

Positive Peripheries: A personal reflection on interdisciplinary research

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Researching “in between”, or on the periphery, is an exciting and challenging place to be, though it is not always comfortable. My first in-between research space was between translation studies and computer science or, more specifically NLP (natural language processing) as applied to Machine Translation. At the start of my career, nobody was interested how translators interacted with technology. Now, it is a thriving field of research and the NLP community has come to realise how important human factors are.

More recently, I, along with other colleagues, have taken to occupying a different kind of in-between space and it is this experience that I will draw on for my talk. The space has been created within the EU-funded INTERACT project (International Network in Crisis Translation), which considers the role of translation in crisis and disaster scenarios. The three year project brings together academics from different disciplines: translation studies, NLP, social work and refugee studies, emergency response, policy analysis, cognitive psychology and ethics. It not only brings together academics from diverse fields, but also experts in commercial translation technology enterprises and in health and humanitarian NGOs.

The diverse network presents significant potential for research and outcomes that are innovative, engaged and impactful. It has the capacity to highlight an interdependence that was mostly unacknowledged heretofore. At the same time, doing research with such diverse disciplines and with organisations whose primary concern is something other than research presents considerable challenges, not least of which entails convincing the other of the relevance, importance and value of your field. And that is just the starting point. When interdependence starts to emerge, the next interesting obstacle is how to do research in mutually acceptable ways and, eventually, how to write about that research. Using the example of the INTERACT project, and drawing on earlier experiences too, I will highlight how our field can create successful synergies.

Short CV

Sharon O'Brien is an Associate Professor in translation and language technology in the School of



Applied Language and Intercultural Studies, Dublin City University. She teaches translation technology, research methods, localisation, translation theory and practical translation. She was Director of the Centre for Translation and Textual Studies for three and a half years (2013-2017). She has been a funded investigator in the Science Foundation Ireland-funded national research centre, ADAPT, for 10 years. Currently, she is coordinator of a Horizon 2020-funded research project on translation in emergency and disaster scenarios. Sharon has supervised over ten PhD students and several post-docs. She previously worked as a language technology consultant in the localisation industry.

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