ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram

STSM final report

Venice, May 22, 2013

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

> Beneficiary: Mantovan Lara, Ca' Foscari University of Venice
> Host: Geraci Carlo, Institut Jean-Nicod, CNRS
> Period: from 01/02/2013 to 30/04/2013
> Place: Paris (France)
> Reference code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1006-010213-023668

started and finished in the expected dates.

The main purpose of my STSM in Paris was investigating the syntax of the Determiner Phrase with respect to two historically related sign languages, namely LIS and LSF. In particular, my project aimed at verifying to what extent Greenberg's Universal 20 (U20) and its subsequent formalizations (Cinque 2005, Abels & Neeleman 2009) can account for LIS and LSF data.

My work during the three-month STSM included several activities.
In order to reinforce and complete my education on formal linguistics, I attended two courses at École Normale Supérieure: Formal Semantics (Prof. Emmanuel Chemla and Vincent Homer),

and Advanced Syntax (Prof. Vincent Homer). In addition, I explored several issues on the nominal domain of different sign languages during the workshop on "Nominal reference in sign languages", that was held in Paris on 27-28 March 2013. Furthermore, I gained some basic knowledge of LSF which was necessary in order to interact with local Deaf informants and collect LSF data.

During various meetings with Dr. Carlo Geraci, we discussed several topics concerning my research and we refined the linguistic analysis on LIS data. Given the considerable degree of internal variation in the DP domain, we tried to evaluate whether the fine-grained version of the U20 is well-equipped enough to predict LIS order variation. With respect to this line of research, we are preparing a joined paper in which we argue that U20 is respected even within languages showing word order flexibility.

At a later stage in my STSM, I organized the elicitation activity in collaboration with Dr. Geraci. Each session was planned to be approximately 1.5 hours long. The materials for the elicitation included a digital camera and a powerpoint presentation containing pictures. If needed, the slides prepared for the elicitation sessions are available to COST members. The linguistic tasks were the following:

1. picture-naming task: useful as warm-up and also for the collection of isolated signs;
2. a) elicitation of bare-minimum sentences including a transitive verb;
   b) expansion of simple sentences by adding nominal modifiers connected to the subject/object DPs in a step-up fashion;
   c) grammaticality judgments on the relative order between two different nominal modifiers in a sentential context (partial combinations);
3. elicitation of sentences containing the elements relevant to U20 (demonstrative, numeral, adjective, and noun);
4. elicitation of restrictive and non-restrictive adjectives in sentential context.

After a short training session, I elicitated data from a LIS informant. This activity was supervised by Dr. Geraci. In the following elicitation sessions, I worked autonomously and collected LSF data by recording the linguistic production of three LSF informants. Stimuli were provided through pictures or in LSF directly; French was never used. Mirko Santoro, a Deaf research engineer who has very good competence in LSF, helped me occasionally during some of the elicitation tasks.

The collection and recording of linguistic data represent the starting point towards further research on the syntax of the nominal domain. Although the preliminary results show some apparent similarities between LIS and LSF, accurate investigations are required. Once data analysis is completed, an interesting research goal is to trace a path from data to theory. Given the hypotheses proposed by Cinque (2005) and Abel & Neeleman (2009), Dr. Geraci and I are planning to verify which of the two proposals is best suited to account for the collected LIS and LSF data. We expect to write a paper on these issues and possibly to submit an abstract to a conference.

A further correlated research topic is the distribution of cardinal numerals with respect to the noun, which has already shown some surprising results in a preliminary work (Mantovan & Geraci, 2012). After having examined some peculiarities of Shuapamem, a Grassfields Bantu language, on the basis of Vázquez-Rojas's work (2011), I considered the possibility that some similarities with LIS could arise. In order to verify this possibility, I conceived a series of linguistic tests involving cardinal numerals (a.o. measure phrases, presentational context, maximality implication), some of which take into account some modality-specific aspects such as hand orientation and non-manual marking. Whether the position of the numeral with respect to the noun may give rise to different semantic interpretations is an open issue. It requires further investigations and future exchanges, possibly in the frame of COST.

Best regards,

Lara Mantovan

References

Abels, A. & Neeleman, A. (2009). Universal 20 without the LCA. In J. M. Brucart, A. Gavarro, J. Sola, (eds.), *Merging features: Computation, interpretation, and acquisition*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 60-79.

Cinque, G. (2005). Deriving Greenberg's Universal 20 and its Exceptions. In *Linguistic Inquiry*, vol. 36, 315-332.

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Vázquez-Rojas, V. (2011). Definite and Indefinite Numeral Phrases in Shupamem. In Neil Myler & Jim Wood. *NYUWP*, Vol 3, 3, 231-244.