Book Review: Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training, Revised Edition

Sherry Shaw
University of North Florida, sherry.shaw@unf.edu

Book Review: Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training, Revised Edition

Sherry Shaw[1]

University of North Florida

1.   Introduction

The new and improved edition of Daniel Gile's (1995) seminal work on training interpreters and translators through a process-oriented approach is a must-have for every interpreter trainer/educator. From a strictly aesthetic perspective, the volume takes on more of the appearance of a textbook than a handbook, and although it is intended for teachers of interpreting and translation in higher education settings, it definitely deserves consideration as a textbook for advanced students. If you are familiar with the first edition, you will instantly notice that this edition underwent a serious rewrite for flow, readability, economy of expression, and clarity (and changed from American English to British English spelling). Format modifications (e.g., spacing, fonts) make the text a comfortable read. In fact, it is such a "comfortable read" that it is difficult to put down, no matter how many times you might have reread the first edition. If it has been a while, you might just find yourself becoming so engrossed in Gile's discussions that the work impacts you again with all of its practical applications to your work as an interpreter trainer.

Upon examination of the revised edition (Gile, 2009), one immediately is struck by the fact that the volume is packed full of new references and topics that speak to trainers 15 years after the original version was published. This is indicative of Gile's attempt to incorporate such current topics as inference and anticipation (Chernov, 2004), physiological stress responses (Kurz, 2002), sociocultural aspects (Pym, Shlesinger & Jettmarová, 2006), working memory (Timarová, 2008), and lexical processing demands (Prat, Keller & Just, 2007). In the event that you share my tendency when reviewing new materials to turn directly to the reference list, you likely will discover that therein is an adventure in exploring the sources that support Gile's assertions. These sources come from a variety of perspectives on interpreting and translation training, especially when Gile taps into the fields of cognitive psychology (which he dubs "the most relevant reference discipline," p. 187) and psycholinguistics (unfortunately for me, not all are available in English). Gile has made every effort to review original examples for content obsolescence and acknowledges when something is outdated but still relevant (for instance, a source text

---

[1] *Correspondence to: sherry.shaw@unf.edu*

Book review

in an example, p. 49). The 2009 edition is so current as to include reference to this journal (IJIE), which is one of many allusions to signed language interpreting and its relevance to the discussion of interpreting models and concepts. Although the new edition continues to focus primarily on translation and conference interpreting, Gile acknowledges that the principles are applicable to signed language interpreter trainers. In fact, he opens the door for further development of these models and other conceptual frameworks that are specific to "public service" and signed language interpreting students (p. 23). On numerous occasions throughout the book, signed language is included when referring to such topics as executing the interpretation, general and thematic knowledge bases, interpreter role, sight translation, and language availability (informed by Carol Patrie through personal communication, p. 179). It is evident throughout the reading of this book that Gile's perspective on the profession has broadened markedly since the first edition.

2.   Primary distinctions between the first and the revised editions

In addition to the technical improvements, Gile made several content-related changes and replaced a previous chapter on interpreter/transliterator training with an introductory chapter on translation theory. (Keep in mind that Gile does not claim to be a theorist, but rather presents his models as strictly didactic and pragmatic to skill acquisition.) The purpose of the second edition, in the author's own words, is to "correct and hopefully improve my ideas, models, and methods" (p. xiii). This is accomplished by distinguishing macro-level and micro-level communication aims (Chapter 2), adding the cultural component to *linguistically induced information* and expanding the fidelity discussion (Chapter 3), analyzing decision-making for gains and loss risk (Chapter 5), incorporating internet use in acquiring ad hoc knowledge (Chapter 6), and extensively developing the Effort Models to include working memory and the Tightrope Hypothesis, as they relate to cognitive psychology. A bonus to the text is the incorporation of a glossary, a name index, and a revised concept index. Additionally, what were initially identified as chapter main ideas are now highlighted in a contrasting font as *What students need to remember* items at the end of each chapter.

2.1   The old and the new premises

There are several key premises that stem from the vast experience Gile brings to his conceptual framework for teaching translators or interpreters. First and foremost is that his models are continually refined to be useful and are simplified to represent the theoretical components that directly affect the interpreting process. Another is that students initially improve their translation and interpreting skills through a process-oriented approach, in which the teacher focuses on the reasons for student decisions during the interpreting process. Guidance provided to the student from this perspective ultimately results in an improved product, and students learn how to "use appropriate strategies and tactics" (p. 17) in new situations during their career. Throughout the text, Gile repeatedly brings the reader back to this purpose: using the models for process-oriented teaching (if the reader does not understand the term *didactic*, he or she will certainly be familiar with it by the time this book is completely digested).

Another premise that has been historically central to Gile's models is that processing capacity is constrained by certain factors, and teaching students how to eliminate strains and maximize capacity through the allocation of resources is imperative to avoiding interpreting failure. This premise guides the reader through the expansion on the Effort Models of interpreting in Chapter 7 and presentation of the Gravitational Model of Linguistic Availability in Chapter 9. A final, overarching premise is that students must learn to face, and cope with, the inevitable, inherent difficulties associated with comprehending and reformulating messages as part of their learning sequence. In so doing, students perform crisis management tactics that do not involve what Gile calls "the wrong laws" of self-protection or least effort (p. 217).

Within Gile's discussion of the Effort Models, a new term for an old concept emerged in the revised edition. The *Tightrope Hypothesis* characterizes what many practitioners and interpreter trainers have identified as a state of saturation in which simultaneous interpreters work with diminished processing capacity, whether as a whole or specific to a certain effort. Although Gile allows that the hypothesis is minimally substantiated by empirical

Shaw

evidence, he suggests that there is sufficient anecdotal evidence to warrant applying the hypothesis to his discussion of processing capacity constraints and coping tactics for failure prevention. The Tightrope Hypothesis is helpful in guiding students to identify their cognitive "problem triggers" or causes for saturation (p. 192) in the hope that they can reduce their processing capacity requirements.

In Chapter 3, regarding fidelity, Gile adds a cultural component to the term *Linguistically Induced Information*, so that the new term becomes *Linguistically/Culturally Induced Information*. This addition is particularly germane to today's climate in which recognition of the cultural role is essential for effective communication, and the reader is assured that Gile is making every effort to bring the book up-to-date. Another addition is presented in a discussion of the Sequential Model of Translation in Chapter 5.

3.   Applications to signed language interpreter training

As with the first edition of the book, Gile's work can be applied to signed language interpreter training, although he suggests that someone with more expertise should further develop his models to directly apply to that area. Whether the topic is efforts, language availability, fidelity, coping, loyalty, knowledge, plausibility testing, quality, or theory, there is plenty within this volume that needs to be incorporated into training programs—regardless of modality. "Public service" interpreters and trainers/educators, such as those of us who work in signed language interpreting programs, will find boundless opportunities to filter this information through our own experiences and adapt the concepts, as necessary, so that our students can benefit from the content of this book. There is a lot to learn within the 263-page volume. We learn from Gile how to focus on the student's process rather than the product and how to explain the importance of maintaining terminology and concepts within the active range of language availability. We learn about the difference between primary and secondary information within a message and how to instill the basic principles of fidelity in our students. Gile provides us with metaphors that can be used with students to clarify concepts, such as a road map with road signs that "point toward a destination," (p. 73) or guide us in making linguistic and cultural choices when we interpret. Not only does he provide us with models, he elaborates on how to teach students about the models, which is particularly helpful.

The back cover of the revised edition of *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training* touts the book as a "systematically corrected, enhanced and updated avatar of a book (1995) which is widely used in T & I training programs worldwide." In that regard, the revision certainly manifests Gile's commitment to linking the literature and his best thinking to the fundamentals of interpreting and translating. The term *avatar* is a coincidentally appropriate descriptor, considering that *Avatar*, an Academy-Award-winning film of 2009, was an action adventure film making technological breakthroughs in cinematography, just as Gile takes us on our own action adventure of self-discovery about our capacity to do the work of an interpreter. For its stimulating and comprehensive presentation of models and concepts that are explained so that they will make sense to students and teachers, the revised edition is a welcome addition to any interpreter trainer's (and student's) personal library.

4.   References

Chernov, G. V. (2004). *Inference and anticipation in simultaneous interpreting.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Gile, D. (1995). *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Gile, D. (2009). *Basic concepts and models for interpreter and translator training* (Rev. ed.). Amsterdam/ Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Kurz, I. (2002). Physiological stress responses during media and conference interpreting. In G. Garzone & M. Viezzi (Eds.). *Interpreting in the 21ˢᵗ century* (p. 195–202)*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

178

Book review

Prat, C. S., Keller, T. & Just, M. A. (2007). Individual differences in sentence comprehension: A functional magnetic resonance imaging investigation of syntactic and lexical processing demands. *Journal of Cognitive Neuroscience, 19*(12), 1950–1963.

Pym, A., Shlesinger, M. & Jettmarová, Z. (Eds.). (2006). *Sociocultural aspects of translating and interpreting.* Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

Timarová, Š. (2008). Working memory and simultaneous interpreting. In P. Boulogne (Ed.), *Translation and its others. Selected papers of the CETRA Research Seminar in Translation Studies, 2007.* Retrieved from http://www.kuleuven.be/cetra/papers/papers.html (Accessed day 27 September, 2010).