Elicitation methods in the DGS (German Sign Language) Corpus Project

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Abstract

During the first three years of the DGS Corpus project the main focus is on data collection. Before setting up the corpus design we conducted a survey to get an overview on the existing elicitation materials. The design of our data collection contains a variety of different stimuli and tasks with the special attention to free conversation, dialogues and monologues. To this effect, a range of possible discourse modes were considered: narration and renarration, discussion, report and description. The stimuli include pictures, picture stories, non-verbal film clips (e.g. cartoons and realistic film clips) and signed movies. In order to minimize the influence of the surrounding spoken/written language, written German is not used if possible. Introduction and explanation of each task is provided in DGS in form of movie clips. All tasks were tested in a pilot phase to examine their feasibility and reliability. Some of the tasks tested needed to go through several rounds of modifications while others did not work at all and thus were excluded from the data collection. In this paper, we not only present the tasks for elicitation and stimuli, but also describe their development process. We also discuss reasons why some stimuli were adopted from other projects while others had to be developed specifically for the purpose of our project.

1. Introduction

The DGS Corpus Project is a long-term project of the Academy of Sciences in Hamburg. It started in January 2009 and has 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 corpus size is a film length of 350-400 hours resulting in approximately 2.25 million tokens.

The purpose of the corpus is to document the use of DGS and also 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. About 50 hours of the material and its transcripts will be published for free access in the course of the project time. We expect that these materials will be interesting not only to researchers but also to the members of the Deaf community. In other words, we expect that the corpus not only becomes a valuable resource for linguistic research, but also a treasure given back to the Deaf community to which its members contributed themselves.

The corpus is compiled as a general resource for future research and is open as to what these questions might be. Therefore, 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 the following, we will discuss a survey we conducted on existing elicitation materials, describe the process of task development, and present the tasks along with the insights gained so far after completing the filming in two regions (Hamburg and Schleswig-Holstein).

2. Task development

2.1 Survey on existing elicitation materials

There are many different ways to collect language data from Deaf signers. There are visual stimuli such as pictures, photographs and movies, to name but a few. Since sign language researchers have used different elicitation materials for various research purposes since the early days of sign language research, our first aim was to get a comprehensive overview on the different kinds of elicitation methods. Although a number of elicitation materials have been shared among linguists, all of these stimuli are neither necessarily publicly available nor all researchers have published descriptions of their stimuli and elicitation procedures. A survey has been conducted within the sign linguistics community (Hong et al. 2009) to gather information on such materials. In the form of a questionnaire researchers were asked to give details on

- the form of the elicitation material used (pictures, animated cartoons, flash cards etc.),
- the content/subject matter of the elicitation material (topics of discussion, content of a

picture story etc.),
- the research question,
- the specific task the informants were given.

In addition, the researchers were asked to give comments on the feasibility and reliability of their materials. The researchers were also asked if and from whom or for which project their material was adapted and if they were willing to share the stimuli with us.

On the basis of these questionnaires we were able to categorize the different kinds of elicitation materials in the following groups:
- language input (word lists of isolated words, single sentences in written language, written texts, signed videos),
- pictures (cartoons, single drawings, picture stories, photographs),
- motion pictures, movies, animations,
- topics for an open conversation or discussion (topical issues, fairy tales and fables),
- games,
- combination of pictures and words.

The analysis of the survey also allowed us to describe the advantages and disadvantages of the different stimuli. Furthermore, it became obvious that there are materials which are especially suitable for cross-linguistic studies because they have already been used for many spoken and/or signed languages, for example the picture book *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer, 1969), the so-called *Pear Story* (Chafe, 1980), the cartoon of *Tweety and Sylvester* (Warner Brothers, 1950) and the drawings from Zwitserlood (2003). Researchers' experience shows that elicitation materials cannot be adopted from abroad without taking cultural differences into account. Some linguists use the Aesop's Fables as a stimulus because these fables are well-known in many countries. This is not the case in Germany where most children grow up with Grimm's fairytales. But beyond the question whether Aesop's Fables or Grimm's fairytales are better known, linguists should always bear in mind that even such common stories might not be well-known within the Deaf community. The survey also indicates that a large number of stimuli of the same kind can be very tiring for the informants.

2.2 Adoption and development of tasks

We adopted *Frog, Where Are You?*, the *Pear Story* and the cartoon with *Tweety and Sylvester* in our tasks. The first two stimuli were originally used in spoken language studies (amongst others Berman & Slobin, 1994; Chafe, 1980) and were soon adopted by researchers in sign language studies (amongst others project "A Cross-linguistic Study of Sign Language Classifiers"). The cartoon *Tweety and Sylvester* is used for a cross-linguistic comparison of classifier constructions (project "A Cross-linguistic Study of Sign Language Classifiers").

Other existing materials could not be used or adapted because they did not meet our purpose. For example, the accessible stimuli for agreement verbs (e.g.

Hong, 2009) and negation (materials from the Centre for Sign Linguistics and Deaf Studies in Hong Kong) were designed to elicit isolated sentences. This is not the main focus of corpus building which should enable researchers to analyze signs and linguistic structures in a larger context of near-natural signing. For this reason, we developed new materials focussing on these phenomena (see 4.13 and 4.10).

Since one of the goals of our project is the compilation of a dictionary, the basic vocabulary was also in the centre of interest. None of the existing elicitation materials covers these needs. In order to collect the basic vocabulary which is not covered by the rest of the tasks, a task to cover as many subject areas as possible was developed (see 4.12).

Not only did we develop new tasks to elicit certain linguistic features, but we also ensured that different discourse modes are included in our corpus. For example, we created new tasks for eliciting negotiation and description of procedures (see 4.5 and 4.13).

In order to ensure that all informants would receive the same input, the instructions needed for each task were filmed in order to be presented to the informants on screen alongside with the materials. This also allowed us to provide different instructions to the two informants in settings where they had different roles in the task.

As for the adopted stimuli as well as new ones, we needed to deal with copyright issues. Two picture stories had to be excluded from our data collection because the publishers did not give us the permission to use the materials. Other publishers like the Bavarian Broadcasting (BR) and the Deaf Association in Berlin didn't have any objections and generously supported the project by providing us with materials.

3. Testing

3.1 Pre-tests

One step in the development of the various elicitation tasks was testing them in different stages of development to assess whether or not the tasks met our expectations. These tests were conducted by hearing researchers and student assistants with Deaf colleagues at the IDGS (Institute of German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf) as informants.

After each test, the informants were asked if they felt comfortable with the task, understood the instructions clearly and if not, what they would suggest to improve them. In addition, they were asked if they considered this task suitable and feasible for potential Deaf informants. All tests were filmed and analysed to assess the following aspects of the tasks:
- 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)?

The tests revealed that in some cases the first versions of the instruction movies were not properly understood. This led to several rounds of revisions and re-testing before the final version was ready.

In some tasks the pre-test showed that an instruction movie alone was not sufficient for the informants. One of the aspects with which they had difficulties is the reference. The signer in the instruction movie addresses the informant directly by pointing forward and refers to the second informant by pointing behind his back due to the seating arrangements in the studio (see Hanke et al., this volume). Although the references established in the signed instructions matched the real elicitation setting, the informants did not understand the use of space in the instruction movie immediately. For this reason, the moderator, the fieldworker leading the session, now introduces the reference system at the very beginning of the session.

The pre-tests also made us aware that some informants tended to sign towards the moderator instead of signing to their dialogue partner. The moderators now get special training to avoid such situations.

Additionally, the stimulus material itself was edited. The font size of written words within the stimuli was enlarged and some pictures were replaced with better-known pictures, because the informants didn't grasp the picture's intention. One task, in which the informants are asked to describe the characters of the figures in an animated movie, had to be dropped since the informants tended to retell the story and had difficulties in describing only the characters of the figures.

As for all picture stories the pre-tests revealed that it is necessary to hide the stimuli when the informants is signing. Otherwise the signer would keep looking at the picture story instead of looking at his or her dialogue partner.

After the first testing period, the tasks were selected and put together in a reasonable sequence to get a session time of 5:30 hours with additional 1:30 hours for three breaks.

3.2 Final tests

Prior to the first elicitation session, we conducted two more or less complete test sessions each lasting a whole day. In the first session Deaf student assistants were recruited as informants and in another session two Deaf persons not affiliated with the IDGS were invited. The contact person in charge of the Hamburg area moderated both test sessions. The material and instruction movies were presented using SessionDirector (see Hanke et al., this volume) for the first time.

The major aim of these complete test sessions was

to simulate an elicitation session in a situation that was as close to the real studio setting as possible. The first session took place in a seminar room, but the second one could be held in the studio newly set up. In addition to the goals in the pre-tests, we also looked at the further aspects:

- 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?

One result from the test sessions was the observation that the tasks took less time than in pre-tests and provided less material than expected. In the pre-tests the informants took much more time to complete each task. This may be an effect produced by the fact that the Deaf colleagues who served as informants in the pre-tests were used to signing in front of the camera, knew that they were expected to produce much signing and were therefore very cooperative. Another reason may be that in single tests the informants focus more on the given task while the participants in complete sessions knowing that the session contains many tasks and lasts for more than six hours focus more on completing the tasks than to linger on them. Here the results of the complete test sessions showed us that the moderator needs to be aware of the fact that the aim is not to complete the task as quickly as possible but to use the time and keep the informants on the subject to produce the expected amount of signed material.

As a result of the analysis of these two sessions we corrected the expected time for each task, modified tasks by adding subtasks and stimuli, changed the order of the tasks for the sake of balanced breaks, and added two extra tasks alongside the existing optional tasks to make the time management more flexible. We further refined the instructions to the moderator which are communicated in a written manual as well as in special training sessions.

4. Tasks

After the moderator has clarified questions concerning the consent form and checked on the questionnaire for the metadata collection with each informant, the moderator and the two informants take a seat in the studio to start the session.

4.1 Sign names

In the first task they are asked to show their sign names and to explain where these names come from. The goal of the task is to collect name signs with their origin as a part of Deaf culture. The task also aims at warming up the informants and introducing them to each other. We decided not to ask for their fingerspelled names of the informants (though they may present them, if they want), because some older Deaf are not familiar with fingerspelling. The whole task is completed in the average time of two and a half minutes.

4.2 Jokes

Prior to the elicitation session, each informant is asked to prepare one joke to present to the other informant on the day of filming. We adopted the idea of having one task for a prepared signing and its position at the beginning of the session from the Auslan Archive and Corpus Project. The task also helps the informants to warm up and to make them feel confident by signing something they are already familiar with. Furthermore, we expect that some of the informants tell a Deaf joke, which is part of the Deaf culture. Depending on the length of performances by both informants, the task takes between 2 and 7 minutes.

4.3 Experience of Deaf individuals

The moderator asks both informants questions on their experience from Deaf schools, residential schools, Deaf retirement homes, Deaf sports clubs, associations of the Deaf and so on to make them tell stories from their own lives. In this task no instruction movie is presented but instead the moderator needs to prepare questions in advance which fit the profile of the informant using the metadata questionnaire. The task aims at documenting typical experience from Deaf lives in form of narratives. We expect a lively and spontaneous talk as informants are supposed to tell their own experience. For this task the moderator is explicitly instructed to exploit the time slot of 20 minutes fully.

4.4 Movie and picture retellings

Informants look at either a picture story or a movie clip which they are asked to retell to the other informant. We paired four stimuli in two sets, so that one quarter of the informants performs each stimulus. Three of the stimuli are those which have been used in eliciting retellings in various languages: a picture story *Frog, Where Are You?* (Mayer, 1969), a movie clip with cartoon characters *Tweety and Sylvester* (Warner Brothers, 1950) and the so-called pear film or *Pear Story* (Chafe, 1980). The goal of using these stimuli is to supply materials for cross-linguistic research. The fourth stimulus is a comical sketch titled *Haushaltshilfe* (Housekeeper) broadcasted in the German TV program by and for the Deaf "Sehen statt Hören" (Bavarian Broadcasting, 2006). This is the only stimulus with DGS signing as an input in the whole elicitation session. (The exception is the

stimulus in an additional task, re-telling of the story on a fire alarm, see 4.18.) Both *Frog, Where Are You* and *Tweety and Sylvester* are presented twice. In the second run the story is divided into several groups of pictures / several movie clips and after each section the informant retells the respective part of the story. For our purpose some stimuli are presented in a slightly different form from the original. The *Pear Story* contains background sounds (but no verbalization), but it is played without sound. The broadcasted version of *Haushaltshilfe* is accompanied by German subtitles, but we use a version without subtitles, which the broadcasting company kindly provided. In the pilot phase Deaf informants pointed out that Deaf informants might get uneasy seeing signs in written English in *Tweety and Sylvester*, for which reason we considered adding German subtitles. However, we dropped the idea because the English signs did not have German counterparts and they did not play an important role in the story either. Rather, we decided to instruct the moderator to tell the informants to ignore the English signs. For the whole task the moderator is also explicitly instructed to turn the monitor black before the informant starts signing so that the informant doesn't look at the stimulus. This is important because the material then can be used in studies in which eye-gaze plays an important role. Since our experience in the final tests showed that the moderator sometimes forgets to do this, we adjusted the session directing software in a way that the monitor automatically turns black after 20 seconds in such cases. The pair of *Frog, Where Are You?* and *Tweety and Sylvester* takes 27 minutes on average to complete, *Pear Story* and *Haushaltshilfe* 17 minutes on average.

4.5 Calendar task

Informants are shown a one-week calendar with fictive appointments and are instructed to arrange two meetings of two hours respectively to prepare a surprise for the wedding party of a mutual friend. They are also told explicitly to talk about their other activities in the week during their negotiation. Target vocabularies of this task are days of the week, time terms and various common activities such as seeing the doctor, going on vacation, being at work, going to the movies and the theater, sports activities, having a plumber at home and so on. This is the only task in which some kind of role-play is required. The target discourse type is a dialogue with a special focus on planning and negotiation. We created two sets of calendars with different layouts, one with seven days side by side and the time flowing from top to bottom, like a timetable, and one with two pages for one week, Monday to Thursday being on the left and Friday to Sunday on the right page. In the pre-test, Deaf informants found the former more comfortable to look at. Nevertheless we kept both versions, because we realized that the Deaf informants to whom the former one was shown used vertical timelines in their signing which might have derived from the specific layout of the elicitation material. The task is completed in an average

time of 9 minutes.

4.6 Discussion

Informants are confronted with four controversial statements from which they are to choose one to discuss. The topics include both Deaf issues (e.g. cochlea implants, mainstreaming of the Deaf) and general issues (e.g. smoking bans). The goal of this task is to get the informants engaged in a lively and emotional discussion in which they hopefully don't think about their language use. We prepared two sets of topics, each of which is shown in every other session. The informants in the pilot phase mentioned their concern as to a high cognitive demand on informants as many of them are not used to reflecting on social issues or defending their own opinion. This makes the role of the moderator crucial who is supposed to put questions to support the informants to carry on their discussion. Our experience so far shows that they fill the slot of around 20 minutes. In some cases the moderator even needed to cut off the discussion to move on to the next task.

4.7 Free conversation

Following the topic discussion the moderator gives an instruction to the informants that they can now talk about anything they like while he or she leaves the room and comes back after 15 minutes. For ethical and practical reasons, the moderator makes explicit that the task is to chat in an unobserved setting. We adopted this task and its position after the topic discussion from the Auslan Archive and Corpus Project in which they had positive experience (p.c. Trevor Johnston July16, 2009). In the DGS corpus project, the topics so far are the elicitation session itself, club activities (Deaf club, nine-pin club), family members and their hearing status, friends, communication and work.

4.8 Elicitation of isolated signs

Although our elicitation sessions mainly aim at filming monologues and dialogues, we have one task for eliciting isolated signs in order to document (regional) variation. In the first part of the task informants take turns at looking at German terms with or without an illustrating picture and are asked to sign it in DGS. Additionally, they are also asked to give one short example sentence of the sign. The choice of the 34 terms is based on previous experience from projects such as the sign language dictionaries of technical terms (e.g. Konrad et al., 2003). All of them have shown a wide regional variety in previous projects (e.g. bread, egg, water, man, woman, birthday, satisfied, mistake). In the second part, one informant is asked to sign the names of the 12 months and 4 seasons, and the other informant continues with 11 color terms for all of which a wide regional variety has also been observed. We intend to collect regional variation effectively and get some meta-linguistic discussions as one informant is free to comment on the sign or the example sentence of the other. The whole task is completed in 12 minutes on average.

4.9 Retelling of picture stories *Vater und Sohn*

In the final task of the morning session, each informant is asked to retell a simple picture story consisting of 5 to 6 pictures taken from the book *Vater und Sohn* (Father and Son) by Erich Ohser, a German cartoonist. We expect the informants to use constructed actions in their retellings. This is one of the optional tasks and can be skipped if other morning tasks took longer than expected. Our experience shows that the task takes the average time of 4 minutes.

4.10 Warning and prohibition signs

In the first task in the afternoon the informants look at warning and prohibition signs collected from different places of the world and are invited to discuss what they might possibly mean. In most cases the signs are unfamiliar to the informants and they need to guess. One practical aim of this task is to warm up the informants for the more demanding tasks in the afternoon. The scientific aim is to elicit negated sentences in a coherent context. The task turned out to be suitable for this purpose as our tests showed that the informants used negations in descriptions of the given signs, and occasionally, to express their disagreement to the other informant's suggestions. The task originally consisted of 12 warning and prohibition signs. Later, another 4 signs were added because the final tests showed that the discussions lasted slightly shorter than expected.

Our experience shows that the informants need an average time of 16 minutes to look at the instruction movie and discuss all of the 16 warning and prohibition signs.

4.11 What did you do when it happened?

In this task informants are asked to report what they did and/or felt when they heard about or experienced one of the shocking or moving events provided in the task. These include big historical moments (e.g. the moon landing, the fall of the Berlin Wall), significant soccer games in World Cups, catastrophes (e.g. the Indian Ocean Tsunami, the nuclear accident in Chernobyl), attacks (9/11, Kennedy assassination) and the death of famous figures such as Princess Diana. One of the topics is Deaf-specific, being the unexpected death of Gunter Trube, a widely recognized Deaf performer, an event which was a great shock to the German Deaf community. In addition to the signed description, well-known pictures of the events are provided which should evoke memories. The aim of the task is to encourage the informants to talk lively, in monologues (personal experience narratives) and/or in dialogues (further exchanges and discussions). The task also aims at documenting the way how Deaf people, who used to have limited access to information, learned about the news or experienced the events and how they processed them for themselves. In tests and in the elicitation sessions we indeed observed informants often mentioning TV news from which they had to guess what was going on. In order to cover various topics but not to

overwhelm the informants, we prepared two sets of stimuli, which are to be used in every other session. Each informant is asked to choose one out of 6 topics (or alternatively the informants choose two together). In the pilot phase and in the first elicitation sessions we got the feedback that younger informants were irritated by seeing not only recent events but also events, which eventually predated their birth. After a long discussion on whether to make specific sets for young informants, we decided not to make this age distinction in order not to reduce the flexibility of the setup should it become necessary to replace an informant (having fallen sick, for example) at short notice by someone else potentially from another age group. The task lasts 20 minutes on average.

4.12 Subject areas

This task is designed to initiate a conversation about at least two different topics. The aim is to get a solid basis for the selection of basic vocabulary in DGS. Therefore we classified every-day conversation into 25 subject areas (e.g. work and profession; energy and environment; family and relatives; ceremony, celebration and party; emotions and feelings; clothing and fashion; communication; partnership, relationship, love and sexuality; school and education; sports and games; travel). This classification takes former studies on basic vocabulary of written and spoken German into consideration (Plickat, 1980; Pfeffer, 1984) as well as actual lexicographic work on slang in spoken German (cf. Wippermann, 2009; and the corresponding website http://szenesprachenwiki.de/).

Each subject area is presented as a written German phrase with 4 to 8 photographs or drawings to complement the written input and to stimulate the informants' associations (figure 1).

Figure 1: Subject area work and profession

Due to the fact that we have at least 8 pairs of informants in each of the 12 locations, we prepared 8 different sets consisting of 4 subject areas each (some subjects appear in more than one set). To each pair of informants one set is presented. They are shown 4 slides with subject name(s) and illustrations and a final slide, which summarizes the four subjects (with name(s) and at most 6 illustrations). The informants are to choose two subject areas. If they do not come up with anything to talk about, the moderator asks questions prepared by us for each subject area in order to initiate a conversation (e.g. "What do you find good about your job?", "Is there any law that is especially important to the Deaf?", "What can each of us do for a clean environment?"). If the informants are well ahead of time, one more subject (different from the suggested ones) is shown for further discussion. The task takes an average time of 32 minutes.

4.13 Combined tasks

This task is a combined task: one informant is supposed to perform the task description of procedures, the other one is supposed to retell a picture story. **Description of procedures**: The informant is asked to choose one familiar activity familiar to him/her from a set of 8. Each activity suggested consists of a sequence of actions (e.g. making jam, changing a car tire, decorating a Christmas tree). The target text types are step-by-step description and explanation. Furthermore, we aim at eliciting phrases to structure a text describing sequences of actions. We prepared two sets, each of which is presented in every other session, so that 16 activities are covered. However, if informants are not familiar with any of the suggested activities, they are free to describe any activity of their choice. **Retelling of a picture story Travel Story**: The informant looks at a picture story about a tour guide and participants who have to overcome several difficulties (figure 2).
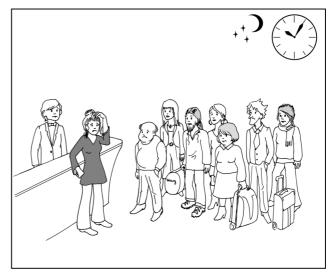

Figure 2: Scene from the travel story

In the second run, the informant sees several pictures at a time and is asked to retell it to the other informant. As in the movie and picture retellings (see 4.4) the moderator is instructed to switch the monitor into black before the informant starts signing (or it turns black automatically after 20 seconds). The aim of the task is to elicit various ways of the use of space for directionality and plurality.

We created the picture story consisting of 17 scenes specifically for our purpose, because the survey mentioned above had shown that there were no suitable stimuli available for eliciting the target signs in the framework of a narration. The combined task, which consists of description of procedures and picture retelling takes 17 minutes on average.

4.14 Regional specialities

Informants are asked to talk with each other about specialities in the region they live in. The corpus design demands both informants living in the same region and having lived there at least for 10 years. Possible topics range from festivals of the region, popular tourist destinations, typical activities, famous figures, prominent landscapes, traditions and customs, typical products from the region to culinary specialities. The aim of the task is to collect signs for names of places, famous festivals and so on. The target text type is a discourse. We originally intended to elicit a planning discourse by asking the informants to produce a signed presentation on the region. The informants then would talk to each other about how to organize and prepare the signing output. We dropped this idea because most people (also hearing people) are not used to talk on a meta-linguistic level. The task lasts for about 20 minutes.

4.15 Retelling of a movie *Signs*

Both informants watch a five-minute movie and are asked to talk about it. The instruction is kept vague on purpose to avoid constraints on the conversation. What is special about the movie is the fact that there is no talking. The two protagonists communicate by showing each other written English words on a piece of paper. The end of the movie leaves it to the viewer to decide if the female protagonist is Deaf or not. We expect signs expressing love and feelings as well as assumptions. To make sure that the informants understand the written words in English, we added German subtitles. This task is optional and takes an average time of 8 minutes.

4.16 New vs. old signs

Informants are invited to report signs which are different between young and old generations. One goal is to capture sociolinguistic variance which is not covered in the other tasks. A further aim is to elicit a meta-linguistic discourse. In spite of the usefulness of the material we decided this task to be optional because during a pre-test we observed some discomfort among the informants who had difficulties in listing up such signs spontaneously. The task lasts 7 minutes on average.

We positioned two optional tasks, retelling of a movie *Signs* and new vs. old signs, near the end of the session to make the time management as flexible as possible.

4.17 Deaf events

The elicitation session ends with a Deaf-specific task in which each informant is asked to talk about one Deaf event in which he or she took part. In order to call various Deaf events to mind, German names of the events and related visual materials (e.g. posters and pictures) are presented (figure 3). The topics range from national events such as culture festivals of the Deaf, sign language theatre festivals and sports festivals of the Deaf to international events such as Deaflympics and Deaf Ways. If the informant did not attend any of those events, he or she is free to choose any other event. The goal of the task is to document Deaf culture and to induce personal narratives and engaged conversations. The task takes an average time of 21 minutes.

Figure 3: Deaflympics

After this final task, the session ends with a closing conversation in which the informants are asked for feedback concerning the elicitation session itself.

4.18 Additional tasks

The moderator can include two additional tasks if the planned session time is not reached. One task is the retelling of a signed story about a fire alarm in a hotel and the other task is a route description based on a city map. Both of the tasks were adopted from the Dicta-Sign project (see Matthes et al., this volume). If the moderator decides to apply one or both of these tasks, they are inserted before the task "Deaf events" since we want our elicitation sessions to end with a Deaf-specific topic.

5. Conclusions

Having conducted about 20 elicitation sessions so far, the tasks and the elicitation session as a whole seem to work as expected. Due to the intensive pilot phase, in which many aspects could be reflected and improved, the stimuli achieve their intended purpose. Although the session lasts 7 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.

6. Acknowledgments

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