



Universität Hamburg
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FAKULTÄT
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via Mail:

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Hamburg, d. 02. März 2021

Dear Mr. Remmo,

We would like to thank you very much for awarding the "DANKE-Skulptur" to the Institute for German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf (IDGS).

We are very pleased that you thereby honor our commitment to inclusion.

Allow us to take a brief look back at the special history of our institute.

The research work at IDGS, which began in the 1970s, was based on the first findings from the USA, on the basis of which it was scientifically proven that sign languages are full-fledged languages in their own right, with which a separate Deaf culture and history of Deaf people is associated.

At that time there was still very little well-founded knowledge about sign languages in Germany, but also worldwide. Instead, prejudices and half-knowledge were still very common - for example, many believed that sign languages were merely primitive gesture systems. In the education of deaf children and in public, sign languages were forbidden since the advent of oralism in the 19th century, sometimes under threat of physical punishment. Deaf people were often ridiculed when they signed to each other in public. There were no trained interpreters for communication with hearing people, and deaf people made do with laborious speech, lipreading or written notes. At that time, life for deaf people was characterized by a struggle against numerous barriers that stood in their way on a daily basis.

In the early 1970s, linguist Prof. Dr. Siegmund Prillwitz in Hamburg took up the subject of sign language scientifically. During a university training course for teachers at the Hamburg School for the Deaf, he happened to come across this language when he saw the deaf schoolchildren signing to each other during the breaks. Intuitively, he realized that this form of communication represented a language system of its own with enormous potential for the education of deaf children.

In 1981, he founded the "Research Center: German Sign Language" at the University of Hamburg. There, Prillwitz exchanged ideas with three deaf native speakers on this topic, and the meetings were interpreted by a staff member who had learned German Sign Language (DGS) from her deaf parents - there were no academically trained interpreters at the time. Thanks to Prillwitz's linguistic expertise

and the deaf native speakers' intuitive knowledge of the components and rules of their language, the group uncovered more and more aspects of the grammatical structure of DGS.

In 1985, the Hamburg research group invited participants to an international congress entitled "Signs in the Education of the Deaf". With this event, the researchers mainly wanted to inform the representatives of deaf education. During the lectures and workshops, the scientific findings on sign language were presented. At the same time, the speakers emphasized the enormous importance of sign languages for the cognitive, linguistic, social and emotional development of deaf children. The outlines of a grammar of German Sign Language developed by the research group were distributed to the participants and from now on the language of deaf people in Germany was called German Sign Language (DGS). In addition, deaf education in Germany was increasingly called upon to develop and implement concepts for bilingual education of deaf children - the first bilingual school trial in Germany started in Hamburg in 1993 on the basis of a concept developed by a group of experts initiated by Prillwitz.

In 1987, the "Center for German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf" was founded as a successor institution to the research center at the University of Hamburg.

This step was another milestone and had an enormous signal effect on the deaf community in Germany. At the European level, too, voices were growing in support of the recognition of sign languages. Thus, in 1988, the European Community published the recommendation to legally recognize sign languages as independent languages in the member states.

First academic trainings for sign language interpreters started and soon new educational opportunities for deaf people opened up: In the winter semester of 1987/88, four deaf students enrolled for the first time at the University of Hamburg and began their studies with the help of interpreters.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the study programs "Sign Languages" and "Sign Language Interpreting" were introduced in Hamburg as models and in 1996 they were taken over into regular operation as the first undergraduate study programs in this field. Currently, both programs can be studied with the degrees B.A. and/or M.A.. The IDGS is still the only institution in Germany where students can study the subject "Sign Languages", which is registered in the Index of Small Subjects, in addition to the degree program "Sign Language Interpreting".

Numerous research papers have been produced at IDGS and made available to the public. The specialized library established at IDGS, focusing on sign language research, culture, history, and education of deaf people, is the largest of its kind in Germany. Furthermore, the professional journal DAS ZEICHEN has been editorially supervised at the IDGS since 1987 and published together with the Society for Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf (GGKG) e.V.. DAS ZEICHEN is the only journal of its kind in the German-speaking world and publishes articles on topics such as deaf culture, sign language linguistics and interpreting. Since 2020, the editorship lies solely with the GGKG e.V..

IDGS has modern multimedia learning materials in DGS teaching, two language labs, a professional film studio, and an Experimental Sign Language Lab with EEG and eye-tracking instruments to conduct neurolinguistic studies of sign language processing in the brain.

Our expertise in the development of specialized sign lexicons on various professional fields, gained in the early years of IDGS, forms the basis for the "DGS Corpus Project" of the Academy of Sciences in Hamburg ("Development of a corpus-based electronic dictionary German Sign Language (DGS) - German"), which is located at IDGS with a 15-year duration. The DGS corpus is a representative collection of sign language texts from all over Germany, signed by adult deaf native signers of different age groups, recorded in a mobile studio at twelve locations in Germany. Some of the footage obtained has already been published and is available free of charge at www.meine-dgs.de equipped with German subtitles.

This partial corpus is also available in a further version with attached transcripts and English subtitles to all researchers who would like to work scientifically with this material as part of a research project.

The data material represents a valuable resource of documented authentic German Sign Language, not only for the deaf community itself, but for all those who use DGS: Educators and teachers, parents of deaf children, sign language interpreters, sign language linguists, cultural scholars, students, and DGS learners in general.

Upon completion of the project in 2023, a general language digital bidirectional dictionary DGS-German will also be available. With this resource, it will be possible to look up the sign language entries for individual German words through various search filters, or to find the corresponding German entries starting from a sign.

IDGS is well connected internationally and was, among other things, co-organizer of the world's largest congress of sign language linguistics, TISLR13, which took place in September 2019 in Hamburg at the University of Hamburg.

Currently, we are mostly working from our home office due to the Corona measures. This is the second semester we have had to hold all of our classes, guest lectures, and team meetings online via ZOOM. This presents great challenges for everyone involved, especially since we can only experience and teach a three-dimensional sign language on screen in two dimensions.

We wish you all the best and thank you again for your great idea to empower the actors of this world in the field of diversity and inclusion through your great sculptures. We accept this award with joy and pride and have given it a proper place in the IDGS.

With the very best regards,

Annika Herrmann and the IDGS team