

# 1 Establishing common ground

## Paradigms in perspective

### Towards deeper levels of insight

‘Can you replicate your study?’ ‘What have you done to validate your findings?’ ‘How can you prove that your theory is not based on data you have cherry-picked in order to support your preexisting biases?’ Questions such as these are sometimes raised during research conferences or when defending a doctoral thesis. Behind these concerns are beliefs about the nature of existence (*ontology*) or about what can be known in the world around us (*epistemology*). Even for colleagues who are unaware of their assumptions, these beliefs about what is useful, truthful, and knowable continue to operate quietly in the background, shaping both thought and action:

We all invoke implicit philosophies of science when we conduct studies, interpret results, criticize others’ work, or decide between competing theories. Epistemological issues can be viewed as primary because they underwrite all of the knowledge claims of a discipline.

(Anderson 1986, p. 158)

Applied linguists, as with many others in the applied social sciences, tend to devote their thoughts and energies towards the concrete tasks of ‘designing studies, generating data and analyzing results’ (Anderson 1986, p. 158); however, a consideration of philosophical issues is vital, especially if one is preparing to embark on the methodological journey of grounded theory. Unless and until we raise awareness of the beliefs driving our research activities, we leave the door open for more misunderstanding and conflict. Such dramas are played out daily, where researchers or graduate students and their supervisors discover that while they had been speaking the same language, they had been operating from very different perspectives. Today’s scholarly world is marked by multidimensional understandings, and it is important for applied linguists to not only be better aware of their own sets of beliefs but also to have an informed understanding about what shapes the viewpoints and research strategies of others.

Therefore, anchoring this book to a discussion of research paradigms is necessary for establishing common ground. Only then will it be possible

to begin one's methodological quest, which will entail numerous decisions, debates, and points of divergence. In this chapter, I will encourage you to reflect upon your deep-seated beliefs about research and, more specifically, to think about what it is you hope to accomplish through the methodology of grounded theory.

To those ends, in the spirit of a philosophical 'bricoleur' (Levi-Strauss 1966, Hatton 1989), I will first arrange the materials and tools that will be used to build the framework of this chapter, starting with conceptual metaphors of the type that are commonly used for describing the theoretical nature of research paradigms (e.g. Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005). This will be followed by a consideration of autopoietic theory (Maturana and Varela 1980), which will be used as a way of both organizing the plethora of paradigms, ontologies, epistemologies, research methodologies, and methods that are found in research literature today, and for explaining the interactive nature of what some see as incompatible worldviews, or what in the philosophy of science is called the problem of incommensurability. I will suggest that interplay, rather than incommensurability, might provide a better philosophical base for the multidimensional, qualitative, and mixed-methods approaches already adopted by many teacher-researchers in AL, and by those outside of applied linguistics who currently use the methodology of grounded theory.

## Paradigms and conceptual metaphors

The concept of paradigm and its influence to shape the nature of research inquiry became a household word through Thomas Kuhn's, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1962/1996). Kuhn's work, while groundbreaking, was also ambiguous to the point that vigorous debate erupted around how to more clearly define the term (Masterman 1970, Eckberg and Hill 1979, Gage 1989, Berkenkotter 1991, Goles and Hirschheim 2000). In the aftermath, Guba and Lincoln (1998, p. 200) successfully crystalized Kuhn's thoughts by explaining research paradigms as

a set of *basic beliefs* (or metaphysics) that deals with the ultimates or first principles. It represents a *worldview* that defines, for its holder, the nature of the 'world,' the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts, as, for example, cosmologies and theologies do.

This invariably leads to the use of religious or cosmological metaphors (Bowie 1993, pp. 5–9, Guba and Lincoln 1998, Richards 2003, p. 33). Morgan (1983, p. 602) explains that this happens because, at a conceptual level, 'metaphor makes meaning in a primal way; its role is not just embellishment'. Metaphorical language is theoretical. It stimulates analytical and creative possibilities. While the tension between the analytic and the creative does present the potential for difficulties, especially since the creative aspects

of metaphor ‘can also become distortions, as the way of seeing through a metaphor becomes a way of *not* seeing’ (Morgan 1997b, p. 5), so long as the potential for misrepresentation is kept in mind and the intent of the writer is understood, metaphors serve as the power tools of theoretical framework construction (Wood 2002, p. 11).

My conceptual metaphor for explaining the quiet gravitas of research paradigms is found in the cosmological phenomenon of a protostar (Figure 1.1). Protostars are swirling masses of dust and gas that emit a faint glow as growing gravitational forces cause hydrogen to coalesce and burn. Because it is still in the process of development, the protostar gives off more light than heat. Its greatest power at this time is in the unseen gravitational force exerted over the bands of gas and particulate matter spiraling around at different speeds in relation to their distance from the center (Clark 1999, Klessen 2001). The symbolism here is evocative of Kuhn’s description of paradigms as being ethereal, while at the same time providing, when viewed from a distance, a discernible form to the research of social scientists (Kuhn 1962/1996, pp. 107–110).

Closest to the gravimetric center of paradigm is the band of ontology – the region most directly influenced by paradigms where the very nature of reality is defined. Ontological discussions are given meaning based on the common paradigm around which they orbit; even though proponents of a particular ontology may use different words to give linguistic form to

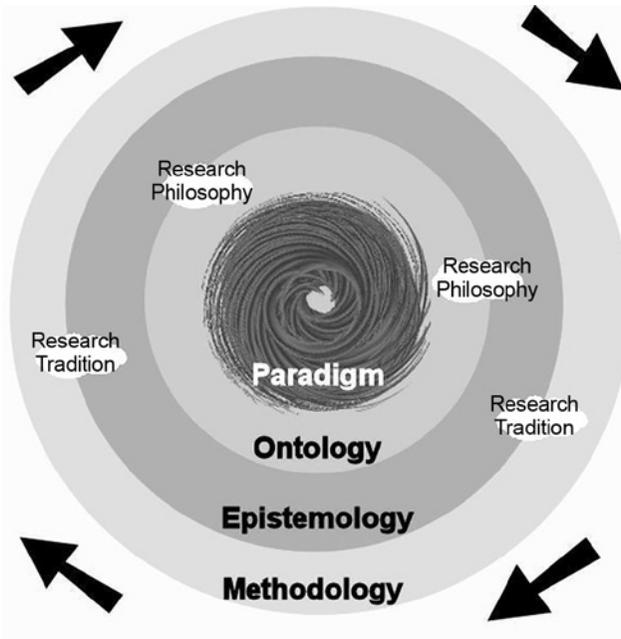


Figure 1.1 Metaphor of a Paradigmatic System of Thought

their thoughts, commonly held assumptions about the nature of what is real are fundamental to the creation of their research philosophies. Mostly within this band are found research philosophies, which, like the denser dust clouds circling a protostar, dissipate after time or grow after absorbing smaller clouds around them. This can be seen in the social sciences, where once influential research philosophies, such as that of symbolic interactionism, disappear after its main tenets have been absorbed by other, similar systems for construing reality (Fine 1993). Research philosophies put most of their emphasis on ontology, but also touch on issues related to epistemology as they seek to explain the relationship between the two (Gingell 1999, p. 172). Ontological beliefs exert a discreet pull on what research philosophies treat as useful knowledge.

Further away from the paradigmatic center is the band of epistemology. The intellectual material here orbits at a different speed, thus symbolizing my belief and those expressed by other philosophers of science (Bhaskar 1989, Cupchik 2001) that ontology and epistemology, while certainly held together by the power of paradigm, do not necessarily correspond exactly to one another, thus resulting in research philosophies sharing similar ontological beliefs, but disagreeing on what can be known about this reality. When researchers are open to this realization, points of overlap with other paradigmatic 'systems' along the ontological level are formed. It is at this key point of intersection that we begin to understand possible reasons for the diversity that is observed in social science research.

Out of these articulated beliefs about the nature of reality and knowledge emerge research traditions. Burrell and Morgan (1979/2005, p. ix) use similar metaphorical language to mine by describing these as 'rival perspectives within the same paradigm or outside its bounds appear[ing] as satellites defining alternative points of view'. Richards (2003, p. 12) notes that they are 'a historically situated approach to research covering generally recognized territory and employing a generally accepted set of research methods'. Laudan (1977, p. 81) adds that research traditions contain 'a set of general assumptions about the entities and processes in a domain of study, and about the appropriate methods to be used for investigating the problems and constructing the theories in that domain'. While research philosophies focus more on ontology than epistemology, I maintain with Herne and Setälä (2004, p. 72), who summarized Laudan's (1996) continued development of the term, that a research tradition focuses more on epistemology and methodology, and less on ontology. Action research, case studies, or grounded theory are examples of qualitative research traditions, and are used in order to explore the epistemological concerns of a particular academic community (Berg 2004, pp. 306–307, Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 18).

This is distinct from the additional band, which I have labeled more generally as 'methodology'. Like epistemologies, methodologies associated with certain research traditions can become diffused and mixed with other research traditions later on (Figure 1.2). This is why some research

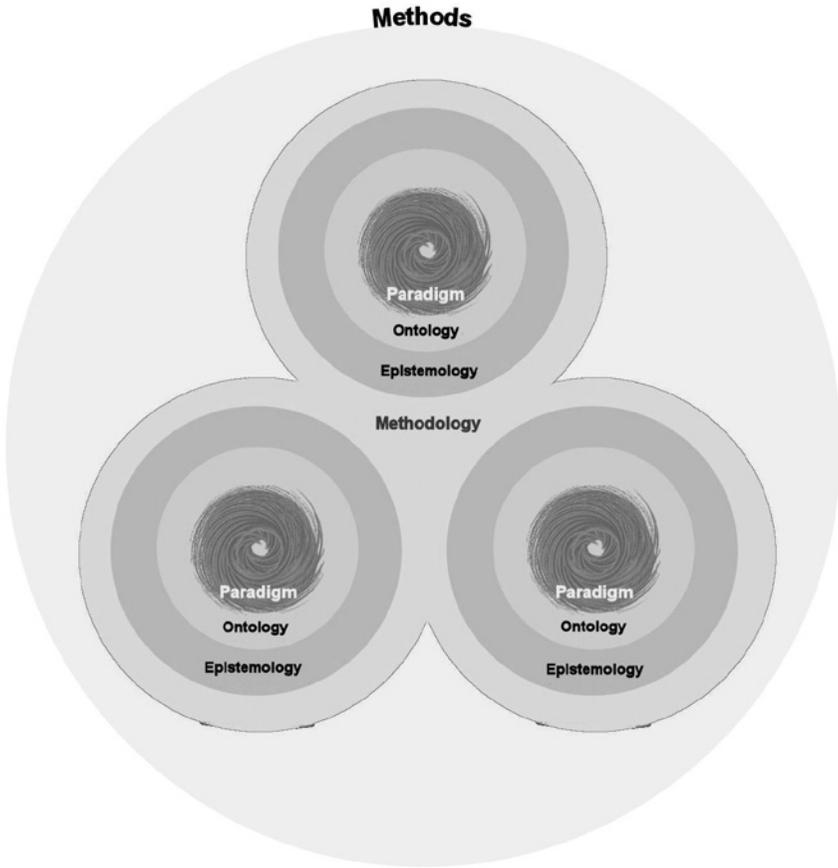


Figure 1.2 Interplay of Methodologies and Methods in Research Paradigm Clusters

traditions inspired by different epistemologies may employ virtually identical methodologies (Richards 2003, pp. 13–14), albeit for very different purposes. And, again, using my cosmological metaphor, methods act very much like the material found on the far reaches of a stellar system or cluster of protostars. Methods can be drawn into the service of other methodologies and research traditions. This eclecticism can be seen, for example, where coding methods often associated with grounded theory are used with other traditions such as case studies, action research, or ethnography (Heath et al. 2008). Therefore, academic discourse, methodologies, methods, thought experiments, and research investigations exist in systems of paradigmatic belief that are marked by continuous interaction. Symbolically, like the particulate matter in orbit around a protostar, new ideas, practices, and insights are constantly colliding and interacting with each other to form new knowledge.

### **The issue of incommensurability**

This perspective differs from those who believe that some methods and approaches are incompatible with certain research paradigms (Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005, Hughes 1990, Lincoln and Guba 2000). According to this view, methodologies as well as methods should be faithful to their paradigmatic heritage. Hughes (1990, p. 11) and Connell, Connell, Lynch, and Waring (2001) are among those who argue that paradigms run hierarchically, starting from the level of paradigm and working down to the level of method. This line of thinking supposes that research methods and methodologies are structured by one's epistemology and ontology. Research methods are treated as preset packages that should not be used unless one understands and accepts the original metaphysical beliefs used to create them (Clarke 2005, p. xxxiii). Attempts at mixing methods is disparaged as 'slurring' (Cutcliffe 2000), because their association with different paradigms result in the generation of fundamentally incompatible bodies of data (Brannen 1992, pp. 15–16).

However, even Kuhn, who himself was also a strong proponent of incommensurability, believed in periods of overlap, where one paradigm slowly fades as another becomes ascendant (Kuhn 1962/1996, p. 85). Schultz and Hatch (1996) have built on this notion, calling for paradigm interplay, which allows for shared meanings to emerge from the interchange between paradigm models. Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 5) have also suggested similar ideas, concluding that 'multiple overlaps' exist within the paradigms that inform the methodologies of social inquiry (cf. Angen 2000, p. 379). My metaphorical framework also implies that interplay is possible, but that it is necessary in order for us to develop a broader understanding of what is happening around us. This is made more apparent when viewed through the perspective of autopoietic theory.

### **The autopoiesis of research paradigms**

During the 1970s, philosophers of biology Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela proposed a theory describing the self-producing and self-constructing nature of living things (Maturana 1975, Maturana and Varela 1987, Cuff et al. 2006, p. 108). 'Autopoiesis' is Greek for 'self-generation', and Maturana defined an autopoietic system as

a composite unity whose organization can be described as a closed network of productions of components that through their interactions constitute the network of productions that produce them, and specify its extension by constituting its boundaries in their domain of existence.

(Maturana 1987, p. 349, in Mingers 2002, p. 294)

As a philosophical concept, autopoiesis has been proposed as a way to understand processes taking place within human cognition and social interaction

(Maturana and Varela 1980). Maturana and Varela's theory was then modified by the physicist and systems theorist Frijof Capra, who created the notion of *autopoietic networks* (Capra 1996, pp. 162–168). Capra theorized that the notions of structure, pattern, and process operated in constant interaction within a dynamic framework, which in turn generates and maintains biological life. Capra (1996, p. 172) believed autopoietic networks could be applied metaphorically to describe the nature of human cognition and the development of differing systems of philosophical thought. This point was taken up by various theorists on social interaction, discourse, and communication (Brans and Rossbach 1997, Arnoldi 2001, Luhmann 2001, Cuff et al. 2006, p. 107) whose work has influenced some in AL (Crookes 1997, Morgan 1997a).

It was at this point that researchers Sid Lowe at Kingston University, London, and Adrian Carr from the University of Western Sydney (Lowe and Carr 2003, Lowe et al. 2004) proposed that the interrelationship between research paradigms could be illustrated through the autopoietic functions of structure, pattern, and process. This was a stroke of brilliance, as organizing research paradigms in this way helps to summarize the massive corpus of competing paradigmatic models that emerged during the heated 'Paradigm Wars' of the late twentieth century (Gage 1989, Berkenkotter 1991). Let us now look at research paradigms through this lens before applying these concepts to our philosophical framework.

### *Paradigms of structure*

There are many labels for paradigms of structure in the literature, with the most common being positivism. The ontology associated with this paradigm cluster is realism, which in its most basic form is known as naive or empirical realism. This states that a separate natural and social world exists 'out there' independent of us or our ability to perceive it. Through the right methods, reality can be discovered (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 165, Gall et al. 2003, p. 14).

The epistemology of the paradigms of structure is objectivist, meaning that truth exists and that knowledge of the truth can be discovered empirically. The role of the researcher is to transmit knowledge of the truth free of any value statements (Hutchinson 1988, p. 124). The thinking here is deductive, and research is designed either to prove or disprove hypotheses, thereby validating the development of truthful theories.

The methodology of social research traditionally associated with the paradigms of structure is usually quantitative in nature. Interviews or observational data are considered unquantifiable and unreliable, unless the data can be placed in a replicable matrix where discreet items can be counted or otherwise validated (Babbie 2004, p. 396). In the words of one adherent to this paradigm, 'There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0' (Miles and Huberman 1994, p. 40). Hard data emerges from removing variables through structured sets of widely accepted methods,

such as statistical studies or cross-sectional surveys. Truth is found in quantity, and for that reason, discovering overall trends in large populations is seen as more valid than what can be learned from studies with smaller samples (Bryman 2001, pp. 284–285, Leedy and Ormrod 2001, pp. 193–194, Cohen et al. 2003, pp. 169–171).

### *Paradigms of pattern*

This paradigm cluster studies the emergence of repeated activities and discourse within a socially constructed world. Human behavior is believed to emanate from a dynamic reality formed from multiple perspectives. Potter's (1996, p. 14) review identifies ten terms that are synonymous with this paradigm, some of them being interpretivism, qualitative paradigm, naturalism, phenomenology, humanism, hermeneutic, and post-positivism. Regardless of the label, Sciarra (1999, pp. 40–41) states that they share strikingly similar features.

The ontology of these paradigms tends towards idealism, which states that an external reality, apart from a mind to perceive it, does not exist. The world is 'in there' – that is, in the mind of the one who sees and thinks about what is happening. The mind is not the only source of reality construction: there is something 'out there', but ultimately, it cannot be perceived by observation alone (Guelke 1976, p. 170). Shared reality takes place through the creation of socially constructed symbols. Locke explains that social reality

is not a given. It is built up over time through shared history, experience and communication so that what is taken for 'reality' is what is shared and taken for granted as to the way the world is to be perceived and understood.

(2005, p. 9)

Despite gradations of the finer details, the belief in reality as a mental construct is an important tenet common to all of these ontologies.

Epistemologically, this paradigm is interpretivist in nature. Knowledge is believed to be shaped by the values and worldviews of like-minded groups of individuals (Moore 1989, p. 880, Michell 2003, p. 17). Knowledge is intersubjective and created through an ever-evolving consensus between the participants and researcher (Lincoln and Guba 2000, p. 165). Researchers operating from this paradigm are required to be critically self-aware – a practice known as reflexivity. Instead of deductively testing preexisting theories, interpretivist researchers reflexively induce new theoretical concepts that occur out of their interaction with the data. They attempt to reconstruct new understandings into a narrative discussing the possible 'whys' and 'hows' of the phenomenon being studied (Ritchie 2004, pp. 28–29).

Research methodologies in this paradigm are as much an art as a science, since social reality is viewed as fluid and emergent (Bryman 2001). This

results in the flexible use of multiple methodologies. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 3) describe the researcher as one who tinkers about and ‘uses the tools of his or her methodological trade, deploying whatever strategies, methods or empirical materials as are at hand’. The focus of the research project is less predetermined in the beginning, but over time, researchers explore various avenues of inquiry and abandon others as dead ends. Mixed methods are used to investigate social phenomena, and the researcher can change directions if serendipitous events uncover issues that go to the heart of understanding the study. Methodologies, as explained by Potter (1996), are usually qualitative in nature. There is a preference for unstructured interviews, reflective journaling, and observational techniques.

### *Paradigms of process*

Process paradigms emphasize the chaos of human interaction and focus on the immediacy of the present without interpreting underlying meanings. Paradigms clustering under this heading call into question the theories, findings, or insights generated from those operating from the paradigms of structure and pattern:

The world is characterized by uncertain dynamic process rather than such certain structures. Process does not involve certainty or foundations and discourse is characterized by paradox, contradiction and indeterminate meaning. Language, as the principle vehicle of the cultural process, is uncertain and indeterminate because it is a process that reflexively contains its own antithesis and upon which meaning is politically imposed. The ‘active’ world is thus a chameleonic process without structure or certainty.

(Lowe 2001, p. 326)

Adherents of process advocate deconstructionism, transgression of traditional academic conventions, anti-establishmentarianism, and call for plurality in critical discourse in order to extricate themselves from what they see as the domination of academic and socioeconomic hegemonies. This paradigmatic position is associated with the postmodernist work of Derrida, Baudrillard, and Foucault, as well as post-structuralism, orientalism, literary theory, and critical social theory (CST).

Ontological questions of reality as neither ‘in there’ nor ‘out there’, but instead *nowhere*, until it is created by a particular group, and even this is historically inconclusive, highly contextualized, and culturally limited (Grenz 1996, p. 7, Scheurich 2001, p. 33). Multiple realities are layered one on top of another, each with something important to add. Researchers uphold epistemological relativism, which in relation to social inquiry, does not refer to cultural, moral, or ethical relativism. Instead, it relates to multiple ways of knowing and doing. These manifold ways do not entail, as opponents claim, that wild fantasy, illegality, sophistry, nihilism, or unbridled eclecticism are

acceptable (Guba 1992, pp. 18–20). Richardson (2000, p. 928) states that a relativist epistemology simply allows researchers

to know ‘something’ without claiming to know everything. Having a partial, local, historical knowledge is still knowing. In some ways, ‘knowing’ is easier, however, because postmodernism recognizes the situational limitations of the knower.

There is an emphasis on *theorizing* as an active process rather than *theory* as a product. This deepens the sense of immediacy and highlights restive, chaotic dynamics constantly at work within the socio-historical milieu. Attention is paid to the ‘variables’ ignored by those dedicated to the paradigms of structure (Clarke 2005, pp. 28–32, Charmaz 2006, p. 128). While those informed by this paradigm avoid the creation of grand, overarching theories, localized theories are possible so long as the process of how the theory was created is understood, and it is recognized that they ‘are not concerned about the ‘truth’ of their research but rather the pragmatic applicability of their results’ (Annells 1996, p. 391). This ‘pragmatic applicability’ of process-based theorizing focuses on text, that ‘worded world’ (Richardson 2000, p. 923) as it appears in a moment in time, before it is once again reworded. Methodological practices employ semiotics and can work to advocate for the social or political liberation of the research participants. Kilduff and Mehra (1997) note that in most cases, researchers guided by a process perspective use the same methodologies associated with the paradigms of pattern, especially ethnographic or phenomenological methods. Researchers of process avoid quantitative methods, though some state that nothing prevents their use (Guba 1992, p. 18, Reinharz 1992, pp. 92–94). The difference is in purposes for why they are implemented. While structure-based researchers seek the verification and/or falsification of theories, and researchers from the paradigms of pattern focus on understanding the social experience of informants in the construction of theories, researchers from the process paradigm both deconstruct and reconstruct in order to encourage a greater awareness of alternative perspectives. By emphasizing the local and the non-generalizable, they question generalized conceptions of truth and problematize language that betrays the bias of scientific, modernist thinking. A summary of the features of structure, pattern, and process paradigms, together with some of their manifestations in AL, is presented in the Table that follows (Table 1.1).

### *Mapping paradigmatic perspectives*

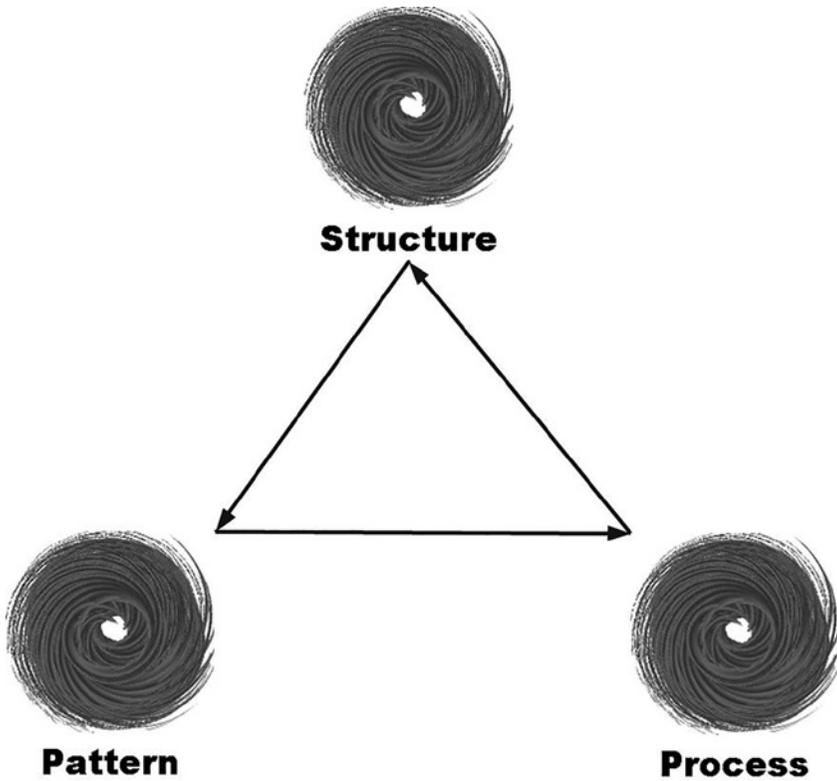
In collaboration with Michael Thomas of the University of Strathclyde, Lowe and Carr developed a technique for ‘paradigmapping’ the philosophical positions of research papers in their field (cf. Lowe et al. 2004). This

Table 1.1 Research Paradigms and Their Implications for TESOL and EAP

	<i>Structure</i>	<i>Pattern</i>	<i>Process</i>
<b>Ontology</b>	<i>Realist:</i> What is ‘out there’ truly exists.	<i>Idealist:</i> Existence is ‘in there’ – i.e. created in the mind.	<i>Ontological Relativism:</i> Multiple realities exist, but might interact via discourse.
<b>Epistemology</b>	<i>Objectivism:</i> Truth is ‘out there’ and can be discovered.	<i>Subjectivism:</i> Truth depends on values and personal constructs that are shared by the community.	<i>Epistemological Relativism:</i> Many standards for locally legitimate knowledge exist, which are based on ephemeral discourse manifested in a historical moment.
<b>Theoretical Stance</b>	<i>Deductive:</i> Theory, hypothesis, observation, and confirmation.	<i>Inductive:</i> Observation, discovery of patterns, hypotheses and theory.	<i>Pragmatic:</i> Outcomes are deemed acceptable by a particular discourse group.
<b>Methodology</b>	Discovering structures for prediction and control.	Understanding emergent patterns for greater insight.	Focusing on immediate processes for deconstruction and reconstruction.
<b>Outcomes in EAP/ TESOL Education and Research</b>	Grammar-translation, data-driven learning, task-based learning, statistical testing.	Humanistic learning, cooperative development, ethnography, action research.	Critical discourse analysis (CDA), deconstruction of the ‘native speaker’, validation of ‘World Englishes’.

heuristic device, aptly named ‘Capra’s Triad’ (Capra 1996, Lowe and Carr 2003, Lowe et al. 2004) (Figure 1.3), was a significant development in autopoietic theory.

However, Lowe and Carr’s (2003) map of paradigmatic positions is static in that it appears to overlook the potential for dynamic interaction. Therefore, as the final part of the philosophical framework that we have been building, I have modified Capra’s Triad to show paradigmatic positions as restive systems of discourse, which share points of epistemological and methodological overlap with other paradigms. I have combined this with the autopoietic flow of structure to patterning, patterning to process, and process back to structure (Figure 1.3). Instead of viewing different paradigms,



*Figure 1.3* Capra's Triad (Modified from Lowe, Carr, and Thomas 2004)

methodologies, and methods as self-enclosed and incommensurable, in this view, paradigms flow cyclically in and out of one another in constant autopoietic interaction. According to this view, different paradigms, with their respective ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies, are not at odds with each other. Neither are they to be seen, as Lincoln and Guba (2000, p. 725) have claimed, like separate religions in competition for new converts. Rather, paradigms of structure, pattern, and process operate as an autopoietic network, each with vital functions contributing to a fuller understanding of a complex, multilayered social reality. Lowe et al. (2005, p. 189) argue,

Structure . . . is merely a manifestation of the 'process' of embodiment of the 'pattern' of organization of a system. As a result, 'structure' is not ontologically 'real' as such, because it is always a reification of process and pattern.

It is through this constant that the existence of the other is both generated and maintained.

## Implications and applications

Far from being some magical mystery tour of mixed metaphors, this framework has important uses for individual researchers, for creating greater balance within scholarly communities, and for understanding the developments taking place concurrently across many disciplines.

On a personal level, the philosophical framework proposed here can help you to map out your personal philosophical position and gain a better idea about issues that would be of interest to you. For graduate students, an autopoietic perspective will also help you to understand more quickly the perspective of your supervisor, of those sitting on ethics committees, and the underlying assumptions that are usually only implied during the oral defense. Teacher-researchers will be able to understand the concerns hiding behind the questions raised at conferences or in feedback on journal submissions.

Within specific academic communities, autopoieticity fosters a space for greater methodological flexibility and openness to other perspectives, and creates the possibility for greater cooperation. With regard to the use of mixed methods, there is little doubt that many teacher-researchers opt for such an approach, but an autopoietic understanding provides a philosophical justification for why it is both possible and helpful. Putting people into different epistemological or methodological boxes and then rejecting those who differ from each other's standards may make for great sport, but it generates more heat than light and creates an imbalance in the overall flow of research inquiry. Instead, Bryman (1992, p. 60) states,

Quantitative research is especially efficient at getting to the 'structural' features of social life, while qualitative studies are usually stronger in terms of 'processual' aspects. These strengths can be brought together in a single study.

Reinterpreting the discussion at the beginning of this chapter autopoietically, the AL community, which has tended to overemphasize the paradigm of structure, has not fully realized that greater openness to and cooperation with researchers of other paradigmatic worldviews represents a fuller expression of the shared search for insight into what is taking place in our classrooms and educational institutions.

To provide an example of how Capra's Triad can be used to understand the wider currents affecting research across disciplines, an early version of Denzin and Lincoln's (2000) seminal paper describes six periods in the history of qualitative research. During what Denzin and Lincoln call the 'traditional period' (1900–1945), qualitative researchers followed a positivist and objectivist point of view that used the language of hard empiricism. During the modernist phase (1945–1970), social scientists shifted from purely objective and deductive qualitative accounts towards more interpretive methods of study, albeit still couched within the language of structural

paradigms and with concerns fixed on creating rigorous methodologies for making qualitative research appear more reliable and valid in the eyes of academia. By the 1970s, many had settled for the uneasy *détente* of tolerating multiple ways of construing social reality, which was the beginning of the next period, the time of blurred genres, which ran until 1986. The crisis of representation and postmodern period from 1986 to 2000 describes how even as they had gained greater acceptance in the academy, qualitative researchers had already started to question not only the values of validity, generalizability, and reliability, which were crucial to positivist researchers, but also the subjective constructions of interpretivist researchers. Their own value-laden assumptions of ethics, rigor, and reflexivity were increasingly problematized. With the criteria of earlier movements being discarded, and new varieties of textual genres being included in sociological studies, the resultant deconstructive movement was distinguished by a struggle for coherence that was surpassed only by the desire of sociologists to stimulate positive change in society. The post-experimental movement that Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 17) state began at the turn of the century sought even further 'to connect their writings to the needs of a free democratic society'. Later versions of Denzin and Lincoln's history of qualitative research have expanded to eight periods of development (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 40), but these changes added little to the original paper. Two of the 'eras' described as being between the years 2000 to 2005 seem to be essentially the same inasmuch as the crisis of postmodernism was part deconstruction and part a search for new meaning. Their eighth era, labeled 'the future', by definition, cannot be evaluated.

Placing Denzin and Lincoln's history within Capra's Triad (Figure 1.4), one can see the movement from structure towards pattern and then onwards to deconstructive processing. It not only aids in understanding the reasons for earlier debates within the academic community but also makes sense of current issues while suggesting future developments. For example, since the writing of Denzin and Lincoln's historical treatment of qualitative research, a more recent paper by Denzin (2009) discusses the current effects of an 'audit culture', which is emerging in universities around the world, which are being transformed to emulate neoliberal economic values. Denzin describes how qualitative researchers are now being forced to engage in 'evidence-based' research following protocols that support statistically driven experiments. I have interpreted these developments to suggest that the qualitative research community has entered an era that is defined by the paradigms of structure. Our current era is one of neo-empiricism – one where policymakers outside of university systems are seeking to link qualitative research, of which grounded theory is a part, to the standards, values, and worldview found in the paradigms of structure. Time will tell whether this is a healthy flow towards later insights, as the research community begins to once again study and interpret patterns of behavior, or if it is symptomatic of an 'autoimmune syndrome' within the community – one where the fixation on one paradigm causes the academic community

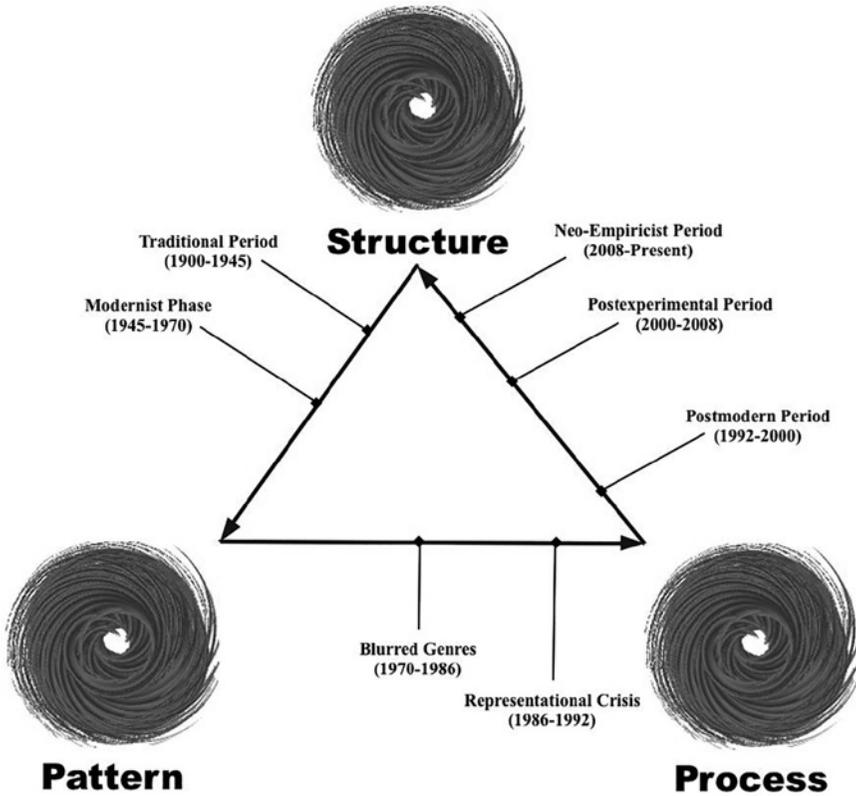


Figure 1.4 Autopoietic Movement within the History of Qualitative Research

to begin attacking itself, as it did during the years of the Paradigm Wars. Structure is necessary for the maintenance of both living organisms and philosophical perspectives within academic disciplines, but when paradigmatic systems of thought are over-structured and over-focused on replication, then efforts at verification and the quantification of truth runs the risk of becoming hardened, inflexible, and petrified. Multiple perspectives are necessary for studying issues related to second language learning. Fine (1993, p. 65) argues that ‘diversity produces intellectual ferment’ and this will be a point that will underwrite this book.

### Grounding methodological practices with philosophical insights

Many in the applied linguistics community draw sustenance from the paradigms of structure. Therefore, those interested in pursuing a qualitative and mixed-methods line of inquiry, or who are drawn to interpretive theorization of the type found in the grounded theory methodology, must be

prepared to work far harder to make their case to colleagues who may mistrust alternative forms of research. Taking the road less traveled requires one having to

entertain complex philosophical debates about what constitutes reality, argue against relativistic concerns, [and] debate epistemological questions about the relationship between the knower and what can be known, before even getting to methodological issues.

(Goulding 2005, p. 17)

Greater awareness is needed with regard to these issues, for as Burrell and Morgan state, this will give you a firm grounding and better understanding as to where you fit within the flux and flow of research activity going on around you. It will open your eyes to the potential contribution of your work and that of your colleagues:

It is important that a theorist be fully aware of the assumptions upon which his own perspective is based. Such an appreciation takes him outside the realm of his own familiar domain. It requires that he become familiar with paradigms which are not his own. Only then can he look back and appreciate the precise nature of his starting point.

(Burrell and Morgan 1979/2005, p. ix)

It is for these reasons that I have used both metaphorical language and autopoietic theory to create a philosophical framework for understanding research paradigms, and for justifying interplay between paradigms, methodologies, and methods. An awareness of these concepts will empower the decisions you will make later during data collection, interpretation, and justification. This will also be apparent in the next chapter, where we will shift our attention to understanding the early development of the grounded theory methodology.