
Promoting metalinguistic awareness of deaf children in five sign languages – the BAG-Sign project

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Résumé

In schools worldwide, there is still a lack of teaching materials for sign languages which are considered as minority languages (Humphries et al 2019). "Be Aware of the Grammar of Sign Languages" (**BAG-Sign**) is an Erasmus+ project in which researchers and teachers in Germany, France, Italy, Austria and Switzerland are cooperating to develop a web-based pedagogical grammar for five sign languages (DGS, DSGS, LIS, LSF, ÖGS) in 2023-2025. The pedagogical grammar aims to enhance the linguistic knowledge and metalinguistic awareness of deaf and hearing pupils. Additionally, teachers receive training through face-to-face trainings and web-based multilingual tutorials to improve their own metalinguistic knowledge and to innovate their teaching skills.

The development of *metalinguistic awareness* (MLA) is the ability "to focus attention on language as an object in itself or to think abstractly about language and, consequently, to play with or manipulate language" (Jessner, 2006:42). It is a crucial aspect of language development in children and young people especially in multilingual contexts and deafness. Research has proven that MLA can be shared across languages and correlates positively with (second) language learning and cognitive flexibility (e.g. Zhang et al 2023, Torregossa, Eisenbeiß & Bongartz 2023).

Our *pedagogical grammar* is under progress and is based on a selection of contents from the totality of linguistic grammar of a language. Its purpose is to facilitate the transfer of linguistic research findings into educational practice. It is characterized by a comprehensible and concrete presentation that considers the learner's level of development and language(s), serving as a resource for teachers as well as for pupils.

The pedagogical grammar that is developed in the BAG-Sign project follows a *communicative-functional approach*, emphasizing the use of linguistic devices for communicative purposes, such as expressing time, aspect, negation, question, etc.

The BAG-Sign pedagogical grammar is developed on basis of a comparative content analysis of documents and curricula for sign languages in the five participating countries, a needs analysis via focus group interviews with teachers in all five countries and a linguistic analysis of the selected fields for the pedagogical grammar.

The developed web-based pedagogical grammar content and structure underwent a first

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testing phase, involving deaf and hearing teachers and pupils in schools. Data of the usage and feedback was collected in 2023 through qualitative focus group interviews, which is then utilised to improve the website and adapt it to the pupils' needs in 2024-25.

Following the WFD Position Paper "Primacy of deaf people in the development and teaching of national sign languages", deaf and hearing colleagues cooperate actively in all processes. The project places a strong emphasis on participative methodology, allowing teachers and researchers to collaborate and exchange ideas between schools and universities.

The needs analysis clearly showed the requirements for a grammar that is accessible, free of charge, user-oriented, multimedia-based and multilingual, thus considering the heterogeneity of deaf and hearing pupils.

See the general web site: <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/bag-sign/>

See the BAG-Sign web site for Unit 1 "Time":

In LSF: <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/signlanguagesforpupils/lsf-temps/>

In DGS: <https://www2.hu-berlin.de/signlanguagesforpupils/dgs-zeit/>

References

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Mots-Clés: deaf pupils, sign languages, minority languages, metalinguistic awareness, communicative approach, website