



Language Policy Concerning Sign Languages

Case study: RSL

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Linguistic theory and language description, HSE



Outline

1. Sign language basics
2. Deaf communities
3. Sign language policy
4. Official status of RSL: formal view
5. Case study on RSL
6. Discussion

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What is a Sign Language?

Naturally emerged system of communication used in Deaf communities of different countries

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How many SLs are there?

144 sign languages vs. 7,111 spoken languages (Ethnologue 2019)

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SL are substitute for speech?

Signs express meaning that not always corresponds to the meaning of spoken words. Phonology, morphology, lexics, and syntax differ from a contact spoken language.

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Are SLs old?

Nobody knows for sure, but it's often said that SLs are relatively young. The earliest systematic description of a sign language occurs in the late 18th century (de l'Épée)

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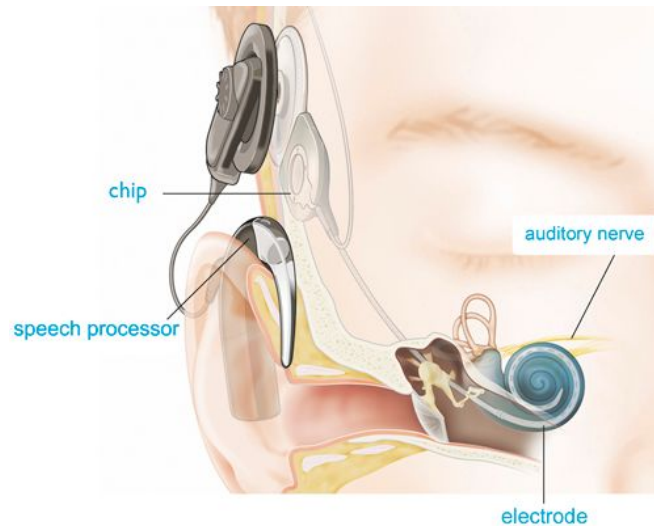
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Discussion

Deafness

is a “static” medical condition.

Disability model that denies the distinctive culturo-linguistic phenomenon of SLP identity.



Deafhood

represents the struggle that Deaf people have to uphold themselves in a larger community of hearing people (Ladd, 2003; Lewis, 2007; Morgan, 2014).

Social complexity, own beliefs, norms, values (Ladd, 2003), activities, shared oppression, diversity (Lane, Hoffmeister & Bahan, 1996), history, and customs.

NB! Definitions are an important political tool

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General info

The earliest example of “signing communities”: in Martha’s Vineyard, the United States (Groce, 1985)

Deaf people form a small percentage of the population: less than 1 in 1,000 (Wall, Ladd 2010)

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The Deaf community concepts

Baker & Cokely (1980): attitudinal deafness

Johnson (1994): communities of communication, communities of ethnic identity, communities of solidarity

Bahan & Nash (1996): suppressing community, assimilating community

Lane et al. (1996): differentiating community

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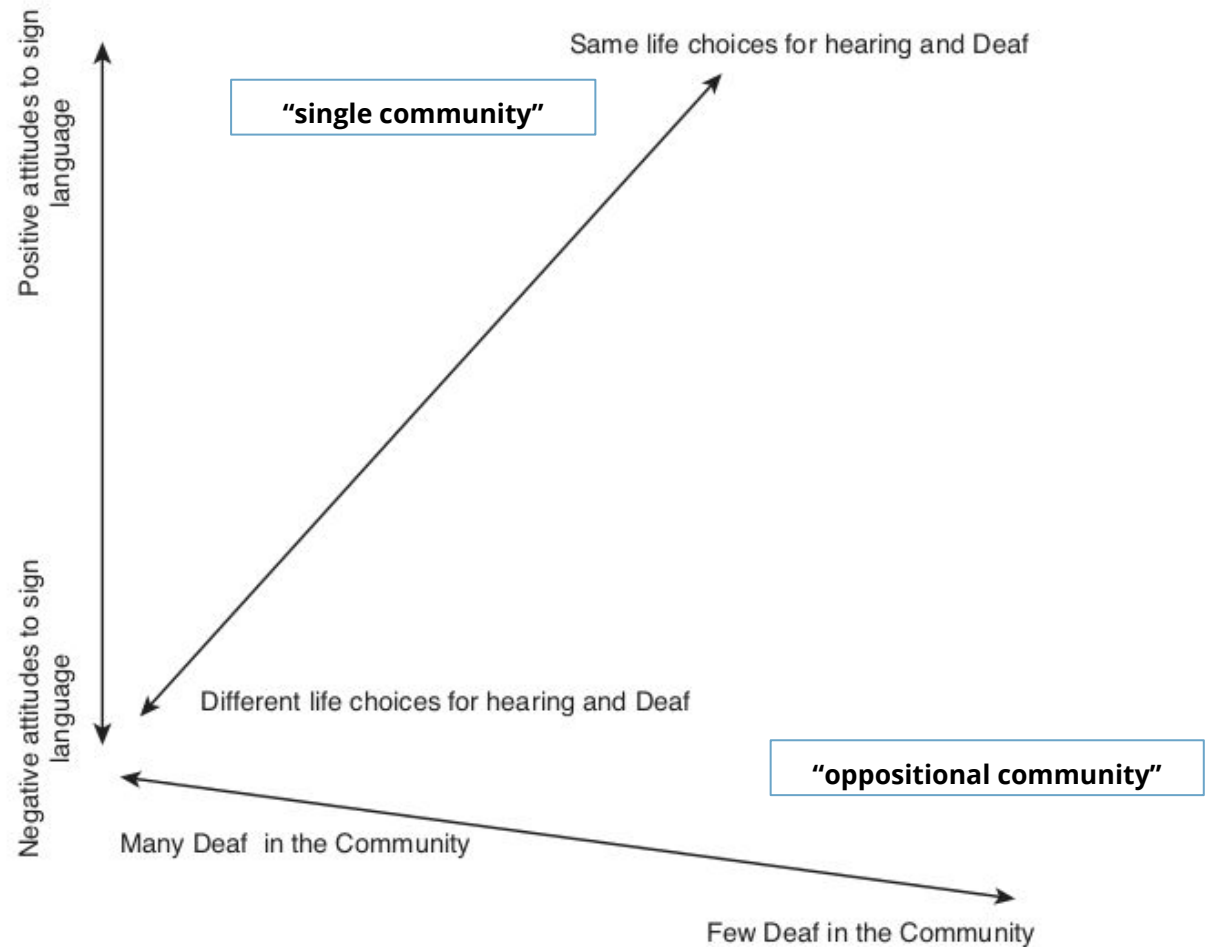
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Transmission (Brentari 2010)

Sign languages are not typically transmitted in the home.

Deaf residential *schools* and Deaf *clubs* form the cornerstones of the Deaf community (Woll, Ladd 2010). Deaf children are *enculturated* into a Deaf culture through alternative means (Stander & Mcilroy 2017).

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Internal factors:

Size

Self-awareness

Longevity

Educational intervention

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Transmission (Brentari 2010)

External factors:

Economic situation

Mono- vs. multicultural environments

Educational intervention

Governmental intervention

Medical intervention

Availability of interpreters

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SL deprivation

“Oralist century”: the 1880 Milan Conference: SLs were prohibited at schools for Deaf all over the world (Fisher & Lane 1993)

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Russian educational system was highly influenced by French and German approaches (auditory-verbal therapy)

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The first linguistic studies: the middle of the XX century:

W. Stoke “The Structure of Sign Language”, 1960 initiated the study of other SLs, which partly contributed to the recognition of their official status

Deaf started to fight for the recognition of SLs, bilingual status of the Deaf community

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Language policies for signing communities

Currently, about **37 countries** have recognized their SLs, mainly in EU

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Language policies for signing communities

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Why so few?

stigma of disability

sign language users are often not perceived as a linguistic and cultural minority

strips Deaf of their linguistic and cultural identity

adopting the majority spoken language

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Categories of the Most Common Types of Explicit Legal SL Recognition (De, Meulder M., 2019)

1. Constitutional recognition
2. Recognition by means of general language legislation
3. Recognition by means of a sign language law or act
4. Recognition by means of a sign language law or act, including other means of communication
5. Recognition by means of legislation on the functioning of the national language council

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Constitutional Recognition

11 countries, 8 in sections of *the constitution on language and/or culture*:

Uganda (1995), Finland (1995), South Africa (1996), Austria (2005), New Zealand (2006), Kenya (2010), Zimbabwe (2010), and Hungary (2011).

1 state in sections of the constitution *on education*: Portugal (1997)

2 states *on the rights of persons with disabilities*: Venezuela (1999), Ecuador (2008)

The most prestigious form, but still can be purely symbolic

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Recognition by Means of General Language Legislation

4 countries:

Latvia (1999, Official Language Law),

Estonia (2007, Language Act),

Sweden (2009, Language Act),

Iceland (2011, Act on the Status of the Icelandic Language and Icelandic Sign Language) - the most comprehensive:

“The state and local governments have a responsibility to preserve ISL, develop it, and promote its use.”

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Recognition by Means of a Sign Language Law or Act

Slovakia (1995, Law on the Sign Language of the Deaf),

Uruguay (2001, Law no. 17.378),

Brazil (2002, Federal Law 10.436 [Libras Law]),

Slovenia (2002, Law on the Use of Slovenian Sign Language),

Belgium, Wallonia (2003, Decree on the Recognition of Sign Language),

Cyprus (2006, Act on the Recognition of Cyprus Sign Language 66[I]),

Belgium, Flanders (2006, Decree on the Recognition of the Flemish Sign Language), etc.

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Recognition by Means of a Sign Language Law or Act, including Other Means of Communication

NB! this inclusion is a result of the watering down of legislative proposals

Colombia (Law 324 of 1996, according to which standards are created for the Deaf population),

the Czech Republic (2008, Law 384/2008 on the communication systems of deaf and deaf-blind people),

Spain (2007, Law 27/2007): *Spanish sign languages are recognized and the means of support for oral communication*

Recognition by Means of Legislation on the Functioning of the National Language Council

Norway (2009) and Denmark (2014)

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Categories of Implicit (Legal) Recognition

1. Countries that have mentioned their sign language only *in disability legislation*:

Lithuania (1991, Law of Social Integration of Disabled People), Germany (2002, Dis-ability Equality Law), Mexico (2005, General Law on Persons with Disabilities), Chile (2010, Law 20422, which establishes rules on equal opportunities and social inclusion of people with disabilities), Japan (2011, Revised Basic Law for Persons with Disabilities), and **Russia** (2012, Law on the social protection of people with disabilities in the Russian Federation).

+ only educational legislation

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Categories of Implicit (Legal) Recognition

2. Countries that have granted recognition by *a declaration or government decision* (no explicit legal recognition):

Australia (1991, National Language Policy),

Thailand (1992, Government Resolution),

UK (2003, Statement by the Department of Work and Pensions),

Wales (2004), Northern Ireland (2004, Statement by the Secretary of State),

Scotland (2011, Statement by the Scottish Minister of Public Health)

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Categories of Implicit (Legal) Recognition

3. SLs are not yet recognized at the federal level but are mentioned in *some state or provincial legislation*:

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Categories of Implicit (Legal) Recognition

3. SLs are not yet recognized at the federal level but are mentioned in *some state or provincial legislation*:

Several Canadian provinces have legislatively recognized ASL or LSQ as *a language of instruction*.

In the United States, 40 states have recognized ASL as a language, and a number have recognized it as *a (foreign) language for educational purposes*.

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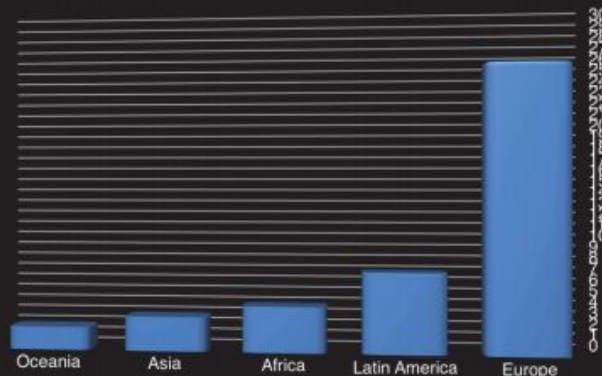
the recognition of ASL in the United States has largely affected **hearing more than deaf people**

The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages

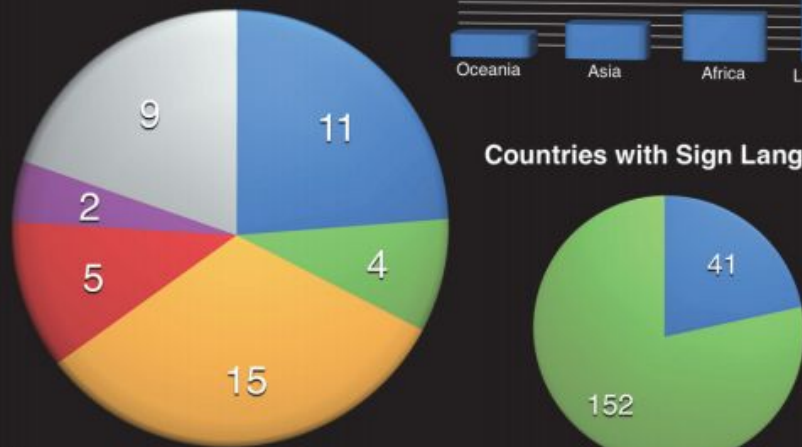
Co-created by Dr. Joseph Murray and Kaj Kraus with reference to De Meulder, M. (2015). The Legal Recognition of Sign Languages. *Sign Language Studies* 15(4): 498-506.

1995 Uganda	2006 Cyprus	2011 Japan
1995 Finland	2006 Belgium (Flanders)	2012 Russia
1995 Slovakia	2007 Estonia	2014 Denmark
1995 Lithuania	2007 Spain	2015 Finland
1996 South Africa	2008 Ecuador	2015 Serbia
1996 Colombia	2008 Czech Republic	2015 South Korea
1997 Portugal	2009 Sweden	2015 Scotland (United Kingdom)
1999 Venezuela	2009 Bosnia and Herzegovina	2015 Papua New Guinea
1999 Latvia	2009 Macedonia	2016 Malta
2001 Uruguay	2009 Hungary	
2002 Brazil	2009 Norway	
2002 Slovenia	2010 Kenya	
2002 Romania	2010 Zimbabwe	
2002 Germany	2010 Catalonia (Spain)	
2003 Belgium (Wallonia)	2010 Chile	
2005 Austria	2011 Hungary	
2005 Turkey	2011 Iceland	
2005 Mexico	2011 Poland	
2006 New Zealand		

Sign Language Recognition by Continent



Countries with Sign Language Legislation



For the purpose of this infographic, we are defining countries as Member States of the United Nations, of which there are 193.

Types of Legal Recognition

- Constitutional Recognition
- General Language Legislation
- Sign Language Law or Act
- Sign Language Law or Act and Other Means of Communication
- National Language Council Recognition
- Disability Legislation

- Legislation Passed
- No Legislation Passed

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Amendments on the Federal Law on the social protection of people with disabilities in the Russian Federation, 2012:

“RSL is a language of communication for hearing and/or speech impaired, including the spheres where spoken state language of Russian Federation is used”

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The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), ratified by Russia in early 2012

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Sociolinguistic info available on RSL

Internal factors

Size: 120.5 thousands – 2 millions vs. 143 millions of hearing people

Self-awareness: Deaf vs. deaf, Глухой vs. глухой, Deaf world vs. Deaf community

Longevity: recent years (?), developing of positive Deaf identity

Educational intervention: inclusion, RSL deprivation, self-education

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External factors

Official status since 2012, interpreters are available

Still no official use in schools for Deaf and hard-of-hearing



Further reading

Sign Language Studies Vol. 12, No. 4, Summer 2012. Special Issue: Language Planning and Policies for Sign Languages. Gallaudet University Press <https://www.istor.org/stable/e26190873>

Sign Language Studies, Vol. 15, No. 4, Summer 2015. Special Issue: Language Planning and Sign Language Rights. Gallaudet University Press <https://www.istor.org/stable/e26190992>

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Questions to discuss

1. How could you evaluate sociolinguistic situation concerning RSL in Moscow/Russia?
2. What governmental institutions deal with issues concerning RSL in education?
3. Do Russian Deaf communities need inclusion in schools?
4. Is it enough to endorse one law about official status of RSL?
5. What research questions you could list on the issue under consideration?