



ISCH COST Action IS1006 SignGram



STSM final report

Göttingen, Mai 25 2014

Dear STSM coordinator,

This is to notify that the following STSM:

Beneficiary: Markus Steinbach, University of Göttingen

Host: Carlo Cecchetto, University Milano Bicocca

Period: from May 2 to May 11

Place: Milano (Italy)

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started and finished in the expected dates.

Text of report

The general conceptual goal of this STSM was to discuss the interaction of formal (morphological and syntactic) and functional (semantic and pragmatic) aspects of reference grammars in general and to identify sections in the manual that show non-trivial interactions of form and function in particular. The more concrete practical goal was to work on selected sample sections and to improve the division of and interaction between formal and functional aspects in the subsections. Since basic grammatical categories are used to express semantic and pragmatic concepts in a language, a (modality-) independent general description of the meaning of such concepts is crucial for every reference grammar. A basic problem is that the mapping between semantic and pragmatic categories

and the corresponding markers in morphology and syntax is usually not one-to-one. Therefore, the grammar developer needs to know the underlying semantic and pragmatic concepts in order to identify the (possibly multiple or zero) realization of these concepts in the sign language she/he is going to describe. At the same time, she/he needs to know concrete examples of possible formal realizations of these concepts to get a better understanding of their meaning and to know what to look for.

To improve this situation, one aim of this STSM was to develop general guidelines for the division of labor between form and function and to work on concrete sections in morphology and syntax with the corresponding sections in semantics to improve the interaction between form and function. Hence, the plan was not only to develop guidelines but also to revise already existing sample sections to provide explicit models for the members of all work groups. The concrete work plan was as follows:

- Description of semantic/pragmatic concepts and corresponding morphosyntactic markers for selected topics
- Description of context-dependent data elicitation for selected semantic/pragmatic concepts
- Review of existing sample sections that discuss formal and functional aspects
- Preparation of general guidelines for the division of labour between form and meaning
- Preparation of a illustrative sample sections to illustrate the interaction of form and function
- Presentation of the results at the core group meeting in Milano, May 9 and 10, 2014

The STSM successfully implemented this work plan. A careful discussion of the table of contents of the manual on the one hand and various sample sections on the other hand lead to guidelines of how to organize the division of labor between the general semantic description of grammatical categories and the corresponding formal encoding. One of the main aims of the discussion was to strike a balance between a user-friendly distribution of information and the avoidance of unnecessary repetitions of information about form and function of grammatical categories. To avoid replication and confusion, the design of the blueprint and the sample sections require a clear division of labor and a clear interaction between phonology, morphology, and syntax on the one hand and semantics and pragmatics on the other. Nevertheless, the discussion lead to the conclusion that repetition in form of a brief informal description of the function of grammatical categories in the formal sections as well as some examples illustrating possible formal encodings of these categories in the functional sections cannot be completely avoided.

Since most sample sections submitted so far do not yet clearly distinguish between the formal grammatical encoding that belongs to phonology, morphology, and syntax and the corresponding underlying concepts that are defined in semantics and pragmatics, we went through selected sample sections to improve the division of labor. Hence, in a second step, several sections such as, for instance, the sections on subordination and adverbial clauses, sentence types and sentence mood, as well as role shift and constructed action have been revised according to the guidelines developed in the previous discussion. Finally, the results of the discussion and the new versions of the sample sections have been presented and discussed in detail at the meeting of the core group on May 9 and 10, 2014.

Overall, this STSM has directly contributed to the conception and writing of all sample sections that discuss grammatical concepts from a formal and functional perspective (which is the majority of the sample sections in the manual). The outcome was not only relevant for work group 3 on semantics and pragmatics but also improved already existing sections of work group 1 and 2 on lexicon, phonology, morphology, and syntax and it will support the writing and revision of the pending sections.

All the best,



Markus Steinbach



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