

SHORT TERM SCIENTIFIC MISSION (STSM) SCIENTIFIC REPORT

This report is submitted for approval by the STSM applicant to the STSM coordinator

Action number: CA16105 - European Network for Combining Language Learning with Crowdsourcing Techniques

STSM title: Exploring possibilities for combining crowdsourcing with sign language education

STSM start and end date: 21/09/2019 to 28/09/2019

Grantee name: Irene Strasly

PURPOSE OF THE STSM:

(max. 200 words)

The aim of this STSM was to check options to include sign languages to the crowdsourcing mechanisms of creativity data sets for online language education. This STSM aimed at establishing a first practical collaboration with the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies and the local Deaf community. Our initial aim was to explore theoretical and practical possibilities of adding learning content in Icelandic Sign Language that would be directly added by the Icelandic Deaf community through crowdsourcing techniques. The output could have possibly been implemented in an online education platform, for example the Icelandic Online website, an online course developed at the University of Iceland (<http://icelandiconline.is/index.html>). This platform is currently used for Icelandic Sign Language learning material.

DESCRIPTION OF WORK CARRIED OUT DURING THE STSMS

(max. 500 words)

The aim of this STSM was to establish a first solid ground for cooperation with the local Icelandic Deaf Community and Branislav Bedi of the Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies. During the period I spent in Iceland, I met with Branislav Bedi and became acquainted with his colleagues and their working environment. Branislav and I then went to meet Kristín Lena Þorvaldsdóttir, the Director of the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Reykjavík. She gave us precious information on the Deaf people in Iceland and we discussed practical venues of collaborations. It was essential to get acquainted with the local Deaf Community there: we met various sign language interpreters and sign language teachers and attended a class of Icelandic Sign Language at the Centre. The day after, we met Kristin again at the University together with Branislav and Rannveig Sverrisdóttir, Assistant Professor in Sign Language Studies and Head of the Sign Language Department. We discussed again about possible larger fundings to be obtained at a ministerial level in Iceland in order to get the project going. We then met the programmer working on the Icelandic Online website and had fruitful exchanges about adding sign language content to the website.

After these meetings were held in person, we have then exchanged by e-mail about how to continue our collaborations. Branislav and I have then set together and checked possible options for getting larger fundings and started planning the work ahead.

DESCRIPTION OF THE MAIN RESULTS OBTAINED

The initial idea was to explore venues to create crowdsourcing content in Icelandic Sign Language in order to foster its use and help the Icelandic Deaf Community spread the use of its endangered language. After discussing with Kristín Lena Þorvaldsdóttir, the Director of the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Reykjavík, we realized that crowdsourcing was not the best option for the local community. The reasons are as follows: the Deaf community is mainly living in the city of Reykjavík. They are about 300 people in total. Given the fact that they almost all live in the same place, there is no language variation. This, on the other hand, is experienced in countries like Switzerland, where Deaf people have historically been educated in specialized schools for the Deaf and developed their own specific signs that differ according to the institutions. In Switzerland, therefore, it would make sense to have a project based on crowdsourced material, in order to gather different signed varieties of the language. In Iceland, on the other hand, it would make more sense to have a community-based project, but a crowdsourcing approach to data seems not to be the best approach.

75% of Deaf children are born in foreign families in Iceland: their parents do not know Icelandic nor Icelandic Sign Language in most cases. After consulting with the local Deaf community, it has been decided to explore a different option. The University of Iceland already uses an online platform, Icelandic Online, to teach Icelandic to foreigners. A new project is now funded to create content for kids: Icelandic Online for kids. The local Deaf community would be happy to add filmed content into Icelandic Sign Language so that families having deaf children could access content and learn both Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language. Content in sign language would be of course accessible to everyone, so that would also foster the learning and use of Icelandic Sign Language. The Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Reykjavík already has signed videos of some folklore tales and of a book written by a local author, Islandsbok Bannanna by Margaret Tryggvadóttir and Linda Ólafsdóttir. They also have a sign database that is accessible online and that could be used by the programmer of the Icelandic Online website to create more content. The idea would be to start implementing some parts of the translated book and create custom stories (a child could select different versions of the story that would lead him to different endings) for deaf children. This material could also inspire Icelandic Online for their content and vice versa, content in Icelandic could be translated into Icelandic Sign Language.

FUTURE COLLABORATIONS (if applicable)

Together with Branislav Bedi we will look for possible venues for fundings and try and put in place a first project with Icelandic Sign Language by the end of 2020 – beginning of 2021. This is what has been suggested by the programmer of the website Icelandic Online, given the upcoming developments on the Icelandic Online for Kids website (this new version for children is starting to be developed now and it will take about a year to be available: it will then be possible to add content into sign language).

I will collaborate with them as a mentor, both to help them plan the project as well as to look for fundings at a local and/or European level.

A guide for parents that is already available in French and has been written by a Canadian Professor that collaborates with me, Charles Gaucher, will be adapted for families living in Iceland who have deaf children, to make them more aware of the importance of using a signed language with their children.

Scientific articles and divulgative information will be published following advances in these contexts.

I have read the report and hereby approve it.

In Reykjavík, 30th September 2019



Branislav Bédi
The Árni Magnússon Institute for Icelandic Studies