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The Impact of Practicing Sight Translation Skills on the Performance of Consecutive Interpreting Trainees[1]

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Abstract

Sight Translation (ST) has long been used in conference interpreting training. However, a few studies have identified and tested the efficacy of ST on developing consecutive interpreting in an Iraqi context. This study investigated the relationship between ST and consecutive interpreting among Iraqi trainees. Further, it explored the relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performance in sight translation and their overall consecutive interpreting performance. As such, a purposive or non-probability sampling method was selected. The participants in the study comprised 20 consecutive interpreting trainees from Iraq, studying English translation at Al Hadba University College in Iraq. The materials for this study consisted of two English texts, one for the sight translation task and the other for the consecutive interpreting task. Both texts were authentic. The English text for sight translation contained 300 words. For the consecutive interpreting an approximately 10-minute audiovisual task with the delivery rate at a maximum speed of 180 words per minute was selected. Both tasks were to be translated into Arabic. To analyze the data, Pearson correlation and regression were run. The results showed that Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performance of sight translation had a significantly positive relationship with their overall consecutive interpreting performance. The findings also revealed that Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performance of sight translation meaningfully predicted their overall consecutive interpreting performance.

Keywords: Consecutive interpreting; Iraqi translation trainees; Sight translation, Overall consecutive interpreting performance

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Introduction

Sight translation is the process of translating written text from one language to another, while reading it out loud. This is typically done in real-time. This is a special mode of simultaneous interpreting (henceforth, SI), which is termed "simultaneous interpreting with text" (Pöchhacker, 2011, p. 19). It is common in conference interpreting settings, which require the interpreter to keep up with the source speech rate. Sight translation is often used in situations where a document must be translated quickly, such as in legal, medical, or business settings. Consecutive interpreting is the process of interpreting spoken speech after the speaker has finished speaking. The interpreter listens to the speaker and takes notes as they speak. Once the speaker has finished speaking, the interpreter then translates what was said into the target language. Consecutive interpreting is a mode of interpreting in which the speaker makes a speech (or says a few sentences) whilst the interpreter takes notes. The interpreter then reproduces what the speaker has said for the audience (Shang and Xie, 2020). Consecutive interpretation is often used in situations like meetings, negotiations, and court proceedings. Sight translation and consecutive interpreting can be invaluable tools for training translators and interpreters because there is a great deal of overlap in the skills and aptitudes required for translation and interpreting.

Iraqi interpreters play a crucial role in facilitating communication between different parties in a range of settings, including governmental, military, and humanitarian contexts. However, there is limited literature on the effectiveness of interpreter training courses in Iraq, and even less on the role of sight translation in executing such courses.

Therefore, this study aimed to explore the influence of sight translation on the performance of Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees. By examining the impact of sight translation on fidelity, language, and delivery of consecutive interpreting, the study sought to shed light on the role of sight translation in interpreter training and identify possible factors that may affect its effectiveness. In this study, the footsteps of Shang and Xie (2020) in their recent investigation was followed. They studied the predictive validity of sight translation for Chinese consecutive interpreting performance. In the present study, we employed a predominantly quantitative approach in our data collection and analysis methods. Specifically, in this study, a sample of Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees was selected and asked to perform a series of consecutive interpreting tasks with and without practicing sight translation

beforehand. The performances were evaluated by expert raters using three pre-determined items, including fidelity, language, and delivery.

In this study, the following questions were addressed:

RQ1. Is there any relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation and their consecutive interpreting performance in general?

RQ2. To what extent Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation can predict their overall consecutive interpreting performance?

Research Hypothesis:

There is no relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation and their consecutive interpreting performance in general.

Literature Review

Although sight translation has not been researched as widely as written translation and consecutive or simultaneous interpreting, several studies have recognized its indispensable role in interpreter training. While sight translation may seem easier than traditional interpreting modes due to the presence of textual support, studies suggest that it is a more demanding task than simultaneous and consecutive interpreting due to the constant presence of the source text, which creates visual interference and makes it difficult for interpreters to maintain a steady and fluent delivery of the output. Chen (2015) discussed the importance of sight translation in interpreter training and explored the cognitive constraints and challenges that interpreters face when performing sight translation. Moreover, Chen (2015) highlighted the importance of teaching specific skills in ST classes, such as focusing on meaning, identifying key words, segmenting meaning units, and developing the ability to read ahead.

Felberg and Nilsen (2017) analyzed three certified interpreters' renditions of two different texts in an experimental design. The data included interpreters' reflections on the feedback from the researchers' analysis of the interpreters' exploitation of semiotic resources. The study explored which semiotic resources interpreters use in their renditions of written text, concluding that the interaction is affected by proximity, the handling of the artifact (document) and body postures. One interpreter kept the document in front of her whilst sitting opposite to the

listener, whereas another put the document in front of the listener and accompanied the translation by pointing in the text with a pen as the translation proceeded. The interpreters semiotically exploited prosody, gestures and gaze in their renditions. Whilst they used different strategies, these strategies were more or less deliberate.

Defrancq and Verliefde (2018) investigate the status of a written text in a police hearing through a case study, testing the hypothesis that drafting the written document is regarded as a turn by the participant. The case is transcribed and analyzed for the interactional and linguistic features of turn-taking. They concluded, amongst other things, that the interpreter includes the text that the police wrote as a turn to silence the client (i.e. the interpreter reads directly from the report whilst it is written). The researchers also found that the person functioning as the interpreter upgrades the registers of the client's talk and downgrades the register of the written term.

Vranjes et al. (2018) conducted an eye-tracking study that draws on conversation analysis to test the idea of interpreting as two overlapping dyads with no space for direct grounding between participants. The study reveals that gaze was used as a listener response not only to the speaker when they were the interpreter but also to the primary speaker. Gaze was, for example, used as a feedback signal to the primary speaker when the listener learnt something new through the translation. This is called dual feedback, and it maintains the triadic participation framework.

Gerwing and Li (2019) conducted an interactional analysis of video-recorded doctor–patient consultations rooted in gesture studies from the perspective of the interpreter-user. They argued that even if the interpreter-users did not understand the utterances, the visual of the hand movements could provide some insight into the interpretation process. They suggested that the gestures could be a signal for checking understanding, finding that when a gesture made by a primary participant was not repeated by the interpreter, the speech act was also likely to be absent.

Methodology

This study is a quantitative correlational research ~~conducted on~~ twenty Iraqi participants aged 19–26, selected through purposive or non-probability sampling method. This means that a specific group of individuals who met criteria for inclusion in the study were selected. The participants were in the third or fourth

semester of undergraduate studies. Since the participants were studying English translation, it was assumed that they had a good command of English, and were familiar with the translation and interpreting process. It is also noteworthy that the participants took some in interpreting in their first or second year of undergraduate studies, which means they were also familiar with both consecutive interpreting and sight translation. Table 1 provides the demographic information of the participants.

Table 1. *Demographic background of the participants of the study*

Number of Participants	20
Gender	Male & Female
Age	19–26
Level	undergraduate
Native Language	Arabic
Target Language	English

Two translation tasks, one for sight translation and the other for consecutive interpreting were selected, their topics were different. Both were authentic, meaning that they were taken from real-world sources rather than being created specifically for this study. The text for sight translation task was taken from The Cambridge Law Journal and comprised 300 words. The consecutive interpreting task was a video from NBC News approximately 10 minutes long, and its delivery rate was at a maximum speed of 180 words per minute.

The participants were supposed to sight translate the English text into Arabic within five minutes. Following that, they were asked to consecutively interpret the second text from English to Arabic. The researcher was present during performing the translations. Finally, the gathered data were rated and analyzed. In this study, to rate both tests, three raters were requested to participate. They rated both the sight translation test and the consecutive interpreting test. One of the raters was the researcher, and the other two PhD graduates in either Applied Linguistics or Translation. The use of multiple raters was important for ensuring the reliability and validity of the study's results. To ensure the reliability and validity of the ratings, the researcher provided the raters with clear and detailed scoring criteria, including descriptions of the different levels of performance (distinction, good, weak, and

poor) that they were scoring. The rating scale for the sight translation test and the consecutive interpreting test consisted of four categories: distinction (7–8), good (5–6), weak (3–4), and poor (1–2). This rating scale is commonly used in performance-based assessments, where different levels of performance are defined according to specific criteria.

A Pearson correlation was used to measure the degree of correlation between the scores on the sight translation test and the consecutive interpreting test.

Data Analysis and Results

In this study, two separate tests were administered to the same group of 20 Iraqi interpreting trainees. The scores on both tests were collected and analyzed to determine whether there was any correlation between the two variables. Specifically, the high/low scores on the sight translation test associated with high/low scores on the consecutive interpreting test were examined.

In this section, after presenting the results of the data, the results obtained from Pearson correlation and regression analysis were obtained and reported. Prior to using sight translation task and the consecutive interpreting task, their reliability indices were estimated. The reliability indices of sight translation task and the consecutive interpreting task were shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Reliability indices of sight translation task and the consecutive interpreting task*

Instruments	
Sight translation task	.66
Consecutive interpreting task	.69

As shown in Table 2, the reliability indices of the sight translation task and the consecutive interpreting task are satisfactory to be utilized in the current study. Further, in order to check the normality of the distributions, two procedures were followed. First, the descriptive statistics of the data were obtained and kurtosis and skewness ratios were calculated. Second, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run as a further attempt to inspect the normality of the distributions. The descriptive statistics

related to the obtained scores on the instruments, including the calculated values of skewness ratio and kurtosis ratio, appear below in Table 3.

Table 3. *Descriptive Statistics of Sight Translation and the Consecutive Interpreting Tests*

		ST	CI
N	Valid	20	20
	Missing	0	0
Mean		3.50	4.50
Std. Deviation		1.449	1.988

As demonstrated in Table 3, the descriptive statistics of sight translation (ST), and Consecutive Interpreting (CI) are presented. In order to further examine the normality of the distributions, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was run, results of which are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. *Tests of Normality*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
ST	.085	19	.537	.962	19	.002
CI	.154	19	.402	.865	19	.000

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

As presented in Table 4, the *p* values for trainee' sight translation (ST), and Consecutive Interpreting (CI) are more than .05. This point suggests that the assumption of normality was not violated for the variables and the normality assumption was met. In this regard, the researcher concluded that the data met the assumptions of parametric statistical technique. The data were also checked graphically for normality of distribution. In order to determine normality graphically, we can use the output of a normal Q-Q Plot. The data points will be close to the diagonal line if the data are normally distributed. If the data points stray from the line in an obvious non-linear fashion, the data are not normally distributed. As we

can see from the normal Q-Q plot below in Figures 1, 2, and 3, the data is normally distributed.

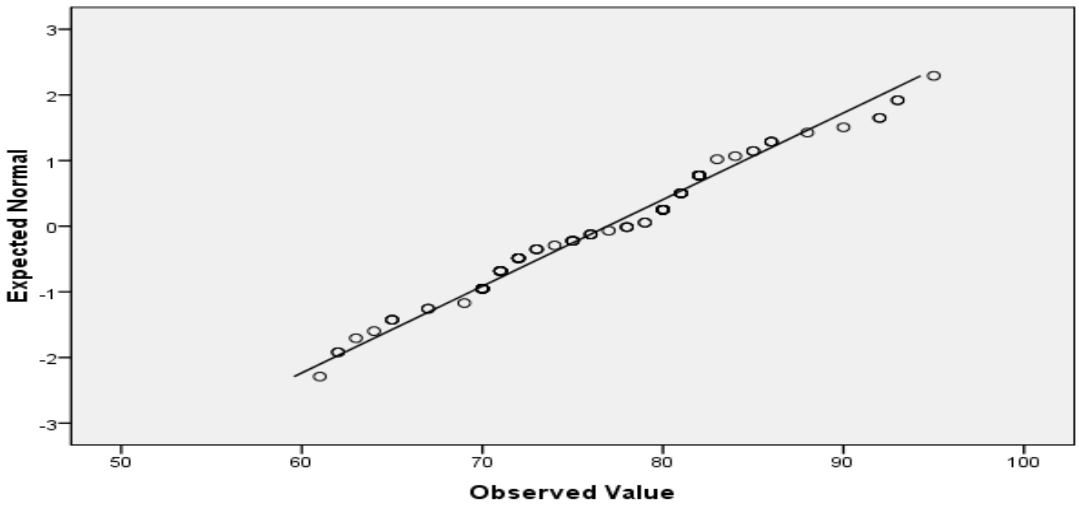

Figure 1. *Graphic Indicator of Sight Translation Scores' Normality*

As it can be visually observed the data points are not far from diagonal line, then, the Figure 1 shows the normality of distributions as well. Consecutive interpreting scores were also graphically illustrated in Figure 1 to ascertain normality.

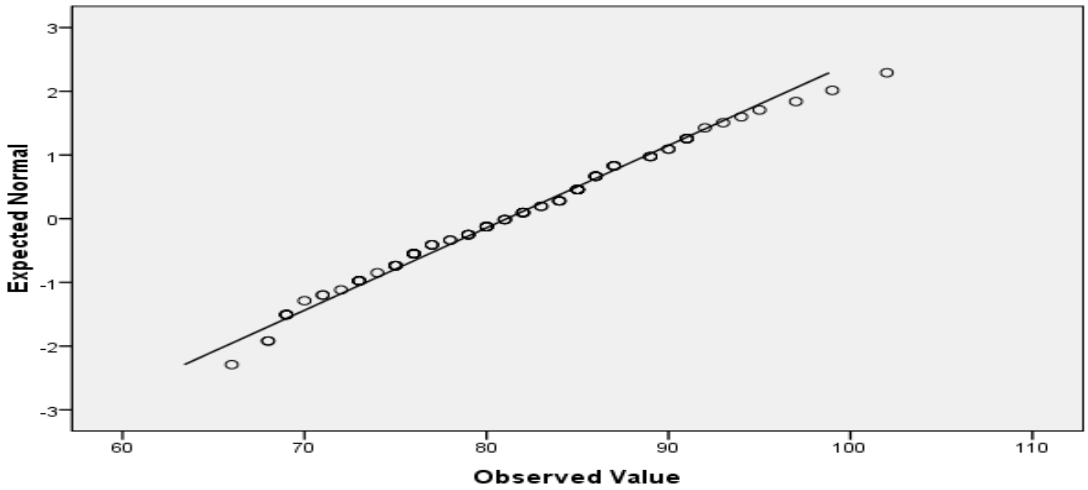

Figure 2. *Graphic Indicator of Consecutive Interpreting Scores' Normality*

Investigating Research Question 1

The first research question explored the relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performance of sight translation and their

interpreting performance. To answer this research question, the relationship between two variables was examined by Pearson correlation.

Table 5. *Correlation between Consecutive Interpreting and sight translation*

			Sight translation
Pearson r	Consecutive Interpreting	Correlation Coefficient	.673**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	19

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

According to the results of the analysis reported in Table 5, it was concluded that there was a significantly positive correlation (r=.673) between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation and their interpreting performance since *p* value is less than 0.05.

Investigating Research Question 2

The second research question inquired about consecutive interpreting trainees' performances in sight translation predicted their overall consecutive interpreting performance. To this end, regression analysis was run.

Table 6. *Linear regression with overall consecutive interpreting performance as criteria and consecutive interpreting as predictor*

Criteria		Predictor			
Overall consecutive interpreting performance		Consecutive interpreting			
	ß	.107			
	T	1.22			
	P	.00			
	N	350			
R=.313[a]	R^2 = .015	$R^2_{adusted}$=.006	F=1.27	df=1	p=.00

The regression variance analysis of trainees' overall consecutive interpreting performance in relation with their overall consecutive interpreting performance (Table 6) indicated that R^2 = .015 (R^2 is the common variance between trainees'

overall consecutive interpreting performance and their consecutive interpreting performance) and p=.00. Since p>.05, the linear regression is significant. In other words, the predictor had a linear relationship with overall consecutive interpreting performance in Iraqi context (ß = .107, p>.05). The scatter diagram is presented in Figure 3.

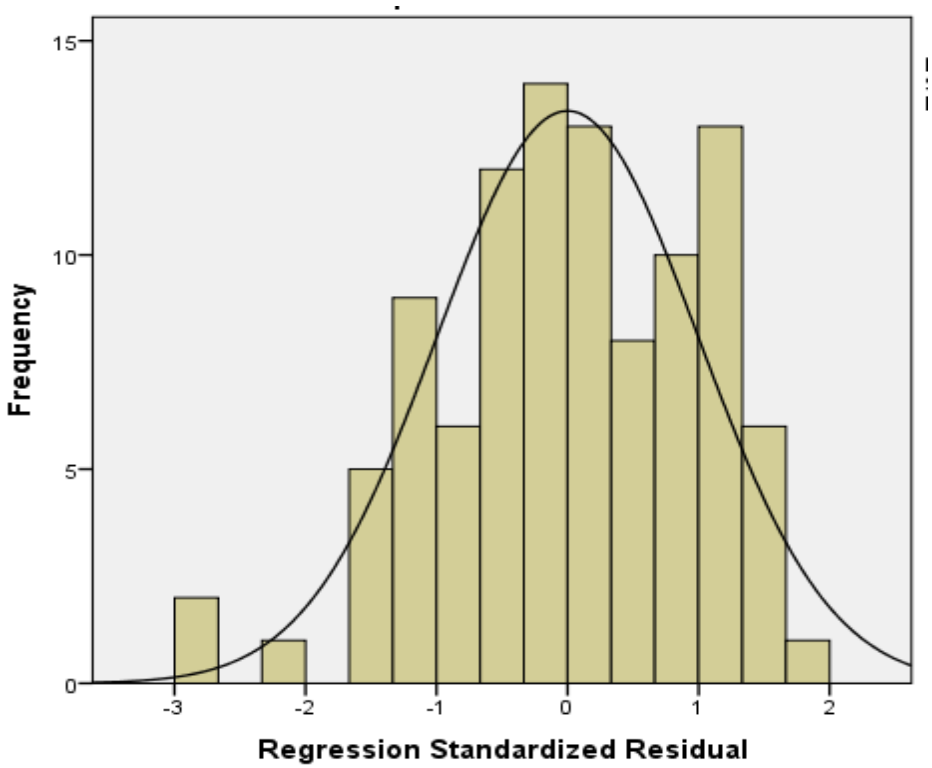

Figure 3. *The regression standardized residual for L trainee' consecutive interpreting and their overall consecutive interpreting performance*

Discussion

This study investigated the relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation and their interpreting performance. Further, it explored Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances in sight translation predicted their overall consecutive interpreting performance. The results showed that Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances of sight translation had a significantly positive relationship with their interpreting performance. The findings also revealed that Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances in sight translation meaningfully predicted their overall consecutive interpreting performance.

The findings of the study can be supported and justified by a number of previous research studies (Chen, 2015; Russo & Pippa, 2004; Pöchhacker, 2011; Shang & Xie, 2020; Russo, 2019, 2011; Russo & Pippa, 2004, to name few). In the same vein, Russo (2011) did a longitudinal study, and found that the Italian-to-Italian oral paraphrasing test was highly predictive of interpreter trainees' subsequent performance, with synonym production and coherence being the most reliable predictors. Similarly, Pöchhacker's (2011) also demonstrated a good ability to predict performance in German-to-German intralingual consecutive interpreting task. The results are also in line with the findings of Shang and Xie's (2020). They also explored the predictive validity of recall across languages for interpreting performance in the Chinese context based on empirical data. The research results revealed that recall across languages could generally predict candidates' consecutive interpreting performance, regardless of language direction.

In the same vein, previous studies have also revealed that the essential skills required for sight translation include reading ahead, resisting source text interference, paraphrasing, quick searches for equivalents, the ability to expand and condense, and understanding cultural nuances (Chen, 2015). Studies on curriculum design, meanwhile, have primarily focused on exploring the construct of sight translation and its relation to translator and interpreter training (e.g. González et al., 2012; Lee, 2012; Li, 2014), where it has generally been agreed that sight translation should be incorporated as part of the interpreter training curriculum due to the significant benefits it affords interpreter trainees (e.g. Ersozlu, 2005; Wan, 2005; Zhan, 2012). For instance, Wan's (2005) study revealed that interpreter trainees with prior sight translation training outperformed those without prior experience in terms of information prioritizing, message parsing, delivery accuracy, and untangling long sentences. It should also be noted that researchers investigating the cognitive processing of sight translation have largely reached a consensus on the particularly demanding nature of sight translation in comparison to other modes.

Similarly, Agrifoglio (2004) suggested that sight translation was more cognitively challenging than consecutive interpreting in the sense that the constant visual presence of the source text posed significant obstacles to the translator. The results are also in line with the findings of Jiménez Ivars (2008). She showed that the challenges encountered in sight translation, such as source text interference, lack of immediate access to equivalents, insufficient adeptness at reading ahead, and the need for other problem-solving strategies, made it a more challenging task than written translation. She also demonstrated there was a correlation between the

participants' performance in the sight translation and their subsequent consecutive interpreting performance.

The overall predictive power of consecutive interpreting trainees' performance of sight translation could be a consequence of the differences between these two modes of activity. During consecutive interpreting, the interpreter typically has no access to the source text but must instead leverage a broad skill set – including comprehension, memorization, note-taking, and coordination in the comprehension stage, and note-reading, short-term memory, and coordination in the production stage – in order to fully and accurately convey the message of the original speech (Gile, 2009). By contrast, in sight translation, the sight translator must perform the 'double conversion' of both the language and the medium (Setton & Dawrant, 2016); that is to say; they must read a written source language text aloud in the target language (Gile, 2009).

As a result of such differences, sight translation and consecutive interpreting may differ in terms of the range of qualities being assessed, which in turn could affect the predictive validity of sight translation. For instance, good active listening and short-term memory are two essential qualities required of the interpreter in the comprehension and production stages of consecutive interpreting – especially for lengthier speech segments. Nevertheless, such skills largely go untested in sight translation because a written source text is provided beforehand and remains visually present throughout the process. Participants with poor comprehension skills and memory could therefore have reached high scores in the sight translation tests and potentially become 'false positives' unsuitable for interpreter training, thus reducing the predictive power of such tests.

Similarly, during sight translation, the sight translator is usually provided with the source text beforehand, which allows them to overcome many difficulties by reading sentences and preparing their segmentation either mentally or through appropriate annotations. On the other hand, in interpreting, given that the transcript is not always provided, particularly when dealing with improvised speeches, the interpreter must leverage a great deal of synthesizing and reformulating skills to ensure smooth delivery. According to Gile (2009), the availability of the text and advance preparation in sight translation considerably reduces the effort load. Therefore, the differences in the construct—i.e. the underlying qualities being assessed—between sight translation and interpreting may have partially contributed to its predictive validity. Furthermore, the general practice in leading interpreter

training schools across the world is for consecutive interpreting and sight translation training to be offered before simultaneous interpreting (Setton & Dawrant, 2016). Indeed, as Bowles et al., (2016) state, candidates must have reached a 'confirmed and robust' baseline in consecutive interpreting before learning interpreting. Therefore, the participants' subsequent mastery of consecutive interpreting skills should also be treated as an important factor that can impact their readiness for training and hence the outcome, not to mention the role played by factors such as learning motivation and teaching quality as confounding variables (Russo, 2011).

In addition, the predictive power of consecutive interpreting trainees' performance in sight translation could also be attributed to the fact that "sight translation is more of an 'acquired skill' than a part of interpreter readiness" (Angelelli, 2007, p. 74). Therefore, the superior performance of some participants may be a result of a higher interpreting overall performance but perhaps instead a consequence of their having received prior training, or attended crash preparatory training prior to the overall performance. Therefore, those without such prior training could have been easily eliminated in the overall performance, thus becoming 'false negatives'. In addition, rather than testing participants on their interpreter-related skills (Horváth, I., & Tryuk, M.), the use of sight translation in interpreting overall performance is more akin to "testing a car driver for a pilot's course by asking him to fly" which should instead check their abilities in terms of "20/20 vision, steady hands, a grasp of trigonometry, and freedom from motion sickness" (Setton & Dawrant, 2016, p. 132). However, a test that focuses on testing participants on their acquired skills rather than on their overall performance does not guarantee its predictive validity. It might be worth noting that the participants' performance was correlated with both their consecutive interpreting and performance. While correlation does not necessarily indicate causation (Gravetter & Wallnau 2013), this finding could partially corroborate the importance of an individual's first language in overall performance, as advocated by interpreting practitioners and scholars (Carroll, 1978; Setton & Dawrant, 2016).

Conclusion

Sight translation is valued as an important pedagogical tool in the interpreting and language classrooms. Teaching of sight translation and consecutive interpreting skills is a reality, either as a separate course or a teaching unit in a translation or interpreting course.

This study investigated the relationship between Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performance in sight translation and their consecutive interpreting performance. Further, it predicted the trainees' overall consecutive interpreting performance through their consecutive interpreting performance in sight translation. The results showed that consecutive interpreting trainees' performance in sight translation had a significantly positive relationship with their consecutive interpreting performance. The findings also revealed that Iraqi consecutive interpreting trainees' performances in sight translation meaningfully predicted their overall consecutive interpreting performance.

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