Online and Kicking: Sign Language Activism via Social Media

ICMLXVII Colloquium  Virtual communities a breathing space for minority languages

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Lorraine LEESON
leesonl@tcd.ie
Overview

1. Background – Sign Language Communities
   - Effortful Engaging

2. Sign Languages Online –
   - Activism

3 Examples
   - #YestoISL - ISL Recognition Campaign (2017)
   - #WherestheAccess (2017-pres)
   - “Deaf Community Together for Yes” - Repeal the 8th Amendment Campaign (2018)

4. Summary
1. Background – Sign Language Communities
Sign Language Communities

Sign languages as minority languages

- Not covered by the Charter for Regional or Minority Languages
  BUT

- Recognised as indigenous languages of Europe by the European Parliament (1988, 1998, 2016), the Council of Europe (2018), the United Nations (UNCRPD 2006) and in the growing number of countries that have recognized sign languages officially (constitutionally, legally) (Tupi 2019)

- Sign languages are increasingly visible, in great part, because of social media
Effortful Engaging


• **Key concern of deaf SL users:** effort required to engage in civil society

Grounded Theory of “Effortful Engaging”:

• This emerged from coding data across a number of funded and non-funded projects including Leonardo da Vinci funded projects: Signall III, Medisigns, Justisigns, DESIGNS (Erasmus+), a study on how deaf leaders engage with interpreters (Haug et al. 2017), PROSIGN 1 & 2 (European Centre for Modern Languages) (Danielsson & Leeson 2017).
**Effortful Engaging at a Macro Level**

- **NAVIGATING PHONOCENTRIC SYSTEMS** “I am so over being Deaf. It’s exhausting, especially advocating for our equal rights to have Auslan interpreters provided and funded. It’s exhausting living in an audist and ableist world.” (Sherrie Beaver @isigniwander, 8 May 2019, 06:47)

- **KNOWING (Fund of Information)** (e.g. Dean & Pollard, varia)

- **PERFORMING AUTONOMOUSLY** “Order only the good interpreters” (Haug et al, 2017)

- **NAVIGATING IDENTITIES** *(Construction of identity (ies), Performance of Identity (ies))*
“Citizenship is itself phoncentric…”

- “Citizenship is itself phoncentric…the social contract rests on an assumption that to be speaking and hearing is an essential norm” (Emery 2009: 38)

- Prototypical activism – offline – 1971

- And then came Facebook…. 
2. Sign Languages Online
#YestoISL

Towards Full Citizenship & Equal Access for All

INTERNATIONAL TWEET & TAG CAMPAIGN

Please tweet or tag senators and get them to vote YES in the upcoming vote for Irish Sign Language recognition on 19th October 2016.

Show your hand and vote YES

Legalise Our Irish Sign Language NOW
Please support - tacaigh Le seo le bhur d'toil.
3:45 PM - Oct 6, 2016 - Val-de-Vesle, France

We all say YES for Irish Sign Language!
Storm Ophelia
#WherestheAccess

Aidan 66.4% DEAL WITH IT @ginger_culchie

ISL Interpreter had to post the Ophelia vlog on FB for free. That’s how least deaf aware Ireland is...... 😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞😞�

9:16 AM - 15 Oct 2017

2 Retweets 4 Likes

Aidan 66.4% DEAL WITH IT @ginger_culchie

There are 5000+ ISL users in Ireland, but 80% of them cannot write/read English. Their first language is ISL. #WheresTheAccess

3:39 PM - 15 Oct 2017

1 Retweets 1 Like

Aidan 66.4% DEAL WITH IT @ginger_culchie

They usually write English through ISL syntax & grammar. I think they have a reading age of 8. #WheresTheAccess

3:40 PM - 15 Oct 2017

1 Retweets 1 Like

We experience discrimination & marginalization in all areas. Lack of deaf awareness is widespread in Ireland #WheresTheAccess

3:49 PM - 15 Oct 2017

1 Retweets 1 Like

Aidan 66.4% DEAL WITH IT @ginger_culchie

We pay taxes and license fee too. We should be entitled to the same rights and treatment as hearing people. #wherestheaccess

3:49 PM - 15 Oct 2017

1 Retweets 1 Like

Aidan 66.4% DEAL WITH IT @ginger_culchie

Access to information is literally a matter of life & death. Lest you hearing people forget. //End #wherestheaccess

3:49 PM - 15 Oct 2017

1 Retweets 1 Like
#WherestheAccess

Orla G @greahango  ·  15 Oct 2017
@MetEireann #Ophelia .... Half hour news. No sign of Irish Sign Language Interpreter there with you? U forgot Deaf people. U let us down!

Mark McCaffrey @MarkJMcCaffrey
#WherestheAccess
ISL Access to all National Emergency Bulletin henceforth 'not just Storm Ophelia'. ACCESS means informing and saving lives
4:34 AM - 16 Oct 2017

STORM OPHelia

Storm Ophelia: Poor safety briefing ‘put deaf at risk’

Sean Hogan, the National Emergency Co-ordination Group chairman, during a media briefing on Ophelia. There was anger over the lack of interpreters for the deaf
Gareth Chaney/Collins
Deaf groups say their members haven’t been able to get the Ophelia news they need

The Irish Deaf Society and the Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters have expressed their disappointment at the lack of sign language interpreters present during briefings regarding Storm Ophelia.

BY CIANAN BRENNAN | MONDAY 16 OCT 2017, 5:26 PM | HTTP://JRNL.IE/3649682

TWO PROMINENT BODIES representing the deaf have expressed their “deep disappointment and annoyance” at the failure of the emergency coordination group to alert those they represent to the “imminent dangers of Hurricane Ophelia”.

The Irish Deaf Society and the Council of Irish Sign Language Interpreters directed their ire earlier this afternoon at the National Emergency Coordination Group (NEC) and Met Éireann, saying that “neither organisation has followed the growing international trend of using sign language interpreters when
#YEStoISL

BREAKING: Joyous scenes in #Dail as the Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill passes @IrishDeafSoc @rteneWS
2017 – Irish Sign Language Act passed
Irish Sign Language given official legal recognition

New Act will allow use of the language in courts and for State services for 50,000 people

President Michael D. Higgins today signed the Irish Sign Language Bill 2016 into law: president.ie/en/media-libra… ...
#IrishSignLanguage

President Michael D Higgins who on Sunday signed new legislation conferring legal recognition on Irish Sign Language. Photograph: PA
President of Ireland has just signed into law Civil Rights for the Deaf Community. 'The Irish Sign Language Act' becomes the law of the land on Christmas Eve, best kind of Christmas present for my friends in the Deaf Community #IrishSignLanguage #YestoISL

President signs Irish Sign Language Bill 2016 into law

Having considered the Irish Sign Language Bill 2016, the President has signed the Bill and it has accordingly become law.

Tar éis dó a mhachnámh a dhéanamh ar An Bille um Theanga Chomhartháíochta na hÉireann, 2016 tá an tUachtarán tar éis a lámh a chur leis agus dá réir sin tá é ina dhlí.

10:34 AM - 24 Dec 2017
Post ISL Act
Post ISL Recognition: Emma & the Beast from the East

Statement from the National Emergency Coordination Group on Severe Weather

Storm Emma update Tuesday 6th March 2018
Deaf Community Together for Yes (Repeal the 8th Campaign)
Deaf Community Together for Yes

and discuss it in our own languages.
As the referendum is looming close, we, from the Deaf Community Together for Yes team, would like to say a few things to show our appreciation for everybody involved in this campaign.

And lastly, please vote yes!

#repealthethe8th #togetherforyes #deaftogetherforyes
Leo doing ISL!

It's been 10 days since the referendum and we've been reflecting a lot on the work we have done over the past few months. Originally, this page was set up to educate and inform the Deaf Community about the impact of the 8th Amendment, yet we found ourselves unintentionally educating the hearing community about Irish Sign Language and the issues of how the 8th Amendment affected Deaf women in Ireland!

On our Facebook page alone, we had over 1,300 followers, over HALF A MILLION unique post engagements and people spent over 8,200 hours viewing our videos!

We also took over the Know Your Repealers Twitter account for one day on the 15th May which has over 3.8k followers. We tweeted about how the 8th Amendment impacts on the Deaf Community which received a lot of retweets and interaction.
Deaf Community Together for Yes

@deaftogetherforyes

Home
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Deaf Community Together for Yes

24 September 2018

Information in Irish Sign Language about the March for Choice

#ARCMarch18 #deaftogetherforyes #repealedthe8th

962 Views

Abortion Rights Campaign

24 September 2018

This year, as usual, we will have an ISL interpreter for our speeches at the end of the march.

At the Abortion Rights Campaign, we know that ensuring access car...

See more
4. From Online to Offline: Getting Political in the Mainstream
Summary/Discussion

- Online activism in the Irish Deaf community demonstrates leveraging of multimodal linguistic repertories (as per Kusters et al 2017); it started as community-led work towards ISL recognition.

- Some fora are more ISL-led, community facing (Facebook) while others are more outward facing, and in English (Twitter).

- Twitter has facilitated connectivity with other activists working from linguistic, political or issue-specific work. It has also facilitated increased mainstream media attention.

- Success with the ISL campaign has bred subsequent successes, and supported young leaders in their drive to engage on subjects that are not ‘Deaf community specific”, e.g. “Deaf Community for Yes”

- Subsequent to this, we see deaf people in Ireland engaging in mainstream politics for the first time.
Towards less Effortful Engaging

• **Success arises where Deaf communities have AUTONOMY to guide processes that impact on them.**
  
  • This requires community members who are well informed [KNOWING] around systemic practices [SYSTEMS] and who can skillfully navigate these [NAVIGATING].
  
  • This navigation requires NAVIGATING IDENTITIES - working to construct / deconstruct how deaf people are perceived – within the Deaf community/ies, and in hearing society.

• **The process is still effortful, requiring significant voluntary leadership, but it is WORTH the effort [Community response, legislative outcomes].**

• ....And in our the visibility of deaf candidates for election.
Thank you!