

Dynamic collaboration as a stopgap: Approaching the process of South African Sign Language translation

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Signed language interpreting is usually conducted in the simultaneous mode and generally takes place in less than ideal working conditions, marked by unattainable performance expectations and conflicting reviews from clients who rarely understand the interpreter's role (c.f. Dean and Pollard 2001; Du Toit & Wallmach, 2017). Signed language translation is even less optimally understood. Clients see signed language translation as an immediate act very similar to signed language interpreting, and do not recognise the norms governing the process of translation in the standard sense (in a controlled environment with time and resources as variables). There is also little understanding of the added difficulty posed by the fact that translation between signed and spoken languages also involves translating between modalities: one sound/print-based, and one entirely visual/gestural and with no print base (Temple & Young 2004: 161). Theoretically speaking, signed languages have also received very little attention from researchers in translation studies.

In South Africa, signed language interpreters are often assigned to assignments and put at a disadvantage, given the lack of readily available translation resources in South African Sign Language (SASL). This paper reports on one such instance, where two accredited conference interpreters were tasked to translate five academic papers from English to SASL. The interpreters inadvertently made use of a dynamic collaborative approach as a stopgap to compensate for the lack of standardised academic vocabulary, translation norms (cf. Toury 1995), strategies and resources in SASL which their spoken language translator peers can take for granted. The researchers reflect on the collaborative process that took place during the language transfer activity that resulted in a hybrid form of interpreting, namely sight translation (Dragsted and Hansan, 2009). The sight translation process enabled the interpreters to control the pace of the source language input and reduce the memory effort involved. However, it emerged from the analysis that source language interference had not been taken into account. This case study serves as an urgent plea for the professionalisation of signed language translation in South Africa and the recognition of the usefulness of sight translation as a process in its own right.

Keywords: dynamic collaboration, signed language, norms, translation, simultaneous interpreting, hybrid interpreting, translation strategies, interpreting strategies, emergency strategies, sight translation, source language interference

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