

## Bringing a corpus in line with deaf communities' perspectives

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## Roadmap

1. Corpora and preservation
2. Corpora and communities
3. Involvement of communities
4. Precedents for corpora and communities
5. Working with communities
6. Pilot survey and follow-up
7. Challenges, strategies and questions

## Corpora and preservation

Create a corpus of a language via systematic data collection, annotation and archiving

One purpose: preserve a language for community awareness and practical purposes (language can be endangered but not always)

Compare:

Maintenance - sustain an endangered language  
Revitalization - revive an extinct language

## Corpora and communities

More literature on creating a sign language corpus has focused on methodology and technical aspects

Less discussion about best practices for linkages between universities and deaf communities in building a corpus that is also intended for language preservation

## Corpora and communities

By convention, SL corpora are open to the public, including both researchers at universities and deaf communities (e.g. Auslan, NGT, BSL, DGS)

Issue: active involvement of the deaf community in corpus planning

## Involvement of communities

- a) Community awareness of own language
- value of storytelling, poetry, narratives
  - appreciation of changes over time
  - understanding of regional differences



## Involvement of communities

- b) Practical applications to language instruction
- deaf children (SL as L1)
  - high school / college students (SL as L2)
  - future teachers of deaf children
  - future interpreters

E.g. NGT Corpus: “can use the movies . . . as materials for excersises in both productive and the receptive skills”

([http://www.ru.nl/corpusngtuk/using\\_the\\_corpus/types\\_of\\_use/](http://www.ru.nl/corpusngtuk/using_the_corpus/types_of_use/))

## Precedents

As a starting point, useful to look at earlier examples of purposeful linkages between universities and communities in language preservation:

- National Association of the Deaf
- Indigenous communities

## National Association of the Deaf

Made efforts in early 20<sup>th</sup> century to preserve ASL by filming signers

Signers, e.g. Amos Draper and Edward Miner Gallaudet, worked at Gallaudet College

## Navajo community

“Members of the Navajo Language Academy have been working together since the early 1970s to further the goals of Navajo language scholarship through research on Navajo grammar, the development of pedagogical materials, and work in language planning”

“The Navajo Language Academy approach is to teach people how to do scientific research on the Navajo language, to discover the rules and principles underlying the grammar.”

(Navajo Language Academy brochure)

## Working with communities

Ask a community what they desire from a **linguistics project** (Jessie Little Doe Fermino (Wampanoag) and Sandra Deer-Standup (Mohawk), SULA 1, UMass, 2002)

A survey is one way to determine what the deaf communities desire from a corpus.

Such a survey can also be used to build further contacts within deaf communities.

## Pilot Survey

- Gathering of deaf youth in the US
- 50 respondents (70% women, 30% men)
- Average age of 24 years
- Most (82%) learned ASL before 5 years of age

Note percentages do not always add up to 100, because there are either no responses, or the respondent doesn't know, or doesn't understand the question

## State of ASL

Do you think there will be more people using ASL in 300 years?      Yes                      No

Do you think the mainstreaming of more deaf children will affect the number of people using ASL?                      Yes                      No

Do you think current medical technology is already reducing the number of deaf people who use ASL?                      Yes                      No

## State of ASL

Sample comments:

“The world is now better educated about sign language. There’s increased popularity in (foreign language) schools, etc.”

“The more we share ASL all over and definitely will be people using ASL”

## State of ASL

“People are talking about it, digital age allow Deaf people to reach out easier”

“The deaf community’s getting stronger so I can imagine ASL becoming one of the well-known languages by then”

Reflective of comments suggesting ASL will continue due to a strong base of signers, even if the number of deaf people using ASL is reduced

## Preservation of ASL

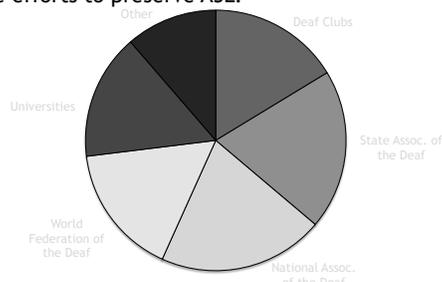
Should ASL grammar be taught to Deaf students in K-12 and beyond, in parallel to English instruction?                      Yes                      No

Should there be a campaign to preserve ASL as NAD did in early 1900s? Yes                      No

⇒ Indicates the deaf community will provide support for building a corpus even if ASL will continue

## Leading ASL Preservation

Next question: Who should take the lead in all of the efforts to preserve ASL?



## Questions for follow-up survey

a) Migration patterns - solicit information on where respondents have lived and worked to obtain a better picture of migration patterns, which will help with site selection as well as understanding variation

b) Content of corpus:

- Individual signs and sentences in isolation?
- Narratives, conversations and monologues?
- How to format the presentation of signs?
- How much information per sign?

## Questions for follow-up survey

c) Specific content tailored to specific audiences  
- e.g. SL teacher: what kinds of information do you often wish you had while planning a class?

d) Ownership: Is providing open access to the corpus sufficient for the purpose of ownership by the deaf community?

## In closing

Ideal for universities and deaf associations to deepen their linkages for mutual benefit from a sign language corpus

Challenges:

Is deepening linkages with the deaf community in creating a SL corpus considered sufficient reciprocity?

Or, should the corpus team give something more back to the deaf community, and if so, how?

## Strategies

Consultants

- Involve deaf signing consultants in high-level decision-making
- Establish advisory boards (possibly two - community and scientific)

Website

- Explain corpus in depth, making the whole project transparent to the communities
- Post vlogs to pull in the interest of the deaf community and foster discussion of their language

## Strategies

Outreach at local level:

- Have contact people give regular updates on the corpus project
- Provide training on how to access and use the corpus for a specific purpose, like developing a curriculum for teaching a sign language as L1

## Strategies

Outreach on larger scale:

- Present and run exhibition booths at various deaf gatherings (e.g. National Association of the Deaf, SL Teachers' Association)
- Collaborate with local, state and national associations of the deaf in hosting "Open Houses"

## Closing question

How effective have you found the strategies for strengthening linkages between universities and deaf communities if you have tried them already?