



ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram



STSM final report

June 27th, 2013

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

Reference: Short Term Scientific Mission, COST Action IS1006

Beneficiary: Stamp, Rose, Deafness, Cognition & Language Research Centre (DCAL), University College London (UCL)

Host: Cardinaletti, Anna, University of Venice Ca'Foscari

Period of stay: 17/06/2013 to 21/06/2013 Place: Venice (Italy)

Reference code: COST-STSM-ECOST-STSM-IS1006-170613-032046

Started and finished in the expected dates.

The primary goal of the STSM was to compare wh-question constructions from LIS and BSL using the data from their respective corpora. We started by discussing the methodologies of the two corpora – how they were similar, how they differed, what variables were analysed, methods for extracting wh-signs and determining doubling. During meetings with Chiara Branchini we discussed more specifically the methods for determining sentence and clause segmentation. For example, sentences had been segmented in the LIS corpus by native signers and were determined by intonational and semantic cues. While in the BSL corpus, clauses were segmented following annotation guidelines used in the Auslan Annotation Guidelines. We also discussed the two projects investigated in LIS: that is, one looking at occurrence and positioning of wh-signs and one looking at wh-doubling. Considering the similarities and differences across sign languages, was a useful starting point for analysing wh-signs, ensuring that the same variables were investigated and that the



methods were made comparable. It also highlights difficulties experienced across sign languages where discussing the possible solution in one language can help in the other sign language.

We talked in depth about the elicitation materials that were used as part of the LIS Corpus Project. In addition, we discussed the follow-up that took place after the LIS Corpus Project in which a small sample of deaf people were shown the different uses of wh-signs (e.g., in different positions including sentence initial, in-situ, final and doubling) and they offered their opinions on the naturalness of the data. The wh-elicitation task was not used in the BSL Corpus Project. We reached the conclusion that it would be useful to collect more data in BSL using the same methodology and to do a similar follow-up consultation with deaf people to confirm their intuitions on the use of BSL wh-signs. As a result, we discussed applying for small research project funding to complete a further data collection.

I used the week to extract wh-signs from the 1,500 tokens, which had been annotated as part of the BSL Corpus Project. The extracted examples were exported to excel and analysed to consider multiple factors from looking at the corpus data – for example, the position of the wh-sign, its duration and whether there were examples of doubling. Whilst sharing examples from the LIS dataset, we discussed the use of a non-specified wh-sign used in LIS, given the gloss ARTICHOKE. I considered whether there were equivalents of this non-specified wh-sign in BSL. After consultation with other members of the BSL Corpus team, we proposed two possible signs that may act in a similar manner to the sign glossed ARTICHOKE. These were:

- a sign that outlines a question mark ‘?’ used as a question marker
- a gestural sign glossed as G:WELL used in many different contexts

Further to this discovery, I extracted and analysed their use in the annotated BSL Corpus data.

This visit was limited to a week in length and as a result it was useful for considering the initial challenges of comparing wh-signs in BSL and LIS, however, further analysis is needed to fully understand their systematic use throughout the corpora. The BSL Corpus Project is currently being annotated and segmented into clauses so its searchability is increasing everyday.

As for future collaboration, Chiara Branchini and I are planning to meet again to revisit the progress of the analysis of wh-signs in BSL. We have arranged to meet whilst at an international sign language conference in London in July 2013 and we may then be able to consider whether these results can be formed into a publishable article.

All the best,
Rose Stamp

