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The University of Dublin

# Online and Kicking: Sign Language Activism via Social Media

ICMLXVII Colloquium Virtual communities a breathing space for minority languages

Leeuwarden –22 May 2019

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# Overview

## **1. Background – Sign Language Communities**

- Effortful Engaging

## **2. Sign Languages Online –**

- Activism

## **3 Examples**

- #YestoISL - ISL Recognition Campaign (2017)
- #WheretheAccess (2017-pres)
- “Deaf Community Together for Yes” - Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment Campaign (2018)

## **4. Summary**



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# 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

- **Method:** Classic Grounded Theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967, Glaser 2001, 2003, 2005).
- **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))**

Deaf man banned from Donegal for harassing family

Greg Harkin

Published 19/05/2016 | 02:30



# “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....





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## 2. Sign Languages Online





# Facebook

**Irish Sign Language (ISL) Vlogs and Films**  
Closed group

Interacting as yourself

- About
- Discussion**
- Chats
- Members
- Events
- Videos



Joined ▾ Notifications Share ... More

**Irish Deaf Politics and Current Affairs Group**  
Closed group

Interacting as yourself

- About
- Discussion**
- Chats
- Announcements
- Members



# #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.

**#yestoISL**

Trinity College Dublin  
The University of Dublin  
Irish Deaf Society

Show your hand and vote YES



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**#yestoISL**

Trinity College Dublin  
The University of Dublin  
CENTRE FOR DEAF STUDIES

Irish Deaf Society

Show your hand and vote YES

**EUD**  
@EUD\_Brussels

Please support - tacaigí Le seo le bhur dtoil. #yestoISL

8:58 AM - Oct 17, 2016

♡ 22 💬 21 people are talking about this



**Liadh Ní Riada MEP** ✓

@LiadhNiRiadaMEP



Please support - tacaigí Le seo le bhur dtoil.

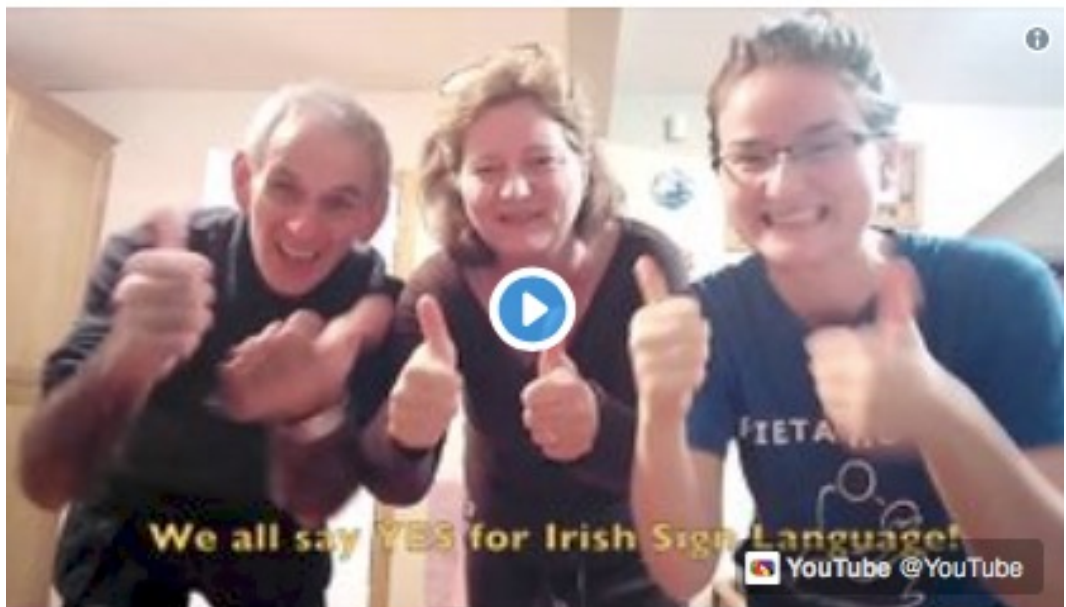
3:45 PM - Oct 6, 2016 · Val-de-Vesle, France



21



See Liadh Ní Riada MEP's other Tweets





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# Storm Ophelia

# #WherestheAccess

 **Aidan** 🧑 66.4% DEAL WITH IT 🧑  
@ginger\_culchie Follow

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 

  2  4 

 **Aidan DIE HARD IS A XMAS FILM** @snappy\_boss · 15 Oct 2017  
There are 5000+ ISL users in Ireland, but 80% of them can not write/read English. Their first language is ISL. #WheresTheAccess

 1  2  1 


 **Aidan DIE HARD IS A XMAS FILM** @snappy\_boss · 15 Oct 2017  
They usually write English through ISL syntax & grammar. I think they have a reading age of 8. #WheresTheAccess


 1   

 **Aidan DIE HARD IS A XMAS FILM** @snappy\_boss Follow

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

3:39 PM - 15 Oct 2017

 1   



 **Aidan DIE HARD IS A XMAS FILM** @snappy\_boss · 15 Oct 2017  
We pay taxes and license fee too. We should be entitled to the same rights and treatment as hearing people. #wherestheaccess

 1  1  2 

 **Aidan DIE HARD IS A XMAS FILM** @snappy\_boss · 15 Oct 2017  
Access to information is literally a matter of life & death. Lest you hearing people forget. ///End #wherestheaccess

  1  1 

# #WherestheAccess

**Orla G** @grehango · 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!



4 9 15

**Mark McCaffrey**  
@MarkJMcCaffrey [Follow](#)

[#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

# #Hashtagactivism works

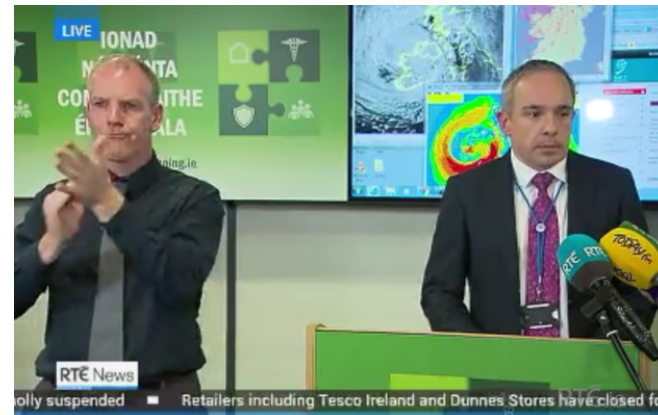


## thejournal.ie

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](http://jrnl.ie/3649682)



A sign language interpreter working at the briefing of the National Emergency Coordination Group this afternoon - this was the first time such an interpreter had been present at these briefings

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

# #YESstoISL



**Conor McMorrow** ✓

@ConorMcMorrow

Follow

**BREAKING:** Joyous scenes in #Dail as the Recognition of Irish Sign Language for the Deaf Community Bill passes @IrishDeafSoc @rtnews



10:55 AM - 14 Dec 2017



# 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

🕒 Sun, Dec 24, 2017, 11:13

🕒 Updated: Sun, Dec 24, 2017, 11:34



President Michael D Higgins who on Sunday signed new legislation conferring legal recognition on Irish Sign Language. Photograph: PA



**President of Ireland** ✓

@PresidentIRL

Follow

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

2:13 AM - 24 Dec 2017

196 Retweets 564 Likes



💬 32 🔄 196 ❤️ 564 ✉️



Tweet your reply



**Colin Allen AM** @WFDPresident · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @PresidentIRL

Thank you President Higgins.

💬 🔄 1 ❤️ 11 ✉️



**QueenJ** @queenjules · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @PresidentIRL

#YestoISL Thank you Mr President! ❤️ what a beautiful Christmas present to get!

💬 🔄 1 ❤️ 4 ✉️

# “The best Christmas present ever”



**Senator Mark Daly**   
@SenatorMarkDaly

Following

President of Ireland has just signed in to 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 mhachnamh a dhéanamh ar An Bille um Theanga Chomharthaíochta 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



**Elaine Grehan** @ElaineGrehan · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @SenatorMarkDaly

This is the best Christmas present I ever have. I feel I'm coming home. [@SenatorMarkDaly](#) [@ISLrecognition](#) [@iDDW](#) - thanks for believing in us



**Lianne Quigley** @liannequigley · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @SenatorMarkDaly

Thank you .. it is a best Christmas present ever for me and my friends/families.. wish you a very happy Christmas!!



**Karen Walsh** @katiew137 · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @SenatorMarkDaly

Thank you so much Senator. Our dreams have come true for us. [@jconama\\_bosco66](#)



**Noelle Lee** @Tooty110 · 24 Dec 2017

Replying to @SenatorMarkDaly

Thank so much for your hard work . You did great job. Happy Christmas & all best for 2018 🥰🙌





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# Post ISL Act

# Post ISL Recognition: Emma & the Beast from the East



Storm Emma update Tuesday 6th March 2018

## Statement from the National Emergency Coordination Group on Severe Weather





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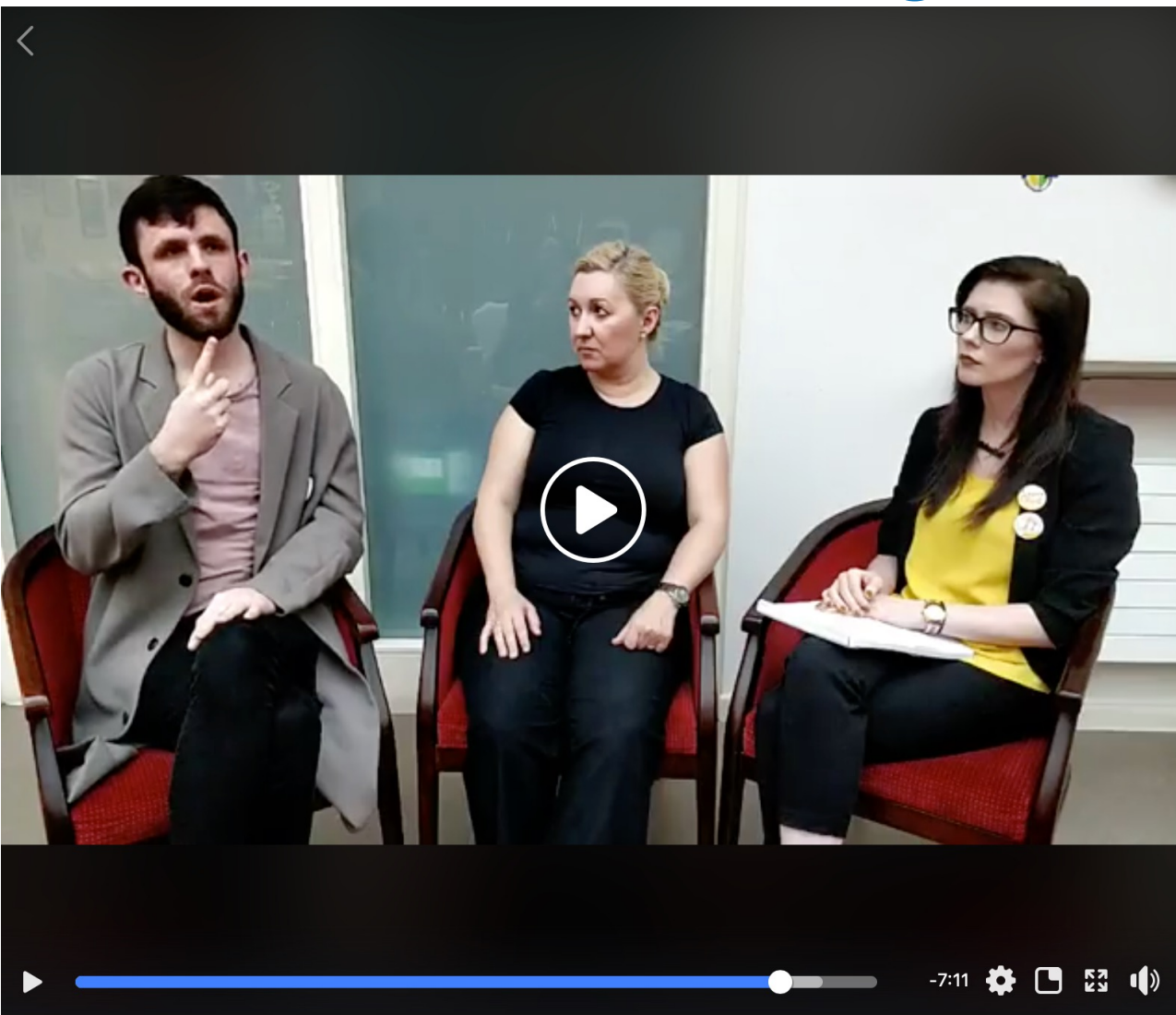
The University of Dublin

**Deaf Community Together for Yes  
(Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Campaign)**

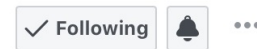
# Deaf Community Together for Yes



# Facebook Live: bilingual events



**Deaf Community Together for Yes** was live.  
about a year ago · 🌐



🎥 Questions & Answers session with #LawyersforChoice. ⚖️  
Ask any question you want about the current law, the meaning of the 8th amendment and what are the proposed laws. 🗣️💬  
Please comment with your question below. 📌📌📌  
#togetherforyes #deafaltogetherforyes

👍❤️ 64

17 shares 1.8K views



Comments

Up next

Most relevant ▾



**Micheál Kelliher** · 32:09 Are there any constitutional protections against death penalty or eugenics? One side was claiming not to trust politicians on abortions, but okay on others?

Like · Reply · 1y



**Micheál Kelliher** · 16:35 What will happen to Northern Irish women if the 8th amendment is repealed? Will they have a safe, legal and free access to abortion services across the border, in Ireland?

Like · Reply · 1y



**Deaf Community Together for Yes** · 32:20 Hi rezann, I apologies for the noise in the background but there's nothing we can do about that.

Like · Reply · 1y



## A message from the team

Love Comment 145

 Deaf Community Together for Yes

2.5K views · about 12 months ago ·

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!

#repealthe8th #togetherforyes #deaftogetherforyes





## Deaf Community Together for Yes



Page Liked · 5 June 2018 · 🌐

### Leo doing ISL!



Deaf Community Together for Yes is 😊 feeling accomplished. ...

5 June 2018 · 🌐

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

About

Posts

Events

Videos

Photos

Community

Notes

Create a Page

Liked Following Share ...



### 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 · 🌐

Like Page

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



Micheál Kelliher  
Independents4Change  
Cabra-Glasnevin  
@Micheal4Change



Candidate Graham  
O'Shea  
@grahamoshea19

# MICHEÁL KELLIHER

**POLITICS BASED ON HUMAN RIGHTS  
AND NOT YOUR POCKETS**  
**LOCAL ELECTIONS CANDIDATE**

**VOTE 2 FOR CLLR. CIERAN PERRY  
VOTE CLARE DALY FOR EUROPE**

#MICHEÁL4CHANGE  
M.KELLIHER3@GMAIL.COM  
WWW.MICHEALKELLIHER.IE

INDEPENDENTS 4 CHANGE



# Summary/Discussion

- Online activism in the Irish Deaf community demonstrates leveraging of multimodal linguistic repertoires (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!

