

INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL GILE

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Introduction

When *Sendebarr* proposed that I should interview Daniel Gile, many thoughts came to my mind. First of all I was aware that it is a very special honour to get to interview the man who without doubt is the most influential personality in interpreting research since it began some decades ago. But this honour also implied a great responsibility – that of designing an interview that would be worthy of its subject. I know I haven't remotely achieved this, but the attempt has been worthwhile for the personal pleasure it has meant for me, given the deep appreciation and admiration I feel for Daniel Gile, both professionally and personally. And now that I've chosen to confide my fears with the reader, I should also say that I am conscious of the risk of appearing adulatory. Yet nothing is further from my intention or disposition. I have simply chosen to act as the representative of many other researchers and to reflect certain facts – only a few – which illustrate why Daniel Gile has remained at the top for so long and on his own merits. I feel it is right and necessary to do this, and that not to do so would in fact have been more egotistic.

A schematic presentation of Daniel Gile might be as follows: trained in mathematics (among other subjects), translation and interpreting, professor of ESIT at the University of Sorbonne in Paris and honorary or associate professor in various universities, among them the Shanghai International Studies University. Guest speaker at countless academic events in universities throughout the world, editor of CIRIN, that invaluable vehicle for the dissemination of scientific production in interpreting (<http://cirinandgile.com/>). President of the EST from 2004 up to the very recent past, member of the editorial board of such prestigious journals as *Interpreting* and *Target*, member of the AIIC, etc, etc.

He is also the author of over 200 publications. But overriding the question of quantity, is the quality of his work. During his time as a researcher, Daniel Gile has provided us with essential studies and reference works, in the strict sense of the term. I'll mention just three monographs here: *Regards sur la recherche en interprétation de conférences* (1995, Lille, Presses Universitaires de Lille); *Basic Concepts and Models for Translator and Interpreter Training* (1995, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company – revised edition published 2009) and *La traduction. La comprendre, l'apprendre* (2005, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France), translated into Chinese and Arabic. All of these books are milestones and have laid the foundations of the discipline.

If I had to make a brief general assessment of his contribution to the field, I would emphasize his long-time role as driver of interpreting research, not only from the thematic point of view but – still more important – methodologically. It is possible that intuitive ideas about interpreting would have eventually, little by little,

taken the shape of scientific investigation. But it is certain that without Daniel Gile this would not have happened in the way that it has, or in such a short space of time, in a discipline which may be considered still relatively young and in which the research continues to be done mainly by the professionals themselves.

All that I've said up to now is widely known and acknowledged by most people. The same may be true of the following, but it's important to emphasize this quality too, since it could go unobserved among so many others. I refer to his other, human dimension, which combined with the professional one is surely what has fuelled his interest and enthusiasm for projects undertaken in the geographical 'periphery' – whether academic or generational. Or to put it another way, for efforts made outside the 'establishment'. In this way, he has helped to forge one of the basic characteristics of contemporary interpreting research – that it's not exclusively in the hands of a more or less predetermined nucleus.

And as a small tribute to his dedication, and to the enthusiasm and inspiration he transmits, I've proposed that two young interpreting researchers – the new generation – should also have the opportunity to ask a question. In this way, the interview unites the past and the present with the future of interpreting research – as does Daniel Gile.

Interview

Ángela Collados (ÁC): Daniel, let's speak of your beginnings - trained in mathematics and later moving to languages. How did that come about? I would certainly say it's unusual...

Daniel Gile (DG): Actually, I never studied languages, except Japanese, rather late. As a child and teenager, I lived in several countries and picked up a few languages. My schoolmates predicted that I would have a career linked to languages, but I rejected the idea and turned to mathematics, which I enjoyed very much. Nevertheless, after one year of mathematics at the university, I decided to also study sociology in parallel. I think I felt a need to also remain in touch with something less abstract and more human than mathematical entities, and the combination of both may explain the path in which I found myself later. By the way, even though in sociology I never went beyond the first degree, contact with the discipline has left me with an awareness of sociological aspects of phenomena which influences strongly the way I analyse the Translation Studies scene today.

While I was studying, I was fortunate enough to be able to earn my living as a translator (untrained). When I graduated and started working as a mathematician in a company, I found that my job entailed too much routine and not enough creativity and decided that I wanted to explore other avenues. This meant doing more advanced studies in mathematics and studying Japanese in parallel, but also working

as a freelance translator to pay for the luxury of engaging in further studies. In third year Japanese there was an introductory course in interpreting. I found the exercise interesting, was introduced to an ESIT instructor who encouraged me to enrol in the conference interpreting programme at that school, which I did and eventually found myself in the marketplace as a conference interpreter, something which I had certainly not planned...

ÁC: And so you came to interpreting, a new transition. Mathematics, Sociology, languages and interpreting – it seems almost as if the step to research was inevitable.

DG: Perhaps. But I know two other colleagues in France who studied mathematics before becoming interpreters, and they are not interested in research. I think that what really caused me to get interested in research into translation and interpreting was a combination of curiosity...and a triggering event. In 1979, when I graduated from ESIT, I was offered to teach scientific and technical translation at the department of Japanese and Korean at INALCO, the Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales in Paris. At ESIT, I had been exposed to Interpretive Theory and knew that training methods for interpreting were based on this conceptual framework. I asked to see the head of the translation section and asked him about his training methods and conceptual framework for translator training. From his answers, I realized he had none (I hasten to say that this has changed since). I then undertook to develop my own methods, which required some research. Once I was into it, I found the exercise fascinating and continued doing research, with papers, then a first doctoral dissertation, then more studies and papers, then a second doctoral dissertation...all for fun, because I had no need for the degrees or publications and was not thinking of an academic career. There must be some masochistic streak in me. Or perhaps a sadistic streak, looking at it from the point of view of those who have to read my writings?

ÁC: I won't accept that you consider either my colleagues or me as masochists! And by way of revenge, here's a rather more complicated question: which of your facets as researcher, teacher and interpreter has provided you with most satisfaction up till now?

DG: There is a lot of satisfaction in each. Freelance conference interpreting is often interesting. You see important events as they are happening, you experience the excitement of meeting famous thinkers, artists, heads of State, religious personalities and of being their voice, and you constantly discover new fields, new knowledge, new ideas. For people who are curious about the world, this is very gratifying. On the other hand, as an interpreter, I suffer regularly from the feeling that my performance was not up to what I think it should be, that I omitted bits of information or made

errors or produced output which was linguistically clumsy, and I do not think this feeling of inadequacy will ever go away.

Research is almost an addiction for me. People around me, including my grandfather, called me an 'intellectual' early on. I did not really understand what they were saying, but I suppose this refers to the fact that I tend to go off into (useless) analyses about things when normal human beings take the experience as it comes and enjoy it or suffer through it more naturally without feeling the need to cut it up into pieces and then examine each part and its relation to other parts with lots of 'hows' and 'whys'. Well, at university, this happens to be what you are expected to do. I am very fortunate in that what I have been writing as a result of my compulsive behaviour has received favourable reactions from the academic community, so I really cannot complain.

But teaching is perhaps what I enjoy most, because it combines reflection and human interaction in which I am allowed to delude myself into thinking that I am actually helping someone. I have often reservations about my interpreting performance and about the scope and depth of my research, but generally, I feel that I can achieve to a reasonable extent the more modest goals of training: help students understand something, help them unfold their potential, open their minds to new ideas, or simply encourage them.

Of course, training researchers combines the pleasure of both research and training...provided I can actually help. This is not always the case, perhaps because there is not enough opportunity to do hands-on exercises to make sure that principles have been understood and can be implemented by the trainee researchers. It is easier to help student translators and student interpreters.

ÁC: How does it feel to know that some of your contributions, for example the Effort Model, are helping teachers throughout the world to improve their training of new interpreters?

DG: I am thrilled and consider myself very lucky.

ÁC: Many years ago now you launched the IRN, now known as CIRIN. This unique network helps to ensure that research interpreters are informed of what is being done about what all over the world – the precondition of all research, as it were. How did the idea come about?

DG: You are far too generous in your assessment. Anyway, in the 1970s and 1980s, there were several centres where interesting work was being done but there was little sharing, little critical confrontation of ideas, as communication channels were monopolized by a few major players who had a rather protectionistic attitude. I thought that this was an unhealthy situation which prevented us from progressing, and that everyone would gain from more circulation of information. I was encouraged

to act when, in November 1986, at a wonderful conference organized by SSLMIT Trieste in Italy, with wide participation of interpreter trainers from many schools, I saw how excited they were to find out about each other's existence and views, which were not necessarily in line with prevalent thinking at the time.

I thought that if there was no institutional dissemination of information, perhaps a private initiative, in the form of a network, could do the job. I talked about it to a few colleagues. They were sceptical about the feasibility of the project, but agreed to give it a chance by cooperating with me. I would write a bulletin which I would send to a small number of national nodes, they would photocopy it and distribute it within their respective countries. This type of network structure would make cost-sharing possible, as each of us would only have to send out a few dozen copies and we could reach a total population of several hundred people.

Well, we were lucky. It worked, and the network grew rapidly and has been providing much information, thanks to the contribution of colleagues in various countries. In December 2010, CIRIN Bulletin number 41 will be out. It will mark the 20th anniversary of the network. Of course, I think that we are now in a new era, where information is circulating quite well, and there is no real need for CIRIN. Nevertheless, I like to think that the network is still useful, again thanks to the much appreciated contribution of colleagues from many countries, who kindly take the trouble to send in information about publications written in languages that most of us cannot read.

ÁC: How would you assess the advances in interpreting research? What are its main strengths and weaknesses at the present time?

DG: We have come a long way in research into interpreting since the 1960s and 1970s. I will not attempt a systematic analysis of what has been going on, but can perhaps make a couple of comments.

First of all, we have far less prescription and far more exploration and description, including more empirical studies, which is good news for people who want to do research.

Secondly, there is much more communication between researchers from different countries and from different branches of Interpreting Studies. There is also more communication between them and researchers from Translation Studies as a whole, and we have started seeing more studies which involve both translation and interpreting. There is also systematic interest in theories and methods from other disciplines, though there is still very little export of our ideas, methods and findings into other disciplines.

Thirdly, the field of interpreting is now firmly established as far wider than conference interpreting, which is also a good thing, because the social contribution of interpreting is much greater in community interpreting and the like than in conference interpreting.

Fourthly, there are many more of us than 30 or 40 years ago, which provides us with more opportunities for exchanges, ideas, motivation, and eventually meaningful results.

As to weaknesses, there are two points which strike me:

The first is that we are still weak as regards the logic of research, i.e. with respect to design and inferencing. We still tend to be deficient in the logic of our design of empirical studies and to make claims that are far from justified on the basis of logic or findings. Such phenomena are even found in the research of people viewed as big names in our discipline. As long as we have not overcome this weakness, even advanced technology, which is being used increasingly, will not take us where we want to go.

The second is that we still suffer from chronic guru-itis and general-ideas-itis. Instead of focusing on the work and on specific findings, we cling to general ideas and look up to people who are good speakers, perhaps powerful personalities, perhaps authors of many texts, but not necessarily well-trained researchers, to come and lecture us about what is right and what isn't. I think this has adverse consequences. Firstly, it sends the wrong message to newcomers to the field: research, at least research as I was taught to think of it, is about meticulous work, not about general ideas or about convincing audiences with well-articulated presentations as opposed to evidence and logic. Secondly, it damages our credibility in the eyes of colleagues from neighbouring disciplines who have stricter research standards.

AC: What can be done to improve the situation?

DG: I think that with respect to weaknesses in the logic of research, the situation is improving gradually as more people are being trained in research, often with some input from more established disciplines. I am thinking in particular of one colleague from Geneva who apparently went through research training with psychologists. When I met him recently, I had the encouraging feeling, when talking about technical issues, that he had a good grasp of methodological principles which many colleagues who have not had the training fail to understand. (My apologies if this sounds arrogant; I am referring to those aspects in which I was trained myself, and do not make the (ridiculous) claim to have a good grasp of all research methods).

Perhaps it is possible to go a bit faster than natural evolution would take us in the direction of rigorous logic through some specific measures, such as organizing workshops, perhaps two days of practical exercises, on research project planning and critical reading of research. I think this would have good chances of raising the awareness of trainees, and perhaps even be enough to improve their own practice, though I find that it often takes some time before raised awareness and declarative knowledge turn into a skill that is actually applied successfully.

With respect to what I perceive as excessive importance being given to general ideas and to gurus, this may be a negative side-effect of the close relationship

Interpreting Studies now has with the Translation Studies community as a whole. (I hasten to say that I think this close relationship is a very good thing, but even good things can have unwanted side-effects). You know that the gurus of Translation Studies, those who are most widely quoted, are known for their general ideas, not for their empirical research. Things may change over time, but there is little we can do about it.

ÁC: Without doubt, the new generations will help, the young researchers whom you have always motivated, showing interest in what they are doing and providing help when needed – something especially laudable. But how do you manage to maintain that enthusiasm and transmit it to others?

DG: I like the idea (or the delusion?) that I can contribute something to someone. And I see many young colleagues whom I admire for their personality and their enthusiasm, and often for the effort they put into their work. So what probably happens is some kind of interaction dynamics. I am inspired by them, and perhaps the fact that I appreciate what they are and what they do is incentive for them as well. By the way, I am sure that this is what makes you such a great contributor to research in Granada, Ángela: not only do you do your own research, but you truly appreciate the younger members of your team, and they feel it, which provides motivation to both sides and has resulted in the remarkable output of your team.

ÁC: Thank you, Daniel. In fact I'm convinced that the young contribute more than they receive, and help us to stay a bit younger too! And it is from the young that the future gurus – in the good sense of the word – of interpreting will arise. For this reason, and in view of what I said in the previous question, I've taken the liberty of conceding 'official entry' to this interview to two young researchers, in representation of many others, who have each prepared a question for you. The first comes from Olalla García Becerra:

OG: You are in contact with young researchers in various countries; what differences have you noticed in the focus of their research?

DG: Interesting question. There may indeed be cultural differences. One is tempted to think that there is more of an empirical research tradition in Nordic countries, more humanities-like studies in South-European countries.... In a recent doctoral dissertation, which I found particularly interesting, Karen Bennett talks about the traditional influence of Catholicism in the Iberian peninsula, with a certain writing style, and the influence of the Protestant religion in English-speaking countries and its associated writing style.

But the evidence does not necessarily corroborate the idea that differences are strongly country-specific or culture-specific. Other factors come in and are perhaps much

stronger. I am thinking of local opportunities and local personalities. For instance, in Trieste, in the 1980s, Laura Gran wished to go in the direction of interdisciplinarity and happened to have in her university a neuropsychologist called Franco Fabbro, who was also interested in cooperating with interpreters. As a result, for over a decade, there were many studies from Trieste in a particular direction. When Franco Fabbro left, it was more or less over. In Granada, thanks to the enthusiastic and powerful leadership of Ángela Collados, you have been working on interpreting quality in a particular way and have produced a remarkably consistent body of research. In Japan, broadcast interpreters have been very active in the national interpreting and translation research association JAIT, so there are opportunities for research on broadcast interpreting. In Spain again, community translation and interpreting are becoming important because of geopolitical factors, and when some instructors take the lead in a university, they can inspire their students to follow. In Forlì, some research on pauses in interpreting followed Peter Mead's doctoral dissertation on the same topic, and the remarkable body of work on corpora from the European Parliament which has been done by Italian colleagues could inspire more research (Claudio Bendazzoli has just finished a doctoral dissertation on the subject). There does not seem to be anything country-specific about these foci.

Moreover, because of extensive international communication which is constant nowadays, with conferences and publications, researchers have the opportunity to see what is done elsewhere, and the influence of national cultures is becoming less relevant in determining what type of research will be done in a given university, at least in the field of Interpreting Studies.

AC: The second question comes from Rafael Barranco-Droege:

RB: In recent decades there have been several empirical studies in the field of interpreting studies, with a view to providing greater scientific rigour. Given the degree of complexity of the social sciences as an object of study, to what extent do you think the empirical method has fulfilled expectations?

DG: An important question. Yes, as you say, human behaviour is complex, with multiple interactions between related factors and high variability. In terms of empirical research, I would think of two major implications: the first is that a lot of studies, including many replications, are necessary before one can hope to find convincing answers to finer questions, and the second is that often, one will find no answer other than variability. Expectations need to be realistic: I think it is not unreasonable to expect empirical research to confirm or disconfirm the truth of some general assumptions about interpreting (or translation), but in view of the complexity and variability of translation and interpreting phenomena and of the small number of empirical studies conducted so far, one should not expect revolutionary discoveries that will change the way we work. I would even say that we should not expect em-

irical research to provide immediate answers to finer questions having to do with topics such as interpreting cognition, quality perception, directionality etc. What we can expect is convincing evidence that there is enough variability in interpreting performance, in quality perception, in speech difficulty etc. to conclude that set ideas and rules about such issues which have been claimed to be ‘truths’ validated by experience are not (yet) backed up by solid evidence. What we can also expect from empirical research is the possibility to assess the amplitude of variability, and to provide descriptive data of various kinds. So the question of whether empirical research has fulfilled expectations really depends on the expectations and on whether they were reasonable in view of existing resources and constraints.

ÁC: Young people and the future – the link between the two brings me to my next question: how do you envisage the future of interpreting research?

DG: This is really a difficult question. I can perhaps identify present trends such as more interdisciplinarity, more use of technology, more work on corpora, more cooperative work with research on written translation, more work on community interpreting, but it is difficult to see beyond, into the future. It would be easier if there was a solid research tradition and if we had many research centres, because there would then be a stable basis for a continuous movement of investigation, but we still depend too much on individual leaders, on their interests and on their ability to inspire and motivate younger colleagues to do research, and it is difficult to predict how the winds will blow in a few years’ time. Even the emergence of new theories and the spectacular development of new technology do not guarantee that there will be enough interpreting researchers to actually make use of them in a meaningful way.

What I can tell you is what I would like to see: more rigorous research, which need not necessarily be more sophisticated, a systematic policy of encouraging replications and of instilling in young researchers the values of simplicity and careful logical thinking, more empirical research on simple questions which are relevant and important but do not necessarily lead directly to thorough understanding of interpreting (or translation) cognition, interpreting or translation quality, what makes interpreters tick, the effect of translation and interpreting on society. We have got to accept the idea that in Translation Studies and more generally in the human and social sciences, empirical research is a long, collective trek with modest achievements before it leads to major discoveries...except occasionally, if one is particularly lucky.

Let me add that I think we are making headway: I see quite a number of young researchers doing empirical research with much investment and the required caution. I see quite a few in Spain, where you seem to have been able to create a special atmosphere which stimulates active, friendly cooperation (I admire in particular what I see in Granada), some in Italy (in particular in Forlì), some in Poland, some in Denmark, some in Israel, some in Vienna, some in Japan, some in Korea, just

to cite a few examples. Looking at what these younger people do makes me more optimistic than looking at the ways of my generation of researchers.

ÁC: Yes, it's easy to be optimistic when the raw material is of such high quality...But to continue about the future – what are your immediate and longer term plans?

DG: If you are talking about important things, I need to take care of a few mundane matters for my daughter and my son, take the garbage out, do some laundry and buy some fruits and vegetables, because the refrigerator is empty.

If you are talking about Translation Studies, I have a couple of ideas. One is to try to help Javier Franco of Alicante, who has been working for many years now on BITRA, an online, free access bibliography of Translation Studies, to make its existence better known and perhaps show how it can be used to do empirical research on Translation Studies as an object of study. I also have another project focusing on quality and a comparison between interpretations of the same speech into French, German and Japanese. A first paper with some modest findings has been accepted and should be published in the near future. I am also trying to improve and extend the Effort Model of simultaneous interpreting for use in signed-language interpreting, with the help of a doctoral student of mine and through contacts with the American signed-language interpreting community, a group of people that I appreciate very much. Actually, at the end of October, I went to San Antonio, Texas, to attend the conference of the CIT, the American 'Conference of Interpreter Trainers' organization, where I met great people and heard and saw very interesting ideas and work, mostly on interpreter training. We have much to learn from them. You may also be aware of an upcoming conference on interpreting quality which promises to be very interesting, in Spain, next year? Since you are one of its main organizers. Having the pleasure of attending it and of listening to reports on new research by colleagues is another project that I am looking forward to...

ÁC: Yes, ten years have passed since the first conference, almost without our noticing...But as you know, I'm also interested in the important things, and that empty fridge you mentioned encourages me to ask a more personal question. What do you do when you're not working? What are your pastimes?

DG: I do spend a lot of time working as an interpreter, teaching, doing research, because I find these activities fascinating. When I am not engaged in work, I spend my time complaining about the government, about the trade unions, about the weather, about myself, or about the fact that I have nothing to complain about. I also like sports. I used to practise Judo very intensely, to do a lot of mountain climbing and skiing. When I can't, I do a lot of walking. I find the physical activity necessary. I love reading as well, and listening to classical music and to jazz, especially when I am very tired. Nothing special, as you can see.

ÁC: *Classical music and jazz, fantastic. And from now on perhaps flamenco as well – recently declared Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Well, I could happily go on with the questions, but I don't want to take up more of your time than I've done already. So here's the last one: what question have I not asked, that I should have asked?*

DG: Perhaps I could think of one if I were a politician trying to get elected. I am grateful and a bit embarrassed when I see all the time you have devoted to this interview. I do have a comment, perhaps: I was very happy to see what happened in Trieste in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and I am again happy to see many things that you do in Granada: I like the interdisciplinarity between interpreting and psychology that gave rise to interesting research a few years ago, I like all the work that you do on interpreting quality, I like your teamwork, what I see of your relations with the students, the spirit of *Sendebar*, and I like and admire many of your staff and young colleagues whom I have had the opportunity to meet over the years. Whenever I come to Granada, I find myself smiling with pleasure at what I see and hear. So keep up the good work.

ÁC: *Many thanks for your kind words. And many thanks as well for devoting your time to us and – above all – for allowing us this insight into your thoughts, opinions and wishes.*