

Developing methodological expertise in interpreting studies

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Introduction

A quarter into the 21st century, the “climate” in academia feels considerably rougher than three or four decades ago, at least in the arts and humanities, under which the field of translation and interpreting studies is usually subsumed. As university leaders become increasingly conscious of their institution’s position in international rankings, they are compelled to promote the productivity of their research staff, typically measured by the amount of grant funding acquired and the number of scientific articles published in high-impact journals. For scholars and researchers, the imperative long known as ‘publish or perish’ has thus been reframed as a focus on *what* and *where* to publish, with articles in indexed journals serving as the gold standard.

Against this background, the invitation by the editors of the new journal on *Methods in Translation and Interpreting* (*Métodos de Traducción e Interpretación*) to contribute a reflective essay on my research career is unusual but greatly appreciated all the same. Inaugural issues of newly launched journals often strive to showcase cutting-edge research by well-known authors so as to establish their credibility – and candidacy for subsequent inclusion in major citation databases, such as Scopus or the Web of Science. Personal reflections, to be written, according to the editors’ guidance, in a more informal style, will hardly be counted as high-level scientific research

– neither for the journal’s nor the author’s (and his institution’s) bibliometric purposes. And yet, the editors’ commendable conceit of bringing together a collection of reflective essays on academic research careers is attractive and well justified.

As an academic discipline, translation and interpreting studies in its current form (as represented and promoted by AIETI) is the product of institutional (sociological) developments as much as of individual achievements over time. In other words, the field has a history, and junior scholars socialized into this discipline should be aware of it. One way of learning about this history is through the experience-based accounts of senior members of the research community with first-hand knowledge about ‘how things were’ and in what way they are different today. The invitation to offer such a personal account is therefore a welcome opportunity – not only to the author for a more casual way of writing, but also, and mainly, to our research community for potentially enriching its collective memory and permitting a deeper understanding of the way our field of study has evolved over time.

If senior colleagues are to tell ‘their story’, what might they best be talking about? The answer should be evident from the name of the new journal but could easily be derived also from the vantage point of the philosophy of science: As is the case for most fields of science, the history of our discipline has been shaped, in large measure, by developments in methodology. It therefore comes almost naturally that in reflecting on my academic career I will feature a number of topics relating to research methods. Following the editors’ guidance for this contribution, the main theme of my essay will be the changes and advances I have witnessed in the course of 35 years of scholarly work in the field of interpreting studies. As will become clear, the title of this essay applies both to the (sub)discipline of interpreting studies and to my own academic trajectory, for which my doctoral work in the early 1990s was the point of departure.

Theory and data – in search of method

Around 1990, a university graduate with a Master’s degree in conference interpreting wishing to pursue a PhD in this field would not easily find an academic home. With the exception of the doctoral program in *Traductologie*

at the University of Paris, work toward an advanced degree in interpreting studies, if done at all, was typically supervised by professors of languages and (applied) linguistics, with significant implications for the theoretical and methodological approaches brought to bear on the topic. Indeed, the lack of an academic infrastructure for the acquisition of research skills was one of the main obstacles facing the would-be interpreting scholar in those days.

At the University of Vienna, where I had fulfilled my MA thesis requirement in the late 1980s by compiling a bilingual glossary of medical terms, a significant first step toward building an infrastructure for academic research was the appointment of Mary Snell-Hornby as the first full professor of Translation Studies. Working under her supervision, I benefited greatly from her close contacts with leading translation scholars such as Hans Vermeer and was socialized into the German school of functionalist translation theory. This was at odds, however, with the prevailing empiricist movement in interpreting research as spearheaded by Daniel Gile, whose paper on “Scientific Research vs. Personal Theories in the Investigation of Interpretation” (Gile 1990a) confronted me with a difficult dilemma. Could general theorizing and empirical research be reconciled at all? And if one were to heed Gile’s call for empirical research, how would one go about it? Much work on interpreting in the field’s “Renaissance” (Gile 1994a, 151), as reflected in the early issues of *The Interpreters’ Newsletter*, was based on experiments, either following in the steps of David Gerver (1976) or adopting more complex interdisciplinary designs (e.g. Gran 1989). If either approach seemed out of reach, some encouragement could be derived from Gile’s (1990b) appeal for more “observational research” as a prerequisite for explanatory experimental studies. But even the observational route could seem blocked by major obstacles, such as the lack of access to authentic speech material and interpreting performances.

Overcoming this practical hurdle was an initial goal I set myself on the road toward an empirical study of simultaneous interpreting, and thanks to contacts from my freelance work as a conference interpreter it proved possible, if extremely arduous, to compile a bilingual corpus of speeches and simultaneous interpretations from a three-day technical conference. Fourteen hours of audio recordings meticulously transcribed, combined

with background information and a full set of conference documents, constituted a rich body of data. Now what?

Having chosen the distinctly general functionalist theory of translatorial action as my starting point and conceptual framework, there was no specific causal hypothesis to be tested against the empirical data. The assumption was, however, that interpreting, as any translatorial action, was shaped by its purpose (*skopos*) and by the situational context in which it takes place, including the speakers and listeners participating in the communicative event. This suggested the need to account for all and any factors that might have an influence on an interpreter's performance – from the macro level of the event to the 'situation', conceptualized as the constellation of interactants, and to the 'input' of the micro-level interpreting process, with special emphasis on the mode and rate of source-speech delivery. The same descriptive approach was applied to the interpreters' "output", which was scrutinized in particular for features of fluency such as filled and unfilled pauses and repairs. This rich set of corpus data permitted a number of observations, for instance, regarding the frequency of speech errors ("slips") and repairs by speakers vs interpreters and the way simultaneous interpreters dealt with jokes. The issue of quality was raised as well but proved all the more intractable the more it was construed as a multidimensional construct that could not be fully captured by an assessment of source–target correspondence and ultimately depended on the perceptions of users.

My aim here is not to give a summary account of my doctoral thesis (Pöchhacker 1994). Rather, I have introduced it briefly to show how a substantial amount of theoretical work, focusing on the analysis of concepts like text, process and situation, could be done, along with an enormous effort devoted to corpus-based empirical analyses, without any clear sense of methodological approach. In fact, this lack of a methodological framework manifested itself in my ignorance not only of specific empirical methods (e.g., of data collection and analysis) but also of the *language* of methodology. The notion of case study, applied to my conference corpus, seemed sufficiently clear, and I was similarly naïve about concepts such as observation and quantification. Indeed, the fundamental distinction – and tension – between quantitative and qualitative research approaches and the epistemological positions associated with them had not yet appeared on my

limited horizon, and may still have been distant even for the field at large. At least for those in the translation studies community who had joined the emerging discipline from the study of language and literature, the concept of empirical research, with positivist overtones, was still rather unfamiliar in the early 1990s. This is perhaps reflected in Snell-Hornby's (2006) claim that translation studies took an "empirical turn" in the 1990s, without much of an argument about the implications that such a reorientation would have for the field's methodological repertoire and for the research training to be imparted to the next generation of translation scholars.

A much more outspoken advocate of research training at the time (and for decades to come) was Daniel Gile, whose active involvement with the newly founded European Society for Translation Studies (EST) may have been vital in bringing the field of interpreting research into the fold of "Translation" (translation and interpreting) studies after it had flourished in the distinctly interdisciplinary environment of the "'Trieste era' in interpretation studies" (Gran & Dodds 1989, 268). Gile's concern with "methodological aspects" of research is aptly reflected in his contribution to the first collective volume on empirical research in interpreting (Lambert & Moser-Mercer 1994), which also happened to be the inaugural volume of the Benjamins Translation Library, still the field's most prestigious book series, with over 160 volumes published, and counting. Gile's (1994b) chapter, like his earlier papers published in the aftermath of the Trieste Symposium, marks an important initiative in providing research training by publication, in the form of written argument and guidance. In parallel with these consequential new beginnings, Gile also offered research training by teaching, thanks to his appointment as Chair professor in the 1993 edition of the translation studies summer school organized by José Lambert at KU Leuven. Aside from reaffirming the integration of interpreting research into an emerging discipline strongly shaped by literary scholars, Gile's role as CERA (now CETRA) Chair professor had a significant effect particularly for research training in interpreting. The most impressive evidence of this impact may be the Aarhus Seminar – an initiative that grew out of the 1993 CERA session and deserves to be described as a major milestone in the development of methodological expertise in interpreting studies.

Steps in and by the community

The seminar held in Aarhus in January 1997 was a one-week research training event for PhD students in the field of interpreting. It was organized, in collaboration with Daniel Gile, by four Danish doctoral students who had participated in the 1993 CERA summer school. Distinctly international in scope, the Aarhus PhD seminar was the first of its kind, although at least two other interpreting research events also deserve to be acknowledged here. One of these, known as the Ascona workshops, was in fact held in January 1997 as well, but with a broader, more ambitious aim. Rather than teaching research skills to doctoral students, the convenor, Barbara Moser-Mercer, sought to enrich the field of interpreting research as such by inviting experts from other disciplines, such as cognitive psychology, psycholinguistics, bilingualism, computer science and psychophysiology, to share their expertise with interpreting scholars (Moser-Mercer 1997). The other event took place already in 1995, and on a much smaller scale. Still, it was a one-week course in interpreting research, held in Almuñécar as part of the summer programs offered by the University of Granada. What motivated the organizer, Ángela Collados Aís, to invite me as a course leader alongside Daniel Gile must have had more to do with my work in the German tradition (Pöchhacker 1994) than with my methodological expertise. Nevertheless, the format of presenting an example of a personal research journey and various theoretical insights gained along the way was not too different from what was offered in early 1997 in Aarhus.

The program of the Aarhus Seminar included presentations by senior scholars as well as more junior researchers, who shared with the participants their own research projects and methodological approaches. Though not as deliberately interdisciplinary in outlook as the Ascona workshops, the impressive roster of presenters covered a broad range of research perspectives. By way of example, Ingrid Kurz, who had followed up on her 1969 doctoral thesis on cognitive multi-tasking, presented studies on personality traits and EEG patterns in simultaneous interpreters; Bill Isham shared his experience with psycholinguistic experiments involving sign language interpreters; and Miriam Shlesinger provided a vivid account of her exceptional efforts in developing an experimental research design for the study of working memory in simultaneous interpreting. From yet another, radically different

perspective, Cecilia Wadensjö introduced participants to the sociology of interaction and discourse-analytical approaches to dialogue interpreting.

Even these few examples from the program of the Aarhus Seminar leave little doubt about the formidable challenge facing those who would aim to teach methodology to doctoral students of interpreting. The great diversity of topics and the broad range of theoretical approaches and research designs make it hard to identify a repertoire of skills that would form the core of an interpreting researcher's methodological expertise. No less difficult than content selection is choosing the format in which research training can best be offered. Face-to-face interaction, as in summer schools and seminars with room for discussion and personal consultations, is probably the most effective component of a constructive learning environment, but such events require a considerable investment of time and resources by organizers and participants alike. Moreover, such research training events face issues of sustainability, not only in environmental terms but also with regard to longer-term impact and accessibility. Considerations like these motivated the organizers of the Aarhus Seminar to offer its content also in a more durable form and make it available to a wider audience. In other words, they chose to fall back on research training by publication as a complement to their interactive learning event. The resulting collective volume on *Getting Started in Interpreting Research* (Gile et al. 2001) is yet another milestone in the evolution of training resources for would-be interpreting scholars. Its content, true to its title, foregrounds basic research skills, such as critical reading and reviewing of relevant literature, and selecting a topic in the first place. Thus, the volume is not a textbook on methodology; based to a great extent on a variety of personal research experiences, the book is a highly readable account of much of what had been presented and discussed in the course of the seminar, with valuable guidance also for beginners at the MA thesis level. This is in sharp contrast with the publication documenting the Ascona workshops (Moser-Mercer 1997) in the field's newly founded journal, *Interpreting*, which also marks a transition in my present account from the topic of research training to that of research standards.

In her critique of the "Paris School" approach to interpreting research, first published in 1990, Moser-Mercer (1994) presents the "natural science paradigm" founded on objective description and rigorous hypothesis testing

as the way forward for the interpreting research community. This would also include the aspiration to scientific standards in the way research findings are presented and disseminated, particularly in scientific journals. In the early 1990s, however, there was no such journal for interpreting studies. Aside from the *Journal of Interpretation*, published intermittently by the Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf in the US, the only outlet specifically for publications on interpreting was *The Interpreters' Newsletter*, which grew out of the 1986 Trieste Symposium. It proved highly valuable to the emerging community of interpreting scholars, but it was a locally sustained effort and not initially designed as a scientific journal. That crucial step was taken by Moser-Mercer in founding *Interpreting*, published, like *Target*, by John Benjamins. In line with her distinctly interdisciplinary orientation, Moser-Mercer teamed up with cognitive psychologist Dominic Massaro as co-editor and recruited a panel of five associate editors, all with a background in psychology. First published in 1996, *Interpreting* devoted its second volume to the collection of papers derived from the Ascona workshops of 1997, including articles on working memory, corpus-based speech analysis, computer modeling, expertise and stress measurement. It then put out only three further volumes before publication lapsed for several years and the journal was relaunched in 2004 under new editorship. It would go too far to discuss possible reasons for this development, but it seems likely that the dearth of submissions accepted for publication in those years had to do with issues of methodology – that is, research designs and analytical procedures that did not meet scientific standards like those found in the cognitive sciences. With regard to publishing standards, it is worth noting here that *Interpreting* was launched without any mention of peer review. Submissions were presumably reviewed by the editors, but it was not until a decade later that a double-blind peer-review procedure became an explicit part of the editorial process – as discussed below with regard to my own experience as editor.

Before stepping into these much bigger shoes, my own small steps in the interpreting research community in the late 1990s included a survey research project as well as two case studies of non-professional interpreting in the healthcare setting. Without going into any detail, I would admit that these projects, like my doctoral work, were undertaken without sufficient time or opportunity to acquire a solid grasp of the relevant methodological

approaches. For the questionnaire-based survey – on community interpreting needs of healthcare and social-service providers in Vienna – I was at least able to get support from an experienced social scientist, but the skills acquired in that process were largely operational rather than grounded in a thorough understanding of quantitative research methods. Likewise, my discourse-based case studies certainly benefited from my exposure to Cecilia Wadensjö's work (e.g., at the Aarhus Seminar) but hardly reflected the expertise of a discourse analyst well versed in the principles and procedures of a given school of thought.

These experiences with empirical research, though reasonably productive, made the need for methodological guidance acutely felt. Admittedly, there would have been no shortage of textbooks on research methods in the social and linguistic sciences, but the diversity of approaches and degree of specialization would certainly overwhelm a junior scholar in the community of what Gile (1994a) referred to as “practisearchers”. In this situation it seemed like a revelation when Graham Turner, an influential scholar of sign language interpreting, pointed me to Colin Robson's (1993) *Real World Research*, characterized in its subtitle as “a resource for social scientists and practitioner-researchers”. What impressed me, in particular, was the author's own trajectory from a psychologist trained and experienced in quantitative methods to a researcher doing fieldwork in institutional settings. This broader perspective on methodological approaches was encapsulated in a three-fold distinction of different research “strategies” that I have found very helpful ever since: Faced with a particular problem, the researcher might choose between naturalistic fieldwork or a controlled experiment or else a survey approach. Going beyond the classic dichotomy of observational vs experimental research (e.g., Gile 1990b), Robson (1993) first proposed these three options for one's choice of basic approach before describing specific methods or techniques of data collection that could serve to implement the strategy adopted. This conceptual scheme accommodates – and indeed promotes – triangulation (i.e., multi-method research) and an open and pragmatic attitude toward quantitative and qualitative research, which also clears the way for engaging in mixed-methods research as a ‘third paradigm’ that has gained great attraction in recent decades.

It may have been only at the turn of the century that I fully digested Robson's (1993) textbook on applied research methods, without following up on various transformations in subsequent editions. An additional "incentive" (read: strong pressure) to make further progress in developing methodological expertise came from my work on *Introducing Interpreting Studies* (Pöchhacker 2004). Though designed as a textbook describing the evolution and state of the art of interpreting studies as a (sub)discipline, the book also included a five-page section of guidance for novice interpreting researchers, precisely because a textbook on methodology was still lacking. It materialized, at last, a decade later – and remains, still in its first edition, the only volume on *Research Methods in Interpreting* (Hale & Napier 2013). Characterized as "a practical resource", the book offers reader-friendly guidance, with illustrative examples, on a range of methodologies, including ethnographic and survey research, discourse analysis and experiments. As noted by Gile (2016, 487), the book is not without "infelicities and inaccuracies" and would thus be of even greater use if published in a revised edition. On the other hand, other books on research methods in translation (and interpreting) studies have meanwhile become available (e.g., Saldanha & O'Brien 2013; Angelelli & Baer 2016), offering helpful guidance on various methodological approaches or explaining a given set of methods with greater depth (e.g., Mellinger & Hanson 2017).

Thanks to these important steps taken by the community of interpreting (and translation) scholars, opportunities for acquiring methodological expertise in interpreting studies have expanded significantly since the 1990s. Research training through publications is certainly possible now and gives the field an increasingly solid underpinning on which new research projects can be based. What is more, this foundation also benefits research training efforts based on teaching, as the readings available permit a higher entry level of basic methodological knowledge. A noteworthy illustration of this was seen at Heriot-Watt University, Edinburgh, where a strong team of scholars organized two editions of a one-week interpreting research summer school in 2013 and 2014, with invited speakers such as Daniel Gile and Barbara Moser-Mercer. Although there has not been any follow-up, research training events open to PhD students of interpreting have become well established in the field of translation and interpreting studies, with some (usually one-

week) programs even setting a thematic focus, such as historiographic or cognitive process research, and the original CETRA PhD summer school still going strong.

Gains and gaps

Over and above the gains made by the interpreting research community with regard to enhancing its published resources for research training, the CETRA research summer school, arguably the most influential such initiative in the field of translation studies, can serve as yet another indicator of relevant developments. After Gile's appointment in 1993, it took 14 years before another interpreting researcher (and, again, one with considerable expertise also in translation) served as CETRA Chair professor. Miriam Shlesinger, in 2007, spoke about experimental research on working memory in simultaneous interpreting as well as corpus-linguistic analyses of translation styles enhanced by early versions of machine learning. Her lectures on these and other topics not only demonstrated how a single scholar could acquire expertise in multiple research paradigms but also highlighted the synergies to be gained from integrating interpreting in a broader disciplinary framework – an orientation she championed under the heading of “inter-subdisciplinarity” (Shlesinger 2004). This was most evident for corpus-based interpreting studies, an “offshoot of corpus-based translation studies” she initiated and promoted (Shlesinger 1998) despite the added methodological challenges associated with it. Her impact is aptly reflected in a collective volume on *Addressing Methodological Challenges in Interpreting Studies Research* (Bendazzoli & Monacelli 2016) dedicated to Miriam four years after her untimely death in 2012.

That same year it was my turn to serve as CETRA Chair professor, and I chose to make different methodological approaches the focal point of my lectures. In line with the threefold choice of strategy, I reviewed and presented my own examples of survey research on the interpreting profession, fieldwork on interpreting in community settings, and experiments on cognition and communication in simultaneous interpreting. Only five years later, in 2017, Jemina Napier took a similar approach as yet another interpreting specialist in the CETRA Chair. The co-author of the 2013

methods textbook, she showcased mixed-methods research as well as participatory research projects in the area of sign language interpreting, which also marked an extension of the way interpreting has been featured in the CETRA program.

My involvement with the CETRA summer school, to which I have been contributing a seminar on methodological choices since 2007, has served me well to learn about new developments in theory as well as methodology – from fellow teaching staff and from participants discussing their projects in tutorials and presentations. Working with bright doctoral students in this setting is surely a privilege, also because it is gratifying to see how constructive criticism and suggestions can be taken up to make good work even better, or at least salvage a misguided or overambitious project. In contrast, it can be very frustrating to serve as an external examiner of PhD theses already completed, sometimes with less than felicitous choices of research design. Some regulations, perhaps only in Anglophone countries, permit major revision and resubmission, or at least minor revisions to the text, whereas most systems require examiners to judge a thesis as final – as the doctoral student's best effort.

Experiences like these, in terms of constructive feedback to optimize methodological choices but also explicit criticism of flaws that cannot be remedied, are also associated with my work, for most of this century, as a journal editor. As co-editor of *Interpreting*, first with Miriam Shlesinger and now with Min-hua Liu, I have been in a privileged position to observe the evolution of research in the field of interpreting studies. Much could be said about various kinds of changes – in authorship, thematic scope, languages, etc. – witnessed in the course of the past two decades, but I will limit myself to issues related to methodology.

Much more comprehensively than in the CETRA context, where projects on interpreting are typically in the minority, the hundreds of submissions received and read over the years, often based on PhD research projects, give a vivid impression of the spectacular gains made in research on interpreting since its “Renaissance” in the early 1990s. On the broadest level, one notes a shift from the fixation on experiments as the royal road to scientific knowledge toward the use of fieldwork in naturalistic settings, typically relying on (transcriptions of) audio- or, increasingly, video-recordings

of interpreter-mediated interactions. A similar shift from typically quantitative approaches to qualitative ones can be observed for survey research projects, where interviews have become no less common than self-administered questionnaires, now typically distributed online. Moreover, the former dichotomy of quantitative vs qualitative designs is increasingly transcended in projects taking a mixed-methods approach and combining multiple techniques of data collection and analysis.

Aside from these broader trends, which have major implications for the breadth of methodological skills – and epistemological awareness – to be mastered by an interpreting scholar, it is fascinating to see also the many research techniques that have become available to even junior researchers, mainly thanks to advances in digital technologies: the arduous task of transcription, which hampered large-scale corpus-based studies, is now effectively supported by automatic speech recognition tools and by transcription editor software accommodating multimodal content; prosodic analyses of pauses and pitch can likewise rely on speech analysis software, not to mention powerful corpus tools for tagging and querying massive amounts of verbal data. More impressive still, eye-tracking devices have come within reach and have been used in doctoral (and even MA-level) research across methodological paradigms, in psycholinguistic experiments and naturalistic studies of interaction alike. And what Ingrid Kurz (1995) accomplished only thanks to the lab facilities and expertise of a neurophysiologist, namely, using EEG recordings of brain activity during interpreting, is now feasible with an EEG cap that can be worn by interpreters at work in the booth. The same applies to techniques for measuring stress, including heart rate monitoring, galvanic skin response and cortisol levels.

Most of these high-tech devices generate vast amounts of quantitative data, and here, too, progress in methodological expertise has been stunning. Aside from breathtaking gains in available computing power for quantitative data processing, the field has seen a paradigmatic shift in the use of advanced statistics, with increasing reliance on linear mixed-effects modeling using R, a statistical analysis software. These analytical approaches have changed the way multifactorial research designs are developed, giving some hope of better managing individual variability and the multitude of variables at play in quantitative research on interpreting.

Despite all these advances in the development of the field's methodological expertise that can be gleaned from recent research submitted for publication, significant gaps are in evidence as well, at least for editors and reviewers. In fact, it is the work of these agents in the publishing process that is meant to ensure that weaknesses and outright flaws do not become evident to readers of scientific articles. Leaving aside weaknesses that are due to insufficient academic writing skills, which can be remedied to some extent by professional copy-editing, the reasons for the high rejection rate of *Interpreting* and similar journals often have to do with issues of methodology. These include poor choices in sampling for surveys, in choosing and operationalizing the variables in experimental designs, and, most disconcertingly, in conducting advanced statistical analyses without a sound rationale.

Bearing in mind that many submissions to the journal come from doctoral students, the root cause of such shortcomings would appear to lie in a lack of research training, which would bring this review back to its point of departure. But the situation is really more complex: a crucial role is played by PhD supervisors and *their* methodological expertise, apart from their constraints of time and workload. The latter are in turn shaped by institutional policies, which sometimes prioritize the quantity of grant funds acquired over the quality of intellectual engagement, and which put increasing pressure on PhD students to publish in high-impact (indexed, refereed) journals early in their career.

Additional gaps, or obstacles, related to methodology result from a persistent lack of access to relevant target groups and sensitive fields of activity. Interpreting in healthcare, police and asylum settings or even at the United Nations are cases in point, leading many to study populations that are in large supply, such as undergraduate interpreting students. Irrespective of theory and methodology, these choices have consequences for interpreting studies as such and raise questions about the field's relevance in the future.

Conclusion

Having started my personal reflections in this essay around 1990, when I began my academic career, my account of the various steps along the way toward higher levels of methodological expertise in research on interpreting

has been intertwined with my own experience of significant developments in interpreting studies. Research training, and the lack thereof, emerged as a prominent theme, and I have sought to show how knowledge-sharing initiatives in the form of seminars, summer schools and publications have been effective in grooming a generation of interpreting scholars with higher levels of academic research skills. This positive development was underpinned by the growing institutionalization of interpreting studies as a (sub) discipline, with professorships, advanced study programs and opportunities for academic networking and exchange, much needed to ensure sufficient unity among the various subparadigms of an academic field that overall remains relatively small.

Despite the significant gains made in interpreting studies over the past two or three decades, (self-)sufficiency in methodological expertise cannot be taken for granted. On the contrary: as new research techniques and analytical procedures become available and the required standards of scientific research, from accessibility to ethics and to transparency, continue to rise, the need for research training and ever higher levels of methodological expertise remains as great as ever. If the efforts and initiatives reviewed in this essay can be continued, in the form of research-oriented teaching programs and publications, the outlook for the field should be favorable. The increasing technologization of interpreting, widely perceived as a threat to the profession, should not diminish the need for research; on the contrary: the impact of technology requires scientific study based on the requisite methodological expertise. Rather, the most serious threat to the future viability of interpreting research may stem from the detrimental impact of public (mis)perceptions: If interpreting is no longer viewed as a worthwhile academic career, the field's supply of fresh talent risks being eroded. With reference to the 6M Model of critical issues for progress in interpreting studies (Pöchhacker 2004, 198), the soft spot would no longer be the proficient use of methods; rather, the main challenge may be finding (wo)manpower motivated to acquire specialized research skills with which to extend the knowledge base about an essentially human task that will remain relevant to communicating across barriers of language and culture for generations to come.

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Developing Methodological Expertise in Interpreting Studies

Abstract

At the editors' invitation, this reflective essay reviews my personal trajectory as a researcher, which is largely congruent and intertwined with some major initiatives and stages in the development of interpreting studies. My PhD research on simultaneous interpreting in the early 1990s serves as a starting point, highlighting the tension between general theories and empirical aspirations in the absence of methodological expertise. Pioneering efforts to promote research training by publication and by teaching are then described, with special reference to Daniel Gile and his role in the 1997 Aarhus Seminar. Further milestones include the founding of the journal *Interpreting*, whose subsequent volumes reflect major advances in research methods, and the publication of textbooks providing methodological guidance.

Keywords

Methodology, research design, research training, PhD research, paradigms

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