

What happened to standard signs?

Richard Cokart & Trude Schermer

The effects of the standardization of NGT lexicon on the variation of signs used within deaf families and their children

Introduction

Since 2002 when standard signs were introduced in the schools for the deaf a generation of young deaf children from deaf families has grown up on the one hand with standard signs in school and their parents regional NGT variety on the other hand.

This raises the question if and how the signing within these families is influenced. Did the regional variation disappear? Did the children use a standard variant at school and a home variant using their parents signs? What happened to the new signs that were introduced that are not taught explicitly at school? Do the parents know and use these signs?

Another issue we addressed in this study is the attitude towards the standard signs of the deaf adults.

Methodology

Participants:

6 deaf families from four different regions in the Netherlands with at least one deaf child in the age between 8 and 12 who attended a school for the deaf in the period between 2004 and 2012.

- 50 signs with a standard variant and at least two regional variants were elicited from the participants by presenting them glosses of 50 signs in written form.
- The lexicon of NGT has been expanded over the last 7 years with a great number of new signs that do not have a regional variant. Twenty of these new standard signs were elicited, also by presenting them glosses of 20 new signs in written form accompanied by a picture.
- All parents were interviewed on video by a deaf NGT researcher about their experiences with regional signs versus standard signs.

Research question

What is the effect of the introduction of standard signs on the variation of signs used by members of deaf families with deaf children who have been educated at primary school by teachers using standard signs?

Conclusions

- Both standard signs and regional variations are used in the inter family signing. Children understand their parents' variants but prefer the standard signs themselves. There is no school versus home signing.
- Deaf adults learn standard and new signs from their children and via interpreted news broadcasts. Both deaf parents and children use few new standard signs that are related to fruits and vegetables.

References

Reagan, Timothy (2001) Language Planning and Policy. In Lucas, Ceil (ed), The sociolinguistics of Sign Languages. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 145-180.
Schermer, Trude (2012) Sign Language Planning in the Netherlands between 1980 and 2010. In: Sign Language Studies, Vol 12, no 4, Summer 2012.

Contact

r.cokart@gebarencentrum.nl / t.schermer@gebarencentrum.nl

Results

1. Elicitation task of 50 standard signs:

	Region	Mother	Father	Deaf child 1	Deaf child 2	CODA
Family 1	G/V/R	38/24	33/5	38/4	-	33
Family 2	V	39/17	34/22	43/26	43/27	-
Family 3	A/G/V	44/29	36/1	40/1	39/1	34
Family 4	A/S	36/28	30/10	44/17	-	32
Family 5	G	36/6	28/2	35/8	-	34
Family 6	R	31	25/14	35/21	-	27
Average		37,3	31		39,6	32

Table 1: Total number of standard signs used / standard ≠ regional variant

* No Deaf parents/relatives

^ Deaf parents/relatives

Family 1: Mother*: V Father*: G+R
Family 2: Mother*: V Father*: V
Family 3: Mother*: V Father*: A+G
Family 4: Mother*: S Father*: A
Family 5: Mother*: G Father*: G
Family 6: Mother*: H+H Father*: R

2. Elicitation task of 20 new signs:

	Region	Mother	Father	Deaf child 1	Deaf child 2	CODA
Family 1	G/V/R	12	10	11	-	7
Family 2	V	10	9	9	8	-
Family 3	A/G/V	11	8	8	10	1
Family 4	A/S	7	5	7	-	1
Family 5	G	11	9	9	-	8
Family 6	R	2	0	2	-	0
Average		8,8	6,8		8	3,4

Table 2: Numbers of the 20 elicited new signs that were the standard signs

3. Interview results:

Parents report no problems regarding the introduction of standard signs: they often know the standard signs, prefer their own signs at home, but accept the childrens use of standard signs. They point out that they think its important to continue to use regional variants to enrich the language. However, they are not opposed to the use of standard signs in schools. They report that they learn new signs from their children and from the interpreted news broadcasts. They make little use of sign dictionaries.

Standardisation process of NGT lexicon



1999-2002 STABOL project

- Standardisation of 2500 signs from basic NGT lexicon and 2500 signs from educational lexicon.
- Standardisation was carried out by members of the Deaf community and the Dutch Sign Centre.
- Implementation in schools and materials >2002 via dvd rom and (online) dictionaries.

Basic lexicon (2500):

60% : national signs (no variation)

25% : regional variation: synonyms

15% : choice for one variant

Educational lexicon (2500):

little variation, mostly new signs (developed by Deaf people).

