Brief Activity Report from Ethiopian Sign Language Team

Dear Colleagues,

The past few weeks have been full of activities for our team which we would like to share with you.

Participation in the Networking Workshop:

We were so happy to participate in the successful networking workshop in Hawassa. Pawlos presented a paper titled Introduction to Ethiopian Sign Language at the networking workshop. From the feedback at the workshop the presentation was the first to many participants and an eye opener which delighted our team because creating awareness about Ethiopian sign language is one of our objectives for the duration of the project and starting the awareness at a gathering of prominent linguists and scholars was a golden opportunity for us. Three representatives of the Ethiopian Deaf Community whose support is very important to us also participated in the networking workshop and contributed to the discussion on our team’s action plan for the next four years. We were delighted that the representatives of the community indorsed our plan and pledged their full support for its success. We would like to seize this opportunity to congratulate our colleagues at Hawassa University for the successful workshop.

Hosting Dr Rolf Halvorsen:

We had the honor of hosting Dr Rolf Halvorsen from Oslo between 25th and 31st May, 2014 at our university. Dr Rolf is one of the two Norwegian partners in the sign language team and his visit was very important to us. We did our best to make good use of his visit and we were rewarded, thanks to his cooperation and zeal. Dr Rolf spent his brief time with us on four important activities. The first was creating awareness on sign linguistics research. He gave an impressive introductory lecture on sign linguistics research to interested staff members of our department and post graduate students. Although attendance was low we were very happy with individuals who attended the lecture which includes two senior lecturers of our department, Dr Moges Yigezu and Dr Binyam Sisay. Being the first we consider it a success and fully satisfied with the outcome. The second was a lecture on sign language research to our final year students who were writing their senior easy on various topics related to Ethiopian sign language. His lecture was timely and added
a great value to the students’ research for which we all owe him a hearty appreciation. The third activity was working with the two PhD candidates in sign linguistics, Pawlos and Andargachew. Although he was not able to deliver the lectures he prepared for them due to unexpected health problem he encountered in the last days of his stay when the lectures were scheduled, he provided the power points and many important reading materials he has brought along, facilitated the opening of a common drop box, discussed their concept papers with them and provided the much needed advice and directions to follow in the future and put the candidates on track for the long journey of a PhD research. The fourth was the discussion on the proposed MA program in sign linguistics. He helped with the drafting of a complete action plan with time table which begins with the drafting of a curriculum and end with the launching of the program. In all his brief stay with us was gratifying and fruitful for which we are grateful to him and to those who facilitated his visit to Ethiopia especially Professor Janne. We can’t wait to his next visit.

**National Ethiopian Sign Language Teachers’ Capacity Building Workshop:**

Organizing a national training workshop for Ethiopian Sign Language teachers was the biggest event. The workshop which is the first of its kind in Ethiopia was a dream that came to pass and very successful. Worried by the increasing language lag in deaf children mainly due to inadequate sign language teaching experience on the part of the teachers, we have been dreaming of organizing such a workshop for a long time but unable to translate the dream to reality. Thanks to this project we gathered 34 Ethiopian sign language teachers, from all parts of the country, in Adama from 9th to 12th June 2014 and gave a four days intensive training on what and how to teach Ethiopian sign language. The hardest part of organizing the workshop was how to select 40 participants approved for us out of over hundreds of sign language teachers all over Ethiopia. Out of the forty selected two invitations failed to reach their distensions due to address error, 4 participants didn’t come for a reason we are not aware yet. The 34 workshop participants came from 5 universities, 6 teachers’ training colleges, 15 primary schools and 8 NGOs across the federation. Almost all of them were teaching Ethiopian sign language without due qualifications. The training included Introduction to sign language linguistics, Deaf Culture, and sign language teaching and evaluation methodologies. The training was given by Pawlos kassu, Andargachew Denke along with a staff
member of the Program Unit Eyasu Hailu. At the end of the training participants were awarded with a certificate of participation. The workshop was a success and we are now trying to find a way on how we could organize more of such trainings to give the opportunity to as many teachers as possible.

All these successes would not have been possible without the cooperation and support of many people which includes Dr Hirut Mariam, Dr Binyam Sisay, Dr Deribe Ado, Professor Janne Bondi Johannessen and many more. We size this opportunity to express our heartfelt gratitude.

Below you will find pictures showing our activities.

Pawlos Kassu & Andargachew Deneke

23rd June, 2014

Rolf lecturing staff and students
Workshop Participants
Pawlos giving training
Awarding certificates
Practicing a sign language teaching methodology