

Barcelona, 30 May 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

I am writing to you as Chair of the COST Action IS1006 “Unravelling the grammars of European sign languages: pathways to full citizenship of deaf signers and to the protection of their linguistic heritage” (http://w3.cost.eu/index.php?id=234&action_number=IS1006) in connection with the bill on Italian Sign Language (LIS) that is being currently discussed in the Italian Parliament.

While as sign language researchers we strongly support the legal recognition of LIS and the protection of the linguistic and civil rights of the Deaf signers, we are very much worried about the fact that a new name has been proposed to refer to it, namely *linguaggio mimico gestuale*. On the one hand, this label is at odds with what we currently know about sign languages in general from a scientific point of view, that is, that they are not simply communication systems based on mime or gesture, but rather full-fledged human languages that display all the defining properties thereof and are produced and perceived in a visual-gestural modality. On the other, it also questions the choice that the Italian Deaf community has long made with respect to the name of their language, in accordance with what has happened under similar circumstances elsewhere in Europe and around the globe. The name through which the language is recognized by users and scientists in publications and research meetings is precise and well motivated:

-*lingua* (not *linguaggio*, which can refer to gestural systems created *ad hoc* for teaching spoken language to deaf children, for instance);

-*dei segni* (the term *sign* points to the linguistic nature of the basic unit corresponding to the word in spoken languages);

-*italiana* (the national domain where it is used, in this case the Italian Republic).

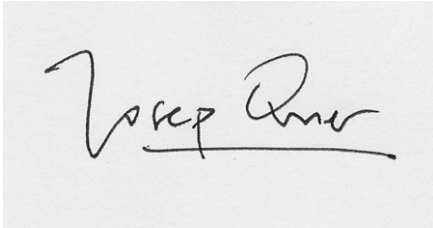
Using *linguaggio mimico gestuale* would be as scientifically misleading as calling spoken Italian *linguaggio vocale*, which could in principle refer to any kind of system, spontaneous or invented, which employs the vocal tract as articulator to convey information, not even circumscribing it to human beings. Such an unnecessary change of name in the legal text would be extremely detrimental to the general goal of reaching equality for sign language and signers, which we believe to be the motivation of the bill under consideration, and it would send an erroneous message to Italian society as a whole.

Within the activities of our European COST Action network on the development of reference grammars for sign languages, LIS is one of the languages in the initial pool of languages in the 10 countries that have signed the Memorandum of Understanding at

this stage. LIS researchers will be actively participating in the Action for the coming 4 years and they are present in the Management Committee of the Action, which is funded by the European Commission and the European Science Foundation. It would be unacceptable for all of us that all of a sudden we should refer to LIS with a name that counters all we know about it.

On these grounds we strongly encourage you to reject the proposal to change the name of Italian Sign Language (LIS) in the bill, as much as we look forward to seeing the bill passed in the Italian Parliament in the immediate future.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink on a light gray background. The signature reads "Josep Quer" in a cursive script. The name "Josep" is written in a larger, more prominent hand, and "Quer" is written in a smaller, more compact hand. A horizontal line is drawn under the name "Quer".

Josep Quer Villanueva

Chair of COST Action IS1006

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