Background

Sign language interpreter training has been offered at the universities of applied sciences in Magdeburg and Zwickau (Germany) since 1997 and 2000, respectively. The training programmes share an applied perspective in research and training. Provision of sign language resources, adequate in content, format and notational quality, has been a major concern. Over the last ten years, both programmes have amassed a heterogeneous collection of analogue and digital video films for training and research purposes. In 2007, the same type of digital training facilities (video labs) was installed in Magdeburg and Zwickau. The video lab lets us to individual workshops linked to a central video server that hosts all the resources in a unified digital format. The Video-Sign Language Training System, a software custom-made by Z - Infinite Computer Universtities, is used to organize, arrange and work on data (http://sgl.univie.ac.at).

Both institutions now face the challenge of converting and complementing existing sign language materials so as to create an accessible library of video resources. For the training of sign language interpreters the SLI training course.

Goals

The SLI training course should allow for comparative analyses and practical exercises in interpretation and translation. Beyond mere practical training of linguistic corpora, there are four main desirable.

- Structuring and differentiation of sign language corpora in terms of full spectrum of sign language and, more specifically, SLI uses.
- Inclusion of spoken language (i.e., General parallel tests to allow for comparative analyses and practical exercises.
- Inclusion of 104 speaker/test pairs (i.e., observations and interpretations of sign language and spoken language tests that may serve models and objectives of object selection.
- Development of a system of classification that allows for following or systematic cross-references within and between sign and spoken test texts.

The corpus should be organized in such a way that it allows trainers for access data according to the respective focus of the training, such as setting (e.g., health care), discourse type (e.g., monologue), test type (e.g., rhetoric, genres (e.g., consultation interviews), and linguistic features (e.g., constructed action).

Recording metadata

Text entered into the SLI training corpus and characterized according to the criteria shown above need to be stored in terms of meta-information. Thus, each test needs to be described as to date, time and location of the recording, names/pseudonyms of the participants, length, type or title, textual features (e.g. number of sentences, used, perspective and image quality, data of the recordings, availability of additional material (e.g. transcripts, written texts). If possible, background on the participants and context of the recording should be noted.

Prospects

In converting, complementing a heterogeneous collection of language materials, ethical, legal, administrative, and technical concerns need to be clarified. These concerns will be addressed in a collaborative agreement between the two universities concerned.

Efforts will be made to include examples of sign language use that parallel spoken western language genres even when an established sign language genre may not exist. Thus, a cooking recipe is not normally signified in sign language, but a cooking instruction might be signified as a parallel test. However, availability of parallel tests may be limited in certain settings/games due to usage conditions of sign language (e.g., multi-party games, these does not want to rectify any sign language equivalent is a written or spoken asset venture).

Some of the classification criteria seem fairly straightforward in their application. Thus, in many uses, data can quite easily be described according to basic “discourse type”, “setting”, “participants’ languages”, “modalities” and “genres”. Together with the more general metadata, these entries serve as the basic text classification.

Clearly, criteria such as “text type” and “genres” are more complex. There is no single definition of test types and genres to be drawn upon, and neither of them has been applied to sign language with any consistency and breadth. However, a SLI training corpus that successfully represents a wide spectrum of sign language use should allow the gradual assembly of criteria that initial application may be somewhat preliminary and of fine tuning.

Since the current database is not intended to be a comprehensive database of linguistic features a dictionary will be used only selectively according to what seems most relevant for didactical purposes and interconnection. Again, a full-size SLI training corpus should ultimately allow the kind of analyses that will lead to more reliable insights into the features of sign language (“text type”, “genres”) and forms (linguistic features) in the use of a sign language such as ISLS.

Contact

Prof. Meike Vasepi
University of Applied Sciences Zwickau
meike.vasepi@fh-zwickau.de

Prof. Dr. Jost Hoffmann
University of Applied Sciences Magdeburg-Stendal
jost.hoffmann@hs-stendal.de

Literature