Pilot: Establishing a Corpus for Norwegian Sign Language (NTS)

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// BACKGROUND

Researchers from HiOA and HiST received funding from the Norwegian Department of Culture to start collecting data for an NTS corpus. This pilot is a response to a growing interest in documenting and preserving this minority language for the Deaf community. It also aims to develop the field of signed language research and teaching.

// METHODS AND PARTICIPANTS

- With a focus on documentation and preservation, this initial pilot will prioritize the filming of NTS produced by Deaf senior citizens.
- Ten older (65+) Deaf, native signers from Oslo, Trondheim, and Bergen will be invited to Oslo to participate in this pilot, as a way to initially document and verify three possible dialectal signed varieties.
- The participants will be asked to complete several language-based tasks: a narrative retelling of “Frog, Where Are You?” (Mayer, 1969); a personal experience narrative about 9/11, and free conversation.
- These sessions will be led by a Deaf, native signer and video recorded with three high definition cameras.
- Additional recording of spontaneous conversational discourse is planned during a Deaf senior citizen vacation cruise on the Hurtigruta later in 2015 (see right).
- A further existing dataset of humorous anecdotes and jokes produced by deaf senior citizens may also be included in the corpus.
- The Deaf community across Norway will be actively involved. Members of the project group will travel to local Deaf Clubs, giving information in person.

// PRELIMINARY THOUGHTS ON ANNOTATION

- We will use existing video material for annotation practice, while the corpus is being collected.
- Currently, we lack a lexical database of NTS, which limits our gloss annotations, although it is possible to start with partly and non-lexical signs.
- Focus will be placed on training annotators and building a shared understanding of signed language corpus methods and the annotation process – a new field in Norway.

// HURTIGRUTA

We are cooperating with the Norwegian Association for the Deaf (NDF) to arrange data collection on this trip. The practicalities of this filming are to be discussed with the NDF shortly.

// DATA SHARING AND PROTECTION

NSD is the Data Protection Official for around 150 research and educational institutions, including all Norwegian universities, university colleges. We are currently discussing how to best protect our participants data, while also encouraging open access of the corpus to the Deaf community and other researchers.

// PROJECT GROUP

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// COOPERATION WITH FONTS

Fornefing Norsk Tegnspråk (The Association for Norwegian Sign Language, FONTS) is a non-profit organization dedicated to spreading awareness about NTS and promoting it as a part of Norwegian society. They support this project and have offered their assistance.

// BACKGROUND

The National Library has indicated an interest for NTS to be represented in their «Language bank» (Språkbanken), which is a public collection of various language corpora. We are working on how some part of the pilot corpus may be included in this public resource in the future.

// LEXICAL DATABASE

- We envision that this pilot will facilitate the beginning development of a Norwegian Sign Language lexical database by providing an initial set of data from which to draw lexical signs.
- In addition, a future lexical database will also integrate signs documented by the Norwegian Sign Language online dictionary (tegnordbok.no).
- Planning for such a database is in its early stages and is focused on funding possibilities inside and outside of Norway.