



Assessment of the study programme in
Sign Language Interpretation at the HiOA

and

Methodology of the planned study
programme in Sign Language
Interpretation at the MU

1. Description and evaluation of the Norwegian study programme in Sign Language Interpretation

The study programme in Sign Language Interpretation is provided by the Institute of International Studies and Interpretation, a part of the Faculty of Education and International Studies at the College of Applied Sciences in Oslo and Akershus.

The three-year study programme is primarily conceived as a practical one. During the first year, students are immersed in a very intensive training in Norwegian Sign Language. As no preliminary practical knowledge of the Norwegian Sign Language is required upon admission to the course, it is desirable that the students reach a certain level of practical command of the language since the beginning. Due to the non-existence of standardized tests for the Norwegian Sign Language, this level cannot be related to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. The language learning takes place without any grammar explanation. Four days a week, in three-hour lessons students are exposed to interaction with native speakers, without using another mediation language. One of the arguments for applying this direct method of teaching a language typologically completely different from spoken Norwegian is the need to “re-orient” a hearing person to the primarily visual communication code. Generally speaking, the deaf point out the insufficiently developed ability of hearing people to work with space, iconicity and mimics in the sign language, and that is why students begin with the training of these skills in particular, even to the detriment of learning grammar and conventional vocabulary. Besides these practical tutorials, students get once a week a lecture on the habits and culture of the deaf community, again delivered by a deaf teacher.

In the second year of study, interpretation skills are included in the training, in a similar way – that is with only a minimum of explanation and theory. The teaching again consists mainly of practical training, during which the students try to make maximum use of their limited knowledge of the language vocabulary and grammar. Theoretical explanations are dedicated only to general communication principles, an introduction to the theoretical description of the Norwegian Sign Language, and interpretation ethics. Discussions with the head of the study programme have shown that the main purpose of this approach is to develop the ability of the students’ prompt reactions and their resilience against the stress in interpretation work. Obviously, the Institute follow the idea that by sufficient repetition of typical situations the students will develop their capacity to abstract themselves the rules (in the sense of both the language grammar and interpretation methods), which in itself constitutes a value that they would not get if they were offered theoretical explanations in advance.

The rest of the study programme then consists of deepening knowledge and competences acquired in the first and second years of study, training of typing on a keyboard (since in Norway speech to text reporting skills are considered to be a competence of a graduate interpreter), and interpretation for the deaf-blind. From the human resource point of view, the study programme is based on deaf teachers of the language and culture, interpreters and linguists.

Figure 1 illustrates the division of specific fields of study into thematic blocks and semesters of the study programme.

semester	1 Language block	2 Interpretation block	3 Theory of communication	4 Speech to text reporting block
1	Language tutorial I			
2	Language tutorial II			
3	Language tutorial II	Introduction to interpretation theory Interpretation tutorial I	Theory of communication I Linguistics I Ethics I	
4		Interpretation theory Interpretation tutorial II	Theory of communication II Linguistics II Ethics II	
5		Interpretation tutorial III Interpretation for the deaf-blind	Theory of communication III	Theory of speech to text reporting
6		Interpretation tutorial IV	Theory of communication IV	Speech to text reporting tutorial

Figure 1: The HiOA study programme

2. Description of the planned study programme in Czech Sign Language Interpretation at the Masaryk University

The accreditation of the three-year Bachelor's study programme will be prepared using the good practice and experience of the teachers in Oslo and under the patronage of the Institute of General Linguistics and Baltic Languages and Literatures at the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University (MU). It is assumed that the study programme will be implemented by that Institute in the future. The courses will be prepared and the teaching will be done by the staff of the Institute of General Linguistics and Baltic Languages and Literatures and that of the Tiresias Centre MU.

Students will acquire necessary competences in three major areas, corresponding to three study blocks: 1. practical language competences in the Czech Sign Language and in Czech; 2. general linguistics; 3. specific interpretation methods and specificities of the deaf community culture.

The purpose of the first study block will be the development of practical knowledge of the Czech Sign Language and achieving a certain level of expression in Czech. These two natural languages will be reflected in the second block using methods of contemporary linguistics; the purpose of this block is to teach the students both to recognize universal linguistic structures in the two natural languages, and to grasp their differences in theory and in practice as well. The third block will teach the students how to translate *salva veritate*

between the two languages, and acquaint them with the deaf community and culture in the Czech Republic.

As to the chronological division of the study, in the first year the main focus will be on practical skills in the Czech Sign Language. Given the fact that there are generally only very limited opportunities how to acquire such skills outside the university environment, only basic knowledge of the language will be required from the applicants upon admission. As the main precondition for the interpreters' good performance is reliable knowledge of the two languages between which they translate, the main goal of the first year of study will be to improve the level of the students' knowledge of the Czech Sign Language from "basic" to "advanced".

Gradually the study programme will include an increasing proportion of linguistic courses oriented to abstract thinking about the natural language and comparative analysis of the students' native language with the Czech Sign Language. The study block of specific interpretation skills will be conceived as a more theoretical one from the beginning. Students will get acquainted primarily with legislative rules accompanying the work of interpreters and with specificities of the deaf community in the Czech Republic as well as in general. Upon achievement of a certain level of language skill (presumably in the second year of study) the teaching will be directed on mastering specific methods in the diversified range of situations faced by interpreters in the course of their professional careers. The study is planned to be concluded by practical experience in organisations providing interpretation services, carried out in the course of the final two semesters.

Figure 2 below illustrates the division of planned compulsory study courses into blocks (columns) and semesters (lines).

semester	1 Language block	2 Linguistic block	3 Interpretation block
1	Language tutorial I Explanation of the system I (introduction) Conversation I	Linguistics I (introduction to the language)	Culture I Legislation
2	Language tutorial II Explanation of the system II (phonetics, phonology, morphology) Conversation II	Linguistics II (phonetics, phonology, morphology)	Culture II Means of communication
3	Language tutorial III Explanation of the system III (morphology, syntax)	Linguistics III (morphology, syntax) Comparative linguistics I	Interpretation I Interpretation tutorial I
4	Language tutorial IV Explanation of the system IV (syntax)	Linguistics IV (syntax) Comparative linguistics II	Interpretation II Interpretation tutorial II
5	Language tutorial V	Linguistics V (semantics) Diploma thesis seminar I	Interpretation III Practical experience I

Figure 2: Study programme planned at the MU

The accreditation of a follow-up Master's programme is assumed to be submitted in the future; it will be more focused on linguistic and theoretical analysis of sign languages, and possibly also their comparative analysis with oral languages. At the same time it is assumed that graduates of the Bachelor' programme in Sign Language Interpretation will be able to continue studying in the Master's degree in any other philological programme at the Faculty of Arts, MU.

3. Comparison

The most striking difference between the existing Norwegian study programme for the education of sign language interpreters and the planned Czech one is based to a large extent on the character of institutional background of the organisations that provide, or plan the programmes in question. In Norway, it is a college type of educational institution, which may be compared to the Czech "higher professional school", and it is therefore fully understandable that in the process of student training most attention is paid to practical command of a certain amount of skills, from the Czech point of view to the detriment of theoretical reflexion of the natural language system or the methodology of interpretation. The planning and providing of the study programme in Czech Sign Language Interpretation will take place under the patronage of the Institute of Linguistics and Baltic Languages and Literatures, Faculty of Arts, MU – i.e. a workplace with a tradition in approaching natural languages on the basis of theoretical description (including formal approaches). This difference between the two workplaces is (will be) inevitably reflected in the courses dedicated to training and description of the language. Unlike the existing Norwegian study programme, that planned at the MU will include one entire extra study block dedicated to theoretical reflexion of the natural language (from a general point of view, and with regard to sign languages too; the so-called linguistic block, no. 2 above – see Figure 2); moreover, even the block dedicated to practical command of the sign language (the so-called language block, no. 1 above – see Figure 2) will include a certain amount of grammar explanation, which – as we have understood – the Norwegian colleagues are missing. As we could observe on the Norwegian side, the application of the direct method of teaching the sign language appeared to be very effective and strongly impressed especially our deaf colleagues. It is therefore planned to incorporate this method to the training of the Czech students as well, within the so-called language block of study (block no. 1 above – see Figure 2). There has been no opportunity to assess the effectivity of a similar approach in the teaching of interpretation skills.

As the Norwegian study programme is a part of the Institute of International Studies and Interpretation, there necessarily must be more stress on the study of communication theory and the culture of the deaf community. The latter field has been planned in the new MU study programme as well, but it will definitely not be as strongly represented in the study schedule as it is in Norway.

Generally speaking, it may be summarized that while the existing Norwegian study programme in Sign Language Interpretation is oriented primarily to practice (language, interpretation) and the theoretical training of students focuses to the knowledge of the deaf community culture, the planned study programme in Czech Sign Language Interpretation at the MU has been conceived as a philological one; besides practical command of the language and interpretation itself, stress will be put also on theoretical reflexion of Czech and the Czech Sign Language within the framework of linguistic approaches to the natural language in general.

The above comparison is illustrated in Figures 3 and 4 below, relating the amount and mutual proportion of lessons dedicated to individual thematic blocks within the existing study programme at the University College of Applied Sciences in Oslo and Akershus (Fig. 3) and the planned study programme at the Masaryk University (Fig. 4).

We unfortunately did not have any opportunity to watch the syllabuses of individual subjects or study materials of the Norwegian colleagues. That is why the planning of concrete contents of the courses in the interpretation study programme at the MU will require consultation of these and other resources.

6th sem.			interpretation (20 lessons)		speech to text reporting (5 lessons)
5th sem.			interpretation (20 lessons)		speech to text reporting (5 lessons)
4th sem.	language (2 lessons)	linguistics (2 lessons)	interpretation (30 lessons)	theory of communication (10 lessons)	
3rd sem.	language (2 lessons)	linguistics (2 lessons)	interpretation (30 lessons)	theory of communication (10 lessons)	
2nd sem.	language (20 lessons)				
1st.sem	language (20 lessons)				

Figure 3: HiOA study programme

6th sem.	language (3 lessons)	linguistics (4 lessons)	interpretation (9 lessons)
5th sem.	language (3 lessons)	linguistics (6 lessons)	interpretation (9 lessons)
4th sem.	language (5 lessons)	linguistics (7 lessons)	interpretation (5 lessons)
3rd sem.	language (5 lessons)	linguistics (7 lessons)	interpretation (5 lessons)
2nd sem.	language (8 lessons)	linguistics (3 lessons)	interpretation (6 lessons)
1st sem.	language (8 lessons)	linguistics (3 lessons)	interpretation (6 lessons)

Figure 4: MU planned study programme