism; we do not believe that only an expert can do statistics, only an expert can criticize psychological models, and so on.

- We affirm the humanistic virtues of using basic experiments in the training of translators and interpreters, not just as an introduction to science but as a valuable aid to introspection and self-evaluation.
- We are thus able to integrate some of the tenets of action research, transferring knowledge to some of the people it should hopefully empower. This may mean breaking some of the rules of research, notably objectivity and anonymity.
- We stress the need to bring new ideas to old data, reinterpreting the studies of the past, not as empirical researchers but as critical readers of science. Re-interpretation is as necessary as replication.
- We praise the capacity of amateurs to understand why knowledge is needed, and of what kind – as non-technicians we are in able to undertake the creative hypothesis development that is so disastrously lacking in many of our current projects.

Beneath all these, the important point is that we must be able to state clearly what we want to know, why we want to know it, and why others should help us know it. As amateurs, love will cover our faults.