ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram

STSM final report

Paris, July 31 2012

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

Beneficiary: Gemma Barberà, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona)
Host: Carlo Geraci, Institut Jean-Nicod (Paris)
Period: from 02/07/2012 to 31/07/2012 Place: Paris (France)
Reference code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1006-060712-9697

started and finished in the expected dates.

Report:

The main purpose of this STSM was to analyse the interpretative properties of sign space referred by localised whole entity classifiers. The specific goals were the following:

-To test whether the iconic component of sign language classifiers is mainly triggered by handshape or by the localisation in sign space of the handshape.

-To test the iconic component that classifiers handshapes have.

To achieve the first goal, a pilot experiment has been designed, together with Dr. Carlo Geraci. In this experiment the generation of scalar implicatures will be tested in exhaustive

listings expressed with classifier handshapes localised in sign space. Previous to the design of the experiment, my work consisted in three main tasks:

-To achieve a better understanding of the semantics of exhaustive listings with relation to scalar implicatures and the generation of alternatives. For this task, conversations with Dr. Philippe Schlenker and Dr. Geraci have been crucial for my understanding of the theoretical issue.

-To learn the basics of how to design a psycholinguistic experiment, by identifying the variables, its predictors, and the design of stimuli. For this task, conversations with Dr. Emmanuel Chemla and Dr. Geraci have been crucial for the development of the task.

-To achieve a deeper knowledge of language specific properties that localised whole entity classifiers have cross-linguistically, by considering Catalan SL (LSC), Italian SL (LIS) and French SL (LSF). This task has been undertaken together with Dr. Geraci and the two native informants for LIS and LSF, respectively.

The result is the design of a pilot study which will be tested in the three aforementioned SLs. The results of this experiment will contribute to a better understanding of the interpretative and iconic properties of the localisation in sign space of whole entity classifiers.

During the conversations with Dr. Geraci, the issue of testing the role of iconicity in classifier handshapes also arised. To test it, another experiment will be designed and tested in the near future by replicating Bosworth & Emmorey (2010) study. This experiment will study the semantic priming effects that sign language classifiers have. The working hypothesis is that semantic relatedness enhances the recognition of signs, and that iconicity of handshape classifiers is not relevant for the recognition of signs.

Another important work that was carried out during this STSM was the elicitation of data about specificity encoding in LIS and LSF. This preliminary data shows that the marking of specificity is encoded differently across sign languages and the present working hypothesis is that specificity marking is compositionally built with index signs directed to the three spatial planes and with non-manual marking. This study will enhance a depth knowledge of referentiality in sign languages, as well as foster cross-linguistic comparisons of concrete phenomena in these visual-spatial languages.

This productive STSM has led to some future collaborations that will take place between Jean Nicod (Paris) and Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Barcelona) with long distance interactions, as well as other possible exchange meetings, within the frame of COST:

(i) The running of experiment 1 in the three SLs and the corresponding analysis and interpretation of results in the 3 SLs.

(ii) The design and running of experiment 2.

(iii) After the conversations with Dr. Geraci and the SL native informants, some grammatical differences have been attested on the use of classifier handshapes among the three SLs, which deserve a theoretical cross-linguistic approach.

(iv) Work on a subtopic related to specificity marking, such as specificity encoding within sentential complements, will be addressed in the near future.

These four lines of future collaborations will culminate in various publications, which will contribute to WG3, and also WG2 (see collaboration (iv)), of our COST Action.

All the best,

Gemma Barberà