



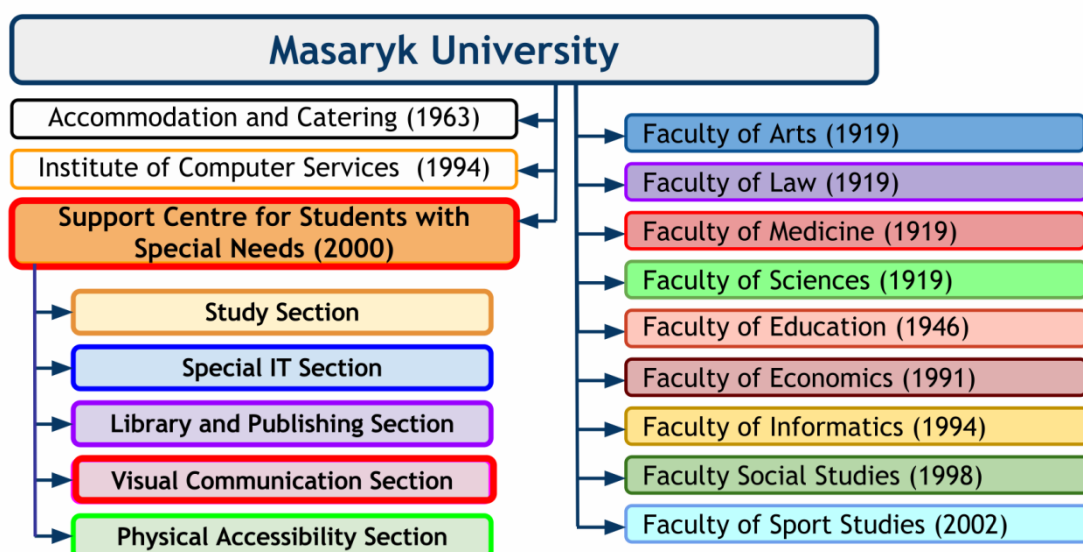
Norway grants – an interim report on the institutional cooperation

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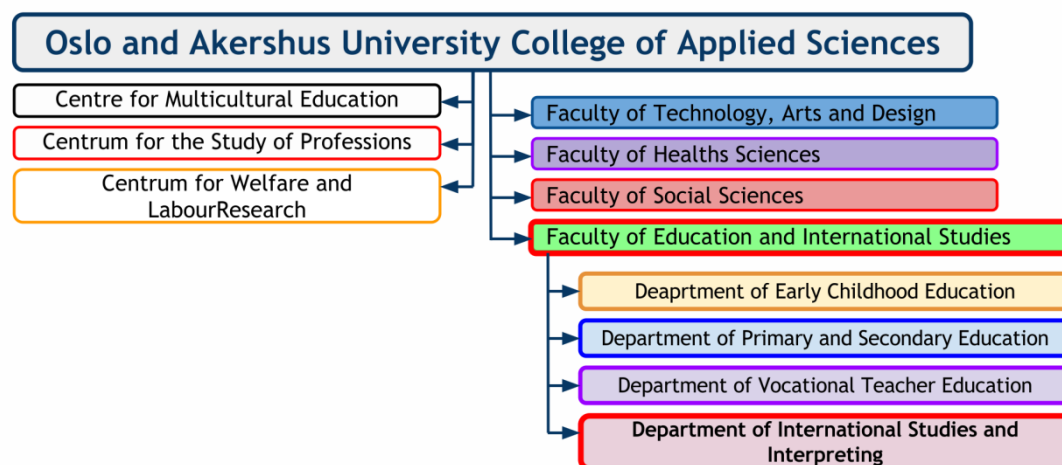
Sign Languages in Higher Education – an organizational framework

The project *Sign Languages in Higher Education*, which was funded by Norwegian funds under no. NF-CZ07-ICP-3-229-2015 in 2015/2016, allows the Support Centre for Students with Special Needs at Masaryk University the institutional cooperation with the Institute of International Studies and Interpreting (*Institutt for studier og internasjonale tolkeutdanning*) at the Faculty of Education and International Studies (*Fakultet for lærerutdanning studier og internasjonale*), the University College of Applied Sciences in Oslo and Akershus (*Høgskolen i Oslo og Akershus*). The aim of this cooperation is to allow the team of mostly deaf specialists to mutually compare the role, which is currently fulfilled by the Czech and Norwegian Sign Language in the Czech and Norwegian tertiary education. Other partner institutions are the Department of Special Education Sciences of Palacký University in Olomouc and Statped (National Institute of Special Educational Services in Norway), in particular its Centre for Educational Materials and Technology Development in Trondheim, and NAV (Centre for Welfare and Labour Research) as the national guarantor of the citizens' right to communicate in Norwegian Sign Language.

The different perspective of both cooperating institutions is to some extent obvious from their organizational structure, i.e. from the context in which the component departments are incorporated. On the Czech side it is the team of the Visual Communication Section, which operates within a large university-wide workplace, and its practical task is to ensure the inclusive education at Masaryk University:



On the Norwegian side there is a professional team of interpreting of the Norwegian Sign Language at the Department of International Studies and Interpreting and its task is a professional training of teachers and social workers for the multicultural work in groups endangered by social exclusion both in Norway (traditional and new ethnic minorities, a new immigration wave, socially excluded people, people with hearing impairment) as well as in other parts of the world where Norway provides its assistance and cooperation:



The Norwegian Sign Language users as a target group find themselves next to the holders of other cultures and other spoken languages, for which Norway is ready to provide conditions for a secure life, professional career and education with the respect to their cultural identity and the right to self-determination. This context clearly puts the Norwegian educational concept alongside the educational programmes of the Deaf Studies conceived rather culturally (but not the Disability Studies). The focus of the study is not that of special education, even though other branches of the same faculty are educational. Similar contextual classification can be applied to

other two Norwegian university departments at which the vocational training of interpreters of the Norwegian Sign Language is provided: The University of Bergen (*Universitetet i Bergen*), and Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim (*Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige Universitet i Trondheim*).

Statistical comparisons of interpreting activities

If we consider that in Norway three universities with the accredited programme for interpreters training currently operate with a total amount of around 50 graduates a year, the biggest current difference is obvious compared to Czech conditions, where the strict tertiary education of the sign language interpreters does not exist. The professionally closest one is the Department of Languages and Communication of the Deaf at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague, whose current programme is focused on the bilingualism of Czech Sign Language speakers in the Czech environment and their communication, rather than directly on the interpretation between these languages, the Deaf College in Hradec Králové is only starting the study programme for interpreters (not on the Bachelor level), at Masaryk University and Palacký University in Olomouc the establishment of such a programme is a part of strategic plans, as well as at Charles University in Prague. This is then reflected in a dramatically different number of registered sign language interpreters: 600 on the Norwegian side (approximately 100 as internal employees of NAV, the rest as self-employed) against 40 people registered in the Czech Centre for Interpreting Services for the Deaf (a more optimistic figure of 70 interpreters is shown by Iva Rindová, the head of the Deaf College in Hradec Králové and is overtaken by ASNEP). Because of the difference in population, against 7–8 sign language users for one interpreter in Norway, there stands an alarming number of 100–200 users of the Czech Sign Language for one interpreter.

A comparative table of data on sign language interpreting		
	Norway	Czech Rep.
Population	5 million	10 million
Number of speakers of the sign language	4–5 thous.	7–8 thous.
Number of registered interpreters of SL	500–600	40–70
Number of the deaf speakers for one interpreter of SL	7–8	150–200
Number of university interpreting study programmes	3	0
Number of graduates from interpreting programmes per year	50	0

The Norwegian expenditure on interpreting according to the data of a speaker of NAV is 463 million CZK annually, on the Czech side at the moment it is not possible to determine the overall funds spent due to the decentralization of the costs. The most distinctive is the money which the Ministry of Education allocates to 70 deaf students at universities in the amount of approximately 10 million CZK (2015, this amount also includes other services). If all sign language users were comparably funded, it would mean for the Czech budget the annual spending of

about 1 billion CZK, which would be comparable to the amount of Norwegian spending. The situation, however, is such that the budget chapter of the Ministry of Education for interpreting services at universities is at the moment the only so defined chapter in the Czech budget, together with the amount which ASNEP gets from the Ministry of Social Affairs for their Centre for Interpreting Services for the Deaf.

Comparison of the approach to the sign language and its interpreting

To compare the approach of individual institutions we use this working typology of possible views on the sign language:

1. Sign language as a deaf communication tool

- historically the oldest documented approach
- common within the field of special education
- signing is the subject of attention not linguistic, but as one of the communication tools of the deaf used in education (dealt with similar attention as Braille writing in education of the blind)

2. Sign language as a form of visual communication

- close to the understanding of the deaf themselves
- common in the environment with the attention paid to nonverbal communication in general (psychology, arts education, etc.).
- attention paid to the ability to perceive visual stimuli around and refer to them when communicating

3. Sign language conceived linguistically

- theoretical foundations: William C. Stokoe (Gallaudet University) following Bernard T. M. Tervoort (University of Amsterdam)
- based on structuralism, linguistic analysis is applied to sign languages (phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicology)
- used for the research purposes

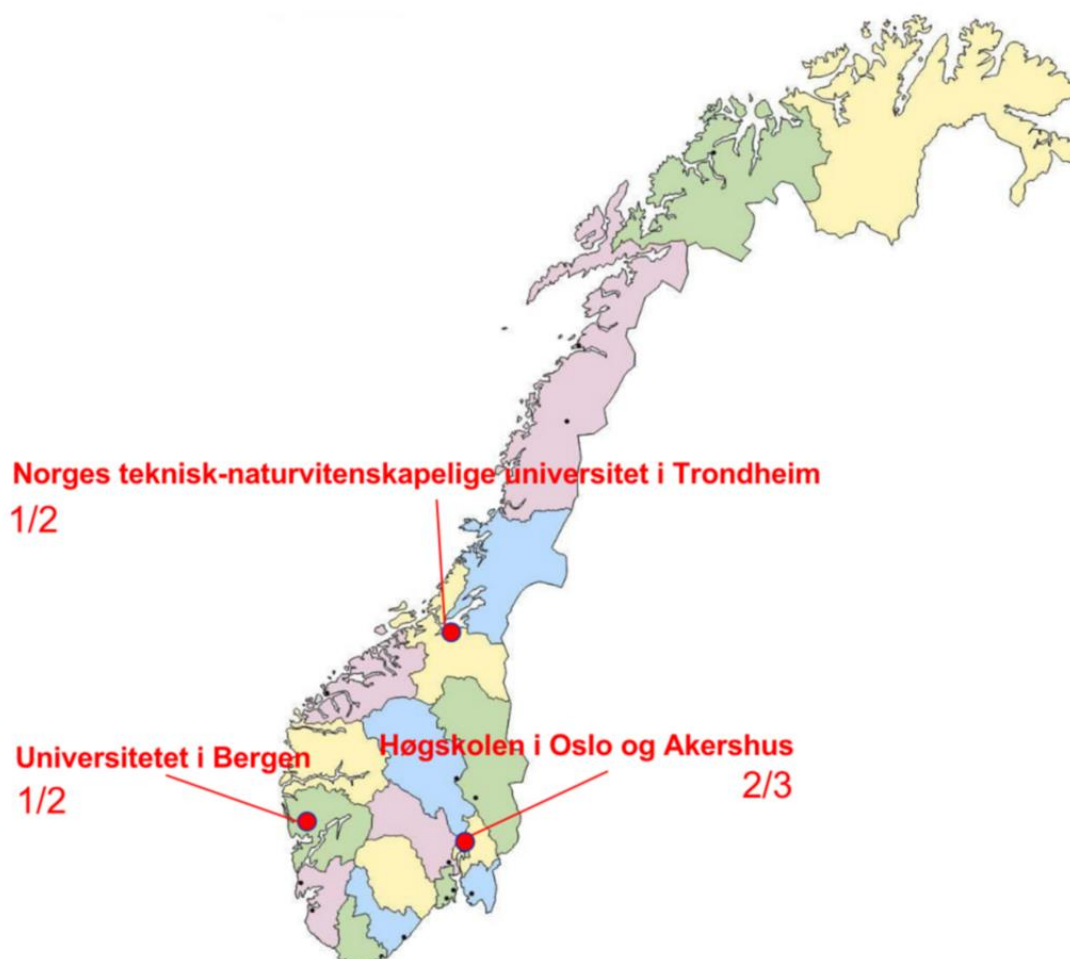
4. Sign language understood psychologically

- a less common approach in academic practice
- the attention is paid to the relationship of language and thinking, to the specifics of perception, thinking and learning given by visual-motoric communication

Using this typology, we can say that the teaching of the sign language in Norway is emancipated from pedagogical context (the approach is different, however, in Statped when creating publications in the sign language, which are seen as educational material), thus the conception (1) is not typical. At the same time, however, it can be observed that the linguistic concept (3) and a psychological concept (4) in the practical training of interpreters also show relatively rarely, particularly in the context of receding general awareness of linguistics, which, under the pragmatic Anglo-Saxon influence, infringes the common educational practice. The Department at the University of Applied Sciences in Oslo is the closest to this concept, considering that training of sign language interpreters is linked to the training of interpreters of other languages. Additionally, the personality of Professor Arnfinn M. Vonen, who is a renowned linguist in Norway (he headed the Royal Language Board) is clearly visible in the department. Yet it is true

that the three-year degree course in the sign language interpreting is designed primarily practically. In the first year, students are subjected to a very intense training (language bath) in the Norwegian Sign Language. To start the studies, no basic knowledge of the Norwegian Sign Language is needed, so it is desirable from the beginning to get students to a certain level of practical mastery of the language. Because of the absence of standardized tests for the Norwegian Sign Language it is not possible to relate this level to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The language acquisition takes place is based primarily on imitating native speakers, not on the knowledge of grammar rules: students in three-hour blocks within four days a week face the interaction with native speakers, without the use of further intermediate language. One of the arguments for the application of this direct method is the fastest change in orientation of a hearing person to the primary visual communication code, which demonstrates the approach (2).

Norwegian study programmes for sign language interpreters and their typological classification



The relationship between the study programmes for interpreters and professional practice

The strength of the Norwegian study programmes for interpreters represents a large number of students and experienced teachers, both hearing and deaf and a high efficiency of the practical training of communication skills of students. The weaker aspect is a little linkage between the linguistic theory and visual communication practice. The necessity to include the mastering of the sign language itself into the studies reduces the time allocation for interpreting theory and practice (mastering of spoken languages is not included in the curriculum). The missing linguistic description (grammar, lexicology) is projected as a lack of course books or e-learning courses – there is no precise definition of the requirements for each phase of studies (expected pen- sum of grammar, of sign vocabulary, etc.).

The impact of these factors on the professional experience of the Norwegian interpreter is obvious. Positively reflected fact mainly is that the offer of interpreting services exceeds the demand and that there are practically no financial constraints on individual pumping of interpreting services.

A very substantial advantage is the right of an employer to get one interpreter position for 3.5 fulltime equivalent of the Deaf employees and a strong technological support for interpreting online, which is related to the need to solve the interpretation at a very low population density. For further development of the Czech interpreting services, it is appropriate to take into account the weaker aspects of the Norwegian practice. Even the high financial investment in Norway does not fully resolve the covering of the interpreting needs. Purely social conception of the service is not always consistent with the linguistic definition of the interpretation: a hearing person – who is a part of the same communication and has the same rights – is not eligible for the service, there is, consequently, a lack of responsibility of public speech organizers (including universities) for the accessibility etc. The requirements for interpretation may remain uncovered at times, even though the offer exceeds the demand: the Labour Code and work habits of the freelancers may reduce the availability of the interpretation in the evening hours, on holidays etc.

The method of coordination does not correspond to a large number of interpreters (there is a lack of a database of specialties and practice, tools for avoiding the duplication etc.), and surprisingly there is a lack of a system of further (lifelong) interpreters training.

The role of sign languages at universities

Neither the Norwegian nor the Czech education system counts with the tertiary educational institutions, in which the sign language would be the primary language of instruction, as in Gallaudet University. A deaf person is therefore a typical representative of a minority, no matter if this minority is defined educationally, psychologically, sociologically or ethnically. Sign languages then occur in the tertiary education in two fundamentally different roles, each of which is internally divided into:

1. practical communication tool of the academic minority

- 1.1. *minority of students* – on the Czech side this minority reached the peak three years ago by the number of 80 students and it gradually goes down, on the Norwegian side we were not successful to find it out
- 1.2. *minority of teachers* – on the Czech side, this group exists only at Masaryk University (5 speakers of the sign language as internal employees, 10 hearing assistants capable of communication in ČZJ, while at Charles University and Palacký University there is only one permanent deaf linguist cooperating with several bilingual hearing ones; on the Norwegian side, there is a larger number of internal deaf tutors or linguists (at all three schools 3–5 people) and especially much larger teams of hearing employees capable of fluent communication in NTS

2. the subject of research and education

- 2.1. *practical training in sign language communication* – on the Czech side there exist no accredited university programmes of that focus, so it's just about subjects or groups of subjects, which at most of Czech schools are usually included into programmes of special education, at Charles University into the linguistic programme; on the Norwegian side there are education programmes for interpreters at 3 schools
- 2.2. *theoretical research of the sign language and publication of data* (grammar, lexicography) – on the Czech side the systematic linguistic research is conducted only at Charles University; at Palacký University and Masaryk university, the research is rather pedagogical, while publication of data is of interest to all three schools; to a certain extent West Bohemia University in Plzeň and University of Hradec Králové also participate; on the Norwegian side the research seems to be more evenly distributed, but the amount of linguistic data available is very low in both countries.

Although it is desirable that all the above mentioned roles were in coordinated cooperation and were mutually supported, in practice, the holders of those roles are usually completely separated interest groups, in Norway, paradoxically, it happens even more often than on the Czech side (1.1 is provided by NAV and the school does not solve these tasks; 1.2 is provided by bilingual teachers or an internal interpreter paid by NAV; 2.1 is only to a small extent based on theory and research, 2.2 is only to a small extent used in practical training). The issues to be solved are:

1. *verification of the sign language competence*

- the size of the community of speakers of the sign language does not enable more standardization of language skills and competence (A-level in spoken language, A-level in the sign language)
- in the practice of both countries it is irrationally assumed that anyone who considers himself/herself a member of the community of signers, is linguistically competent in sign language
- thus the problem is an ongoing training and cultivation of language skills (intuitive grammar skills, knowledge of technical terms and sign archaisms, dealing with the difference between the formal and informal communication);

2. *international studies and mobility*

- how to motivate the deaf to achieve proficiency not only in the local sign language (ČZJ, NTS) and the written language (Czech, Norwegian), but also in international sign languages (IS, ASL) and written languages (English, French);
- how to deal with interpreting of academic activities and events in international languages (lectures, seminars and conferences in English)
- how to solve both linguistically and economically the international mobility of deaf students and teachers

3. *bilingualism and linguistic autonomy of the sign language*

- whether, in which cases and how to create communities using the sign language professionally and independently in the spoken language,
- how to deal with the training in spoken languages (academic writing in the local language, in English) in the case of the Deaf? Should it be based on comparison with the sign language models and patterns and explained in sign language?
- what is more important – the have the sign and spoken language linked to each other (a sign is understood as a synonym of the word), or to stress autonomy of the sign language and their coherence among themselves?
- how to assess the stylistic value or general applicability of neologisms created in interpreting practice or individual communication, and to identify those that can be offered in formal public communication?
- Should or should not the speaker of the sign language be trained – in addition to direct communication – to generate professional documents in the sign language, to produce sign literature etc.?

4. *the role of the documents in the sign language*

- there is no settled sign writing for daily practice, which leads to the fact that the data on the sign language are known rather from the direct communication and must be handled by visual memory,
- the video recording is not anonymous and is almost non-editable,
- there are therefore not enough documents in the sign language and the lack of the midstream of these documents – the documents in the sign language are either superficially popular, or just for linguistic purposes, only rarely the deaf make their own language to be the subject of analysis, they do not play with it, do not study foreign sign languages
- too much knowledge and information is tied to direct personal communication, the deeper logical analysis and reflection of language models for educational practice is very exceptional, signs disappear with the perishing generation of users etc.
- basically the fiction is missing as one of the pillars of culture;

While the project *Sign Languages in Higher Education* is mainly engaged in the points 1–3, an independent project *Desktop Publishing in Sign Languages* is specifically engaged in the point 4.

Conclusion

Despite the huge difference in the investments made by the Norwegian and the Czech government in the Deaf education and technological support of the inclusion some key issues remain on both sides equally open:

1. The identity of the Deaf, which would include a sense of belonging to the hearing of the same age, the same municipality, region, nation etc. (the idea of inclusive education) and also belonging to the Deaf on the basis of common language and perception of the world, across the regional and national borders (idea of special education, aiming to overcome the feeling of one's isolation, seclusion and atypical, problematic nature).
2. Linguistic and cultural competence in families where there can be no transfer of experience between parents and children.
3. Linguistic and cultural competence of the deaf in the mainstream education. How to achieve the necessary level of exposure to the sign language in an inclusive setting, considering that the community of the professionally educated and cultured Deaf people as models, which is the idea of special schools? How many sign languages must the Deaf master in order to be prepared for the European and global mobility in education?
4. Linguistic and cultural competence of the deaf regarding the written form of the spoken language, or their oral articulation by the deaf speakers, and their lip-reading. How to achieve the necessary degree of sovereignty in the majority languages so that the sign speaker was prepared for the European and global mobility in education?

Is bilingualism sustainable through an interpreter, without a real bilingualism of the entire society? Whose is the cost of the training of interpreters, the interpreting itself and the language education of the whole society (courses of sign and spoken languages for family members, teachers, classmates, colleagues)? Should the freedom of expression be restricted to narrow circles and individual events? And if not, how to avoid objections for economic unsustainability of a more general concept of equal access to information?