DIFFICULTIES OF SIGHT TRANSLATION: TRAINING TRANSLATORS TO SIGHT TRANSLATE

Mohammad Ahmad Thawabteh

Al-Quds University, Jerusalem,
Occupied Palestinian Territories

Abstract

From time immemorial, translation has always been described as an exercise of intercultural communication. Undoubtedly, this exercise requires more and more training of translators to fulfill different translation tasks as effectively and efficiently as possible. Translator training has thus received undivided attention in training institutions all over the world. Drawing on findings of previous research, this article argues that sight translation remains an optimal invariable tool for interpreter training; yet it fails to exert any influence and presence in such training. The article further addresses theoretical and teaching methodological issues, and offers insights into an eminently pedagogical problem gained from an analysis of genuine output of two MA translation students who sat for the comprehensive exam at Al-Quds University for the scholastic year 2013–2014. The article shows serious problems in the translation task assigned to the students and, based on the analysis of their translations, it proposes pedagogical tools that may hopefully help to overcome sight translation intricacies.

Key words: interpreter training, sight translation, simultaneous interpreting, Arabic, English

1. INTRODUCTION

The significance of translation all over the world throughout history is based on the fact that it has played a crucial role in narrowing the cultural gap and making attitudinal change among nations. Without translation, we may claim, much would have been missed in our daily life. It goes without saying that the goal of translation is the transfer of meanings between two languages: the language from which translation occurs (Source Language, SL) and the language into which translation happens (Target Language, TL). This transference requires an appraisal of training in translation theory and active practice, a point which gives rise to no consensus amongst translation theorists and practitioners. Some believe that preference should be given for theory, rather than for practice, as Pym (2005: 3–6) states:

> A lot of theorizing is just there to protect academic fiefdoms. It helps gain institutional power. Every professional guru soon develops specific terms and catchphrases. That kind of power is not a bad thing. With it, changes in the profession can eventually lead to changes in institutional training program. Without it, we would be back to medieval apprenticeships.

In a sense, "the theory of translation teaches us […] that one cannot really translate without taking account of the context, or using the context to deduce guidelines that are not linguistic themselves but do have an impact on, and determine, lexical choices" (Correia 2003: 42).

On the other hand, others, including Pym, point out that practice should be the ultimate goal of translator training. "Translation theories are abstruse and useless; only professionals know the realities of translation; trainees thus need the professional skills, not the academic theories" (Pym 2005: 3–6). By the same token, Newmark (1991: 46–47) gives priority to practice and opines that "course curriculum should consist of 60% translation practice", including, among other things, sight translation (written or oral) (see also Niska 2005: 49). It seems possible to argue that translator training is a composite of translation theory and practice. Therefore, De Beaugrande (2003: 27; emphasis in original) speaks of reconciling theory and practice:

> **Theory** is how things get represented, whereas practice is how things get done. […] The relation between theory and practice would be **dialectical**, where a **dialectic** consists of an interactive cycle between two sides guiding or controlling each other. When the dialectic is working smoothly, the practice is **theory-driven**, and the theory is **practice-driven**; the theory predicates and accounts for the practice; and the practice specifies and implements the theory.

With regard to sight translation, compromising practice and theory may invariably be helpful to understand the complexities of this mode of interpreting and help to make appropriate pedagogical implications for the work of the translator.

2. SIGHT TRANSLATION

To set our claim clear from the beginning, it would be advantageous to look at sight translation. Talking about sight translation actually takes us on a long journey deeply rooted in interpreting. Weber (1984: 33) states that sight translation is "one of the basic ingredients of interpretation". According to Martin (1999, as cited in Shunnaq 2006: 20), sight translation "has all the characteristics of a translation whereas the final product has the demands of an interpretation, namely instant understanding and reformulation of cognitive content". Lambert (2004: 298) aptly defines sight translation in relation to Simultaneous Interpreting (SI):

> as a specific type of written translation as well as a variant of oral interpretation. From a human processing perspective, sight translation appears to have more in common with [SI], given the number of variables involved – time stress, anticipation, reading for idea closure, not to mention the oral nature of the task – factors that are either absent in written translation, or present only to a limited degree.

In terms of teaching methodology of translation, Newmark (1991: 46–47) considers sight translation as part of translation practice. Lambert (2004: 298) argues that "sight translation can be rendered more or less challenging: an unstressful form of sight translation is where the candidate is allowed approximately ten minutes to read a 300-word passage and prepare the vocabulary." However, "[a] more stressful variation of sight

translation would be where preparation time is eliminated altogether and the candidate is asked to begin translating immediately, without even having the chance to read the document" (ibid.; see also Song 2010: 122).

A convenient pedagogic method for developing interpreters' skills in SI is proposed by Song (2010: 123). It is a new method of sight translation based on using animated, time-controlled PowerPoint presentations instead of texts on paper, simply because in conference interpreting training, sight translation "is not taught or practiced merely for its own sake. It is taught with hopes that those particular skills of [sight translation] that are shared with SI can be developed prior to the commencement of SI, training and eventually acquired in time" (see also Marjorie, 2004 and Li, 2015).

The new method, Song further claims, must meet the following three requirements to make sight translation "more closely related to" SI:

> (1) It must be able to minimize the visual interference so that the skills of meaning-unit identification and chunking can be practiced with relative ease.
> (2) The effect of having the words vanish shall be simulated to the extent that the exercises for SI skill acquisition are made similar to the actual SI process.
> (3) In order to achieve this effect and the interplay of working memory with other skills in SI, external input rate must be introduced

> according to the individual competency levels of students (Song 2010: 123).

Perhaps, it is worth noting that there is a striking difference between sight translation and sight interpretation. In this regard, Lambert (2004: 299) makes a useful comparison between the two modes:

> Sight interpretation – as opposed to sight translation – is one step closer to [SI] in that the message is presented both aurally and visually. In this case, candidates are given five to ten minutes to prepare the written version of the message. Then, candidates are asked to deliver a sight interpretation of the text as it is being read to them through headphones. Candidates are urged to follow what the speaker is saying, given that the speaker may depart from the original text from time to time, and not to simply read from the passage as though it were a sight translation exercise.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Data of the study

Taking our cue from De Beaugrande's (2003) view, we analyse authentic student translations, thus an analysis that is theory practice-driven, with an eye to practice theory-driven. The main purpose of the present article is to investigate the difficulties of sight translation from Arabic into English. The data consists of an Arabic text (94 words in total, see Appendix I below) from

BBC Arabic[1]. To pinpoint and bring the problem under discussion into focus, the translations of two MA translation students from Al-Quds University were selected. The two students sat for the Comprehensive Exam for the scholastic year 2013–2014. The students translated the text into English using Audacity 1.3.2-beta (Unicode) and the recordings were transcribed and carefully analysed.

3.2. Significance of the study

It may be safe to claim that a large body of literature addresses itself to sight translation. However, we can claim that there is nothing to write home about research concerning sight translation in the Arabic-speaking world. In view of a lack of interest in sight translation and the dearth of basic and up-to-date Arab literature on the topic under discussion (perhaps with the exception of Shunnaq [2006]), the present article may be deemed significant because it addresses the complexities and intricacies of sight translation as illustrated in the outputs of MA translation students at Al-Quds University. Hopefully, this article provides pedagogical implications that will be of help to both translator trainers and trainees and illumine scholarly debate research-wise.

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[1] Available at:
http://www.bbc.co.uk/arabic/worldnews/2014/11/141124_australia_baby_found (visited March 2015).

4. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

In light of the aforementioned synoptic remarks on sight translation, it would be useful to examine a few illustrative examples to make our argument more diversified and corroborated. To speak of the cut and thrust of students' translations, a taxonomy of the major areas of difficulty is made, namely into discourse-related problems and linguistics-related problems.

4.1. Discourse-related Problems

According to Bowen and Bowen (1984: 4), the "ideal discourse would be a well-organized, but free-flowing one, based on a thorough knowledge of the subject". In translation, however, the discourse may be ill-starred. The term discourse is used by Hatim and Mason (1997: 216) to refer to the "modes of speaking and writing which involve social groups in adopting a particular attitude towards areas of socio-cultural activity (e.g. racist discourse, bureaucratese, etc.)". Hatim and Mason (ibid.) further argue that discourse embodies "attitudinal expression with language becoming by convention the mouthpiece of societal institutions (sexism, feminism)." Let us now take concrete examples to discuss under a number of headings *vis-à-vis* discourse.

4.1.1. Poorly-Organized Speech

The SL text should always establish a harmonious relationship among a web of intertextual signs with a view to arguing, describing, informing, and other aspects. The translation, it is hoped, should be a miniature version of the original as much as

possible. In Example 1 below, the output of the student translator is poorly-organized which makes it difficult for the target audience to comprehend the rhetorical purpose the SL text intends to make.

Example 1

Original	القت الشرطة الأسترالية القبض على شابة تبلغ من العمر 30 عاما بعدما اتهمتها بمحاولة قتل رضيعها بعيد ساعات من ولادته.
	[Gloss: Australian police have charged a 30-year-old woman with attempted murder after she abandoned her newborn baby in a drain].
Sight Translation	The Australian police has arrested a lady, her age is thirty after accusing her of killing her child after hours of his birth.

The seriously flawed sight translation (obtained via transcription of the recorded material of the exam) in Example 1 above is due to the fact that the signs are recalcitrant to each other, i.e. the translation does not go smoothly for obvious reasons. First, opting for 'a lady' with all the positive connotations (e.g. a woman from the upper classes, referring to a woman out of respect) suffers from a curious contradiction in the subsequent flow of the original speech in which شابة (lit. 'young lady') is used with pejorative connotations as shown in 'attempted murder of a newborn baby'. Second, the wordiness in 'her age is thirty' is a sign of incompetence on the part of the student translator. Third, opting for a literal translation of Arabic قتل (lit. 'killing') is inadequate as it is pragmatically neutral in English whereas in Arabic, when viewed in concomitant with بمحاولة قتل رضيعها (lit. 'attempted murder of a newborn baby'), it refers to a

179

deliberate and illegal killing of a newborn, an abominable crime indeed that cannot be encapsulated in the use of 'killing', but rather in 'attempted murder of a newborn baby' *per se*. It exemplifies, therefore, that these peculiarities in translation are alien to the pragmalinguistic features of English.

4.1.2. Multifarious Rephrasing Speech

Multifarious rephrasing speech should not be assumed to be discrete or hermetic, but conducive to maximum communicative thrust by means of a host of requirements, ranging from understanding the subject to knowing the language and terminology (see Bowen and Bowen 1984: 12). Nevertheless, example 2 below illustrates superfluous rephrasing that is likely to hinder the communication in the utterance in question.

Example 2

Original	ويظن الأطباء أن الطفل قد بقي في الخزان ملفوفا في بطانية خاصة.
	[Gloss: Doctors believed the baby had been left in a drain, wrapped with a hospital blanket]
Sight Translation	Medicals, Medicines, Medicals believe the baby was left in a drain, wrapped with a hospital blanket.

The translation in Example 2 is awkward resulting from student translator's ineptitude, with apparently hesitant unsure performance on the part of the student translator. Labouring the point, the student translator runs the risk of producing incorrect lexical items with such a conflictual relationship, e.g. the use of 'medicals' and 'medicine'. Failure to uphold idiomaticity in

English might be ascribable to increased pressure normally entailed in interpreting. Rephrasing speech by trial and error might be a good method to come up with a correct choice which, unfortunately, is not the case in example 2 above. It is worth drawing attention to the fact that the translator should, or even must, make a conscious effort to select the right and appropriate item, rather than just jumping on a haphazard selection of words.

4.1.3. Fragmented Syntax Speech

Bowen and Bowen (1984: 13) point out that "the translation must contain the complete sequence of ideas in the original speech", a point that is quite true in sight translation. Consider example 3 below:

Example 3

Original	وعثر على الرضيع في خزان لصرف مياه الأمطار على عمق مترين ونصف المتر داخل الأرض في منطقة مهجورة. [Gloss: He was discovered 2.5 meters down inside the pit in a deserted area]
Sight Translation	It was found this child in a… a… a… a… a place for running the rains in the drowns, depth for 2.5 meters inside the land.

In example 3 above, the fragmented syntax speech is self-evident and obviously detrimental to clarity. Truly, the fragmented sentences, other things being equal, give rise to a total breakdown in communication.

4.1.4. Speech of Discontinuities

It is of paramount importance that a student translator renders a stretch of discourse quite logically. A lack of smooth and continuous logical development of a given discourse may have deleterious effect on the TL audience's comprehension of that discourse as example 4 (used above to illustrate a totally different point) may show:

Example 4

Original
وعثر على الرضيع في خزان لصرف مياه الأمطار على . عمق مترين ونصف المتر داخل الأرض في منطقة مهجورة. [Gloss: He was discovered 2.5 meters down inside the pit in a deserted area]

Sight Translation
The infant was found in a… in a… in a… in basin of a waste water, waste water, at a depth of 2.5 meters, in a desert in a… in a desert, in an isolated area.

A labyrinth of conflicting ideas is observed in example 4 above. The student translator mutters and utters something unintelligible. More concentrated and/or reflective listening on the part of the target audience to forge an interpretation of what has been said is highly needed, yet with a great chance of failure. The translator should enunciate each word slowly and carefully.

4.2. Linguistic-related Problems

It is oft-truism that languages cut linguistic realities quite differently, which is almost bound to lead to an impoverishment of translation. Arabic and English are two languages that stand

as a perfect example of those of little linguistic and cultural affinity. A set of categories for the classification of problems is adopted for the sake of the present study, namely as lexical and syntactic problems.

4.2.1. Lexical Problems

Undoubtedly, Arabic and English are remote languages, and hence emerge the differences both culturally and linguistically. Dispartity at lexicons between the two languages is expected. The nomenclature of animals in Arabic for instance gives more than 200 names for a camel, 450 for a lion. Lexical equivalence tends to be challenging. Larson (1984: 189) states that "translation is much more than finding word equivalencies. The source text must be abandoned for the natural receptor language structures without significant loss or change of meaning." Consider example 5 below:

Example 5
Original   قتل رضيعها
                    [Gloss: killing her newborn]

Sight   killing her child
Translation

Strange as it may seem, at first sight, the researcher stakes a claim that formal equivalence for Arabic قتل (lit. 'kill') could be 'kill' in producing a somewhat commendable translation. Having indulged into the connotations and emotive overtones of the Arabic قتل (lit. 'kill'), we come up with ones not shown in the sight translation, simply because of lexical incongruence between Arabic and English. English has its own peculiar

properties of 'kill', 'murder' and 'assassination' that are likely to be impervious to Arabic. *Collins Cobuild* (2003; emphasis in original) offers the following defintions of those items, respectively: "If a person, animal, or other living thing **is killed**, something or someone causes them to die"; "**[m]urder** is the deliberate and illegal killing of a person"; and "[w]hen someone important **is assassinated**, they are murdered as a political act."

4.2.2. Syntactic Problems

Translation should comply with the generally accepted syntactic norms in the TL. It is perhaps always the case that syntactic divergence between the SL and TL prevails in the course of translation. In example 6 below, the baby was taken to a hospital for medical treatment. The translation may imply that the baby was hospitalized for reasons other than treatment.

Example 6	
Original	وتم نقله الى المستشفى حيث يعاني من حالة صحية سيئة لكنها مستقرة.
	[Gloss: The baby, who is in a serious but stable condition, was admitted to hopsital]
Sight Translation	And he was transferred to the hospital and he suffers of severe bad health

If we look more deeply into the rendition above, we will find that it falls short of delivering the message of the Arabic utterance. The addition of the definite article to the English noun 'hospital' makes the message rather odd.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Thus far, the discussion makes a plea for a greater consideration to the pedagogical angle depicted by the study. Typically, interpreting is extremely difficult for both not-fully-fledged student translators/interpreters and even professional translators/interpreters who might be on a knife-edge. This mode of translation of great antiquity necessitates the introduction of pedagogical issues that can help to give translator training all over the world a jump-start. Pedagogical-related implications in previous research are made by Weber (1984: 33), that the instructor should observe the student translators' skills in the following areas: (1) public speaking qualities, poise, presentation, and voice; (2) speed; and (3) clarity and conciseness of the rendition. Precisely true, training should, or even must, help postgraduates or translator trainees to acquire public speaking skills – students should be calm and self-controlled. In example 2 above, the student apparently does not have poise. To do sight translation with aplomb, extensive training (grounded in most recent developments in technology and teaching methodologies) should be applied. Drawing on the findings by Weber, the following pedagogical implications can be made.

5.1. Ubiquity of Training Principles

Training beyond university frontiers can be of help. Such training is not exclusively bound to universities or other training institutions. Traditionally, translator students receive training within a narrow geographical area: a language laboratory with booths, computers, videos, and other equipment. The rapidly developing growth of technology, and the pervasiveness of

computer technology in particular, change everything. For instance, training may involve the introduction of, say, user-friendly Audacity 1.3.2-beta (Unicode) software to sight translation, virtually unknown a few decades ago. Student translators can go through self-training over and over again, thus attaining a state of confidence. The instructor may provide the students with various texts for sight translation outside a training institution. Alternatively, the student translators can work on any type of text on their own.

5.2. Horizontal Axis Principle

This principle is based on systematic relations in which two or more units are arranged horizontally to make a correct, meaningful clause, sentence, or another unit based on eye tracking – the motion of the eye along the horizontal axis cognitively, analysing the most important segments in the making of meaning. Hatim and Mason (1990: 226) point out that "text items are analyzed in themselves and matched against each other, a process of syntactic and lexical decoding which results in the gradual building-up of composite meaning as reading proceeds" In figure 1 below, the student translator should be able to anticipate that شابة (lit. 'young lady') is a criminal, based on horizontal axis eye tracking and then detailed analysis, i.e. 'Australian police arrested', and 'murdering'.

القت·الشرطة·الاسترالية·القبض·على·شابة·تبلغ·من·العمر·30·عاما·بعدما·اتهمتها·بمحاولة·قتل·رضيعها·
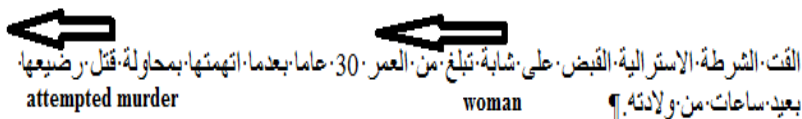attempted murder   woman
بعيد·ساعات·من·ولادته.¶

Figure 1: Horizontal axis information process

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The student translator can deal with the sequence in figure 1 above in a horizontal direction, focusing on the most determinants in the making of meaning. Arguably, it is this horizontal axis information process that may help the student translator make countless practical decisions that القت الشرطة الأسترالية القبض (lit. 'the Australian police arrested') and بمحاولة قتل رضيعها (lit. 'attempted murder of her newborn baby') are sufficient intertextual signs to select 'a woman', rather than 'a lady' in the end product by the students.

5.3. Vertical Axis Principle

This principle is based on a cognitive process in which two or more units are arranged vertically to make a correct, meaningful clause, sentence, or another unit. The eye tracks vertically in the most salient segments in a given text. This is another mode of reading. According to Hatim and Mason (1990: 226), "readers bring to text their own sets of assumptions based on previous experience of the world, so that each successive portion of text is processed in the light of these assumptions, and predictions are made the likely development of the text." In figure 2 below, the segment عثر على الرضيع (lit. 'the baby was discovered') should trigger the hospitalization of the newborn baby, malnutrition, dehydration, among many other signs.

القت الشرطة الاسترالية القبض على شابة تبلغ من العمر 30 عاما بعدما اتهمتها بمحاولة قتل رضيعها بعيد ساعات من ولادته. وعثر على الرضيع في خزان لصرف مياه الامطار على عمق مترين ونصف المتر داخل الارض في منطقة مهجورة وتم نقله الى المستشفى حيث يعاني من حالة صحية سيئة لكنها مستقرة. ويظن الاطباء ان الطفل قد بقي في الخزان ملفوفا في بطانية خاصة باحد المستشفيات مدة تصل الى 5 ايام حيث يعاني من جفاف شديد ونقص حاد في التغذية. وتعرفت الشرطة على الام بعدما راجعت سجلات حالات الولادة خلال الايام السبعة الماضية في المستشفيات القريبة

Figure 2: Vertical axis information process

5.4. Contrastive Linguistic Principle

Honing translation skills in preparatory translation practice courses prior to attempting sight translation seems to be useful in training. In contrastive linguistics, the student translator is likely to be exposed to intensive training on how to translate a particular segment from language A into language B. In example 6 above, the error committed by the student may be attributed to the student's lack of knowledge on the use of definite articles with nouns like church, prison, school, hospital in which the use of the article sets the purpose. Another example is the unnaturalness of the use of 'transferred' instead of 'was taken' or 'was admitted'.

5.5. In-Class Rostrum Principle

Weber (1984: 33) believes that "it is important to have students perform at a speaker's rostrum, so that they face the class. This will help them cope with stage fright and nervousness." In interpreting setting, we can argue that 'two translators are half a translator, and three translators are no translator at all'. In other words, individuality should be encouraged and enhanced. The instructor should encourage students individually for public speaking. When students take to the podium, they may gain several qualities, e.g. self-assurance, self-belief, among other things.

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5.5. Reading Comprehension Principle

Developing reading comprehension and fast reading skills is crucial in sight translation training. Ersozlu (2005: Exercise 1; see also Hatim and Mason 1997) says:

> In the beginning, the students are given a text (250–300 words) in their native language and are asked to read the whole text in 20–30 seconds. Then, they are asked general questions about the subject of the text. In the second phase, they are asked more specific questions (such as names, dates, places, etc.) before they are asked to read the text for the second time. This time, they are given 10–15 seconds to find the specific information. Lastly, the students are given enough time to read the text thoroughly. This time, they are asked comprehension questions. The same exercise is repeated with the texts written in L2.

Two reading comprehension skills are suggested: scanning which refers to looking through written material "quickly in order to find important or interesting information" (*Collins Cobuild* 2003) and skimming: to "read through it quickly" (ibid.).

The students should be given different text types (e.g. legal, technical, business, etc.). It is also important to help the student acquire two of the most important reading strategies, namely skimming and scanning.

Thawabteh M. (2015). Difficulties of Sight Translation: Training Translators to Sight Translate. Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E, 2. 171–195.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study examined the translation problems in sight translation from Arabic into English as illustrated in two MA student translators' work, i.e. texts on paper method different from that proposed by Song (2010). An analysis of the translated sentences yielded the following conclusions: the sight translations are replete with discourse-related problems and linguistic-related problems as well, possibly due to excessive employment of formal equivalence-based strategies, e.g. literal translation, word-for-word translation and so on. These formal strategies imply inadequate language competence of the students. What has been said permits the conclusion that functional equivalence may bring about a translation of high quality. To ensure this, some pedagogical implications are made in the light of student translation problems. It can be concluded that (1) a lack of sensitivity to language pairs is a source of difficulty in the translations; to master this problem, Roberts (1992: 61) suggests that trainees could be asked to undertake a strenuous analysis of a source text "intended for a sight translation exercise in class and to look up the meanings of only a given number of terms identified in advance. Their contextual analysis of other lexical items should then be quickly verified before the start of sight translation"; (2) an encyclopedic knowledge of sciences should be included in translator training and; (3) a misuse of appropriate translation strategies in different translational environments contributes to several translation problems of the students; (4) ill-prepared training in sight translation may have contagion traces of erroneous translations; (5) training should cater for two layers of meaning: denotative and connotative, which may lead to better comprehension of the SL; and (6) sight translation seems to be one of the most

favorable cornerstones of university curricula that have to do with interpreting training.

Thawabteh M. (2015). Difficulties of Sight Translation: Training Translators to Sight Translate. Current Trends in Translation Teaching and Learning E, 2. 171–195.

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Appendix I

القت الشرطة الأسترالية القبض على شابة تبلغ من العمر 30 عاما بعدما اتهمتها بمحاولة قتل رضيعها بعيد ساعات من ولادته. وعثر على الرضيع في خزان لصرف مياه الأمطار على عمق مترين ونصف المتر داخل الأرض في منطقة مهجورة وتم نقله الى المستشفى حيث يعاني من حالة صحية سيئة لكنها مستقرة. ويظن الأطباء أن الطفل قد بقي في الخزان ملفوفا في بطانية خاصة بأحد المستشفيات مدة تصل إلى 5 ايام حيث يعاني من جفاف شديد ونقص حاد في التغذية. وتعرفت الشرطة على الأم بعدما راجعت سجلات حالات الولادة خلال الأيام السبعة الماضية في المستشفيات القريبة.