



Signs2Go: a project for deaf signers, by deaf signers

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Abstract

Signs2Go is a KA2 Languages project (2009-2010). Our target group: deaf people who use a sign language as their first language. The objective: to develop a website where deaf signers can learn British Sign Language as a second sign language

Our challenges:

- Most deaf signers cannot read or write English. Many of them cannot read or write their own national language. How do we make a website, how do we make an e-learning course, without any written language?
- We will teach British Sign Language (BSL) as a foreign language. There are many courses and even websites to learn BSL. All of these, however, are for British learners. More specifically: for *hearing* British learners. How do we teach BSL to signers who are fluent in German, Norwegian, Dutch, Italian Sign Language? What is the same, what is different between sign languages? And: how do we teach these differences?
- We have partners in 5 countries. In each country, we have a team of hearing and deaf professionals. Many of the deaf professionals cannot read or write English. They don't know BSL (yet!), but they can communicate in International Sign. The hearing professionals can read and write English, they can sign the national sign language, but they can't sign BSL or International Sign. How do we involve everyone in the discussions and decisions?

We only started in January of this year, So we can't tell you yet if this story will have a happy ending. We can tell you about our work in progress, and you can follow us on the project's website: www.signs2go.eu.

Some of our solutions, so far:

- On the homepage of the website, you can see welcome videos in the sign languages of the participating countries.
- We have asked for, and received, permission to use a series of documentaries produced in Britain, by deaf signers, for young signers : Wicked! (www.bslbt.co.uk/wicked). The deaf colleagues are now watching these episodes to find the differences between BSL and their own sign languages. Together we will write 'explanations' and add interactive activities. On the Signs2Go website, students will be able to watch clips from the Wicked series (real BSL, signed by native users), then watch an English BSL teacher and a national teacher explaining what they see in the clip, then practice what they've learned in interactive activities.
- For communication, we are using ooVoo (www.oovoo.com) as well as email. The deaf colleagues have ooVoo meetings with 5 signers from as many countries on screen at the same time, signing in International Sign.
- Our international consortium meetings are organized in a workshop format, with sign language interpreters to assist us, and many hands-on activities.

Will it work? Will we be successful? Watch this space: www.signs2go.eu !