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Measuring endangerment and the treatment of British Sign Language

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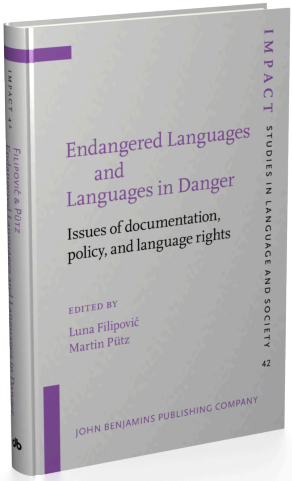

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Sign languages are well researched autochthonous, bio-culturally diverse, visio-spatial languages, both linguistically and neurologically. They confer identity and form new minorities within complex social systems. The continuity of their ethnolinguistic heritages are endangered as replacement levels fall due to the fact that sign languages are not traditionally considered to be mother tongue languages, since most deaf children are born to hearing parents who do not sign, although theoretically they are. A longstanding international discourse since 1880 when sign language was banned in education was due to the supposed effect sign languages have on spoken language acquisition for deaf children.

This ethos continues to modern day, with few parents of deaf children being informed about sign language or offered instruction, or it being used as a teaching medium for their child. This signifies the linguistic imperialism that stems from ignorance of modern research, and surdism (in which deaf people are normalised to be as hearing as possible). All the countries which have implemented sign language legislation fall short of revitalisation since there is no promotion to all parents of deaf children. This study demonstrates that the resulting extremely low number of new learners means British Sign Language (BSL) can be categorised as a severely endangered language. This paper applies spoken language planning theory and methodology to British Sign Language, taking into account the discrete political environments in the UK and history of spoken language revival. It is a rationale view of BSL, and other sign languages, as requiring immediate intervention, against the backdrop of English (and spoken language generally) being the language of oppression.

Keywords: British Sign Language, deaf, language planning, language policy, sign language/s

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1. Introduction

The topic of this contribution is the measurement of the severity of intergenerational dislocation for British Sign Language (BSL) using Fishman's seminal Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scales; his Severity of Dislocation Scales theories; expansion of, and alternatives to his theory. The treatment of disruption is addressed by the application of Fishman's Reversing Language Shift methodology to BSL. Related factors include:

- Power discourse – normalisation or surdism, which is a longstanding international discourse about the supposedly negative effect sign languages have on spoken language acquisition for deaf children.
- Sign language validity and lack of status.
- Linguistic Human Rights and mother tongue definition, introducing Skutnabb-Kangas' theories.

1.1 Brief background of sign language

Langue de Signe Française was introduced in education as a French Deaf school opened in 1760, by hearing people, and more schools were established throughout Europe and the United States which developed their own sign languages, including BSL. They were sign language medium schools, until the "German method" or "oralism" began in the mid-1800s and trialled a new approach to teach deaf children to speak and to understand spoken language. The 2nd International Congress of Teachers of the Deaf-Mutes, established by the pro-oralist Pereire Society, was held in Milan in 1880. Consequently sign languages were banned in education and deaf teachers were forced to resign, resulting in linguistic genocide, which was accompanied by eugenics and a major normalisation programme.

Linguistic genocide is "prohibiting the use of the language of the group in daily intercourse or in schools, or the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group". This was how linguistic genocide was defined in Article III(1) of the final draft of what became The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (E 794, 1948) of the United Nations. The definition articles II(e) and II(b) in the present convention about what is genocide also fit indigenous and minority education. They define genocide as follows:

> Article II(e), "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group"; and
> Article II(b), "causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group".

If an indigenous or minority child does not get the main part of her basic education through the medium of her own language and is forced to be in a submersion programme, with a subtractive learning environment, and if this continues for several generations, minorities are forcibly assimilated. Deaf children were physically and emotionally abused, and still are in educational establishments.

William Stokoe, an American hearing linguist, published the first paper in which the basis for the linguistic analysis of American Sign Language, and other sign languages was outlined (1960). A plethora of sociolinguist and corpus research since, led to many sign languages being legally and officially recognised, including BSL in 2003. Sign languages are accepted as biologically-natural, visio-spatial, autochthonous languages. Research has found that brain processing tissue which was previously labelled *auditory tissue*, can be recruited for visual processing (Campbell et al. 200).

The evidence is that sign languages generally have managed to survive in Deaf schools due to deaf children of Deaf parents transmitting sign language to those deaf children whose parents are hearing. From approximately one hundred Deaf schools in the UK only seventeen remain, two of which are oral. The incremental advent of mainstream education began in the UK from 1951 when free hearing aids were introduced to deaf children, and when deaf children were segregated into two broad categories: (1) deaf, meaning profoundly deaf children who required assistance in learning spoken language; (2) hard of hearing children – thought to be able to hear spoken language with hearing aids. Cochlear implantation for most profoundly deaf children in the western world became common in the 1990s, and whilst hearing aids have improved, all aids have limitations (Sarant & Garrard 2014). In July 2010, the 21st International Conference on Education of the Deaf (which is the modern equivalent of the International Congress of Teachers of Deaf-Mutes), repealed the decision made in Milan 130 years earlier: "rejecting the resolutions from 1880 that banned the use of Sign Language in education for deaf children and promoted the exclusive use of speech and residual hearing called Oralism". The Conference apologised for the detriment affecting many generations of deaf people, but to date has not influenced change in deaf education.

The monolingual spoken language approach for deaf or hard of hearing children is based on the erroneous belief that early exposure to two languages would result in children growing up with poor language skills, but bilingual research has since disproved this theory. For deaf children, findings and experience from Sweden indicate, when educated bilingually, they academically perform very well, (Svartholm 2006) along with many other correlated research findings. It is obviously important that deaf children learn spoken language in all its forms as far as each individual's residual hearing permits, and develop in parallel with sign language to manifest as bilingualism. The philosophy of "informed choice" for

parents as to which language(s) their deaf child should acquire is loosely based, in the UK, on parents' legal right to choice of educational placement. There is no law in statute that maintains that parents should choose their child's language, as is assumed that every child will learn their mother tongue.

Hearing loss is the most common congenital condition, affecting 1 to 3 per 1,000 live births in the USA (Finitzo et al. 1998; Van Naarden et al. 1999). This finding is now applied in the UK. When left undetected, hearing loss of any degree, including mild bilateral (in both ears) and unilateral (in one ear) has been shown to adversely affect speech, language, and academic and psychosocial development (Schein 1996; Bess et al. 1998; Bess & Tharpe, 1986, 1988; Blair et al. 1985; Bovo et al. 1988; Brookhouser et al. 1991; Culbetson & Gilbert 1986; Davis et al. 2000, 1986; Klee & Davis-Dansky 1986; Lieu 2004; Moeller 2000; Oyler & Gross 2000; Yoshinaga-Itano et al. 1998; Richardson et al. 2010; Mason 1997; Shirin et al. 2011; Most et al. 2011). Vostanis et al. (1997) state that deaf children in mainstream education have less interaction with hearing peers, are more often rejected or neglected than their hearing peers, have a sense of loneliness, and require coping strategies. In two experiments, salivary cortisol levels and a self-rating measure were used to measure fatigue due to hard of hearing children expending more effort in listening than hearing children (Bourland et al. 1994). A high level of psychiatric disorder was also found amongst deaf children in mainstream education (61% – Hindley et al. 1994), impacting on the formation of self-image and development of psychosocial skills.

The definition of mild bilateral and unilateral hearing loss varies considerably from country to country, and even from practice to practice. The findings from DEX's literary reviews and research studies are that the majority of deaf children form a hidden group of institutionally neglected children whose needs are not being addressed appropriately. This is because the vast majority has no deaf peer group in local mainstream schools and often has minimal or no support. Not being able to hear what is being said in and outside the classroom, and the resulting fear and fatigue, can domino-effect in behaviour problems, limited concentration, feelings of inadequacy and lack of control over one's environment, impacting on self-esteem, confidence and mental health.

"Always calculate" (DEX 2004) is a major factor, especially for spoken language monolingual deaf children, encapsulating the daily struggle deaf children face in order to understand via lipreading and listening via technical aids. It is akin to doing a mental crossword without a pen or paper, having to work out what is being said in order to calculate and guess sounds and/or lip patterns that are unclear or missing. Deaf children are unable to hear all speech sounds with technical aids in group situations despite spending most of their days in groups. Classroom hearing loop systems eliminate some of the background "cocktail

party" effect as hearing aids are not fully able to help with noise discrimination, yet they only enable communication between the teacher and deaf pupil, not the deaf child's hearing peers. During the Gallaudet University's National Parent Project, 2003, 404 parents of hard of hearing children reported that their children's hearing loss was identified later than profoundly deaf children, even when family members are observant and medical care is excellent. They are not as well served as parents of deaf children, much less likely to have received counselling or information about deafness or sign language instruction, legal rights, behavioral development, school choices. Paradoxically, the positive coping skills developed by hard of hearing children sometimes contribute to their difficulties, typically communicating well in one-to-one interactions, and their good lipreading skills tend to mask the extent of their hearing loss, lulling parents and teachers into believing that they understood more than they did. Deaf children therefore, are placed in mainstream schools with no deaf peer support because uninformed parents are often denied the opportunity of their deaf child learning sign language (Meadow-Orlans et al. 2003).

The National Council for Special Education in Ireland's report (Marschark & Spencer 2009) and the report to the Finnish Government (Office of the Ombudsman for Children, Finland 2012), both outline that many profoundly deaf children utilise Communication Support Workers (CSWs), as well as different hearing devices. Children with implants are also increasingly being placed without deaf peers in their mainstream local schools. Whilst there are gaps in educational achievement compared to hearing children, DEX considers that for profoundly deaf children in a resourced mainstream school with other deaf children the ideal of social integration is somewhat more positive than for children with lesser degrees of hearing loss (DEX's Best Value Review 2004). This BVR was assessed by Boyle et al. (2007), eminent auditors of public services, as good practice, it being a deaf-led audit. Resourced classes include both deaf and hearing children who are co-taught by a general education and a teacher of deaf, and are usually supported by a CSW. Research has identified that resourced schools provide the opportunity for contact between deaf children and their hearing peers in an environment where they are not the only deaf child so they are less likely to feel lonely or isolated and do not have a lower self-esteem. Xie et al. (2014), in their literary review's conclusions reinforce co-enrollment and social skills training programs to be effective interventions for deaf children's social interaction.

1.2 Sign languages as mother tongue languages

Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2003, 2000, 1995) redefines the concept of mother tongue, depending on four criteria:

- Origin – the language learnt first
- Identification (internal and external) – the language one identifies with or is identified by others as a native user
- Competence – the language one knows best
- Function – the language one uses most.

Skutnabb-Kangas states that sign languages are the mother tongue of deaf people, "Deaf people who grow up in hearing families can claim a sign language as their mother tongue … especially with regards to internal identification and function" (2000). She also claimed it was possible to identify with a language one does not know, or have a mother tongue without competence. Skutnabb-Kangas' theory of Linguistic Human Rights, she states, apply to sign languages (2003, 2008) just as much as to spoken languages.

Parents of deaf children in the UK (and in many other western countries) are not informed of this definition of mother tongue, and that sign languages form a complex vehicle on which deaf children's identity and culture is nurtured and shaped. This study factors in Skutnabb-Kangas' research that sign languages are the mother tongue into Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scales, (GIDS) which is based on the traditional view of mother tongue transmission.

1.3 Applying Fishman's graded intergenerational disruption scale, (GIDS) 1991 to BSL

"The desired/discrepancy number / proportion of X-ish users within a diverse language community" is a factor to consider when measuring the health and status of a language (Mulligan 2007). It is difficult to estimate the total number of deaf BSL users since there are no reliable statistics. Turner (2009) quotes Johnston's research in Australia (2004) which found one deaf Australian Sign Language user in every 3,000 Australians. The extrapolated figure for deaf BSL users in the UK could be circa 21,000. The Office for National Statistics' census found 15,000 BSL users in England and Wales but the Deaf community considers this an underestimation. There is also an unknown figure of hearing BSL users i.e. family and professionals working with deaf people Turner (2009) terms the *Sign language community*. Whilst it is important to include all language users in measurements, it is also crucial to hold in mind that deaf people are central to sign languages, for without deaf users, sign languages have no meaning to hearing people.

Few in the community may have any sense of the impending danger outlined by Lewis (2009) and EGIDS Level 6(b). There is a common denial of rapid declines in numbers of X-ish users amongst X-ish language communities (Kaplan & Baldauf 1997; Gruffudd 2000; Fishman 2001; Nelde 2002). There appears to be a

similar evidence of denial and defensiveness of the level of severity of disruption to BSL within its language community, anxious to overstate numbers to ensure access to services.

GIDS Stage 7: Where the minority language is used by an older and not younger generation

Despite Skutnabb-Kangas' positive definition of sign languages being mother tongue languages, there is no intergenerational transmission unless parents are Deaf BSL users too. The most telling point for hearing parents of deaf children is the "perception of language usefulness" (Strubell 2001) for social advancement and the labour market (Colomer 1996). He said that young couples wanting to start a family, in the case of spoken languages, have two main factors to bear in mind: language loyalty and usefulness (also Euromosaic report in Nelde et al. 1996). For hearing parents of deaf children sign language having importance for their deaf child and for the family is paramount. It is not an understatement to say that the perceived value of BSL is low as a means to employment, and the opportunities for many deaf entrants to the wider labour market are limited. Many bilinguals are working within the Deaf community, a choice that monolingual deaf people in English do not have.

GIDS Stage 6: Minority language is passed on from generation to generation and used in the community. Need to multiply the language in the younger generation is important to all threatened or dying languages

Lewis and Simons (EGIDS 2009) also ask Q#3: "Are all parents transmitting the language to their children?" If the answer is "*No*" this means that the "Intergenerational transmission of L1 is being disrupted. This response would "characterize incipient or more advanced language shift".

Although difficult to judge the extent of language shift for BSL and how imminent the threat is, there is a clear downward trend. It seems that there were 75 Deaf schools in the UK in 1982, and this had declined to 23 in 2010, reported by the Consortium of Research in Deaf Education, (CRIDE, 2011) although several more have closed since then. In the schools that remain, many have seen a decline in pupil numbers from the largest roll of 400 down to 30–50 now. Many Deaf schools now have a predominant number of deaf children with complex needs. Schools for the deaf had a major significance until the 1970s as the cornerstone of the Deaf community as BSL could be learned overtly due to the banning of BSL in education (Gregory, British Association of Teachers of Deaf website).

The number of deaf children reported by the survey conducted by CRIDE, 2014 is at least 48,125. This survey used the Freedom of Information Act 2000 so received a 98% response rate from Local Authorities and independent Deaf schools. Currently 16% have a unilateral hearing loss whilst the remainder are bilaterally deaf. 30% of deaf children have a mild loss, 31% have moderate, 11% have severe and 12% are profoundly deaf (CRIDE 2012). CRIDE, 2014, states that in England 9% of deaf children of preschool and school age, "use sign language in some form, either on its own or alongside another language". The CRIDE surveys undertaken annually since 2012 would extrapolate a figure of 3,500 deaf children using BSL in the UK.

Approximately 95% of deaf children are born to hearing parents who do not usually know sign languages (Mitchell & Karkchmer 2002) compounded by the stress of having a deaf child (Calderon & Greenburg 1997, 2000; Moeller 2000). Only 5% of deaf children are able to learn BSL naturally from their Deaf parents, assuming that all their parents sign. The teaching of BSL to parents even where provided is only usually of 6 weeks' duration and parents wanting to learn more have to pay to attend local adult education classes.

Fishman's GIDS Stage 6, therefore, demonstrates the distressing lack of the integral stage for BSL transmission because there has never been opportunity for BSL to be a natural mother tongue, except for the tiny minority of Deaf parents who have deaf children. This is where the term "inter-professional transmission" instead of intergenerational transmission and Governments' adoption of a "language in loco parentis" role could be brought into play as a means of describing how to apply Fishman's GIDS Stage 6 to sign languages, vital as this stage is to all language maintenance.

Language planners must address how to enable parents to quickly accept their deaf child's need for a mother tongue alongside English as being integral to BSL's maintenance. As the Deaf group of native users decreases over decades, the demand for other BSL professionals is likely to dwindle and die out, i.e. interpreters.

GIDS Stage 5: Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education

This level suggests the need to support literacy movements in the minority language, particularly where there is no government support. On-line or video signing is the "written" version of spoken languages. Within the education system BSL currently has no formal system to reproduce itself in the same way as literacy acquisition in spoken languages.

GIDS Stage 4(a): Schools in lieu of compulsory education and substantially under Xish curricular and staffing control

Almost all schools attended by deaf children are managed by hearing people most of whom do not sign either within the state system or in independently run Deaf schools, (the requirement by the Department for Education for teachers of deaf is Level 1 in BSL, equivalent to conversational level). The amount of time studying the language and the low quality of communication support, and the few deaf peers they have in school, is often resulting in deaf children leaving school with a much lower level of fluency in BSL than hearing adults who have learnt to sign to interpreting level (Turner 2009). Without binding educational linguistic human rights, especially a right to mainly mother tongue-medium education in state schools, with good teaching of a dominant language as a second language, given by competent bilingual teachers, most indigenous peoples and minorities have to accept subtractive education through the medium of a dominant/majority language. Subtractive teaching subtracts from the child's linguistic repertoire (Nicholaisen et al. 2005).

GIDS Stage 4(b): State or public schools for Xish children, providing some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control

Whilst there are fifteen BSL-using Deaf schools, all are not BSL-medium since many use a combination of English and BSL simultaneously (a sign system) and this "total communication" is widely used through resourced mainstream schools. Some Deaf schools are co-located with mainstream schools, particularly at secondary level. For all deaf children exposed to BSL, English is taught as a subject and used for all written instruction and examinations in other subjects (except in Scotland where pupils can choose to take their exams in BSL, receiving questions in BSL and signing their responses to video camera). Deaf Instructors or BSL Tutors in schools are Deaf adult BSL users, many of whom are not qualified to teach children, so the role is low paid and often of low status. BSL Tutors can qualify for adult teaching via vocational training routes.

GIDS Stage 3: The local/regional (i.e. non-neighbourhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and Ymen

This stage relates to the use of BSL in the work sphere outside the Deaf community, involving interaction between Deaf individuals and hearing spoken language communities. Unless BSL users work with other BSL users there is no BSL usage amongst the working population due to there being widespread ignorance about this indigenous language. A high level of interest was raised amongst hearing

people in learning BSL as a leisure activity at adult learning centres when the UK government subsidised course fees, which in some cases encouraged learners to become BSL interpreters and interest decreased when centres started charging in full. BSL is used in businesses established by Deaf entrepreneurs, such as BSL teaching and Deaf Equality training companies, or where they manage interpreting agencies, and in education with signing deaf children. In the workplace where BSL is not used, Deaf people are entitled to government Access to Work funding which purchases the services of BSL/English interpreters or CSWs. This funding can be dependent on employers' ability to financially contribute, and because the scheme is poorly promoted, many Deaf people do not receive this support. This is the stage of greatest concern to deaf adult BSL users, in order to access non-BSL work environments and services. The establishment of a fluent workforce must be an integral part of a BSL language plan.

2. Local/regional mass media and governmental spheres

Public and private services are goods and services targeted by the UK's Equality Act 2010 in order to enable access for deaf and disabled people. The Act, however, is not making sufficient impact, for whilst there is best practice, many public and private organisations do not comply, largely due to BSL being undervalued and unpromoted. The thrust of this legislation for disabled people (2) (20) is the "duty to make reasonable adjustments", which can prevent access if the provider deems it unreasonable to offer this. The Deaf community wants sign languages to be taken out of the disability arena and for them to be treated in the same way as minority spoken languages, but it cannot make this leap as long as the overriding view is of them being disabled. So, whilst calling for legislation to strengthen services in and via BSL, the Deaf community's call for BSL's legal recognition naturally focuses on the increase and quality of interpreters and wider range of access (i.e. Strubell's Catherine Wheel 1999 – "more demand for goods and services in the language" leading to "more supply and consumption").

2.1 Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels

This is thought to be the natural level on which to focus language planning attention, but this agenda for the Deaf community, as with other minority language revitalisers, is virtually impossible. It is true that, within the Deaf community, as Fishman (2001: 5) posits: "RLS is an activity of minorities, frequently powerless,

unpopular with outsiders and querulous amongst themselves". The UK legal system has, over time, recognised its duty to provide BSL interpreters. Lawyers often in court do not have the financial resources to pay for interpreters, deaf people are not permitted on jury service and to our knowledge there have been no legal challenges to date from deaf people to ensure their linguistic and human rights.

In further and higher education in the UK CSWs are usually not fully qualified and registered interpreters. There is government funding available to deaf students for this service but is often insufficient to cover costs. In mass media translation to BSL is hardly conceived of, with isolated pockets of Deaf-led companies translating public service information, but few filmed parliamentary debates are translated online. There are no deaf BSL using Ministers of Parliament, several deaf people have become local councillors but with no funding for interpretation at constituency surgeries, nor any funding for access to local party political activities.

2.2 Applying other language planning research to BSL

Other language planning theories and guidelines incorporated in this study are the Language Vitality and Endangerment Methodological Guidelines (LVE) (UNESCO 2003); Strubell's Catherine Wheel, 1999; Lewis and Simon's Expanded GIDS (2010), and spoken language "success stories". UNESCO's LVE Framework (2009) states as one of the degrees of endangerment:

> Severely endangered – the language is spoken by grandparents **and older generations** [my emphasis]; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves.

If circa 3,000 deaf children are using BSL in the UK, with likelihood of a decreasing population of deaf children and fewer being exposed to BSL in the near future, it can be stated from Fishman's and LVE's criteria that BSL is severely endangered.

3. Reversing language shift and BSL

3.1 Consideration of reversing language shift and its relevance to sign languages

Having measured BSL against Fishman's Severity of Dislocation Scale and LVS, this study has established the importance of using these measurements and that, according to these criteria, there is severe dislocation and endangerment. This

section focuses on how to redress the severity of its shift using Fishman's Stages of Reversing Language Shift: Severity of Intergenerational Dislocation (2001: 466; Figure 19.1).

3.2 RLS to attain diglossia

Continuity of research should be funded to support the divergent varieties which are shaping BSL into a rich language that is fit for purpose to incorporate educational, medical and legal corpus. Research outcomes must be centrally controlled to advance BSL, as with Welsh language research projects, and also focus on BSL acquisition.

Stage 8. Reconstructing Xish and adult acquisition of XSL (and)
Stage 7. Cultural interaction in Xish primarily involving the community-based older generation

A lexical database documenting 50,000 signs from four regions from the BSL Corpus data has been transformed into an online dictionary, BSL SignBank, as part of work on language documentation and language change by DCAL. This is a reference grammar of BSL, discussing key characteristics of the phonology and morphosyntax of BSL, and is an ongoing project. The community-based older generation of Deaf people constitutes much of the BSL teaching force, either in the community or in schools, with a grave risk of this group not being replaced by younger Deaf people to maintain the current level of BSL teaching. The seven current GCSE awarding bodies in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the Scottish Qualifications Authority should offer deaf and hearing children and adults BSL examinations, i.e. national curriculum required by the New Zealand Sign Language Act.

Stage 6. The intergenerational and demographically concentrated home-family-neighbourhood-community

To address this risk-laden stage the numbers of deaf children learning fluent BSL to enable them to teach it when older must be kept to an optimum level which is, ideally, the inclusion of all deaf children with mild, moderate and severe losses, an additional 72% (CRIDE 2012). The current practice of offering BSL to parents of profoundly deaf children will mean numbers will either stay at this level or continue to decline over coming decades. For deaf children BSL should be a mandatory, accredited subject to examination level in statutory education and further

and higher education. As a minimum standard they should study BSL as a subject, with an option for hearing children, creating a potential pool of professionals.

An organisation commissioned by the Welsh Language Board, Twf, promotes Welsh as an essential language to all pregnant mothers and parents of newborn babies in Wales. This grassroots promotion of Welsh has been highly successful, and is a model that DEX considers could easily fit BSL. This approach encourages parents to opt for Welsh–medium education, as the most effective means. The numbers of Welsh children attending Welsh-medium schools is slowly increasing due to this organisation's work, which includes giving prospective and new parents quality information, teaching and support. Twf has a network of field officers located throughout Wales, conveying to parents and the general public the cultural and economic advantages of raising children bilingually. An evaluation of Twf:

> has grown rapidly in a short period of time and has been extremely successful in transforming the abstract concept of family bilingualism into a concrete message with which the target audience can identify.
>
> (Edwards & Pritchard Newcombe 2005: 135)

This programme could easily be replicated at the point of identification of deafness at the national Newborn Hearing Screening Programme or at later stages. On this care pathway parents of deaf children are advised by medical and teaching professionals (usually hearing people). As in Scandinavia, free BSL classes for parents and extended family members, for up to a year, with state reimbursement to employers for employees' time lost from work should be a legal requirement.

Stage 5. Schools for literacy acquisition, for the old and for the young, and not in lieu of compulsory education

The development of BSL on-line teaching and translation services requires systemic overview, registration and the sharing of materials and resources in a governmental BSL Board Library for BSL teachers, learners and the Deaf community. More cost effective than the printed word, resources can be produced at relatively low cost compared to paper documents.

Stage 4(b). Public schools for Xish children, offering some instruction via Xish, but substantially under Yish curricular and staffing control

Sweden established Swedish Sign Language (SSL) as a first language for profoundly deaf children in its Education Act 1989, and established a teacher trainer course for deaf SSL users to become qualified teachers of SSL. This has given them parity to other teachers in the state system. An important component of a BSL

language plan is that this concept is legally adopted in the UK for all future BSL initial teacher training. Teachers of deaf children working directly with BSL users should have level 3 or 6 qualification in BSL and Education Interpreters (currently CSWs) should be fully qualified interpreters with specialism in education.

Stage 3. The local/regional (i.e. non-neighbourhood) work sphere, both among Xmen and Ymen

A BSL language plan initiative must include all RLS stages since conferring the same rights as hearing citizens of the UK, and placing BSL in the power function of governmental control, will support an improved quality of life for Deaf BSL users. There should be opportunities for hearing people to learn BSL so that there is direct, albeit more low level, communication in local/regional work sphere, including front line staff of public and retail services. BSL Standards mandated for by legislation should target public and private sectors on how to efficiently fund and acquire registered BSL/English interpreters. Their training, work conditions, salary, ratio per Deaf users and quality assurance would be consistently applied by a BSL Board according to statute.

Stage 2. Local/regional mass media and governmental spheres

An appropriately worded BSL Act would require more BSL translation of television and on-line programmes and information, throughout peak viewing times, and more special programmes for Deaf people. The Deaf Broadcasting Council, now the BSLBT, has done sterling work and should advise the BSL Board.

Stage 1. Education, work sphere, mass media and governmental operations at higher and nationwide levels

According to this criteria there should be discrete legislation that primarily mandates for the increase in the number of users of BSL, as well as raising its status as an equal language to English, Welsh and Gaelic in the UK. It is proposed that the management of this is by the governmental cross-departmental establishment of a statutory BSL Board of language planning experts, with ongoing involvement with the Deaf community to give the Board powers to monitor and evaluate, using BSL Standards.

3.3 Welsh language planning

As part of its BVR, 2004, DEX researched the Welsh language and updated its findings for this contribution. The Welsh language is perhaps the most celebrated example of successful language planning, largely through the sustained campaign by the Welsh Language Society, some of whose members were internationally acclaimed linguists. Over the course of the twentieth century the monolingual Welsh population all but disappeared, but a small percentage remained at the time of the 1981 census. The Welsh language has been statutorily promoted through the national curriculum in Wales as a mandatory subject to be learnt within Wales, enacted through the Education Reform Act 1989. The Welsh Language Act, 1993 ensured the effective promotion and monitoring of Welsh via the Welsh Assembly overseeing the compilation of Welsh Language Schemes by public authorities to demonstrate actions taken in the delivery of Welsh in their services. The Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011 includes provisions about the official status of the Welsh language, and states that the Welsh language should not be treated less favourably than the English language in Wales. The Measure established the Welsh Language Commissioner, which replaced the Welsh Language Board, who has powers to decide if a public organisation has failed to carry out its statutory duties and makes recommendations how the organisation should take to rectify the situation, and investigate complaints from Welsh speakers. The Measure continues to develop Standards, formerly called Welsh Language Schemes and created a Welsh Language Tribunal (Welsh Ministers' report 2014). The Welsh Assembly's Welsh Language Strategy (2012–2017) states "the results of the 2001 Census showed that 20.8 per cent of the population of Wales was able to speak Welsh (582,400 people) compared to the 1991 Census (18.7 per cent and 508,100 people). The Welsh Assembly's research suggests focussing Welsh language marketing and promotional approaches on younger age groups, maximising the potential of technology such as the internet and new social media, and improving the accessibility to, and relevance of, available Welsh-language media and resources.

3.4 Gaelic language planning

Gaelic is not a mandatory language in Scotland's education system. Despite Gaelic language RLS efforts (Dorian 1997b, 1980, 1981) the census of 2011 in Scotland indicated that a total of 57,375 people (1.1% of the Scottish population aged over three years old) in Scotland could speak Gaelic at that time, with a decline of 1,275 Gaelic speakers from 2001. A total of 87,056 people in 2011 had some ability in Gaelic compared to 93,282 people in 2001, a reduction of 6,226 users. The

Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005 required a Gaelic Language Board (Bòrd na Gàidhlig) and Gaelic Language Plans and the Bòrd to regularly produce a National Plan. The Scottish Parliament's National Plan for Gaelic (2014) states the Bòrd na Gàidhlig identified its priority action areas, including language, status and corpus, promote Gaelic-medium education, working with local authorities, media and in the arts, tourism, heritage and recreation sectors, quality of Gaelic translations, and research. Gaelic's policy history includes legislation with Gaelic provisions: the Education (Scotland) Act 1980, the Standards in Scotland's School etc. Act 2001, the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act 2005. This model is of greatest interest to the Deaf community in the UK since the BSL (Scotland) Act 2015 was enacted based on spoken Gaelic legislation, and proposed that there is a Minister responsible, a National Advisory Group is established and BSL Plans are developed by the Scottish Parliament and public authorities in Scotland, with extensive consultation and the greatest ever support from the UK Deaf community. DEX has observed that the the Scottish Act merely perceives BSL as an access tool, reinforced by De Meulder, 2014. DEX has outlined to the Scottish Parliament and Westminster about the damaging limitations of not factoring in a legal substitute for the lack of natural intergenerational transmission of BSL into any proposed legislation in the UK.

4. Policy and conventions

How can linguistic theory be applied so there is a formalised "linkage system of adult functions and institutions that are *prior to and preparatory for* schooling for children" (Fishman 2001: 15). In the case of sign languages there has to be a clear distinction drawn between the use of (a) language planning, (b) language policy and (c) generalised legal policy using legislation aimed at disability or amending existing legislation/ regulations for sign languages. Sign language legislation generally falls into the latter category as is evidenced by international sign languages' legislation or regulations. GIDS and UNESCO LVE Framework, 2009 should be firmly embedded into initiatives to safeguard sign languages.

4.1 Legislation and UN conventions

The following investigation as to international legislation of sign languages and UN Conventions indicates that not all RLS stages have been brought to play though there are steps to progress.

4.1.1 *UNESCO Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994)*

In 1994 more than 300 participants representing 92 governments and 25 international organisations met in Salamanca, Spain, to further the objective of education for all by considering the fundamental policy shifts required to promote inclusive education, particularly for those with special educational needs. The Statement adopts the principle of inclusion by working towards "schools for all" – institutions including everyone, celebrating differences and responding to individual needs.

II (A) (21) states:

> The importance of sign language as the medium of communication among the deaf, for example, should be recognized and provision made to ensure that all deaf persons have access to education in their national sign language. Owing to the particular communication needs of deaf and deaf/blind persons, their education may be more suitably provided in special schools or special classes and units in mainstream schools.

4.1.2 *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2008*

Many of the world's governments have ratified this convention, and committed to following its recommendations which include each member states' recognition and promotion of their country's sign language. The UK's Protocol ratification date was in 2009, and a government report has been completed stating what UNCRPD targets have been achieved and gaps identified. DEX was asked by the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to submit a Shadow Report to the government's response to be considered shortly. DEX's Shadow Report gives a broad outline of BSL's decline and it is submitting the findings of this study to the UNCRPD Committee in our Alternative Report, updating the Shadow report.

4.1.3 *European Parliament*

In 1988 the European Parliament Resolution on Sign Languages for Deaf People was called on by the European Parliament, requiring the Commission to make a proposal to the Council concerning the official recognition of the sign language in each member state, calling upon member states to abolish any remaining obstacles to the use of sign languages. The wide ranging proposals covered teaching, training of teachers and interpreters, compilation of dictionaries, broadcasting, and technology. The World Federation of Deaf People has worked in coordination with the EUD on this matter.

4.1.4 *European Union of the Deaf*

Some Deaf members of the European Union of the Deaf (EUD) are also members of their own country's European Union councils, and this has assisted in raising the profiles of sign languages in Europe, ie. the EUD report of 2005 was the first account of the state of play for sign language status in individual countries.

4.1.5 *European Charter for regional or minority languages*

Deaf communities in Europe appealed to the Council of Europe for sign languages' inclusion in its European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, 1992, to persuade it to explicitly mention sign languages as part of its remit. The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued its Recommendation 1598 in 2003, that "the Committee of Ministers devise a specific legal instrument on the rights of sign language users". Subsequently the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe issued Motion for a Resolution, Doc. 10636, 2005, (6) "The Assembly therefore calls on the Committee of Ministers to proceed without delay to draft and consult on such a legal instrument that specifically delivers the following:

i. Legal recognition of the relevant sign languages within each member state
ii. The right of parents of deaf children to be advised as to the role that sign language could play in their lives
iii. The right of the deaf child to be taught with the use of sign language if they so wish.

Apart from the fact that this Motion was never followed through, in it there are two major flaws, as it has not applied basic language planning theory: that parents are the missing key to transmission, and the phrase "could play in their lives" has not emphasised the importance of promotion. Item (iii) did not consider the age of the deaf child expressing a wish to learn sign language, and that leaving it until the child is capable of making a judgement delays the opportunity for the language to be acquired at an early age.

Internationally, resources available to minority languages, too, are "often quite meagre … with no outside support of any operational significance to fall back upon" compared to those for the mainstream host languages (Fishman 2001:13). The current global economy is such that deemed luxuries such as services for minorities are being severely cut, not just language minorities. Ladd (2003) states that when there are cutbacks in service levels due to economic constraints, low priority is always given to deaf people's needs.

4.1.6 *Legal status of minority languages as part of RLS*

The legal recognition of sign languages is one of the major concerns of the international Deaf community. Each country has its own constitution or parliamentary system which makes it difficult to find a standard route to ensure the same legal status for all sign languages. In some countries, the national sign language is an official state language, whereas in others it has a protected status in certain areas such as education. However, symbolic recognition or legislation is no guarantee even that sign language users' quality of lives will be bettered. This section considers how legal status has affected the development of minority languages in various parts of the world, and whether state overall control has conferred power, language spread, corpus and acquisition planning. With respect to sign languages different policies adopted by countries throughout the world have:

i. recognised their sign language is a *bona fide* language of the country as an official language by amending the constitution or by other means
ii. recognised the sign language as a language per se
iii. mentioned sign language in education law or policy
iv. written their sign languages into other existing laws
v. established a new law to enshrine the country's sign language(s).

Each country's Deaf community and its allies have actively pursued many routes applicable to each passage of legislation or official declarations. In some cases countries have more than one sign language which have been mentioned in law or regulations:

Belgium – French Community, 2003 (French-Belgian Sign Language)
– Flanders (Flemish Sign Language) 2006
– Wallonia (French-Belgian Sign Language) 2003
Spain – Spanish Sign Language and Catalan Sign Language, 2007, 1994, 2006.

The following countries have used education acts to legislate for sign language acquisition; specifically legislated for its sign language; mentioned their sign language in other legislation; and recognised it; (though perhaps not giving the country's sign language its name):

Austria 2005; Brazil 2005; Bulgaria 2012; Canadian Providences: Manitoba 1988, Alberta 1990, Ontario 2007 (American Sign Language); Cyprus 2006; Czech Republic 1998, 2008; Denmark 2005; Estonia 2007; Finland 1995, 2003; France; Germany 2002; Greece 2003; Hungary 2011; Iceland 2004, 2011; Ireland 1998; Latvia; Lithuania; Macedonia; Netherlands 2003; New Zealand 2006; Norway, 1999; Poland 2011; Portugal; Romania; Slovak Republic 1995;

Slovenia; Sweden 1981; Switzerland; Thailand 1999; South Africa 1994/1996; Uganda 1995; UK 2003; Uraguay 2001; Venezuela 1999.
(Wheatley & Pabsch, European Union of Deaf 2012)

4.2.1 *UK recognition of BSL*

The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) of the UK government announced BSL recognition on 18 March 2003 (Hansard):

> "The Government recognise that British Sign Language (BSL) is a language in its own right regularly used by a significant number of people …. The Government understand that people who use BSL want their language to be protected and promoted in the same way some minority languages are by the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Council is considering how that might be achieved for indigenous sign languages. The Government will give careful consideration to any proposals which the Council might make. The Government have already taken action to improve access to BSL, for example by identifying situations where it might be reasonable for employers and service providers to engage the services of a BSL/English interpreter. The Government will be funding a discrete programme of initiatives to support this statement".

£1.5 m funding was allocated for this programme to be used to increase awareness of "the communication needs of deaf people who use BSL and increasing opportunities for people to study BSL at a professional level." The funding allocated for recognition was used for training of BSL/English interpreters, aspiring to and modelled on Finland's greater ratio of interpreters per Deaf people. The recognition of BSL is not in statute. The UK has three laws mentioning sign language and interpreters: Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984; Mental Capacity Act 2005; Equality Act 2010. Following the 10th year anniversary of the DWP announcement, there has been a re-emergence of interest within the Deaf community calling for a BSL Act, with over 11,000 deaf people clicking on to a Facebook page and lobbying from Deaf organisations for action.

4.2.2 *Commentary on legal status and recognition of sign languages internationally*

Most of the countries mentioned above have treated their sign language(s) as access tools to increase the number of interpreters to access mainstream services or to promote them to service providers. The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Act, 2006, declared NZSL a voluntary subject in the national curriculum, and an official language of New Zealand, giving it equal status to Maori and English. A review by the New Zealand Office for Disability Issues, 2011, states: "neither the Māori Language Act 1987 nor the NZSL Act specifies what designation as

an 'official language' means". A considerable number of submitters to the Review observed that Deaf children in mainstream education have poor access to NZSL. The New Zealand Human Rights Commission reported on the state of NZSL since the Act and recommends in its report:

> The Ministry of Education plays a key role in enabling not only access to NZSL but also its maintenance and promotion. Therefore, the Commission's strongly preferred option is that the Ministry is the agency charged with leading the development of a NZSL Statutory Board.

The use of the term "deaf" in all countries' legislation is not clear unless stated, i.e. Norway 1999 legislates for profoundly deaf children. DEX visited Sweden and Norway as part of its BVR and there it was ascertained that hard of hearing children were not encouraged to be part of the bilingual programme, although many of the hard of hearing young people DEX interviewed wished that they had been included. There was a special school for hard of hearing children at the time of the BVR visit in 2002 which was not a Swedish Sign Language-medium school. Denmark is the only country that actually qualifies in law that the teacher determines whether or not the deaf child can use Danish Sign Language although this is standard practice throughout the world. Legislation is seen as a major victory for longstanding campaigners, but until effective RLS efforts are applied, this has to be a hollow victory.

Legislation in Greece states Greek Sign Language is the language of deaf and hard of hearing pupils and teachers need to know sign language. Thai Sign Language is used by 20% of deaf students in education, a significant figure. Macedonian Sign Language's official recognition does not state that users should be deaf, "a natural way of communication between the people" which may promote language spread amongst the range of deaf, as well as hearing, children.

Branson and Miller (2008) argue that national sign languages should not be the only sign languages to be addressed by policy-makers, but that localised sign languages should also be included: i.e. Canada has Langue de Signes Quebecoise, Inuit Sign Language and American Sign Language within its multilingual remit. The Austrian Federal Government has proposed its National Action Plan for the implementation of the UNCRPD, dedicating a full chapter to sign language. Whilst the Austrian Deaf Association welcomes this, it is concerned that this chapter only addresses the public administration and funding area, and "*that securing communication via sign language interpretation alone is not the way forward.*" In Ireland a bill for the legal recognition (Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill 2013) was defeated in January 2014, and rejected by 3 votes (24–21) at its second reading. Proposed by the opposition party,

the Minister of State for Health opined that "this Bill is putting the cart before the horse", as it was considered that the bill had not been properly thought through.

Despite Finland's efforts to successfully increase the numbers of interpreters, with just 5,300 users, the endangered status of Finnish Sign Language has been acknowledged in 2011 by the Language Policy Programme and a Memorandum by the Ministry of Justice. The Human Rights Council Resolution 22/3, with Answers by the Finnish Association of the Deaf in 2013, highlighted the fact that, despite recognition in legislation, Finnish Sign Language is threatened. The Finnish government passed The Sign Language Act in March 2015, referring to Finnish Sign Language and Finland-Swedish Sign Language. A signer is defined in the Act as a person "whose own language is sign language" – a definition to include both deaf and hearing people.

5. Concluding recommendations

The summary of overall findings of this study are that, when compiling BSL language policy in the form of legislation it is, therefore, crucial to incorporate the language planning field of enquiry, which also includes other linguistic theories and practice, all informing each other. Because language policy has traditionally addressed spoken language, simply focusing on a generic or social policy approach is detrimental to the future of BSL and to its users, and viewing BSL simply as an access tool to mainstream services, although, granted it is one, threatens its existence even more.

Fishman (2001) states that language planning has to take into account the high power stages above GIDS stage 6, which is the establishment. Threatened languages such as BSL need to be given a secure functional niche. However, although giving BSL status will give it security, other RLS efforts must be applied consistently.

The practice of focusing on hearing levels of deaf children as a gateway to learn BSL must end. Not only is this detrimental to the health of the language and to deaf children's wellbeing but it is a fundamental breach of linguistic and human rights. If the state acts as intergenerational transmitter, and undertakes its duty of safeguarding BSL in a *linguistic loco parentis function* for deaf children and the wider Deaf community, this will demonstrate a will to effectively BSL language plan.

DEX has determined that the Welsh Language model is applicable spoken language law to act as the structure for effective BSL legislation. DEX has the support of some of the linguists who attended the LAUD Symposium (2014).

Colin Baker, internationally renowned expert on bilingualism, and Meirion Prys-Jones, Chief Executive of the Network to Promote Language Diversity, who was also the Chief Executive of the former Welsh Language Board, have advised and supported DEX's work. DEX's suggested RLS approach is based on its original BVR recommendations, strengthened by this language planning study and, thus proposes RSL treatment: a BSL Board consisting of committed experts in the field of language planning, recommended to the government for appointment, in line with the Welsh Language Board's development. The BSL Board should be a government appointed advisory body, with the powers to make recommendations to the relevant Secretaries of State and with a governmental method of appeal against decisions. In this hierarchical sense it should follow the Welsh Language revival model.

Parents of deaf children have a right to know what the best outcomes are for their deaf child, based on a huge body of research. This study has brought about a realisation that the individualistic wellbeing and safeguarding approach to deaf children should become a collective linguistic rights issue.

Two quotes emphasise why there is need for a well perceived language plan for BSL, and as a model for other sign languages: "When my teacher signs I hear everything she says" (The Swedish National Association for Deaf, Hearing-Impaired and Language-Impaired Children's website).

Bernard Spolsky, Professor Emeritus at the University of Tel Aviv, has kindly read through DEX's research. He gave his verdict: "BSL is severely endangered, and deaf children are also severely endangered."

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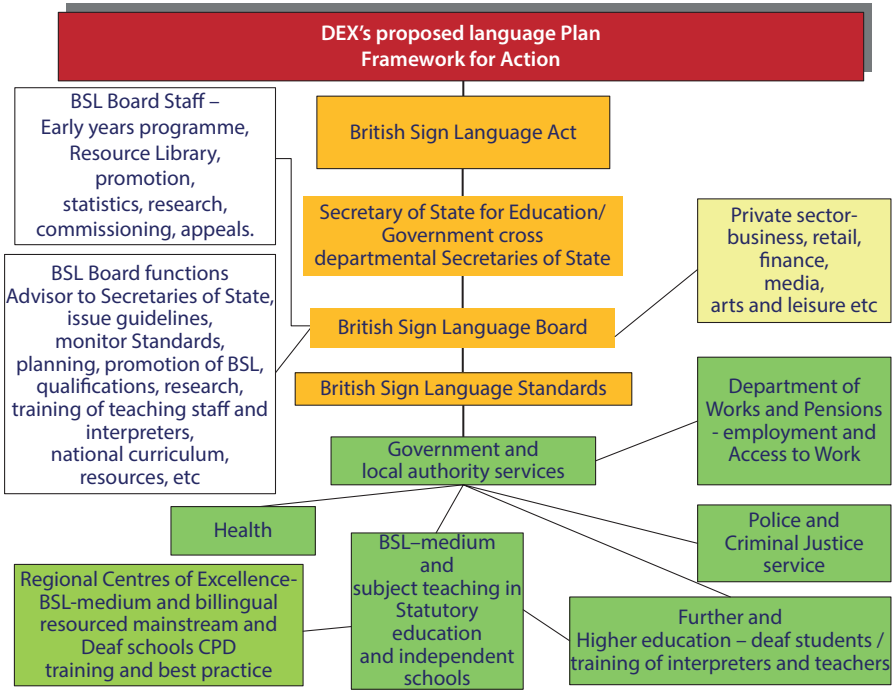
Appendix


DEX's proposed language Plan
Framework for Action
BSL Board Staff –
Early years programme,
Resource Library,
promotion,
statistics, research,
commissioning, appeals.
British Sign Language Act
Secretary of State for Education/
Government cross
departmental Secretaries of State
Private sector-
business, retail,
finance,
media,
arts and leisure etc
BSL Board functions
Advisor to Secretaries of State,
issue guidelines,
monitor Standards,
planning, promotion of BSL,
qualifications, research,
training of teaching staff and
interpreters,
national curriculum,
resources, etc
British Sign Language Board
British Sign Language Standards
Department of
Works and Pensions
- employment and
Access to Work
Government and
local authority services
Health
Police and
Criminal Justice
service
Regional Centres of Excellence-
BSL-medium and billingual
resourced mainstream and
Deaf schools CPD
training and best practice
BSL–medium
and
subject teaching in
Statutory
education
and independent
schools
Further and
Higher education – deaf students /
training of interpreters and teachers