

# Teaching and Researching Translation

Basil Hatim

Second Edition

Applied Linguistics in Action Series  
Edited by Christopher N. Candlin & David R. Hall



ROUTLEDGE

*Teaching and Researching Translation*

# APPLIED LINGUISTICS IN ACTION

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# Teaching and Researching Translation

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Second edition

Basil Hatim

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## General Editors' Preface

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**Applied Linguistics in Action**, as its name suggests, is a Series which focuses on the issues and challenges to teachers and researchers in a range of fields in Applied Linguistics and provides readers and users with the tools they need to carry out their own practice-related research.

The books in the Series provide the reader with clear, up-to-date, accessible and authoritative accounts of their chosen field within Applied Linguistics. Starting from a map of the landscape of the field, each book provides information on its main ideas and concepts, competing issues and unsolved questions. From there readers can explore a range of practical applications of research into those issues and questions, and then take up the challenge of undertaking their own research, guided by the detailed and explicit research guides provided. Finally, each book has a section which provides a rich array of resources, information sources and further reading, as well as a key to the principal concepts of the field.

Questions the books in this innovative Series ask are those familiar to all teachers and researchers, whether very experienced, or new to the fields of Applied Linguistics.

- What does research tell us, what doesn't it tell us, and what should it tell us about the field? How is the field mapped and landscaped? What is its geography?
- How has research been applied and what interesting research possibilities does practice raise? What are the issues we need to explore and explain?

- What are the key researchable topics that practitioners can undertake? How can the research be turned into practical action?
- Where are the important resources that teachers and researchers need? Who has the information? How can it be accessed?

Each book in the Series has been carefully designed to be as accessible as possible, with built-in features to enable readers to find what they want quickly and to home in on the key issues and themes that concern them. The structure is to move from practice to theory and back to practice in a cycle of development of understanding of the field in question.

Each of the authors of books in the Series is an acknowledged authority, able to bring broad knowledge and experience to engage teachers and researchers in following up their own ideas, working with them to build further on *their* own experience.

The first editions of books in this series have attracted widespread praise for their authorship, their design, and their content, and have been widely used to support practice and research. The success of the series, and the realization that it needs to stay relevant in a world where new research is being conducted and published at a rapid rate, have prompted the commissioning of his second edition. This new edition has been thoroughly updated, with accounts of research that has appeared since the first edition and with the addition of other relevant additional material. We trust that students, teachers and researchers will continue to discover inspiration in these pages to underpin their own investigations.

*Chris Candlin & David Hall*  
*General Editors*

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# About this book

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## Re-writing the research agenda

An interesting thread runs through the discourse found in many introductory books on translation studies. There is a tendency to use linguistics as a scapegoat – as something to blame for the ills that have befallen us in the study of translation. The argument usually lists the weaknesses of such paradigms as structural linguistics and transformational grammar (which admittedly leave a great deal to be desired as linguistic theories, let alone as translation models), only to conclude that linguistics has all but failed us.

This book suggests that the conceptual map of translation studies could be drawn differently and perhaps in more helpful ways. The script we will be working to is inspired by a simple yet telling coincidence. The year is 1955, and the place is Harvard. Noam Chomsky was lecturing on his theory of transformational generative grammar, and the linguists and psychologists – and a few translation theorists – were buzzing with excitement. In the same year, the British philosopher John Austin was also at Harvard to present the prestigious William James Lectures. In the course of these lectures, Austin outlined a programme for what was to have an enduring influence for generations to come – the study of language as **Action**, and language use as ‘doing things with words’. Pragmatics has had a strong impact on a wide range of disciplines, including linguistics and translation.

The first question we must then ask of any linguistics-oriented model of translation is: What kind of linguistics is being applied? Yet, it is remarkable how all criticism of the role of linguistics in the study of

translation seems to have focused on abstract and esoteric work divorced from practical considerations, and to ignore the contribution of those trends in linguistics which are anything but abstract and esoteric.

This book takes a close look at this inconsistency and asks: Would the conceptual map of translation studies have looked different, and linguistics perhaps less uninviting, had we been more discriminate of the kinds of ‘linguistics’ that were on offer? Would we have offered the translator more effective guidance had we paid more attention to such forward-looking models of linguistics description as pragmatics and to what these paradigms can do and have actually done for the translator? These are some of the questions that this book will attempt to answer.

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## Overview

*Teaching and Researching Translation* is divided into four major sections. Section I (Chapters 1–6) outlines the historical and conceptual background to translation studies, and highlights key issues in translation research. The various strands work together to provide answers for such questions as:

- *Which research is informed by which paradigm?*
- *What does research into the various paradigms tell us?*
- *What does it not tell us?*
- *What should it tell us?*

There seems to be a pattern to the way translation studies and research seem to have evolved. No matter which way the wind of fashion blows, translating or the study of translation has always and inescapably been seen in terms of the two extremes ‘literal’ vs ‘free’. Thus, such requirements as whether it is the ‘letter’ or the ‘spirit’ of the original that can or needs to be reproduced in the translation have regularly been used as a basis for what have come to be well-known distinctions such as communicative vs semantic translation, or covert vs overt translation. In mainstream translation studies, distinctions such as the literal/free have also been influential in defining other aspects of translation method or strategy, and familiar categories such as ‘interlinear’ translation at one end, and ‘imitation’ at the other, are conceived within such frameworks. Distance from or adherence to the source text thus seems to be an important motif and one that has underpinned significant

developments in the discipline. This metaphor is used as a main organising principle in this book.

Section II (Chapters 7–13) focuses on how the perspectives outlined in Section I have yielded operational frameworks for research. In this book, researching the practice is seen in terms of three major aspects of how texts function and how they get translated:

- Textual **register**, informed by a language use/user perspective.
- The **pragmatics** of intentionality, acceptability and related standards of textuality.
- Language as a social-**semiotic** impinging on micro- and macro-units of interaction and involving what users of language in social life actually do with **texts, genres and discourses**.

In this section, the questions asked are:

- *How has research on the ground been and how can research best be applied?*
- *What interesting research possibilities does practice raise?*

Section III (Chapters 14 and 15) presents current practical applications of translation research: How the areas represented by the three facets of translation research (register, pragmatics, semiotics) have shaped up in terms of practitioner action research projects (both carried out and yet to be carried out). With this, the question becomes:

- *What are the important researchable issues and topics that practitioners can research in an action research way?*

Section IV provides links and resources for translators and is supplemented by a glossary of basic terms. This will end a journey through a rather difficult terrain. Indeed, the case may not have been overstated when Ivor Richards (cited in Holmes, 1988: 73) once described translation as ‘very probably the most complex type of event yet produced in the evolution of the cosmos’.

## Section

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# Translation studies: History, basic concepts and key issues in research



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# Translation studies and applied linguistics

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This chapter will . . .

- describe how applied linguistics can contribute to the study of translating and translations;
- set the theory–practice debate against the background of pioneering work on educating reflective practitioners;
- propose the notion of practitioner/**action research** as an ideal methodology with which to study translation, and thus question the assumption that theory and practice are separate and distinct;
- introduce translation studies in terms of the way the subject has evolved as an interdisciplinary endeavour.

Translation studies, the discipline which concerns itself with the theory and practice of translation, has come of age and is maturing rapidly. Nevertheless, a number of obstacles remain and will have to be overcome if the discipline is to develop further.

To begin with, activities such as translating or translation teaching have, until fairly recently, been kept separate from ‘research’ into these and related issues. The polarisation is historical and is evidence of the misleading demarcation lines that are often too readily drawn between ‘theoretician’ and ‘practitioner’ in many disciplines. Theory and practice are ultimately complementary and, particularly in a field such as translation, the distinction needs to be re-examined.

Another obstacle in the development of translation studies has to do with a distinction also traditionally maintained between ‘linguistics’ and

the range of disciplines within which translation is studied (e.g. cultural studies). Like the theory vs practice distinction, this division has militated against fostering an atmosphere of interdisciplinarity in the study of translation as an important form of intercultural communication.

To set the scene for this survey of how translation studies has evolved, the first question addressed is: *In what ways can applied linguistics, with its many and varied orientations, inform translation research?*

## 1.1 Applied linguistics and the translation analyst

### Quote 1.1

Translation is characteristically purposeful as a profession; it has targets and goals. It is done on behalf of sponsors. It lacks (except in rare cases) the leisure of reflective consideration about the researchable questions of why like this, why here. Nonetheless, translators as applied linguists do have certain obligations to the furthering of our understanding of language and our ability to explain the acts of communicating in which we are continually engaged.

Christopher Candlin (1991)

In applied linguistics, it is now generally accepted that what is applied in teaching or research is not so much knowledge about language as it is a way of investigating language. The identity of *what* exactly is being applied tends to be of secondary importance, compared with *how* the application might best be effected and *for what purpose*. There is still a great deal of uncertainty among linguists as to what the subject matter of their discipline is. Yet, this has not stood in the way of applied linguists using linguistics in the search for solutions to a wide range of practical problems in fields as varied as language teaching and speech pathology.

From an applied linguistic perspective, it is thus the *how* and, perhaps more important, the *why* of an application that should underpin any serious attempt to deal with translation. In this applied sense, a range of characteristics generally associated with sound scientific practice would be adhered to: objectivity, comprehensiveness, explicitness, precision.

Theoretical statements would also be valued, taking into account not only the 'facts' which one's methodology uncovers, but also how the facts may best be systematised and explained.

Applications conducted along these lines invariably seek to solve a problem. In practice, however, the notion of 'problem' is not so straightforward. In attempting to deal with a perceived problem, the first complication likely to arise relates to *responsibility*: Who decides whether there is a problem in the first place?

In this respect, reference to the practitioner or learner is standard practice in applied linguistics. In the first instance, these consumers of linguistic knowledge can reveal through tests, experiments and so on, what the problem is. The problem would then be viewed within a particular framework that 'linguistics' as the discipline applied makes available. Such procedures are being increasingly adopted in translation studies where traditionally armchair theoreticians have been the first to pronounce on problems of translation.

But no sooner is the issue of 'responsibility' resolved than another arises, this time relating to *constituency*. Language or translation analysts constantly come up against the question of whether groupings such as 'practitioners' or 'learners' are sufficiently homogeneous to yield meaningful generalisations about what the problem is. The issue at stake is complex and has a great deal to do with the varying degrees of *awareness* that members of a professional group bring to a task.

This 'awareness' factor influences the process of problem solving considerably. In terms of level of awareness regarding the nature of the problems encountered, two types of practitioner are generally recognised. Among trainees or in the workplace, for instance, there are those whose training has focused on such issues as the relevance of theoretical statements and the need for abstract models of description. However, there will also be those whose apprenticeship has all but excluded the benefits of a training that is theoretically oriented. The two groups will have different notions of what constitutes a 'problem', and this will make generalisations difficult to sustain.

In applied linguistics, one way of dealing with this disparity has been to use research techniques such as comparative data obtained from professional practitioners or experienced trainees vs novices and beginners (with one or the other grouping serving as a 'control group'). Recent work in the field of translation studies has adopted similar approaches. As a long-term solution and in order to overcome the difficulties inherent in dividing practitioners or learners into such neat categories as 'aware' and 'unaware', it is important to recognise that, prior to embarking on

any analysis, more could be done through *awareness-raising* of entire population samples (with control groups deprived of such input). That is, there has to be a realisation that a problem is 'real' and that it is recognised as a problem by the majority of those affected by it. Unless such a consensus is reached, the purpose of the analysis will remain unclear. Thus, as a first step, the different parties concerned need to be alerted to the problem and sensitised to its side effects. Convincing explanations would have to be offered for why the problem exists in the first place, and only then might plausible descriptions of a problem be provided and effective solutions worked out.

At this point, the question of *how* the application should be effected becomes relevant. Several possible courses of action would be open to those involved. An *intellectual appeal* might be made to those professionals who are genuinely interested in placing what they do best on a more solid footing. *Self-criticism* should also be encouraged within the professional group through looking more systematically at the kind of difficulties encountered and the practices which engender them. This process of encouraging 'practitioner research' has come to be known as **action research**.

An intellectual appeal with the aim of raising critical awareness and thereby sensitising professionals to the nature of the problems encountered is thus one major course of action in any attempt to link up with those affected by the application of particular disciplines to the various domains of professional practice (e.g. linguistics applied to the study of literary translation, or **discourse** analysis to medical gate-keeping encounters). Such appeals can take many forms. An overriding consideration, however, is how best to communicate relevant research findings to practitioners largely unaware of what the problem is, and how far feedback received from these professionals, once engaged, can set the agenda for further research. In their discourse analytic work, for example, Roberts and Sarangi (2003: 338) were concerned with 'how discourse-based findings are fed back to practitioner professionals and the extent to which the feedback received from the latter can set the agenda for further discourse analytic work'. Drawing on their consultancy work with the Royal College of General Practitioners, the authors focused on those discourse-based findings relating to the specific context of medical gate-keeping encounters, and identified three interactionally grounded modes of talk: professional, institutional and personal experience. These theoretical, discourse analytic categories were then discussed with the practitioners concerned, and subsequently used as parameters with which to ascertain whether such distinctions were actually picked up and ultimately used as a heuristic for dealing with practical issues.

### Concept 1.1 Reflexivity

Recognition of the dialectical relationship between ‘research’ and ‘action’, and a focus on the empowerment of practitioners to develop and execute their own research, are two of the ways in which unhelpful dichotomies such as ‘theory’ vs ‘practice’ may be reassessed. These tired clichés would be replaced by *reflexivity* as a more dynamic process and one in which theory and practice interact and mutually enrich one another. In adopting such a stance, however, we need to guard against inadvertently promoting yet another undesirable dichotomy, this time involving **action research** or research done by practitioners vs ‘pure research’ as the mainstay of **technical rationality**.

In this theory–practice dialectic of attempting to raise awareness and in the process engage practitioners in the identification and solution of problems, the mode is certainly both ‘reflexive’ and ‘visionary’ (i.e. professional groups tend to intellectualise what they do best and to develop a professional vision which will have its own discourses, practices and view of the world). But as Candlin and Sarangi (2001: 241) incisively point out, ‘such a dialectic interprets reflexivity not merely as “reflection”, nor simply as “action”, [but also as a] critical appraisal of knowledge claims *and* an evaluation of effective action’. That is, reflexivity seen merely in terms of ‘reflection’ followed by ‘action’ would simply be too mechanical a process to capture the intricacies and dynamics of real-life problem solutions. To be purposeful, reflection must be honed with a healthy dose of criticalness, and action tempered with a much-needed evaluativeness. This echoes the general thrust of arguments developed in the 1970s and 1980s by American education theorist Donald Schön in his pioneering work on ‘reflective practice’.

---

## 1.2 Reflective practice

### Quote 1.2

Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. It is this working with experience that is important in learning.

Boud et al. (1985: 19)

Donald Schön was among the first to call into question such time-honoured distinctions as theory vs practice, and technical rationality vs craft knowledge. In his seminal book *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983), Schön argued that, in developing professional excellence, practitioners need to reconsider the role of traditionally highly valued ‘technical knowledge’ (the mainstay of ‘technical rationality’), and to reinstate largely undervalued ‘artistry’ (knowledge as ‘artful doing’). It is only then, Schön stressed, that the dilemma ‘rigor’ vs ‘relevance’ may be resolved, with the practitioner beginning to exhibit not only ‘expertise’ but also ‘criticalness’, as crucial elements of his or her professional portfolio. Reflective practice, then, is a process of reflecting on action as part of continuous, lifelong learning (Schön, 1983). In this way, reflective practice would entail ‘paying critical attention to the practical values and theories which inform everyday actions, by examining practice reflectively and reflexively. This leads to developmental insight’ (Bolton, 2010: xix).

In addition to the rationality and artistry issue, the concept of reflective practice is underpinned by another important distinction which Schön had earlier established – namely, between ‘single loop’ and ‘double-loop’ learning. Single-loop learning is the predominant mode among practitioners who, even after an error has been identified and corrected, continue uncritically to use current strategies and techniques. Double-loop learning, on the other hand, requires that current strategies and techniques be continuously reassessed for efficacy and that new problem-solution ‘framings’ be adopted even when seemingly similar situations arise (Argyris and Schön, 1978).

Another crucial set of concepts promoted by Schön relates to ‘reflection-in-action’ and ‘reflection-on-action’. Reflection-in-action involves the ability of a practitioner to ‘think on their feet’, hence the label ‘felt-knowing’ (Walkerden, 2009). It is a form of intuitive knowledge which enables practitioners, when faced with a professional challenge, essentially to connect with their feelings, emotions and prior experiences, including attending to ‘theories in use’. Reflection-on-action, on the other hand, is by definition post-experience, involving practitioners stepping back from the situation at hand and to analyse their reaction, explore the reasons for the way they reacted the way they did, and assess the consequences of their actions. This is usually carried out through a documented reflection of the situation.

Can the translator or interpreter be trained to become a reflective practitioner in this Schönian sense of reflective practice? This question will occupy us in Chapter 13 on the pedagogy of translation, and the

answer is a resounding ‘yes’. Like all practitioners, translators ought to be able to study their own ‘translatory’ behaviour and ‘translational’ practice (Koller, 1995), to determine what works best. True, translating is a complex phenomenon, and there is not one ‘right’ approach. But reflection is not about one-track choices of ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ – far from it. We could indeed reflect on different versions, different modes and different models, comparatively assessing the merits and demerits of a particular strategy, and in the process reshaping past and current experiences in a manner that could only lead to improved practices.

Schön’s reflection-in-action assists practitioners in making professional knowledge systematically gained from experience a conscious part of decision making. But, to achieve this, we must make a leap from a knowledge base of discrete skills to a stage where skills are there only to be modified to suit specific contexts and situations, and eventually to give rise to newer and more effective strategies. In implementing a process of reflective practice, translators, for example, will be able to move themselves beyond existing models and theories, to a mode of practice that is open-ended, yet not entirely unpredictable or uncontrollable. That is, while translators should be encouraged to resist establishing a ‘culture of control’ and instead to become ‘reflective practitioners’, they should at the same time be empowered to deal in a disciplined and methodical manner with what is essentially a fluid and dynamic environment. In short, like all practitioners, translators can, through reflective practice, help themselves develop personally and professionally. It is surely not too much to ask oneself or one’s trainees to keep a journal, solicit feedback, see experiences objectively, or take time at the end of each experience to reflect-on-actions taken or not taken.

---

### 1.3 Action research: The theory–practice cycle

#### Quote 1.3

If knowledge is tentative and contingent upon **context**, rather than absolute, then I believe that practitioners, rather than being consumers of other people’s research, should adopt a research orientation to their own classrooms.

David Nunan (1992)



As indicated above, research in translation or interpreting and practical pursuits such as the teaching of these skills, have been pulling in somewhat different directions. Research has generally been seen as a matter of 'reflection', whereas activities such as teaching, translating or interpreting are taken to be the 'real action'.

From the perspective of practice-driven action research, however, it is advocated that an appreciation of what the problem is, why it needs to be solved, and how it may best be solved, can reverse the trend of treating practitioners as mere consumers of research. As work by Donald Schön and other writers on 'reflective practice' has made amply clear, the practitioner would be viewed as someone who is in fact heavily involved in the determination of the problem or 'puzzle'. Furthermore, such a practitioner/researcher would be seen as someone who possesses not only 'craft knowledge' but also **analytical knowledge**, and more. This would ensure that problems are properly identified and appropriate solutions proposed and duly explained. Solutions can never be definitive, but once action research is underway, the research cycle of practice–research–practice would have certainly been set in motion.

The kind of practitioner research proposed here and throughout this book couples the knowledge which practitioners have with their own immediate concerns, and yields:

A form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

(Carr and Kemmis, 1986: 162)

This is a standard definition of action research: an initial idea, followed by fact-finding, action plan, implementation, monitoring and revision, amended plan and so on (McDonough and McDonough, 1997). The cycle ensures that research is participant-driven, reflective, collaborative and of the type which leads to change. The change will impinge not only on how knowledge is acquired, but also on the **context** that motivates the enquiry in the first place. The basic premise underlying this new research focus on 'reflective practice' is that the practitioner may now be seen as someone with a portfolio of skills which includes, most notably, an enquiring mind.

Translation studies has been rather slow to interact with these developments, a situation that has been exacerbated by the polarisation of theory and practice cast in terms of two quite distinct and incompatible **universes of discourse**. Recently, however, such stark distinctions have been fast disappearing and the 'action' vs 'reflection' dichotomy is being