Signed Language Interpreting – a Treasure Trove for Interpreting Studies: An Interview with Daniel Gile

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The II Congress on Interpreting Studies and the III Colloquium on Sign Language Interpreting in Community Contexts: Health, Education & Justice were held online on May 26, 27 and 28, 2021, in a closed platform. As a special guest for the opening of the events, we had the honor of receiving Dr. Daniel Gile, proponent of the Effort Models for conference interpreting.

Dr. Gile is a former mathematician. He completed a PhD on the training of Japanese-French translators and interpreters in 1984, and another, on the difficulties in the transmission of information in simultaneous interpreting in multilingual meetings, in 1989, as well as a post-doctoral dissertation (habilitation) in 1994. He dedicated his entire career to Translation and Interpreting Studies, and influenced the education and training of translators and interpreters with his seminal research. He was a professor at ESIT, Université Paris 3 – Sorbonne Nouvelle, from 2007 to 2013, and became Professor Emeritus at the same university in 2014.

He is the founder of CIRIN (Conference Interpreting Research Information Network), associate editor of *Interpreting* and a member of the

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editorial board of *Target* and other Translation and Interpreting Studies journals. He was the fourth CERA chair professor at KUL Leuven, and a co-founder and third president of EST, the European Society for Translation Studies.

The Congress on Interpreting Studies (CONEI) seeks to shed light on interpreting in different linguistic combinations and/or modalities, bringing together the fields of Interpreting Studies of sign languages and of spoken languages in Brazil. The theoretical and practical discussions involving trainers, interpreters, users and students alike have the ultimate purpose of strengthening the area of Interpreting Studies as a whole.

Professor Daniel Gile's keynote speech, entitled "Signed Language Interpreting, a treasure trove for Interpreting Studies", was the crowning of the organizing committee's efforts to have the two fields come together in a mutual collaboration. The following interview is an attempt to highlight some of the main ideas Prof. Gile conveyed in his inspiring speech.

Diego Barbosa & Raffaella Quental (DB & RQ): Before we begin, could you tell us a little bit about the focus of your current research? What is CIRIN? How did this initiative come about, and what are the most frequent objects of study in the field?

Daniel Gile (DG): These years, I am still focusing on interpreting cognition. I am exploring the constructs of cognitive load and cognitive effort during interpreting, and would like to conduct some experiments to continue testing a few hypotheses linked to the Effort Models. Another focus is exploration of Interpreting Studies from a socio-academic angle, looking at various forces and interactions which shape its development. Which is linked to your two other questions. The birth of CIRIN, or IRTIN as it was called when it was set up in 1990, was my reaction to the lack of information circulation between researchers working on conference interpreting. At that time, one paradigm based on a single theory was powerful (sociologically speaking), and those voices which

investigated conference interpreting with different theories and methods could not be heard – they were practically never cited. With a few colleagues from different countries, we established an independent international network to disseminate information on research being done and published worldwide. Such information was circulated through a Bulletin, which was issued twice a year and sent to national Nodes that forwarded it to their local, national and regional contacts. This made it possible to operate worldwide at a very small cost. Of course, the situation is very different now: research into conference interpreting now complies with the communication norm of scientific research in general, competing theories are known across borders, and the World Wide Web makes the circulation of information much easier in most countries. But colleagues apparently continue to find CIRIN and the CIRIN Bulletin convenient and useful, both because its access is totally open and free of cost and because it contains some information on research reports in languages that may not be easily found in journals. This includes information about unpublished theses and dissertations. Incidentally, in the CIRIN Bulletin, there are now entries on signed language interpreting as well, though the focus is still on (spoken language) conference interpreting. Note that I collect most of the information manually, mostly using texts to which I have direct access. Contributions also come from colleagues. For instance, about texts published in Finnish (this information dried up when Yves Gambier, who provided news about recent MA theses completed in Finland, retired from the University of Turku), in Chinese (two Chinese colleagues contributed information for a while, but this has stopped as well) and in Czech, thanks to the very regular contributions of Ivana Čeňková from Prague. She is another spoken language conference interpreter who is interested in and supports signed language interpreting. I also use texts made available through Google scholar and two academic social networks, Academia.edu and Researchgate.

As to topic areas which are very popular judging by the information collected for CIRIN, these include interpreter training, interpreting cognition, interpreting quality expectations and perception, professionalization issues,

interpreting tactics and strategies, and note-taking in consecutive. But specific topics, theories and research methods evolve over time, sometimes rather rapidly. Colleagues are invited to see for themselves by reading the CIRIN Bulletin online.

DB & RQ: In your keynote speech at the Congress on Interpreting Studies (CONEI), in 2021, you called sign language interpreting a "treasure trove for interpreting studies". Can you please elaborate on that idea and describe your first contact with Sign Language Translation and Interpreting Studies?

DG: In a few words, there are a number of explanations for this statement: firstly, signed language interpreting (SLI) involves basically all phenomena and issues found in other settings in which interpreters work with spoken language interpreting, including interpreting cognition, strategies, quality assessment and perception, training, professional status, conference interpreting and so on, with priorities and viewing angles which are not the same as in spoken language interpreting, and in particular in spoken language conference interpreting, the field I come from. For instance, the issue of the interpreter's role and of ethics towards a particular language and culture community in each country, that of the signing Deaf, is particularly prominent for signed language interpreters and rather unproblematic in spoken language conference interpreting. And as regards quality perception, in SLI, attitudes are viewed as very important, sometimes more important than information accuracy, for example, in sharp contrast with spoken language conference interpreting. In addition, some phenomena that also exist in spoken language conference interpreting but do not draw much attention are very salient in SLI. This includes language variability and lexical gaps, to cite just two examples.

I believe it is always useful to gain awareness of viewing angles different from one's own. SLI offers such an opportunity to spoken language interpreting.

As to my contacts with SLI, there were initial contacts when I was giving seminars in Australia, Malaysia and South Africa, and then during a conference on Deaf people and mental health organized at UNESCO. During this conference, we spoken language conference interpreters saw signed language interpreters at work for a whole week, with much admiration. Meanwhile, some SLI colleagues were showing interest in my Effort Models, which had been developed for spoken language interpreting. I was not aware of this interest until some of them started writing to me. In 2010, I was invited to give a one-week seminar to signed language interpreter trainers in Salt Lake City. This gave me an opportunity to become more familiar with SLI. But the most informative opportunity to learn about SLI was given to me when I supervised a master's thesis on lexical gaps in French-into-French Sign Language interpreting, and later a doctoral dissertation on SLI by Sophie (Pointurier) Pournin – it was defended in 2014. Throughout the process, I learned a lot. Together, we developed a version of the Effort Models for simultaneous interpreting into a signed language. Ever since, I have been in constant touch with the SLI community, mainly in the USA and in the UK, and have been reading SLI literature, though admittedly not as systematically as conference interpreting literature. I have also co-authored a few articles with colleagues from signed language interpreting, with pleasure, and have participated in a few meetings of signed language interpreters and interpreter trainers. Always with much interest.

DB & RQ: What phenomena in Sign Language Translation and Interpreting Studies called your attention the most? And what are the convergences with Translation and Interpreting Studies of spoken languages?

DG: Chronologically speaking, the first phenomenon of which I became aware was the lexical gap issue, because this was what Sophie was working on. But almost simultaneously, while listening to her and reading the literature, I

became aware of other striking phenomena, the first being the strong socio-affective dimension of signed language interpreting resulting from the history of the Deaf and the way they were treated by the hearing, with dire effects on hearing signed language interpreters who are not necessarily trusted until they have proved their alignment with the Deaf community that they serve. This is something that is not found in spoken language interpreting as far as I know. It has practical implications on technical decisions by interpreters, for instance avoiding some tactics such as fingerspelling if they are viewed as an intrusion of the relevant national spoken language into the signed language even if this means losing information. This also seems to have generated a defensive, sometimes offensive pro-Deaf anti-hearing ideology among some signed language interpreters, perhaps as a psychological mechanism to cope with the pressure from the Deaf community on which they depend professionally. I also became aware of the high language variability with which signed language interpreters have to cope, when working for Deaf people from different parts of a country and different school backgrounds. Again, this is not something that is found in spoken language conference interpreting, and probably not to that extent in other settings of spoken language interpreting.

But at a more fundamental level, the cognitive challenges, preparation strategies and coping tactics while in action are very similar, as I found out. Which makes it particularly interesting to look at similarities and differences in our interpreting behavior and in related areas such as interpreter training, quality expectations and perception, and so on.

DB & RQ: How and why did the Effort Models come to be? What are the efforts for Sign Language Interpreting, and how do they operate?

DG: When I was studying conference interpreting, at ESIT, I noticed that all students, including myself of course, found interpreting very difficult. Sometimes, insufficient thematic knowledge and insufficient mastery of the

working languages could explain the problems we had, but not always. I thought an explanation had to be sought elsewhere, but no satisfactory explanation was forthcoming from our teachers. So I tried to look for one on my own. One of the claims our teachers made was that in your native language, verbalizing a thought is "spontaneous" and effortless. But introspection and observation told me a different story. I felt that even in one's own language, some effort was often required, and I wondered whether the speech production problems students encountered regularly during interpreting were not due to the fact that for some reason, while interpreting, they were not able to make such an effort. Similarly, when listening to the source speech, sometimes parts of the speech that did not seem to hold any particular difficulty were not "understood", and students actually thought they had not heard them. Again, I thought an explanation might be found in a similar direction as for speech production. Eventually, I came up with three functional units, in other words three activities to which interpreters could relate and distinguish intuitively, namely listening, speaking and placing information and retrieving information in/from memory for a short time. Each was effortful (why should one forget something that was just placed in memory a second ago if some effort was not required to keep it there?), hence the name: Efforts. Of course, introspection and intuition had to be checked in the relevant scientific literature, and I found such backing in cognitive psychology. But the Effort Models remain a functional construct to think about and explain subjective perception by interpreters, not a tentative architecture of the interpreting process with cognitive modules. If I had tried to model the interpreting process in a descriptive way as is often done in cognitive psychology by trying out various cognitive module architectures, my models would have been very different. This is something that some colleagues do not seem to take on board when discussing the Effort Models, for instance by mistaking the Memory Effort for working memory, in spite of explanations I have provided in several published texts.

Basically, for simultaneous interpreting in spoken languages, the functional units or Efforts that the Effort Model is made of are Reception,

Production, short-term Memory operations, and Coordination (for the allocation of attentional resources to each functional Effort at each moment, which would include functions such as monitoring the tasks in which each is engaged, available resources and resources engaged in the task). After hearing Sophie and checking with other languages, it was decided to add two efforts when working into a sign language: one is SMS, self-management in space, which refers to the interpreter's effort to be physically positioned so as to see the speaker and/or the screen and to be seen by the Deaf users of his/her services and so as not to disturb the physical arrangement in the room (or studio in the case of television interpreting). The other is ID, interaction with the Deaf, since while interpreting, there are reactions from the Deaf which need to be monitored, as they signal that they understand or do not understand, may request a repeat, clarifications, may ask for the floor, may correct the interpreter or provide the interpreter with data such as the name-sign for persons or their signing preferences etc. All this has a cognitive cost as well, and these two additional Efforts can be clearly identified as functional mental activities by interpreters. The Effort Models help focus on them, on what they entail practically, on how they affect or do not affect other Efforts etc. In other words, the whole Effort Model concept is offered for convenience, to help focus on cognitive challenges which arise while interpreting. This does not mean that social aspects are ignored, but the focus is on cognitive challenges. Recently, recognizing from the literature that signed language interpreters are often confronted with difficult decisions to make because of social and psychological situations and stakes and that such decisions can require cognitive effort as well, I have added another effort, the Human and Social Considerations Effort. This is relevant in spoken language public service interpreting as well, I believe, and even in diplomatic interpreting done by conference interpreting in some dialogic situations, but it is far less relevant in monologic conference interpreting situations.

I know that colleagues from both signed language interpreting and spoken language interpreting have developed their own versions of the Effort

Models, often with further Efforts. Reading about them is always interesting, but so far I have not adopted any, because the added Efforts do not fit the philosophy which underlies the Effort Models as I have developed them. I wanted the Models to remain simple, and every Effort to be easy to identify as an activity which is at least partly deliberate, which has a distinctive cognitive cost, and which does not come naturally under the existing core Efforts. For instance, Sophie suggested the addition of a spatial memory Effort when working with signed languages, because interpreters need to remember where they mentally place objects, people and other entities when formulating their target speech in sign language. I found this very interesting, but considered that such spatial memory effort came naturally under the Production Effort, so I did not adopt it as an additional Effort. Which does not mean that it should not be considered when studying the Production Effort, of course. But as part of the Production Effort. Other candidates for new Efforts suggested by colleagues were cognitive cost items, not distinct deliberate or partly deliberate activities associated with cognitive cost, or distinct activities not associated with distinct cognitive costs. But colleagues are free to choose their own way of conceptualizing interpreting, especially in a didactic context, and I may well find a promising candidate for a new Effort in the literature someday.

DB & RQ: In your conference, you explained there is a difference between tactics and strategies in simultaneous interpretation. Could you reiterate that difference and give us some examples for sign language interpreting?

DG: The difference is quite simple. Tactics are decisions and actions taken to face a challenge that has arisen or is about to arise, decisions that involve no planning or practically no planning. For instance, at a given moment, how will you sign a particular concept for which there is no standard sign? If you have not understood something the speaker said or signed, what do you do? Ask for a repeat or for clarification, gloss over it, tell the users of your services that you

have not understood something and see whether they will want to ask for clarifications? Strategies are decisions and actions taken with some planning, for instance preparing for an assignment by agreeing with a partner about particular signs that will be used or meeting with clients and explaining the interpreter's role to facilitate the interaction later, during the meeting. I think it makes sense to draw the distinction between them because strategies can be learned and require good will and some work, but are not highly dependent on available attentional resources during interpreting, while tactics depend much more on cognitive skills and on available attention at any time. Interpreters may be well prepared in terms of strategies but have insufficient tactical skills, or have good tactical skills but fail to be conscientious enough or knowledgeable enough to adopt optimal strategies, and remedies are different in each case.

DB & RQ: What conclusions can you draw observing the differences in the education and training of conference interpreters and sign language interpreters?

DG: Spoken language conference interpreters are basically trained to provide high-level interpreting service in high-level meetings, mostly when officials from different countries discuss matters that have to do with international interactions, as is typically the case in intergovernmental organizations such as United Nations agencies, European Union organizations and so on. Over time, their activities expanded to cover other types of meetings, but the basic requirements led to the establishment of programs that were demanding and highly selective. This is not the only way people become conference interpreters. Some are self-trained bilinguals or multilinguals, some studied languages and eventually found themselves translating or interpreting at different settings, including conference settings, but the 'industry standard' so to speak is that of a graduate program to which only students who already have an excellent mastery of their working languages are admitted. You know that this is not the

case of signed language interpreter training programs, many of which include language training as such and acquisition of knowledge and skills about the history, sensitivities and structure of the Deaf community, not the world of international geopolitics, science and technology. I am not sure it makes much sense to compare the two types of training. One thing that strikes me is that some signed-language interpreters who have not been trained specifically for conference interpreting perform excellently in conference settings and similar settings. I have experienced this personally in the USA, when giving a rather technical seminar in Salt Lake City, and years before that, at a UNESCO conference. I mentioned both of these events earlier. This reminds me again that an industry-standard training program is not a sine qua non for people who would like to become conference interpreters. But I am not sure comparing the training of signed language interpreters and the training of spoken language conference interpreters is a very useful exercise. What would probably be much more meaningful would be a comparison of training of spoken language public service interpreters and training of signed language interpreters. The two settings are sufficiently similar, and I am sure spoken language public service interpreting could gain a lot from reflecting on differences between training in their settings and training in signed language interpreting settings.

DB & RQ: Do you think it would be possible and advisable to separate the fields of Interpreting Studies and Translation Studies? In addition to that, what are the advantages of the affiliation of Sign Language Interpreting Studies to Interpreting Studies?

DG: It is always tempting to claim a disciplinary entity for oneself rather than be part of a larger disciplinary entity, if only to gain visibility in the academic world, and perhaps more resources such as academic departments, faculties and positions, funding, dedicated journals, all of which are helpful when conducting research on one's favorite topics. In that sense, it is only natural to wish

Interpreting Studies to be recognized as an autonomous academic discipline. There is also some technical justification for that as regards working mode, environmental parameters, cognitive constraints and so on. All of these differ in translation and interpreting. But the same rationale could apply to some extent to public service interpreting vs. conference interpreting, or to spoken language interpreting vs. signed language interpreting and so on. If research into each of these were to lead to a large volume of good publications, enough to draw the attention of the academic world and of powerful authorities outside the academic world, why not? But the fact is that most of these simply do not produce enough research considered important or even noteworthy by academic and other authorities, at least not important enough to justify the attribution of dedicated resources and institutionalize them as academic disciplines on their own. In fact, even Translation Studies is not recognized as an academic discipline in many countries. Many academics are not aware of its existence, and many believe it should be part of linguistics. As to Interpreting Studies, which is demographically far smaller than Translation Studies, its academic visibility is even lower. Under the circumstances, it makes sense to unite, support Translation Studies and benefit from the academic territory it has gained. Besides the fact that this will stimulate cross-fertilization. Interpreting Studies stands to gain from the work done on written translation, and Translation Studies stands to gain from interaction with Interpreting Studies, which contributes new viewing angles on human activities which have much in common. Fortunately, many Translation Studies scholars have recognized this and have opened up spaces for Interpreting Studies scholars. Perhaps the best examples are the CERA program in Belgium (now CETRA), an international doctoral school, and EST, the European Society for Translation Studies, to my knowledge the first international scholarly society devoted to translation (and now to interpreting as well) besides Bible translation organizations. In these two important TS fora, Interpreting Studies scholars have been invited to participate and even to take leading positions such as CE(T)RA chair professors and EST presidents and members of the Executive Board. This has been very productive

in terms of exchanges of ideas. Initially, it made sense to consider that Interpreting Studies was a sub-discipline of Translation Studies. But because of the growth of Interpreting Studies as an entity that includes conference interpreting and public service interpreting and both spoken language interpreting and signed language interpreting, many scholars including myself call for a change in the name given to the discipline, from 'Translation Studies' to 'Translation and Interpreting Studies' (TIS), to give Interpreting Studies more visibility with associated benefits and institutionalize the interaction between research into written, oral and signed translation.

The rationale for including signed language interpreting in IS, and therefore in TIS, is similar. As I argued earlier, there is room for much cross-fertilization between spoken language interpreting and signed language interpreting. On certain aspects, research into signed language interpreting is more advanced than research into spoken language interpreting, but on others, it is the other way around. Besides opportunities for cross-fertilization, there is an opportunity for increased visibility for SLI, not only in the academic world in general, but even among TS scholars and even spoken language interpreting scholars.

Let me just stress that I am referring to Interpreting Studies in the academic sense, in other words research into interpreting. In terms of professional organization and training, I think the situation looks different. The type of interpreting to which SLI is closest is spoken language public service interpreting, but the professional environment differs strongly between the two. For instance, in spoken language public service interpreting, users come and go, as many of them learn the national language and needs depend largely on migration flows. Also, public service interpreters cater to the needs of people from various country backgrounds. In signed language interpreting, there are stable Deaf communities, and in most countries, they all use the same sign language, albeit with marked variability. I realize that this is not necessarily true for all countries, though. And the Deaf know about their country and its institutions. There are also specific educational needs and so on. So, both as

regards the professional environment and the best training curricula, the two are different. And of course, they are different from conference interpreting. I am not sure at all that professionally speaking, signed language interpreters would gain much from being put in the same box as spoken language interpreters. There are commonalities, of course, in particular in court interpreting and health care interpreting, and exchanges are possible and desirable, but institutional integration may not be the most efficient way of addressing organizational and financial issues optimally for all.

DB & RQ: With a view to strengthening the field of Interpreting Studies as a whole, in what ways could Sign Language Interpreting Studies and Interpreting Studies of spoken languages collaborate?

DG: I can think of a number of initiatives, but their success depends on colleagues on each side being interested in cooperating with the other side. So first, one has to make sure they see the advantages of cooperating with the other side, which may require information campaigns and a few colleagues with good will, 'goodwill ambassadors', who will disseminate the message that there is something to be gained by looking over one's garden's fence into the neighbors' and cooperating with them. I am convinced this is the case, as I have written and co-written elsewhere, but it is sometimes difficult to get people to act beyond their immediate environment. Small symposia on selected themes such as cognitive load, tactics and strategies, quality perception and training-related issues could work well with sufficient preparation and some leadership and guidance from the organizers. And of course, common research projects could be interesting. I would be happy to participate in some, and have a few ideas. But this would only work if enough colleagues from both spoken language interpreting and signed language interpreting are interested, and I realize it is not easy to get them interested. If these modest operations are successful, there are chances this could develop further.

DB & RQ: Finally, in terms of education, training and research, what would you say are the future perspectives for Interpreting Studies?

DG: The topic of training is as popular now as it has always been in research into interpreting. Of course, optimizing training in view of recent developments in terms of skills acquisition, including skills related to evolving technology, in terms of language enhancement, in terms of adaptation to the requirements and wishes of the market is an important goal, and the diversity of the situations in various settings and various markets makes it likely that this will be a fruitful research avenue for a long time to come. Especially in view of the fact that it is relatively easy to find research participants among students, far easier than among professionals. Many other research avenues are open and could yield interesting results. I am thinking in particular of interpreting cognition, language issues, quality expectations including role concepts in specific settings, and professionalization, to mention just the most salient. But to me, two conditions will determine the outcome of such research: the motivation of IS scholars to engage in such research, and a good level of research scholarship, especially as regards the quality of the researchers' rationale in designing their research, of their data collection methods and of their inferences. As long as these suffer from substantial weaknesses in a non-negligible proportion of the publications, prospects are limited. So, it is important to devote some serious thinking to how to train IS researchers in terms of rigorous thinking and systematic, critical reading.