Collaboration in Sign Language Testing and Assessment

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Topics for discussion

- Signed Languages
- CEFR adaptations to suit signed languages
- Criteria developed for Sign language
- Assessment of production, comprehension and interaction skills
- Examples of use in the classroom
- Further considerations

Describing language: it's complicated!

Language proficiency:
What we know?
What we do?
What we can do, but not very well?
What we cannot (yet) do? What we don’t know?
Signed Languages... Even more complicated!

- Visuo-spatial language
- Use of space, body (torso), shoulders, head, non-manual features (nmf’s)
- Aspectual markers, word(sign) order
- Independent from spoken languages
- Unique to each country: NOT international
- Cultural aspects of signed languages (SL’s)

Relating Signed languages to CEFR

- What’s not transferable:
  - Reading skills / Writing skills
  - Auditory based skills
- What is transferable:
  - Receptive.... Comprehension
  - Productive.... Signing

CEFR and Signed Languages

- CEFR provides a common basis for elaboration
- Levels adapted to suit visuo-spatial nature of SLs
- Focus on understanding and signing
- Scope for a variety of aims
- Linguistic, Sociolinguistic, Pragmatic
- Analysis of relevance:
  Sustained Monologue, Addressing Audiences, Production of Reports/Assignments, Monitoring and Repair
Five skill areas

Understanding
- Listening
- Reading

Speaking
- Spoken production
- Spoken interaction

Writing

Comprehension
- Real life Receptive
- Receptive exercises

Signing
- Production
- Signed interaction

Pre-Recorded Signing

Signed interaction

A1 level:
I can interact in a simple interaction provided the other person is prepared to repeat or reformulate things at a slower rate and help me to formulate what I am trying to express. Can ask and answer simple questions, initiate and respond to simple statements in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.
Developing Assessment

• CEFR Scales provide a source for the development of rating scales
• Relate to specific learning objectives and levels of proficiency

Assessment... some considerations

• Linguistic Competency
• Sociolinguistic Competency
• Pragmatic Competency

Assessment: Validity, Reliability, Feasibility

• Validity: based on communicative use, real life representation, cultural norms
• Reliability: fairness for all candidates, rating procedures, marking criteria, cyclical approach, rater/teacher training
• Feasibility: resources available, equipment used, hours involved, costs incurred, standardisation of SL's
Developing Assessments for SL’s

- Dependent on standardization of SL’s
- Ireland: Irish Sign Language (ISL)
- Netherlands: Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT)

Barriers in Assessing Signed Languages

- Language variation
- Lack of standardization of some signed languages (ISL) except in the Netherlands
- Teacher qualifications
- Monitoring standard of interaction
- Lack of SL resources/ materials

Overcoming Barriers

- Discussion/ training among teaching staff/raters
- Test rater and test taker feedback to shape future tests
- Scripted dialogue to maintain fairness
- Use of mock tests in class as preparatory material
Final Thoughts....

- CEFR needs greater adaptation for SL’s
- Grammatical features alter approach to levels
- Standardization of SL’s is a major factor
- Resources
- Real-time nature of SL’s
- Alot to consider

Thank you!

My collaborateurs
Other Resources

Trinity College Dublin

- CDS site - www.tcd.ie/slscs/cds/
- D-Signs Project - www.dsigns-online.eu
- SIGNALL Project - www.signallproject.com

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