Development of a Framework of Reference for Sign Languages and Reference Level Descriptors for Czech Sign Language

Martina Hulešová, Charles University

The CEFR is a well-known, useful, and widely exploited tool used for many European languages, as well as in some non-European language contexts. Most of the contexts where the CEFR is used concern spoken languages. However, regarding sign languages, there have only been a few attempts to explore how the CEFR might be adapted and modified. In 2019, a CEFR-related project started in the Czech Republic (as one of five key activities of a bigger project – called APIV A – that concerned inclusion of users of first languages other than Czech) with the original aim of adapting the outcomes of the ProSign project[1] led by The European Centre for Modern Languages, which basically meant creating proficiency scales for the description of Czech Sign Language. However, it became clear that a mere translation or a slight adaptation is neither possible nor appropriate. Therefore, the project became much broader, and, in the end, two original comprehensive and interrelated documents were developed: a general Framework of Reference for Sign Languages and a more specific Reference Level Descriptors of Czech Sign Language. Both documents are bilingual: in written Czech and translated into Czech Sign Language.

Three main topics are discussed in this article. Firstly, the content and the processes by which these two documents were planned and published are described. The rationale for their development is presented, and the approaches, including blind alleys, doubts and their solutions discussed. Secondly, challenges faced by the writing team are presented, for instance the collaboration of Deaf and hearing colleagues, the collaboration of hearing linguists with Czech Sign Language teachers with no linguistic background, terminological issues, given that sign languages in general, and the Czech sign language specifically, are so-called less-taught languages. Finally, problems and challenges related to the features of the Czech deaf community, such as the specificity of culture, language modalities, the absence of standardisation, research, and the lack of recognition of the language as a fully-fledged code, are presented.

Key words: sign language(s), framework of reference, reference level descriptors, deaf community

1 Introduction

The CEFR and the CEFR Companion Volume are useful and well-known tools used in many European contexts. They have also been adapted for some non-European contexts where the CEFR impacted local language policies (Canada, Thailand, Malaysia, Uzbekistan) or the way languages were described, assessed or taught (Japanese, Arabic), as described, among others, by Salwa (2021, Savski (2020), Soliman (2017) or Khatamova (2018). However, the implementation of the CEFR has mostly been concerned spoken languages, i.e., audio-oral languages. For sign languages (SL), working within the visual-manual environment, there have been only a few attempts to explore how the CEFR might be adapted and modified for learners and users of SL, for instance, in a project at the Zurich University of Applied Sciences (ZHAW), funded by the Swiss National Research Programme, where descriptors and scales for SL competence complemented the CEFR scales, or, in the ProSign Project, led by the European Centre for Modern Languages, where

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1. When the ProSign project is mentioned, we refer to the first ProSign project realised between 2012 and 2015.

variants of some of the proficiency scales and descriptors were developed for the use in SL contexts. The descriptors and scales for SL from the ProSign project were also used in the CEFR Companion Volume (CV) (Council of Europe [COE] 2020: 49), together with a specific chapter on signing competencies describing aspects of competencies unique to SL. These proficiency scales are accompanied by texts explaining their theoretical background and key concepts operationalised in them.

In 2017, a project called APIV A started in the Czech Republic to support the inclusion of language communities with different L1 languages, which would include the community of users of the Czech Sign Language (CSL). At the time of preparing the project documentation and applying for European funding for APIV A, only the ProSign project outcomes were known to the project promoters, and neither in the later stages information about similar projects was encountered. Also, the CEFR CV existed as a provisional version. Consequently, the CEFR 2001 and the ProSign documents were the main sources of information. Originally, it was envisaged that a translation of the ProSign documents and its use as a framework for the description of CSL competence would be the only primary outcome of the APIV A project and that it would be sufficient with some additional texts. Although the ECML project with the ProSign document as its most salient outcome was an important step on the way towards the wider visibility of SL, it turned out not to be comprehensive and consistent enough for the purpose of a thorough description of a particular SL. This was largely because complex information describing the specific modality of SL and the contrasting nature of the sign and spoken language was missing. Therefore, when work on the project relating to CSL began in 2019, the original intention to take the ProSign outcomes and to translate and slightly adapt them for the description of CSL was perceived as insufficient. The project became much broader. It was decided to create a coherent descriptive framework for SLs and CSL specifically. For this, it was necessary to have a theoretical foundation as well as a clear idea about the resulting framework's potential practical applications. Both ambitions would require a significant amount of theoretical research, consultancies, discussions, and cross-language collaboration, as well as a community willing to take part in this initiative.

In the following sections, the most important areas related to the development of both frameworks are described. Section 2 provides a brief overview of the project, the development, the content, the purpose, and the target group of readers of the two main outcomes (Framework of Reference for Sign Languages and Reference Level Descriptors for Czech Sign Language) and their relationship to the source documents (CEFR and ProSign). Section 3 describes the methodology, the workflow and some of the challenges, such as the need to work in two different language modalities and the problems related to the translation. Section 4 focuses on the approach to the validation, and explains how the validation was carried out and in what aspect was specific. Section 5 reflects the lessons the team learnt during the project. The last Section 6 ends with some concluding remarks on the benefits the project outcomes might bring for the Deaf community, Czech signing linguists and the Czech Deaf community in general.

2 An overview of the documents

Despite initial challenges, a late start, and issues related to bilingual-bimodal teamwork (which required constant linguistic and transcultural mediation), two comprehensive and interrelated documents were eventually developed: a *Framework of Reference for Sign Languages (FRSL)* and a comprehensive *Reference Level Descriptors for Czech Sign Language* (RLDCSL)[2]. The FRSL is a reference document that is intended to be read by a broader public, especially teachers, and students of SL, authors of syllabi, and curricula. The RLDCSL is a descriptive tool that collates notions and concepts specific for CSL. As the ProSign document was insufficient for their purposes, the authors went back to the original sources, i.e., to the CEFR 2001 and later to the CEFR CV 2020. As the CEFR CV writing team argues, "[m]any other CEFR descriptors are actually applicable to SL since it is used to fulfil the same communicative functions" (COE 2020: 49). In case of FRSL and RLDCSL, not all chapters, illustrative scales and descriptors from the CEFR

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2.   The project APIV A ended in November 2022.

were modified and used, on the one hand, and on the other hand, some other scales not included in the CEFR were developed: *reception of artistic or entertaining texts in visual media or live; production of longer factual/expository texts; control of phonetic and phonological aspects of a SL*. The authors decided to use from the CEFR CV only very few texts and scales (roughly estimated at less than 10%) that were considered as the most relevant for the purpose, target readers and the SL and CSL. Several originally developed texts and scales were added by the Czech team as they were felt to be missing in the CEFR CV but important. In conclusion, the main source of inspiration was the structure of the CEFR and the interaction between the content of both CEFR for spoken languages and the specific nature and needs of the SL.

The resulting documents, FRSL and RLDCSL, contain theoretical chapters which explain important background information, the rationale for the content included and the approach adopted, as well as introducing the proficiency scales for SL (FRSL) or Czech SL (RLDCSL). They share structural and content features with the CEFR, but some chapters, particularly in terms of their level of specificity, are different. This was caused by the need to respect the nature of the SL in terms of their linguistic structure and the extent of knowledge (e.g., regarding the linguistics, applied linguistics and didactics) of potential users, especially within the Deaf community. In comparison with the CEFR, the FRSL and the RLDCSL use a more explanatory approach, trying to balance the specific terminology with the commonly used language in both systems, i.e., the spoken and the SL. Whilst the FRSL is intended to be read as a reference document by a broad but informed public (e.g., teachers, lecturers, students of SL, authors of syllabi, curricula, teaching materials, and assessment tools), the aim of the RLDCSL is to be the first comprehensive collation of the notions and concepts specific to CSL. In addition, it is intended as a tool that might be used for preparing language course syllabi and in the creation of teaching and assessment materials. In short, it is intended specifically for those involved in teaching and learning CSL.

2.1 Framework of reference for sign languages

The FRSL is intended as a reference document for SL in general and therefore, it is supposed to be read before the RLDCSL. Chapter 1 introduces the target group of readers, explains the history and the development of the documents that were sources for the CEFR. Chapter 2 describes how the sources were adapted when developing the FRSL. Chapter 3 explains the key concepts (e.g., reference level, descriptors and scale), and how they relate to each other, and other concepts mentioned in the following chapters. The text continues explaining in detail the role of the communicative situations, and introduces the notions of communicative spheres, communicative factors and communicative activities and strategies. Chapter 4, in which communicative activities and strategies are explained, is the key part of the FRSL. It contains and then defines proficiency scales from Pre-A1 to C2 and describes what the user of SL can do in and with SL in different communicative situations. Chapter 5 describes the language competencies (or signing competencies, as stated in the CEFR CV) of the SL users: linguistic competence (phonetic-phonological competence, grammatical competence, lexical competence), pragmalinguistic competence and sociolinguistic competence.

2.2 Reference level descriptors for Czech Sign Language

Although the FRSL offers a general description of the language behaviour of the SL user in different communicative situations (defined by the proficiency scales), the RLDCLS introduces knowledge, topics, and skills whose acquisition enables the CSL user to perform language activities described in the FRSL. Only levels Pre-A1–B2 are included in RLDCSL, which is in line with the project brief. However, there are also pragmatic reasons why C levels are not included. There are practically no signers at C1 or C2 levels among the users of CSL as a non-L1 language; there are no teaching materials, corpora, and very few students interested in continuing studying in courses at these levels. As a consequence, examples of language production at C levels were not available.

Chapter 1 of the RLDCSL introduces the material itself, its content, structure, how the text relates to the CEFR, it explains how the text should be read and used. And levels A1-B2 are characterised briefly in this chapter. *Chapter 2* provides basic information about the nature, modality, and key terms of CSL, such as the manual and non-manual language means simultaneity, linearity, and iconicity. *Chapter 3* describes the essential language structures and rules, and it also contains a list of grammar structures and lexical units related to topics and reference levels A1-B2. *Chapter 4* summarises sociocultural knowledge and skills related to the community of Czech SL users and defines what is expected (regarding sociocultural knowledge and skills) at levels A1-B2. *Chapter* 5 describes language knowledge and skills at A1-B2 levels from the perspective of 14 thematic areas and the most common expressions related to these areas are listed in the subchapter called *Vocabulary*. In the Czech language version of the documents, these expressions are represented by dictionary entries that are the equivalents of the signs. Each chapter has slightly different content and graphical structure that respect the content and approach felt as the most effective with regards to the target users.

Both documents also contain examples of the language in use; the FRSL attempts to exemplify the general principles of SL, and the RLDCSL contains examples of the language use, which is specific to CSL. Both contain scales with illustrative descriptors with Can Do statements. The reference scales in the FRSL go from Pre-A1 to C2 as their intention is to describe the features common to SL in general, whereas the RLDCSL contains scales from A1 to B2.

2.3 Glossary

The Glossary accompanying the FRSL contains terms that were considered key or important ones, as well as those which were found challenging during the validation process both by internal hearing and not-hearing colleagues, as well as by the external reviewers. The explanations attempt to be in line with the current thinking in Czech linguistics. In a broader sense, the FRSL and RCSL may serve as a source of key terms and the metalanguage for all those involved in the (C)SL community, as their descriptive language mirrors and follows important current trends in Czech linguistics.

Both the FRSL and RCSL and the Glossary exist in two language versions: in Czech and CSL. The website[3], in addition to other information, will contain both language versions and a downloadable interactive PDF version in Czech.

2.4 The purpose of the documents and the target group of users

The initial definition of the target group for the FRSL and the RLDCSL in the Project Chart was very broad and allowed for many interpretations[4]. On the one hand, it allowed for a later broadening of the project's scope to the needs that emerged as the team gained knowledge, for instance, having two separate documents with differentiated purpose and content (FRSL and RLDCSL). On the other hand, it was challenging to define the target user and, therefore, to determine the scope of the documents, the level of detail, and the language used. Therefore, one of the main discussions at the beginning of the project work focused on defining the target group of users. After a series of discussions within the team and within the broader community of signers and linguists, the main target group of users was defined as the teachers of CSL as a foreign or second language, i.e., mainly deaf teachers in courses of CSL for hearing students.

Parallel to the discussion about the target user of the FRSL and the RLDCSL, a discussion about the articulation of the purpose of the documents took place. As had happened with the CEFR, which was taken as a prescriptive instead of a descriptive tool at the beginning of its existence, a similar reaction occurred when preliminary versions of the FRSL and RLDCSL were presented to members of the Czech

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3.   The website was launched at the end of 2022: https://cefr-czj.npi.cz/

4.   The intended uses originally went from FRSL being a framework for developing exams for SL interpreters to a resource for teachers of deaf students at primary schools.

deaf community, as well as to other stakeholders with limited knowledge of or experience with the CEFR[5]. The clarity of the purpose and the target reader were also two of the areas investigated in the validation process (see section 3.6), which brought important feedback to the writing team. The validators (validating the RLDCSL) and reviewers (validating the FRSL) pointed out the need to describe more clearly and explicitly the intended purpose and to precisely define the target users of the documents. To this end, separate chapters on how to read and use the FRSL and the RCSL were added.

3 Methodology: Teams, workflow, and challenges

External and internal members worked together as part of a broader team. As the teams and their members had different knowledge and specialisations, each team had different duties, such as writing texts and scales, searching the literature, providing consultancies, leading validation, translating, and editing. The relation among the teams is outlined in the scheme in Figure 1. The central groups are represented by the central five subgroups connected with arrows that represent the directions of communication. The *Search team* and the *Website team* worked more at the beginning or in the later stages of the project, respectively. External colleagues took part in specific points of the project.

3.1 Teams and their duties

The *Linguistic team* was the main writing team. It was composed of Czech signers and Czech speakers, most of them linguists. The *Linguistic team* and the *CEFR team* asked for support from the *Research team*. They looked for relevant literature, mainly at the beginning but also during other project stages. The *CEFR team* had two roles: first, they provided consultancy, information, familiarization, and initial training in working with the CEFR and related materials. Later, they collaborated closely with the *Linguistic team* as co-authors of some chapters. They supported the *Linguistic team* with their expertise in the CEFR, provided feedback and advice on issues relating to the adaptation of the CEFR to the new SL and CSL needs, as well as on issues concerning the alignment of the new scales to the CEFR.

The *Validation team* was created in one of the later stages of the project. They were responsible for gathering the feedback on the texts, leading the validation of the documents, and providing feedback on the created documents. The *Validation team* collaborated with both internal and external colleagues. As these were Czech speakers but also Czech signers, close collaboration with the *Translation team* was needed.
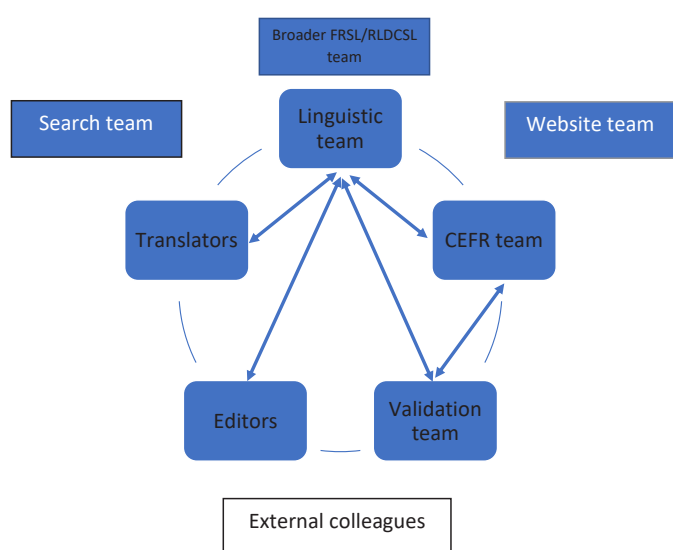

Figure 1. Teams and their collaboration

5.   During the project, there were about 10 dissemination panels where the results were presented and discussed with the public. Also, regular reports to the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport had to be presented.

3.2 Workflow challenges

The initial workflow was envisaged as follows:

| The Linguistic team asks for information from the research team and the consultancy from the CEFR team; they write the texts, some of them with the help of external collaborators. |

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| The CEFR team check the text from the CEFR perspective. |

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| All texts are edited by the editorial team and translated[1] into CSL. |

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| The Validation team carries out validation with external colleagues; the suggestions are discussed and then accepted or rejected. |

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| The texts are prepared for publishing by the editorial team. |

However, in reality, the workflow was not linear and smooth. Writing the text required much more involvement from the CEFR team and the external collaborators. In addition, the validation required much more involvement from the Linguistic team and the Translation team. The Translation team had to retranslate many texts several times. Some parts of the texts were translated again based on the validation findings.

After several cycles of feedback, discussion, clarification and redrafting, the text was given to the Editorial team, who then prepared it for the final translation. Once the translations had been completed, the text was read and reread in consultation with the Linguistic team and sometimes also with the CEFR team, and in case it was needed, redrafted, and translated again.

3.3 Living and working in two language modalities

Probably the most basic and salient difference between spoken and SL is the modality, i.e., the way the languages exist and how they are used in and for communication. Spoken languages are of an audio-oral nature, the physical perception happens through hearing, the production by the speech organs and the meaning lies in the sounds and the context. SL is of a visual-motor nature, i.e., the message is perceived by sight, produced by the body parts, movement and space, and the meaning is created by the shape, position and movement of the hands, body, head, and face muscles, and, as with spoken languages, in combination with the context. The different modality of SL brings about other challenges. For instance, SL do not have a written form and the message can only be live or video recorded. As language is closely related to thinking and culture in the broad sense, languages with different modalities also assume different cultural, sociocultural as well as interpersonal contexts, and behaviours. Norms, relations, and taboos are not always shared or equally understood.

From the simplified explanation above, it is evident that the hearing and signing colleagues did

not share the same communicative space, and they were not able to communicate directly without translation or mediation. Usually, for less formal meetings, hearing members of the linguistic team interpreted the communication; for more formal meetings or broader team discussions, interpreters were required. All of this had an impact on the organisation and operativity of the communication. Furthermore, a group of translators was needed to disseminate information to the public, and the mediator had an important role during the long-term validation process, as they helped beyond just transferring the meaning. In fact, they also carried out a transcultural transfer to avoid socio cultural misunderstandings or embarrassing situations.

3.4 The languages of the documents and the translation

One of the frequent questions the people outside the project asked the writing team why the documents were written first in Czech and only then translated into CSL. It is a perfectly legitimate question for many reasons: the documents are about SL or CSL, the most important target group are primarily people with CSL as their L1, and due to the different modality of SL, the thinking, living and world-perception are shaped differently for CSL and, thus, generally less accessible to Czech speaking linguists or experts.

The honest answer to the question of why the team decided to work in the spoken Czech first is quite simple: it was difficult to find enough colleagues within the Czech Deaf community that would meet the criteria for being able to work on the project (for instance, to be familiar enough with the CEFR and its use, to be able to read and to know the terminology in English and Czech; to have a background in linguistics and didactics of foreign languages). It should also be mentioned that the CSL is in an early stage of development in some political, educational, and especially legal aspects. The project itself was proposed and written by both Czech signers and Czech speakers who had contacts with the Czech deaf community and who were sensitive to the need to fill the existing gaps in terms of the linguistic and didactic tools for describing CSL. Subsequently, Czech speakers and Czech signers agreed on the need to have this tool, but when the project leaders looked for team members that would meet the requirements and were willing to take part in the project, it was much more challenging to find Czech signers than it was to find Czech speakers[6]. Due to the limited availability of educational programmes designed specifically for members of the Czech Deaf community, there is a relatively low number of Czech signers with a university degree in linguistics. As a result, the team's make-up favoured Czech speakers with more experience in linguistics than Czech signers. Therefore, it was decided to work on the documents in spoken Czech first, to distribute the tasks according to the profiles of each member of the project teams and translate the texts later into the Czech signed language. This decision required a lot of coordination across the team, constant monitoring of the workflow, and very intensive communication among the teams.

The decision also led to some negative consequences for the timetable, especially for editing and translating. These had to be postponed as much as possible as we wanted to translate as complete a version of the documents as possible, and some parts were re-translated several times. This was caused by issues with a non-standardised translation that resulted in misunderstandings by Czech signers and by the need to implement the findings emerging from the validation.

3.5 Working with and in a non-standardised language

The CSL lacks a standard form. Thus, it might be characterised as a language with a highly individual but particularly lexical variability (Hynková Dingová 2020). This variability is conditioned geographically and socially. Although CSL has become more frequent in the public space, which has had a positive impact on the standardisation (as the language used in the public media is taken as the model of

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6.   All the Czech speakers in the linguistics team were highly proficient in Czech Sign Language, but not the members of the CEFR or the validation team.

use), the variability is still very high. The lack of a language standard meant that the translators and the linguistic team members struggled due to the lack of equivalents or standardised signs for many concepts (relating to the CEFR, linguistics, abstract ideas, and metalanguage) in the non-standardised CSL. Unfortunately, this was discovered quite late, after the first piloting of the validation method during one of the dissemination panel meetings. Only after this feedback, problems with misunderstanding the texts were discovered, and issues in translations were detected. The team realised that coherent, acceptable equivalents for the terms from the CEFR CV (originally used in English) were not used consistently in CSL. For some concepts, their equivalents were even missing in CSL. It was challenging to find agreement on the translation form for many expressions, as the standard equivalent did not exist and had to be created and agreed upon among the translators and the community.

4 Validation

The initial intention to follow the approach towards the validation as described by North (2007, 2020), North and Piccardo (2019) and CEFR CV (2020), both with panels of Czech signers and Czech speakers, turned out not to be feasible after the piloting phase that emulated the procedures described in the above-mentioned literature. The main conclusions from the piloting that led to the decision to change the validation approach were (a) the modality of the SL that makes the process difficult for presenting the activities with scales and descriptors, (b) the level of preparedness of the deaf colleagues and their lack of experience with similar activities; (c) the sociocultural aspects specific to the Czech Deaf community where the members are not used to be trained or taught by a hearing person from outside the community; (d) given that working with descriptors and scales presupposes a certain level of knowledge of the descriptive scheme itself, its language and metalanguage, the terminology; in fact, for the Czech Deaf community, the texts were incomprehensible without a mediator (usually from the Linguistic or the CEFR team); (e) very few members of the deaf community had experience with workshop-based activities. Therefore, the validity had to be re-conceptualised and a new approach towards validation had to be applied, different both in terms of the content (WHAT was validated) and in terms of methods (how the content was validated). The validity of the documents was conceptualised as the agreement between three facets: the theoretically defined purpose of the documents based on the needs of the main target group of users described theoretically, the validators and reviewers representing the target group of users representing, and the content of the FRSL and RLDCSL that describe the construct of SL (or CSL) from different perspectives, such as learning, teaching and assessment. The validation emphasised the aspects of comprehensibility for the users, completeness, usefulness, and balance between the level of expertise and accessibility. One of the most important indices of the validity was the attitude of reviewers and validators towards the documents, specifically, how the attitude developed during the validation process and what impact the validation had not only on the participants but also on the broader community.

Basically, the FRSL was validated by *reviewers*, i.e., a mixed group of three hearing and deaf experts (in linguistics, pedagogy and the CEFR). They were asked to provide a detailed structured review of the whole document except the scales. It was expected they focus on four main areas: comprehensibility, completeness, usefulness and balance between expertise and accessibility. The questions they were asked were not too specific and left room for broader answers and deeper thinking about the areas. Reviewers were given the whole document and were asked to provide a provisional review first, then to meet with the validation teams for consultancies, and only after this write the final review. They worked independently, always having the possibility of consultancies with the CEFR teams with whom they consulted several times. A final meeting was organised with two aims: first, to give experts the opportunity to ask for explanations and to see the changes made in the FRSL after the validation, and, second, to give an opportunity to the CEFR team to explain some issues that proved to be unclear to the experts.

The RLDCSL was validated by *validators*, i.e., a group of Czech signers with profiles reflecting the target group of RLDCSL users. The outcome was a written or video-recorded review. The key person was the *mediator*. The mediator was a signing colleague hired to lead the group of signing validators and mediate the content and the processes of validation, which had been designed by the hearing members of the validation team. He was trained by hearing colleagues who provided him with support, consultancy, and explanations. This was done with the help of interpreters.

The RLDCSL validation had several rounds. Each chapter was validated separately by a slightly different group of the validators against a set of topics-questions related to these chapters. These questions were mediated by the mediator because validators and the mediator were exclusively deaf colleagues. However, the materials were in a written form prepared by Czech speakers from the Validation team.

Validators focused basically on the same aspects as reviewers (comprehensibility, completeness, usefulness and balance between the expertise and the accessibility), but the questions were formulated in a completely different way. They were introduced by a short explanatory text describing the chapter in question, they were worded very specifically and explicitly, and there were several questions targeting the same aspect. Validators were also asked to rely on their experience as teachers of the CSL.

The mediator and validators met several times at individual consultancy meetings. These meetings were not translated simultaneously. They were transcribed for the purpose of reference and the Validation team. After each individual meeting, the mediator met with the Validation team for consultancy and to plan the next meeting. The final group meetings of each group of validators with the mediator were recorded. The aim of these final meetings was to receive answers to the questions prepared by the Validation team. These final meetings were interpreted simultaneously because the Validation team took part in the discussions.

5 Lessons learnt

When looking back, all parties involved in this project learnt several important lessons. Firstly, in similar projects in the future, the writing team should communicate more closely across the teams and prevent misunderstanding and the creation of different levels of shared knowledge. Secondly, areas of responsibility should be better defined, distributed and incomplete tasks should be discussed immediately at regular meetings of the project members. As well as being regularly organised, these meetings should be attended by members from across different teams. Thirdly, more training (especially at the beginning of each stage) in topics related to the project aims, should be provided, and terminological and conceptual issues should be discussed. Finally, in addition to the training, a shared database of frequent questions and terms and concepts should be created. These should be bilingual and accessible to all team members. On the other hand, the project also had a very positive impact. The Czech deaf community and Czech-speaking experts collaborated closely on such a big project for the first time, and we hope this prepared the floor for future collaboration of both parties and also for the emancipation and more independent work of deaf colleagues and their major involvement in similar projects. The initiative for future projects in CSL should come from the Czech deaf community, and the project should be led by deaf colleagues.

6 Concluding reflections

As it was mentioned before, both documents complement each other. The FRSL introduces the Czech Deaf community to a theoretical description that might be conceptually challenging. However, when considered in the light of the RLDCSL, it can be understood thanks to the specific examples the RLDCSL provides.

The project itself, the outcomes (the FRSL and the RLDCSL), has had a positive impact on the Czech deaf community as a whole. Their members were invited to take part at different stages of the project

(as consultants and validators), and they were also invited to the dissemination panel meetings, which were organised during the three years the project ran. They became aware of what the project was about, and they were informed about the goals, outcomes and the use and usefulness of the project.

Both the *Framework of Reference for Sign Languages* and the *Reference Level Descriptors for Czech Sign Language* are highly significant for the Czech deaf community. They provide a unique theoretical background and description of CSL in relation to the CEFR levels, as are common across other European languages. This will make communication about the use, teaching, learning and assessment of CSL possible within and outside the Czech Deaf community. Potential users of the FRSL and the RLDCSL will have a descriptive tool that enables them to understand each other when communicating in their areas of interest, in teaching, preparing syllabi, planning curricula, assessing, or learning CSL. It might also be a positive step towards standardisation, at least in pedagogy, teaching and learning CSL as a foreign or second language. The descriptive and illustrative nature of their content might increase the comparability of the courses, materials, and assessment approaches and thus improve the mobility of students and teachers of CSL. They might also help improve the quality of teaching and assessment of CSL, to support the production of course materials and content, and to give teachers a common language in which they can communicate about CSL and its users, and open a broader discussion about the SL itself, its nature, the ways to teach and learn it effectively, and thus support CSL on its way to become a fully-fledged language.

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8 Biography

Martina Hulešová graduated in Spanish philology at Charles University (Czech Republic), later obtained her MA in language testing at Lancaster University (UK) and PhD in didactics of foreign languages at Masaryk University, Czech Republic. Her research interests include standard setting, validation, training in language testing and assessment. She works as quality manager for the Research and Test Centre at the Institute for Language and Preparatory Studies at Charles University and as a freelancer she provides consultancy for other projects related to language assessment, Czech sign language, diagnostic tests and others.