Studies in Linguistics and Literature
ISSN 2573-6434 (Print) ISSN 2573-6426 (Online)
Vol. 8, No. 2, 2024
www.scholink.org/ojs/index.php/sll

Original Paper

Research Methodology in Translation Studies: Main Issues of Concern to Post-graduate Students

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Received: February 19, 2024 Accepted: March 8, 2024 Online Published: April 8, 2024

doi:10.22158/sll.v8n2p24 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/sll.v8n2p24

Abstract

The aim of this paper is pedagogical since it seeks to explain the concept of methodology in translation studies and to provide students with research skills. Furthermore, the paper discusses relevant methodological approaches, research procedures, and several types of research undertaken in translation studies. The approach adopted is qualitative. The examples of research approaches mentioned in this paper proceed from the ideas and theories developed by David James (2015), Gabriela Saldanha and Sharon O'Brien (2014), Leavy (2017), Glaser and Strauss (2006), and others. The findings of this research include the following: Methodology is co-dependent on (the) method, epistemology, and ontology. Every research has epistemological roots that should be stated clearly. The sources of data and the data analysis method influence research results that should be accurate, verifiable, and replicable.

Keywords

methodology, epistemology, approach, translation studies, types of research

1. Introduction

This paper is a pedagogical material that discusses the centrality of methodology in scientific research, in general, and in translation studies, in particular. Indeed, students often need orientation and guidance regarding issues about research methodology in translation studies. In undertaking this demanding task, one of the critical questions that needs to be asked has been raised by Ian Mason in the following quotation:

> But what are the characteristics of doctoral work in the broad field of translation studies and what kinds of area-specific training are appropriate? In presenting the contributions to this special issue of The Interpreter and Translator Trainer (ITT), this introductory article argues that, provided research designs are clear, consistent and internally coherent, there will be no need to force

> individual studies into a common mould. Correspondingly, the goal of mutual understanding and respect will best be served by introducing doctoral students to a full range of theoretical perspectives, empirical tools and methods, among which they will be enabled to perceive the relative scope and effectiveness of those they have selected. (Mason, 2014, p. 1)

According to this quotation, there is no need to force individual researchers to follow a common methodology and pattern. It is more important to ensure that students are introduced to multiple theories, methods, and tools. Against this background, the following authors are selected to discuss research terminology and praxis.

Professor David James of Cardiff University (UK) is selected to explain research terms and concepts such as method, methodology, epistemology, and ontology. In the same perspective, the definition of methodology, theory, and other research terms, is provided by Leavy (2017):

> In research practice, methods and theory combine to create a **methodology**, which is a plan for how research will proceed—how you will combine the different elements of research into a plan that details how the specific research project will be carried out. The methodology is what the researcher actually does once he/she has combined the different elements of research. (Leavy, 2017, p. 16)

Following the above quotation, it is correct to say that methodology blends (the) method and (the) theory. Most researchers are familiar with the term 'method', but the term 'theory' will be made more explicit in this paper. Indeed, the question of theory is twofold: What is a theory? And can every researcher generate a theory? In answering the first question, Leavy (Ibid, p. 11) explains that:

> The main elements of research can be organized into three general categories: (1) philosophical, (2) praxis, (3) and ethics (Leavy, 2014). The philosophical substructure of research consists of three elements: paradigm, ontology, and epistemology. At the level of praxis there are four key elements of research: genre/design, methods/practices, theory, and methodology. The ethical component (which combines philosophical and praxis elements) includes values, ethics, and reflexivity… Although all of these terms may seem confusing at first, they are really addressing two simple questions:
>
> 1. The philosophical elements of research answer the question "What do we believe?"
> 2. The praxis elements of research answer the question "What do we do?"

Therefore, a theory is an element of research operating at the level of praxis; and praxis is one of the three general categories of research. The elements of praxis answer the question: 'What do we do'?, while the philosophical elements of research answer the question: 'What do we believe'? People come to research with different beliefs and worldviews. For example, while some researchers think that knowledge exists before any research project and can be discovered through objective methods, others believe that the researcher constructs knowledge. These two beliefs express different ontological and epistemological positions. Every research work should indicate its epistemological position.

Using a qualitative approach, this paper discusses the question of research methodology in translation studies following the above-mentioned three general categories, namely the philosophical category, the praxis category, and the ethical category. More specifically, the paper discusses the concept of methodology from different perspectives. It highlights several research approaches and types of research. It raises ethical questions related to plagiarism and research standards and ends with a caution against a flawed methodological practice likely to jeopardize the validity of the research results that should be accurate, verifiable, and replicable.

2. Methodology

1) Objective

The objective of this article is pedagogical since it is meant to teach students how to conduct research in the field of translation studies. In reading this paper, students should be able to: (1) understand some types of research that can be carried out in translation studies; (2) distinguish between the three categories of research; (3) formulate theories using the data collected and the literature review; (4) ensure that their research results are accurate, verifiable and replicable.

2) Problem Statement

It is a truism that post-graduate students are always called upon to write essays and theses, which require an in-depth understanding of methodological practices and research training. This paper should be instrumental in guiding students into the meanders of research methodology.

3) Instruments

The research instruments used include e-books, the Internet, Youtube, hard-copy books, and articles.

4) Method

This paper uses the qualitative method. It does content analysis and interprets ideas using the data available.

5) Data

The data consists of the theories developed by the authors mentioned in the abstract and in the rest of the paper.

6) Data Analysis Approach

The data analysis uses both an interpretivist and a constructivist approach.

3. Results

1) The main elements of research consist of philosophical, praxis, and ethical categories.

2) Methodology combines method and theory.

3) A theory can be developed using the data collected and the literature review. This exemplifies inductive research.

4) In every research project, there is a method, a methodology, an epistemology, and an ontology.

5) In translation studies, there are several research models, namely product-oriented research, process-oriented research, participant-oriented research, and context-oriented research.

6) Research approaches include quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory approaches.

7) There are several types of research, including conceptual, evaluative, exploratory, explanatory, descriptive, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA).

8) The structure of the research report includes IMRAD, and Introduction + Literature Review + Conclusion.

9) Research data and results should be verifiable.

10) Plagiarism is an ethical issue confronting researchers, especially the novice.

4. Discussion

4.1 The Philosophical Elements of Research

4.1.1 Leavy's Perspective

The philosophical elements of research, according to **Leavy** (2014), consist of paradigm, ontology and epistemology. According to Kuhn (1962) as well as Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2011), a **paradigm** is a worldview or framework through which knowledge is filtered. Guba (1990) is cited by Leavy (2014) saying that he thinks of paradigms as sunglasses, with differently shaped frames and differently coloured lenses. ''When you put on a pair, it influences everything you see.'' (Leavy, op. cit., p.12) As far as **ontology** is concerned, Egon Guba and Yvonna Lincoln explain the concept by asking the following question: ''What is the form and nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it?'' (1998, p.201). **Epistemology** is, according to Guba & Lincoln (1998), Harding (1987) and Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2004, 2011), a belief system concerning how research should proceed and what counts as knowledge.

4.1.2 David James' Perspective

In the same vein, Professor **David James** of Cardiff University (UK) explains, in a lecture entitled 'How to get clear about method, methodology, epistemology, and ontology, once and for all', that methodology comprises a method plus a design. He has used the metaphor of an ICEBERG to describe what methodology is. He has noted that only 12 percent of an iceberg is visible. The visible part of it is just like METHODS. The invisible part is made up of methodology, epistemology, and ontology. These four concepts are locked together. In a scientific paper or dissertation, for example, the techniques for data gathering are clearly described. Researchers clearly describe the interviews conducted, the contents of questionnaires, the surveys carried out, participants' observations, photo elicitation, etc. These are visible activities that represent the tip of the iceberg. Methodology is just below (the) method, and a little harder to see. According to the professor, in methodology, 'ology' means that there has been a debate or a study about what to do first, what to do next, and what to do last. People often account for

their approach with terms like quantitative approach, qualitative approach, mixed methods, case study, ethnography, or experiment.

As far as Epistemology is concerned, David James explains that all research comes with a view of knowledge, or what is knowable and worth knowing. The word comes from the Greek word 'episteme' meaning to know. (Plato distinguishes between episteme and doxa). Epistemology is also about how experience is constructed. The way experience is constructed can lead to different results. Philosophically speaking, epistemology is the study of how we go about knowing things, how we know whether things are true or false, and what steps we need to take to gain knowledge of the world. Regarding Ontology, 'Ontos' is a Greek word that means 'being' or 'to be'. Ontological questions include what is existence? What is the nature of existence? For social scientists, some fundamental ontological questions might be: Are people essentially selfish? Do people always know the consequences of their actions? (https://youtube.be/b83ZfBoQ_Kw)

4.1.3 Saldanha and O'Brien's Perspective

In *Research Methodologies in Translation Studies* (2013), Saldanha and O'Brien have also discussed philosophical elements of research. Indeed, they have explained key research terms and concepts including objectivism, constructivism, realism, and three epistemological positions linked to these ontological categories: positivism, interpretivism, and realism. They have cited Matthews and Ross (2010, pp. 24-25), according to whom, ''objectivism asserts that the social phenomena that make up our social world have an existence of their own […], apart from and independent of the social factors (humans) who are involved.'' Saldanha and O'Brien explain that this position is often assumed by natural scientists when they carry out investigations in nature. A key characteristic of these scientists is objectivity.

Unlike objectivism, constructivism asserts that social phenomena ''are only real in the sense that they are constructed ideas which are continually being reviewed by those involved in them (the social actors).'' (Ibid, p. 25). These are two different ontological positions. Realism, a third concept, takes an intermediate position between objectivism and constructivism and accepts that social phenomena may be independent of the social actors involved in them but some structures and mechanisms may affect the observation of social phenomena. (Ibid, p. 26) Realism is considered as both an ontological and an epistemological position.

At this juncture, it is important to stress that in doing research, it is useful to indicate one's epistemological position, i.e. positivism, interpretivism, realism etc. Saldanha and O'Brien say that the quantitative approach uses a positivist epistemology, while the qualitative approach uses an interpretivist epistemology.

4.2 The Elements of Praxis in Research

4.2.1 Methodology and Theory

As mentioned earlier, according to Leavy (2014), methodology is one of the four elements of praxis,

with the other three being genre/design, methods/practices, and theory.

Indeed, Patricia Leavy in ***Research Design*** *(2017, p. 17)* mentions the components of methodology: ***METHOD + THEORY = METHODOLOGY***. See how she defines the term theory below:

> A theory is an account of social reality that is grounded in data but extends beyond that data (Adler & Clark, 2011). There are two levels of theory: (1) small-scale theories that researchers suggest based on their data (theory with a small *t*) and (2) large-scale theories that are widely legitimated based on prior research and that may be used to predict new data or frame new studies (Theory with a big *T*). (Leavy, Ibid, p. 15)

The implication of this is that a researcher can generate his or her small-scale theory on the basis of the data s/he has gathered. In other words, your data enables you to come up with a small-scale theory. The literature review can also guide you into numerous theoretical perspectives. ‘‘There are numerous theoretical perspectives that may guide the research process, which you may discover during the literature review process.’’ (Ibid) When you combine your research method and your theory, you get the research methodology. The research **methods** mentioned by Leavy are experiments, survey research, interviews, field research, unobtrusive methods, case studies, mixed methods, literary practices, performative practices, visual arts practices, and community-based.

4.2.2 Research Approaches

Regarding research approaches, Leavy (Ibid, p. 18) mentions five, namely quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, arts-based, and community-based participatory in social sciences.

The **quantitative** approach has a postpositivist paradigm and uses randomized, quasi, single-subject, and questionnaire methods. Experiments and survey research use this approach. The **qualitative** approach has a postpositivist, interpretive, constructivist, and critical paradigm, and uses structured, semistructured, in-depth, oral history, biographical, participant observation, content analysis, visual analysis, audio analysis, historical, comparative, and other methods. Interviews and field research use this approach. **Mixed methods** have a pragmatic paradigm and use sequential, convergent, and nested methods. An **arts-based** approach has arts-based, aesthetic, and intersubjective paradigm, and uses fiction-based research, experimental writing, drama, ethnodrama, film, dance and movement, comics, cartoons, and painting methods. Literary practices, performative practices, and visual arts use this approach. The **community-based** participatory approach has a transformative paradigm and uses participatory action research and social action research methods.

In a bid to give a practical example of each approach, Leavy (Ibid, p. 17) makes the following remark: ‘‘In order to get a better sense of each approach, let’s take one research topic and look at how we might design a project within each of the five approaches…Here is our research topic: ‘‘students’ experiences with drinking on college campuses.’’

Regarding the **quantitative method**, Leavy suggests, for example, a questionnaire as the data collection method. It can be administered online so that students can feel free to answer with a

guarantee of anonymity. Students will be asked to self-report their attitudes toward alcohol as well as their behaviours on campus, peer rates of drinking, their participation, accessibility of alcohol, etc. The information gathered can enable the researcher to collect a lot of data from a great number of students and to determine the prevalence of drinking on campus. ‘‘In other words, the study would result in *statistics about each of the major dimensions of drinking on campus* about which you ask the respondents.’’ (Ibid, p. 19) While this method enables the researcher to generate statistics on alcohol consumption and consumers on campus, the qualitative method enables the researcher to deal with a different aspect of the research.

If a researcher chooses a **qualitative method**, s/he can use focus groups as the data collection method. Several focus group sessions can be held. Each focus group will consist of several students. Students can be hosted in a room and one student’s confession can prompt reactions from other students. In this atmosphere, students will talk openly using their own language and describing their personal experiences. Leavy (Ibid) says: ‘‘The major advantage of this approach is that you could collect rich *data with descriptions and examples*, and the *participants’ language and concerns would be at the forefront*.’’ This approach is more concerned with individual perceptions and feelings.

If the researcher chooses **mixed methods**, Leavy recommends a questionnaire as a data collection method to learn about the prevalence of drinking on campus. Then, focus groups will be asked to analyse the statistical data, while explaining their personal experiences and describing the circumstances of drinking on their campus. The focus groups’ sessions will be held ‘‘in an effort to unpack the meanings behind the statistics’’ (Ibid) and record students’ personal experiences, motivations, and situations. By using mixed methods, the researcher will not only collect statistics but will also understand personal experiences, motivations, and contexts.

Using an **arts-based** research method, the researcher can conduct a ‘participatory visual arts study’ by presenting materials used in collage making (i.e., magazines, newspapers, colorful selection of paper, drawing tools, pens, scissors, glue, tape etc.). Students can be asked to create drawings representing their perception of the drinking culture on their campus and to show how they feel about these. They can also be asked to textually describe their collage. The drawings can be displayed at vantage points on the campus.

Last but not least, **community-based** participatory research assembles the relevant stakeholders, including students, campus police, health services staff, resident advisors, administrators, and faculty.

> Together, develop a project to assess and improve the policies and procedures for dealing with drinking on campus, in ways that identify and meet student needs (e.g., being able to call campus police or health services, without fear, if a student is in trouble) and meet institutional needs (e.g., keeping students safe and not endorsing unlawful behavior)… The major advantage of this approach is that all *relevant stakeholders are equally valued and can collectively identify core issues, problems, and solutions*. (Ibid, p. 20)

As regards research methods, Saldanha and O'Brien explain that the discussion of qualitative data obtained from participant-oriented research is equally interpretive and so is that of qualitative results obtained from verbal reports, experts' diaries, reflective journals, and field notes from observation studies in process-oriented research. (op. cit., p. 241) Regarding the quantitative method, the two authors explain that: ''Questionnaire surveys and process-related research typically generate quantitative data which can be reported textually and numerically (in tables), but are usually also supported visually by bar charts, pie charts, scatter plots, etc.

In addition to the concepts of theory and method, another element of praxis is the research model.

4.2.3 Research Models

Saldanha and O'Brien mention several research models undertaken in translation studies and invoke two prominent authors, namely Chesterman and Marco.

> Chesterman distinguishes three types of models: **comparative models**, which aim to discover language-pair translation rules, language-system contrasts, or translation product universals (also known as features of translation); **process models**, which represent change (from state A to state B) over a time interval (although the process is not necessarily linear) and allow us to understand decision-making in translation and cognitive factors influencing this process; and **causal models**, which aim to explain why translations are the way they are by reference to three dimensions of causation: the translator's cognition (translator's knowledge, attitude, identity, skills), the translation event (translator's brief, payment, deadlines) and the socio-cultural factors (ideology, censorship, cultural traditions, audience). (Saldanha and O'Brien, 2014, p. 6)

According to this quotation, Chesterman distinguishes three types of research, namely comparative models, process models, and causal models. The comparative model makes a contrastive analysis of the two linguistic systems; the process model focuses on the strategic decisions made by translators and on the translator's mental influence on the process; and the causal model assesses the translator's knowledge and skills as well as contractual issues and socio-cultural factors influencing translation.

From Marco's perspective, there are four models of research. ''Marco (2009) proposes four (non-exhaustive) models of research in Translation Studies: (1) textual-descriptivist, (2) cognitive, (3) culturalist, and (4) sociological.'' (Ibid, p. 7) In the textual descriptivist model, Saldanha and O'Brien say that Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics can be used to examine translated texts. The cognitive model has to do with the translator's cognition and decision-making process.

In addition to the models proposed by these two authors, Saldanha and O'Brien (2014) propose four models, namely the product-oriented model, the process-oriented model, the context-oriented model, and the participant-oriented model.

> On a superficial level, we could say that the product-oriented methodologies described in Chapter 3 correspond to Chesterman's comparative model; the process-oriented methodologies described in Chapter 4 to the cognitive one; the context-oriented methodologies described in Chapter 6 to

> the causal one; and participant-oriented methodologies might be mapped either onto a cognitive or causal model according to the precise focus of the research. (Ibid, p. 6)

In trying to explain the term model, Saldanha and O'Brien (Ibid, p. 12) say that 'A model is a representation of the 'reality' of your research topic or domain.' More specifically, models enable researchers to investigate hypotheses, explore different scenarios, and make predictions about real-world phenomena. The product-oriented model is explained in the following quotation:

> Broadly speaking, research on translated texts can be carried out with a descriptive/explanatory or an evaluative purpose in mind. These two types of research have generally relied on rather different methodological approaches, even when they occasionally share the use of the same resources, as in the case of corpora. (Ibid, p. 50)

Product-oriented research can be descriptive, explanatory, or evaluative and uses tools such as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and corpus linguistics. Regarding the process-oriented model, Saldanha and O'Brien give the following explanation:

> Translation process research seeks to understand translator or interpreter behaviour, **competence**, **expertise**, the **cognitive processes** that orient these, and the relations between cognition and the translated or interpreted product. Furthermore, since translation is not divorced from social context, process research seeks to understand the effect of the context on the process. Individuals, with their specific traits and ways of processing, are also a central focus. Hence, while translation process research is frequently understood to mean investigating the mental operations involved in translating, in fact it encompasses a much broader object of interest. (Ibid, p. 109)

In summary, the process-oriented model focuses on the translator's expertise and knowledge as well as on the relations between the translator's cognition and the translated product. The third model is the participant-oriented research that the co-authors define as follows:

> Ever since the publication of Douglas Robinson's *The Translator's Turn* (1991) there have been calls for more attention to be paid to the human agents in the translation process, in particular, to translators and interpreters… a new sociological approach to the study of translation, with several publications proposing new theoretical frameworks in order to explain the interaction between human agents, translated texts and their context of production and reception from a sociological perspective (Inghilleri 2005a; Chesterman 2006; Wolf and Fukari 2007; Wolf 2011) (Ibid, p. 150).

The participant-oriented research focuses on the interaction between the translator, the translated texts, and the context of production and reception. Therefore, the human agent doing the translations is given attention in this model. The fourth model announced earlier is the context-oriented translation which is briefly explained as follows: ''Most translation studies research today claims to pay attention to context. Koskinen notes that "[i]t has rather become a truism to say that translations do not take place in a vacuum, that they need to be interpreted and evaluated in their relevant context" (2008, p. 72). (Ibid, p.

205)

The physical context of translation has become important because it contains cultural, sociological, political, and economic aspects that influence translation. It also studies the influence of translation on the receiving culture.

In addition to research models in translation studies, Saldanha and O'Brien (Ibid, pp. 14-16) discuss types of research and research designs/plans as well.

4.2.4 Types of Research

The types of research mentioned by these co-authors include inductive, deductive, and abductive research. An inductive research develops theories and hypotheses from the data collected. A deductive research tests existing theories or hypotheses through data. An abductive research researches existing hypotheses further. This type of research was first proposed by C.S. Pierce in 1878.

There is also empirical research, conceptual research, and basic or applied research. Williams and Chesterman (2002, p.58) explain that ''empirical research'' **s**eeks new data, new information derived from the observation of data and from experimental work.'' Conceptual research defines and clarifies concepts, and interprets new ideas. Basic or fundamental research aims to acquire new knowledge. Applied research is research that has an application in life. Experimental research seeks to establish cause-and-effect relations. There is also explorative research, evaluative research, action research (leading to change), and ethnographic research (i.e. research that explores cultural groups to understand and interpret a way of life). Equally important in research methodology is the structure of the research report.

4.2.5 The Structure of the Research Report

''Empirical research reports have traditionally followed what is known as the **IMRAD** (introduction, methods, results, and discussion) structure. The assumption is that this structure reflects the actual steps of the research process.'' (Ibid, p.234) In the IMRAD structure, methods are reported after the literature review and immediately before the results section. The two sections that always need to remain in place are the introduction and the conclusion. Saldanha and O'Brien indicate that the rest of the report can take many different forms, provided there is some sort of logical sequence to guide the reader. The co-authors suggest as well the structure 'Introduction, literature review, and conclusion', arguing that:

> ''Providing a rationale for our project, contextualizing the research within the academic literature and assessing its contribution in relation to existing knowledge is essential. These are the main functions of the introduction, literature review and conclusion sections. A summary of existing research serves to identify the gap in the literature that we are trying to fill and, together with the section on methodology, situates our project within a theoretical framework.'' (p. 236)

Indeed, the research should raise a problem or a gap in the literature review that it tries to fill. There should be a link between the research and the existing literature in the scientific area concerned. No

research is undertaken in a vacuum. Research is normally undertaken to address a problem and contribute to knowledge about a topic. Saldanha and O'Brien advise researchers to indicate in the introduction the aim of the study and present the research questions and/or hypotheses.

Regarding the structure of the research report, they note that the traditional IMRAD structure is as follows: Introduction, literature review, and methods. However, they underline that: ''While it is important to demonstrate awareness of existing literature on the topic early in the report, sometimes it makes more sense to cite relevant literature as the argument develops rather than concentrate it in one section.'' (p.236) Furthermore, it is not enough to list a good number of publications and previous findings. It is useful to evaluate them in terms of their contribution to an area of knowledge.

4.2.6 Other Perspectives on Research Methodologies in Translation Studies

The following are some books that discuss research methodology in translation studies and provide references for further reading: (1.) *Translation Research and Interpreting Research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies* edited by Claudia V. Angelelli and Brian James Baer. This book published in 2018 explores various research methodologies in translation and interpreting studies. It discusses the strengths and limitations of different approaches and includes references to studies that exemplify each methodology. (2.) *Researching Translation and Interpreting* by Claudia V. Angelelli. This book published in 2014 introduces key concepts and methodologies in translation and interpreting research. It covers topics such as ethnographic approaches, case studies, and mixed methods. The book includes references to influential studies in the field. (3.) *Translation and Translating: Theory and Practice* by Roger T. Bell. While not specifically focused on research methodology, this book published in 1991 provides an overview of translation theory and discusses practical aspects of translation. It includes references to significant works in the field and can be a useful resource for understanding the foundations of translation studies. (4.) *The Routledge Handbook of Translation Studies* edited by Carmen Millán and Francesca Bartrina. This comprehensive handbook published in 2012 covers various aspects of translation studies, including research methodologies. It includes chapters written by different experts in the field and provides references for further reading.

4.2.7 Methodological Flaws Prevent Verification of Research Results

This section cautions against methodological flaws. A case in point is *The Polish Peasant,* a book by Thomas and Znaniecki discussed in *The Discovery of Grounded Theory* (2006) by Glazer and Strauss. The latter explain the purpose of the book as follows:

> During 1938 tbe Social Science Research Council struck upon the idea of subjecting to critical appraisal a series of significant contributions to social science. In sociology, Herbert Blumer was assigned the task of appraising Thomas and Znaniecki's great monograph, *The Polish Peasant in Poland and America.* A year later Blumer's critique was published by the Council. (p. 74)

In appraising *The Polish Peasant in Poland and America*, Blumer noted that the major theoretical conceptions and generalisations found in the book by Thomas and Znaniecki could not be verified using the data available in the book. This finding underlines the importance of verification in scientific research. What this implies is that a scientific material should be verifiable. ‘‘Blumer's principal criticism of *The Polish Peasant* was directed at what he believed was an important methodological flaw in it.’’ (Ibid, p. 74) More specifically, the methodological flaws were as follows: Not even the major theoretical conceptions used by Thomas and Znaniecki were grounded on the documents they used though they claimed that their analyses rested largely on numerous "human documents": letters, agency records, life histories, court records; "their *particular* interpretations of Polish peasant life were not formed solely from the materials they present; worse yet, usually one could not say that "the interpretation is either true or not, even though it is distinctly plausible," (Ibid, pp. 74-75); "the important question is whether the materials adequately test the generalizations (regardless of their source) which are being applied to the materials but "the answer is very inconclusive".

> The very puzzling issue of plausible interpretation versus genuine verification remained. Blumer concluded, **first**, that the materials were not a decisive test of theoretical interpretations, although they did more than simply illustrate them; **second**, that a test of "theory would have *to* come in other ways, such as in its internal consistency, in the character of its assumptions, in its relation to other theories, in its consistency with what seems to be 'human,' or in other kinds of data than those provided by human documents"; and, **third**, that the authors' use of human documents would seemingly imply that their essential function "would be to . . . yield to a sensitive and inquiring mind hunches, insights, questions suitable for reflection, new perspectives, and new understandings" (pp. 75-76). **In short, the data were useful for theorizing but not adequate for verification**.

Therefore, the conclusions reached in *The Polish Peasant in Poland and America* could not stand the test of verification. It seemed that the authors of the book drew their conclusions from previous works. Consequently, their theory was not grounded on the data available in the book. Two important conclusions can be drawn from this methodological error: in scientific research, any theory should be based on the data. The data is a source of theorisation. A mismatch between theory and data can only lead to wrong results.

5. Ethics in Research

5.1 Definition of Ethics

The following definition of the term *ethics* is given by Leavy (2017).

> The word **ethics** comes from the Greek word *ethos*, which means *character*. Ethics involve morality, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness. *Morality* is about knowing what is right and wrong, and *integrity* is about acting on that knowledge. Ethics are central to social research.

> Because we are human beings engaged in understanding other human beings—social realities—ethics are of the utmost importance so that our research is not harmful. (p. 24)

According to this definition, ethics involve morality, integrity, and truthfulness. Indeed, research results should be true and people involved in research should be treated fairly. Regarding the fair treatment of people involved in research, Leavy (p. 21) notes that ‘‘there is a historical legacy of egregious exploitation and abuse of human research subjects, which has informed contemporary ethical standards.’’ To justify this statement, the author has given the example of the **Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment** which occurred in the USA from 1932 to 1972. This was a story of abuse and infection of 201 African American men involved in a Syphilis vaccine experiment conducted by the U.S. Public Health Service and the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

Later on, in 1960s and 1970s, the civil rights movement, the women’s rights movement, the gay rights movement, and the labour movement took up the struggle and created major shifts in cultural values. Due to the influence all these movements exerted, social research became an important vehicle for social change and for influencing public policy. Questions including the following emerged in research projects: (1) whom do we include in our research? (2) How do we identify relevant stakeholders? (3) How do we come up with topics, write purpose statements and frame research questions? (4) Will we attempt to impact public policy, and if so, how? (5) What do we choose to study? (6) What is our political or social agenda? (pp. 29-30)

The ethical issue in research is very broad, however this paper only discusses a few aspects related to participant exploitation in research projects, plagiarism, and the advantages and disadvantages of anti-plagiarism softwares.

5.2 Plagiarism

Saldanha and O’Brien make the following point about ethics in research.

> We cannot discuss the concept of ethical research without discussing techniques for avoiding plagiarism, which is probably one of the most common ethical problems in research, especially among novice researchers. Plagiarism is the use of somebody else’s work as if it were your own. However, it is much more than taking a published author’s words (or pictures) and using them in your own work without giving an appropriate reference. Plagiarism also includes the use of the ideas of other people (such as a fellow colleague or student) and even the re-use of one’s own work, without acknowledgement. (Saldanha and O’Brien, p. 48)

Plagiarism is, indeed, a serious offense in the field of research. Therefore, students are advised to be careful not to use other researchers’ works or ideas without citing them. Many graduates have been deprived of their degrees and qualifications for failing to provide proper references in their theses. Having said that, it is important to note that it is not enough to avoid plagiarism to claim that one is doing ethical citing. According to Saldanha and O’Brien, unethical citing includes citing authors that are only favourable to the researcher’s position, omitting to cite references that contradict the

researcher's findings, or citing results without commenting on the replicability or credibility of the research. (Ibid, p. 149)

5.3 Anti-plagiarism Softwares

Nowadays, many academic institutions use anti-plagiarism softwares to detect plagiarism in students' works. These tools are useful in educational institutions, publishing industries, and other contexts where originality and intellectual integrity are important. However, it is important to recognize some limitations and potential concerns associated with anti-plagiarism softwares: (1) False positives and negatives: Plagiarism detection software uses algorithms to compare submitted content against a database of existing sources. While these algorithms have improved over time, they are not perfect and can sometimes generate false positives (flagging original work as plagiarized) or false negatives (failing to detect actual instances of plagiarism). A researcher complained that an anti-plagiarism software detected as plagiarism, expressions such as 'first of all', 'against this background', etc. For these reasons, it is important to set software parameters right to avoid a situation where students would unduly be punished by anti-plagiarism softwares that create confusion and misrepresent students' original works.

In summary, anti-plagiarism software can be a valuable tool in promoting originality and intellectual integrity. However, it is important to use these tools as part of a comprehensive approach to academic integrity, and to interpret their results with care, considering the limitations and potential concerns associated with them.

Conclusion

This article has briefly discussed the main issues post-graduate students need to take into account while doing research. Using a qualitative approach, the article has focused on methodology, which is a combination of method and theory. The importance of the method cannot be overemphasized. As Silverman puts it, ''Short of reliable methods and valid conclusions, research descends into a bedlam where the only battles that are won are by those who shout the loudest. (Silverman 2006, p. 310) Equally important in research methodology are aspects relating to the objective, the literature review as well as the quality of the data, and the results that must be accurate, verifiable, and replicable.

Research methodology is a very important issue that has been widely discussed in academic papers and books. However, it constantly needs to be reviewed because of its dynamic and ever-changing nature.

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