Language Policies and Campaign for Irish Sign Language in the Republic of Ireland

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How can we know this is language policy?

• Can be identified through
  – Explicit statements
  – Implicit statements
  – Dominant ideologies
  – Personal preferences
Irish Government policy on ISL

• Programme for Government – March 2011
  – “We will examine different mechanisms to promote the recognition of Irish Sign Language” (page 24)

• National Disability Strategy Implementation Plan 2013-2015
  – Only two references to ‘sign language’ and four to ‘deaf’ in this 36-page long report
  – No reference to ‘different mechanisms’

• ”The existing legislation in Ireland gives a level of recognition and practical measures equal to, or above that, in countries which have formally recognised sign language”
  • (Department of Justice official – Irish Times 25/9/13)
22 January 2014 – this Bill was rejected by three votes in Senand Eireann (the upper house)

Widespread disappointment among Deaf people

Sparked more interest in ISL recognition campaign
“….We do not want to see scarce resources, particularly at this time of extremely scarce resources, used without the service being put in place. We need to put the service in place before we put the legislation in place. That is what we have done in other areas and that is what we would like to do in this regard.”
Education Act 1998

• First legislation to deal with primary and post primary education for many decades

• The only one legislation mentions the term ‘Irish sign language or other sign languages’

• But....
  – this term is described as one of support services therefore signed languages are seen as equivalent to psychological and therapeutic services

“support services” means the services which the Minister provides to students or their parents, schools or centres for education in accordance with section 7 and shall include any or all of the following:

(a) assessment of students;
(b) psychological services;
(c) guidance and counselling services;
(d) technical aid and equipment, including means of access to schools, adaptations to buildings to facilitate access and transport, for students with special needs and their families;
(e) provision for students learning through Irish sign language or other sign language, including interpreting services;
(f) speech therapy services;
Census 2011

- Question 15 relates to the usage of languages ‘spoken’ at home
- Yet, usage of ISL was reported in the Bill of Health (Profile 8) instead of Migration and Diversity (Profile 6)
- Yet the majority of ISL users recorded here are not ‘disabled’
- Evidence of ‘dominant ideology’ influences?
What we have to do next?

- Once received legal advice; it is clear to us that a political campaign is absolutely required rather than pursuit of legal redress and we have to up the ante!
Councils that have passed motions for Irish Sign Language in Ireland Include:

**County Council**
Cavan County Council  
Clare County Council  
Kerry County Council  
Kildare County Council  
Kilkenny County Council  
Laois County Council  
Leitrim County Council  
Longford County Council  
Louth County Council  
Mayo County Council  
Meath County Council  
Monaghan County Council  
North Tipperary County Council  
Offaly County Council  
Roscommon County Council  
Sligo County Council  
South Dublin County Council  
Wexford County Council  
Wicklow County Council

**Borough Council**
Clonmel Borough Council  
Drogheda Borough Council  
Wexford Borough Council

**Town Council**
Ardee Town Council  
Athy Town Council  
Bandon Town Council  
Carrickmacross Town Council  
Clones Town Council  
Cootehill Town Council  
Dundalk Town Council  
Killarney Town Council  
Naas Town Council  
Tralee Town Council  
Trim Town Council

**City Council**
Cork City Council  
Dublin City Council  
Limerick City Council  
Waterford City Council

Thank you for your support!  
If you would like to get your local County or City or Town council onto this list -  
Email: islnow@irishdeafsoociety.ie for more information.
Council shows support to deaf community

BY CAROLINE WHelan

Galway County Council has passed a motion calling on the Government to give official recognition to Irish Sign Language. The motion was proposed by Loughrea Official recognition is an important step in advancing the rights of deaf people. The motion is in line with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which promotes equal opportunities for all people with disabilities. The motion acknowledges the significant strides made in recent years towards the recognition of Irish Sign Language, but also highlights the need for continued efforts to ensure that deaf people are fully included in society.

Irish Sign Language makes point his language is not recognised. Needs to pay for translation in civil court from own pocket “any language" means nothing if it can’t be used:

AMNESTY

Councillors sign language recognition

AT LAST week’s meeting of Michael Smyth of the Clare County Council, he proposed a motion to support the Irish Sign Language (ISL) movement. The motion was supported by members of the council and passed unanimously. The motion recognised the importance of ISL and called for the Government to give legal recognition to ISL.

‘Clare’s deaf being denied basic human rights’

Andrew Hamilton

MORE than 100 Clare people are being denied their basic human rights because they are deaf or hard of hearing, according to a leading deaf rights campaigner.

Clare County Council last month passed a motion, put forward by Cllr Mary Howard (FO), calling for Irish Sign Language (ISL) to be recognised under Irish law. This recognition would give Clare deaf people the right to communicate with organs of the state - such as the courts or medical services - using sign language.

“We are so glad to have Clare County Council passing the motion on our behalf. We knew that the motion carries no legal weight but it does carry a great significance as we are glad that Clare County Council agreed to get behind our campaign to have the ISL recognised,” said Dr John Bosco Canama of the Irish Sign Language Recognition Campaign.

We view the denial of bestowing the legal recognition of ISL as a human right breach. With regard to access to vital public services like education and health, there are many instances of deaf people who could not stay in education for the want of interpreters, because there is no one willing to fund the interpretation costs.

“The HSE is often reluctant to pay for the interpreters even for serious medical consultations, like cancer treatment. Deaf patients are often forced to rely on family members to relay important medical information, which can be risky since family members may not be competent in relaying from spoken language to signed language.”

According to De Conama, Irish Sign Language could be rolled out across public services in a very cost effective way with a number of frontline staff in each organisation being trained in ISL.

ABOVE:
Noel and Carmel Ball (Ennis) protest outside Dáil Éireann last year during Irish Sign Language Week.
Concluding remarks

• Having identified specific language policies that regard ISL as a compensatory tool rather than a language in its right
• Academic issues arising from this campaign
• Political theories of recognition (Taylor, Honneth)
• Importance of cultural issues (Ladd, Deafhood)
• Public recognition vs individual autonomy (Patton)
• Recognition - redistribution dilemma (Fraser)
• Academics' roles in political activism (Young)
• Political and societal attitudes to signed languages