ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram

STSM final report

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

Beneficiary: Alba Celia, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Departament de Traducció i Ciències del Llenguatge
Host: Cecchetto Carlo, Universita' degli Studi di Milano-Bicocca, Dipartimento di Psicologia
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started and finished in the expected dates.

The main goals of the stage were threefold: to compare and exchange data from Italian Sign Language (LIS) and Catalan Sign Language (LSC) regarding wh-questions; to develop/compare elicitation materials and strategies for eliciting wh-questions; lay the foundations for the design of an experiment to compare wh-questions in spoken and signed modalities.
During the meetings with Prof Carlo Cecchetto we discussed some basic data of LSC wh-occurrences and compared them with LIS. Some of them were: wh-doubling, wh-NMM spreading, indirect wh-questions, long distance wh-dependencies, and multiple wh-questions. The necessity of eliciting specific structures showed up. For instance, some tests have been shown necessary to know whether we are in fact dealing with indirect questions or with free relatives. To test this, we need to better observe NMM over these constituents (free relatives more easily accept raised-brows-NMM). In addition, substituting simple wh-

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expressions for complex wh-expressions in these examples will help avoiding possible DP readings.
Many differences between both languages have been made clear, such as wh-doubling (LIS is more constrained in terms of the distribution of the two wh-elements, and LSC allows a greater variety of distributions), and wh-NMM spreading (although the compulsory spreading to the right of the wh-element is shared by both languages, LIS is more constrained in terms of the spreading over the material on the left of the wh-element, and LSC allows more 'leftward' spreading).

The meetings with Prof Carlo Cecchetto were also fruitful in terms of how data could be accounted for. Specifically, we have worked on the possibility of giving an account of some syntactic facts based on a different framework from the approach followed until now. This new approach will not assume a syntax that gives all the information about linear order. Syntax, under this view, would only give hierarchy: it gives the level of embedding of each element. To put it simply, the higher a node is in the hierarchy, the more peripheral it is linearly. In these terms, what counts for syntax is not whether Spec,CP is on the right or on the left, but rather if a given element is in a peripheral or in an argumental position. The final relative order of sister constituents is left to a linearization algorithm. This new perspective poses new questions that must be answered and that the previous approach could not face. For instance, why is LSC so permissive in linearizing elements? why are some elements generally linearized differently from spoken modality?
The meetings with Prof Cecchetto and Prof Papagno allow me to go one step further in the experimental part of my work, e.g. the study of the working memory particularities of signed modality. My working hypothesis is that the prominence of the beginning of the proference is lower in signed modality than in spoken modality when processing a sentence. In other words, there would be a lack of what has been called *primacy effect* in signed modality. In order to test this, I will run a free recall experiment in both modalities. During my discussions with Prof Cecchetto and Prof Papagno, it has become evident that it is necessary to correctly evaluate the impact of semanticity in this kind of tests. The pilots, which are being designed now, will help determining the convenience of using signs, pseudosigns or both.

During my stay in Milano, I was fortunate to be invited to a meeting of the LIS research group in the frame of the COST project whose aim is to carry out a comparative study of the different SL in Europe. The meeting, held in Venice, devoted one session to imperative constructions and, luckily, a second session to wh-doubling constructions. These meetings were very helpful for me in two senses: first, I could observe their eliciting methods and setting, and refine mine own; and, second, I could observe some of the hypotheses the group is working with regarding wh-doublings. The testing of such hypotheses in LSC will be interesting in the description of my data and also in the comparative work between different SL.