

## Sight Translation as a Pedagogical Tool to Enhance Translation Skills

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### Abstract

Over the years, sight translation has been used as pedagogical tool for teaching interpreting especially in simultaneous and consecutive forms. Research has always focused on how sight translation improves interpreting skills. However, very little research has explored its impact in boosting translation skills. Thus, this study investigates how the practice of sight translation can improve translation skills among students. The study is a descriptive analysis of data generated from 30 final year students who took translation at the Delta State University. Sight translation was used as a tool to enhance their translation skills for a period of six months. The findings show that students achieved significant progress as regards translation speed, choice of register and sentence splitting. The study concludes, therefore, that sight translation also be applied in translation as it improves significantly the appropriate translation speed rate, and sentence splitting technique. This study provides some exercises to enhance students' sight translation competence. It is recommended that sight translation be taught to final year students as a component of translation course to enhance the different skills combination. The study posits that students need to learn to translate intelligently, whether verbally or mentally, without literally reproducing their reference languages.

**Keywords:** sight translation (ST), source text, simultaneous interpreting, consecutive interpreting, sentence splitting, word for word translation.

### Introduction

Reading a text written in the source language and then pronouncing it in the target language is known as sight translation. While the content is still being read aloud, the translator must instantaneously comprehend the idea or the meaning of the original work. Sight translation is defined by Herbert (1952, cited in Agrifoglio, 2004) as a form of simultaneous interpretation. While simultaneous interpretation and translation and sight translation share a few characteristics, sight translation is unique in its own right. Sight translation, as described by Wallace (2015), is the process of translating written words from one language into another orally. Verbally translating the current passage of text, the translator—or interpreter, depending on the situation—reads forward. This need to go on smoothly without hitch or repetition in the translation process and the translator must ensure that there is no interruption in the reception of the message for the audience.

Komissarov (2009) states that sight translation is like rendering the target text as if the source text, which s/he had not seen before, were written in the target language. Sight translation usually involves glancing over the ensuing sentence in order to determine whether certain linguistic elements need to be re-structured for the purpose of conforming to target norms. It is as a result of this constant shift in the translator's visual contact with the written source or original text that sight translation is often

considered a much more difficult task when compared with other modes of interpretation (Mikkelsen et al., 1995).

The practice of sight translation has been in use for many years now and for many pedagogical and professional purposes. It has brought about positive result in many classrooms, for example, according to Luce (2012), the use of sight translation was impactful in the teaching of Latin and in other modern languages. Zhan (2012) is of the opinion that a good number of interpretation programmes around the world include sight translation as part of their curricula. This, according to experts, has led to various improvements in terms of developing quick reflexes, in depth understanding of the source text, and flexible oral skills among trainee interpreters. From literature review, it is evident that for many scholars, sight translation is a pedagogical tool to help acquire techniques in interpreting, an exercise through which student interpreters can learn to develop reflexes and improve their oral skills (Chmiel & Mazur, 2013; Falbo, 1995; Viaggio, 1995).

There are many studies on how sight translation improves interpreting skills. However, research shows that very little study on sight translation and how it impacts translation skills have been carried out so far. It becomes imperative, therefore, to examine the impact of sight translation on translation skills among university students learning translation.

### **Translation, Interpreting and sight translation: the distinction**

Bell (1991: xv) begins with an informal definition of translation:

The transformation of a text originally in one language into an equivalent text in a different language retaining as far as is possible, the content of the message and the formal features and functional roles of the original text

Clearly, every definition reflects the theoretical approach underpinning it. Bell, working within a systemic functional paradigm, even in a general description like the one above, puts forth the importance of ‘equivalence’ connected with the ‘functional’ roles of the ST. According to Nida and Taber (1969) in *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, —

“Translating consists in reproducing in the receptor language the closest natural equivalent of the source language message, first in terms of meaning and secondly in terms of style”.

From the above definitions, Nida and Taber’s definition seem to reflect the true meaning of translation both in process and in product. Central to written translation are the following skills: the ability to comprehend written text in one language (reading skills), and the ability to produce a comparable rendition in written form in a second language (writing skills) into another. Most professional translators provide only unidirectional translations, as a rule working into their dominant language. Unlike spoken language interpreters, translators often have the luxury of time and other resources to come up with the best way to capture the nuances of meaning in the original text.

As regard interpreting, it is the verbal rendition of spoken or signed communication from one language to another. For the purpose of this research, focus will be on spoken communication. In addition, Setton (1996) notes that interpreting is a process by which a spoken language or utterance take place in one language which is intended or presumed to convey the same meaning as previously existing utterance in another language. Interpreting entails the following skills: the ability to comprehend the intended message of oral communications in two languages (listening skills), and the ability to produce an accurate and complete conversion from one language into another (speaking or speech production skills). This entails listening and speaking skills in the two languages. In some cases, depending on the makeup of the meeting and the context, interpreters are often required to provide bidirectional rendition (le retour) – this is to say, from language A into language B and from language B into language C – in the moment. There are also situations that call for relay. This is a situation where by an interpreter A do not understand the language of the speaker, as a result, he listens to interpreter B and renders the message in another language for the target audience.

As already defined and explained in the introduction, sight translation is the verbal rendition of written text in one language into another language and this is usually done at the spot. Central to sight translation are the following skills: the ability to comprehend written text in one language (reading skills) and the ability to produce an oral or signed rendition in another language (speaking or speech production skills). According to Adigwe (2019), a good command of language shows complete language mastery which is crucial in translation domain. Sight translation is often requested of an interpreter during an interpreting assignment. This practice is generally used in training interpreters.

### **Sight translation as an academic course**

La traduction dite à vue consiste en une traduction orale d'un texte écrit. Il s'agit d'une technique difficile à maîtriser, même avec une parfaite maîtrise des langues concernées. Site translation is an academic course in the curriculum used in training student interpreters. Sight translation skills training seems to be imperative. The course design is meant to prepare student interpreters for interpreting activities. Traditionally, in interpreting programmes, sight translation is been taught as a compulsory course to be taken by all students. For example, in the Advanced School of Translators and Interpreters (ASTI) in Buea, Cameroon, sight translation is taught to students as a compulsory course. This is the same for other interpreter training schools in Europe, the US, Canada etc. In fact, ST has been widely used in laying the foundation for training and acquiring skills in consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Weber, 1990; Viaggio, 1995). Most interpretation training programmes even use ST for aptitude tests in the admissions process (Moser-Mercer, 1994). ST is also part of the testing components in the certification of court interpreters in Canada and the U.S.

Many researchers consider sight translation as a useful pedagogical tool helping students learn to abstract away from the source text, to use lexical and grammatical transformations, and to faster process the input information (Moser-Mercer, 1994), a pedagogical exercise for getting started in techniques of consecutive and simultaneous interpreting (Viaggio, 1995). Sight translation exercises contribute to developing mental skills such as comprehension speed, memory, ability to perceive the whole text,

not its separate parts, ability to visualize key words, synthesizing skills, ability to avoid using false cognates, mental processing and speech rate, concentration level (Pratt, 1991).

### **The use of sight translation in training interpreters**

In most training programme for interpreting, sight translation is introduced at the admission stage. This is in order to test the candidates' aptitude to quickly grasp the essentials of text, to transfer the message and to extract vital information as well as retaining information. Pedagogical use of sight translation differs from school to school. Sight translation practice usually starts once students obtain mastery of the basics and are able to pass the message, rather than words, based on the understanding and analysis of the source language text (Viaggio 1995; Weber 1990; Seleskovitch & Lederer 1989). Sight translation is practised off the cuff or following a very brief review of the text. It has proved to be a good exercise. It improves text understanding, non-linear approach to text and identification of core information. It helps to avoid word for word rendition and linguistic interferences and to break free from the source text (Jiménez, 2008). It is a vital tool for preparation for simultaneous interpreting, especially booth interpreting with text.

### **Principles and strategies in sight translation practice**

Sight translation is centred on three major principles:

- a written translation text requiring mental analysis in the source language, or a written document to read;
- comprehend and process the message of the text into the target language, verbally;
- verbalise the processed idea or message into the target language, where the output demands certain cognitive skills that are different from that of reading skills.

In summary, the strategies involved in sight translation include visually segment the text; highlight key verbs, terms, figures and names; etc. Sight translation involves anticipation, generalisation and selecting the key details under time and linguistic pressure with sharp vocabulary reflex and quick response in the target language; ability to split long and complex sentences; fluent communication and rendition without repetitions and unnecessary corrections.

### **Improving translation skills through sight translation practice**

Research shows that attention has for long been focused on sight translation as a tool in enhancing interpreting skills. Undoubtedly, the practice of sight translation has greatly improved the field of interpreting training as most interpreting training curriculum has sight translation as a component or a course. Sight translation has enabled us to enter into the dynamics of simultaneous interpreting given that in both cases it involves a form of interpreting that requires multitasking or division of attention. However, very little has been explored regarding sight translation as a course and translation as a practice. This study seeks to examine the significance of sight translation in translator training. More specifically, the study seeks to find out if the practice of sight translation can improve students' translation skills.

### Methodology

This study uses the descriptive method. It analyses the impact of sight translation in improving translation skills among students from English into French and vice versa. The sample selected for the study comprises of 30 final year students who have been offering translation as a course since 200 level in the university and are now in their final year. Out of these 30 students, 15 were selected to practice sight translation for a period of six months while attending translation classes with the other 15 students. The students (30) were given two different texts to translate from English to French and vice versa, every day for five days (Monday to Friday). The translation exercises by the 30 final year students were examined, compared and analysed so as to identify the differences in the translations produced by the two groups.

### Analysis

S/N	Observations/Techniques	15 students who practiced ST	15 students who did not practice ST	Interpretation
1.	Sentence splitting	13	14	out of the 15 students who practiced ST, 13 were able to use the sentence splitting technique in their translation whereas 14 students out of the 15 who did not practice ST could not apply the technique.
2.	Word for word avoidance	15	13	All the 15 students who practiced ST were able to avoid the word for word translation. While the 13 others were unable to translate beyond words.
3.	Translation speed	11	09	out of the 15 students that practiced ST, 11 were able to translate at greater speed than other students.
4.	Ability not to follow grammatical order of the source text	15	15	The result shows that all the students who practiced sight translation were able to detach themselves from the source text while translating whereas, the other 15 students stuck to the source text grammatical order.
5.	Fluent delivery and translation quality.	14	15	After examining the translations, it was discovered that the first group of students who practiced ST has a better fluent delivery or rendition when compared to the second group of students who did not practice ST.

### Synthesis of findings

- ST practice improves sentence splitting technique which is a critical skill in translation process;
- ST gives the translator the ability to translate beyond words; to being glued to the source text;
- ST improves translation speed;
- ST practice gives the student the ability to distance himself/herself from the source text while remaining faithful to the original message;
- ST skills promote natural rendition of the original message.

**Sight translation and translator training: recommendation**

This study advocates for the inclusion of ST into the curriculum of translation particularly at the beginning of the training programme. Findings from this study reveal the quality and timeframe gap between the translations produced by the first group that practiced ST and the second group that did not practice ST. Some experts in the field such as Gorszczyńska (2010) support the idea of including sight translation in training programmes that are centred on translation. The importance of acquiring sight translation skills for translation purposes cannot be over emphasised. Acquiring sight translation skills helps to reduce the timeframe of translation, making the process more effective and speeding up the transfer of information. This study, therefore, recommends the use of ST in the translation process. It also suggests that students with training in ST are more likely be more effective than those who have never practiced ST.

Ersozlu (2005) outlines six major skills for ST at undergraduate level are identified, namely fast reading and comprehension, domain knowledge, detailed reading, dealing with unknown words, chunking skills, and meaning retention. These skills are essential for ensuring accuracy, coherence and fluency in ST as well as in translation as a process and a product. ST is found to be beneficial for the practice of and training in translation, therefore, an ideal curriculum design for translation would thus emphasize ST in the training of students who offer translation as a course in the university.

**Conclusion**

Sight translation which has received little attention particularly as regards written translation is in fact a viable tool in translator training be it at the university or at training institution. Teaching sight translation skills in a translation class is also beneficial, as ST makes students more aware of the importance of prioritizing meaning over words, an ability that often takes a long time to acquire among trainees. The split technique required for performing ST are especially useful in helping students untangle long sentences with embedded clauses. This study has shown that sight translation can be a crucial component in teaching translation.

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