



ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram



STSM final report

Amsterdam, April 26th, 2015

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

Beneficiary: Roland Pfau, University of Amsterdam

Host: Meltem Kelepir, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul

Period: from April 13th to April 22nd, 2015

Place: Istanbul (Turkey)

Reference code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1006-130415-056344

started and finished in the expected dates.

Text of report

The STSM had two goals, both of them directly or indirectly related to the topic of the COST Action IS1006. The main goal of the STSM was a research-related goal, namely the cross-linguistic study of comparative constructions. Besides that, the secondary goal was to brainstorm with the host about the content of classes that we are going to teach at the COST SignGram Summer School in Barcelona in May.

My time at the Boğaziçi University was very efficient, and I am highly satisfied with what I achieved during these 8 days. This being said, I have to admit that – due to circumstances – the balance between the two goals was not as originally planned, mostly because other important COST-related tasks sneaked in which required my attention. Yet, I am convinced that I put my time at Boğaziçi University to very good use. Below, I will address the two goals and also add comments on the other work I executed.



Study on Comparatives:

- (i) Discussion of TİD data and comparison to NGT: I had a very fruitful and inspiring discussion with Sumru Özsoy and Hüner Kaşıkara on comparatives. Both have recently started to work on TİD comparatives. Their data elicitation from a number of signers yielded very interesting results. We watched and discussed some of their data, and I feel that I was able to provide some useful feedback. To name just the most intriguing aspects: (a) They found a manual modification of certain adjectives which they considered an instance of incorporation (of the manual sign MORE). It seemed to me, however, that an incorporation analysis is not appropriate and that we are in fact dealing with an instance of inflection. (b) They identified an auxiliary-like element in the data which traces a path between the base and the comparee. We discussed the auxiliary status of the element and the typologically unusual fact that the comparee is mentioned first (cf. *His brother Peter is taller as*). (c) We discussed the striking fact that TİD allows for double marking of comparatives (cf. *Peter is more taller than his brother*). I was able to provide some hints concerning a phrase-structural account of the data.

The comparison with NGT was less informative than I had hoped, as I had not been able to conduct a reliable pilot study before the trip. Still, it is clear that NGT behaves differently in at least some respects. First, it is clear that in NGT, iconic signs referring to concrete properties (e.g. TALL, FAT) behave differently from non-iconic signs referring to abstract properties (e.g. OLD, INTELLIGENT) in that the former are easily modified to express the comparative functions. While different types of signs were included in the TİD study, this distinction was not central in the investigation, and our discussion concerning this factor was thus enlightening. Also, NGT commonly employs a sign MORE, while the use of a comparable sign appears to be less common in TİD (although it is attested).

- (ii) Methodology: I profited a lot from the discussion of the methodology used by Sumru and Hüner. While some of the elicitation materials designed by Hüner turned out not to elicit the desired structure (or were simply misunderstood by the signers) – something that commonly happens in sign language research – she succeeded in putting together an impressive set of visual stimuli that turned out to be very effective. Her model will no doubt inspire my own work on comparatives.

Preparations for Summer School, Barcelona 2015

Meltem Kelepir and I spent quite some time discussing the content of our courses at the COST SignGram Summer School in Barcelona (May 7-9, 2015). This exchange was useful for various reasons.

First, we discussed the content of our classes which will deal with sign language interrogatives (Meltem) and negation (Roland), respectively. In this context, we addressed the fact that the background of the attendees will likely be very diverse, and how to handle this challenge. Clearly, it will be very positive to have a joint approach. On the one hand, we don't want to swamp a part of the group with unfamiliar concepts; on the other hand, we also don't want part of the group to be bored. We also communicated about the readings for the students and succeeded in coming up with a list that should be interesting for all participants. Importantly, we will both use parts of the COST Manual as preparatory reading.

Second, we addressed the structure of our classes. Following a fruitful exchange about what we want to address, we decided to structure the classes in a parallel fashion: in both classes, the discussion of typological and methodological issues will precede a more theoretical and formal



approach to the structures under investigation. We strongly believe that this parallel approach will be beneficial for the students. It was further decided that, at the outset of the classes, we will chart the expertise concerning individual sign languages present in the classroom, and that we will aim to put this expertise to use during the discussions, thus getting the students involved in a natural way.

Taken together, our discussions were certainly worthwhile, as they gave us a clearer idea about the organization of our classes and about the potential challenges. We agreed that also during the summer school, it will be important to exchange our experiences. Importantly, our agreements concerning content and structure were shared with the third instructor, Markus Steinbach.

Work on COST Manual and PNAS article

While being in Istanbul, it turned out that the ongoing work on COST tasks also required continuing attention. This aspect had not been included in the original work plan, but it soon became clear that I, and the COST Action as a whole, would profit immensely from spending time on this additional goal. I estimate that in the end, I spent approximately 30% of the STSM time on such Action-related tasks, which included (i) work on parts of the COST Manual (writing new parts and editing existing parts); (ii) work on the Glossary (combining and editing existing entries and writing new entries); and (iii) filling in gaps in the SignGram Visuals overview sheet.

This work profited from intense exchange with Aslı Göksel, with whom I have co-authored sections within the Morphology part of the Manual. Amongst other things, we discussed the notion of “subject/object markers” (section on agreement) and the text of various Glossary entries. As for the latter, we also decided to combine some entries. Besides that, we also reconsidered the structure of the Morphology part and came to the conclusion that it should be slightly modified (with the section on nominal inflection preceding the section on classifiers).

Finally, Meltem Kelepir and I also spent approximately half a day working on the proofs of an article that will appear in the prestigious journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS)* in the last week of April. This article can be considered a significant result of networked research that the COST Action has made possible (collaboration between participating institutions in Paris, Istanbul, and Amsterdam).

I therefore think that spending time on these additional tasks, which had not been specified in the original work plan, is justified, as they are clearly related and beneficial to the COST Action in the context of which the STSM has been undertaken.

Finally, I wish to point out that, beyond the content components sketched above, my stay in Istanbul also strengthened my academic and personal relationship with the colleagues from Boğaziçi University – an outcome of the STSM that cannot be overestimated. Besides the interaction with my senior colleagues, I was happy to also have had the opportunity to engage in discussions with students Emre Hakgüder, Serpil Karabüklü, and Hüner Kaşıkara, and I am confident that they also profited from our exchange.

I am deeply grateful to the host and her colleagues for their time and efforts; for the inspiring discussions we had, for organizing social gatherings, and mostly for making me feel welcome. I thoroughly enjoyed my time with them in Istanbul.

All the best,

Roland Pfau



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