Assessing the Vitality of NZSL

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TILSR 12, Melbourne, Jan 5th 2016
Language Vitality

A language with strong vitality (*survival prospects*) is used

– by many people

– in the home and in many other domains

– to talk about most, if not all, topics

– by all generations (children!)
Structural Factors in Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Figure 2.1  A taxonomy of the structural variables affecting ethnolinguistic vitality
Source: Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977: 309)
Subjective vitality
Attitude to using own language
Perceived strength of lang identity
Relations with majority group

Objective Vitality
Number of speakers & distribution
Institutional support
“The reality is, it’s probably not really a living language”

2014 - a father’s response to census stats on NZSL, & why his family doesn’t sign
two critical factors

Community size (number & distribution of speakers)

Inter-generational transmission (children using the language)
UNESCO levels of endangerment - factor 1: inter-generational transmission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Endangerment</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Speaker Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>safe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>The language is used by all ages, from children up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsafe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitively endangered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>severely endangered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critically endangered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The language is used by very few speakers, mostly of great-grandparental generation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extinct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>There are no speakers.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

UNESCO factor 3: proportion of reference population who use the language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Endangerment</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Reference Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>safe</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>All speak the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>unsafe</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nearly all speak the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>definitively endangered</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>A majority speak the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>severely endangered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>A minority speak the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>critically endangered</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Very few speak the language.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>extinct</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>None speak the language.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Urban & Village SLs face threats, but SLs were not included in UNESCO endangerment data

• International Institute for Sign Languages & Deaf Studies, UCL (Ulrike Zeshan) collaborated with WFD expert committee on SL, & researchers to:
  – adapt UNESCO LVE survey for assessing SLs
  – “map & monitor” vitality of SLs worldwide
  – raise awareness among communities and policy makers about protecting SL diversity

(Safar & Webster 2014; iSLanDS)
UNESCO LVE survey adapted for SLs at iSLanDS, UCL, 2011: Example results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of endangerment</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Safe</td>
<td>5 (None)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerable/Unsafe</td>
<td>4 Austria, Brazil, Denmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definitely endangered</td>
<td>3 Kata Kolok, EthiopianSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severely endangered</td>
<td>2 Fin-SSL, ChicanSL (Mexico)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critically endangered</td>
<td>1 Mardin (Turkey), InuitSL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extinct</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(reporting in Safar & Webster 2014)
Language Endangerment entails

• **Language Shift** (to a majority language)

• **Loss of language complexity** – simplification of grammar (morphology), loss of vocabulary

• **Social impacts**: weakening of
  – cultural capital/knowledge encoded in that language
  – **identity** and **cohesion** of community
  – **political rights** based on minority language status

(See Austin & Sallabank 2011)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Educational</td>
<td>Literacy in: The language is being transmitted through a system of public in vigorous use, with standardization and literature being sustained through a widespread system of institutionally supported education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Written Developing</td>
<td>The language is used orally by all generations and is effectively used in written form in parts of the community in vigorous use with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6a</td>
<td>Vigorous</td>
<td>The language is used orally for face-to-face communication by all generations and is being learned by children as their first language the situation is sustainable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6b</td>
<td>Threatened</td>
<td>The language is used orally for face-to-face communication by within all generations, but only some of the child-bearing generation are transmitting it to their children it is losing users.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Shifting</td>
<td>The child-bearing generation knows the language well enough to can use it the language among themselves but none are transmitting it is not being transmitted to their children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8a</td>
<td>Moribund</td>
<td>The only remaining active speakers users of the language are members of the grandparent generation and older.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Seeking evidence about NZSL vitality

- Language documentation, resources
- NZSL teaching
- Child acquisition
- Number of signers
- Policy, Attitudes
- Domains of use
Data sources

• **Statistics** (objective)
  – Census data
  – Schools: child NZSL users
  – Deaf org membership

• **Govt agency websites**

• **Human Rights Commission** report on NZSL

• **Surveys** (subjective)
  – NZSL community (*online, F2F*)
  – Parents of deaf children (*online*)

• **Interviews** (subj)
  – Parents of deaf children
  – Deaf youth
  – Hearing NZSL learners
What is the Reference Population?

“all people who may be expected to use a particular language according to their ethnicity, heritage, culture, history, geography”

For a SL, the Reference Population includes:

1. All deaf people, of all ages (not late deafened)
2. Hearing family members – as culturally relevant
3. Hearing signers who use SL regularly – professionals, friends, associates of deaf

(iSLanDS adapted UNESCO Survey)
People who can use New Zealand Sign Language
2001, 2006, and 2013 Censuses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number (000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2001 Census</td>
<td>27,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006 Census</td>
<td>24,087</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2013 Census</td>
<td>20,235</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistics New Zealand

25% drop 2001 – 2013
## Deaf organisation numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 local Deaf Clubs – total membership</td>
<td>843 (some hearing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>most clubs decreasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National interpreting service - registered Deaf users</td>
<td>1400</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaf Aotearoa NZ (Association)</td>
<td>2000 (mailing list)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZ Deaf Sports Federation</td>
<td>155 (cf. 300 in 1999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These numbers represent a portion of NZSL community, but even if one-third > still indicate a very small number compared to census stats.
Deaf organisation membership numbers represent a portion of NZSL community, but even if multiplied, indicate a small number compared to census stats.
USE OF NZSL BY CHILDREN
Deaf NZSL users in mainstream schools: difficult to get data!

Source: KDEC & VADEC 2014
Deaf children’s communication modes
(Parent survey, n = 112)

- Speaking: 51%
- Speaking, with gestures: 24%
- Signing with speaking: 12%
- Signing: 10%
- Bilingual - can communicate in spoken English and NZSL: 3%
- 25% or less use SL
“there’s not much support for parents like us ... it’s difficult to get resources and support. It’s just an ongoing battle for us to try and learn a language that we don’t know, to teach our child a language.”

Hearing mother of deaf 2 year old, 2013
Language shift: Communication advice to parents before and after CI surgery

- Use speech and listening only, not sign language:
  - Advice pre-school: 25
  - Advice post-CI: 42

- Can use sign language as well as speech:
  - Advice pre-school: 28
  - Advice post-CI: 14

- Focus mainly on sign language:
  - Advice pre-school: 3
  - Advice post-CI: 1

- No advice:
  - Advice pre-school: 5
  - Advice post-CI: 4
SUBJECTIVE VITALITY:  
DEAF COMMUNITY PERCEPTIONS
Survey of Deaf Community

n = 254 (12 % non-deaf)

Language use: I express myself best in

- **66%**: NZSL
- **22%**: Sign+Speak mixed
- **10%**: TC
- **2%**: Speaking
Where do you use NZSL in your daily life? (with or without interpreter)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>At Deaf club and Deaf community events</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visiting people</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At home</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At work</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At a service place (e.g. hospital, doctor, WINZ interview, legal)</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VRS - phone relay calls</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At School / university / study</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sports - playing, or watching</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To communicate with staff in shops, bars, restaurants etc.</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In church / religious activities</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the marae</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do you use NZSL for online video chat?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>31%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>242</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Higher use by younger age groups)

Have you seen information in NZSL on public websites?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Has the NZSL Act made any difference to you?

- Yes - attitudes, 24%
- Yes - attitudes + access, 28%
- No, 48%
“How good is deaf children's access to NZSL in mainstream schools - for learning and social communication?”
“In 30 years, the NZSL community will be...”
“Future threats & issues for NZSL?”

**Attitudes**
- Lack of NZSL awareness in society
- Power of medical model in decisions

**Resources & access**
- Lack of resources, infrastructure to promote NZSL
- Not enough provision of interpreters, info in NZSL

**Education system**
- Mainstreaming – poor NZSL access, no deaf peers
- Low quality of bilingual educ; low attainment
- Hearing control of policy & practice

**Cochlear implants**
- Linked with oralism – no SL, late SL, SSE
- Gap btwn families & D. community, & btwn deaf

**Social networks**
- Deaf organisations – shrinking, ageing, leadership
- Technology - less face-to-face SL interaction
Subjective vitality | Objective vitality

EGIDS level 6b Threatened: “The language is used for-face-to-face communication within all generations but it is losing users”
EVIDENCE OF RESILIENCE IN NZSL COMMUNITY
Institutional support

NZSL Board members
• “First Signs provides families with deaf and hard of hearing children with real opportunities to include NZSL as an additional language in their home
• ... eligibility is not based on an audiogram, use of assistive listening devices or home language. Our service is about connecting families to a language that is accessible to all children”

(Government funded, Deaf-run
See: http://www.deaf.org.nz/services/first-signs)
Bottom-up language promotion & community development

www.teachsign.org.nz
Learn 7 signs in 7 days to WIN
Outreach to diverse & younger deaf identities. Sport maintains NZSL community.

25TH/26TH MARCH 2016
Deaf/Hearing Impaired/Cochlear Netball is back!

We are hosting 25th New Zealand Deaf Rugby Union next year during Easter weekend on the 25th–27th March 2016, conjunction with the National Deaf Rugby Championships in Auckland. We would like to support the Deaf Netball. This will be an exciting weekend of Deaf netball and rugby.

If interested to play – please contact your local host.
MORE INFORMATION WILL COME AT LATER DATE!
Support by Lyneen Allen

HOSTS
Northern
SAFFIRE UALESH
Email: saffireualesh@gmail.com
Central
CHANTELL DE CLEENE
Text no 021 070 9927
Southern
LISE AGNEW
Text no 021 010 201
2015 NZ SHORT FILM ENTRIES

Here is a list of the eight film entries we received for the NZ Deaf Short Film Festival Competition. These will all be shown at the screenings - come and watch them!

NEW ZEALAND DEAF SHORT FILM FESTIVAL — SHORT FILM ENTERIES 2015

AOTEAROA
Joanne Klawer

In New Zealand (1780 – 1790), lived a Maori whanau, with a Deaf boy. In 1770, an English man, and his Deaf wife arrive. Initially, communication is good, however time passes, and war starts. By 1778, the boy’s mother tells her son and his girlfriend to run and escape the war.

BRIDGE OF REVENGRE
Zoe Ferguson

Selena is the only Deaf student at her school and has been the target for bullies. While out with a friend they come across two of the bullies from school. In a snap decision Selena grabs the opportunity to get revenge.

LITTLE BUTTERFLY GONE TOO SOON
Danielle MacKay

A following family traditional way for Hayley’s anniversary of her Death and her Birthday

RAILWAY CROSSING
Oliver Ferguson

John try go to Counsellor for break his fear cross the railway crossing. Counsellor to support with Josh he have autism but try to break through.
References


iSLanDS website ([www.uclan.ac.uk/islands](http://www.uclan.ac.uk/islands)) and the iSLanDS blog [http://islandscentre.wordpress.com](http://islandscentre.wordpress.com).


Further info on project


Go straight to NZSL summary at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjApIzlA2wc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vjApIzlA2wc)


Contact: [rachel.mckee@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:rachel.mckee@vuw.ac.nz)