planning experience in a specific region and in offering some reflections on it. With this collection of articles, we hope to further raise awareness of the constant threats to sign language maintenance and to the users’ rights even when sign language policies are being implemented.

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Sign Language Planning in the Netherlands between 1980 and 2010

This article discusses several aspects of language planning with respect to Sign Language of the Netherlands, or Nederlandse Gebarentaal (NGT). For nearly thirty years members of the Deaf community, the Dutch Deaf Council (Dovenschap) have been working together with researchers, several organizations in deaf education, and the organization of parents of deaf children (FODOK) to improve Deaf people’s accessibility to the hearing society and to change the status of their language. They have also joined forces to implement a sign-language policy that has influenced several areas, such as guidance programs for the parents of deaf children, deaf education, the development of the NGT lexicon, the development of national sign-language (teaching) materials, the introduction of NGT in higher education, interpreter facilities, the status of NGT as a language, and the rights of deaf people as a linguistic minority in the Netherlands.

Language planning can be divided into three subtypes: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition or educational planning. Status planning refers to all efforts undertaken to change the use and function of a language (or language variety). The recognition (or lack of recognition) of a language as an official language is part of status planning. The standardization (a codified form) of a certain language or language variety involving the preparation of a normative grammar and dictionary, as well as the modernization of the

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lexicon, are all part of corpus planning (Deumert 2001). Acquisition planning involves the teaching and learning of languages. Acquisition planning for second-language learning abroad in spoken languages is often supported and promoted by national institutions such as the Dante Institute (Italian), the Goethe Institute (German), and Maison Descartes (French). In the Netherlands the Dutch Sign Center may be viewed as such an institution to some extent, albeit at the domestic level. Other institutions such as the universities of Utrecht, Nijmegen, and Amsterdam also play an important role in status, corpus, and acquisition planning.

In this article I focus first on the relationship between educational methods and the status of NGT. This is important to our understanding of the history and the process of language planning in the Netherlands with respect to NGT. After that I discuss status planning in relation to the infrastructure, the milestones, and the current situation with respect to the recognition of NGT. Following that I describe aspects of corpus planning: the developments with respect to the NGT lexicon, the standardization of part of the lexicon, and the modernization of the lexicon. Subsequently, I explain the developments with respect to the teaching and learning of NGT and then conclude the article.

The Relationship between Educational Methods and the Status of NGT

Looking back in history we can distinguish four main periods that help to understand the current status of NGT. These four main periods are as follows:

- the oral period (1915–1980)
- the Total Communication period (1980–1995)
- the monolingual/bimodal period (2004–present)

From Oral Method via Total Communication to Bilingual Education

Before the oral period deaf people were taught in schools for the deaf that were founded between 1790, when the first such school was established in Groningen by Henri Daniël Guyot, and 1911, when the fifth school for deaf students was founded in Amsterdam. Even though most such schools in the Netherlands banned the use of signs in the classroom right after the resolution of Milan in 1880, the school in St. Michiels gestel continued to use signed Dutch, more specifically called the Van Beek system, until 1915 (Beek 1827). Ironically, this same school would be known for its strict oral policy throughout the world until well into the 1970s.

For almost a century in the Netherlands the main priority in deaf education was for deaf pupils to become—as much as possible—hearing persons. In order to attain this goal the main focus in deaf education was on learning how to speak and to lip-read. This objective has had an effect on the status of sign language. In the eyes of deaf people and of hearing people NGT did not exist in a linguistic sense despite the fact that deaf people at the schools for the deaf have been using NGT at least since 1790 (Betten 1984). The term “sign language” was nonexistent, and the word “deaf” had only one meaning: “having a handicap in the medical sense: Something is missing and needs to be repaired,” and this point of view greatly influenced the way in which deaf people were approached, as well as the way in which they viewed themselves.

The oral period came to an end in the Netherlands around 1979, when the results of deaf education turned out to be very disappointing and the parents of young deaf children were informed that sign languages were true languages. A major event in this respect occurred when Dutch hearing parents of deaf children attended an international conference in Copenhagen in 1979 (Lem, pers. comm.): For the first time they encountered highly educated deaf people who were presenting lectures in different sign languages.

These parents, who participated in the parent guidance program of the Dutch Foundation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child (NSDSK), returned to the Netherlands and subsequently initiated the introduction of signs in their parent guidance program, which was backed up by the research on early-language interaction between mother and child. Founded in 1953, the NSDSK is an independent organization for parent counseling, audiology, and research (early detection of hearing and language disorders, (sign) language acquisition, and evidence-based counseling programs) located in Amsterdam.
Total Communication

Since the beginning of the 1980s these parents of deaf children have been exerting pressure to effect a change in family counseling and deaf education. They have demanded more insight into the use of signs with their children. Their signing children, who were entering the kindergartens of the deaf schools, forced the schools to acknowledge the fact that the communicative competence of these children was far greater than that of the children in previous years, who had had no exposure to signs. Slowly the educators adapted their school language policy. A major influence in this respect were the three-day workshops that the NSDSK organized for parents and teachers to introduce them to the so-called Blackwell curriculum, a language program for deaf children developed by Peter Blackwell and his staff from the Rhode Island School for the Deaf (Blackwell 1988). Simultaneously with this new approach, parents, their children, and the children's teachers were also taught signs by the first deaf NGT teachers and were introduced to the NGT grammar, which was being unveiled by the first NGT researchers (Tervoort 1953, 1986; Schermer and Harder 1986; Schermer 1990; Bos 1995). During these workshops researchers, parents, teachers, and deaf people (the leaders of the Dutch Deaf community, who were often from deaf families) discovered this new era: It was a new and exciting period for all who were involved.

With respect to language planning it is interesting to note that the first changes in status planning have come about from the bottom up: The change with respect to the use of signing in deaf education was effectively forced by the influx of signing children who communicated and performed much better than the children that were taught orally, supported by research and researchers from institutions such as NSDSK, the University of Amsterdam, the national organization of (hearing) parents of Deaf children (FODOK), and the Dutch Deaf Council.

The parents' initiatives were first organized at a local level by the NSDSK, namely Amsterdam, hometown of the NSDSK and the University of Amsterdam. In the early eighties the NSDSK's parent guidance program, which included sign-language courses for parents, became a nationally funded plan that was implemented in all organiza-

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tions for parent counseling. In that way the local initiatives obtained more and more national support. In addition, FODOK, supported by the NSDSK, played a very important role in making parents and professionals working in deaf education aware of the necessity of changes in deaf education and, more specifically, the importance of NGT and deaf professionals in the lives of young deaf children.

Signed Dutch

From 1980 to 1995 in the Netherlands most schools for the deaf used the philosophy of Total Communication in their teaching methods (Evans 1982; Lem and Fortgens 1996). In practice this meant that hearing teachers were learning signs and used Signed Dutch (Nmg) in the classrooms. There have been no attempts in the Netherlands to develop artificial manual sign codes as has been described for the United States (Reagan 2001). Signed Dutch is the outcome of the simultaneous combination of spoken Dutch and NGT, which can be described as a contact language. Signed Dutch does not have a grammar. As a visual representation (of parts of) spoken Dutch, it uses the lexicon and some grammatical elements of NGT. Depending on the purpose of Signed Dutch and its participants, the extent to which NGT grammatical elements are applied may differ (Terststra and Schermer 2006). Signed Dutch was used rather than NGT chiefly because there was as yet no description of the NGT lexicon or grammar, no teaching materials were available during this first period (discussed later), and NGT was not yet considered a true language by the majority of the professionals working in deaf education.

Deaf people were introduced into the classrooms first as teaching assistants and later as teachers. For the first time, young deaf children had deaf role models in their educational environment. Although the introduction of Signed Dutch improved the young deaf pupils' communicative skills, their school skills, especially reading proficiency, did not improve sufficiently (Lem and Fortgens 1996).

Bilingual Approach

In the Netherlands, results from both national and international research on bilingualism and deaf education prompted individuals to favor NGT over Signed Dutch (Hansen 1987; Knoors 1992; Fortgens
2003). In 1995 H. D. Guyot in Groningen became the first school for deaf pupils to officially adopt a bilingual policy. More and more deaf signers were hired as teachers, and the percentage of deaf signing personnel in the schools increased rapidly between 1995 and 2000.

The generation of deaf children that grew up in this period are the only pupils that were exposed to bilingual NGT/Dutch education: They are now in their early twenties. This generation has developed an NGT variety that we call “street signs”: The signs differ from the adults’ signs in movement, use of oral components, and spoken components (Muller, Koolhof, and de Ronde 2010). Clearly, this generation of signers has the language skills to influence NGT, very likely as a result of their bilingual upbringing, which can be viewed as an important effect of the educational planning in the early nineties.

From Bilingual Back to Bimodal Again

Since the beginning of this century the number of very young children who have received a cochlear implant has increased drastically. Again, pressure from parents—supported by the medical specialists in so-called CI (cochlear implant) teams at the Academic Medical Centers—has forced schools for deaf pupils to change their language policies: More and more parents demand hearing teachers for their deaf children with a CI, signed Dutch rather than NGT, and sometimes even a monolingual spoken-Dutch approach. In addition, we have seen a huge shift from deaf children attending special education to now attending regular schools (with interpreter support).

Parents prefer schools in their neighborhoods over special schools for the deaf farther away from home. We have seen the introduction of classroom interpreters since the beginning of this century. Even though schools for deaf pupils in the Netherlands officially adhered to the bilingual language policy as defined in the late 1990s, this policy was carried out in a great variety of ways. In some schools the policy was applied to all staff; in others, only to staff working in the first two or three groups (ages 4–8); and in some schools NGT was offered, whereas in others different forms of NmG (Signed Dutch) were used.

Various explanations can be offered here, but the main ones are the following: First, the teachers’ level of NGT proficiency (fluency or near fluency is necessary to teach in NGT) has not been sufficient in most schools despite the schools’ efforts to train teachers. Second, the introduction of a bilingual program requires adequate teaching materials and a lexicon. The development of materials has taken time (discussed later). Defining a language policy is one thing, but the infrastructure that is required to implement this policy is quite another. The infrastructure was not (or was not sufficiently) in place in the early nineties. Third, there is a strong tendency in CI teams now in the Netherlands to advise parents not to sign with their young deaf children. Hearing parents of young deaf children prefer Signed Dutch rather than NGT (Knoors 2011). The number of deaf native signers who are employed as teachers or in other positions in schools for the deaf have been declining rapidly in the last three years. Although there is no hard evidence for this assumption, the decline of deaf teachers is very likely related to the current and growing tendency to teach Signed Dutch rather than NGT, a consequence of pressure from hearing parents. These parents now assume that deaf children with a CI no longer need a bilingual education.

It might seem as if this is a return to the oral period or to the period of Total Communication, but there is a slight difference: Deaf children with a cochlear implant indeed have better and earlier access to spoken Dutch than deaf children in the past with traditional hearing aids, so they do have better chances of becoming bilingual, provided they are offered both spoken Dutch and NGT. Unfortunately, the role of signed input in the education of children with a CI is much debated. There is, however, another side to this: Several studies have been done on the social-emotional development of this youngest generation of deaf children. This research emphasizes the need for deaf children, especially those in their teens, to be able to choose between or to combine the deaf and hearing worlds and languages (Isarin 2006). Very recent research on the underlying processes in speech perception and the effects of signed input on spoken-language abilities in a group of five- to six-year-old children with a CI revealed that signing experience did not negatively affect their speech perception and that bimodal input seemed to even facilitate spoken-word recognition (Giezen 2011). Positive effects on the development of speech
are also seen in children with speech and language impairments, and it is becoming more and more popular for hearing parents to use signs when communicating with their young hearing children (baby signing). This leads to a very strange and controversial situation: Hearing parents are encouraged to use signs when communicating with their hearing babies because this will stimulate the infants' cognitive development. At the same time, hearing parents with deaf children are warned not to use signs with their children. This is a strange and alarming dichotomy. Today, when multilingualism is becoming more and more a necessity for success in a global environment, deaf children are more and more denied the benefits of a bilingual/bicultural upbringing and education.

In summary, the relationship among educational methods, the language policies of the schools for deaf pupils, and NGT can be characterized as highly dependent. If a bilingual education is no longer an option for professionals in deaf education, the status of NGT will be threatened as well, as long as there is no legal protection for the use of NGT in (deaf) education. However, even though the role of deaf education is very important in relation to the status of NGT, it is not the only factor, as I explain in the next section.

Status Planning

As stated earlier, status planning refers to all efforts undertaken to change the use and function of a language (or language variety). The legal recognition (or not) of a language as an official language is part of status planning. In this section I review the initiatives that have been important in bringing about changes in the status of NGT in the Netherlands.

National Cooperation: Infrastructure

Looking back in history, we see that a crucial step in the developments in status planning with regard to NGT in the eighties and nineties was the close cooperation among a few organizations. The Dutch Foundation for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Child (NSDSK), which initiated a new approach to (hearing) parent counseling and introduced communication courses as part of a program for hearing parents of deaf children, the Dutch Deaf Council (which was established in 1977), the organization of parents of deaf children (FODOK), and the department of general linguistics at the University of Amsterdam (chaired until 1987 by Bernard Tervoort, a strong advocate of changes in deaf education and a great proponent of NGT research). A major event that would change the attitude of deaf people toward their own language and their position in the hearing world took place in 1985, when the Second European Congress on Sign Language Research in Noordwijkherout in the Netherlands introduced deaf people in our country to general linguistics and to insights from sign-language research (Tervoort 1986). A few years later, some of these deaf teachers visited the first DeafWay International Conference held at Gallaudet University, in Washington, D.C. (1989), which influenced them to such an extent that they wanted to teach sign language rather than signed Dutch and inspired them to create poems in their own language (Emmerik 1995). The lowercase word “deaf” had acquired a second meaning and had become uppercase “Deaf,” referring to deaf people as a cultural and linguistic minority.

Close cooperation among researchers, members of the Deaf community, and hearing parents of deaf children led to a greater awareness of the importance of NGT in the Deaf community itself. It provided a foundation for national initiatives to improve the status of NGT and to strive for legal recognition. Instrumental in the status planning of NGT has been the outcome of research on NGT. The linguistic research departments of NSDSK, the University of Amsterdam, the University of Leiden, and, more recently, Radboud University have played an important role here. Since 1990 a great number of dissertations have been published on (socio)linguistic aspects of NGT and on language acquisition by deaf children.

The establishment of a chair for NGT linguistics at the University of Amsterdam in 1999 was a step forward with regard to the status of NGT. Bachelor's and master's degree programs in NGT linguistics have been established since then, enabling both hearing and deaf students to undertake linguistic research.

Status planning of NGT has taken place primarily in educational spheres, as is often the case with sign languages (Reagan 2001). In
the Netherlands, educational spheres should be interpreted broadly: Even preschool activities and activities in relation to parent guidance programs are components of this area.

National Initiatives on the Status and Legal Recognition of NGT

Since the early 1980s the Dutch Deaf Council has strived to attain legal recognition of NGT as the official language of those people who were born deaf or were deafened early on (for details see the report titled Juridische Erkenning NGT, Dovenschap 2008). An important incentive was the European Parliament’s advice in 1988 to its member states to officially recognize their sign languages. Around 1995 the lobby for the legal recognition of NGT became more powerful as the need for this designation was acknowledged by a wide group of organizations. In addition to the organizations and institutions mentioned earlier, all schools for deaf pupils joined the initiatives to recognize NGT as a language, especially after the introduction of a bilingual NGT/Dutch policy in those schools in 1993 (discussed earlier).

In 1996, as a result of the pressure of these combined forces, the Dutch government (specifically, the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Welfare) established a committee to investigate all of the aspects of an official recognition of NGT. The committee was asked to recommend possible ways to bring this recognition about. The report Meer dan een gebaar (“More than a Sign/Gesture”), published in 1997 by the Commissie Nederlandse Gebarentaal, became an important milestone. It contained numerous recommendations to the government for improving the situation of Deaf people in different areas of society, such as education, work, family life, access to news media (television, newspapers, and the Internet), mobility, and interpreters. The commission advised the government to recognize NGT as an official language. One of the arguments stated in the report is that Deaf children are entitled to bilingual education, that is, education in spoken and written Dutch and NGT.

In response to the report’s recommendation to recognize NGT legally, the Dutch government demanded a standardized lexicon of NGT. The main argument for this requirement was that if the lexicon were not standardized, the language could not be recognized. Naturally, linguists, researchers, and members of the Deaf community pointed out that this demand was highly unusual and that it had not been a precondition for the recognition of other languages, such as Frisian. Despite the objections, a standardization of part of the lexicon was carried out (see the later discussion of the STABOL project). This prerequisite for recognition turned out to be a political means of slowing down the process of legal recognition: Despite the fact that the basic lexicon of NGT was standardized in 2002, the Dutch government has still not officially recognized NGT as a language. This is a serious disappointment to the Dutch Deaf community and to everyone who has been involved in the STABOL project. There are a number of implicit legal recognitions in the Netherlands, such as the right to have NGT interpreters and the establishment of bachelor’s-degree programs in NGT teacher and interpreter training, but so far these have not been considered legal recognition of NGT as a language used in the Netherlands.

Another argument that the Dutch government has presented for withholding the legal recognition of NGT is the fact that spoken Dutch is not mentioned in the Dutch constitution as the official language of the Netherlands. Frisian has been recognized as a minority language because it is geographically limited to the province of Friesland. One strategy that lobbyists for the legal recognition of NGT can still pursue is to include both Dutch and NGT in the Dutch Constitution. For a while this seemed a viable path, one that was supported by a political party (Christen Unie 2010). The majority of the current Dutch Parliament, however, does not favor including Dutch in the constitution.

In 2003 the Dutch Deaf Council and the Dutch Sign Center initiated a Committee for NGT Recognition. All of the committee’s attempts so far have, however, been unsuccessful. Perhaps the Dutch government’s ratification of the UN’s human rights treaty will open the doors for legal recognition of NGT.

It remains very important for the Dutch society to legally recognize NGT in some way, and it is essential for Deaf people to become independent of the schools’ bilingual education policies for deaf pupils. In addition, it is crucial to secure the rights of deaf children to choose a bilingual education despite the growing number of deaf children with a CI in regular schools.
National Initiatives in Relation to the Development of Teaching Materials

Initially (in the 1980s) teaching materials, such as those for communication courses, were developed both by the NSDSK and the Guyot school for the deaf in Groningen. Also in close cooperation with the Dutch Deaf Council, deaf native signers were trained to teach these communication courses. Around 1990 it became apparent that everyone would benefit if the development of course materials for parents and teachers were coordinated nationally by one center that operated independently of these schools and in close cooperation with the Deaf community.

In order to bring about this central coordination, the Dutch Sign Center (Nederlands Gebarentcenter) was assigned to coordinate all efforts with respect to NGT modules and develop additional NGT materials for different target groups at various levels. Furthermore, the Dutch Sign Center started to train deaf native signers as teachers of NGT. Between 1980 and 2010 the NSDSK, the Guyot School, and subsequently the Dutch Sign Center all played an important role in the coordination and development of the NGT lexicon and of NGT and Signed Dutch teaching materials.

The Dutch Sign Center began as an NSDSK project in 1992 and was subsequently founded in 1996 by the schools for the deaf; it is a small, independent, national foundation that employs both deaf and hearing staff. It has been partly funded by the Dutch government. From 1996 to 2004 the center developed a large number of NGT course modules at different levels for various user groups. Since 2004 the Dutch Sign Center has been partly funded by the Department of Education to maintain and expand a national database of the NGT lexicon. The Dutch Sign Center is also recognized by the Department of Education as the national institute for NGT lexicography. Today the focus of its work is mainly the NGT lexicon and the development of Signed Dutch modules. In 2009 other organizations, such as the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, the University of Amsterdam, and Kentals (the largest organization for deaf education), established an academic team to develop an NGT curriculum following CEFR, the Common European Framework for Languages (Oyserman and van den Bogaerde 2011).

The fact that since 1995 all schools for deaf pupils in the Netherlands have been educating deaf children in both NGT and Dutch was a major factor in convincing the government that it should allocate funds for the development of educational materials.

Following the recommendations of the committee Méér dan een gebaar (1997), mentioned earlier, the Dutch government funded a steering committee for three years (1999–2002). The committee consisted of representatives from the Dutch Deaf Council, FODOK, all schools for deaf pupils, the Dutch Sign Center, and the University of Amsterdam. The following three national projects were subsequently carried out:

1. The standardization of a small subset of NGT lexicon to be used by schools for deaf pupils and in national teaching materials and sign dictionaries. This project is described later.
2. The production of a basic grammar of NGT on CD-ROM for teachers (Bos 2002).
3. The development of a sign-language curriculum for primary deaf education (Werkgroep Sprong Vooruit 2007).

In terms of status planning, it is vital to create the foundations for change: Without an adequate lexicon, teaching materials, and sign language courses it is not possible to implement changes in deaf education. Projects such as the ones described earlier are therefore necessary for status planning and need governmental financial support. The funding of the Dutch Sign Center for creating and maintaining a national database has been of great assistance in the codification, modernization, and dissemination of the NGT lexicon, as I explain next.

Corpus Planning

The standardization (a codified form) of a certain language or language variety involving the preparation of a normative grammar and dictionary, as well as the modernization of the lexicon, are all part of corpus planning (Deumert 2001). Between 1980 and 2000 major changes occurred in deaf education. There was an urgent need for sign-language dictionaries, research on and description of the NGT grammar, sign-language courses, an NGT curriculum for primary deaf
education, teachers with adequate signing skills, training of deaf signers, qualified interpreters, a linguistic program for NGT researchers, and NGT in higher education and the media.

The first priority in corpus planning in the Netherlands has been to inventory both the NGT lexicon and the production of sign dictionaries and NGT course materials and also to undertake research on the NGT grammar (Schermer and Harder 1986; Schermer et al. 1991).

Next I discuss the main activities in the development of the NGT lexicon. Two main periods can be distinguished:

1. Between 1982 and 1999 the language policy was to produce dictionaries and educational materials such as sign-language curricula that reflected regional variation. The regions in which these signs were used were also indicated.

2. From 1999 to 2011 the language policy was to standardize part of the NGT lexicon, to modernize it, and to disseminate the entire lexicon from one central, online database maintained by the Dutch Sign Center. Since 2011 regional variants are also included in the online dictionary that is maintained by the Dutch Sign Center.

Activities with Respect to the NGT Lexicon

The first research project that was initiated by NSDSK and the University of Amsterdam in 1981 was a dictionary project aimed at providing hearing parents of deaf children with information about NGT signs. The description and development of lexicon are important parts of corpus planning.

The main focus in corpus planning in the Netherlands has been on the description and expansion of the lexicon and on the establishment of standard signs for part of the NGT lexicon.

Two major lexicon projects are the project Kommunikatieve Vaardigheden (Communicative Competence), or the KOMVA project (1982–1990), and the STABOL project (Standardization of Basic Lexicon, 1999–2002). Another more recent project that is an extremely important resource for research is the NGT corpus project (Crasborn and Zwitserlood 2008). Both the KOMVA and the STABOL projects have been extensively described (Schermer 2003), but I briefly review them here in relation to NGT corpus and status planning.

The KOMVA Project (1982–1990). As described earlier, the attitude towards signing changed between 1982 and 1990 under the influence of the Total Communication philosophy. The need for sign dictionaries led to the initiation of a project to inventory the signs used by Deaf people in the Netherlands. This project—the KOMVA project—was carried out by the University of Amsterdam and the NSDSK. There were five schools for deaf pupils in various parts of the Netherlands. Despite the fact that signing had not been allowed since the beginning of the twentieth century, deaf people nonetheless used sign language among themselves whenever they were out of sight of hearing people. The goal of the KOMVA project was to inventory the signs used by deaf people in the Netherlands in order to compile a sign dictionary. The choice was made to collect signs from the five regions where schools for the deaf were situated in order to gain insight into the regional variation (Schermer 1999).

Meetings were held with one hundred deaf native signers around the country, which yielded fifteen thousand signs (based on two thousand concepts) on videotapes. The inventory of signs and the subsequent comparison revealed the (regional) variation in the NGT lexicon. The first sign dictionary that was compiled from these data incorporated all of the regional variations. Analysis of the KOMVA data led to two goals for this dictionary:

- Incorporation of variation
- Contribution to the unification process by labeling the signs that were common to every region (designated "preference signs")

Thus, the designation "preference signs" indicated that these signs were used nationally. The results can be found in the first national dictionary of NGT, which was produced for parents and teachers of young deaf children: Handen uit de Mouwen (Schermer, Harder, and Bos 1988). An example from this dictionary is shown in figure 1.

Standardization of Part of the NGT Lexicon: STABOL Project (1999–2002). One of the committee’s recommendations in the report Mee dan een Gebaar was to legally recognize NGT. As mentioned earlier, the Dutch government required a standard lexicon in order to consider
would be expensive to develop NGT materials in different regional variants. The schools for deaf pupils were also in favor of national NGT materials, which could be used in NGT tests to monitor the students' linguistic development and to set a national standard.

As one of three projects that resulted from a 1998 agreement between the Dutch government, the Dutch Deaf Council, and schools for deaf children, the STABOL project was carried out by a group of linguists, native deaf signers, and native hearing signers (mostly deaf teachers) in close cooperation with the Deaf community and coordinated by the Dutch Sign Center. A network of Deaf signers from different regions was established. This network maintained contacts with larger groups of Deaf people, whose comments and ideas were shared with the project group that made all of the final decisions. Within the project, a standard sign was defined as a sign “that will be used nationally in schools and preschool programs for deaf children and their parents. It does not mean that other variants are not ‘proper signs’ that the Deaf community can no longer use; this clarification turned out to be crucial in the Deaf community’s acceptance of the notion of standard signs” (Schermer 2003).

Five thousand signs were included in the standard lexicon, and 2,500 signs were selected from the basic lexicon. The aim of standardization was to develop national standard materials. Therefore, the basic lexicon included every sign that is taught in the first three levels of the national NGT course modules used to instruct parents and teachers of young deaf children. Another 2,500 signs became part of the lexicon needed for educational subjects. Because NGT had not been used in education between 1915 and 1980, the available lexicon for educational subjects was seriously lacking. In order to implement bilingual education, this type of lexicon needed to be developed, and that is why it was included in the STABOL project.

A great advantage for this project was the fact that one could work with the data from the KOMVA project: There were research data available on regional variation in the NGT lexicon. Selection of one region over another, for example, has never been an option in this standardization project.

In principle, signs that were the same nationally were described as standard signs. In the basic lexicon, we can characterize the twenty-five
hundred signs that showed the most variation and the selections that were made for certain signs as follows:

- Of the signs in the basic lexicon that were included in the STABOL project, 60 percent are national signs that are recognized and/or used with the same meaning in all regions.
- Twenty-five percent of the signs are regional signs that have been included in the standard lexicon.
- For 15 percent of the signs, a selection was made for a standard sign.

For 25 percent of the signs, regional variation is represented in the standard lexicon. This sounds contradictory, but it was done in two ways (for full details of the linguistic-selection criteria see Schermer 2003). Regional variations are included in the standard lexicon as synonyms (e.g., friend and parents, as shown in figure 2). Numerous synonyms (which, in fact, were regional variants) were “added” to the lexicon in this manner; however, the region of origin was not mentioned (in contrast to the first dictionaries in book form and on CD-ROM).

Apart from regional synonyms, regional variation is included through the specification of the meaning of a sign (e.g., horse and riding-on-horseback, as shown in figure 3). Horse in the Amsterdam region was used for both “horse” and “riding on horseback.” In the Groningen region horse was used only for “horse” and not for “riding on horseback.” In the standardization process the Groningen sign became the standard sign horse, and the Amsterdam sign became the standard sign for riding-on-horseback. Thus, both regional variants were included.

The inclusion of regional variation in the ways mentioned earlier might look like an extreme interference in the language. In practice it was not. A possible explanation is that changes with respect to the meaning and/or the linguistic category of a sign applied to only a few signs. However, it would be very interesting to have a thorough linguistic analysis of the changes involved and the impact they have had on the signing of both younger and older signers. In order to evaluate the consequences of the standardization of part of the NGT lexicon, the Dutch Sign Center initiated a new research project in 2012.

In the STABOL project, for only a few hundred signs out of the total of 2,500 signs an explicit choice was made between regional variants based on linguistic criteria (see Schermer 2003 for details). For the 2,500 signs for educational subjects it was not difficult for the STABOL project members to establish a standard sign: These
are mainly newly developed signs with very little or no regional variation.

So, in total, five thousand signs were included as standard signs for the STABOL project. These were produced in sign-language dictionaries on DVD (Schermmer et al. 2006). Furthermore, all of the materials for course modules were adapted to the standard signs.

Implementation of Standard Signs

The implementation of the NGT standard lexicon has been coordinated by the Dutch Sign Center. A very helpful and crucial tool in the codification, development, and dissemination of the NGT lexicon is a large database that has been developed and maintained by the Dutch Sign Center since 2004. The database currently contains about 17,000 signs, including context and grammatical information and regional variants. Linked to the database is an online dictionary containing 14,000 signs and 3,000 NGT example sentences. The database provides the data for the compilation of a number of multimedia educational materials. In 2006 the first online dictionary of standard NGT signs was launched on the website of the Dutch Sign Center. Currently 14,000 signs are available online and on DVD. Apart from sign movies, the database contains illustrations of signs that have been made available to teachers and parents to use in the classroom or at home for the compilation of their own materials.

An interesting question in relation to corpus planning is, what happened with the NGT lexicon after the STABOL project ended? Between 2002 and 2011 more than eight thousand signs were added to the lexicon database. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the signs in relation to regional variation.

In summary, 25 percent of the 14,000 standard signs that are currently available in the Dutch Sign Center’s online dictionary are the result of choices made in the STABOL project. Forty-two percent of the signs are common to all regions (no regional variation), and 33 percent are new lexical items (no regional variation) that are mostly signs used in domains for which no signs were available, such as primary and secondary school subjects, health, law, and law enforcement. Thus, the standardization of the NGT lexicon in fact affected only a very small subset (25 percent) of the NGT lexicon that has been documented and distributed. For a large part of the lexicon very little or no variation existed.

A milestone in relation to the status of NGT and the distribution of standard signs is the dictionary that was produced by the Dutch Sign Center and published by the most prestigious publisher of spoken-language dictionaries in the Netherlands, Van Dale (Schermmer and Koolhof 2009). This dictionary contains 3,000 NGT sign illustrations and example sentences, which are also available in NGT in the online sign-language dictionary (www.gebarencentrum.nl). The dictionary is available in every bookstore in the Netherlands amid the spoken-language dictionaries. For the Deaf community it is very important to have such a dictionary. As one older signer put it when the dictionary first came out, “To have a Van Dale dictionary means that our language exists [and] that we NGT signers exist.” Even though the standardization of the NGT lexicon met strong opposition in 1999, by 2011 most deaf NGT users had accepted having a standard lexicon. This is evidenced by the fact that the Dutch Deaf Council bestowed its annual award on the Dutch Sign Center for its work on this Van Dale dictionary.

Adult users of NGT continue to use their own regional variants; yet, they have been exposed to the standard lexicon by interpreters. How this has influenced their signing is unknown. The quality of interpreting has been influenced by the NGT interpreters’ level of competence.

The fact that more and more interpreters had not acquired regional variants in addition to the standard lexicon was problematic for both deaf NGT users and interpreters. It has been ten years since the STABOL project was completed. The first generation of deaf children
who were exposed to this standard NGT lexicon either in schools for deaf pupils or in regular schools with an interpreter will soon leave school. In 2012 the Dutch Sign Center will start a research project to investigate the changes that have occurred in the lexicon of the younger users of NGT and the effect the standard lexicon has had on deaf adult NGT users who were indirectly exposed to this lexicon.

Standardization of a sign language is often associated with its diminution because the richness of variation is to an extent eliminated. In the STABOL project, however, regional variation was included in the standard lexicon in several ways. Numerous synonyms were added to the lexicon. Even though these synonyms are originally regional variants, the youngest generation of deaf children who grew up with these signs no longer consider them as belonging to a particular region (Elferink, pers. comm.). In view of corpus planning and the full documentation of the NGT lexicon, the Dutch Sign Center has initiated a project to include the data on regional variation from the KOMVA project. These data consist of descriptions in a sign notation system. In the coming years these regional variants will be made available in the online sign-language dictionary. Apart from the data in the lexicon database, those collected for the NGT corpus project (Crasborn and Zwislerood 2008) are extremely valuable for both status and corpus planning. In the NGT corpus project, NGT data were collected from numerous signers in five regions. The materials have been annotated and to a large extent made available (www.corpusngt.nl). Apart from research, the NGT data are used in the training of interpreters and teachers of NGT.

Acquisition Planning: Establishment of Qualified Interpreters and NGT Teachers

As a consequence of the emancipation process that was taking place in the Deaf community, the need for interpreters increased. Until 1985 interpreters were mainly hearing Codas (children of deaf adults) who were brought up with sign language or professionals who had become good communicators with deaf people. In the latter half of the 1980s the Dutch Deaf Council received funding to set up an experiment with paid interpreters for the deaf. In 1988 deaf people obtained the right to ask for an interpreter: thirty hours per year for private affairs, maximally 15 percent of work time, and as many hours as needed in education (www.dovenschap.nl). The interpreters wanted to be trained as professional interpreters, partly because of the increasing difficulty of and the variety of situations in which they were asked to interpret. In 1984 a middle-level vocational training program for interpreters was founded. Although originally a two-year program, it was later extended to three years. Slowly the focus changed from lexicon teaching to sign-language instruction. In 1997 the Ministry of Education granted permission to start four-year bachelor’s-degree programs in NGT teacher and interpreter training, both run by the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht.

A start was made with two pilot groups that included thirty-two students. Because at that time no official method of teaching NGT was available, the Dutch Sign Language Center took on the responsibility of developing an NGT curriculum, which was implemented at the school in 1998 (van den Bogaerde 2007). From the very beginning, the findings of studies and publications on NGT and the didactics of NGT and interpreting skills (Frischberg 1986) were implemented into the curriculum (for an overview see Baker et al. 2008). Since 2009 the NGT curriculum has been in the process of being adapted on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (Oyerman and van den Bogaerde 2011). Presently about two hundred students (mainly hearing students with no prior knowledge of NGT) have been enrolled in the program each year. In addition to the bachelor’s degree programs, the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht also offers a master’s degree program in Deaf studies. In 2007 a research unit, Deaf Studies, was established. This program, in addition to the already existing research centers at the universities of Amsterdam and Nijmegen, is a necessary and valuable step in the process of educational and status planning.

Conclusion

The situation with respect to the status of NGT and the position of the Deaf community can be characterized as follows: In 2011 NGT acquired a relatively strong position in Dutch society, and as a result of joint efforts by the Deaf community, parents of deaf children, researchers, and professionals there is a clear infrastructure with respect to
NGT. Deaf people have become visible, albeit still not visible enough. An increasing number of deaf students have entered higher education. The number of Deaf teachers of the deaf increased until quite recently. A basis in national NGT course modules has been established, several national sign-language dictionaries have been developed and published, and a basic description of the NGT grammar has been made available, although many aspects of the grammar still need to be researched and described.

In addition, we need further studies of the effects of standardization on the language of deaf people and of the use of classroom interpreters on NGT. A recent analysis of the differences between interpreters, younger deaf signers, and older deaf signers revealed differences in the use of the auxiliary verb op, which might be attributed to the explicit way in which the use of the verb has been taught to interpreters (Cokart, Koolhof, and Schermer 2011). In view of status and corpus planning, more studies are necessary in order to describe these important changes in the language.

In the Netherlands one can study NGT at several locations: the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht, the University of Amsterdam, and Radboud University in Nijmegen. Moreover, several research centers focus on NGT (Radboud University, the University of Amsterdam, the Dutch Sign Center). There is also an independent national center (Dutch Sign Center) funded by the Department of Education for NGT lexicography. Schools for deaf students officially adopted a bilingual NGT/Dutch policy in 1995. We have qualified NGT interpreters and teachers. The University of Applied Sciences Utrecht offers BA programs for NGT interpreters and teachers and has a master's degree program in Deaf studies. The University of Amsterdam offers a program in NGT linguistics. News broadcasts are interpreted on national television every weekday morning. Deaf people have the right to an interpreter in different domains, including education.

Despite the considerable achievements with respect to the position of NGT in the Netherlands we are concerned about the future of NGT and the position of deaf people. The number of children with a CI is increasing rapidly, and it remains to be seen whether the schools for deaf students will be able to hold on to their bilingual education policy. Changes in the language policy have already been announced (Knoors 2011). The number of native signers will decrease rapidly, which will influence the position of NGT as a language, as well as the position of the Deaf community. Without legal recognition of NGT, most of what has been achieved in the past thirty years may not be sufficient for the NGT infrastructure to survive. The position of NGT and its users is still vulnerable in the Netherlands, and it remains very important to join forces, both deaf and hearing, to ensure the right of Deaf people to fully participate in our society.

References
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