SIGHT TRANSLATION PRACTICE EXERCISES

The exercises outlined below will help you develop skills in sight translation. Practice them in all your working languages.

Exercises in Public Speaking

1. Reading aloud - stand in front of a mirror and read passages aloud from any book, newspaper or magazine - a legal textbook, code book or other legal text is a good idea to become used to legal language. Record yourself and play back the tape when you are finished. Listen (and, if you can, videotape yourself, also observe) yourself critically and pay attention to your voice, pitch, tone, hesitations, sighs, projection, enunciation and posture.

2. Controlling emotions - practice controlling your emotions, while reading aloud, texts with high emotional content such as fear, anger, humor, etc. Make sure you convey the author's intended emotions, not your personal reaction to the subject matter.

3. Public speaking - practice speaking before a group of people at every opportunity. People you know will provide a less threatening audience and will allow you to ease your way into public speaking and build your confidence. Court interpreting is an ongoing exercise in public speaking, with witness interpreting and sight translation the consummate interpreter's arena.

Reading Ahead in the Text

1. Extensive reading - build up your reading speed and, as a bonus, also your vocabulary by reading as much as possible in many different fields.

2. Analyzing - analyze the content of each text and practice picking out the subject and verb to help find the core of meaning. (Example: although less influential than in Argentina, migration from Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries affected the development of Chilean political culture. Subject: migration; verb: affected)

3. Identifying sentences and embedded sentences - read a text aloud and as you are reading, break up long sentences into smaller, more manageable units. (Example: juvenile delinquency, which is seen most often among minority youths in urban ghettos, nevertheless cannot be attributed to the urban environment alone, as it plagues the suburbs as well. There are three embedded sentences in this complex sentence:

A. Juvenile delinquency is seen most often among minority youths in urban ghettos.
B. It cannot be attributed to the urban environment alone.
C. It plagues the suburbs as well.

4. Deciphering handwriting - obtain texts written by hand (e.g. letters) and practice deciphering the handwriting on the first oral reading.

Analytical Skills

1. Reading for content - read a text aloud to a friend and afterwards have the person ask you questions about its content.

2. Chunking - choose a text and mark off the units of meaning in it. (Example: I was getting ready/ to go out to lunch with/ my mother-in-law/ when/ all of sudden/ I felt sick to my stomach./ It occurred to me that/ it might be/ something psychosomatic,/ but I later found out that/ I was simply allergic to/ the perfume she always wore.

3. Using transcripts - perform the same task with transcripts of court proceedings (or any document with a question-and-answer format). Try to establish a hierarchy of importance of the units of meaning. (Example: Now, Mr. Jones, in your earlier testimony you mentioned that you had seen the defendant in that bar prior to the date of the incident. Can you tell us, or give us an approximation of how long before the incident it was that you first saw the defendant in the El Camino bar?)

   Hierarchy of importance:
   A. How long before the incident
   B. You first saw the defendant
   C. In the El Camino bar
   D. Tell us, or give approximation
   E. Had seen defendant prior to date of incident
   F. Mentioned in earlier testimony
   G. Mr. Jones
   H. Now

4. Completing phrases - have a friend write a series of incomplete phrases. Complete the phrases and determine. whether the resulting sentences convey the same idea the friend originally had in mind. (Example: After being reprimanded unfairly by her boss in front of her coworkers, the secretary tendered . . . The judge determined that the defendant had strong ties to the community and therefore released him . . .) As you do this exercise, take note of the errors you make and be aware of how susceptible we are to reaching false conclusions based on partial information.

5. Paraphrasing - read a text out loud and rephrase it as you are going along, taking care not to change the meaning. (Example: Since political parties are found almost everywhere in Latin America, they would seem to be a common denominator in the region's political life. Yet this is not the case. Cultural, environmental and historical influences on party development are so varied they challenge conventional notions. Most nations hold periodic elections, but, like parties, the implications of elections differ profoundly from those we assume from our own culture. Rephrased: Because political parties can be found in just about every Latin American country, one might conclude that they are a common thread in the political life of this region. This is not so, however. There is such a great variety of cultural, environmental and historical influences on the development of parties that commonly held ideas are contradicted. Elections are held periodically in the majority of countries, but the implications of these proceedings, like those of parties, are very different from the assumptions we can make in our own culture.)

6. Expanding - read a text aloud and expand it (that is, say the same thing in more words) as you are going along, again taking care not to change the meaning. (Example: In spite of what you may have heard, scientists are just like other people. A scientist walking down the street may look just like an insurance agent or a car salesman, no wild mane of hair, no white lab coat. Expanded: Although you may have heard assertions to the contrary, there are no differences between scientists and people who are not in that profession. As a matter of fact, if you stroll on the sidewalk, you might mistake him for a person who sells insurance, or an automobile dealer. Scientists don't all have wild manes of hair, and they don't always wear white laboratory coats.

7. Condensing - read a text aloud and condense it (that is, say the same thing in fewer words) as you are going along, retaining the same meaning. (Example: The multiplicity of cues which are utilized in the categorizing and sorting of the environment into significant classes are reconstructed from the strategies and modes of coping with the problems presented to the subjects. In many situations, no certainty can be achieved; the varying trustworthiness and merely statistical validity of the cues frequently make inferences only probable. Condensation: Many cues are used to classify the environment. They are reconstructed from the subjects' problem-solving strategies. Often, because the cues are not uniformly reliable and are only statistically valid, the results are not certain.

8. Manipulating the register - read a text aloud and alter the register or language level as you go along, being careful not to stray from the original meaning. (Example: As I was driving to work in the morning, I noticed that the stop sign which used to be on the corner of Main and 1st had been removed. Higher level: Upon transporting myself to my place of employment in a motor vehicle at some point in time prior to noon, I observed that the insignia which had formerly been stationed at the intersection of the thoroughfares known as Main and 1st to cause motorists to bring their vehicles to a stationary position, had been displaced. Lower level: On my way to work in the morning I saw that they took out the stop sign that used to be at Main and 1st.

NOTE: These are learning exercises designed to build mental agility, linguistic flexibility and analytical skills and to heighten awareness of language usage. In actual sight translation, the interpreter does NOT paraphrase, summarize, or change the register of the original text.