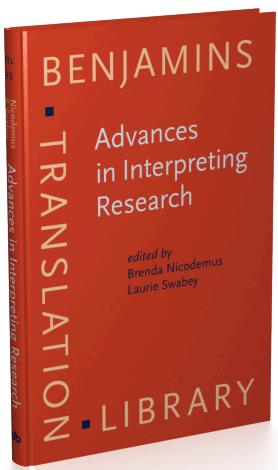
Benjamins Translation Library
99

Preface

https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.99.01pre



Pages vii–x of
Advances in Interpreting Research: Inquiry in action
Edited by Brenda Nicodemus and Laurie Swabey
[**Benjamins Translation Library**, 99] 2011. xi, 264 pp.

© John Benjamins Publishing Company

This electronic file may not be altered in any way. For any reuse of this material written permission should be obtained from the publishers or through the Copyright Clearance Center (for USA: www.copyright.com).

For further information, please contact rights@benjamins.nl or consult our website at benjamins.com/rights

John Benjamins Publishing Company

Preface

While the discipline of Translation Studies (TS) at large was born out of the initiative of scholars from the world of literature interested in translation, Interpreting Studies (IS) was started by interpreting practitioners and interpreter trainers who still represent the overwhelming majority of authors in the field. A discipline populated and driven by such practitioners-cum-researchers ("practisearchers") is an interesting object of research in itself, especially when many of them, including many of the most prominent authors in the field, have had little or no training in research.

One striking feature of early history of IS is the important role played in its development by "personal theorizing", i.e. systematic individual reflection on one's professional experience. It is such personal theorizing by pioneer Danica Seleskovitch which led to the crystallization of the Interpretive Theory paradigm, a set of ideas about the nature of the interpreter's (and translator's) work which has become the backbone of translator and interpreter training methods in many parts of the world (a recent update of the ideas making up this paradigm is offered in Lederer 2006).

Personal theorizing has the major advantage of being highly relevant to the phenomena at hand – but it is also self-limiting. Genuine engagement with other theories as well as empirical research are required to enrich it, correct it, and bring in new perspectives. Within conference interpreting, wide interaction between researchers started in the early 1990s, as evidenced *inter alia* by citations patterns. It gradually grew from small local networks with few links between them to wider networks with links to various schools of thought and some cognate disciplines, mostly linguistics, cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics and neurophysiology (Gile 2006). More recently, with the development of research into public service/community interpreting (PSI), significant interaction has started beyond conference interpreting and between various branches of IS, including interpreting in court and hospitals, as well as for medical consultations, asylum seekers etc.

Citation analysis helps identify a number of interesting phenomena in this inter- and intra-disciplinary interaction. One of them is the existence of discipline- and sub-discipline specific hierarchized citation patterns (the first and fourth items below are documented in Gile 2005, 2006 and Nasr 2010; the second and third are currently under empirical testing):

- IS authors cite TS authors much more often than TS authors cite IS authors;
- within spoken language interpreting, PSI authors cite some conference interpreting authors as well as TS authors, but few conference interpreting authors or TS authors cite PSI authors (except in overall reviews and analyses of IS);
- signed language interpreting authors cite spoken language interpreting and in particular conference interpreting authors much more often than the other way around; and
- finally, TS and IS authors cite authors from cognate disciplines such as cognitive psychology, linguistics, comparative literature, philosophy, cultural studies and sociology much more often than the other way around.

Another interesting phenomenon evidenced through citation analysis is that TS authors, including IS authors, tend to be cited for their theories and opinions, but much less often for their research methods or findings, except in a few subbranches such as research into interpreting quality (see Gile 2005, 2006; Nasr 2010). This contrasts sharply with patterns found in established empirical disciplines. It can be taken as one indicator of the general weakness of the empirical side of the discipline, which is perhaps related to the lack of training in empirical research methods within TS in general and IS in particular, though marked improvement has been achieved over the past decade or so.

Also related to the empirical vs. non-empirical distinction in the field, close scrutiny of the work of TS authors reveals the existence of two distinct ways of doing research, one closer to a tradition which emerged from the natural sciences, and the other closer to the liberal arts, a point which was first made by Moser-Mercer (1994). In particular, the two traditions have different norms regarding what evidence justifies what claims. Some authors do not like this distinction, which they claim to be "divisive", and call for a merger or some middle way between the two. This very rejection of a (potential) finding before it has been explored in reasonable depth is another indicator of the weakness of IS as an empirical discipline.

My view is that exploring the distinction empirically can help gain better understanding of the operation of TS as a field of research and of the reasons for some misunderstandings between authors (see for instance Gile in Schäffner 2004: 124–126), and inform decisions in research policy and research training.

I see a similar advantage to exploring the differences between various branches of interpreting rather than denying their existence under the motto "we are all interpreters". Interestingly, judging by citations found in signed language interpreting publications, conference interpreting in spoken languages seems to have been a source of inspiration, or perhaps aspiration, for signed language interpreters. This is understandable: for historical and economic reasons, conference

interpreting has from the start benefited from higher prestige and remuneration. And yet, conference interpreting only represents a fraction of the work of signed language interpreters, and many of the issues they face are quite different from those encountered in conference interpreting. It is therefore a good thing that public service interpreting, which is at least as relevant to the needs of signed language interpreting, is gaining more recognition within IS.

Actually, in terms of research, signed language interpreting probably has more to offer than conference interpreting, if only because it covers a far wider range of settings and roles arising from actual expectations of users, as well as important sociological and psychological components that are virtually nonexistent in conference interpreting. Fortunately, over the past decade or so, conference interpreters have become more interested in public service interpreting, and are perhaps more prepared to listen to the discourse of signed language practitioners, trainers and researchers and learn from them.

This book is good news, firstly because it powerfully brings together authors from signed and spoken language interpreting in a collective volume. The fact that TS, including IS, needs more empirical research but still offers little training in research methods gives another reason to rejoice about this volume: while in the TS literature, there is an abundance, perhaps an over-abundance, of abstract analyses and categorizations, in this collection, some well-known authors have chosen to write about down-to-earth questions and offer practical descriptions of situations and projects. Their papers are refreshingly useful for beginning or aspiring researchers.

Thinking about the same potential readers: practices from other disciplines are useful input, but phenomena and environmental conditions vary, and aspiring researchers should know that the most sophisticated methods are not necessarily the most powerful under all conditions. For example, speaking about interpreting, where inter-individual and intra-individual variability is high and it is difficult to recruit samples of more than 10 people, experimental designs with highly controlled conditions and highly quantifiable indicators with inferential statistics for dessert are not always the most effective tool. "Quasi-experimental" designs and even non-experimental designs can often yield more while remaining just as "scientific", as long as they are compliant with underlying norms of science.

Methodologically speaking, IS has a long way to go, and initiatives such as this volume will certainly help.

Daniel Gile
ESIT, Université Paris Sorbonne Nouvelle

References

Gile, Daniel. 2005. "Citation patterns in the T&I didactics literature." *Forum* 3 (2): 85–103.

Gile, Daniel. 2006. "L'interdisciplinarité en traductologie: une optique scientométrique." In *Interdisciplinarité en traduction. Actes du 11e Colloque International sur la Traduction organisé par l'Université Technique de Yildiz,* Öztürk Kasar (dir), 23–37. Istanbul: Isis.

Lederer, Marianne. 2006. *La traduction aujourd'hui. Le modèle interprétatif*. Caen: Lettres modernes Minard.

Moser-Mercer, Barbara. 1994. "Paradigms gained or the art of productive disagreement." In *Bridging the Gap: Empirical Research in Simultaneous Interpretation,* Sylvie Lambert and Barbara Moser-Mercer (eds), 17–23. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.

Nasr, Maria. 2010. *La didactique de la traduction – une étude scientométrique*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. ESIT, Université Paris 3 Sorbonne Nouvelle.

Schäffner, Christina (ed.). 2004. *Translation Research and Interpreting Research. Traditions, Gaps and Synergies*. Clevedon, Buffalo, Toronto: Multilingual Matters.