

## **Cross-linguistic study on discourse structure in LSC and DGS: Discourse connectors and other structuring devices**

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### **Introduction and motivation**

Discourse connectors form a closed class of natural language expressions and are the main discourse structuring devices. They help to organize a discourse by conveying information concerning the epistemic states of the speaker/signer, or also of the interlocutors, with respect to the descriptive content of an utterance (Zimmermann 2011). Discourse connectors and other discourse structuring devices have only been partially studied in sign languages (Metzger and Bahan 2001, Villameriel 2007, Winston 1995). The main goal of this Short Term Scientific Mission is to provide a description and a further analysis of the manual and non-manual strategies that two particular sign languages (Catalan Sign Language, LSC; and German Sign Language, DGS) use to organise discourse and that have the function of providing a link between two utterances in relation to the epistemic state of the interlocutors.

The discussions and the work of this STSM will deal with the following aspects:

- (i) Manual discourse connectors
- (ii) Non-manual discourse connectors
- (iii) Possible division of labour between manual and non-manual connectors
- (iv) Discourse relations between utterances established by discourse connectors (cf. Mann and Thompson 1988)
- (v) Relation and overlap between information structure from a syntactic point of view (current section 2.3 *Information structure* in WG3 ToC) and structure at the discourse level (current section 2.5 *Structure of discourse* in WG3 ToC)
- (vi) Cross-linguistic similarities and differences between DGS and LSC (and other particles described for other SLs, such as THAT in ASL, PALM-UP in NGT, etc.)
- (vii) Foregrounding and backgrounding strategies

The study will be based on comparable corpus data. The Aesop fables recorded in LSC and DGS will be taken as a point of departure for the description and establishment of the main hypotheses. The classification and analysis will be further extended to other discourse genres.

The work of this STSM will directly contribute to the writing of the section 2.5 *Structure of discourse* of the WG3 'Semantics and pragmatics' of this Action. This section is defined as a non-interface phenomenon without directly linking to other components of the grammar and is thus treated as a pure semantics/pragmatics aspect. However, the overlap with information structure at the syntax level needs to be discussed and treated with caution. Moreover, this study aims at proposing a new contribution to sign language formal discourse studies, which will develop into a cross-linguistic research and a joint collaboration.

## **Work Plan of the STSM (10-23 March 2014)**

Pre-STSM work:

- Literature review on discourse structure and discourse connectors, both in spoken and signed languages
- Preparation of checklist for items that need to be considered for the data analysis

Week 1:

- Excerptation of manual and non-manual discourse connectors in LSC and DGS fables
- Comparison of items in the checklist found in LSC and DGS discourse
- Analysis of different discourse genres
- Discussion of classification of discourse structuring strategies
  - General classification
  - Language specific classification
- Preparation of first draft of the ToC and the manual for the section

Week 2:

- Final classification of discourse structuring devices
- Further analysis of foregrounding and backgrounding strategies
- Revision of ToC
- Writing of the manual section
- Preparation of joint paper
- Discussion of future collaboration

## **References**

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