



efsli trainers' seminar

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Sonja Erlenkamp studied general linguistics, phonetics and psychology at the University of Kiel, Germany, and finished her Ph.D. on parts of speech in German Sign Language and Norwegian Sign Language in 1999. Since 1998 she has been working in Norway, doing research on and teaching Norwegian Sign Language at the University of Oslo and the Sør-Trøndelag University-College in Trondheim, Norway.

In 2007 she became the first to hold a professorship in signed language in Norway. Her department at the University-College of Sør-Trøndelag in Trondheim offers studies in sign language interpreting, sign language education and sign language in general.

Currently she works with the education of sign language interpreters and the development of a signed language model for teaching purposes.

“Explaining the challenges of sign to speech interpreting” – plenary presentation

In the field of spoken language interpretation/translation it is generally assumed that it is better to translate into a native language than into a non-native language as it is experienced as easier, leading to a more solid performance (Visson 1999). This is, however, not the experience of sign language interpreters. Not only do interpreters often feel more uncomfortable when doing sign to speech interpretation, clients also give feedback that sign to speech interpretation often is perceived as less skilled than speech to sign interpreting.

This presentation will uncover some of the main reasons why the process of sign to speech interpretation is experienced as more challenging than speech to sign interpretation.

A new model for signed languages is used proposing that signed languages draw on two different mechanisms of meaning construction (as suggested by e.g. Cuxac 2007; Erlenkamp 2007).

The main difference between these two mechanisms of meaning construction is the use of iconicity. While one of the mechanisms mostly operates on the same morphosyntactic construction principles as spoken languages, like word order and morphemic modification, the other mechanism is based on

the active use of iconicity, simultaneity and three dimensionality and seems to have elements in common with speech accompanying gestures (Liddell 2003 for American Sign Language; Erlenkamp 2009 for Norwegian Sign Language). It seems common to find both mechanisms in signed languages, even in the same utterance. This has consequences for the process of interpretation.

The presentation will give a brief overview over the model, explaining the two mechanisms of meaning construction, followed by an explanation how this effects the experience and performance of sign to speech interpretation. Finally some strategies to cope with the additional challenges of sign to speech interpreting will be suggested.

Cuxac, C.; Sallandre, M. 2007. Iconicity and arbitrariness in French Sign Language: Highly iconic structures, degenerated iconicity and diagrammatic iconicity. In: Pizzuto, E.; Pietrandrea, P.; Simone, R. (eds.) *Verbal and signed languages. Comparing structures, constructs and methodologies*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 13-34.

Erlenkamp, S., 2007. Why all sign languages have so-called "classifier verbs", "roleshift" and "agreement" verbs. *Presentation given at AFLICO II, Lille, France, 10th-12th May 2007*.

Erlenkamp, S. 2009. Gesture verbs – Cognitive-visual mechanisms of "classifier verbs" in Norwegian Sign Language. *CogniTextes* 2009:3,

<http://cognitextes.revues.org/index250.html>

Visson, L. 1999. *From Russian into English. An Introduction to Simultaneous Interpretation*. Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing.