



Intellectual Output 03: Validation

Report on the workshops held in order to test the programmes and teaching materials produced by the Give Me A Sign project (teaching sign languages as foreign languages)

Izmir, Turkey, 12th and 13th September 2017

On the contrary to popular opinion, sign language is not universal, and in fact each community has naturally and spontaneously created and developed its own sign language over the years. There is a system of international signs which enables deaf people to communicate at international meetings and conferences, but this is not in any way a natural language and is rather a convention of signs in order to summarise. For these reasons, fluid international communication between deaf people requires the learning of foreign sign languages, in exactly the same way as oral languages. However, in spite of the several initiatives put in place by the European Commission in order to promote multilingualism in Europe, little or nothing has been produced in terms of projects to create teaching and learning materials which might make this idea of multilingualism accessible to the deaf communities across Europe and, indeed, across the world. As a result, opportunities to learn foreign sign languages are severely limited when they exist at all, which therefore represents a significant obstacle to transnational communication between deaf people and, in turn, a clear limitation to their rights of citizenship, most obviously as far as the free circulation of citizens in Europe is concerned.

With this in mind, the Give Me A Sign project has carried out research into the language learning needs of the deaf, which can be consulted on the project website www.givemeasign.org. Among the instruments we have produced with the aim of kick-starting the idea of foreign sign language learning is a collection of learning programmes at A1 and A2 levels for Portuguese Sign Language, Austrian Sign Language, Turkish Sign Language and British Sign Language, created in accordance with the indicators described in ProSign (Sign Languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) and which together constitute Intellectual Output 02 of our project. These learning programmes, together with a number of pedagogical approaches discussed by the project partnership and several sample lessons, have in turn been subject to validation by the deaf communities and schools for the deaf in the different partner countries.

01. Doncaster, January 2017

An experience with validating the British Sign Language programme at A1 level took place in Doncaster at the beginning of 2017, taking advantage of the fact that our UK partners were hosting several deaf colleagues from different countries as part of a meeting for another project. The group was composed of around 10 participants of different origins (Turkey, Romania, Italy, Spain) and different profiles (some deaf, others hard of hearing).



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Perhaps because of the mix, or perhaps just like any language course situated at level zero, the participants showed different learning speeds and, if this had been the first session of a real course, it would probably have been better to separate them into two smaller groups as a result. Another difficulty faced by the BSL teacher Natalie Pollard was the presence of an International Sign Interpreter in the room. This interpreter was there to help the group with the rest of their visit, but proved to be a distraction for the students and an obstacle to the learning process, in the sense that the participants would often look at the interpreter when unable to understand, instead of looking at the teacher and trying to grasp the meaning using BSL and the visual support.

Nevertheless, by the end of a four-hour session the participants were able to understand and use a variety of basic everyday expressions and phrases in BSL, including introducing themselves and exchanging personal information. At the end of the workshop she concluded the deaf participants were natural sign language users and it would have been more beneficial to start them on a higher level programme. Natalie highlighted the need for a learner initial assessment, which is vitally important for tutors to assess the learners' level of sign language in order to know which level is appropriate for them.

Natalie also produced a report on the experience in which she highlights several useful practical strategies for foreign sign language teaching, and these valuable considerations will be included in Intellectual Output 07 (Final Recommendations to the Sector).

02. Brasil, December 2016, and Guiné-Bissau, May 2017

During visits to Brasil and to Guiné-Bissau, LGP teacher Amílcar Morais was able to test the proposed programme for learning Portuguese Sign Language at A1 level during intensive one-week courses with groups of 15 deaf participants during a total of 35 hours in each country. These experiences took place at the University of Brasilia from 10th to 17th December 2016, and at the Salvador Allende School in Bissau from 23rd to 27th May 2017.

In both cases, Amílcar found that the students were able to learn and use the LGP sign alphabet together with several useful everyday expressions, including introducing themselves and exchanging essential personal information, and the knowledge they had acquired was successfully tested through short personal presentations in LGP.

The levels of motivation and application to learning LGP as a foreign sign language were very high, as can clearly be seen in the photographs available on our project website www.givemeasign.org.

03. Klagenfurt, June 2017

Our partners at the University of Klagenfurt in Austria were given an interesting opportunity to test the Austrian Sign Language programme during June 2017, when at the request of the local immigration authorities, they began working with ÖGS teaching together with a deaf Syrian refugee.



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The participant was a competent sign language user and reader of written Syrian, but the first sessions were rather challenging in the sense that a number of other people from the authorities were also present, including deaf people, hearing sign language users and hearing people with no sign language competence.

The participant learned basic skills in ÖGS such as greetings (together with the cultural component related to this in Austria) and became able to use some everyday expressions, despite having difficulties learning the sign alphabet given certain specific characters in German. The two teachers involved in the experience avoided written German and focused on signs and the use of pictures and performed dialogues to help the participant to move forwards. In their report on the experience, they highlight the fact that, especially with learners from a different culture and with a different written alphabet, teachers will need to be prepared for the unexpected; for example, in this case the participant was keen to also learn written German, which of course in this case implied learning to write from left to right instead of right to left.

04. Izmir, September 2017

These validation activities culminated in the Give Me A Sign Project Foreign Sign Language Workshop, held specifically for this purpose in Izmir, Turkey on the 12th and 13th September 2017, hosted by our partners Mavi Pencere. During the two full days of the workshop, sample lessons in the basics of three of the four sign languages of the project (Portuguese, Austrian and Turkish) were presented and taught in accordance with the principles established in our A1 learning programmes. It should be noted that all four sign languages were planned for this workshop, but that a sudden illness unfortunately prevented our UK partner's senior deaf sign language teacher from travelling to Turkey, which made it impossible to test the British Sign Language materials in Izmir. The main participants at the workshop were 11 deaf subjects who are users of Turkish Sign Language (one of whom apparently of Egyptian origin), including 7 men and 4 women. Most of the participants, but not all of them, were teachers of Turkish Sign Language.

Each of the three teaching sessions lasted for three hours and was followed by evaluation.

a) First session: Portuguese Sign Language (LGP)

Portuguese Sign Language teacher Amílcar Morais began by presenting several useful pieces of basic information about LGP as a language, about the Portuguese deaf community and about some of the related cultural aspects. This presentation was delivered using International Signs and was followed by an opportunity for each of the participants to introduce themselves.

As soon as the introductions were complete, Amílcar began to introduce the themes of the session, now using only Portuguese Sign Language as the exclusive vehicle for communication, together with a series of pictures to facilitate the understanding of meaning. The session provided the opportunity to learn essential communication skills for use in the following contexts:



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- Greetings and saying goodbye
- Sign alphabet in LGP
- Using numbers to express dates and age
- Signing your name
- Gender
- Days of the week
- Months of the year
- Colours

The materials used included Powerpoint slides containing pictures and photographs, together with the sign alphabet.

The session worked in an extremely dynamic way, involving constant interaction in LGP between the teacher and the participants, but also among the participants. We should mention here that it has become clear over the course of the entire project that deaf people in general appear to be noticeably quicker than hearing people in terms of basic language acquisition and of memorising vocabulary.

The session was subsequently evaluated by means of a questionnaire distributed to the participants, the results of which can be seen at the end of this report.

b) Second session: Turkish Sign Language (TİD)

Turkish Sign Language teacher Hasan Dikyuva began by presenting several useful pieces of basic information about TİD as a language, about the Turkish deaf community and about some of the related cultural aspects. This presentation was delivered using International Signs.

As soon as the introductions were complete, Hasan began to introduce the themes of the session, now using only Turkish Sign Language as the exclusive vehicle for communication, together with a series of pictures to facilitate the understanding of meaning. The session provided the opportunity to learn essential communication skills for use in the following contexts:

- Greetings and saying goodbye
- Sign alphabet in TİD
- Using numbers to express dates and age
- Signing your name
- Gender
- Days of the week
- Months of the year
- Colours



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This session involved essentially two interested non-Turkish deaf participants, one from Portugal and the other from Austria, both of whom were sign language teachers.

The materials used included Powerpoint slides using written Turkish as support, and the session was subsequently evaluated by means of a questionnaire distributed to the participants, the results of which can be seen at the end of this report.

c) Third session: Austrian Sign Language (ÖGS)

Austrian Sign Language teacher Elisabeth Bergmeister began by presenting several useful pieces of basic information about ÖGS as a language, about the Austrian deaf community and about some of the related cultural aspects. This presentation was delivered using International Signs.

As soon as the introductions were complete, Elisabeth began to introduce the themes of the session, now using only Austrian Sign Language as the exclusive vehicle for communication, together with a series of pictures to facilitate the understanding of meaning. The session provided the opportunity to learn essential communication skills for use in the following contexts:

- Greetings and saying goodbye
- Sign alphabet in ÖGS
- Using numbers to express dates and age
- Signing your name
- Gender
- Months of the year

The session included a game based on the sign alphabet of ÖGS, together with presentations by the teacher of both herself and the themes introduced.

The materials included Powerpoint slides containing both a variety of pictures and written German as forms of support, and the session was subsequently followed by an evaluation of the knowledge and skills acquired by the participants.

Conclusion to the Izmir Workshops

The participants showed great interest in learning the foreign sign languages presented, especially in the sense of being able to use them to communicate with other deaf people from other countries. They were very keen to request both more learning opportunities and a chance to learn much more of each of the foreign sign languages presented, and eager to have many more hours of training. They provided very positive feedback in relation to the approach used by the three sign language teachers, mentioning in particular the way each of the teachers took into consideration the feedback being provided by the participants during the sessions.



LGP seemed to be the most difficult to learn and use, in particular the sign alphabet and the number signs, which also caused certain learning difficulties in ÖGS.

At the end, the participants clearly expressed their enthusiasm for the project and would very much like it to continue, so that it may begin to produce learning content and also include a wider variety of sign languages from other countries. The partners of the project were congratulated for having begun this initiative and for the Give Me A Sign project as a whole.

Results of the evaluation of the participants

The classification which follows uses 1 as the weakest factor and 5 as the strongest factor.

Amílcar Morais (LGP teacher):

Theme / Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	none
Overall learning				X		
Learning difficulty				X		
Session dynamics				X		
Methodology				X		
Clarity of communication				X		
Motivation				X		
Attention during the session(s)				X		
Correction, additional information and explanation				X		
Overall information					X	
Support				X		

Hasan Dikuya (TİD teacher):

Theme / Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	none
Overall learning				X		
Learning difficulty				X		
Session dynamics				X		
Methodology				X		
Clarity of communication					X	
Motivation				X		
Attention during the session(s)				X		
Correction, additional information and explanation				X		
Overall information				X		
Support				X		



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Elisabeth Bergmeister (ÖGS teacher):

Theme / Evaluation	1	2	3	4	5	none
Overall learning				X		
Learning difficulty				X		
Session dynamics				X		
Methodology				X		
Clarity of communication				X		
Motivation				X		
Attention during the session(s)				X		
Correction, additional information and explanation					X	
Overall information				X		
Support				X		



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