Elicitation Methods in the DGS (German Sign Language) Corpus Project
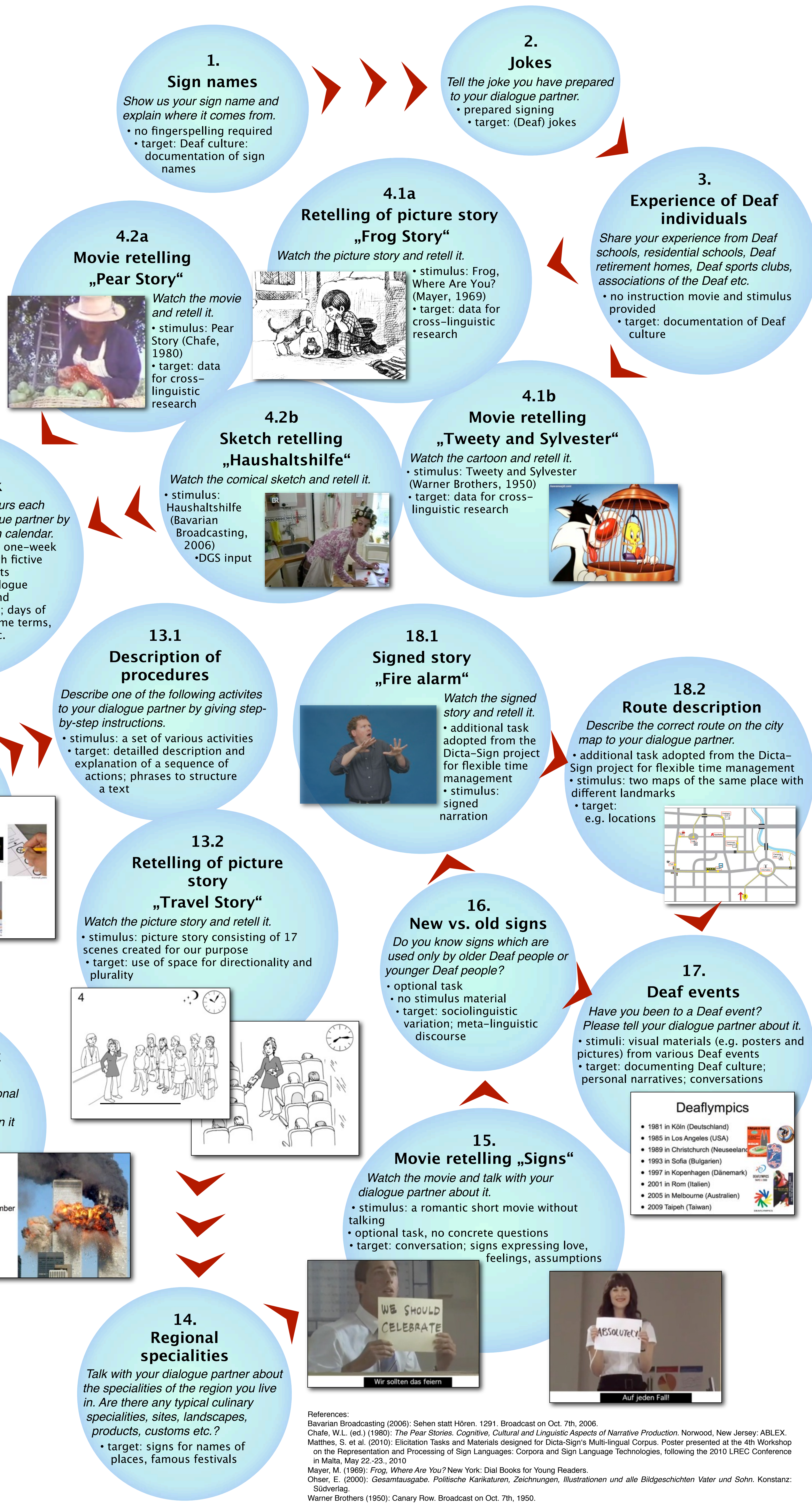
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The DGS Corpus Project of the Academy of Sciences in Hamburg is a long-term project with two major aims: (i) to establish an extensive corpus of DGS and (ii) to develop a comprehensive dictionary of DGS-German based on the analysis of the corpus data.

In the first stage of the project, data of about 300 informants is collected at 12 sites throughout Germany. The corpus is designed to reflect everyday language of users of German Sign Language. The sample of informants is aimed to be balanced for sociolinguistic factors such as region, gender and age. Signers are always filmed in pairs and come for one elicitation session lasting for about 7 hours (including breaks). The target size of the corpus is about 350–400 hours of filmed material resulting in approximately 2.25 million tokens.

The purpose of the corpus is to document the use of DGS and to provide material of and on Deaf culture and life. It will be a resource that can be used for a variety of research questions, which is why it needs to consist of a large variety of discourse modes and grammatical structures as well as various subject areas. As one of the project aims is to compile a general dictionary of DGS, the corpus should also provide enough material on the lexicon of DGS and its use.

In order to elicit the sign language data we developed different kinds of tasks which are presented to the informants on a monitor.

1. Sign names
Show us your sign name and explain where it comes from.
- no fingerspelling required
- target: Deaf culture: documentation of sign names

2. Jokes
Tell the joke you have prepared to your dialogue partner.
- prepared signing
- target: (Deaf) jokes

3. Experience of Deaf individuals
Share your experience from Deaf schools, residential schools, Deaf retirement homes, Deaf sports clubs, associations of the Deaf etc.
- no instruction movie and stimulus provided
- target: documentation of Deaf culture

4.1a Retelling of picture story „Frog Story"
Watch the picture story and retell it.
- stimulus: Frog, Where Are You? (Mayer, 1969)
- target: data for cross-linguistic research

4.2a Movie retelling „Pear Story"
Watch the movie and retell it.
- stimulus: Pear Story (Chafe, 1980)
- target: data for cross-linguistic research

4.1b Movie retelling „Tweety and Sylvester"
Watch the cartoon and retell it.
- stimulus: Tweety and Sylvester (Warner Brothers, 1950)
- target: data for cross-linguistic research

4.2b Sketch retelling „Haushaltshilfe"
Watch the comical sketch and retell it.
- stimulus: Haushaltshilfe (Bavarian Broadcasting, 2006)
- DGS input

5. Calendar Task
Arrange two meetings of two hours each with your dialogue partner by using the shown calendar.
- stimulus: a one-week calendar with fictive appointments
- target: dialogue (planning and negotiation); days of the week, time terms, activities etc.

6. Discussion
What is your opinion on this issue? Discuss with your dialogue partner.
- stimuli: controversial statements (on Deaf and general issues) signed in DGS
- target: emotional discussion

7. Free conversation
The moderator will leave the room for 15 minutes. Please feel free to chat with your dialogue partner. The cameras will continue recording.
- no stimulus
- target: signing in an 'unobserved' setting

8. Elicitation of isolated signs
What sign do you use for the following items? Please also give a short example sentence with the sign.

BROT
- stimuli: German terms with or without an illustrating picture
- target: regional variation

9. Retelling of picture stories „Vater und Sohn"
Watch the picture story and retell it.
- optional task
- stimulus: picture story
- target: e.g. constructed actions

10. Warning and prohibition signs
Try to find out with your dialogue partner what the warning and prohibition signs mean.
- stimuli: warning and prohibition signs from various countries
- target: negations

11. What did you do when it happened?
You will see pictures of historical or emotional events. Tell your dialogue partner what you did when it happened?

Tschernobyl 26.4.1986
11. September 2001
- stimuli: pictures of historical or very emotional events
- target: personal experience narratives

12. Subject areas
Watch the pictures and tell your dialogue partner anything which comes to your mind by looking at them.

Politik
- stimuli: various photographs and drawings representing subject areas for stimulating the informants' associations
- target: terms on 25 subject areas to cover the basic vocabulary in DGS; conversation

13.1 Description of procedures
Describe one of the following activites to your dialogue partner by giving step-by-step instructions.
- stimulus: a set of various activities
- target: detailed description and explanation of a sequence of actions; phrases to structure a text

13.2 Retelling of picture story „Travel Story"
Watch the picture story and retell it.
- stimulus: picture story consisting of 17 scenes created for our purpose
- target: use of space for directionality and plurality

14. Regional specialities
Talk with your dialogue partner about the specialities of the region you live in. Are there any typical culinary specialities, sites, landscapes, products, customs etc.?
- target: signs for names of places, famous festivals

15. Movie retelling „Signs"
Watch the movie and talk with your dialogue partner about it.
- stimulus: a romantic short movie without talking
- optional task, no concrete questions
- target: conversation; signs expressing love, feelings, assumptions

WE SHOULD CELEBRATE — Wir sollten das feiern
ABSOLUTELY — Auf jeden Fall!

16. New vs. old signs
Do you know signs which are used only by older Deaf people or younger Deaf people?
- optional task
- no stimulus material
- target: sociolinguistic variation; meta-linguistic discourse

17. Deaf events
Have you been to a Deaf event? Please tell your dialogue partner about it.
- stimuli: visual materials (e.g. posters and pictures) from various Deaf events
- target: documenting Deaf culture; personal narratives; conversations

Deaflympics
- 1981 in Köln (Deutschland)
- 1985 in Los Angeles (USA)
- 1989 in Christchurch (Neuseeland)
- 1993 in Sofia (Bulgarien)
- 1997 in Kopenhagen (Dänemark)
- 2001 in Rom (Italien)
- 2005 in Melbourne (Australien)
- 2009 Taipeh (Taiwan)

18.1 Signed story „Fire alarm"
Watch the signed story and retell it.
- additional task adopted from the Dicta-Sign project for flexible time management
- stimulus: signed narration

18.2 Route description
Describe the correct route on the city map to your dialogue partner.
- additional task adopted from the Dicta-Sign project for flexible time management
- stimulus: two maps of the same place with different landmarks
- target: e.g. locations

References:
Bavarian Broadcasting (2006): Sehen statt Hören. 1291. Broadcast on Oct. 7th, 2006.
Chafe, W.L. (ed.) (1980): *The Pear Stories. Cognitive, Cultural and Linguistic Aspects of Narrative Production.* Norwood, New Jersey: ABLEX.
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Mayer, M. (1969): *Frog, Where Are You?* New York: Dial Books for Young Readers.
Ohser, E. (2000): *Gesamtausgabe. Politische Karikaturen, Zeichnungen, Illustrationen und alle Bildgeschichten Vater und Sohn.* Konstanz: Südverlag.
Warner Brothers (1950): Canary Row. Broadcast on Oct. 7th, 1950.

All tasks were tested in a pilot phase to examine their feasibility and reliability. In the first round each task was tested with Deaf colleagues and students. In the second round the complete session was tested simulating the real elicitation setting. One of the two final-test sessions was conducted with Deaf informants who were not involved in research context.

1. Pre-tests
- Do the informants feel comfortable with the task?
- Do the informants understand the instruction movies? Is all necessary information given?
- Do the informants understand the stimulus material? Do they see what we want them to see?
- How much time does it take the informants to complete each task?
- How much signed output do the informants produce in each task?
- Do the informants produce the expected kind of language output (reliability)?

2. Final-tests
- How long does each task take, now embedded in the whole session?
- How long does the whole elicitation session take?

- Are the breaks at the right positions? How stressful is the session for the participants?
- Does the order of the tasks work? Do they influence each other in a positive or a negative way?
- Do interactions between the moderator and the informants work smoothly?
- Does SessionDirector work as expected in presenting the tasks and the stimuli? Do the informants know what to do when?
- Are Deaf people with different educational backgrounds able to cope with the tasks?

As a result of the tests an elicitation session comprises up to 21 individual tasks and lasts approximately seven hours, including three breaks. The variety of topics and the diversity of task types seem to help the informants to work concentrated during the whole session. The feedback received so far from the moderators and the informants shows that the participants find most of the tasks interesting and entertaining.

Thanks to the commitment of the moderators and the motivation of the Deaf informants, the data collection started successfully. This provides a base for an extensive and valuable corpus, which will not only serve for future research, but also document the language and culture of the Deaf.