

ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram



Work plan for STSM to University of ...

Sign action number: IS 1006

Title of the action: Unraveling the grammars of European sign languages: pathways to full citizenship of deaf signers and to the protection of their linguistic heritage

Action short name: SignGram COST Action

Applicant's Name: Andrea Lackner

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Host Institution: Faculty of Icelandic and Comparative Cultural Studies
Centre for Sign Language Research
School of Humanities
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STSM Title **Implementing a methodological approach for identifying modality¹ categories in sign languages**

For Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS) a methodological approach was created in order to identify (epistemic and deontic) modality categories. The findings on ÖGS show that first, signing lines of thoughts offers a very good context in which various means of coding (epistemic and deontic) modality occur and second, there are various nonmanuals which also code modality in addition to manual modality expressions such as modal verbs and other modality expressions (Lackner 2013).

¹ The term 'modality' is used, as it refers to the semantic domain while the term 'mood' is avoided as it is mostly associated with grammatical categories like indicative and subjunctive.

The STSM and the following cooperation of both parties aim at

- testing this approach for identifying modality categories in Icelandic Sign Language (ÍTM) by a test run,
- documenting the procedure for identifying semantic categories in sign languages (SLs) within the framework of semantic field research,
- and comparing the outcome regarding the implementation in both research teams as well as the findings in both SLs.

The work plan for implementing a methodological approach for identifying modality categories in SLs within the framework of semantic field work will include three phase.

Phase 1 and 2 will be conducted by a test run during the STSM. The continuation of Phase 2 and the implementation of Phase 3 will follow the STSM.

In Phase 1, contexts are produced by Deaf informants in which means of coding (epistemic and deontic) modality very likely tend to occur. The informants will be instructed to sign lines of thoughts, embedded in short stories. Signing thoughts gives the possibility to express unreal situations, wishes, possibilities, conditions and so forth. In addition, signers may express their attitude on these thoughts such as being certain or uncertain about an imagined situation. To conclude, expressing thoughts are a very good context for getting various elements which code (epistemic and deontic) modality.

In Phase 2, means of coding modality which occur in these signed thoughts are identified by the same informants. The same informants will be instructed to annotate (only) the signed thoughts within the short stories they produced before. When doing this task, the Deaf participants will annotate short segments of the videos (i.e. the signed thoughts) produced by the other informant(s) and their own signed data. As a result, the annotation will be done from the Deaf informant's perspective and from an addressee's perspective. This includes the identification of the own and the others' produced elements.

Concerning the identification of language-relevant non-manual element, the informants will be instructed to described them with regard to the kind/sequence of motion (i.e. whether the particular language-relevant non-manual element is/are movement(s) or a position of a particular articulator), the exact beginning and ending points of these language-relevant non-manual means, the direction of motion for these non-manual elements (e.g. positioning the head forward versus positioning the head backward), additional characteristics (such as the intensified performance, the size of performance, the speed of performance, additional co-occurring factors such as the degree of body tension or additional movement components) and the current possible meaning of each identified non-manual element in the particular context.

In Phase 3, those manuals and nonmanuals which coding modality meanings are selected from the others, compared between the annotators with regard to their judgment on form and meaning, and classified.

The findings are used for a cross-linguistic comparison on coding (epistemic and deontic) modality meaning between ÍTM and ÖGS. With ÖGS, various means of coding modality have already been identified. What is of great interest concerning the findings on ÖGS is that there are various nonmanuals which code modality. These include several epistemic non-manual markers, a deontic non-manual marker, indicators which show the hypothetical nature of signed thoughts,

and an interrogative marker which differs from interrogative markers in direct questions and constructed dialogues. The findings will show whether also several nonmanuals coding modality exist in ÍTM.

In the following the full work plan is described which has been discussed and agreed by the STSM applicant Andrea Lackner and the host institution. Also this project will be conducted in close cooperation with the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Grensasvegi 9, 108 Reykjavík.

Work plan in detail: Mai 30, 2014 to June 4, 2014

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| Mai 30, 2014 | Exchange on the research project |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Exchange/discussion on the topic</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing literature on coding epistemic and deontic modality in SLs - Describing the findings on ÖGS, in particular, the nonmanuals coding modality meaning • <u>Exchange/discussion on the methodological approach</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Explaining the methodological approach for identifying means of coding (epistemic and deontic) modality which was created and implemented by the STSM applicant - Describing the instructions given for the recordings as well as for the annotation task in the ÖGS-study (including presenting recordings from the Austrian informants and their annotations) |
| | <p><u>Participants:</u> the Icelandic project coordinator: Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir; the Austrian project coordinator: Andrea Lackner; Rannveig Sverrisdóttir from University of Iceland; (in the afternoon) the Deaf project members from Iceland and Austria: Svava Jóhannesdóttir, Nikolaus Riemer;</p> |

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| Mai 31, 2014 | Participation at the workshop on SL at the LREC2014 |
| | <p>If the STSM applicant's proposal for the workshop is chosen, the presentation will describe the methodological approach for identifying means of coding epistemic and deontic modality in ÖGS. Thus, the presentation will be an addition to this project. Anyway, this event is a good opportunity to exchange this research project with a broader audience.</p> |
| | <p><u>Participants</u> (who are involved in this STSM-project): Andrea Lackner, Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir, Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, Nikolaus Riemer;</p> |

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| June 1, 2014 | Preparation of the project implementation |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Preparation of procedure</u> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Defining/Discussing the entire phases of the process for implementing the methodological approach • <u>Preparation of documentation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing the documentation procedure: responsibility for the documentation process, contents to be documented, persons doing the documentation, final output of the documentation, contribution to WG 3 of the COST action IS1006 • <u>Preparation of the elicitation/annotation procedure</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing and arranging all needs for the elicitation material - Previewing the annotation instructions and conventions <p><u>Participants:</u> project coordinators: Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir and Andrea Lackner</p> |
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| June 2, 2014 | Preparation for the first test run |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Creation of the elicitation material</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presentation of the elicitation material in ÖGS - Showing a selection of the recordings in ÖGS - Describing and discussing the instructions given to the Austrian Deaf informants - Instructing the employee of the Communication Centre who will guide the recordings - Preparing an instruction video for the investigation in ÍTM • <u>Preparation for carrying out the annotation task</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Describing and discussing all requirements for doing the annotation task (ELAN template, annotation instructions, annotation conventions and so forth) as the annotation procedure (of the Icelandic Deaf annotation participants) will be guided/supported by the Icelandic project coordinator and a Deaf annotation coordinator - Testing [trying out] the annotation procedure by both Icelandic coordinators with support of the STSM applicant <p><u>Participants:</u> Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir, Andrea Lackner, Deaf project members from Iceland and Austria: Svava Jóhannesdóttir and Nikolaus Riemer;</p> |

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| June 3, 2014 | First test run |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Recoding signed thoughts</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Guiding two Icelandic Deaf informants through the recordings The informants are instructed (by the recorded instructions as well as by the Deaf project member) to sign lines of thoughts which are embedded in short stories. The STSM coordinator will support this process, if questions/issues arise. This test recording is scheduled for the morning. • <u>Annotating the signed lines of thoughts</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Annotating a selection of the signed trains of thoughts by the two Deaf informants. To be precise, only short segments – i.e. a selection of the signed thoughts – will be annotated. As the informants will not be familiar |

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| | <p>with ELAN (similar situation as it was in Austria when doing this task), the annotation coordinator(s) will do the administrative work for them. They will type into ELAN what the informants tell them to enter. This means that the informants describe the manual/non-manual language-relevant element, their beginning and ending point as well as further relevant characteristics. In addition, the informants should describe the meaning of the identified element, which is also annotated. The annotation task for the test run starts in the afternoon.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Feedback/discussion</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reviewing the procedure and the outcome of the first day of the test run - Documenting the first day of the test run <p><u>Participants:</u> Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir, Andrea Lackner, Deaf project member from Iceland, two Deaf informants from Iceland;</p> |
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| June 4, 2014 | Continuation of first test run, first analysis |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Annotating the signed lines of thoughts</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of the annotation task (same procedure as the day before) • <u>Discussion on the procedure and the first outcome</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussing, documenting and analyzing the first insights of this project with regard to coding modality - Arranging the continuation of the collaborative project <p><u>Participants:</u> Kristín Lena Thorvaldsdóttir, Andrea Lackner, Deaf project member from Iceland, two Deaf informants from Iceland;</p> |

The plan is to document a methodological approach for identifying semantic categories – here (epistemic and deontic) modality - within the semantic field research. This documentation will be a contribution to WG 3 of the COST action IS1006. What is more, the collaborative project will offer cross-linguistic comparison on coding (epistemic and deontic) modality in two SLs.

Reference

Lackner, Andrea (2013) Functions of head and body movements in Austrian Sign Language. A corpus-based analysis. PhD thesis, University of Graz.