ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram

EUROPEAN COOPERATION
IN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

STSM final report

Klagenfurt, June 23 2014

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

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Host: Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies, Centre for Sign Language Research,
School of Humanities, University of Iceland
Period: from May 30, 2014, to June 4, 2014
Place: Reykjavík (Iceland)
Reference code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1006-300514-041482

started and finished in the expected dates.

The goal of the STSM was implementing a methodological approach for identifying (epistemic) modality categories in Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM) by a test run. This approach was realized to identify (epistemic) modality categories in Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS). The small-scale investigation aimed at implementing this study in another unrelated sign language (SL), documenting the procedure and comparing the findings between both sign languages (SLs).

The STSM included the following steps:
- Exchanging/Explaining the research project
- Participating at the SL workshop at the LREC 2014 in order to discuss the methodological approach
- Preparing the project implementation including the creation of instructions for the informants as well as the preparation for carrying out the annotation task (ELAN-template, annotation guidelines for this project, annotation conventions in Icelandic and English)

- Conducting a first test run with two informants including recording their signed thoughts as well as annotating their recordings
- Discussing the first outcome focusing on manuals and non-manuals coding (epistemic) modality

For the most part we followed our work plan. Before the STSM I prepared/adopted/translated (into English) the annotation guidelines (procedure), the annotation conventions and the ELAN template which were used for this project. In addition, my Deaf Austrian project colleague gave an introduction into ELAN. Also, he described the most important steps for annotation with regard to this research purpose.

During the STSM we followed the work plan (as described above), simply the preparation of an instruction video was changed into giving face-to-face instructions to the informants. In addition, various ideas for thoughts including the signers' evaluation on these thoughts were discussed, listed, and offered to the informants.

With the test run, we realized that the recording process took a whole day. Thus, the following day(s) the informants conducted the annotation task. The very reason therefore was that it took some hours for recording all 'signed thoughts' as we made some breaks in order to discuss with the Deaf instructor how to change instructions in order to get more signed thoughts[1]. What is more, the entire recordings had to be cut, converted and looked through as only a choice of signed thoughts expressed with different epistemic attitudes were taken for the annotation task.

With the Deaf informants' annotation task, the first insights of the procedure showed various similarities to the annotation procedure of the Austrian Deaf informants. The annotator(s) identified various nonmanuals within a train of thoughts, often associated them with the manual lexemes (with regard to their occurrence), and described the meaning of these nonmanuals within the particular language context. Also, the first insights show that (epistemic) modality seems to be coded (also) non-manually. But, in order to get clear results on coding (epistemic) modality manually and/or non-manually, a large-scale and detailed investigations will have to be conducted in ÍTM. As expected, the annotation task took a vast amount of time and so the annotation task of the second annotator had to be continued after the STSM.

To conclude, the first insights show that this methodological approach can be used as 'elicitation guideline' for getting more insights on coding (epistemic) modality in SLs. What is more, the STSM surely fostered the collaboration between the Austrian and Icelandic SL research teams.

All the best,
Andrea Lackner

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[1] In ÍTM the sign IMAGINE is not only used for expressing lines of thoughts; the sign is also used for imaging a happened event. This resulted in various recordings in which the informants told a story which happened in the past (and which they just imagined). In ÖGS there are different signs for imaging / thinking of a situation which are VORSTELLEN (IMAGINE), ÜBERLEGEN (THINK-OF), GEDANKEN-VORSTELLEN (IMAGING-THOUGHTS). Using these different signs made it easier for the Austrian instructor(s) to explain the task.