FEATURE ARTICLE.

RESEARCH METHODS IN PUBLIC SERVICE INTERPRETING AND TRANSLATION STUDIES: EPISTEMOLOGIES OF KNOWLEDGE AND IGNORANCE. / MÉTODOS DE INVESTIGACIÓN EN LA TRADUCCIÓN Y LA INTERPRETACIÓN EN LOS SERVICIOS PÚBLICOS: EPISTEMOLOGÍAS DEL CONOCIMIENTO Y LA IGNORANCIA.

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Abstract: How disciplines approach their objects of inquiry is a result of their epistemological traditions, which include decisions about what they choose to examine and what they decide to ignore. As an interdiscipline, Interpreting and Translation Studies (ITS) was born to overcome the limits of discipline-specific approaches to translation and interpreting, and when observing complex real-life phenomena, examining issues through an interdisciplinary lens can reveal things that approaches from single disciplines on their own would miss. This feature article reviews how ITS has shaped Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT), focusing specifically on the advantages and vulnerabilities that its interdisciplinary nature yields as regards research methods. Three distinctive features and their impact on research methods are examined: (1) the complexity of the object of inquiry, (2) the novelty of the disciplinary field that aims to scrutinize and to explain PSIT, and (3) the changes that the social sciences in general have undergone and are currently undergoing, opening up new opportunities for research practices and methodological reflections. Contemplations of these features reveal issues identified and the efforts undertaken to tackle them in relation to the internal and external validity of research studies as well as unexplored strengths and roadblocks in the path towards achieving a critical mass of studies that can adequately represent the relevance of PSIT in contemporary societies.

Keywords: Research methods; Public service interpreting and translation; Epistemology; Epistemologies of ignorance.

Resumen: La forma en que las disciplinas abordan sus objetos de investigación es el resultado de sus tradiciones epistemológicas, que incluyen elecciones sobre lo que se estudia y lo que se ignora. Como interdisciplina, los Estudios de Traducción e Interpretación (ETI) nacieron para superar los límites de los enfoques disciplinarios que se aproximaron a la traducción y a la interpretación. Al examinar fenómenos complejos de la vida real, las miradas interdisciplinarias pueden observar lo que las disciplinas por sí mismas pasarían por alto. Este artículo revisa la forma en que los ETI han moldeado la Traducción y la Interpretación en los Servicios Públicos (TISP) centrándose específicamente en las ventajas y vulnerabilidades que su naturaleza interdisciplinaria produce en lo que respecta a los métodos de investigación. Se examinan tres características distintivas y su impacto en los métodos de investigación: 1) la complejidad del objeto de estudio, 2) la novedad del campo disciplinario que pretende estudiar y explicar la TISP, y 3) los cambios que las ciencias

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sociales en general han experimentado y están experimentando actualmente, y que abren nuevas oportunidades para las prácticas investigadoras y las reflexiones metodológicas. Reflexionar sobre esas características revela algunos problemas en relación con la validez interna y externa de las investigaciones y los esfuerzos realizados para abordarlos, así como los puntos fuertes y los obstáculos inexplorados en el camino hacia una masa crítica de estudios que puedan representar adecuadamente la pertinencia de la TISP en las sociedades contemporáneas.

Palabras clave: Métodos de investigación; Traducción e interpretación en los servicios públicos; Epistemología; Epistemologías de la ignorancia.

1. Interdisciplinarity as the foundation of PSIT studies

Public Service Interpreting and Translation (PSIT) as an object of inquiry is a complex phenomenon. Its performance involves, inter alia, linguistic, cognitive, cultural, political, social, legal, and even economic aspects, all of which can be examined in isolation or in various combinations as different interdisciplinary efforts. Any attempt at observing PSIT from (intra)disciplinary approaches entails limitations, which researchers have tried to overcome by adopting *inter*disciplinary lenses. In the 90s, integrating different disciplinary perspectives allowed Interpreting and Translation Studies (ITS) to reach not only "beyond language" (Snell-Hornby, 2006), but also beyond text and, by extension, beyond interaction, beyond structures, beyond performance, beyond ideas of translation. Modern ITS was born to expand upon what other, allied disciplines in isolation knew or intuited about translation and interpreting, and this has been made possible, in large part, by privileging and leveraging interdisciplinarity, and acknowledging that "real-world cases necessarily integrate heterogeneous knowledge bases" (Krohn, 2017: 41).

The variety of epistemic contributions that allowed ITS to succeed in that task and to thrive as a modern interdiscipline has been accompanied by the increasing complexity of methodological approaches used to obtain and examine our data, zooming out and widening the scope of our analyses and allowing researchers to consider different, more, and previously unthought of sources, producing nuanced and calibrated results. Opening up to interdisciplinarity has expanded and challenged research methods in ITS with what other disciplines have been developing and contributing. Once, translators' minds were conceived of as black boxes until think-aloud protocols, imported from psychology, were able to illuminate our knowledge of cognitive processes, even as they failed in their attempt to provide methodological irreproachability (see Toury, 1991; Pöchhacker, 2000; see also Herring and Tiselius in this issue). Practices characterized by insiderism were regarded as hindering objectivity in qualitative research until we imported anthropological views on reflexivity (Hume and Mulcock, 2004). In sum, conceptual and methodological interdisciplinarity has enriched ITS tools, allowing a burgeoning of new knowledge in the field along with a concomitant reduction of the limitations inherent to reliance upon any one single disciplinary perspective.

The novelty of ITS and its interdisciplinarity came with issues impacting both the profession and academia. These include a lack of established systems for training and accreditation (Hale, 2004), a shortage of academic and scientific infrastructure (see Pym, 2000), inefficacies caused by the dearth of a critical mass of studies pursuing common research agendas (see Gile, 2012: 73-74), and a lack of social recognition (see Gouadec,

2007). These deficiencies have resonated with scholars and have become widespread topics in the academic literature. Not so popular is how this novelty brought about a fresh look at imported and reinterpreted disciplinary traditions aiming for operational responses to intricate, real-world problems, and the epistemic consequences of reviewing their foundations, constructs, and methods in different ways. Disciplines look at the world through the lens informed by their history, and so the questions asked and the answers given from that basis influence the way future paths are forged (Knorr Cetina, 1999) establishing, in turn, boundaries that allow fields of study to emerge as distinct entities, providing particular solutions that legitimize their place among the sciences.

As a younger sibling of other disciplines, but especially as an interdiscipline by necessity, ITS has been able to posit different questions —considered irrelevant for other disciplines and therefore ignored— thereby generating new and relevant knowledge both for and about translation and interpreting. It has also been able to look at real-world problems without limiting their dimensions, focusing on complex causalities with multidimensional perspectives, increasing the amount of information produced and providing complex responses (Klein, 2017) by decreasing ignorance about complex issues (Kline, 1995).

While garnering further information and creating knowledge, our interdiscipline has evolved, establishing itself as a rich field that has learned to ask questions about its objects of inquiry, to design paths forward in search of answers, and to build new constructs from those answers. Such bodies of new knowledge rely intrinsically upon the first decisions taken along those first paths walked by pioneers in ITS: such early decisions about directions to take have guided the questions that have come afterwards. As complex phenomena, translation and interpreting offer a multiverse, much like Borges' garden (1997) —every time ITS took one path, a myriad of others were left unexplored. In describing how ITS became a discipline in its own right, Gile points out how conference interpreting took the lead as an object of academic interest, and only then did established researchers turn their eyes to community interpreting (Gile, 2012: 78). This idea of returning —of going back to walk a path that was left behind and redeeming itself from "the predicament of irreversibility" (Arendt, 1958[1998]: 237)— was a collective effort to redress some damaging forms of ignorance of neglected interpreting and translation practices, those more closely related to vulnerable populations. In the process, PSIT began to walk the path forward in the footsteps of a discipline that was in motion and under constant re-construction itself: ITS.

Nonetheless, whereas interdisciplinarity has contributed a wealth of insights to the unknowns of translation and interpreting, the increased complexity of approaches and methods (see Vuori and Hokkanen, this issue), their possible combinations (see Aguilar Solano, this issue), and their variety of objects of study have also created deleterious vulnerabilities. Such vulnerabilities in interdisciplinary research need to be identified and addressed in order to ensure the production of relevant knowledge that can be used by scholars, practitioners, and users.

The current state of PSIT studies is the result of a tradition which is partially a result of how ITS was born and how it evolved. This article will reflect on the specific conditions of that evolution and highlight some issues that we see as requiring our collective consideration. In what follows, we comment on different vulnerabilities attached to the diversity of research methods required to fully understand PSIT and how these may inadvertently lead to injustice in PSIT research by producing and sustaining individual and collective ignorance on different aspects of the field. First, we will outline how ignorance can be regarded as a disciplinary

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practice, how epistemic ignorance relates to research methods, and how practices and policies of ignorance may impact the construction of a field of inquiry.

2. Epistemologies of ignorance as a way of looking at research methods in PSIT

Science has thrived since the Enlightenment. Scientific knowledge has accrued value as the ultimate source of authority and has generally taken the lead position over any other approach to sense-making practices in modern societies. By arrogating the values of rationality and neutrality, the knowledge produced by academics has been presented as universal truths which are independent of their locations and contexts. In so doing, scholars have evaded "the accountability that socially concerned communities have to demand of their producers of knowledge" (Code, 1993). For decades now, alternative epistemologies have challenged the neutrality of the knowledge produced, and in doing so, have revealed the consequences of hiding the connection of any human enterprise with the "particularities of its producers" (Scheman, 1993: 200). Kuhn (1962) triggered an emancipation process in science whereby the scientific method came to be understood as part of a network, the result of interactions between theories and hypotheses, but also between assumptions and, as it has been more recently pointed out, between biases derived from the researchers' situatedness impacting perceptions and interpretations (see Mellinger in this special issue), and therefore results and the epistemologies constructed.

To examine a discipline in search of an epistemology of ignorance is an attempt to critically look at how knowledge is produced and accumulated. This approach has been successfully used to reveal the lack of neutrality in scientific practices, especially in those linked to androcentrism and racism. Indeed, privilege is as central to science as it is to other social endeavors —"privilege in European modernity is distinctively marked by the tendency to take its own particularities as generic, to cast those who differ from its norms not just as inferior, but as deviant" (Scheman, 2011: 42). Considering the dominant identity as the point of departure to finding the universal truths of the empirical world, science has created knowledge on specific subtypes of individuals and objects, but has presented the results as universal, in that way neglecting but also discouraging the analysis of diversities which were deemed too particular to lead to real conclusions, too complex to design properly 'scientific' studies. To wit, Calesi and colleagues published a paper in 2017 (MacManes et al. 2017) which became a landmark in showing striking differences between male and female specimens and acknowledging the importance and the rarity of including both in research (see Pierre-Louis, 2017). Sullivan and Tuana consider it naïve to see those choices as mere accidents:

> a lack of knowledge or an unlearning of something previously known often is actively produced for purposes of domination and exploitation. At times this takes the form of those in the center refusing to allow the marginalized to know […]. Other times it can take the form of the center's own ignorance of injustice, cruelty, and suffering […]. Sometimes these "unknowledges" are consciously produced, while at other times they are unconsciously generated and supported. (Sullivan and Tuana, 2007: 1)

In a previous work, Tuana argued that ignorance is better understood by scrutinizing how certain phenomena are overlooked or unlearned when creating and circulating

knowledge (Tuana, 2004: 194). As knowledge is accrued and safeguarded to provide paths for new research to build upon existing resources, ignorance is also enacted, continued, and preserved (Tuana, 2004: 195). In essence, research communities learn to effectively interact with their objects of inquiry to produce the knowledge expected, while reinforcing the ignorance inherited. These practices may reinforce societal hierarchies and inadvertently harm stakeholders by neglecting specific needs, views, and particularities while providing gains that can be implemented by already advantaged populations. Critically examining what is ignored and how it is kept hidden provides a way to investigate the political values underlying research practices and to reveal which stakeholders (and which of their values) are being targeted and missed by the discipline and its research (see Lomeña Galiano, this issue).

In an attempt to shed light on practices of knowing and ignoring in developing the interdisciplinary field of PSIT research, this special issue endeavors to critically review the methods used in PSIT studies to produce knowledge and ignorance in interpreting and translation practices that are particularly socially sensitive due to power asymmetries between institutions (public service authorities and workers) and individuals. Has ITS successfully served its community of knowledge? What political values can be identified in the knowledge and ignorance produced? What role have research practices played in the evolution of this particular scientific field? This feature article will outline specific challenges linked to research methods in interdisciplinary endeavors, most especially in relationship to the areas of confluence explored within the articles in this special issue.

3. Methodological complexity—Perks and perils

One of the perils of scientific inquiry is the hard truth that most of the constructs developed by scholars which aim to explain a complex, real-world reality are doomed to be but limited attempts, subject to and dependent upon subsequent enrichment by new perspectives and interpretations of the same data. In order to take a first step in examining the knowledge and ignorance produced by the methods used in PSIT, this article proposes a set of categories and their possible implications in the epistemologies of PSIT studies. The issues enumerated here will later be further developed attending to the consequences they may have for the study of PSIT.

- **Incommensurability.** Different contributing disciplines have developed different internal logics. The notions they have used to pursue their own agendas and purposes have been imported into ITS and adapted to (sometimes somewhat) different objects of inquiry, presenting different complexities. Operationalizing these concepts and agreeing on the relevant constructs which guide research design is a pending issue that hinders the comparability of results, leading to a lack of common ground for dialogue.

- **Variability.** The evolution of data sources and methods of inquiry is an enriching factor in PSIT studies. However, the lack of a unified paradigm reinforces the establishment of parallel paths in PSIT research, and consequently hinders conclusive findings by smattering the data and impacting commensurability.

- **Dilettantism**. The rapid institutionalization of ITS and its dependency on existing academic structures has resulted in a dependence upon existing disciplinary traditions. The focus on known methods and a lack of training in others may result in faulty implementations and research designs.

- **Inertia.** Shifting trends in research methods and operationalizations, along with the canonization of specific methods and designs, and their inclusion in the professional toolkit, may cause the irreflexive and sometimes incoherent application of known methods to new research questions.
- **Universalism.** Challenging positivism and universalism in science is a relatively new stance within the study of complex and diverse phenomena. Researchers in ITS have been trained in entrenched and consolidated disciplinary practices and have learned to hold universal categories in particularly high esteem. Such ingrained practices have usually been developed within structuralist thought based on 'neutral' objects, or dominant groups and identifies. The particularities of localized complexities have been generally neglected in science as a social endeavor.
- **Androcentrism and racism.** As a particular type of universalism, the preference for gender-neutral, race-neutral, and class-neutral approaches and objects of study has caused the overlooking of non-standard objects of inquiry.

From operationalizations of complex ontologies to the selection of methods and research designs, the complex and multifaceted nature of PSIT is, in itself, prone to perpetuating damaging forms of ignorance. The above-mentioned six sensitive sources of bias will be developed in the following subsections under three headings focusing on their impact on the discipline: lack of a critical mass of studies and results, issues with internal coherence and validity, and challenges for external validity or applicability of results beyond the specialism, population, or time period from which they were derived.

3.1 Roadblocks to reaching the critical mass in PSIT research

In the field of physics, critical mass is the minimum quantity of radioactive material required for a nuclear fission explosion to occur. The term has been used metaphorically across disciplines to refer to points where companies (see, e.g., Arroyo-Barrigüete et al. 2009), social movements (Oliver, Marwell, and Teixeira, 1985), but also interdisciplinary fields (Klein, 2010) become viable, produce significant changes, or reach a particular goal. In the case of academic disciplines, the number and scale of research and training programs, the development of an infrastructure for encouraging and communicating research, and a scholarly body of knowledge that can create a shared epistemology are key in reaching the point of critical mass.

As Gile pointed out (2012), ITS has indeed developed and achieved status and legitimization as a field of inquiry, at least in some regions. However, our understanding of the complexities of translation and interpreting practices and their contexts, requirements, and constraints is still developing, yielding a field of tessellated interdisciplines. Such a mosaic features overlaps of various and parallel imported disciplinary traditions: for example, concepts of legal studies are imported into the study of legal translation, whereas comparative literature feeds into literary translation studies, etc. Similarly, the various subspecialties within ITS prioritize and identify disparate issues as dominant: whereas technical translation studies focuses on terminological equivalences, healthcare interpreting studies increasingly looks beyond the terminological, embracing and exploring concepts of role, such as mediation. Analogously, subspecialties feature a disparate array of stakeholders: conference interpreting, for example, has largely developed on the basis of studies of international

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delegate conferences whereas, in contrast, community interpreting places the underprivileged at the center. Finally, the ITS interdiscipline also encompasses subfields developed in different languages and nurtured by different cultural traditions: think, for example, of the jurilinguistic tradition mainly developed in French as opposed to forensic linguistics, which has become canonical in English-speaking countries. Indeed, this enriching variety also entails exposure of ITS as a discipline to vulnerabilities that may impede researchers' possibilities to study and contribute to PSIT epistemologies and practices.

One such vulnerability is the internal logic of the different perspectives contributed by the distinct imported disciplines, creating the potential for conflict when one epistemological orientation collides with the internal logic of other disciplines which have already been imported into ITS. The integration of perspectives required to move from multidisciplinarity to interdisciplinarity (see Klein, 2017) requires internal organization of the views adopted (O'Rourke, Crowley, and Gonnerman, 2016). A lack of coordination between theoretical perspectives and the consequent variety in the operationalization of constructs can potentially impede the comparability of results across analyses, thereby hampering the accumulation of a critical mass of studies. The "add and stir" approach (see Harding, 1995) has proven to be dilettante-like, and the integration of constructs requires cooperation across studies. Research in PSIT has increasingly become a cooperative effort, aimed at establishing common ground. And yet, incursions into other disciplines continue to improve our understanding. If we want to grow together, differences among perspectives and their networked implications will need to be identified and managed in the very first steps of study design (for an attempt at designing spaces of cooperation at construct level, see, for example, Buzelin, 2005; Abdallah, 2014).

A key vulnerability resulting from the import of different disciplinary traditions emerging from various scientific field is the clash between natural and social epistemologies and knowledge models, particularly the legitimacy wars between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Bryman spoke of a paradigm peace (2006) having been reached —a peace which favors the combination of both approaches, subject to its adequacy vis-à-vis the research questions. At the time of writing his inspiring paper, Bryman referred to a lack of established standards to assess the quality of mixed-methods approaches and advocated for letting the particularities of each study, its goals and objects of inquiry determine how rigor and research quality were to be ensured and assessed. As pointed out by the author, only on the basis of a paradigm peace can issues of quality be pondered and developed, and the contingency of research methods upon their objects be acknowledged. To put a finer point on it, research methods are contingent upon how their objects of scrutiny behave and the type of scrutiny that such examinations allow. Not all objects are inert, and it is this distinguishing fact that forms the basis of positivism. Whereas qualitative methods may be regarded as defying positivism, paradigm peace allows for both methods to be combined in harmony. The clash between positivism or post-positivism and other approaches in some ways tainted ITS, and is still perceptible in justifications of non-positivist research designs. A number of contributions in our discipline have felt and still feel compelled to justify not focusing on inert objects of inquiry that can be subject to 'neutral' scientific methods and, at the same time, meaning-focused approaches are employed either without making quality standards explicit or by simply adopting quantitative quality standards for qualitative research. As post-structuralist approaches are gaining ground (Angelelli and Baer, 2016a), Bryman's paradigm peace in ITS is legitimizing tailor-made research methods to scrutinize consolidated and emerging sources

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of knowledge. Acknowledging the value of flexibility and diversity in scholarly inquiry is a bold step towards responding, mitigating the forms of ignorance caused by paradigm wars, and embracing the possibilities of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods. Reaching a paradigm peace means situating the object (or subject) of inquiry at the center, focusing discussions on the issues that can make us move forward, and situating PSIT on the right track towards achieving the coveted critical mass.

3.2 Hampering internal validity

Internal validity refers to the strength with which a causal relation has been proved; it necessarily entails the rebuttal of alternative (and incompatible) explanations (Brewer, 2004). Internal validity is mostly used in the context of experimental and quasi-experimental research, but it also applies to any effort to find correlations between variables. Experiments most typically isolate one causal relationship between dependent and independent variables, whereby internal validity can be assessed in a more straightforward way. However, being able to reduce a complex, real-life object of inquiry to a single causal relationship is problematic, as is refuting all alternative explanations in a world that is expanding and unveiling itself. Indeed, the use of 'validity' has been linked to positivist approaches. However, internal validity ultimately defines how accurately the research design was able to answer the research question and we contend that by acknowledging the contingency of research methods upon objects (or subjects) of inquiry, the necessary rigor to establish true dialogue between diverse contributions in PSIT studies can be reached through transparency of all decisions taken in a research project, the explanatory clarity and coherence of discussions and conclusions, and the reflexivity of the researchers' stance and position. Against this background, some obstacles may still hamper a professional application of research methods.

Firstly, internal validity may be hampered by methodological inertia. A common practice across disciplinary fields is choosing research projects because they can be completed with the methods in vogue, sometimes those which are feasible in terms of the researcher's budget, level of access, and affiliations, or those which are encouraged by institutional research policies. This *methodolatry* "hinders new discoveries" (Daly, 1993: 11) subjugating scientific knowledge to institutional scientific policies and the whims of current trends nurtured by the pressures of succumbing to impact factors. Changing fashions in methods gain support through unreflective imitation of what is considered to be scientific in a given moment, sometimes privileging the interests and agendas of funding entities. By imitating and being led to imitate the style of natural science research, social sciences fall prey to allodoxic practices (Bourdieu, 1971), offering distorted pictures of the real-world concerns they are responsible for explaining.

Gile (2015: 2) warns that "much of the research in TS is done by people who were trained to be practitioners of Translation, not practitioners of research, regardless of their status as members of the academic faculty in their respective institutions". Translation and interpreting undergraduate and MA training includes text analysis as part of the tools of the trade (see, e.g., Schäffner, 2002), but methods that may come in handy when researching translation and interpreting from cognitive, cultural, social, ethical, or political perspectives are not always part of the picture (see, e.g., Wu, Zhang, and Wei, 2019; Whyatt and Naranowicz, 2020). Thus, young researchers or *practisearchers* (Gile, 2018) often experience

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a reality in which the analysis of textual methods forms the bulk of the tools in their toolkit, and these are thus more likely to inspire and shape their research interests. In other words, being trained in a particular epistemology (of knowledge and of ignorance) may have a direct bearing on what they see as analyzable and knowable.

(Self-)aware of its own lack of training, the field has recently produced a wealth of discussions and handbooks to introduce and examine both qualitative and quantitative research methods (see, e.g., Hertog and van der Veer, 2006; Hale and Napier, 2013; Saldanha and O'Brien, 2013; Angelelli and Baer, 2016b; de Pedro Ricoy and Napier, 2017; Mellinger and Hanson, 2017; Biel et al. 2019). However, contributions are required to help the field of ITS reconsider how it faces the path of knowledge and ignorance creation, how is creates and disseminates its quality standards, and how it ensures researchers, including young researchers and *practisearchers* can meet them. This need for self-awareness is particularly acute in the case of PSIT. PSIT is a particularly sensitive field because its stakeholders include vulnerable populations participating in unbalanced power relations. Indeed, epistemic asymmetries feature high in interactions between individuals who are performing a professional role they repeat every working day with the support of institutions and other individuals who lack a knowledge of the rules of the game and the necessary capital (notably linguistic, but also social and cultural in general) or even the capabilities (in the case of sign language interpreting) demanded to participate. Allophone populations in these situations fulfill the three forms of vulnerability defined by Misztal —they depend on authorities and on interpreters and translators (dependency), they cannot predict the adversities of actions in settings that are unknown and unfamiliar to them (unpredictability), and that at times trigger irreversible memories or even traumas that "reduce the chances of collaborative relationships" (irreversibility) (Misztal, 2011: 95). A socially committed discipline needs to make decisions regarding where its limited resources should be allocated.

3.3 External validity

External validity is the possibility of generalizing results to a larger population than the one contributing the data for the research project conducted (Ondercin, 2004). In positivist science, objects are seen as representing an ideal typology, and one needs only to discover their features or the ways in which the idealized object can be understood in order to be able to garner knowledge that describes the whole universe. In a structuralist light, universal descriptions and rules are coveted goals. The search for universals, but particularly the paths taken to find them, has been abundantly problematized. The prominent psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg may serve as an example (Kohlberg, 1982). He developed categories of moral development based on participants' responses to different sets of moral dilemmas. While Kohlberg worked with both female and male participants, female responses were found to be less easy to fit within his categories. As Carol Gilligan pointed out (1993), it is problematic that Kohlberg did not wonder why. Rather, he replicated the assumption of Freud, Piaget, and Ericson that models of moral development based on men's cognition should be understood as describing human moral development for people of all genders (see also Slicer, 1990). Trying to develop universals without being aware of all the variety of objects within a field entails vulnerabilities. PSIT is still discovering the settings where translation and interpreting mediate between authorities and allophone individuals, partly because those performing translation and interpreting are sometimes hidden from scholarly

scrutiny (see Lomeña Galiano, this volume), and partly because new translation and interpreting needs are constantly emerging in the world. Additionally, PSIT research has largely focused on interpreting rather than translation (Valero Garcés, 2019). Can we trust that the available results are valid for translation as well? Can we assume that new knowledge about public service translation will not challenge our present understanding of public service interpreting? To further limit the external validity of some findings, most research has been conducted in the Western world, from a Western perspective, for Western stakeholders, at the behest of Western patrons, and with a Western conceptual and methodological toolkit (see, e.g., de Lima Costa, 2014; Baumgarten, 2017). Can our constructs and methods be extrapolated to a different cultural and scientific context?

Perception biases, as well as traditions rooted in knowledge and ignorance dynamics, operate throughout the research process, from selecting what to research to conceptualizing the problem, choosing the methods, implementing the design, discussing results, and finally, to applying findings. The decisions taken throughout the process may neglect, deny solutions to, and therefore harm certain stakeholders, which are particularly sensitive in PSIT. Given that androcentrism and racism have pervaded scientific practices (see Tuana and Sullivan, 2006; Sullivan and Tuana, 2007), PSIT studies should be observant of their own procedures. Our collective attention is required to both remedy and acknowledge our limitations, to attenuate our ambition for external validity, and to question its relevance.

4. Conclusion

In a globalized (and unequal) world, PSIT are required for modern societies to operate. And yet, in a society that "has neither time nor the inner urge to reflect on the darkness at the far end of the tunnel" (Bauman, 2006: 76), ITS or PSIT are rarely considered when defining the most coveted research programs, action plans, and policies that have the power to guide researchers' attention and increase the intellectual resources devoted to specific topics. Referring to ITS in general, Gile (2012: 74) phrased this concern quite clearly: "there is little by way of financial incentives, except perhaps when working on machine translation for private businesses". Reaching critical mass requires our coordinated efforts and the most rigorous application of research methods, one that ensures a 'validity' that acknowledges variety and diversality, "the conscious harmonization of preserved diversities" (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, 1990: 903). This can only be achieved by uniting efforts and by presenting hard evidence on the need to turn PSIT into one of the "grand challenges" (see Brooks et al. 2009) —one that is defined as key in global social development, and that can attract the interest of researchers and funders and that is guided by the best practices. Such efforts must, obligatorily, include anticipating and managing the ignorance produced or reinforced by our current epistemology.

This feature article has aimed to explore how ITS has addressed Public Service Interpreting and Translation, focusing specifically on the advantages and vulnerabilities that its interdisciplinary nature produces as regards research methods. These advantage and vulnerable points have been reviewed along three features characterizing and impacting research in ITS and PSIT— (1) the complexity of the object of inquiry, (2) the novelty of the disciplinary field, and (3) the social and scientific changes in the social sciences.

Firstly, the complexity of the object of inquiry results from its concern with real-life problems, occurring in the empirical world within a network of other social phenomena and objects. To fully acknowledge this complexity, several stances represented by various disciplines must be integrated. When examining complex real-life phenomena, interdisciplinary examinations can observe things that discrete disciplines on their own would miss. ITS was born from the will to overcome the limits of (intra)disciplinary approaches to translation and interpreting, and the interdisciplinary approach has been successfully embraced by ITS and PSIT studies. However, the complexities derived from integrating various epistemological traditions need to be further reflected on. Indeed, how disciplines approach their objects of inquiry is a result of their epistemological traditions, which includes choices about what they examined and what they decided to ignore. The integration of different disciplines allowed ITS to become a distinct entity, to specialize and develop new knowledge. At the same time, it also produced the need to coordinate different concepts and constructs originally generated within different disciplinary networks of concepts, agents, and methods. A concerted effort to establish bridges between studies applying different conceptual and methodological sources is required for PSIT studies to be able to compare the results made available by existing research efforts and reach the necessary critical mass.

The second distinctive feature we have highlighted is the novelty of ITS in general and of PSIT studies in particular. On the one hand, this novelty led the field to rely and depend on existing structures, particularly on available research training. Although research training tailored to ITS needs is making headway, specific programs are still scarce (even though PhD programs are increasing and some MA programs, such as the Master's Degree in Translation and Interpreting Research at University Jaume I,[1] focus on developing research competencies for ITS). This relative scarcity of training opportunities encourages researchers to self-educate, with few specific forums to discuss their progress —something which can cause misconceptions and dilettante-like practices to proliferate. The privileging of specific research methods in undergraduate and professionalizing master's degrees (such as textual analysis) may lead to a certain *methodolatry* of textual methods and approaches, potentially obscuring the way towards objects that demand different approaches and to critical views of other research methods.

Finally, the third feature we have examined refers to changes that have been taking place in the social sciences which have cast doubts on the tenets of positivism and post-positivism, understanding that social dynamics are the result of a network of factors, including their history and origins rooted in specific contexts. ITS has undergone the migration from positivism to our currently dominant poststructuralist stance (see Angelelli and Baer, 2016b) at a somewhat accelerated pace, and even now our outlook is paradigmatically diverse. The lack of a unified paradigm is indeed enriching, but it creates difficulties in our path towards a coveted critical mass of studies, data, and discussions. In the same way, potential obstacles are created to the embracing of quality standards for less known methods, endangering their likelihood of being imparted to those who will shape the future of PSIT. Further, reflexivity about our own disciplinary, sociocultural, and individual assumptions, especially the convenience of looking for universals and certain types of validity, is still developing (see Mellinger, this issue). Additionally, PSIT continues to reveal new settings where they have become essential; new agents are assuming (and developing)

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[1] www.researchingtranslation.uji.es.

translation and interpreting roles; new populations in need of linguistic and cultural mediation appear; and our assumptions about how androcentrism, classism, and racism may permeate our policies and practices undergo constant revision. Against this background, PSIT studies needs to keep its options and its eyes open.

The issues resulting from these distinctive features place the emphasis on the methods used to create knowledge about PSIT. In that vein, the contributions in this special issue focus on creating a forum for dialogue from which our research methods can emerge more powerful —strengthening the comparability of the research contributions in PSIT, critically observing the variability of the disciplinary field, highlighting the dangers of dilettantism in the application of methods, valuing the contingency of study designs upon objects of inquiry, legitimizing a diversalist outlook within the context of the social sciences, and encouraging reflexivity in research by creating awareness of biases such as androcentrism, classism, and racism in any social research, especially those that look at the natural sciences as a model. As argued in this article, those issues may impact the internal and external validity (in the broad sense) of studies, and hinder the discipline's path to the necessary critical mass of studies to prove itself relevant to the wider research and social community. As researchers, we have a collective responsibility to the society that trusts the discipline and its structures to advance its possibilities. When one form of inquiry is selected by an inter- or intradisciplinary research team or by a sole researcher to frame their investigation, an awareness should be developed as to how managing the problem from that point of view can incline researchers and disciplines to overlook or even produce detriments to stakeholders. The purpose of this feature article and of this special issue of *FITISPos International Journal* is to increase awareness of the implications of research policies and practices in the field of PSIT for our global social development.

Acknowledgements

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