In the Danish Sign Language Dictionary (www.tegnsprog.dk) every meaning\(^1\) is illustrated by one or more sentences showing the sign in context. All sentences are represented by a video, by a broad transcription and by a translation into Danish. The purpose for putting in a broad transcription is to show word order in the sentence and to give the users the possibility of going from one entry to another by clicking on a sign used in a sentence.

The sentences were excerpted by hand from a raw corpus of dialogues and monologues – given to us by our group of consultants. The raw corpus contains 148 monologues and 75 hours of discussions from sessions with the consultants group.

The consultants group consists of 25 persons, corresponding to 0.6% of the deaf population of Denmark. The consultants are in the age of 20 – 60 years, and are recruited from sign language centres across Denmark, typically cities that have hosted deaf schools for many years. So far the consultants have met 4 – 6 times a year. One task for the consultants was to discuss the use of signs presented by us. Another task was to tell a story from the consultants’ everyday life. All discussions were videotaped. No hearing people were in the room during the recordings. From this sample of real language we excerpted the sentences to illustrate the meanings of the signs in the dictionary.

The goal of our project has been that every sentence should be taken from real language samples, but due to restriction on time and money we only managed to let approximately 55% of the sentences originate from real language samples. Most of the remaining sentences were constructed by deaf lexicographers. The process from the moment when a sentence has been excerpted from the corpus to the point when an example sentence is finally accepted for use in the dictionary, consists of 11 stages in the DTS dictionary project as Figure 1 illustrates.

\(^1\) except those that appear in minimal entries, e.g. for country names.
Special focus here will be on the stage in the process where the sentence is judged suitable for dictionary use, that is stage 2 and 3 in figure 1.

**The good context example**

The purpose of having context examples is apart from attestation of the use of a word or a sign, in a dictionary that – at least partly – is aimed to serve as a dictionary for learners of the language both to elucidate meaning and to illustrate contextual features as syntax, collocation, register, etc. (Atkins and Rundell 2008). In other words the purpose of having examples sentences is to help the dictionary user to gain additional knowledge of a meaning of a sign, as well as to provide sentence constructions that can be adopted by the L2 learner.

Utterances found in corpus may have to be slightly changed, to fulfill these purposes. In the DTS dictionary project we have set up a number of guidelines for the context examples for the lexicographer to follow and we allow for adjusting the real utterance if this necessarily to follow the guidelines.
The guidelines sentences in the DTS dictionary (Kristoffersen & Troelsgård, 2010)

Sentences should

- reveal something about the core meaning
  A sentence like *This is a cow* does not reveal anything of the meaning of the lexeme *cow* but the fact that a cow can be. A sentence like *The farmer was milking the cows every morning*, on the other hand, tells us something about a cow belonging to the world of a farmer and being something that you can milk. Similarly, the fragment *eating strawberries* gives more information on strawberries than *buying strawberries*.

- include a common use of the lexeme
  Sentences serve in this way more than one purpose: firstly the sentence helps to interpret the meaning, secondly the sentence provides the learners with usage examples to copy in their everyday conversation.

- be understandable out of a larger context
  All parts of the sentence should be present. e.g. anaphoric reference may in the real sample only occur as an eye gaze in a direction of a locus, but when we copy only a part of an utterance, this kind of reference must be replaced by a lexical item; a pronoun.

- keep the user focused on the sign
  Sentences should be of everyday matters and rather a little dull than to fantastical, too keep the user's focus on the matter – understanding the sign – and not use all energy trying to understand a seldom experienced situation. To keep focus on the lexemes, the sentences should be showing the sign in a common context, e.g. a sign meaning mixing something should rather be in contexts as mixing water with flour, than in a context mixing raisins with whipped cream. In the last example the user will get an everyday situation to help interpret the meaning of the sign. In the first example the user could be puzzled since – at least in Denmark – mixing raisins with whipped cream to most people is not a well-known everyday activity. So firstly, the sentence will not help understanding the meaning 'mix', secondly, focus will easily be on "what are they cooking?"

- have a high truth value
  Sentences like: *All fish in Danish lakes has died from lack of oxygen* were modified to *Many fish in Danish lakes has died from lack of oxygen* – again to keep focus on the sign language - untrue or unbelievable statements are disturbing and take away focus.

- not be offending in any way
  Sexual matters, politics, religious and race-matters should be kept on a minimum.

- not reveal the source of the sentence
  Our consultants constitute 0.6% of the deaf population in Denmark. They are all prominent in the deaf community – being an active member of deaf clubs etc. was one of the criteria for being asked to contribute to the project. This means, that our consultants' family, work and life are known to a lot of people. The deaf community is very small in Denmark, and it is essential to us that the sentences in the dictionary not in any way reveal any personal information. Of course all names on persons and places have to be changed, but also other signs, for example the sign for a motorbike has to be changed into a sign for another kind of vehicle, golf has to be changed into another sport etc. to keep the anonymity of the source.
- contribute to the balance in topics
  At a point we discovered that the sign MOTHER occurred in a lot of sentences, but the sign FATHER only in a few, we had a lot of occurrences of the sign for 'motorbike' but none for 'bike', lots for 'football' and none for 'volleyball' etc. To get a balance in topics we therefore sometimes substitute one noun for another, both belonging to the same semantic field. The user gains from this not only because more topics are represented in the sentences, but also because signs that have not yet been analyzed thoroughly, and have not yet their own entry in the dictionary, can be found in a sentence. Through this substitution possibility we have ensured that a wider range of signs can be watched in the sentences.

- not be a definition of the sign
  We distinguish between the definition of a sign and the sign used in real language. In the DTS Dictionary, the meanings of the signs are explained through Danish equivalents, complemented with one or more example sentences. We do not – yet – have definitions of the sign meanings, but we would like to be able to supply definitions later, and we don't want them to clash with the usage examples.

An example
(1) and (2) illustrate how a sentence can be moderated. (1) is the original utterance from our consultant and (2) is how it ended up in the dictionary, when it was turned into a context free sentence with no hesitations from the speaker

(1) PRON PLACE PF NAME AR[T]/ USE-TO NAME NEW ART SQUEEZE~1/SQUEEZE~2/SQUEEZE~3/ WHAT 1.p WHAT/SOME THINK CAUSE PRON LOTS-OF ART ALSO FLOCK-TO/PRON gesture SEE /LAND[SCAPE] / BEAUTY LANDSCAPE/ ENLIGHTENMENT/ ART/GO-TO/  

(and) that place is called art... use to be called the artist squeeze... squeeze ... squeeze, why I don't know, some people think the reason is that also a lot of artists go to this place... erm... to see land... to get inspired by the beautiful landscape, they go there.

(2) PRON PLACE LOTS-OF ART FLOCK-TO/ BEAUTY LANDSCAPE/ ENLIGHTENMENT/ ART/  

Lots of artists go to that place to get inspired by the beautiful landscape.

References


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