

УДК 81.33

## **Sight Translation: Typological Insights into the Mode**

**Veronika V. Obidina\***

*Siberian Federal University  
79 Svobodny, Krasnoyarsk, 660041, Russia*

Received 22.10.2014, received in revised form 30.11.2014, accepted 03.12.2014

---

*This article explores sight translation as a hybrid mode. It gives the insights into its place in the language learning programmes, interpreter and translator training programmes, linguistic research and language service industry.*

*Keywords: sight translation, conditions, foreign language learning, interpreting, interpreter and translator training, curriculum, perspectives.*

*Research area: philology.*

---

### **Introduction**

The area of interpreting studies has always provided a wide range of topics for scholars. The research on interpreting and its quality is one direction, investigated by many prominent scientists, including M. Viezzi, W.K. Weber, B. Moser-Mercer, D. Gile, F. Pöchhacker, M. Agrifoglio and others. Some of them are interested in sight translation itself, others in its implementation as a tool to master the language and to achieve simultaneous interpreting proficiency. Our paper tries to generalize the results of recent studies.

### **What is sight translation?**

Sight translation is a hybrid mode of translation, something in between “pure translation” and “pure interpreting”, an oral translation of written text (Agrifoglio, 2004; Gile, 2009; Viezzi, 1989). D. Gile also describes

it as intermediate (Gile, 2004). Due to its dual nature the notion of sight translation has generated a number of terms, often with different definitions. Sight translation or a-vista translation (Biela-Wołośńcej, 2007; Hadar et al., 2001) is sometimes called sight interpreting, underlining the oral target-text presentation. According to M. Agrifoglio some scholars following the idea of J. Herbert (1952) have treated sight translation as a type of simultaneous interpreting (Agrifoglio, 2004). V. Komissarov characterizes sight translation as a special type of use of written text in interpreting (Komissarov, 1990; Alikina, 2011). L. Barkhudarov defines sight translation as one of the written-oral translation sub-varieties when no preliminary reading is provided and rendering of the text is almost simultaneous to silent reading (Barkhudarov, 1975; Alikina, 2011). A. Sandrelli adheres to the ideas of M. Viezzi, E. Bollardin, C. Laplace, S. Lambert and G. Ilg and says that

sight translation is sometimes in conjunction with consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting and it is mainly performed in three situations: “1) the interpreter is given a written document in advance and has time to prepare his translation (rehearsed sight translation); 2) the interpreter is given unseen text and provides oral translation on-the-spot (unrehearsed sight translation); and 3) the interpreter is given a copy of speech which will be read by a speaker and which will have to be interpreted simultaneously in the booth (the technique is referred to in the literature as simultaneous interpreting with text or sight interpretation)” (Sandrelli, 2003).

Though obvious similarities exist, recent intermodal research by M. Agrifoglio has indicated that sight translation should be distinguished from consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting as they are performed under different conditions and in one case the source text is written and permanent, while in the other it disappears once it is expressed which contributes to significant differences between sight translation, simultaneous and consecutive interpreting with regard to information reception, processing, and production (Agrifoglio, 2004). The error analysis on the basis of Gile’s Effort Models (Gile, 1995, 2009) showed that sight translation brings more errors of expression, while consecutive interpreting and simultaneous interpreting lead to more errors of meaning. Thus visual interference is stronger than audio interference (Agrifoglio, 2004).

The main characteristics of sight translation suggested by M. Agrifoglio, D. Gile, B. Dragsted, I. Gorm Hansen, F. Pöchhacker and A. Sandrelli (Agrifoglio, 2004; Gile, 2005; Dragsted and Gorm Hansen, 2009; Pöchhacker, 2004, Sandrelli, 2003) and reconsidered by the author are the following:

1. Reception conditions:

- written source-text presentation
- absence of author

- punctuation
- permanent access to the text
- attention-sharing between visual input and oral output
- non-sequential reception (reader can go back)
- interpreter-paced (not paced by speaker)

2. Production conditions:

- oral target-text presentation (short, long, recorded)
- considerable time delay between source language production and translation
- coordination of Reading and Production Efforts (according to Gile’s Effort Models)
- monitoring production while reading
- prior access to information (preliminary reading) / progressive access to new information (first sight translation)
- extreme risk of interference
- interpreter-paced (not paced by speaker)
- time-saving (in comparison to written translation)
- no help of colleagues

**The place of sight translation  
in interpreter and translator  
training programmes  
and linguistic research**

Since first mentioned by J.P. Vinay and J. Darbelnet in their work “*Stylistique comparée du français et de l’anglais*” (1958), the idea that translation has three main areas: educational, professional and the area of linguistic research has been recognised by many scientists and proved by numerous research (Cordeo, 1984). As far as sight translation is concerned we have distinguished the following approaches, on the one hand it is regarded as a part of foreign language learning curriculum and on the other hand as a part of translator/interpreter training curriculum; and to be more exact, we accept the concept of

A. Schjoldager, who distinguishes between three kinds of teaching activities which all involve translation: language teaching, translation teaching and translator training (Schjoldager, 2004).

It is worth mentioning that some scientists recognise sight translation as a highly beneficial method of language learning, used to improve translation and communication skills among language learners (Dyk, 2009), while others, according to A. Schjoldager, consider it to be a rather controversial issue and even harmful testing and teaching tool (sight translation and translation in general). In her article “Are L2 learners more prone to err when they translate?” (Schjoldager, 2004) she describes foreign language teaching experience in Denmark. There, as in many other countries, it has long been a tradition to include translation as a compulsory component in the teaching and testing of foreign languages, both at university and lower levels; and as far as sight translation is concerned, she points out that at the secondary (gymnasie-) level, in accordance with ministerial rules and regulations, all oral exams contain an element of sight translation, which is supposed to function as a supplementary test of the student’s foreign language proficiency. In conclusion she suggests investigating this aspect more thoroughly, since empirical evidence would be of great help to those who use translation as a teaching tool, those who teach translation, and also to methodologists and educators (Schjoldager, 2004).

As a part of interpreter and translator training, sight translation can be featured in both core and expanded curriculum, where it is a complementary subject area, chosen as elective (Sawyer, 2004). It is rarely taught per se or listed under a separate course heading (Agrifoglio, 2004; Sawyer, 2004). More often it is viewed as both a learning technique for written translation (González Davies, 2005) and a supportive tool

for consecutive and simultaneous interpretation (Ersozlu, 2005; Niska, 2005). D. Gile in his article “Teaching conference interpreting: A contribution” says that almost all conference interpreting training programmes are built on interpreting exercises, in both consecutive and simultaneous, with some sight translation and other peripheral exercises. Though for teaching sight translation as a separate mode he suggests that seemingly lower in comparison to interpreting cognitive load is misleading and sight translation should not be taught early in the syllabus. It is better to teach it at the same time as simultaneous interpreting, once consecutive has been mastered, to induce meaning-based rather than form-based word-for-word translation (Gile, 2005). D. Sawyer writes that in some institutions consecutive interpretation and sight translation are included in an initial phase and then curriculum continues with an introduction to simultaneous interpretation, which occurs before simultaneous interpretation with text and the interpretation of specialized texts (Sawyer, 2004).

Sometimes sight translation course is combined with written translation. D. Sawyer mentions a case study of Graduate School of Translation and Interpretation of the Monterey Institute of International Studies, where translation course encompasses both written and sight and not less than one-third of class time is devoted to sight translation; he says that it is also an important part of interpreter training (Sawyer, 2004).

Sight translation is also used as a tool for different types of assessments. It is one of the methods of entrance/aptitude assessment to interpreting courses (Corsellis, 2005; Niska, 2005; Pippa and Russo, 2002). However, it is worth noting that the validity of the entrance tests, their format and administration have been the subjects of extensive debate (Campbell and Hale, 2003; Dodds, 1990; Sawyer, 2004; Tamarová

and Ungeod-Thomas, 2009). Recently much research has been focused on the development of new aptitude tests, e.g. the one carried out by A. Gringiani, C. Russo et al. at SSLMIT (Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori – Faculty of Interpreting and Translation Studies) in Trieste, Italy (Dodds, 1990; Tamarová and Ungeod-Thomas, 2009). At some schools and universities sight translation is a part of intermediate assessment. In his book “Fundamental aspects of interpreter education: Curriculum and assessment” D. Sawyer writes that “in intermediate assessment, which is both formative and summative in nature, the aim is to monitor learning progress and to provide corrective prescriptions to improve learning” (Sawyer, 2004). Therefore, periodic assessment is essential. Sight translation can also be a part of final summative assessment during Professional Examinations. Taken at the end of the course or programme it provides crucial information for trainers and methodologists: whether the poor results of the assessment are attributed to the fault of students or the instruction; whether the teacher sets achievable goal or not and whether the programme design, materials, teaching methods and quality assessment schemes are appropriate (Sawyer, 2004; Gronlund, 2009; Gümüş, 2008).

Sight translation is also an area of linguistic research. A number of studies have been devoted to cognitive effort in sight translation including “Cognitive effort, syntactic disruption, and visual interference in a sight translation task” by G. M. Shreve, I. Lacruz and E. Angelone (Shreve et al., 2010) and “Sight translation and speech disfluency: Performance analysis as a window to cognitive translation processes” by the same authors (Shreve et al., 2011). There have been also several comparative studies, e.g. “Sight translation and interpreting. A comparative analysis of constraints and failures” by M. Agrifoglio (Agrifoglio, 2004), “Exploring translation and interpreting hybrids.

The case of sight translation” by B. Dragsted and I. Gorm Hansen (B. Dragsted and I. Gorm Hansen, 2009), and “Shared attention during sight translation, sight interpretation and simultaneous interpretation” by S. Lambert (Lambert, 2004). Sight translation also provides space for research and development in the sphere of sight translation teaching methodology.

### **Some existing practices and further perspectives of sight translation**

Though sight translation is used widely, in literature we find its description as a part of public service interpreting, medical interpreting and legal interpreting. It is believed to be appropriate mainly for short texts. This approach is reasonable, though exceptions still exist.

The working paper “Sight Translation and Written Translation: Guidelines for Healthcare Interpreters” developed by the Standards, Training and Certification Committee of the National Council on Interpreting in Health Care states that not all the documents are appropriate for sight translation (Bidar-Sielaff et al., 2010). The National Council on Interpreting in Health Care recommends strict limits on the length and complexity of documents that interpreters should be asked to sight translate:

1. long documents containing general background information (e.g. patient bill of rights) and educational materials are not appropriate for sight translation, as it is both time consuming and probably fruitless, because the patient is unlikely to remember what was read to him;
2. documents with specific instructions are appropriate for sight translation, with the provider present, so that the patient’s questions can be answered by the provider, not the interpreter;
3. legal documents should be translated in written form first and then, if necessary, read aloud by the interpreter. (It is recommended

because of the register and unfamiliar for medical interpreters terminology, which can result in errors. It is also questionable whether the patients will fully understand and retain long and complex sight translation. The provider should explain the procedure to the patient, including risks and alternate options, and to ensure that the patient has understood the explanation. This means that, even with a translated text, a provider needs to be present while the patient reads the form (or the interpreter reads it to the patient), so as to answer questions and guide the interpreter if there is text that can be omitted (Bidar-Sielaff et al., 2010).

It is also mentioned that in the case of the less-commonly encountered languages sight-translation by the interpreter will be required, regardless of the length or complexity of the material (Bidar-Sielaff et al., 2010).

A. Corsellis says, that in the public services, interpreters should convey to the enquirer the fact that an accurate sight translation is not feasible, when the text in question is too long or too complex for sight translation. In those cases where a sight translation is required and the text is suitable, it is recommended to first read the whole text carefully to ensure a full comprehension, then to tell the listener the provenance and nature of the text before beginning translation (Corsellis, 2005).

Despite the fact that public service interpreting, medical interpreting and legal interpreting are performed under different conditions they share common approaches mentioned above.

During the debate, transcribed and published in “Translation research and interpreting research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies” edited by C. Schäffner, sight translation, as well as subtitling, was mentioned as a field for further both theoretical and practical investigation (Sandrelli, 2004). The speed which is required in both translation and

interpreting today, contributes to considering the introduction of sight translation as a separate course into the core curriculum of different types of interpreters and written translators. Since the job of that kind is required more and more frequently in the competitive market and, as M.T. Musacchio mentions, written translators often find themselves unprepared to meet this growing demand (Musacchio, 2004).

Talking about perspectives of sight translation in the language service industry, it is necessary to mention niche translation. The niche translation is when you translate sophisticated material about sophisticated subjects using sophisticated tools (Gouadec, 2007). The proposed sophisticated tool is a digital voice recorder, and the niche is recorded sight translation. Recorded sight translation is often used during interpreter and translator training for monitoring or (self-) assessment. But we agree with A. Biela-Woźniak that it is also a promising version of a regular sight translation, emerged from the specific market demand (Biela-Woźniak, 2007). This type of translation can occur when the client needs low-cost, sense-oriented, fast, transient translation (Biela-Woźniak, 2007).

## Conclusion

Sight translation being a hybrid mode of translation definitely requires more attention from researchers and educators. Its high demand on the market also adds to assessment the relevance of sight translation in different stages of foreign language learning programmes and interpreter and translator training programmes. It would be worthwhile to investigate and develop proper sight translation quality assessment mechanisms starting from the institutional level and further to the national level as a part of improvement of the quality assurance apparatus in secondary and higher education.

## References

1. M. Agrifoglio, "Sight translation and interpreting. A comparative analysis of constraints and failures", *Interpreting*, 6 (1) (2004), 43-67.
2. E.V. Alikina, "Taxonomy Aspect of Interpretation", *Vestnik Udmurtskogo Universiteta*, 2 (2011), 59-66, in Russian.
3. L.S. Barkhudarov, *Language and Translation (The Issues of General and Special Translation Theory)* (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnye otnosheniya, 1975), in Russian.
4. S. Bidar-Sielaff et al., "Sight Translation and Written Translation: Guidelines for Healthcare Interpreters", ed. by W. Alvarado-Little et al. (NCIHC Board of Directors) (2010), 10, <http://www.ncihc.org/mc/page.do?sitePageId=57022>.
5. A. Biela-Wołośńiej, "A-vista: New Challenges for Tailor-Made Translation Types on the Example of Recorded Sight Translation", *Kalbotyra (Linguistics)*, 57 (3) (2007), 30-39.
6. S. Campbell and S. Hale "Translation and Interpreting Assessment in the Context of Educational Measurement" in *Translation Today – Trends and Perspectives*, ed. by G. Anderman and M. Rogers (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 2003), 205-224.
7. A.D. Cordeo, "The Role of Translation in Second Language Acquisition" in *The French Review* 57(3) (1984), 350-355.
8. A. Corsellis, "Training Interpreters to Work in the Public Services", in *Training for the New Millennium – Pedagogies for Translation and Interpreting*, ed. by M. Tennent (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2005), 153-173.
9. M.G. Davies, "Minding the process, improving the product: Alternatives to traditional translator training", in *Training for the New Millennium – Pedagogies for Translation and Interpreting*, ed. by M. Tennent (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2005), 67-82.
10. J.M. Dodds, "On the Aptitude of Aptitude Testing", in *The Interpreters' Newsletter* (3) (1990), 17-22.
11. B. Dragsted and I. Gorm Hansen, "Exploring Translation and Interpreting Hybrids. The Case of Sight Translation", in *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 54 (3) (2009), 588-604.
12. J.V. Dyk, "Language Learning through Sight Translation", in *Translation in Second Language Learning and Teaching* ed. by A. Witte, T. Harden et al. (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 203-214.
13. E. Ersozlu, "Training of Interpreters: Some Suggestions on Sight Translation Teaching", in *The Translation Journal*, 9 (4) (2005), <http://translationjournal.net>
14. D. Gile, *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 1995).
15. D. Gile, *Basic Concepts and Models for Interpreter and Translator Training*, Rev. ed. (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2009).
16. D. Gile, "Conference interpreting, historical and cognitive perspectives", in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies*, ed. by Monika Baker and Gabriela Saldanha, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Routledge/Taylor and Francis, 2009), 51-56.
17. D. Gile, "Teaching conference interpreting: A contribution", in *Training for the New Millennium: Pedagogies for Translation and Interpreting* ed. by Martha Tennent (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2005), 127-151.

18. D. Gile, "Translation Research versus Interpreting Research: Kinship, Differences and Prospects for Partnership", in *Translation Research and Interpreting Research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies* ed. by Christina Schäffner (Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004), 10-34.
19. D. Gouadec, *Translation as a Profession* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2007), 396.
20. N.E. Gronlund and C.K. Waugh, *Assessment of Student Achievement* (Boston: Pearson, 2009), 240.
21. V.Y. Gümüş, "A Functionalist Approach to Syllabus Design in Translator Training", in *Thinking Translation: Perspectives from Within and Without (Conference Proceedings Third UEA Postgraduate Translation Symposium)* ed. by R. Hyde Parker, K. Guadarrama García (Boca Raton: BrownWalker Press, 2008), 207-216.
22. U. Hadar, R. Dar and A. Teitelman, "Gesture during speech in first and second language: Implications for lexical retrieval", *Gesture*, 1 (2) (2001), 151-165.
23. V.N. Komissarov, *Translation Theory (linguistic aspects)* (Moscow: Vysshaya Shkola, 1990), in Russian.
24. S. Lambert, "Shared Attention during Sight Translation, Sight Interpretation and Simultaneous Interpretation", in *Meta: Translators' Journal*, 49 (2) (2004), 294-306.
25. M.T. Musacchio, "The Debate", in *Translation Research and Interpreting Research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies* ed. by Christina Schäffner (Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004), 34-48.
26. H. Niska, "Training interpreters: Programmes, curricula, practices", in *Training for the New Millennium – Pedagogies for Translation and Interpreting*, ed. by M. Tennent (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2005), 35-64.
27. S. Pippa and M. Russo, "Aptitude for Conference Interpreting: A Proposal for Testing Methodology Based on Paraphrase", in *Interpreting in the 21st century: challenges and opportunities: selected papers from the 1st Forlì Conference on Interpreting Studies, 9-11 November 2000*, (2) ed. by G. Garzone and M. Viezzi (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2002), 245-256.
28. F. Pöchhacker, "I in TS: On Partnership in Translation Studies", in *Translation Research and Interpreting Research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies* ed. by Christina Schäffner (Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004), 104-115.
29. A. Sandrelli, "New Technologies in Interpreter Training: CAIT", in *Textology and Translation* ed. by H. Gerzymisch-Arbogast et al. (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 2003), 261-289.
30. A. Sandrelli, "The Debate", in *Translation Research and Interpreting Research: Traditions, Gaps and Synergies* ed. by Christina Schäffner (Clevedon/Buffalo/Toronto: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004), 34-48.
31. D.B. Sawyer, *Fundamental Aspects of Interpreter Education – Curriculum and Assessment* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2004), 310.
32. A. Schjoldager, "Are L2 Learners More Prone to Err When They Translate?", in *Translation in Undergraduate Degree Programmes*, ed. by A. Schjoldager and K. Malmkjar, (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2004), 127-149.

33. G.M. Shreve, I. Lacruz and E. Angelone, “Cognitive Effort, Syntactic disruption, and Visual Interference in a Sight Translation Task”, in *Translation and Cognition*, ed. by G.M. Shreve and E. Angelone (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2010), 63-84.

34. G.M. Shreve, I. Lacruz and E. Angelone, “Sight Translation and Speech disfluency: Performance Analysis as a Window to Cognitive Translation Processes”, in *Methods and Strategies of Process Research: Integrative Approaches in Translation Studies*, ed. by B. Englund Dimitrova, C. Alvstad, A. Hild and E. Tiselius (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011), 93-121.

35. Ё. Tamarov and H. Ungoed-Thomas, “Predictive validity of admissions”, in *Testing and Assessment in Translation and Interpreting Studies: A Call for Dialogue between Research and Practice*, ed. by C.V. Angelelli and H.E. Jacobson (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamin Publishing Company, 2009), 225-245.

## **Перевод с листа: экскурс**

**В.В. Обидина**

*Сибирский федеральный университет  
Россия, 660041, Красноярск, пр. Свободный, 79*

---

*В данной статье рассматриваются особенности перевода с листа. Подвергается анализу место перевода с листа в процессе изучения иностранного языка и роль в программах по обучению как устному, так и письменному переводу. Помимо этого приводятся существующие направления исследований в этой области, а также практические аспекты переводческой деятельности на рынке языковых услуг, связанные с переводом с листа.*

*Ключевые слова: перевод с листа, условия, изучение иностранного языка, устный перевод, подготовка устных и письменных переводчиков, учебный план, перспективы.*

*Научная специальность: 10.00.00 – филологические науки.*

---