Available but not accessible: Options for adapting old Swedish Sign Language archives to modern documentation conventions

Johanna Mesch
Sign Language Section, Department of Linguistics

Video materials

Video is an important medium for linguistic and historic research on signed language. Video recordings of Swedish Sign Language (SSL), mainly from the 1970s, have been preserved for the next generation, but the organizing, archiving, and sharing of this material is not standardized.

The Swedish National Association of the Deaf (SDR) has been one of the biggest producers of SSL material, before the production moved to Swedish Broadcasting (SVT). A large amount of video recordings, produced 1970-1990, are in the SDR archive, preserved but not systematically archived and documented. SSL material by SVT since 1974 is available through streaming in their “open archive” (“Öppet arkiv”)—about 72 entries—and the Swedish Media Database at the National Library of Sweden (KB)—about 7,100 entries.

Our corpora

Swedish Sign Language Corpus (SSLC)
The Swedish Sign Language Corpus consists of video recordings of pairs of signers filmed during semi-spontaneous dialogues, narratives and elicitation tasks. There are about 24 hours of video from 42 signers from different regions in Sweden (Mesch, 2012). The corpus is annotated with sign glosses and utterance level translations into Swedish, and published with media files and annotation files (Wallin & Mesch, 2014). The SSLC was constructed for the purpose of documenting sign language discourses and to facilitate dictionary-making.

Ongoing Sign Language corpora projects
• A corpus of tactile sign language of deaf-blind signers, consisting of video recordings of 8 different signers (male and female) between 38 and 77 years from different regions in Sweden (Mesch, forthcoming).
• A learner corpus of 18 hearing students at SU who are learning Swedish Sign Language as a second language (Schönström & Mesch 2014, Mesch, & Schönström, forthcoming).

Digitized video materials at Stockholm University

202 media files produced by Swedish National Association of the Deaf (SDR)
265 media files produced by Swedish Broadcasting AB (SVT) and Utbildningsradion (UR)
232 media files by the National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools (SPSM in Swedish) and other producers
55 media files - diverse producers
106 hours of media files, the narratives of 200 deaf older signers during the recordings 1986-1989 for the SDR project (now in The archives of the Institute for Language and Folklore which houses one of Sweden’s largest folklore collections)

Future work

The CLARIN Research Infrastructure and the national Swedish consortium SWE-CLARIN is one way for scholars in the humanities and social sciences to access data, and provides tools for exploring, annotating, and analyzing data (Nilsson Björkenstam et al, 2014). Corpus-based work on SSL started in 2003, preceding the SSL Corpus project (2009-2011), and this work provides a model for annotation work, and metadata and archiving procedures. This could be applied to older archives, such as the SDR material.

References